MEANING, KNOWLEDGE, AND REALITY

• • •

John McDowell

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England
1998

ESSAY 19

Knowledge by Hearsay[1]

1. Language matters to epistemology for two separable reasons (although they are no doubt connected).

The first is the fact that if someone hears a remark and understands it, or reads and understands a sentence in a book or a newspaper, he can thereby acquire knowledge. I do not mean—what is already implicit in crediting him with understanding—that he knows what it is that is being said. I mean that he can acquire knowledge (at second hand) about the topic of the remark or sentence.

The second reason comes into view when we reflect that much of the knowledge we have through language was surely not acquired by understanding a linguistic production. Part of the point here is that we were not yet capable of understanding the elements of what we know through language when we started to acquire them. The body of sentences we accepted from our elders needs to have become quite comprehensive before any of them were comprehended. "Light dawns gradually over the whole".[2] But the image of dawning light does not apply only to coming to understand the members of a stock of sentences accepted from one's elders. The image also fits a general sense in which growing into language is growing into being in possession of the world, as opposed to having a mere animal ability to cope with a habitat.[3] And much of the knowledge that enters into our possession of the world, even though we have it through language, is not something we have been told. It need never have been enunciated in our hearing; rather, we find it implicit in the cognitive-practical ways of proceeding into which we were initiated when we learned our language.[4]

I have mentioned this second way language matters to epistemology only to make sure it is not forgotten. The topic of this essay is the first: acquiring knowledge by way of understanding what one is told.

2. I shall start with an idea of Wilfrid Sellars, that knowledge, at least on the part of rational animals, is a standing in the space of reasons.[5] This idea is what underlies the aspiration to analyse knowledge in terms of justification. Properly understood, I think the idea is correct; but I want to suggest that reflecting on knowledge by testimony is a good way to start undermining a misconception of it.

The conception I want to question can be put like this. If an epistemically satisfactory standing in the space of reasons, with respect to a proposition, is mediated rather than immediate, that means the standing is constituted by the cogency of an *argument* that is at its occupant's disposal, with the proposition in question as conclusion. After all, we might think in recommending such a conception to ourselves, it is precisely by laying out arguments that we delineate the shape of the space of reasons; surely there is nothing else that a mediated standing in that space could be.

1. My interest in testimony derives from Gareth Evans, as does my conviction that it cannot be accommodated by the sort of account of knowledge that I attack in this essay. I believe I also owe to him my interest in the sorts of case I discuss in §4 below, where knowledge is retained under the risk that what would have been knowledge if the relevant fact had still obtained is not knowledge because the fact no longer obtains. This essay has also benefited from comments by Robert Brandom and Jonathan Dancy.

2. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* §141.

3. "Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world, but on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all": Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. 443.

4. Much of *On Certainty* is about the status of this sort of knowledge. Wittgenstein himself is dubious about counting it as knowledge; but I think that is inessential to his main point, which is to warn against assimilating the sort of thing in question—propositions that function as pivots on which our practices of looking for grounds for belief can hinge, by not being on the agenda for testing and confirmation—to cases where it makes sense to look for the grounds of a belief. (Wittgenstein's doubt about counting these propositions as known may reflect the influence of the kind of conception of knowledge I am going to attack.)

5. "In characterizing an episode or a state as that [better: one] of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says": "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", pp. 298–9.

Once we accept this conception of mediated standings, we are under strong pressure to suppose that there are immediate standings in the space of reasons, since the justificatory arguments we are envisaging must start somewhere. There is a heroic position that tries to combine this conception of mediated standings with supposing all epistemically satisfactory standings are mediated. I sympathize with the motivation for this, and I shall come back to it (§5), but we need not consider it now. Apart from the heroic position, different epistemologies in this overall vein differ in respect of the immediate standings they allow; again, I do not think we need to go into the details at this stage.

What I want to suggest is that whatever plausible candidates we pick as the available starting-points in the space of reasons, and whatever we think about whether they are, as it were, absolute starting-points or themselves mediated, to be given parallel treatment at a different point in one's overall epistemology, the basic conception of mediated standings is epistemologically disastrous, in a way that reflecting on knowledge by testimony brings out.

I need first to clarify the conception of mediated standings that I have in mind. There is a completely cogent argument from the fact that someone, say, *sees* that things are thus and so to the conclusion that things *are* thus and so. But that argumentative transition cannot serve to explain how it is that the person's standing with respect to the fact that things are thus and so is epistemically satisfactory. The concept of seeing that things are thus and so is itself already the concept of an epistemically satisfactory standing with respect to the fact that things are thus and so. It makes no sense to suppose someone might understand what it is to see that something is the case, although he does not yet conceive seeing as a way of getting to know how things are. So there is no point in using the notion of a mediated epistemically satisfactory standing so as to count as having application on the basis of that kind of argumentative transition. The cogency of the argument from the fact that someone sees that things are thus and so to the fact that things are thus and so directly reflects the epistemic acceptability of the standing we characterize as seeing that things are thus and so. It does not reveal that standing as mediated. Genuinely mediated epistemic standing, on the conception I have in mind, would have to consist in the cogency of an argument whose premises do not beg the relevant question of epistemic standing.

It is a truism that one cannot see that things are thus and so unless things are indeed thus and so. And a truism should be neutral between different epistemological positions. In particular, the considerations I have just given do not rule out the possibility of an epistemology in which the epistemic standing constituted by seeing that things are thus and so is mediated. The point is that if we want to represent it as mediated, we must not suppose the truistic transition is the only transition in the space of reasons that is relevant to the standing's being an epistemically satisfactory one. What we must suppose, if we stick to the governing conception of mediation, is that the standing we characterize as seeing that things are thus and so is constituted by the availability to the subject of an argument from *different* premises (perhaps involving how things look) to the conclusion that things are thus and so.

Now if a standing in the space of reasons with respect to a fact is acquired in hearing and understanding a remark, the standing is surely a mediated one. It is not as if the fact directly forces itself on the hearer; his rational standing with respect to it surely depends on (at least) his hearing and understanding what his informant says, and this dependence is rational, not merely causal. The question is, then, whether the conception of mediated standings that I have described can make room for testimony knowledge.

Consider a tourist in a strange city, looking for the cathedral. He asks a passer-by, who is in fact a resident and knows where the cathedral is, for directions, hears and understands what the passer-by says, and finds the cathedral just where his informant said he would. Intuitively, this counts as a case of acquiring knowledge by being told; what makes it so is that the informant knows where the cathedral is, and passes on his knowledge in the linguistic exchange. In fact that remark encapsulates what promises to be the core of a good general account of testimony knowledge: if a knowledgeable speaker gives intelligible expression to his knowledge, it may become available at second hand to those who understand what he says.[6]

6. A principle on these lines was stated by Ernest Sosa in "The Analysis of 'Knowledge that P'", p. 8. It matters that I say "may become available to" and not "is acquired by". For one thing, the opportunity for knowledge may not be there for a hearer even if the speaker is giving expression to his knowledge; see §6 below. For another, one cannot be forced to avail oneself of knowledge that one is in a position to acquire; excessive caution, for instance, may lead one to pass up an opportunity.

