

# **ON THE DEEPER PURPOSES OF TESTIMONY**

**A philosophical study of the relationship between  
testimony and the emergence of mind**

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## STATEMENT OF SOURCES

- This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.
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Peter. H. Bennett

6<sup>th</sup> May, 2007

*for my parents*

***Carole Ann Bennett***

*and*

***Robert (Robin) Frederick Bennett***

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation argues for the truth of two fundamental premises: that testimony is the primary source of knowledge in human beings, and that testimony accounts for the emergence and formation of human minds.

The thesis argues that the human ability to *perceive as...*, *to remember as...*, and *to infer as...*, is due to the say-so of others. All human beings, in virtue of being sentient beings, are able to experience both the external world and their own private states of consciousness, this work contends, however, that our ability to *experience as...* is a consequence of our emergence in a world of epistemic transactions and encounters, the most basic of which are explicated by the epistemological notion of testimony. The work argues, then, that we live in an interpreted world – a world interpreted by those who have gone before us.

The thesis argues further, that the world-view that is built within us as a consequence of the sayings of others, induces and forms human minds. The work makes a strong commitment to the Kantian categories and that philosopher's thesis of Transcendental Idealism. On the shoulders of the Kantian *a priori*, however, the dissertation argues that the formation of human doxastic structures is due to what one's epistemic elders say about what *is*. As such, the thesis seeks to establish a fundamental link between ontology, epistemology, and the concept of mind.

The work proposes a view of the concept of truth that synthesises the Correspondence Theory of Truth, the Coherence Theory of Truth, with a theory of meaning – I name this synthesis a Unified Theory of Truth. Extensive consideration is given to the concept of evidence and the role of trust in epistemic transactions.

The work concludes with a consideration of the possibility that human beings may be able to have *experiences* as... that transcend the ways of 'seeing' that are due to testimony. An explanatory theory is posited that the writings and testimonies of mystics provide evidence that human beings are capable of meaningful experiences which cannot be accommodated by the conceptual structures that otherwise make meaning possible.

\*       \*       \*

The dissertation is argued in seven chapters and is constructed thus:

## **Chapter One**

The thesis is stated in four premises:

1. that the testimony of others, with respect to what *is the case* (or may be the case), is the primary source of our beliefs about what *is the case* (or may be the case)
2. that the testimony of others provides adequate relevant grounds for one to claim to know what is the case
3. that education is testimony
4. that the formation and emergence of mind is due to testimony

Significant presuppositions are identified and discussed. A brief argument in support of the thesis is posited. Reference is made to the evolution of the argument and the overall structure and organisation of the project is elucidated.

## **Chapter Two**

The second chapter is dedicated to a detailed and extensive analysis of epistemic justification. I argue that the 'evidence condition' of the tripartite analysis of propositional knowledge is sometimes misapplied by those who argue that its function is to verify propositions. I argue that its function is to justify beliefs and that it does not verify *that p* – the evidence condition 'tracks' the belief condition, not the truth condition. I also examine the concept of evidence itself.

## **Chapter Three**

A detailed examination of the concepts of 'testimony', 'epistemic dependence' and 'epistemic independence' is undertaken. I argue for the centrality and primacy of testimony in the formation of beliefs and subsequently one's doxastic structures. I argue that testimony plays a fundamental role in the process of education and that this fact points to its significance and importance in epistemic transactions and the emergence of rational and self-reflective minds.

## **Chapter Four**

In the fourth chapter I advert to the difficulty encountered in (a) embracing a strong commitment to intellectual autonomy and (b) accepting the say-so of others on trust. In the light of this observation, I undertake a linguistic conceptual analysis of the concept of trust and then examine the role trust plays in the acquisition of beliefs. I argue that the concept of trust does not exclude critical appraisal, but that when one trusts, one must be disposed to act in a certain way. I argue that although trust does play a fundamental role in formation of beliefs induced by the say-so of others, this does not make impossible critical appraisal of the attestations of others.



## Chapter Five

In this chapter I note my agreement with other philosophers that testimony is the speech-act of attesting, but put up an argument that it is also the speech-act of informing. In consequence I undertake an analysis of the concept of information and examine the mechanisms and processes which are at work that enable 'bits' to become information for an entity or system. I argue that because testimony is the speech-act of informing, it is involved in the actual *formation* of human minds and, therefore, that we can attribute to testimony a deeper purpose than merely attesting to certain states of affairs. I argue that testimony builds, for human beings, a world-view and that it plays a fundamental role in how we come to interpret the experience of being.

## Chapter Six

In the sixth and penultimate chapter I develop my thoughts on the relationship between *a priori* understandings, testimony, and meaning. I argue that there is a logical relationship between belief acquisition, meaning, and the emergence of fully developed human minds. In this chapter I give consideration to the possibility of thought, belief, and the existence of mind in non-human animals and pre-linguistic humans. I argue that there are good reasons to believe that non-human animals think and maybe develop understandings, but that the possession of mind, in the sense that one can be *mindful* and therefore attach meaning to experience and be conscious of self, is limited to human beings. I underwrite this view by adverting to the centrality of testimony within the human condition.

## Chapter Seven

In the final chapter of this dissertation I move to a more speculative mode of philosophising and consider whether or not there may be *meaningful* human experiences which are not interpreted through the conceptual schema acquired as a consequence of the say-so of others. I undertake this speculation by examining the testimony of those who claim to have perceived

God directly and those who seek to speak of purported mystical experiences. I also consider some counter-arguments to my thesis that have not been examined in previous chapters. I conclude that there may be meaningful experiences for human beings that lie beyond interpretation and that concepts such as 'ineffability' point to our attempts to speak of experiences which transcend our doxastic structures.

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# INTRODUCTION

*A school boy believes his teachers and his school books<sup>1</sup>.*

Ludwig Wittgenstein

This dissertation examines the nature and role of testimony in the formation of beliefs. It argues that the utterances of others are a primary source of beliefs and that these beliefs make perceptual and inferential knowledge *possible*. Testimony also makes ‘*recalling as...*’ *possible*, it makes ‘*experiencing as...*’ *possible*. The thesis argues further that the emergence of mind is due to testimony.

Prior to the 1980s, philosophical research into testimony was minimal – Hume and Reid gave it some attention, and there are some brief references to it by Augustine, but it has generally been a neglected area in epistemology. Further, prior to the ideas and arguments of John Hardwig (1985) and Tony Coady (1992) those who have investigated the question of whether or not the say-so of others provides good grounds for one’s claim to know, have tended to respond in the negative. This is not surprising.

The tradition that emerged with Descartes’ project of systematic doubt and Kant’s strong rationalism has underwritten emphatic views on intellectual autonomy within the Western philosophical tradition. Misinformation, deliberate deceit on the part of leaders and governments, indoctrinatory practices in schools, the existence of liars and confidence tricksters, as well as a tendency to gullibility in the intellectually weak, immature, illiterate and uneducated, have all made the intelligent, well-informed, and educated, cautious and suspicious about accepting the claims of others. ‘Think for yourself’ is the motto and slogan of the post-Enlightenment wo/man. To

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<sup>1</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*On Certainty* (1979)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by Denis Paul and  
G.E.M. Anscombe) § 263

believe that certain states of affairs obtain because someone else says they do has been viewed by many as a failure in one's intellectual duties. "The more mistrust, the more philosophy," declared Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*.<sup>2</sup> Epistemic assent, it has been argued, should occur only on the shoulders of evidence gained independently and when subject to rigorous tests which demonstrate coherence and lucidity. The fact that testimony as a source of knowledge *seems* to be mediated in a way that perception is not, has relegated it to the position of a distant epistemic country cousin. "Unless", said Thomas, "I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it"<sup>3</sup> - the desire for 'direct' evidence, and suspicion over the veracity of the say-so of others may, it seems, have pre-dated The Enlightenment by many years. Our disposition of caution when it comes to believing what others tell us is important and even noble. We have always known that testimony plays a central role in juridical settings, and we have always seen the need to include a number of in-built safeguards and rules to help ensure the veracity of the say-so of others. The need for such safeguards was recognised from the beginning, particularly in what were literally life and death matters. In the Hebrew book of *Numbers*, Mosaic law demands that there:

...are to be legal requirements for you throughout the generations to come, wherever you live.

Anyone who kills a person is to be put to death as a murderer only on the testimony of witnesses. But no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.<sup>4</sup>

And, of course, the rules of evidence in modern adversarial courts of law are complex, rigorous, and administered by highly trained people who carefully monitor the correct application of these rules. And that is how it should be – it is better, say lawyers, for ten guilty men to go free, than for one innocent man to go to the gallows.

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<sup>2</sup> Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science* (1974)  
(Vintage Books, New York, Translated by Walter Kaufmann  
p. 286

<sup>3</sup> The Gospel According to Saint John, 20:25 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> Numbers, 35:30 (NIV) (It is generally believed that Numbers was written about 3400 years ago.)

I will argue that such a disposition of caution should be maintained and form a fundamental part of the way we educate children and a fundamental part of our intellectual life; our epistemic world is full of deceit. But these matters are not as straightforward as they may seem to be at first blush. This project will show, I believe, that there is an aspect of testimony which cannot be subject to such a disposition of caution; this is due to a rather simple fact - one has to accept certain things as given, via the testimony of others, before such a disposition can ever emerge and become a part of one's intellectual life. Recognition of this fact, I will maintain, has far-reaching consequences for us as belief-forming beings.

Detailed and careful analyses of testimony in recent years have provided strong and cogent arguments for affording it a legitimate place as a source of knowledge and belief. It has been argued, for example, that the reliability of testimony as a form of epistemic justification does not seem to be any less or more than the reliability of knowledge acquired through perception, memory, and inference. All of these sources of belief and knowledge are fallible; from time-to-time, each one of them has 'failed' us. Many epistemologists now also recognise the ubiquitous nature of testimony and have, therefore, realised that to deny it a place as a legitimate form of epistemic justification would mean that we would have to accept that we don't know very much at all. John Hardwig has demonstrated the centrality of testimony in the fields of Science and Mathematics, and I will argue in this project that education would not be possible without granting testimony a pivotal and central place in the formation of concepts and acquisition of knowledge. All this may now seem familiar enough. I will argue, however, that testimony plays an even more significant role in our epistemology, for I want to maintain that the sources of our knowledge, as they have traditionally been held to be, namely, perception, memory, and inference, are sources of knowledge only if they stand upon the shoulders of the word of others, 'words' which interpret the world that is perceptually 'given' as the world we perceive as.... For it seems to me that even my most basic visual perceptions give rise to a new belief *only if* I have

learned what constitutes the object of that belief, and to have learned *that*, is to have acquired a belief which, in virtue of being a belief, is one which has arisen out of the beliefs of others, including those who are no longer alive. If my perception of the world presents to me a red object, I will (can) only *believe that* this is a red object if, and only if, I have learned what constitutes 'red' and 'object'. And I will not know what constitutes 'red' and 'object' unless I have been taught what red is. This is not to say, of course, that I could not have the sense experience of perceiving a certain shade which some community sharing a certain language calls 'red' without being taught that this is red – I can certainly have *that* sense experience. But to form the belief, the knowledge, *this is red*, I have to be taught and I have to learn.

I hope to show, then, that the purported epistemic independence afforded by perception, memory and inference, is, in fact, mediated by beliefs acquired through testimony – we must begin our journey of belief acquisition by believing what we are told, and as such, we come to see the world as.... We will see that testimony is so fundamental to us as belief-forming beings, that it accounts for the emergence of our world-view and in consequence we remain unable to 'see' it (the world) in any other way, though in the final chapter I suggest that there may be some ways of 'seeing', which transcend this limitation of being.

An examination of the central role of testimony in the formation of our belief structures has led me to propose the thesis that testimony has a profoundly deep and fundamental place in the human condition. I have, in this work, endeavoured to show that there is a logical and conceptual connection between the formation of beliefs and the emergence of mind itself. I argue that the minds of human beings can be thought of as the sum-total of our beliefs, and therefore if our beliefs are due to the utterances of others, then our minds are due to the utterances of others. Of course, analyses of the relationship between language acquisition and the way we see the world are not new in the history of Philosophy, but applying the *epistemic* concept of testimony to this relationship is, I believe, an original position. Philosophers such as Elizabeth Fricker have given such an argument some consideration,



but, I believe, my position on testimony's fundamental place in making other forms of belief acquisition possible, as well as my attempt to link testimony with a theory of mind, proposes an original thesis. What I have attempted to do here, then, is to argue for a conception of language learning as a testimonial transaction, which not only grounds beliefs but accounts for the formation of a world-view which itself is due to the building of doxastic structures, the sum-total of which we name 'mind'. It is my view that the epistemic status of each of us is one of *total* dependence, not upon the world of our senses or even our subjective phenomenological experiences, but rather, a dependence upon the beliefs of other human beings – it is the beliefs of others which enable each person to understand, to 'convert' information into beliefs, to make sense of the world, and for a few, to engage in the formation of new ideas. I will argue that my own doxastic structures and conceptual schema exist *in virtue* of the beliefs of others – beliefs which I have been taught, have learned, and have 'used' to build my world-view, which, as it happens, is also the world-view shared by the epistemic community to which I belong; these are the beliefs which I have made my own and upon which I carry out the business of my being. This will lead us to see that the very notion epistemic independence is limited to somewhat 'trivial' epistemic transactions.

Arguing such a position necessitates extensive consideration of fundamental aspects of epistemology. Therefore, I argue for a particular conception of truth which I have called a *Unified Theory of Truth*, whereby I attempt to synthesise a naïve Correspondence Theory of Truth, a naïve Coherence Theory of Truth, and a theory of meaning. I have given extensive consideration to concepts of epistemic justification and also examine the role of trust in epistemic transactions. I have endeavoured to make explicit my views on the essential relationship between epistemology and ontology by undertaking what I hold to be a strong link between the concepts of knowledge, information, and formation. In the latter sections of this work I examine the relationship between belief acquisition and concepts of mind. After arguing for a fundamental conceptual link between testimony, belief acquisition, and the emergence of mind, I conclude this dissertation with a

more speculative approach and consider whether the purported reality of ineffable experiences can be seen in attempts to testify to such events. We will consider, then, the claims of those who testify to perceiving God and those who testify to purported mystical experiences.

My philosophical method is essentially analytic, though I have tried to embrace a more speculative and explanatory approach where I deemed it to be appropriate. Conceptual analysis continues to provide a powerful tool in philosophical research; it is of great value in making certain things 'clearer'. We must, however, be cognisant of the limitations of conceptual analysis. Concepts are living things in that they are held by living beings. Individuals acquire concepts, in the first instance from other people, and the acquisition of concepts allows other new concepts to form in the minds of individuals. Concepts shape our understanding of the world, our application of concepts in turn shapes and re-forms that world, which again re-shapes these modified concepts and also gives rise to new ones. Ruth Jonathan notes:

Though not infinitely plastic, human identity and purposes – and hence the conceptual schemes with which we can rationally operate – are nothing like as fixed as a philosophical method wedded to usage and past practice would lead us to suppose. In acting upon the world we modify social and material circumstances and produce changed realities by which in turn our interests, hopes, desires and satisfactions are modified. Even our most basic concepts are more elastic than we are inclined to believe when social and material circumstance seem to be static.<sup>5</sup>

Philosophy, however, also plays an important role in developing and formulating explanatory theories - it allows for speculation, providing such theorising and speculation is undertaken in a careful and coherent manner and is underpinned by Philosophy's *raison d'être* – to strive to say that which is true. Therefore, although this work begins by applying a strong analytic methodology, the latter stages of the project do move to a more speculative approach. The degree to which such an approach and methodology have 'worked', will be for others to judge.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan, R.

'Education, Philosophy of Education and Context'  
*Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Volume 19, Number 1,  
1985, p. 12

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### ***Some Notes on Style***

Throughout this work I have tried to ensure gender-neutral language. In using third-person personal pronouns, I have adopted the form – s/he, him/her, him/herself. I have also adopted the device - wo/man.

At times I make reference to a purported Ultimate Reality. When doing so I apply the conventions used within the Abrahamic faith-traditions and refer to such a being as God (using an upper-case 'G' and I do not replace the 'o' with a dash, as some writers do). I have wanted to avoid speaking of this being with the masculine pronoun, so have adopted the device of S/HE, or Him/Herself.

When making use of extended quotations, I have indented these without use of inverted commas. When quoting shorter passages, I included these in the main body of the text and use double inverted commas. Where single or double inverted commas occur in indented quotations, they are to be taken as an accurate expression of the way the quoted author has expressed him/herself.

I have adopted the conventions of notation in basic symbolic logic:

$p$       proposition

$\sim$       negation

iff      if and only if

\* \* \*

***Human reason, in one sphere of its cognition, is called upon to consider questions, which it cannot decline, as they are presented by its own nature, but which it cannot answer, as they transcend every faculty of the mind.***

***Immanuel Kant***

***Preface to the first edition***

***Critique of Pure Reason***

***1781***

## Chapter One

*If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants<sup>1</sup>.*

Sir Isaac Newton

### ***Exordium***

I propose the following thesis:

1. that the testimony of others, with respect to what *is the case* (or may be the case), is the primary source of our beliefs about what *is the case* (or may be the case)
2. that the testimony of others provides adequate relevant grounds for one to claim to know what is the case
3. that education is testimony
4. that the formation and emergence of mind is due to testimony.

It is my intention, then, to undertake an examination of the epistemic concepts of 'testimony', 'epistemic dependence', 'epistemic independence', 'epistemic interdependence', 'epistemic justification', 'evidence', 'truth', 'trust', and 'information'. Further, I will be arguing for a *logical* connection between the concepts of belief, knowledge and mind, I shall, therefore, research and

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1. Newton, I.

Letter to Robert Hooke, 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1676 in H.W. Turnbull (ed)  
*Correspondence of Isaac Newton* Vol 1 (1959) p. 416

demonstrate how 'mind' *entails* belief. In so doing, I will attend to the title of this dissertation by elucidating the *relationship* between testimony and mind.

### ***Significant Presuppositions***

I shall begin the argument for this thesis by setting out a number of significant presuppositions for which I shall not be positing detailed arguments. My justification for this can be explained thus: every argument must begin somewhere and it is not *unreasonable* to assert the truth of first premises without arguing for these first premises. If it were required that every premise in an argument be argued for, then, one would first have to argue for the possibility of foundation (bedrock) premises which are (purportedly) self-evident, and that, in and of itself, requires an argument which in turn, leads inevitably either to an infinite regress or vicious circularity. Second, I think some aspects of philosophical investigation can safely be regarded as 'settled' – not in the sense that there is absolute consensus, but in the sense that most philosophers would acknowledge that significant ground work has been done, and to such a degree that we can at least begin a conversation, enter into a dialectic, with *provisional* agreement on certain significant, but not unreasonable, assumptions. In what follows, then, I shall set out my significant presuppositions. They provide the foundation of this work; on these suppositions, I build my thesis.

This thesis is written from the perspective of *positive epistemology*,<sup>2</sup> and by this I mean to commit myself to the view that knowledge is possible. Therefore, I will not, at any stage, engage with various arguments for scepticism (negative epistemology). This is not to say that people sometimes claim to know things when they do not; I believe, and will argue, that whilst knowledge is possible, sometimes people do not know *that p*, even though they believe that they do. But I build this work on the belief that we do know certain things, that we apply

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<sup>2</sup> See Coady, C.A.J. *Testimony – a philosophical study* (1992) (Oxford University Press, Oxford) p. 3, who also makes this distinction between positive and negative epistemology.

the concept of knowledge in our day-to-day discourse in an intelligible and coherent manner. That when I say I know something, my fellow human beings find that utterance meaningful and that there are accepted community standards for determining whether or not I do, in fact, know. I acknowledge the *possibility* that knowledge is not possible, I acknowledge the possibility that I am a brain in a vat, but for the purposes of this work, I contend that I am not a brain in a vat and that my claims to know certain things, and the claims of others to know, are meaningful and open to assessment in accordance with conditions that have been argued for and are coherent. This, then, is my first significant presupposition, that it is possible to know *that p*.

As a positive epistemologist, I will, for the purposes of this work, embrace the tripartite or standard analysis of propositional knowledge<sup>3</sup>, therefore (and *pace* Gettier<sup>4</sup>), whenever I talk of S knowing *that p*, I am to be taken as asserting that S believes *that p*; S has adequate relevant grounds supporting his/her belief *that p*; and that it is true *that p*. I take these three conditions to be necessary and sufficient. I am cognisant of the philosophical debate with respect to the adequacy of this analysis, but hold that these three conditions are, if not sufficient, at least necessary. Further, provisional engagement with this analysis (i.e. the tripartite analysis) will certainly enable me to run the key aspects of my thesis. If the reader holds that knowledge is not possible, or that the very notions of truth and evidence are incoherent, then, what I have to say will not persuade. A significant presupposition of this work, then, is that the proposition: 'S knows *that p*', is meaningful and that if certain conditions obtain, one may be able to determine the truth of that proposition, namely, that S knows *that p*.

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<sup>3</sup> I have borrowed the term 'tripartite/standard analysis' from Dancy, J. see *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (1985) (Basil Blackwell, Oxford) p. 23

<sup>4</sup> Gettier, E. 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' in *Knowledge and Belief* (ed A Phillips Griffiths) (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1983)

With respect to the concept of truth, I want to embrace what I shall call a *Unified Theory of Truth*<sup>5</sup>. This is the term that I want to give to my attempt to bring together a naïve Correspondence Theory of Truth, a naïve Coherence Theory of Truth and a theory of *meaning*. I am not an anti-realist, I believe that there is a Universe that has actual ontological status and that this Universe exists independently of the minds of human beings. I am, however, strongly committed to a Kantian thesis of Transcendental Idealism – what this independently existing Universe is will be available to me only insofar as I apprehend it with the apparatus with which I have come into the world – I will apprehend only what that apparatus will allow me to ‘see’. If a dog could entertain beliefs and if it is true that a dog cannot see colour, then, a dog would believe that a rose is colourless – in fact, the dog would have no concept of colour. The dog’s belief is the result (is caused by)<sup>6</sup> the way it sees the world. I believe the rose is red, and this is the result of the way I see the world, for we see the world not as it is, but as we are. Therefore, I want to distinguish very clearly between a concept of truth as that which corresponds to what is and a concept of truth that enables me to operate in the world in a *meaningful* way, and the world will be meaningful to me (and to others) when it is coherent. How this relationship between ‘meaning’ and ‘coherence’ emerges is, to a large extent, the subject of this work. I hold, then, that that which is real is that which *is*, (the ‘is-ness’ of the world is a matter for ontology) whether I believe it or not and whether or not I have good grounds for holding the belief I do. “To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false; while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”<sup>7</sup> What I take to be true, however, that is, what I believe, that to which I give epistemic assent, what I hold is the truth cannot be simply or merely the correspondence of *my beliefs* with reality, not because there is no independently existing reality, but because what I take that reality to be will be determined, in

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<sup>5</sup> This term was suggested to me by Dr Robert Pargetter in our discussions on truth theories and I thank him for his permission to use it.

<sup>6</sup> I will examine the notion of caused beliefs in Chapter Two.

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle *The Metaphysics* (1991)  
(Prometheus Books, New York, Translated by John H. McMahon) 1011b25



part, by the kind of being I am. I cannot escape the limitations of my being. This was Kant's great insight into that battle between Realism and Idealism. He did not deny the existence of a world independent of human beings, he denied that we could know it, in and of itself.

We ordinarily believe that our knowledge must "conform to the way things are". Indeed it must, said Kant, but it is also true that "objects must conform to our knowledge." But how can this be? we must ask. Do our own mental faculties determine the way the world is? Does the world accommodate itself to our wishes and demands? No, said Kant, but the world as we perceive it through our senses and understand it through our reason must be adapted to our mode of perception and cognition. To take a crude example, if we always looked at the world through green glasses that we could never remove (and didn't know we had on), everything would look green to us – not that everything would *be* green, but that it would appear so to us because of the nature of the lenses through which we looked at it.

It is not the world "as it is in itself" that we perceive, but the world as it is filtered through our senses and our understandings. The world as it is, and world as it appears to us, are utterly different.<sup>8</sup> [italics Hospers']

What is real, then, is that which actually is. What I *believe to be true*, will be that which is coherent, not merely in the sense of the *interdependence* of a network of mutually supporting beliefs I hold, but in the sense that what I say and believe about the world will cohere with the beliefs, perceptions, and understandings my fellow human beings also hold about the world. We perceive alone, but believe together. The degree to which my beliefs may be *held to be true* (by me and others) cannot be in virtue of the mere correspondence of my beliefs with what actually *is*, because true beliefs are true when they correspond to what actually *is, as seen and perceived* by beings like us. There is that which is, in and of itself, and there is that which is, as seen and perceived by me and other human beings. What is true, is to do with the *relationship* that exists between what actually exists and how I and my fellow epistemic beings see what actually exists. I cannot see any way to escape this Kantian insight. The remarkable

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<sup>8</sup> Hospers, J.

*An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (4<sup>th</sup> ed) (1997)  
(Routledge, London) p.138

thing, however, is that Philosophy enables us to understand this special relationship between truth and reality. What we need is a marriage between the naivety of a Correspondence Theory of Truth and the naivety of a Coherence Theory of truth. My beliefs can only be true *in the sense* that they correspond to what actually is *as perceived/understood by me and others*. As a coherentist, my conceptions, my understandings, my beliefs, I hold to be true because of the interface between me as a belief-forming being and the world in which I live; what I take to be true is founded upon notions of *epistemic justification*, and yet I understand that the grounds that *cause* my beliefs do not, in and of themselves, *make my beliefs true*. In other words, I understand that that which is real is that which actually is, 'truth' is one of the ways we describe a proposition, and so a true proposition is that which corresponds to the facticity of the Universe as *seen by us* – with an emphasis on the 'us', not merely as seen by 'me'. I hold that the interface of this Universe and my being *in it*, produces a meaningful and coherent encounter such that I am entitled to hold that what I believe is true, *with the caveat* that I sometimes discover that what I held to be true was, in fact, not true. It is the synthesis of these orthodox theories of truth, that I will name a *Unified Theory of Truth*.