If we accept the conception of mediated standings that I have described, can we match the intuitive verdict? That would require the tourist to have at his disposal an argument to a conclusion about the whereabouts of the cathedral, with the cogency of the argument sufficient to make it plausible that the fact that this justification of the proposition is available to him amounts to his being in an epistemically satisfactory position with respect to it.[7] I believe this is hopeless; any lifelike attempt to apply the basic thought to this case will fail to equip the tourist with an argument sufficiently compelling for him to seem to count as knowing where the cathedral is, if that is what his title to knowledge is to consist in. For our purposes, we can think of the argument as starting from what the tourist understands his interlocutor to say (we do not need to settle whether that is an absolute starting-point).[8] There is no hope of getting from there to the cathedral's being where the interlocutor said it is without ancillary premises. If we make the ancillary premises seem strong enough to do the trick, it merely becomes dubious that the tourist has them at his disposal; whereas if we weaken the premises, the doubt attaches to their capacity to transmit, across the argument, the right sort of rational acceptability for believing its conclusion to amount to knowledge.

Suppose we take the first option. This involves appealing to ancillary premises on these lines: the informant is competent (at least on the present topic) and trustworthy (at least on the present occasion).[9] But can we really say the tourist knows those things, in such a way that they are available to him as starting-points in an argument that could certify, without question-begging, his standing with respect to the whereabouts of the cathedral? Does he really know, in the kind of way that that would require, that (for instance) the supposed informant is not another tourist, equally ignorant of the city's layout, who thinks it might be fun to pretend to be a resident?[10]

7. See Elizabeth Fricker, "The Epistemology of Testimony", especially pp. 60–2, for some discussion of the different possibilities here; in particular, what might be meant by requiring the knower to possess the justification. I agree with her that we lose the point of invoking the space of reasons if we allow someone to possess a justification even if it is outside his reflective reach.

8. This is a point at issue between Fricker and David Cooper's contribution to the same symposium, "Assertion, Phenomenology, and Essence". I think Fricker is quite right that this knowledge is perceptual. (That is not to say that it constitutes an absolute starting-point; see §5 below.) Cooper suggests that this phenomenological and epistemological position must miss the insights of Romanticism, but that strikes me as the reverse of the truth. However, the point is not central to my concerns here.

9. See Fricker, "The Epistemology of Testimony", pp. 72–3.

In the face of this, we might be tempted to take the other option, and retreat to premises on which we might claim that our candidate knower has a firmer grip: for instance, that the apparent informant is moving about in the city without apparent hesitation, that he displays no signs of being engaged in a practical joke (such as suppressed giggles), and so forth. But if the candidate knower's grip on the premises we retreat to is supposed to be firmer by virtue of their being weaker, so that they leave it open that the apparent informant is an ignorant practical joker, as opposed to someone who is putting his own knowledge into words (although no doubt they reveal it as improbable), it should be an urgent question how the argument can be good enough for possessing it to constitute an epistemic position that can count as knowledge. If the tourist's title to know depends on the best argument he can muster for the proposition he believes, and the premises of the argument leave it open that his supposed informant is not giving expression to knowledge, then surely the verdict ought to be that for all the tourist knows the cathedral is somewhere else.

There may be a temptation to say I have simply chosen an unfortunate example. The tourist does not know where the cathedral is, but if one is more careful to equip oneself with the needed premises about competence and trustworthiness, one *can* acquire knowledge by being told things.[11] I think this verdict on the case of the trusting

10. Willingness to say "No" may seem to preclude claiming that the tourist does get to know where the cathedral is. But what is threatened is only that he *knows that he knows* where the cathedral is (on one reading of that claim). And it is quite dubious that someone who knows must know that he knows, in the relevant sense. (See David Wiggins, "On Knowing, Knowing That One Knows, and Consciousness".) There may be another reading of the principle that a knower knows that he knows; I have phrased my sceptical queries so as to leave it open that, if we stop looking for non-question-begging certifications of epistemic standing, we may be able to retrieve a possibility of crediting the tourist with knowledge that his informant is competent and trustworthy, as something on a level with the knowledge he acquires in the transaction, not prior to it in the space of reasons. (Compare the idea that knowledge that one is not dreaming is on a level with the knowledge of the environment that one's senses are yielding one, not something one would need to be able to credit oneself with first, in order to be able to take it that one's senses are indeed yielding one knowledge of the environment. See Essay 11 above, §5.)

11. Some such suggestion is implicit in Fricker's argument ("The Epistemology of Testimony", p. 75) against the idea that one can be entitled to a presumption of sincerity and competence in the absence of special evidence to the contrary. She responds "I would not

tourist is counter-intuitive, but that is not by itself conclusive against it; we can allow a good general account of what knowledge is to alter our intuitions about particular cases. However, the difficulty is more general than such a move acknowledges. Consider a different case of putatively acquiring knowledge by testimony. Let it be the most favourable case we can imagine. Let the hearer have all kinds of positive evidence that the speaker is speaking his mind: a steady honest-looking gaze, a firm dry handclasp, perhaps years of mutual reliance. Surely it is always possible for a human being to act capriciously, out of character? And even if the speaker is speaking his mind, how firm a hold can the hearer possibly have on the premise, needed on this view, that the speaker is not somehow misinformed about the subject matter of the conversation? However favourable the case, can the hearer really be said to know that his informant can be relied on now, in such a way that this verdict can be used in a non-question-begging certification that what he has acquired is an epistemically satisfactory standing? The supposition that the informant is, perhaps uncharacteristically, misleading the hearer or, perhaps surprisingly, misinformed about the topic is not like the typical suppositions of general sceptical arguments (e.g., "Maybe you are a brain in a vat"), where it is at least arguable that no real possibility is expressed. In Simon Blackburn's phrase, mistakes and deceptions by putative informants are "kinds of thing that happen".[12] It is not clear that the approach I am considering can make out the title to count as knowledge of *any* beliefs acquired from someone else's say-so. And too much overturning of intuitions must surely make it questionable whether the general account of knowledge is a good one.

like to be obliged to form beliefs in response to others' utterances in accordance with this presumption!" But I do not want to defend the idea that Fricker is attacking here, that there is a general presumption of sincerity and competence (as if gullibility were an epistemic right, or even an obligation). In the case I am considering, I think the tourist is entitled to his belief about where the cathedral is, without taking care to rule out the possibility of a practical joke; but I do not think that is because he is exercising a general presumption of sincerity and competence. That is the sort of thing it is natural to appeal to in a version of the conception I am attacking, one that keeps the idea that mediated standings consist in the cogency of arguments, but is less optimistic than Fricker about how cogent the available arguments are, unless they are beefed up with general presumptions of this sort. I want a more radical departure from the governing conception. This should become clearer in due course.

12. "Knowledge, Truth, and Reliability", p. 185.

3. I have been exploiting a principle to this effect: if we want to be able to suppose the title of a belief to count as knowledge is constituted by the believer's possession of an argument to its truth, it had better not be the case that the best argument he has at his disposal leaves it open that things are not as he believes them to be. If it does, what we are picturing is an epistemic position in which, for all the subject knows, things are not as he takes them to be; and that is not a picture of something that might intelligibly amount to knowing that they are that way. The argument would need to be conclusive. If you know something, you cannot be wrong about it.