This thesis enables me to counter any suggestion that the illusion I have of an elephant in the kitchen equates with a true belief - if I am the only one who sees it (i.e. the elephant) I am not justified in believing that there is an elephant in the kitchen. If my fellow humans see an elephant in the kitchen at the same time that I claim to see an elephant in the kitchen, then, my *justification* for holding that there actually is an elephant in the kitchen is well grounded. The point I wish to labour is this: my beliefs are justified to the degree that they cohere with the set of my beliefs and the beliefs of my fellow beings. The degree to which they cohere warrants a claim that what I believe is true. As with my presupposition regarding knowledge, I am cognisant of the limitations of a Coherence Theory of Truth – I understand that consensus does not necessarily equate with what *is*, but I wish to posit the view that one can distinguish between a concept of truth as

that which corresponds to what is, and a concept of truth that corresponds to that which is *meaningful*, and meaning only has meaning within a community, a sociology of fellow beings capable of forming doxastic structures. In other words, Philosophy allows us to understand the possibility of a disjunction between reality and truth. ‘Reality’ is to do with ontology. ‘Truth’ is to do with epistemology. Philosophy seeks to say that which is true, we aim for and hope for a correspondence between what we say and what is. Yet we understand, thanks to Kant’s philosophical insight, that our perception of ‘reality’ and our understandings of the way the world is, is unquestionably affected by the kind of beings who are doing the perceiving and are endeavouring to understand. We are not disheartened by this disjunction, however, because we recognise it. There cannot be any private languages.

With respect to the evidence condition of the tripartite analysis of propositional knowledge, I will be examining this concept in detail in the second chapter of this work, as concepts of epistemic justification cannot be addressed under the rubric of ‘Significant Presuppositions’ – they are too central to my project. At this point, however, I want to commit myself to a useful distinction Scheffler makes between ‘evidence’, ‘reasons’, and ‘proofs’. He writes:

The notion of *evidence*, for the purpose of the evidence condition [of the tripartite analysis of propositional knowledge], is, then, to be taken as roughly equivalent to that of *good reasons*, or a *good case*. Having adequate evidence for “Q” is having a good case, or good reasons, in support of “Q.” What is demanded of a good case will, of course, vary with the subject: In empirical matters empirical evidence is appropriate; in mathematics it is proofs that count; in moral deliberation, moral reasons have a distinctive role to play.<sup>9</sup>

I think these distinctions are helpful – whenever speaking of the justification for our claims to know, I will endeavour to use the general term ‘grounds’, or ‘having

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<sup>9</sup> Scheffler, I.

*The Conditions of Knowledge* (1965)  
(Scott, Foremann & Company) p. 59

good grounds'. I will try to be specific when using the term 'evidence', in that I should be taken to mean by 'evidence' 'empirical grounds' – that is, the sort of grounds we seek when wanting to justify our beliefs about the physical, observable world. When speaking of the grounds we have for assenting to philosophical, moral, religious, beliefs, etc., I shall endeavour to use the term 'reasons', rather than evidence; and when speaking of mathematics and logic, I shall use the term 'proofs'.

With respect to the concept of belief, I will be embracing the notion that 'having a belief', 'entertaining a belief', requires language. I will argue from the position that beliefs necessarily entail propositions. Thus, I hold that beings that do not have language, do not have beliefs. Again, I understand that this position is not uncontroversial – Magee, for example, is persuaded that thinking can occur without language. He argues this from the position of personal experience, pointing to occasions where he claims he was thinking without language. I will deal with the possibility of non-propositional beliefs, 'thinking' without language and the possibility of thought in animals in the sixth chapter of this work, for such possibilities are of importance to the central contention of this thesis.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, then, in this project I assume that:

- knowledge is possible
- if S knows *that p*, then S believes *that p*; S has adequate relevant grounds supporting his/her belief *that p*; and it is true *that p*
- a proposition is adjudged as true if it coheres with the already existing web of my beliefs and when my apprehension of the world is a consequence of my *proper epistemic function and the way the world presents itself to me*.

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<sup>10</sup> See Magee, B. in

*Confessions of a Philosopher* (1997)  
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London) p. 102

Further, that when speaking of this belief (proposition) those belonging to my own epistemic community find the proposition coheres with the set of their previously existing beliefs and that its enunciation (by me) is *meaningful*.<sup>11</sup> My belief will cohere with other human beings when what is asserted in expressing that belief reveals that we see the world in much the same way and that when either I or they say something which does not show a mutual way of 'seeing', both they and I will have reason to question the truth of the belief.

- what it means to possess good grounds in support of a belief will vary with respect to the nature of one's belief; beliefs about the physical and material world will be supported by empirical evidence; beliefs about non-physical and non-material matters will be supported by reasons; and beliefs about mathematics and logical claims will be supported by proofs – this taxonomy, as already noted, is due to Scheffler
- possessing, holding, entertaining, a belief, requires language and that all beliefs have propositional status.

### ***The Argument in Brief***

I note that my thesis, as expressed in the Exordium, may be subject to the claim that it is self-refuting. The thesis, itself, sets out a series of propositions about that which is the case, and claims that what we believe is the case is due to the claims of others. Yet, I do not claim that this thesis is due to the views of others. In the light of these two claims, then, it may seem, *prima facie*, that my thesis is self-refuting.

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<sup>11</sup> What I mean by 'meaning' and 'meaningful' will, I hope, become clear as the project proceeds.

A doctoral thesis cannot be based solely on the claims of others – it demands an original explanatory theory. If I am claiming that what I believe is a consequence of the beliefs of others, and this dissertation is an exposition of what I believe, then this thesis is about the beliefs of others which, in turn are about the beliefs of others, and thus its claims are completely circular and advance nothing new, nothing already known. I have not put the cart before the horse, but the horse is going around in circles, in an endless epistemic loop. But I do believe that I am advancing something new and I do not hold that my thesis is self-refuting. On what grounds can I make this claim?

Coady notes that the role of testimony as a source of knowledge has been badly neglected by epistemologists. He writes:

Modern epistemologists tirelessly pursue the nature and role of memory, perception, inductive and deductive reasoning but devote no analysis and argument to testimony although *prima facie* it belongs on the list. After all when we inquire into the basis of some claim by asking: 'Why do you believe that?' or 'How do you know that?' the answer 'Jones told me' can be just as appropriate as 'I saw it' or 'I remember it', 'It follows from this' or 'It usually happens like that'.<sup>12</sup>

Along with Coady, I wish to argue that testimony is a source of knowledge – exactly what I mean by 'a source of knowledge' will, I hope, become clear as this work proceeds. I will go further than Coady, however, and argue that testimony is the primary source of our beliefs (and knowledge) and that everything we come to believe rests on the claims others make about the world. This does not mean, however, that we cannot form new beliefs, generated through our own inner deliberations and reflections. I believe that creativity and dynamic belief formation are possible. I believe in intellectual autonomy. I do not, however, believe that creativity and dynamic belief formation occur in an epistemic vacuum. The fact that there are only twelve tones in a chromatic musical scale does not mean that there are not an infinite number of melodies to be derived

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<sup>12</sup> Coady, C.A.J. *op.cit.*, p. 6

from these twelve tones. This is why my thesis is not self-refuting. All of the beliefs I have about the world in which I live, I have acquired from others, either directly or indirectly. Those I have acquired indirectly are beliefs I have formed as a consequence of my own inner deliberations and reflections – they are a result of my own epistemic creativity. But their coherence, and the degree to which others will find them *meaningful*, will depend on the degree to which these beliefs have emerged from the beliefs of those who have gone before me. I will argue that even my beliefs about the world I perceive through my own senses, can be traced back to what I was told about the world. I do not merely see, I see as.... “How do I know that this colour is red? – it would be an answer to say: ‘I have learnt English’.”<sup>13</sup> My claim, then, is this: the testimony of my epistemic elders forms the *foundation* of my belief structures about the world. The testimony of my epistemic elders is *formative*. As I grow intellectually, I develop increasing capacities for engaging in critical appraisal, finding some assertions incredulous, testing assertions for cogency and coherence. As I grow and develop I am able to synthesise the beliefs I acquired in virtue of the say-so of my epistemic elders and become a creative and original thinker. This involves the development and emergence of the intellectual virtues, the emergence of intellectual autonomy. But I will, nonetheless, argue that these capacities and intellectual abilities emerge from the beliefs I acquired due to the testimony of others. In this sense, testimony is logically prior to other sources of knowledge, it is primary, it is the foundation of our doxastic structures.

I will, then, argue that testimony occurs on different levels. At one level, testimony is epistemically significant, but ‘surface’; the other is epistemically profound and ‘deep’. I will argue that at the surface level, testimony operates as a legitimate source of knowledge and justification for our beliefs. This is the level it operates on when T tells S *that p*. On this level, testimony is all-pervasive; when we listen to the news, read newspapers, books, magazines, street

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<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*Philosophical Investigations* (1958)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe) § 381

directories, user-manuals, take instructions from coaches and teachers, talk to our neighbours, our colleagues, our friends, parents, children, witnesses in courts of law, doctors, motor mechanics, a multitude and plethora of experts, road signs, advertisements, symbols, signs, non-verbal cues and facial expressions – we are swamped with the say-so, the assertions, the claims, the testimony of others. We will need to examine this notion of testimony in detail and explore the relationship between another's say-so and the provision of grounds for the formation and justification of belief. We will need to examine the notion of testimony as a speech-act and if we can show that it is, in fact, a speech-act, we will need to determine what sort of speech-act it is. We will need to examine the notion that the say-so of another does not merely *inform*, but that the actual 'saying' is the evidence *that p*. We will examine counter-intuitive notions that the provision of good grounds, via testimony, for believing *that p*, involves *trust* and *trusting*. I say 'counter-intuitive' because of the strong rationalist tradition that has posited the view that coming to know is an autonomous act and cannot and should not depend on the beliefs of others. As Murdoch observed, we still live in the age of the Kantian man, where we hold that reason has replaced God<sup>14</sup>. We shall, then, examine the relationship between testimony and epistemic dependence and from this, review the concept of education in the light of this level of testimony.

Following this, I shall then argue that testimony operates at a much deeper level. I shall argue that we live in an interpreted world and that the world I experience is experienced in the light of what I have been told *is* the world. On this level, testimony is still functioning as an epistemic operator, but on this level it is doing more than attesting, testimony is actually *forming beliefs*, that is, it is doing more than merely providing grounds; on this level, testimony *is belief*; on this level, testimony is more than the enunciation of an epistemic claim – T told S *that p* -

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<sup>14</sup> Murdoch, I.

'The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts' in  
*Existentialists and Mystics – Writings on Philosophy and Literature* (1997)  
 (Catto & Windus, London)



rather, it is: 'This *is...*'. Paul Tillich observes the intimate relationship between epistemology and ontology. He writes:

(E)very epistemology contains an implicit ontology. It cannot be otherwise. Since knowing is an act which participates in being, or, more precisely, in an "ontic relation", every analysis or the act of knowing must refer to an interpretation of being.<sup>15</sup>

On this level, testimony is revealed in the etymology of the word *information* – here testimony is *informoare* (sic)<sup>16</sup> – what Puddefoot calls 'shaping information'.<sup>17</sup> The testimony of others *forms* beliefs about the world and in consequence, *forms* mind itself. Here, testimony *is* formation. This notion of information is akin to the way in which an object *informs* putty, information can shape, mould, create, bring into being structures. On this level, what one is told actually forms doxastic structures, and these structures, I will argue, are what constitutes mind itself. What I take the world to be, then, will be the world presented, or more precisely, interpreted, by these structures. And so, just as Kant showed that we understand the world in the light of the categories, I want to argue that layered upon the 'hard-wiring' of the organic brain, are the doxastic structures that are built by the testimony of our parents and teachers, by our epistemic elders. Such a position, I believe, does not commit me to any particular conception of mind, specifically with respect to dualistic, physicalist or eliminativist positions. Whilst this thesis is philosophical, not empirical, there is now strong evidence that learning creates and changes neural structures, that is, that learning does shape (inform/form) the physical structure of the brain. In *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School* the authors note:

1. Learning changes the physical structure of the brain.

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<sup>15</sup> Tillich, P. *Systematic Theology* (1968)

(James Nisbet & Co Ltd, Great Britain) Vol I p. 23

<sup>16</sup> The author is advised by colleagues who teach Classics that the correct spelling of this Latin word is: 'informare'. In giving it here as 'informoare' I am following Puddefoot's rendition of it.

<sup>17</sup> Puddefoot, J. C. 'Information Theory, Biology, and Christology' in *Religion and Science – History, Method, Dialogue* (1996)(ed W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman) (Routledge, New York) p. 302

2. These structural changes alter the functional organization of the brain; in other words, learning organizes and reorganizes the brain.
3. Different parts of the brain may be ready to learn at different times.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to the points made above which support the view that learning actually changes neural structures, the most recent studies on how children learn emphasise the crucial role of community and relationships in learning. Although learning psychologists rejected (a long time ago) a *tabula rasa* conception of learning and recognised the capacity of children to engage *actively* in their own learning, (capacities investigated by Piaget, who, it should be noted, was greatly influenced by Kant's early insight into *a priori* predispositions/knowledge), given the central concern of this project, I want particularly to draw attention to the significance of *being in communities, of being in relationships* when it comes to the learning done by children and therefore the early development of mind itself.

In the significant publication cited above<sup>19</sup>, a publication which provides a detailed and thorough survey of the most current research into human learning, the authors write:

*Children and Community.* Although a great deal of children's learning is self-motivated and self-directed, other people play major roles as guides in fostering the development of learning in children. [cf Fricker below]. Such guides include other children as well as adults (caretakers, parents, teachers, coaches, etc.). But not only people can serve as guides; so too, can powerful tools and cultural artifacts, notably television, books, videos, and technological devices of many kinds (Wright and Huston, 1995). A great deal of research on such assisted learning has been influenced by Vygotsky's notion of zones of

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<sup>18</sup> Bransford, J.D., et al

*How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and School*  
 John D. Bransford, Ann L. Brown, Rodney R. Cocking (eds)  
 (Commission on Behavioural Social Sciences and Education,  
 1999, National Academic Press, Washington D.C.) Also  
 available on-line at:  
<http://www.nap.edu/html/howpeople1/ch5.html>

<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience and Schooling*, (ibid) is listed on the Victorian Department of Education's 'Professional Reading List' for 2007. See:  
[http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/leader/pcpd\\_ose\\_2007reference\\_list.pdf](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/leader/pcpd_ose_2007reference_list.pdf)  
 The book was also provided to all Victorian school principals in 2005 at a conference with the Minister of Education.

proximal development and increasing popularity of the concept of “communities of learners,” be they face-to-face or through electronic media and technologies.<sup>20</sup>

*But* even if this were not the case, it is my contention that testimony, at this deep and profound level, accounts for the formation of doxastic structures which emerge and are created outside of the control of the individual epistemic agent, and that these structures make experiences of the *world* as..., possible. Testimony at this level provides meaning, coherence, intelligibility. We are epistemic beings, believing beings, but meaning and coherence and intelligibility are only possible within epistemic communities, that is, *amongst* fellow believers and meaning-seekers. “In order to make a mistake, a man must already judge in conformity with mankind.”<sup>21</sup>

Each one of us, in becoming an adult master of our commonsense scheme of things, has been through a historical process of development during which her attitude towards her teachers and other informants was one of simple trust. No one of us satisfies the condition...whose testimonial knowledge reduces to perception and inference. Instead, each of us has, mixed up in her total web of belief, many beliefs acquired through testimony which at the time of acquisition were accepted uncritically. Bearing in mind the role of teaching by others whom we trust unquestioningly in our learning of language (which is not separate from our learning about the world), this seems inevitable (though there is the deep issue here about the possibility of an isolated thinker and speaker of a self-invented language). At any rate, this phase of simple trust in others, and its input into our resulting world-conception, characterises all of *us*. [italics, Fricker's]<sup>22</sup>

My central concern, then, will be to argue for the centrality and primacy of testimony in the formation of mind itself.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 82

<sup>21</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*On Certainty* (1979)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe) § 160

<sup>22</sup> Fricker, E.

‘Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony’  
*Mind, New Series* Volume 104, Number 414, April 1995 p. 401

## ***On the Evolution of the Argument***

During the late 1980s I prepared a thesis for a Master of Education degree in the University of Melbourne. My thesis was entitled: 'A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Indoctrination' – I had become deeply interested in what distinguished 'education' from 'indoctrination' and in preparing that work, I put up an original analysis of the concept of indoctrination.

That thesis was firmly grounded in linguistic philosophy, and so I began by looking closely at the grammar of indoctrination. On completion of the work, I came to the conclusion that the application of the concept of indoctrination required four logically necessary conditions which, taken together, were also sufficient to characterise the concept.

I argued that S is indoctrinated (with respect to a given proposition,  $p$ ), if and only if: (i) S believes *that*  $p$ ; (ii) S will not consider the possibility that  $\sim p$ ; (iii)  $p$  is a belief (a) of deferred epistemic independence and (b) for which there is inadequate evidence; and (iv) S learned to believe *that*  $p$  from another person or group of people.<sup>23</sup>

I argued that in all cases of indoctrination, the beliefs that an indoctrinated person holds, in virtue of his or her indoctrination, are always the beliefs of someone else. In other words, I argued that we never characterise a person as indoctrinated unless the beliefs s/he holds were first someone else's beliefs.

I also argued that indoctrination brought about a certain disposition, namely, that the beliefs acquired as a consequence of indoctrination are held in such a way that an indoctrinated person will not consider the possibility that any of the beliefs

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<sup>23</sup> Bennett, P.H.

'A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Indoctrination'  
(Master of Education Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1989) p. 1

in question are false. It is not just that an indoctrinated person won't change his/her beliefs – s/he won't even *entertain the possibility* that they are untrue.

But the critical point with respect to my current project, is that as far as I was concerned at that time, one of the logically necessary criteria of the concept of indoctrination, was that the beliefs an indoctrinated person holds are always someone else's beliefs, beliefs which were acquired through teaching and learning, whilst the beliefs we acquire independently of another's teaching, can never lead to indoctrination. This does not, of course mean that I think all beliefs acquired through teaching lead to indoctrination, only that in the case of indoctrination, all the beliefs held in virtue of being indoctrinated, are the beliefs of someone else.

I also believed (and still do believe) that a distinguishing characteristic of an educated person, is that the educated are always prepared to consider the possibility that they are wrong – wrong with respect to any one of their beliefs. It was William James who gave voice to how critical such a disposition is, when he observed that: "A great many people think they are thinking, when they are merely re-arranging their prejudices."

When we acquire the beliefs of others, and further, acquire them as a consequence of another person's teaching, or testimony, we may refer to this technically as *epistemic dependence*, we use this term to describe cases whereby one comes to believe something as a consequence of someone else's say-so and where our *grounds for believing that p* is the say-so of another.<sup>24</sup>

In some cases of testimony, one may be in a position to check the truth of what one has been told, one could become epistemically independent. But in many cases we are in no position to do this. Obvious cases of epistemic dependence

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<sup>24</sup> I first encountered the term 'epistemic dependence' in an important paper by John Hardwig, 'Epistemic Dependence', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol LXXXII, No 7, July, 1985

which eliminate any chance of epistemic independence are with respect to historical claims, when it comes to histories prior to our own existence, we are, in principle, epistemically dependent and in the face of this, we encounter our first major philosophical problem. Can it ever be the case that the testimony of another person provides sufficient grounds or evidence to warrant belief, for one to assent to a belief?

The answer to this question varies and the question becomes even more important when we not only claim to believe something on the say-so of another person, but when we claim to know something on the avowal of someone else. And surely, we do make such claims to knowledge all the time. If someone you trust tells you that the freeway is closed due to flooding or a bad accident, surely you would claim to know that the freeway is closed, even though you, yourself, have not personally witnessed the closure. Your doctor tells you that you have developed diabetes; the news reader tells you that the president has started bombing Baghdad; your spouse tells you that s/he has applied for a new job; we believe what we are told, we claim to know much on the testimony of others. Most of the time, this is how our epistemic world works. It is true that many of us maintain, or seek to maintain, the highest standards of epistemic integrity and autonomy – we like to check things for ourselves, but as we shall see, the degree of such autonomy is limited, and may not exist at all.

So can we ever be justified in claiming to know, as a consequence of testimony? I give the following exposition from John Hardwig.

Hardwig became deeply interested in the way in which some scientific research is carried out. In an important paper entitled 'Epistemic Dependence'<sup>25</sup>, Hardwig described an experiment which sought to determine the half-life of a sub-atomic particle. What interested Hardwig was that the experiment cost \$10 million, 50 human years were spent making the necessary equipment and improvements to

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

the Stanford Linear Accelerator. Fifty physicists worked for 50 human years collecting the necessary data. When the experiments were completed, the experimenters divided into five geographic groups to analyse the data, a process that involved looking at two and half million pictures and measuring 300 000 specific events. The so called West Coast Group, which analysed a third of the data, included 40 physicists and technicians who spent about 60 human years on their analysis.

At the conclusion of all this work, the international team determined the half-life of the particular charmed particle they were looking for – as a scientific community, each member would have claimed to know the half-life of the sub-atomic particle, but no one person could have undertaken this experiment alone, each member of the team had to rely on, was dependent on, the highly specialized expertise of other members of the team. No one scientist knew what others knew, they all had to rely on the testimony and expertise of each other. At the conclusion of his paper, Hardwig asks – do we now know what the half-life of this particular atomic particle is? If we say we do, then we have to accept that much of what we claim to know is based on the testimony of others. If we want to say that we can never claim to know something when our grounds for knowing is the testimony of another, then much of what is undertaken in modern science does not lead to knowledge. If we want to say that we can only claim to know things through our own direct perception of the world, then, Hardwig argued, we would have to accept that we don't know very much at all.

Hardwig's paper led me to realise that my own research and view on the difference between indoctrination and education was not accurate, for I came to realise that it was not just indoctrination that was characterised by the teachings and beliefs of others, I found myself forced to accept that much of what goes on in schools and universities, that is, in formal places of learning, is the practice of imparting and acquiring beliefs through testimony, and, *a fortiori*, that we characterise that process as 'education', not indoctrination. We would not want

to say that what students learn in schools as a consequence of the say-so of their teachers and text books, is *mere* belief, beliefs which do not come up to the standards of knowledge. As a society, as parents, we expect that what students learn in schools has the status of knowledge, that is, beliefs that are true and possess strong grounds of justification, but the evidence students have for the apparent knowledge they acquire in schools is always the result of testimony – the testimony of their teachers, their texts, the testimony of the internet, and tens of thousands of other sources, and if we want to assert that another person's say-so does not provide sufficient grounds for a claim to knowledge, then we will be forced to accept that what goes on in our schools and universities, does not involve the transfer of knowledge, rather, it involves the transfer of a set of beliefs which may or may not be true, and which are not held on good grounds.

My research, however, was to take me to an even more disconcerting realisation. As I examined closely the philosophical writings on the sources of knowledge, I slowly came to form the view that testimony may actually be the primary source of all of our knowing and believing, I came to form the view that we are all epistemically dependent, that our foundation and primary beliefs are a consequence of testimony and that of the beliefs we acquire independently of other human beings, the very acquisition of those is dependent upon, relies upon, prior, foundational beliefs which, on examination, we discover are themselves the result of testimony. In consequence, the central concern of this work began to emerge and further thought led me to form a view on the relationship between testimony and the emergence of mind. It is this thesis for which I want to argue.



## ***Structure and Organisation of the Project***

In order to provide substantive argument for the thesis outlined above, I shall proceed thus:

First I shall examine the concept of testimony as a source of knowledge and belief, noting in particular the relationship between testimony, as a technical epistemological term, and concepts of epistemic justification and epistemic dependence.

Second, I will examine the role of trust in epistemic transactions.

Third, I will examine how the concepts of testimony, epistemic dependence, and trust inform and shape the concept of education.

Fourth, I will examine the relationship between knowledge and information.

And finally, I will explore the implications of this analysis with respect to the concept of mind and being human.

If my argument succeeds, I will have shown that all we believe and know is a consequence of testimony; that education is due to testimony, and that one's ability to find meaning and make sense of the world as it is presented to us, is dependent on the role of testimony. I will conclude with a brief consideration that there may be experiences open to us, which are experiences *as...* and yet transcend understandings based on doxastic structures formed by testimony.

## Chapter Two

True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place; but they will not stay long. They will run away from a man's mind, so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason. That process, my dear Meno, is recollection, as we agreed earlier. Once they are tied down, they become knowledge, and are stable. That is why knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion. What distinguishes one from the other is the tether.<sup>1</sup>

What would it be like to doubt now whether I have two hands? Why can't I imagine it at all? What would I believe if I didn't believe that? So far I have no system at all within which this doubt might exist.<sup>2</sup>

I find myself believing all sorts of propositions for which I do not possess evidence: that smoking causes lung cancer, that my car keeps stalling because the carburetor needs to be rebuilt, that mass media threaten democracy, that slums cause emotional disorders, that my irregular heart beat is premature ventricular contraction, that students' grades are not correlated with success in the nonacademic world, that nuclear power plants are not safe (enough)...The list of things I believe, though I have no evidence for the truth of them, is, if not infinite, virtually endless.<sup>3</sup>

In the first chapter I enunciated what I presupposed with respect to my overall project. I gave a short description of the evolution of this work and stated my thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Plato

*The Meno* 98a in  
*Protagoras and Meno* (1985)  
(Penguin Books, Great Britain, Translated by W.K.C. Guthrie)

<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*On Certainty* (1979)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe) § 247

<sup>3</sup> Hardwig, J.