That conditional principle strikes me as obviously correct. But many philosophers would reject it out of hand. This attitude reflects an assumption that encapsulates the approach to knowledge I am considering. The assumption is that when epistemic standing is mediated, the antecedent of the conditional is satisfied. In that case the effect of the principle is an intolerable scepticism in respect of mediated epistemic standings, since the arguments we can find are almost never that good. (Some form of the principle is indeed the nerve of standard arguments for scepticism.) Accordingly, if we do not contemplate querying the antecedent, it seems that, on pain of scepticism, it must be possible for a title to knowledge to consist in possession of a less than conclusive argument for what is known—that an argument that does no better than display its conclusion as highly probable can be good enough to certify a standing with respect to the conclusion as knowledge. In fact that is a quite mysterious thought, given what I think is spurious plausibility by the idea that the only alternative is scepticism. And we can keep the conditional principle without risking undue concessions to scepticism, if we are willing to contemplate denying that in respect of mediated epistemic standings the antecedent must hold.[13]

4. Consider a device about which one knows (unproblematically, let us suppose) that it will produce outcome A in, on average, ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, and otherwise outcome B. Think of a roulette wheel with ninety-nine red slots and one white one. Given the task of predicting the outcome of a given spin, one will of course

13. Induction can have a confusing effect here: it can seem to be a counter-example to the principle. But demanding that an argument be conclusive is not the same as demanding that it be *deductive*.

predict red (even if white is "overdue", since that does not make the probability of white on any one spin any greater). Suppose one makes one's prediction, the wheel is spun, and the result is red. Did one's prediction then amount to knowledge? Surely not; for all one knew, the result was going to be white. The fact that one had an argument that established a high probability for the outcome one predicted—so that one had excellent reasons for one's prediction—makes no difference at all to that. We can change the example to make the probability higher, but I cannot see how changing the figures can make any difference of principle. If there is one white slot out of thousands or millions, one does not know that the result will not be white.[14] I think the moral is that being known cannot be intelligibly seen as some region at the high end of a scale of probabilification by considerations at the knower's disposal, perhaps with room for argument about how high the standards need to be set. Of course that is an application of the conditional principle that I discussed in the last section.

It is instructive to contrast the roulette-wheel case with the following one. Consider someone who keeps himself reasonably well up-to-date on events of note; suppose he listens to a reliable radio news broadcast at six o'clock every evening. Can we credit such a person, at three o'clock in the afternoon on some day late in the life of, say, Winston Churchill, with knowledge that Churchill is alive? (I do not mean to consider a period when the news is full of bulletins of Churchill's failing health. Churchill has simply not been in the news lately.) Intuitively, the answer is "Yes". Something like that is the position we are all in with respect to masses of what we take ourselves to know, concerning reasonably durable but impermanent states of affairs to whose continued obtaining we have only intermittent epistemic access. If challenged, we might say something like "If it were no longer so, I would have heard about it"; and we are quite undisturbed, at least until philosophy breaks out, by the time-lag between changes in such states of affairs and our hearing about them.

14. Perhaps some will be tempted to maintain that even so, one does know the result will be red; they will think they can protect that claim from being undermined by the fact that one does not know the result will not be white, on the ground that knowledge is not closed under known implication. (See Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, pp. 206–11.) Whatever the merits of that thesis, such an application of it strikes me as desperate.

Of course it matters that the time-lag is quite short; we would not claim to know this kind of thing after months out of touch with the news.[15]

We can think of the subject in such a case as, in effect, following a policy of claiming to know (if the question arises) that things are still the way he formerly knew they were, if a change would have been reported and has not yet been.[16] A subject who follows that policy can be sure that there will be a period, between Churchill's death and the next news bulletin, when following it will produce claims to knowledge that are definitely false. That may not by itself deter him from following the policy. No doubt if Churchill is known to be in failing health, a reasonably cautious subject will not go on taking Churchill to be still alive. Asked whether Churchill is still alive, a doxastically responsible subject in such circumstances will answer that he does not know. But suppose Churchill dies unexpectedly, so that there is not that sort of specific reason for suspending the policy. And suppose our subject follows the policy to the end, so that he is committed to false knowledge claims, since what he claims to know is not so, for the period between Churchill's death and his next access to the news. According to my intuition, the falsity of these late products of the policy does not undermine the truth of its earlier products. As long as Churchill was still alive, the subject knew it.

This intuition does not seem unreasonable. It would be difficult to overstate how much of what ordinarily passes for knowledge would be lost to us, if our epistemology of retained knowledge did not allow that sort of knowably risky policy to issue in acceptable knowledge claims when the risks do not materialize. I think I know, as I write, that Bill Clinton is President of the United States.[17] Can I rule out the possibility that, since my last confirmatory experience,

15. It is a familiar experience to find, some time after one has, say, missed the newspapers for a week, that things one thought one knew have for some time been no longer true. It is striking that the experience has no tendency to dislodge one's belief that one knows a great deal else in the sort of way in which one thought one knew what one has just been disabused of.

16. We can take the former knowledge as unproblematic, for the purposes of the example. Perhaps it was derived from broadcast coverage of Churchill's latest birthday. (The point I am making with this example is about the retaining of knowledge; it is not meant to turn especially on the fact that the knowledge retained was originally acquired by testimony.)

17. Lightly revising this essay in 1997, I have updated the example.

he has been assassinated, and even at this moment the Chief Justice is swearing in his successor? No. But even so, when I have my next confirmatory experience, I shall not take it that I then know *again* that Clinton is President, having not known it in the interim. I shall take the experience to confirm that I *still* know it—to confirm the continued existence of a piece of knowledge I shall take myself to have had all along, including now as I write. All my supposed knowledge of impermanent circumstances in the realm of current affairs is, most of the time, between confirmations. If we reject the intuition I have expressed, we shall be committed to supposing we know a great deal less than we ordinarily think.[18]

I have been using examples involving retaining knowledge that was first acquired by testimony, in the broad sense in which one acquires knowledge by testimony in listening to a news broadcast or reading a newspaper. But the point is obviously not restricted to such cases. Consider a child at school. Does she know the arrangement of the furniture in the living room of her house? We are inclined to answer that she probably does; most people know that sort of thing. But what if, after she left home, her parents acted on the whim of trying a different arrangement? Well, in that case she does not know. But if the furniture is still in the familiar places when she gets home at the end of the school day, then, according to my intuition, that confirms that she *still* has the knowledge she had when she left the house in the morning. She does not need to acquire anew a piece of knowledge that has gone out of existence in the interim.[19] (Rather as with the occurrence of bulletins on Churchill's failing health, the case is altered if the parents have lately been, say, talking about improving the layout—in such circumstances, taking it that the furniture is where it has always been might be doxastically irresponsible.)

Suppose that in the case of the roulette wheel one were to follow the policy of claiming to *know,* at each spin, that the outcome will

18. There may be a temptation to say that the same goes for the roulette-wheel case, on the basis that if we disallow it, we disallow all knowledge by induction. But it is simply not true that in the roulette-wheel case one knows that the outcome will be red. If induction is a way of coming to know things, that is not an example of it. (Knowing that the outcome will *probably* be red is of course quite another matter.)

19. A case like this one, involving retaining knowledge not originally acquired by testimony, is briefly discussed by David Braine, "The Nature of Knowledge", p. 42.

be red. That would be a policy about which one would be in a position to know that, on some occasions (on average one in a hundred, in the case as first introduced), it would issue in one's making a knowledge claim that is certainly false, since what one claims to know is not so. Now when one claims to know, between confirming episodes, such things as that Bill Clinton is President, one in effect follows a knowledge-claiming policy that is, in a certain formal respect, parallel to that one. (It would be silly to try to give definite numbers, but why should that matter?) But the intuition I am expressing discerns a substantive difference alongside the structural parallel. In the roulette-wheel case, *none* of the knowledge claims would be true (in fact no sane person would seriously adopt such a policy), whereas in the case of claims to retained knowledge, those that are not falsified by the falsity of what one claims to know can be true, even though the policy of issuing them in the relevant sort of circumstances will certainly yield some that are so falsified.