'Epistemic Dependence'  
*The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume LXXXII, Number 7, July 1985

My central concern is to show that the beliefs we acquire as a consequence of the say-so of others are fundamental in the formation of our world-view. I will be arguing that a belief in the primacy of perceptually-based beliefs in licensing claims 'to know' is flawed, because the way we see the world is interpreted and understood within a conceptual framework, a doxastic structure that ensures that we see the world as... and that that doxastic structure is due to our immersion and initiation into an epistemic milieu which, in turn, is due to that aspect of the human condition which makes central the act of telling and speaking.

In Chapter One I mentioned also that testimony operates on two levels; on a more superficial, but nonetheless important level, we use the term 'testimony' to describe epistemic transactions where one person tells another what is purportedly the case. On this level, a fundamental concern to epistemologists is the question of whether or not one is justified in claiming to know *that p* when one's grounds for believing *that p*, are the say-so of another, and it is the matter of possessing 'good grounds' that I want to consider in this chapter. Thus, I want to undertake a detailed examination of the 'evidence' condition in the standard analysis of propositional knowledge and I want to examine the actual nature of evidence. I see this as a critical step in fulfilling the overall aim of this project.

### ***On Epistemic Justification***

Understandably, the necessary conditions for the application of the tripartite analysis of propositional knowledge have led to protracted scrutiny. I want to argue that there is evidence in the literature of confusion over what it means for someone to be *justified* in believing *that p*; I want to argue that this confusion has arisen over the relationship between the holding of good grounds in support of one's belief, and the truth condition. The confusion lies in the mistaken view that the evidence condition *verifies* the truth of the belief, or 'makes' the belief true, or 'shows' that the belief is true. This is not the function of the evidence condition. The evidence condition is logically connected with the belief condition, not the

truth condition. The evidence condition is included in the analysis of propositional knowledge in order to point to the issue of whether or not the believer is justified in holding the belief s/he does, it is not there to establish whether or not the belief is true. If the evidence condition tracked the truth condition rather than the belief condition, the notion of justified false belief would be incoherent, and I want to assert that justified false belief is not incoherent.

I note just a few examples to support my claim that such confusion exists. The first is the third quotation presented at the start of this chapter. Hardwig tells us of a number of things he believes, but then includes the phrase: “though I have no evidence for the truth of them.” What I am curious about is the term ‘evidence for the truth of them’; I will make some observations of this specific example later.

In another example from Leslie Stevenson, we note the following:

With some claims one might, if one took enough trouble, check the matter out for oneself, and justify one’s judgement by perception or proof...

If (i) B hears and understands A say that p,  
(ii) B has no reason to doubt A’s sincerity,  
(iii) B has no evidence against p  
(iv) B has reason to believe that there is a chain of testimony behind A’s belief that p, the first member of which has perceived the state of affairs *which would make p true or false* then B is justified in believing that p.<sup>4</sup> [italics mine]

Here, we see a suggestion that some forms of justification, namely perception, *verify as well as justify* – perception “would make p true or false”.

And a third example from Paul Faulkner:

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<sup>4</sup> Stevenson, L.

‘Why Believe What People Say’  
*Synthese*, Volume XCIV, 1993 pp. 429 and 448

I want now to argue that the principle of assent is compatible with the acceptance principle and consistent with its justification. I take the acceptance principle first.

The following distinction may be drawn. A justification connects an episode of believing *with the truth of the proposition believed*: it should state for what reasons a belief is held and it *should determine that the proposition believed is, at least, likely to be true.*<sup>5</sup> [italics and underscoring mine]

I hold 'a justification' cannot determine truth.

In the light of these few examples (and it would not be difficult to point to others), I want to begin our consideration of the nature of epistemic justification by noting the function of grounds as that which accounts for the generation or cause of beliefs; that which 'entitles' one to believe *that p* (by 'entitles' I have in mind a deontological notion of epistemic justification) and what it is that verifies the truth of a proposition.

We begin, then, examining the second of these, that is, by making some observations with respect to what it means for someone to be justified in holding a belief. As indicated in the first chapter, my analysis here is put up within the context of the standard (or tripartite) analysis of propositional knowledge, that is, we ask what it means for someone to be justified in believing *that p*, whether or not it is, in fact, the case *that p*? With this aim in mind, then, I make the following basic observations with respect to the locution:

L1                    S is justified in believing *that p*

We note that:

L1 is a statement about a certain state of affairs – it asserts that something is the case; L1 is a proposition and as such it has a truth value – S either is, or is not,

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<sup>5</sup> Faulkner, P.

'The Social Character of Testimonial Knowledge'  
*The Journal of Philosophy* Volume XCVII, Number 11,  
November, 2000 p.588

justified in holding his/her belief *that p*. From this we may infer at least two things:

- a that there may be a state of affairs in which S is neither justified nor unjustified in believing *that p*<sup>6</sup> and
- b that there may be a state of affairs in which S is unjustified in believing *that p*.

The adjective phrase: 'S is justified...' suggests that a different judgement could be made with respect to the nature of S's belief – that is, whether or not s/he is, in fact, justified in believing *that p*.

L1 asserts that S has achieved some standard; as it is a judgement, we know also that someone must be in a position to ascertain whether or not S has, in fact, come up to that standard. What that standard is, and who is able to tell that S is justified, is not immediately apparent and it is to this very matter that we must give substantial attention. At this point, however, I want merely to note L1's evaluative status – it is *an evaluation*, an evaluation of the *quality* of the grounds upon which S holds his/her belief.

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<sup>6</sup> By including this here, I have two things in mind: the beliefs people sometimes claim to have which do not seem to be the sort of thing for which one can ever have grounds, at least in the way in which we usually think of grounds (eg. empirical evidence, or reasons, or proofs). I think, for example, of the (somewhat strange) question: What is your evidence for believing that you love your spouse? or What evidence do you have for believing in God? From time-to-time one hears people say in response to such questions: I have no evidence, I just love her, or I just believe it; second, the concept of belief is applied to states of mind of human beings (and, perhaps, non-human beings) and it is possible that believing may occur for no apparent reason. It seems that I just believe that I have two hands and that the earth existed before my birth, and that I am in pain and that I am seeing red; to talk of my reasons or evidence for believing these things, seems absurd (cf Wittgenstein). I just believe it. Further, Pojman (2001) in his discussion of Internalism notes that people sometimes believe things but cannot recall the evidence that first produced the belief (p. 142) [forgotten evidence]. It seems also that very young children believe all sorts of things without being able to reflect inwardly on what evidence or grounds they have for believing what they do.

L1 is a statement about S – it is not a statement about the nature of *p*. L1 allows for the logical possibility that whilst S is justified in believing *that p*, it may be the case *that ~p*. The fact that S is held to be justified in believing *that p* says nothing about the truth or falsity of *p*.

I believe that this observation is critically important. L1 is a judgement about S's epistemic status with respect to *p*, it is not an assertion *that p*. That S is justified in his/her belief *that p* does not 'make' *p* true – it does not verify *p*. To say that someone has adjudged S's belief to be justified is not to say that s/he who has so judged has undertaken any tests to determine whether or not it is the case *that p*.

The justification condition is not a codicil to the truth condition, its role in the analysis of propositional knowledge is to assert that S must possess evidence in order to know. The justification condition makes a claim on S – s/he must possess adequate, relevant grounds supporting his/her belief *that p* if s/he is to be adjudged as being justified in believing *that p*. Whether something is true or not has nothing to do with *someone* possessing evidence for that which is true. It can be the case *that p*, even though no-one has any evidence or reason to believe *that p*.

The tripartite analysis of knowledge includes no condition requiring the verification of *p* (though, of course, it does require that it is the case *that p*). It baldly states *that p*. The justification condition, as it lies within the context of the standard analysis, places an epistemic obligation upon S, but it says nothing about the verification of *p*. If the concept of propositional knowledge demanded that S *know that he knows that p*, or must (himself) have verified *p*,<sup>7</sup> we would need to add a fourth condition that may look something like this:

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<sup>7</sup> I realise, of course, that such a requirement would make the standard analysis hopelessly circular as well as subject to an endless regress; or make the justification condition (and perhaps also the truth condition) redundant. If S verifies *that p*, then s/he necessarily has grounds for his/her belief and it is necessarily the case *that p*

S knows *that p*

iff

- i      S believes *that p*
- ii     S is justified in believing *that p*
- iii    S has verified *that p*
- iv     *that p*

It may be, of course, that in the process of fulfilling the requirement of (iii), S acquires the grounds that lead another to say s/he (S) is justified in believing *that p*, but the tripartite analysis does not include condition (iii) above, and condition (ii) is not necessarily the same thing as S fulfilling the requirements of (iii). It seems to me that some of the more controversial epistemological dilemmas to be found in the literature testify to confusion over this very point. (Note again the passage quoted above from Hardwig: "I find myself believing all sorts of propositions for which I do not possess evidence: that smoking causes lung cancer, that my car keeps stalling because the carburetor needs to be rebuilt, that mass media threaten democracy, that slums cause emotional disorders, that my irregular heart beat is premature ventricular contraction, that students' grades are not correlated with success in the nonacademic world, that nuclear power plants are not safe (enough)". I wonder what Hardwig means when he says he possesses no evidence for these beliefs? Surely he possesses evidence for these beliefs? I suspect what he means is that he does not know whether or not these beliefs are true and that evidence, if it's doing its job, should verify the truth of his beliefs. My argument is that this is not the role of evidence in the analysis of knowledge.

Perhaps one of the reasons there is confusion over the relationship between the various conditions for the application of the concept of propositional knowledge is due to the varying 'types' of reasons (justification) one may have for believing



things. The epistemological status of 'grounds' can differ significantly. Compare, for example, the direct evidence of proprioception, or the reasons one has for assenting to the validity and soundness of a syllogism, with the evidence of memory, testimony, or induction. When S is adjudged to be justified in believing that s/he has two hands, the test one makes for determining the quality of S's grounds may be the same as those we would undertake to verify  $p$ . But the fact that one's being epistemically justified is not the same as  $p$  being verified becomes clear when one's reasons for believing  $p$  are based on grounds which do not seem to have the same evidential purchase as that afforded by the direct evidence of proprioception or analytic propositions. I may, for example, say that S is justified in believing that light travels at 300 000 kilometres per second because I know that S has read a great many science books on the topic. If I (or S) wanted to verify  $p$ , however, the hundreds of books S has read on the space-time continuum and the wave/particle characteristics of light will contribute nothing towards the achievement of my aim.

As already noted, the concept of epistemic justification is an evaluative one – S is either justified or unjustified in believing *that*  $p$ . From this a further point may be educed: we say that a person is justified in believing *that*  $p$  if s/he possesses grounds in support of his/her belief. But just as it makes sense to talk of a person being justified (in that s/he *does* possess evidence/reasons), we may also evaluate the *quality* of the grounds upon which S bases his/her belief. The grounds one has for believing something can vary in evidential quality, not just in 'type' – though these two aspects are not unconnected. Nonetheless, one may hold empirical evidence in support of both  $p$  and  $q$ , and so we say that S's grounds for believing  $p$  and  $q$  are empirical in nature, but we may also note that the grounds S has for believing  $p$  are of a superior quality to the grounds s/he has for believing  $q$ . We may, for example, know something about the researchers who sought evidence for  $p$  and  $q$  and know that one research organisation is much more exacting in its data collection and analysis than the other. Further, we note that when we examine the grounds one has for believing

something, we sometimes say that they are good, sufficient, inadequate, weak, strong, excellent, quite good, supportive, rational, reasoned, empirical, self-evident, anecdotal, intuitive, and so on. As with the observation made above, who ascertains the epistemic quality of S's grounds and against what criteria or criterion these grounds are measured is not immediately apparent. Terms like good, relevant, adequate, etc., are themselves concepts open to matters of degree – they are not 'absolute' concepts like 'unique' or 'pregnant' – there are no degrees of uniqueness or pregnancy.

In summary, then, I note the following:

The locution 'S is justified in believing *that p*' is understood to mean (at least) that:

in order for S to be justified in believing *that p*, s/he must have met some standard which permits this assessment

it is logically possible for S to be justified in believing *that p*, and for it (in fact) to be the case *that ~ p*, and

whether or not one is justified or unjustified with respect to the *type* of grounds one possesses, the evidential quality of these grounds may vary

How these judgements are made and who makes them now requires examination.

### ***Internalism and Externalism***

When thinking about epistemic justification, a distinction has been made between the grounds the believer thinks s/he has for assenting to *p*, and the assessment

of those grounds by a person or persons other than the believer him/herself. Philosophers have considered whether or not the justification condition is satisfied if it meets the 'internal' standards of the believer, or the standards of those who are assessing a believer's grounds. The debate is extensive and far-reaching. Pojman lists distinguished thinkers who have committed themselves to one or the other side of the argument. The significant Internalists he identifies are: Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Russell, Chisholm, Lehrer, Pollock, Bonjour, Alston, and Audi. Countering the Internalists he names Goldman, Swain, Sosa, Armstrong, Quine, Dretske and Nozick as Externalists, belonging to one of two camps – Reliabilists and Substantive Naturalists - taken together, a formidable list of epistemologists.

Positing a definition of Internalism, Pojman writes:

Internalism stresses having reasons for one's belief that ground or justify those beliefs...'[H]aving reasons' for your belief is generally interpreted as your being able to access those reasons, being able to recall them from memory, to cite them when questioned, and to use them as premises in arguments. You are able to determine by reflection alone whether a given belief is justified for you.<sup>8</sup>

A commitment to Internalism, then, makes epistemic demands on the believer to produce, through inner reflection, the grounds s/he purportedly possesses for holding a given belief. According to this thesis, to be justified in believing *that p*, means that S can explain why s/he believes *that p*. So here, the question of whether or not S is justified in believing *that p* is a matter for S only, though Internalists maintain that such justification must meet two necessary conditions: *accessibility* and *epistemic responsibility*.

If S is justified in believing *that p*, then, the grounds S possesses for his/her belief must be accessible to him/her through inner reflection. S must be able to

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<sup>8</sup> Pojman, L.

*What Can We Know? An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed) (2001) (Wadsworth, Belmont) p. 136

discover the reasons, evidence, proofs; s/he must be cognisant of them, s/he must know that these *are* the reasons that support his/her belief *that p*. There is no requirement, according to this analysis, that the grounds, themselves, (expressible as propositions) be true. For example, I may believe that I am seeing a tree and when I investigate the reasons I have for this belief I note that my belief is produced by my senses, I believe on the basis of my perceptual abilities. That on this occasion my belief is the result of an illusion is neither here nor there, what counts is that through introspection I can discover the reasons I have for believing *that p*.

This condition of Internalism, of course, presupposes that the believer can engage in some sort of inner dialogue. It also presupposes some sort of disposition and commitment to being rational – that is, the believer must be able to ‘track’<sup>9</sup> the relationship between his/her beliefs and what produces them. On this account, it would seem that Internalism, as a theory of justification, would exclude beings incapable of these dispositions from being justified in holding any beliefs. This may not be a matter of concern; such a requirement does not mean that children, high-order non-human mammals, and even fully functioning intelligent adult humans cannot hold or possess beliefs, it simply means that if such beings cannot access and bring to mind the reasons they have for believing certain things, then they are not justified in holding the belief. Again, this requirement does not mean that the believer does not have reasons for believing *that p*, it means only that s/he cannot access them – s/he cannot ‘see’ them. If this is correct, then, true beliefs held with good grounds, but inaccessible grounds, cannot count as knowledge. To know, one must be justified in believing *that p*, and even if one possesses grounds, if these grounds are inaccessible, then one cannot know.

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<sup>9</sup> I hope to explain what is meant here by ‘tracking’ the relationship between evidence and belief when we consider Peter Achinstein’s notion of an ‘explanatory connection’.

The second condition Internalists maintain is necessary to being justified is epistemic responsibility. On this rests the notion of deontological justification. Accordingly, one is justified in believing *that p* if and only if one is committed to the truth and holds that the grounds one has for believing *that p*, do, in fact, 'track' *p*'s purported truth. The grounds that I can realise by introspection, I must hold to be relevant and adequate with respect to my assertion *that p*. "Epistemic responsibility is analogous to moral responsibility. ...Just as I have a *prima facie* moral duty to tell the truth, I have a *prima facie* epistemic duty to seek the truth."<sup>10</sup> Again, there is an inherent assumption in the 'responsibility' criterion with respect to a commitment to rationality – namely, that I must be prepared to consider the possibility that I am wrong in my belief *that p*. I must be able ascertain whether or not my grounds for believing *that p* do underwrite and support my belief; my grounds cannot (should not) be *ad hoc*. I should take into consideration any reasons/grounds that would count against holding *that p* is true.

The notions of 'relevant' and 'adequate' grounds, however, suggest that the Internalist's thesis is, nonetheless, normative. Even if it is the believer who makes the determination with respect to a justified belief, this assessment will be made against some standard – but whose standard? Surely the answer to that question is that such a determination will be made against the standards of the community of believers in which one makes a claim to know. But this, as baldly stated here, won't do. Galileo was justified in believing that the universe was not geocentric and was assuredly able to access the grounds supporting his belief, whilst the community of believers in which he lived and worked could not, did not, or would not 'see' his reasons/grounds. (I will discuss this situation in more detail when we consider Cohen's thesis on such matters.) But this fact may not count against the claim that the believer's reasons are evaluated against epistemic standards 'external' to the believer. There is good reason to believe that those who rejected Galileo's heliocentric model did so for reasons other than a failure

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<sup>10</sup> Pojman, L. op.cit., p. 138

to sincerely examine his evidence. Given the evidence Galileo had, surely he could not not claim to know that the sun does not go around the earth. Of course, he did recant, but this was under profound levels of duress. He knew he knew, and he knew because he could not deny the connection between his telescopic observations (evidence) and the object of his belief. Despite the religious prejudices of his day, despite the generally low levels of education and schooling of the great mass of Europe in his day, he lived in a time of technological progress, on the cusp of the Enlightenment, and even if he had not lived at the birth of the Age of Reason, the uneducated and un-schooled formed beliefs on the basis of good grounds. Thus, the Internalist thesis, I contend, can only work if we accept that the believer, in examining his/her reasons for believing *that p*, evaluates his/her grounds against epistemic standards we, as belief-forming beings, recognise as underwriting and tracking the object of our beliefs. This is required if the condition of epistemic responsibility is to mean anything.

Externalism, as a theory of epistemic justification, stands as a counter-argument to Internalism. Essentially, the Externalist asserts that the difference between being justified in believing *that p* and not being so justified, is not (merely) a matter for the believer – and perhaps, not a matter for the believer at all. For the Externalist, S is justified in believing *that p*, if and only if, S's grounds are adjudged as relevant and adequate according to (a) some given standard and (b) by someone other than S him/herself. At the heart of Externalism lies the notion of an epistemic community, the notion that whilst belief may be a private and personal matter, perhaps not even within the control of the believer, questions of justification are public matters – they are normative and evaluative.

Pojman observes that Externalist theories of justification fall into one of two main camps. The first is Reliabilism. He writes:

What matters, according to reliabilism, is not being able to cite or access your justification, but whether the belief was produced (or is sustained) by a reliable process. What counts is not whether or not you can give the correct account of your reasons for belief, but whether your belief-forming mechanisms (e.g. five senses, memory, introspection, testimony reports, and ability to make valid inferences) are functioning properly in a suitable context.<sup>11</sup>

Here is a causal model of belief formation; underpinning Reliabilism is the view that our beliefs are the result of causal processes. Our beliefs are justified, if the mechanisms which produce beliefs in belief-forming beings like us are working properly, working reliably. What it means for a belief to be caused, and what is meant by a reliable process, requires examination. Citing Alvin Goldman, Pojman notes that Goldman argues for three necessary conditions of his Reliabilist theory:

Agent *A*'s belief that *p* (*Abp*) is justified, if

1. The belief that *p* is the result of a reliable process;
2. Given *A*'s relevant alternatives, there was no perceptual equivalents that could lead *A* to have a false belief;
3. The Belief that *p* is true.

There is no need for cognitive access to the grounds of one's beliefs. Instead reliabilists emphasize the *causal* relationships, or *nomological*...connections, between belief states (*S* believes that *p*) and the state of affairs that makes *p* true, such that given that *S* believes that *p*, it must be the case that *p*.<sup>12</sup>

The reference above to nomological conditions is connected with the second form of Externalism identified by Pojman, viz., Substantive Naturalists. Substantive Naturalists do away with the notion of justification altogether arguing that it is not needed for knowledge. According to this theory, true beliefs are the result of a law-like operant – true beliefs are caused by the 'fit' between us as

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 143

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 144

belief-forming beings and the world in which we live. We can be assured that many (most?) of our beliefs about the world are true just because we are able to operate successfully within a complex environment that causes us to have true beliefs. Knowledge is true belief and knowledge is possible because there is a symbiotic relationship between us as belief-forming beings and the world which causes us to have these beliefs. Accordingly, I do not need to be able to access the reasons or grounds I have for believing something, in fact, what I believe may not even be under my cognitive control – I don't choose what or what not to believe. Even when I utilize all my powers of abstract reasoning, I may not be able to shake off a belief or assent to a given claim. Only when there is an epistemic match between the grounds presented to me and my responding assent, do I believe. This theory is analogous of the relationship between a key and the lock in which it works – if the key unlocks this door, then it is a true belief. Here we seem to be embracing a Pragmatic Theory of Truth. If the Substantive Naturalists are correct then perhaps this was the explanation behind the cry of the man recorded in the Gospel of Mark when, in tears and begging Jesus to heal his son, the father heartbreakingly says: "I believe; help thou mine unbelief."<sup>13</sup> One simply cannot *make* oneself believe something.

Of course, the most immediate and obvious problem with Substantive Naturalism is that sometimes the physical, empirical world causes false beliefs. We will consider this in more detail below.

### ***Evidence Itself***

In this thesis, I want to maintain that the testimony of others provides adequate grounds not only for justified belief, but for knowledge. If the Substantive Naturalists are correct, and if testimony is a 'natural' source of knowledge (as

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<sup>13</sup> The Gospel According to Saint Mark (KJV) 9:24



perception allegedly is), then perhaps there is nothing more that needs to be said. Testimony, like perception, inference and memory causes beliefs. It may even be that a distant antecedent of this theory of epistemic justification lies in what Reid called the *principle of credulity*, namely, our (human) tendency to operate on the assumption that the attestations of others are faithfully given and generally, can be relied upon.<sup>14</sup> But there seems to remain an epistemic ‘sticking point’ – the orthodoxy of Plato seems to insist that if we know *that p*, then, we must be justified in believing *that p*, and that justification demands an assessment, an evaluation. (And, of course, for Plato, an assessment that the believer him/herself must be in a position to provide.) For some, there is something intuitively wrong about Substantive Naturalism – some people (perhaps even most people) do believe things as a result of what might be recognised as a natural fit between the world and the believer, but others can see that many people hold false beliefs, and maybe, even dangerous beliefs. For the problem of belief, is that beliefs are not benign – beliefs can change the world, beliefs can result in harm to the world. Some people ought not to believe what they do. Sometimes, physical and natural law-like processes deceive us; some people have hallucinations whose verisimilitude is such that they are unable to distinguish reality from the illusion.

In an attempt, then, to examine notions of epistemic justification more deeply, I now want to consider some ideas of Cohen and Achinstein.

### ***Defeaters and the Omniscient Conditional***

Cohen's central argument, as I understand it, is that the relevance of the reasons which are put up as supporting S's belief *that p*, are relevant only in so far as

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<sup>14</sup> Reid, T.

*An Inquiry Into the Human Mind* (1970)  
(University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

they are adjudged to be so by S or someone else. S believes *that p* on the basis of his/her recognising *r*, the reasons s/he has for believing *that p*, and will continue to believe *that p* until such time as s/he is in possession of *d* - a defeater. Following Cohen, a defeater is that which provides S with a reason(s) for no longer believing *that p*. Cohen argues that the power of any defeater to cancel out one's good reasons for believing *that p*, however, is dependent upon S's recognition that the defeater actually is a defeater. Cohen poses the following question:

Suppose in the case imagined that *d* defeats through a very subtle line of reasoning that would escape all but the most acute intelligence. S believes *q* only because he is of normal intelligence and so fails to appreciate the defeating effect of *d*. With the details so specified, does S fail to have good reasons?...Our initial assessment reflects a conception of having good reasons where 'good' means (something like) "ideally correct." S has good reasons in this sense, only if his reasons are undefeated by the evidence he possesses. Our subsequent assessment reflects a conception of having good reasons where 'good' means (something like) "permissible". In this latter sense, S can have good reasons even if those reasons are defeated (by evidence he possesses) provided it is still (epistemically) permissible for S to believe for those reasons, i.e., provided the relevance of *d* is not obvious.<sup>15</sup>

Cohen goes on to build a nomenclature for describing the various points from which S's reasons for believing *that p* may be defeated:

Let us call a defeater, the relevance of which is obvious relative to a standard determined by the normal reasoning ability of a social group, an intersubjectively evident defeater. A defeater that is not intersubjectively evident we can call intersubjectively opaque. A defeater, the relevance of which is obvious relative to a standard determined by the subject's own reasoning ability, we can call a subjectively evident defeater. A defeater that is not subjectively evident we can call subjectively opaque....Given our assumption that having knowledge entails having good reasons, which sense of having good reasons preserves this entailment? I will argue that consideration of this question reveals a social

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<sup>15</sup> Cohen, S.,

'Knowledge and Context'  
*The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume LXXXIII, Number 10,  
 October, 1986 p. 575

component of knowledge. Eventually I will claim that this social component is best seen as indicating that attributions of knowledge are context-sensitive.<sup>16</sup>

In the light of this, Cohen goes on to argue that if a defeater exists with respect to S's belief *that p* which is intersubjectively evident but subjectively opaque, then, we would want to deny S's claim to know on the grounds that what s/he counts as good reasons do not conform to the standards of reasoning required within the social context of S's claim. In other words, everyone else can see what defeats S's reasons, but not S him/herself. However, Cohen wants to grant S good grounds even if there is an existent defeater – but only if such a defeater is intersubjectively opaque. In this case the defeater is both subjectively and intersubjectively opaque, but may be subjectively evident to someone else, or some other society or institution outside of the epistemic context in which the belief is held. This would be the omniscient conditional.