That intuitive difference does not seem to be one that we can make intelligible in terms of the idea that the subject possesses a better argument, of the sort the governing conception would need to cite for purposes of non-question-begging certification of his epistemic standing, in the favourable case. It may be that on the basis of material available for constructing such arguments, it is a better bet that Clinton is President, between confirming episodes, than it is that the roulette wheel will come up red. But that does not seem to be the right kind of point. If we change the roulette-wheel case to give white one chance in millions, we may make the comparison of bets at least less clear; but it still does not seem right to say that I know that the wheel will come up red, and it does seem right to say that if it turns out when I next tune into the news that Clinton was still President as I wrote this, it will have turned out that I do now know that he is.[20]

20. Blackburn, in "Knowledge, Truth, and Reliability", proposes that one knows when one's informational state, conceived otherwise than as having the fact known in one's cognitive grasp, leaves no real possibility ("chance") that things are not as one takes them to be. (Having the fact known in one's cognitive grasp would leave no chance at all of being wrong, but Blackburn contemptuously dismisses conceptions of knowledge on these lines.) He applies that account of knowledge to the general hypotheses on which sceptical arguments trade (that one is a brain in a vat, and so forth). The upshot is that whether one counts as knowing that such hypotheses do not obtain depends on who has the onus of proof in a dispute with a sceptic. But if my informational state, between intakes of news,

What the intuition suggests is that we conceive knowledge of the right kind of truth as a sort of continuant. With fully eternal truths, such a conception is unproblematic. But the intuition indicates that we extend the conception, more interestingly, to knowledge of changeable, though reasonably durable, states of affairs. Like a living thing, such knowledge needs something analogous to nutrition from time to time, in the shape of intermittent confirmation that the state of affairs known to obtain does still obtain. But the persistence of knowledge does not need the constant operation of a sustaining cause; between the intermittent confirmations, we allow a kind of inertia to operate in the dynamics of epistemic life. If someone counts, at some time, as having a state of affairs of the right kind within his cognitive grasp, say by seeing that things are thus and so, we allow that that epistemic status can outlast the original mode of access to the known fact. We can capture the credentials of his epistemic position, at a later time at which he no longer has the state of affairs in view, by saying that he retains a piece of knowledge originally acquired by perception. Of course that cannot be so if the state of affairs no longer obtains. But if the state of affairs does still obtain, he can continue to count, at least for a while, as having it within his cognitive grasp.

It is very hard to see how the governing conception of mediated standings in the space of reasons can make room for such an idea. Perhaps the governing conception can make some sort of stab at a lifelike account of my epistemic credentials with respect to the proposition that Clinton is President while I am, say, watching a White House press conference broadcast live on television. But it does not seem to be able to make sense of the idea that those very credentials (reinforcing an accumulation of credentials from the remoter past) can persist after the set is switched off. How can a justification I no longer have (the screen is dark) be parlayed into a justification I somehow still have? Perhaps I can add material about the reliability of my memory. But that does not address the possibility, which is left open if my present information is not allowed to include the fact itself, that since my latest confirmation the state of affairs itself has changed. It would not be a fault in my memory if that had happened. That is why it makes such a difference to shift from retained knowledge of standing states of affairs to retained knowledge of states of affairs that may stop obtaining between confirmations. The shift undermines all hope of constructing an argument from what I have between confirmations that is sufficiently cogent to serve the purposes of the governing conception, if what I have between confirmations is not allowed to include my still being on to the fact in question.[21]

If I am allowed, contrary to the governing conception, to say that my continuing knowledge that Clinton is President is itself the relevant standing in the state of reasons, these difficulties go away. The justification I still have, for saying that Clinton is President, is that I still know he is. I achieved, in whatever way, an epistemically satisfactory position with respect to the fact that he is President, a position of a sort that can persist between injections of nourishment, and now the darkness of the television screen does not imply that anything relevant to that position has changed.

5. If knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons, someone whose taking things to be thus and so is a case of knowledge must have a reason (a justification) for taking things to be that way. But that is allowed for if remembering that Clinton is President is itself the relevant standing in the space of reasons. Someone who remembers that things are a certain way, like someone who sees that things

with respect to who is President is not allowed to embrace the fact that Clinton is still President, it surely leaves a real possibility that Clinton is no longer President. Assassinations, or other sudden deaths, of Presidents are "kinds of things that happen". So are misleading perceptual appearances (and so on; different kinds of real possibility are relevant to the different sorts of knowledge). So even if Blackburn achieves an onus-swapping standoff with the kind of sceptic who attempts to wield general sceptical hypotheses to undermine whole regions of knowledge all at once, it looks as if his picture will deprive us of pretty much the same knowledge, only piece by piece. If we deny ourselves a "guaranteeing" conception of a putative knower's informational state, the less rich informational state we thereby restrict ourselves to will always leave open perfectly real possibilities (not the sceptic's arguably unreal possibilities) that he is wrong. (Blackburn simply misses this point; he concentrates entirely on the general sceptical hypotheses, as if there could be no threat to ordinary knowledge claims except from them.)

21. Christopher Peacocke discusses retained knowledge in chap. 10 of *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*. He defends a "Model of Virtual Inference", according to which such knowledge requires the knower to have at his disposal a sound abductive argument to the truth of what he is said to know. Peacocke considers only knowledge of standing states, such as that Hume died in 1776. Perhaps someone who finds himself seeming to remember that fact can have a sound abductive argument from his present informational state, considered as not embracing the information that Hume died in 1776, to the conclusion that that is so. But that does not carry over to retained knowledge of changeable states. From my willingness to vouch for Clinton's being President, I cannot get by abduction to his being President now, as opposed to his having been President when I last checked.

are a certain way, has an excellent reason for taking it that things are that way; the excellence comes out in the fact that from the premise that one remembers that things are thus and so, as from the premise that one sees that things are thus and so, it follows that things *are* thus and so.[22] The epistemic positions themselves put their occupants in possession of reasons for their beliefs; those reasons do not need to be supplemented with less cogent arguments from non-question-beggingly available premises.

As I noted in §2, the availability of an inference from an epistemic position to a fact does nothing towards representing the epistemic position as a mediated standing in the space of reasons. It seems clear that knowing that Clinton is President cannot be a rationally immediate matter. So if we stick to the governing conception of what a mediated standing in the space of reasons is, we have to suppose that the standing constituted by remembering that Clinton is President can be reconstructed as possession of an argument that starts from the content of informational states that we can credit to the subject without presupposing that he has that standing. The point of §4 is that at the relevant times no available argument will be good enough. The best it can yield is high probability, but we wanted to reconstruct knowledge that Clinton is President, not knowledge that he probably is.

It should be starting to seem that the governing conception misconstrues the idea that knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons. I do not want to suggest the inferential transitions that the governing conception aims to exploit in its reconstructive task are epistemologically irrelevant. But I do want to suggest that their relevance needs to be differently understood.

22. In Blackburn's terms, seeing that . . ., remembering that . . ., and so forth are "guaranteeing" epistemic positions. Blackburn suggests ("Knowledge, Truth, and Reliability", pp. 176–8) that if one traffics in the idea of "guaranteeing" states, in the usual stamping-grounds of sceptics (knowledge of the external world and so forth), one lapses into bizarre imagery (see his remarks about "the glassy blob of the mind", p. 177). But the relevant concepts belong to sheer common sense. What would be bizarre is to suggest that we do not achieve such "guaranteeing" positions as seeing that things are thus and so. Blackburn's moves are skewed, I think, by an aspiration (which he tends to read into others) to *answer* sceptical challenges. I think the epistemological outlook I am recommending makes sceptical challenges seem less urgent, but obviously not by answering them. (If someone is exploiting a general sceptical hypothesis in order to attack a knowledge claim, he will not be impressed if one attributes to oneself a "guaranteeing" informational state with respect to the proposition one claims to know; if the sceptical hypothesis holds, the attribution cannot be true.)