Thus, Cohen wants to say that we would grant that S has good reasons for believing *that p* if it were the case that S had, *prima facie*, good reasons for believing *that p* and neither S nor the community in which the claim was made were able to recognise a defeater (assuming one existed) which cancelled out what S and his/her community believe to be good reasons. Let us consider some examples of such situations.

It is widely held to be the case that people living two thousand years ago believed that the earth was flat.<sup>17</sup> Today, of course, we would want to deny their claim to know that the earth was flat on the grounds that the earth is not flat. We may be willing to grant, however, that believers in a flat earth had justified belief. Perhaps an even better example than belief in a flat earth was the belief in a

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p 576

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting, of course, that even two thousand years ago there were some people who knew that the earth was not flat, but a sphere. In Cohen's terms, they possessed a subjectively evident defeater supporting their belief that the earth was not flat though the defeater was intersubjectively opaque. Eratosthenes, (c.275–c.195 B.C.), devised a world map and a system of chronology and measured the earth's circumference and tilt and the size and distance from earth of the sun and moon. A truly extraordinary achievement given the time in which he lived.

geocentric Universe. It is arguable that ancients had *prima facie* good reason to believe that they existed on a static disc (or sphere) and that the sun, moon and stars orbited this unmoving place. As far as we know, most of them possessed no reason that would defeat their beliefs. The evidence of their very eyes supported their belief that the sun goes around the earth. There is no way that a wo/man standing on this earth can sense the movement of this place – despite the fact that the globe is spinning at 1670 kilometres per hour and orbiting the sun at 107 000 kilometres per hour. Thus, although the earth is not flat, and the sun does not go around the earth, people believed for a long time in a geocentric Universe – in Cohen's terms, they possessed no intersubjectively evident defeater and therefore, they were justified in holding to their beliefs.

Within the structure of Cohen's analysis, it is worth considering cases where a single individual, functioning, living, within a community in which belief *p* is held, uncovers/discovers a defeater which then becomes subjectively evident whilst at the same time the newly recognised defeater remains intersubjectively opaque. I have already footnoted a reference to Eratosthenes, but perhaps the most famous example of such a situation is that of Galileo and perhaps even Einstein's theory of gravitation, which Eddington was so anxious to produce empirical evidence in support of.<sup>18</sup> We are certainly aware of the personal difficulties faced by Galileo when he became aware of a defeater for a widely held belief that was subjectively evident but intersubjectively opaque. And examples of this kind seem to exist within the field of moral beliefs also. Some have paid a heavy price for believing that there are good reasons to believe *that*  $\sim p$  when everyone else in the community believed *that* *p*. In the light of these examples, then, it seems that Cohen's analysis provides an accurate account of what actually occurs within communities of belief-forming beings like us. Sometimes, we all seem to agree that there is no reason not to believe *that* *p* – sometimes, individual members of our community can see that the rest of us are wrong. This may be

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<sup>18</sup> For a useful discussion on this see Popper, K. in *Conjectures and Refutations – the growth of scientific knowledge* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.) (1989) (Routledge, London) pp. 33-37

because they are more intelligent, more perceptive, better educated, have access to more advanced tools. Whatever the reason, it seems that some have to bear the burden of knowing that the majority is wrong. On the other hand, it is sometimes the case that the majority can see that an individual is deluded in holding to certain beliefs, and sometimes, so deluded that s/he is dangerous and should be removed from the community lest great harm result. Surely it is the case that some of the great human battles and tragedies have pivoted upon just such epistemic dilemmas. Were Joan of Arc and Abraham schizophrenics, or genuine mystics, able to discern the very voice of God? Who is right, Einstein or Bohr (?)— perhaps neither.

The Internalist/Externalist distinction and Cohen's analysis helps us to see something of the relationship between believer and evidence, something of the relationship between what is going on when the grounds a person has for believing something are evaluated. Cohen is insistent that epistemic justification is conceptually embedded in social contexts. Human beings form beliefs; human beings adjudicate degrees of epistemic justification against epistemic standards determined by human beings. But let us consider the notion of an omniscient observer, the notion of a being who is not embedded within a human social context, a being who forms beliefs but is able to view from a distance what we believe and why we believe what we do. Let us consider a being whose beliefs are all true and who, because of his/her omniscience has no need for epistemic grounds, a being who can bypass the justification condition in virtue of his/her omniscience. Should there be such a being, would s/he understand, agree with, allow for, the notion of justified false belief? I will respond to this question after considering something Cohen asserts towards the end of his paper. He writes:

Compare 'know' with a term like 'flat'. Attributions of flatness can vary in truth value depending on what standards are applied. I may look out my window and claim that New Jersey is hilly whereas a giant may assess New Jersey as flat. Each claim is correct. There is no contradiction, since the contexts of attribution yield different standards. Surely I would not want to claim that what the giant says is false owing to his distorted

perspective, or my claim that the road is flat would be subject to the same assessment by an ant-sized being. All of this is familiar enough. Again it is important to see that neither we nor the giant are constrained to use specific standards. I could adopt the giant's standards and agree with him by truthfully stating that New Jersey is flat. This does not conflict with the psychological fact that routinely our own personal/social perspective determines which standards we intend.

This is just what I want to say about 'know' and standards of evidentness (sic) for defeaters. Attributions of knowledge are relative to such standards, and the particular standard that applies for a given attribution is determined by context.<sup>19</sup>

Cohen argues that both his belief and the giant's are true *in virtue* of the evidence they each possess, even though they hold contradictory beliefs. Is this a case of the very thing I am railing against, the notion that the evidence *makes something true*? Cohen seems to be asserting that his belief in New Jersey's topographical undulations is true because that's how the world looks to him. Surely this cannot be right just on these terms? Is the schizophrenic's belief that Jesus is talking to him true because that's how the world seems to him? As Sartre pointedly wonders: what proof did Abraham have when he thought an angel was telling him to sacrifice his son, and what proof did Abraham have that he was, in fact Abraham?<sup>20</sup> In the first Chapter I argued that evidence grounds my beliefs and it is axiomatic that what I believe, I believe to be true. My argument, however, is that truth is dependent on that which is, on the facticity of the world and, *a fortiori*, how that facticity is presented to belief-forming beings. Therefore the giant and Cohen can both be right providing there is an actual correspondence between that which *actually exists and reliable belief formation* in Cohen and the giant. Cohen and the giant are entitled to believe what they do because that is how they see the world, *providing* it is the actual world they are seeing and the way they see it is due to the perceptual apparatus they actually do possess and providing that perceptual apparatus is working as it should. This is a difficult matter. When explicating the concept of truth, I am most anxious to

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<sup>19</sup> Cohen, S. op.cit., pp. 580-581

<sup>20</sup> Sartre, J-P.

*Existentialism and Humanism* (1948) p. 31  
(Methuen & Co, London, Translated by Philip Mairet)

avoid some kind of relativistic position – I reject totally a ‘true for me’ slogan. In my view, we must maintain a link between the concept of truth and the concept of being. This is what I attempted to explain with my reference to a Unified Theory of Truth. I do not want to be taken as asserting that truth is merely what I take to be the case. I want to commit myself to a concept of truth that links, on logical grounds, ontology with epistemology, I want to argue that truth is dependent on facticity. We need to distinguish, however, between the mechanism which links actuality with reliable belief formation and therefore produces meaning and coherence and is *shared by the community of belief-forming beings to which we belong*, and a conception of truth which holds that the evidence possessed by me and others guarantees, or verifies, *that p*. I understand that Cohen’s thought-experiment above is endeavouring to demonstrate a conceptual link between the concept of ‘flat’ and the concept of knowledge – in essence, he is arguing that both concepts are relative, he is arguing that they both depend on the observer and the context. I hold that Cohen’s argument on defeaters is helpful, but if he is arguing that possessing certain evidence ‘makes’ something true for him (and I’m not sure that he is), then that would be a position with which I could not agree. In order to know *that p*, it must be the case *that p*. What is context-dependent and observer/perceiver dependent is the normative and evaluative status of epistemic grounds and the degree to which they warrant belief. We must not, however, collapse together the concept of the possession of grounds, even good grounds, with that which is true and that which is.

It seems to me that Cohen’s analysis, and the thought-experiment of an omniscient observer show a number of things. They show that:

1. the notion of justified false belief is coherent – an all-knowing, epistemically infallible being would be able to see what a community of morons believes, why they believe what they do, and which of their beliefs are true/false

2. an omniscient observer would recognise that a corrigible believer may hold a true belief with good reason or a false belief with a good reason but that the reason does not guarantee the truth of the belief
3. questions of epistemic justification are dependent on social context, but questions of truth are not.

In claiming what I do in point 3, I recognise that I am embracing a particular metaphysical position. I am rejecting the notion that two people can both be right in holding to diametrically opposed positions. In point 3 I am committing myself to a particular ontological position. I quoted Tillich in Chapter One, but include the same quotation here:

(E)very epistemology contains an implicit ontology. It cannot be otherwise. Since knowing is an act which participates in being or, more precisely, in an "ontic relation," every analysis of the act of knowing must refer to an interpretation of being.<sup>21</sup>

In order to understand at a deeper level this apparently intractable conceptual nexus between evidence and truth, between truth, reality and belief, it may be useful to consider the concept of evidence itself – so let us ask: what exactly *is* evidence<sup>22</sup>? In an attempt to answer this, we shall turn to the work of Peter Achinstein.

Achinstein believes that the concept of evidence is applied in at least two distinct ways, in fact, he suggests that there may even be two different concepts. His analysis is complex and detailed, but I think it is worth noting some of his observations.

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<sup>21</sup> Tillich, P.

*Systematic Theology* (1968)  
(James Nisbet & Co Ltd, Great Britain, Vol 1 p. 23)

<sup>22</sup> In Chapter One I noted that I wanted to reserve talk of 'evidence' for empirical propositions. It is the case, however, that 'evidence' is frequently used generically to embrace terms like 'reasons' and 'grounds'. I believe this is how Achinstein uses it and whilst discussing his views I will, for the sake of clarity, walk this path with him.



Achinstein believes that the concept of evidence is sometimes applied in such a way that we may characterise it as *potential evidence*. At other times, it is best to describe the concept as *veridical evidence*. He presents the following case:

Alan's skin has yellowed, so on Monday he sees the doctor, who examines him and declares that he has jaundice, i.e., the visible expression of an increased concentration of bilirubin in the blood (which I will abbreviate as an i.c.b.). Some tests are made as a result of which on Friday, although Alan's yellowness remains, the doctor declares that Alan does not have an i.c.b. but that his yellow skin was produced by a dye with which he was working. On Friday which of the following propositions, if any, should the doctor affirm?

- (i) Alan's yellow skin was evidence of an i.c.b. and still is.
- (ii) Alan's yellow skin was but no longer is evidence of an i.c.b.
- (iii) Alan's yellow skin is not and never was evidence of an i.c.b.<sup>23</sup>

Achinstein sees potential evidence as providing grounds which would lead any reasonable person, given *e*, to believe that it is probable *that p*, and further, that this belief may be (will be) maintained until some other evidence adequately counters the belief. In (i) he sees the notion of *potential evidence*; "yellow skin of that sort is generally associated with an i.c.b."<sup>24</sup> Evidence can be potential evidence even if it later turns out *that p* is false, *providing* that *e* is also *objective*, in that the existence or presence of *e* is potential evidence *that p* whether anyone believes it is evidence for *p* or not. "That Alan has yellow skin is potential evidence that he has an i.c.b. even if no one believes that it is or knows or believes that he has yellow skin or an i.c.b..<sup>25</sup> A third feature of potential evidence is that although it remains potential evidence, even when it later turns out *that p* is false, *e* will fail to be potential evidence if *it* is false. In other words,

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<sup>23</sup> Achinstein, P.

'Concepts of Evidence'  
*Mind*, Volume 87, 1978 p. 22

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23

the patient's yellow skin is potential evidence for liver disease, if and only if (iff) he does, in fact, have yellow skin.

Achinstein's notion of *veridical evidence* requires that (a) *e* is true, (b) *p* is true and (c) there is an *explanatory connection* between *e* and *p*; there must be some sort of connection between that which is being touted as evidence and that which the purported evidence is held to point to. Thus the concept of veridical evidence requires that Alan's yellow skin is only evidence for i.c.b. if Alan actually has yellow skin; further, the yellow skin is only veridical evidence for i.c.b. if Alan actually has i.c.b., and lastly, there must be an explanatory connection between Alan's yellow skin and his having i.c.b.. But what does Achinstein mean by 'explanatory connection' and why does he include it in his analysis of veridical evidence?