Suppose one has become informed of some impermanent but durable state of affairs, and goes on taking it to obtain after one's original epistemic access to it has lapsed. I do not claim that if the state of affairs still obtains then, come what may, one's continued taking it to be so amounts to knowledge. On the contrary: one's status as a knower is undermined, even if things still are as one takes them to be, if one's taking things to be that way is, as I put it, doxastically irresponsible. We have seen some examples of how the notion of doxastic responsibility (which is surely perfectly intuitive) works. It is doxastically irresponsible to go on taking it that some state of affairs of the right kind still obtains if the interval since one's last confirmation is too long, or more generally if the intervals between confirmations are too long, say if one has missed the news for an excessive period.[23] It is doxastically irresponsible to take it, between confirmations, that some state of affairs still obtains, even one of the right general kind, if one is in a position to know that its persistence is hanging by a thread, as in the case of the bulletins about Churchill's failing health.[24]

If one's takings of things to be thus and so are to be cases of knowledge, they must be sensitive to the requirements of doxastic responsibility. Since following the dictates of doxastic responsibility is obviously an exercise of rationality, this can be a partial interpretation of the thought that knowledge in general, and the specific epistemic positions like remembering and seeing, are standings in the space of reasons. We could not conceive remembering that things are thus and so, say, as a standing in the space of reasons if a subject could count as being in that position even if he were not responsive to the rational force of independently available considerations—the material to which the governing conception appeals. But we can se-

23. What counts as excessive depends on the proposition known. If one missed the British news media for a fairly long period, and when one tuned in again there were no lingering traces of national mourning, it might not be doxastically irresponsible to take it that a greatly loved national figure like Churchill was still alive; it would be different with someone else.

24. The topic of doxastic responsibility is clearly complex. Note that the standards can depend on what is at stake. Consider again the case of the child at school. If nothing turns on it, we might casually credit her with knowledge of the arrangement of the furniture in the living room of her house. But if we tell the story so that something that matters a great deal to her depends on whether she is right, it may become doxastically irresponsible for her to vouch for the layout's being as she recalls it to be. In such circumstances, it starts to be significant for her epistemic status that her parents may have moved the furniture, and she is in a position to know that that kind of thing does happen.

parate that point from the idea that one can reconstruct the epistemic satisfactoriness of the standing in terms of the rational force of those considerations.

What I am proposing is a different conception of what it is for a standing in the space of reasons to be mediated. A standing in the space of reasons can be mediated by the rational force of surrounding considerations, in that the concept of that standing cannot be applied to a subject who is not responsive to that rational force. But that is not to say that the epistemic satisfactoriness of the standing *consists in* that rational force. I think we should apply this distinction to all the specific epistemic standings with respect to the empirical world—not just remembering, but also the various modes of perceiving (and testimony too, to anticipate). We could not conceive seeing (say) that things are thus and so as a standing in the space of reasons at all, if a subject could count as being in that position even if he were not rationally responsive to the bearing of how things look on the question how things are. Here too there are requirements of doxastic responsibility.[25] Acknowledging those requirements can be kept distinct from the idea that we can reconstruct the epistemic satisfactoriness of seeing in terms of the cogency of an argument from how things look to how they are—an idea that the history of epistemology surely reveals as hopeless.

On this account, seeing that things are thus and so is a standing in the space of reasons no less mediated than any other. What makes a standing mediated is not that its epistemic satisfactoriness consists in the compellingness of an argument from the mediating considerations, but that it could not be a position in the space of reasons at all if a subject could occupy it without being rationally responsive to the mediating considerations. This brings us to the heroic position that I mentioned with sympathy in §2, according to which there are no immediate standings in the space of reasons—no absolute starting-points. An absolute starting-point would be a position in the space of reasons that one could occupy without needing a suitable rational sensitivity to its surroundings. Seeing is not such a position. Indeed,

25. One does not count as seeing something to be the case (even if the fact that that is how things look to one results, in the way that is characteristic of seeing, from the fact that that is how things are), if one's taking it that that is how things are is doxastically irresponsible. Consider, for instance, a case in which one has excellent reasons for distrusting one's vision, although as a matter of fact it is functioning perfectly.

it should now be apparent that nothing is. It does not help to retreat from *seeing that things are thus and so* to *having it look to one as if things are thus and so*. That is not a position one could occupy all on its own, without a rational responsiveness to surrounding considerations.[26]

In the context of the governing conception of what it would be for a standing to be mediated, the thought that there are no absolute starting-points seemed heroic. It amounted to the idea that a rational standing with respect to one proposition is *always* inferentially derivative from rational standings with respect to others, so that when we set out to establish such standing by retracing the inferential steps we would go round in circles—large circles, no doubt, but it is quite unclear why that should seem to help. But now that we have it in the proper context, with inferential transitions in the required background but not conceived as constituting the satisfactoriness of rational standings, the thought emerges as acceptable.[27]

Of course I am not suggesting that doxastic responsibility ensures that what one has is knowledge. Exactly not: that would preclude making room for knowledge in cases where a maximally careful exercise of doxastic responsibility still leaves it open that the world may be playing one false, as in the examples of §4—cases in which the state of affairs improbably ceases to obtain. What one takes to be the case without doxastic irresponsibility may even so—through no fault of one's doxastic conduct—not be the case, and then one certainly does not know that it is the case.

This may suggest that doxastic responsibility suffices for knowledge, given that the world co-operates—given that what one takes to be so is so. But that seems wrong too. Consider a case in which there is no doxastic irresponsibility in, say, taking an apparent perception at face value, and things are indeed as they appear, but the apparent

26. The idea that perceptual appearances can be absolute starting-points is one form of the Myth of the Given, which Sellars demolishes in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind".

27. The thesis that there are absolute starting-points is a way to formulate epistemological foundationalism. The traditional competitor of foundationalism is coherentism, and that label fits the position I am endorsing here. But we need to get straight how inferences (other than those involving the factiveness of the epistemic concepts) are relevant before we embrace coherentism as an alternative to foundationalism. Otherwise the coherentist alternative is the heroic position, and it is not clear that it yields any real improvement over foundationalism. (See Crispin Wright, "Facts and Certainty", p. 469.)

perception is not a genuine perception for lack of the appropriate relation between the fact and the experience. In such a case, taking the apparent perception at face value ought not to constitute knowledge. It seems over-optimistic about the efficacy of doxastic responsibility to suppose that a believer who was really doxastically responsible would not miss the fact that the required relation did not obtain. Similarly in a case in which there is no doxastic irresponsibility in taking another person's word on some question, and what he says is true, but his saying it is not an expression of knowledge on his part. (I shall return to the idea that knowledge is to be understood as a cooperative product, involving our exercising doxastic responsibility and the world doing its part, in §7 below.)

In the framework I am proposing, we can have a satisfying view of how probabilities are epistemologically significant. As long as we are trying to reconstruct epistemic standing in terms of an argument that moves to the proposition supposedly known from non-question-beggingly available starting-points, it is an embarrassment if the best we can achieve is an argument that represents the proposition supposedly known as merely probable. But there is no such embarrassment if the point is that one cannot count as occupying an epistemic standing with respect to a proposition unless, in taking things to be so, one is responsive to what is probable given one's informational position apart from the putative epistemic standing. Flying in the face of those probabilities is one way to be doxastically irresponsible, and would undermine one's title to the position in the space of reasons that the epistemic standing is.

What captures the epistemic satisfactoriness of the standings in the space of reasons constituted by positions like seeing that things are thus and so, or remembering that things are thus and so, is not the relation to rational surroundings that is required for them to be standings in the space of reasons at all, but the cogency of the inference from someone's being in such a position to the fact that things are thus and so. If the positions designated in such terms—"seeing that . . .", "remembering that . . .", and the like—are really to be standings in the space of reasons, we must insist on a strict reading of the "that"-clauses, as crediting the positions with conceptually structured contents. That is what the requirement of rational sensitivity to mediating considerations makes room for. But creatures that are not in the space of reasons—the space of concepts—can perceive and remember (and

indeed learn through words; as I noted in §1, one starts doing that before one understands the words). It goes with being restrictive about conceptually structured content that we cannot employ the very same notion of factiveness in connection with the states that result from such non-rational or pre-rational capacities. That is part of the point of the idea that language, in initiating subjects into the space of reasons, puts them in possession of the world, which needs to be distinguished from a mere ability to live competently in a habitat. But the capacities are at least, as it were, *pre-factive;* that the states that result from them, once they are taken into the space of reasons, are going to be factive is in the nature of the capacities, even as pre-rationally exercised. Now the epistemological role of the rational sensitivities that I have summed up under the head of doxastic responsibility is to cash out this idea of taking cognitive capacities into the space of reasons—to supply a background that must be in place if we are to take the "that"-clauses strictly. Factiveness takes care of itself. Or at any rate, if more needs to be said, it is not about the space of reasons; it is about the capacities, whether exercised in the space of reasons or not. The style of epistemology that I am attacking goes wrong in trying to make the inferential linkages to which doxastic responsibility requires us to be responsive serve, not just as the necessary background for talking of positions in the space of reasons at all, but also in a task they cannot perform, and need not have been expected to perform: the task of ensuring factiveness, ensuring the excellence of the argument from someone's being in one of the relevant positions to the world's being as he takes it to be.

6. We can now return to the epistemology of testimony.[28] I make no apology for spending so long elsewhere; the upshot is that we now have, on a reasonably independent basis, a general epistemological framework into which we can see how to fit such knowledge.

The epistemic standing one can acquire in conversation is that of having heard from one's interlocutor that things are thus and so.[29]

28. Testimony figured only incidentally, presupposed as a source of knowledge, in the examples I considered in §4.

29. Different descriptions of standings are appropriate for different ways of acquiring knowledge by testimony. One with more general application is "having learned (from such and such a source) that . . .". Consider also the expression "I gather that . . .", which claims knowledge from testimony without identifying the source. (Compare "I heard it through the grapevine".)

One cannot count as having heard from someone that things are thus and so, in the relevant sense, unless, by virtue of understanding what the person says, one is in a position to know that things are indeed thus and so. If it turns out that things are not thus and so, or that although things are thus and so, the person from whom one took oneself to have heard it did not know it, one cannot persist in the claim that one heard from him that things are thus and so. One must retreat to the claim that one heard him say that things are thus and so. Just as one can capture a knower's justification for believing what he does by saying that he sees that things are thus and so, or that he remembers that things are thus and so, so one can capture a knower's justification—his knowledge-constituting standing in the space of reasons—by saying he has heard from so-and-so that things are thus and so.[30]

Acquiring knowledge by testimony is not a mindless reception of something that has nothing to do with rationality; it yields a standing in the space of reasons. We can protect that idea by insisting that the knowledge is available to be picked up only by someone whose taking the speaker's word for it is not doxastically irresponsible. This works in much the same way as the parallel insistence in the case of retained knowledge and perception. A person sufficiently responsible to count as having achieved epistemic standing from some-

30. The point is that hearing from someone that things are thus and so is like seeing that things are thus and so in being a "guaranteeing" informational state. Of course that is compatible with all kinds of differences. In particular, I am not suggesting that in acquiring knowledge by testimony one *experiences* things to be the way one comes to know they are (an obvious phenomenological falsehood that Fricker, "The Epistemology of Testimony", pp. 74–5, spends some time denying). The crucial notion is that of a "guaranteeing" informational state whose being a "guaranteeing" state is not to be understood in terms of how strong a reason for believing the proposition in question is afforded by an underlying non-"guaranteeing" informational state. There is no need to assimilate this to the idea of a direct perceptual or quasi-perceptual mode of access to the state of affairs known. (Compare Crispin Wright, "Facts and Certainty", pp. 443–4.) On the contrary: the epistemic standing constituted by having heard from someone that things are thus and so is clearly mediated by having heard the person say that things are that way; and this mediation (unlike the mediation of seeing that things are thus and so by having it look to one as if things are thus and so) clearly precludes the idea of a direct perceptual access to what one comes to know. What I am objecting to is the prejudice that what this mediation amounts to must be that the non-"guaranteeing" informational state, having heard one's interlocutor say that things are thus and so, yields the subject something on the lines of a premise from which (with other premises if necessary) he can infer the proposition he is said to know, in such a way that his epistemic standing can be made out to consist in the cogency of the argument.

one else's words needs to be aware of how knowledge can be had from others, and rationally responsive to considerations whose relevance that awareness embodies. That requires his forming beliefs on the say-so of others to be rationally shaped by an understanding of, among other things, the risks one subjects oneself to in accepting what people say.[31] There are plenty of ways in which it can be doxastically irresponsible to believe someone, so that even if the other person is giving expression to his knowledge on the subject, knowledge is not to be had by believing him.[32] But although it is obviously doxastically irresponsible to believe someone about whom one has positive reason to believe he is not trustworthy, or not likely to be informed about the subject matter of the conversation, doxastic responsibility need not require positive reasons to believe that an apparent informant is informed and speaking his mind. Here as elsewhere, it need not be doxastically irresponsible to run known risks in taking things to be thus and so. That makes room for knowledge in cases like that of the trusting tourist (§2).

As before, the inferential relations in which what one comes to believe stands to the content of informational states with which one can be credited without presupposing that what one acquires is knowledge do not serve to reconstruct one's standing with respect to that proposition in terms of the cogency of an argument for it that one has at one's disposal. Rather, they constitute a rational structure to which one must be sufficiently responsive, largely in the negative way that one must not fly in the face of its revelations about belief-worthiness, if one is to be capable of being credited with that standing.[33]

31. Here it is important that the topic of this essay is the first of the two sorts of knowledge through language that I distinguished in §1, and not the second. The remark in the text would be quite wrong about the second; as Wittgenstein says (*On Certainty* §143): "A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it."

32. Peacocke, at pp. 149–50 of *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*, gives an example. Mary forms beliefs about whether it is raining sometimes by looking and sometimes by deduction from astrological principles. Her friend cannot acquire knowledge that it is raining from her say-so, even on the occasions on which what she is giving expression to is knowledge.

33. Fricker, "The Epistemology of Testimony", structures her discussion around a choice between Justificationism and Reliabilism. In the case of Reliabilism as she explains it, it is not clear that it requires that someone who acquires knowledge by testimony even has the concept of another person speaking his mind. If there is such a requirement, it is only fortuitous.

There is scope for some subtlety about the way considerations of doxastic responsibility restrict the occasions on which one can pick up knowledge from testimony. Consider the story of the boy who cried "Wolf". After a long succession of frivolous cries, those who knew the boy were rendered unable to derive knowledge that a wolf was present from him, even on an occasion when his cry really was an expression of knowledge. It would have been doxastically irresponsible for them to take his word for it. But what if a stranger happened to be the only audience on the one occasion on which the boy's cry of "Wolf" did express knowledge? (The point of making him the only audience is to exclude his having indirect evidence of unreliability, in the form of sighs of "There he goes again" and so forth.) The apparatus I am recommending allows us to entertain the idea that the stranger might acquire knowledge from the boy; the stranger's epistemic position is quite like that of the trusting tourist. I do not find such a possibility obviously offensive to intuition.[34] The case would be one in which something that might otherwise be an opportunity for the acquisition of knowledge is closed to those who know too much.[35]

The idea is, then, that one's epistemic standing with respect to what one comes to know by testimony consists in one's, say, having heard from one's informant that that is how things are; not in the compellingness of an argument to the conclusion that that is how things are from the content of a lesser informational state. Not that the subject does not enjoy a lesser informational state. It cannot be true that he heard from so-and-so that things are thus and so unless it is true that he heard so-and-so say that things are that way—a

In effect, Reliabilism, in Fricker's contrast, abandons the idea that knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons. I agree with her rejection of this position, but I am taking issue with her implicit suggestion that the only way to keep the space of reasons relevant to the epistemology of testimony is by adopting the sort of view I considered in §2.

34. It is noteworthy that Peacocke's example has Mary talking to her *friend* (who presumably knows her peculiar ways of coming to believe that it is raining). Peacocke does not consider how, if at all, the case is altered if we consider someone who does not know Mary, hearing her say that it is raining on one of the occasions on which her utterance is an expression of knowledge.

35. There seems to be a general possibility of such cases; something can be irresponsible for one person and not for another because the first knows something that the second does not know. (Such cases would be counter-examples to something one might mean by saying that knowledge is seamless. But note that they do not threaten the principle suggested by Gareth Evans at p. 331 of *The Varieties of Reference*.)

truth that leaves it entirely open whether things are that way. Moreover, that lesser state is relevant to the standing in the space of reasons that we ascribe by attributing the more demanding state. But it is not true that the only way the lesser state can be relevant is that its content figures in an argument at the knower's disposal for the proposition he is said to believe.[36]

Compare the fact that one cannot see that things are thus and so unless it looks to one as if things are that way. Here again, the lesser informational state is relevant (rationally, not just causally) to the standing in the space of reasons that we ascribe by attributing the more demanding state. And in this case, we are familiar with the thought (I mentioned it in §5 above) that it is epistemologically hopeless to capture that relevance by trying to reconstruct the epistemic standing constituted by seeing that things are thus and so out of a supposedly strong enough argument for their being that way, at the subject's disposal by virtue of its looking to him as if things are that way.

If we are not to explain the fact that having heard from someone that things are thus and so is an epistemic standing by appealing to the strength of an argument that things are that way, available to the hearer by virtue of his having heard his interlocutor say that they

36. Someone who acquires knowledge by testimony has *some* reason, independently of our crediting him with that knowledge, for believing the proposition in question. That seems guaranteed by his meeting the condition that I have suggested is necessary for doxastic responsibility: that his belief-acquisition be rationally responsive to considerations whose relevance is ensured by an understanding of how the knowledge-acquisition that he takes himself to be engaged in works. Peacocke, *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*, p. 166, writes: "There is a strong intuition that a belief is not knowledge if it is acquired by testimony for which there is no inductive or abductive argument available to the believer to the truth of the testimony." Peacocke goes on to suggest that that intuitive requirement is not met in a case he describes, involving an isolated archaeological relic with a single intelligible sentence inscribed on it. I think that is wrong: the requirement is very weak (simply that one must not be totally without reason for belief), and surely in Peacocke's case there is some inductive argument (from what civilizations generally do with inscriptions) for believing what is written on the relic. The important point is that the requirement is far too weak for meeting it to be intelligible as what makes a case constitute one of knowledge. (The point here is close to one that Peacocke makes himself, at p. 167, n. 9, in arguing cogently against the idea that "Necessarily, most assertions are true" can play a central role in the epistemology of testimony.) The intuition is no recommendation for an inferential model of knowledge by testimony, as Peacocke suggests. (I suspect that the presence of such a model in the context distorts Peacocke's sense of whether the intuition is met in his archaeological case; meeting the intuitive requirement is only a necessary condition for knowledge by testimony, but Peacocke responds to the case as though it were sufficient.)

are, do we need some other account of it? I would be tempted to maintain that we do not. The idea of knowledge by testimony is that if a knower gives intelligible expression to his knowledge, he puts it into the public domain, where it can be picked up by those who can understand the expression, as long as the opportunity is not closed to them because it would be doxastically irresponsible to believe the speaker. That idea seems obvious enough to stand on its own epistemological feet; the formulation makes as much sense of the idea that knowledge can be transmitted from one subject to another as any purported explanation could hope to confer on it.[37]

Supposing I were to grant that we do need more, I would maintain that what we need is an elaboration of points like this: in speaking in such a way as to commit oneself to the truth of what one says, one entitles one's audience to repeat what one says with an authority derivative from one's own, so that if the audience repeats it and is challenged, he has the right to refer the challenge to the original speaker.[38] Claims of that sort make it fully intelligible (if explanation is needed) how, if the authority of the original speaker was that of a knower, that same status can be inherited by a comprehending audience.

Notice that this sketch of an explanation of how it can be that knowledge is transmitted in linguistic exchange simply uses the idea of epistemic authority. It does not aim to explain how it can be that knowledge is transmitted by showing that some reductive account of epistemic authority applies alike both to the original speaker (who may derive his authority from, for instance, perception) and to the audience who learns from him.

7. Two subjects who are candidates for being credited with a given mode of epistemic standing can be alike in respect of informational states that are attributable to them without begging that question, while one of them enjoys the epistemic standing and the other does not. For instance, it can be true of each that he has heard someone whose word he has no reason to doubt say that something is the case; we could tell a detailed story in which the arguments they could construct for the propositions that they are candidates for being said to know, with the contents of the informational states

37. Compare Peacocke's remarks about the need to explain such formulations; *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*, p. 149.

38. See Robert Brandom, "Asserting".

that are non-question-beggingly attributable to them as premises, are equally strong. But my point has been that such arguments always leave open a possibility that their conclusion is false. (That is one way of putting a perennial complaint of sceptics; my aim has been to describe a style of epistemological thinking that deprives the point of sceptical implications.) The inconclusiveness of the arguments guarantees that there can be paired cases in which such a detailed story can be told and only one of the subjects knows; the other does not, because things are not the way he takes them to be, or because, although things are that way, his informant did not know it.

I claim that these differences, outside the respect in which the subjects match, can make it the case that one of them knows and the other does not. It may seem that this marks out the style of epistemology that I am recommending as belonging to a familiar genre, involving a mix of "internalist" and "externalist" elements.[39] But that would miss my point.

A mixed or hybrid epistemology takes it that the non-question-beggingly attributable informational states, and whatever can be reached by inference from their content, are *part* of what constitutes a subject's epistemic standing—in fact, the whole of what is contributed to his epistemic standing by his moves and positions in the space of reasons. That material does not seem to suffice for knowledge. The hybrid epistemology is an alternative to brazening out the claim that it does suffice—that a less than conclusive argument can be good enough for possession of it to constitute a mediated epistemically satisfactory standing (compare §3). Instead, the hybrid epistemology appeals to facts in the world, outside the subject's moves and positions in the space of reasons, in order to finish the job of constituting his epistemic standing.

But the epistemological outlook that I am recommending does not accept this restricted conception of the subject's moves and positions in the space of reasons. Standings in the space of reasons are not limited to the non-question-beggingly attributable informational states, plus good standing with respect to whatever a doxastically responsible subject can infer from the contents of those states. Rather, the

39. For these labels, see, e.g., Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, pp. 280–3. For the idea of a mixed or hybrid epistemology, see Peacocke, *Thoughts: An Essay on Content*. In chap. 9 Peacocke sets out an externalist reliability condition for knowledge (see pp. 155, 157); then in chap. 10 he argues that this must be supplemented with a condition requiring "internal rationality" (p. 156).

subject's standing in the space of reasons, in the favourable case in one of those pairs that I mentioned at the beginning of this section, is *his having heard from his informant that things are thus and so.* That leaves no extra constitutive work to be done by an external condition. The epistemic position, having heard from someone that things are thus and so, is a standing in the space of reasons in its own right, not a position that one can be in by virtue of a standing in the space of reasons when (an extra condition) things are indeed thus and so. (Similarly with the other epistemic positions: seeing that things are thus and so, remembering that they are, or were, thus and so, and so forth.)

Why does it seem that we need a mix of internalist and externalist elements in the theory of knowledge? The context is the thought that knowledge has something to do with satisfactory positions in the space of reasons. The externalist admixture is dictated by the supposed perception that knowledge cannot simply *be* a satisfactory position in the space of reasons. (We must distinguish externalism as an element in a hybrid conception of knowledge from the outright externalism that simply abandons the idea of positions in the space of reasons.) In many areas where we are inclined to claim and attribute knowledge, no policy or method of having one's belief-formation determined by the reasons available to one is free from the risk of serving up false beliefs. (I leave aside the super-cautious policy of forming no beliefs at all; this policy is too dubiously feasible for its freedom from risk of falsehood to be much comfort.) That ineliminable riskiness is hard to combine with the thought that reason ought to be self-sufficient, that whether one is in a satisfactory position in the space of reasons ought to be immune to luck—not in the sense of sheer chance, but in the sense of factors that reason cannot control, or control for. One familiar upshot of this thought is a "Cartesian" or sceptical shrinking of what can be known. The hybrid conception of knowledge can seem to be the only alternative.

The attraction of focusing on the restricted informational states is that, together with what a doxastically responsible subject can infer from their contents, they seem to constitute a province within which reason's control over a subject's rational status is not threatened by luck. The idea is that as long as a subject believes only what his restricted informational states give him reason to believe, with the degree of credence he gives to each proposition determined by the strength of the argument that his restricted informational states put

at his disposal, he will be rationally blameless.[40] If a proposition to which he gives the degree of credence that is warranted by his restricted informational state turns out to be false, that is the world's fault, not a defect in his rational position.[41] But given the ineliminable riskiness we began with, a subject's position in the supposed luck-free zone cannot suffice for knowledge of a state of affairs of one of the problematic kinds. So it seems compulsory to inject an externalist element into the theory of knowledge. Once the idea of a standing in the space of reasons is cashed out in terms of the supposed luck-free zone, an external extra is a necessity if the total picture is so much as to look as if it might be a picture of knowledge.

The externalist admixture involves conceding that whether what one has is knowledge is to some extent a matter of luck, outside the control of reason. The concession is supposed to be tolerable because a proper position in the space of reasons is only a necessary condi-

40. We could complicate this to allow for cases where the subject is blameworthy because his restricted informational states fail to include something they should have included; he should have checked something but did not. This is an analogue to negligence in the field of practical blameworthiness. The complication makes no difference to my point. Even if one exercises maximal care at achieving the right restricted informational states, one will still be at the world's mercy in believing what they give one reason to believe.

41. The point is peculiar to empirical knowledge. If someone takes himself to have proved a conclusion or computed a result when he has not, there must have been a defect in his moves in the space of reasons; it cannot be that the only thing he can blame for what has gone wrong is the world. That is essentially the feature of proof (or computation) that Crispin Wright aims to generalize, in his account of what it is to have verified a statement ("Strict Finitism", pp. 210–18). In a way that is very strange by my lights, Wright combines understanding that feature of proof (or computation) with endorsing, even in that case, the retreat to a lesser informational state, the move I am trying to explain as motivated by the desire to find a region where thought is immune to the world's unkindness. He writes (p. 210): "If arithmetical computation is to be a paradigm of verification, then to be entitled to claim to have verified a statement cannot be to be entitled to claim a conclusive, *indefeasible* warrant for its assertion; for the most painstaking and careful execution of a computation confers no guarantee that it is correct." That is to retreat (in respect of what warrants one's assertion) from "I have proved that it is so" (whose truth surely *would* constitute a conclusive, indefeasible warrant) to "I have before me what, on painstaking and careful inspection, appears to be a proof that it is so" (which leaves it open that the appearance is illusory). But the retreat seems unmotivated, given the fact that if I am misled in such a case, the fault is in my moves in the space of reasons, not in the world. I suppose it is because Wright thinks mathematical proof and empirical verification are on a par in respect of the necessity of that retreat (and so in respect of the defeasibility of available warrants)—in effect, on a par in respect of vulnerability to the Argument from Illusion—that he thinks he can generalize that feature of mathematical verification without risking an undue concession to scepticism. I think the resulting epistemology is disastrous. See Essay 16 above.

tion of knowledge. So reason can still be credited with full control over whether one's positions in the space of reasons are as they should be.

In fact the upshot makes no sense of how it can be knowledge that someone has in a favourable case. If two believers are on a par in respect of the excellence of their exercises of reason, how can we make sense of the idea that only one of them is a knower, on the basis of the thought that, in a region we are invited to conceive as outside the reach of his reason, things are as he takes them to be, whereas the other is not so fortunate?[42] Are we really giving any weight to the idea that knowledge has something to do with standings in the space of reasons? Would it not be more honest to embrace the outright externalism that abandons that idea? I doubt that anyone would take the hybrid conception seriously if it did not seem to be the only hope of keeping the space of reasons relevant while making room for knowledge in the problematic areas.

But there is an alternative position that really does combine those desiderata. The hybrid conception makes its concession to luck too late. The real trouble is with the thought it does not question, the thought that reason must be credited with a province within which it has absolute control over the acceptability of positions achievable by its exercise, without laying itself open to risk from an unkind world. That thought, like its obvious analogues in the sphere of practical reason, has all the look of a philosophers' fantasy.[43] If we avoid the fantasy, we have no reason not to allow that positions like seeing, or hearing from someone, that things are thus and so are standings in the space of reasons in their own right, even though there is an irreducible element of luck, of kindness from the world, in whether one occupies them.

One reason, then, why the epistemology of testimony is perhaps an especially useful topic for reflection, along with the sort of case I considered in §4 above, is that the propensity of human beings to be erratic and capricious, like the propensity of durable but impermanent states of affairs to lapse, brings out vividly how powers of acquiring and retaining knowledge that common sense has no hesitation in ascribing to us are at the mercy of factors that cannot be

42. I press this question in Essay 17 above.

43. On the analogous temptations in philosophical thinking about practical rationality, see Bernard Williams, "Moral Luck".

made subject to our rational control. That fact has induced epistemologists to suppose that if the space of reasons is relevant to knowledge at all, we have to choose between scepticism and the hybrid conception of knowledge. But in trying to avoid the threat of scepticism, the hybrid conception makes it hard to see how what it depicts as knowledge can deserve the title. The supposedly forced choice reflects a typically unnoticed assumption about how to place epistemic luck: that it must be excluded from the space of reasons. My aim has been to suggest the liberating potential of discarding that assumption.