First, the addition of the condition of an explanatory connection is required because, as Achinstein notes, it is not enough for Alan to have yellow skin and for Alan to have i.c.b. if his yellow skin is a consequence of his working with dyes and not a consequence of his having i.c.b.. In order for Alan's yellow skin to be veridical evidence for *p*, there must be some sort of link between *e* and *p*. This is the link that I was arguing for in my considerations of the concepts of truth, reality and belief. Achinstein says that he does not wish to explain what he means by 'explanatory connection'<sup>26</sup> (which is unfortunate) though he later gives the following two definitions under the heading "The Explanation Definition" (of evidence) which, I believe, goes some way to clearing up the matter.

- (1) *e* is potential evidence that *h* [an hypothesis] iff *e* is true and *h* would correctly explain *e* if *h* were true...
- (2) *e* is veridical evidence that *h* iff *h* correctly explains *e* (i.e., *e* is potential evidence that *h* and *h* is true)<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 24

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32

Achinstein recognises, however, that neither of these provide a necessary nor sufficient condition for potential and veridical evidence. Although Alan has yellow skin (and this may be potential or veridical evidence that Alan has i.c.b.), the presence of i.c.b. may not explain his yellow skin. “The fact that Jones has the chest wound he does may be potential or veridical evidence that he will die, even though the hypothesis that he will die does not, and would not if true, correctly explain why he has the chest wound.”<sup>28</sup> The explanatory connection, then, in order to be an explanatory connection, must run both ways. In order for  $e$  to be veridical evidence *that*  $p$ , there must be a link between that fact, namely  $p$ , and  $e$ .

What is this link? Towards the end of his paper, Achinstein brings together a complex analysis of the role of probability in assessing if  $e$  is evidence for  $p$  and combines this with an analysis of the function of explanation in establishing a bilateral connection between  $e$  and  $p$ . It is very important that it be understood that his analysis of veridical evidence *includes* his analysis of potential evidence. The synthesis of this investigation is this:

- (1)  $e$  is potential evidence that  $h$  iff (a)  $e$  is true, (b)  $e$  does not entail  $h$ , (c)  $p(h,e) > k$ , (d)  $p$  (there is an explanatory connection between  $h$  and  $e$ ,  $h.e$ )  $> k$ <sup>29</sup>
- (2)  $e$  is veridical evidence that  $h$  iff  $e$  is potential evidence that  $h$ ,  $h$  is true, and there is an explanatory connection between the truth of  $h$  and  $e$ .<sup>30</sup>

$e$ , then, is potential evidence if  $e$  is true and is not entailed by  $h$ ,<sup>31</sup> the probability of  $h$ , given  $e$ , is greater than  $k$ , and the probability that there is an explanatory

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34

<sup>29</sup> Where  $k$  stands for any expression of probability, say 1/2

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35

connection between  $e$  and  $h$  is greater than  $k$ .  $e$  is veridical evidence iff  $e$  is true,  $e$  is potential evidence that  $h$  and when  $h$  is true. *A fortiori*, there must be an explanatory connection between the truth of  $h$  and  $e$ .

I think this is helpful as an analysis of evidence. It is noteworthy that Achinstein does not link potential evidence with the truth of a proposition, in the sense, that all the conditions of his analysis may be fulfilled whilst the object of what  $S$  believes may, in fact, be false. And even though he argues that veridical evidence has as a necessary condition *that*  $p$  is true, he does not claim that evidence *verifies*  $p$ . For him, evidence, as a concept, may provide an explanatory connection - and that is the most it can do. When the evidence falls under his rubric of veridical evidence, it is the case *that*  $p$ , but this is not because the evidence 'makes'  $p$  true. What makes  $p$  true is *the fact that*  $p$  - not  $S$ 's possession of evidence, which in order to be veridical evidence, must also be potential evidence. This observation leads us to see another critical (in my view) aspect of the *concept of evidence* - evidence, grounds, reasons, are possessed by beings like *us*. Whilst I am convinced that trees and mountains have an ontological status independent of the minds and perceptions of things like us, *what* we understand their nature to be, the properties we hold them to have, are understood in virtue of our ability to entertain, consider, conceive *that*.... This belief formation is produced by evidence and evidence does not have an independent ontological status; evidence is held, possessed, entertained, by belief-forming beings.

And this observation, I believe, allows us to see something further about the nature of the concept of evidence.

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<sup>31</sup> I believe that Achinstein has stipulated that  $e$  must not entail  $h$  as a necessary condition because entailment would render  $e$  redundant, for if  $e$  entails  $h$ , then given  $e$ ,  $h$  must be true.

As we move through the world we acquire beliefs, often, I would assert, without any conscious awareness of having done so, let alone being consciously aware of what grounds we may or may not possess for these beliefs. For example, as I sit writing this sentence I note, through inner reflection and by way of an example, that I believe it is now Autumn in Melbourne. I know that it is mid-April and I can see the many splendid oak trees in my street that are shedding their red and golden leaves. The date, and the appearance of the trees, is evidence for my belief, but I do not routinely seek the evidence I have for beliefs like the one given here in example. One interesting aspect of evidence is that it is a concept that only has application within particular contexts – namely, when it is actually sought out. By this I mean that whilst our perceptions, memories, inductive processes, received testimonies all count as evidence - all cause beliefs (to use a term acceptable to Reliabilists), *that* I have evidence in support of my belief *that p* is a relevant epistemic concern only when there may be some doubt that it is the case *that p* or when I am actually called on to justify believing what I do. We can see this when we consider those situations in which there is a call for evidence – when we are asked: ‘why do you believe that?’

It seems to me that the call for evidence arises when questions exist with regard to the veracity of *p* and the justification of beliefs. We happily proceed knowing/believing that we have good reasons for many of the things we believe, but we only *consciously* consider our evidence for certain propositions when circumstances arise which call into doubt the truth of *p* or the relevancy and adequacy of our reasons for believing *that p*. And because the concept of evidence only comes into play in such cases, the conditions for its application are (and should be) somewhat rigorous. The concept has, I believe, parallels with the concept of friendship. People tend to be cautious in their application of this concept too. It is reserved and used to describe a few special relationships. The

concept of evidence (outside of the sphere of epistemological scrutiny) is also kept in reserve and is used only when called for, when sufficient doubt exists to call *for the evidence*. The realm of scientific hypotheses, beliefs formed as a result of medical examinations, propositions about the purported existence of God, claims made in courts of law, and assessing the justification of a student's claim to know, all these provide examples and set up situations which call for evidence.

We may think of the concept of evidence/grounds, then, as operating in two distinctive and significant ways.

First, evidence produces, causes, beliefs in us. This is the *functional concept* of evidence, this is the concept of evidence that *makes me believe that p*, and this functional concept of evidence *may* occur consciously or unconsciously. I believe things because...., because I saw, or heard, or felt, etc., or because there exists in me a tendency to see connections, to infer or deduce, or because I recall and remember, or because I am told that something is so. I am a belief-forming being, and the things we point to as evidence or grounds are the very things that lead me to believe. Very often this process, this way of the world, occurs without my conscious awareness. I move through the epistemic ether of being and I form beliefs. I come to believe because of the way the world works, because of the relationship that exists between my cognitive functions and that which is presented to them. Much of this is out of my control. Apart from those contexts situated in Epistemology 101, I find that I cannot seriously doubt that the tree I see is there, I cannot seriously doubt that these are my two hands, that this block of ice is cold, that this flame will burn me badly if I hold my hand in it. I am unable to choose *not* to believe these things. No amount of self-talk, no amount of reflecting on Plato's cave, Descartes' malevolent demon or the Wachowski brothers' film *The Matrix*, no amount of examining the arguments for strong

scepticism persuades me that the flame will not hurt me. The relationship between evidence and belief in this sense and context is fundamental. In this context, I find that I simply cannot choose what I believe. Evidence produces beliefs in me.

There are times, however, when I am acutely aware of the nexus between a perception or an argument, and a belief (or potential belief). There are times when I entertain the possibility that the grounds do not, in fact, justify my believing something. On these occasions, evidence fails to produce in me a belief and I consider why this is the case. On these occasions there operates an executive intellectual function; on these occasions I entertain doubts about the connection between what may be considered grounds and that which *may* be believed in virtue of these grounds. It seems that it is within this context that the concept of evidence and its role in knowledge claims comes under epistemic scrutiny. When epistemologists consider what constitutes adequate, relevant grounds, when we consider the notion of epistemic justification, we are engaged in a consideration of the role of evidence in our claims to know and in our claims that what we believe we believe with justification. It is on these occasions that we want to examine whether or not our grounds meet given standards and it is within this context that analyses like the one put up by Cohen and Achinstein become pertinent and relevant.

My argument, then, may be summarised thus:

1. The role of grounds in epistemic claims is logically connected with the believer – ‘grounds’ underwrite, support, give expression to, that which entitles one to hold a certain belief. The grounds we have track the object of our belief, or, to use Achinstein’s terminology, evidence

provides an explanatory connection between what we believe and why we believe.

2. Evidence causes belief. Often our 'seeing'<sup>32</sup> something *just makes us believe* and often we are not conscious of our seeing. We just believe. The concept of evidence includes this belief-forming process or mechanism.
3. Evidence is something possessed by beings capable of forming doxastic structures and systems. The concept of evidence is logically connected with belief-forming beings. 'Evidence' has no independent ontological status – it only has purchase when applied to beings capable of forming beliefs. Therefore, evidence does not, and never can, 'make' something true. The truth of something is determined by its facticity, and the relationship between facticity and reliable belief-forming mechanisms in belief-forming beings who believe together in epistemic communities. The grounds one possesses for believing something can be good or bad, can justify one's belief or fail to justify it.
4. The concept of epistemic justification is applied to situations and contexts when we may want to consider whether or not one actually is justified in believing *that p*. As such, the concept of epistemic justification is normative and evaluative. Whether or not someone actually is justified in believing something will sometimes be a matter of public scrutiny, sometimes it will be a matter of private reflection,

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<sup>32</sup> By 'seeing' I don't mean to refer only to perception, but also, our seeing the reasons, being persuaded by argument and logic, inference, memory, testimony.



sometimes it will be a matter of historical reflection. I do not believe we can legislate on this. There are too many examples of individuals who have held good grounds for believing *that p* even though no-one else could 'see', or understand their grounds (intersubjective opacity); and there are too many cases where individuals have been convinced that their grounds licensed their beliefs and others have seen that the believers are genuinely deluded and insane.

Upon these foundational views of the concept of epistemic justification, I now want to turn to the notion of testimonial epistemic dependence. I will contend that the schema: 'T tells S *that p*' is a fundamental, ubiquitous epistemic transaction which (a) produces belief in S and (b) entitles S (given certain conditions) to claim that s/he is justified in believing *that p* in virtue of S's testimony.

### Chapter Three

*In spite of the differences between perception, memory, and testimony, they all provide techniques or 'mechanisms' for acquiring true beliefs and...testimony has every claim to the status of an important source of knowledge.<sup>1</sup>*

C.A.J. Coady

In Chapter One I committed myself to the tripartite analysis of propositional knowledge. In so doing I hold that there are things we can and do know and that we know when the object of our belief is true and held with good grounds. In Chapter Two, I examined the nature of evidence and the way in which that concept is applied.

In the first chapter, I noted a distinction made by Scheffler between evidence, reasons, and proofs. Scheffler holds that it is helpful to reserve the concept of 'evidence' for the realm of empirical knowledge and belief; the concept of 'reasons' for the realm of ethics, religion, and philosophy; and the concept of 'proofs' for logic and mathematics. I wish to place all of these under the generic term 'grounds', by which I mean that which provides (or fails to provide) us with epistemic justification.

I now also want to assert (though I believe this was implied throughout my discussion in Chapter Two) that epistemic grounds may be thought of not only as that which supports, justifies, underwrites, our beliefs, but further, that evidence, reasons, proofs, are the actual *source* of our beliefs. I hope this was evident whenever I spoke of grounds as *causing us to believe*.

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<sup>1</sup> Coady, C.A.J.

*Testimony - a philosophical study* (1992)  
(Oxford University Press, Oxford) p. 145

My central concern in this project is to argue for the primacy of testimony as a source of knowledge and belief. When I say ‘primacy’, I mean to advert to the view that the say-so of others provides a basic, fundamental, and foundational source of beliefs and knowledge, displacing even so-called ‘perceptual knowledge’. I believe that everything I believe and claim to know rests ultimately on the testimony of others. Further, I believe that the testimony of others not only provides me with grounds for my beliefs, but is actually responsible for the formation of mind itself.

In order to provide an argument for these assertions, I want to examine carefully the nature of testimony and testimonial epistemic dependence and address the question of whether or not testimony provides us with *good grounds*. There is no doubt (that is, there is no need to argue for the point) that much of what we believe about the world and various states of affairs is produced by the say-so of others. What is of interest and concern to epistemologists, however, is whether or not this say-so meets the standards that allow us to say – s/he is justified in holding to this belief. I hope I have dispelled (in the previous chapter) the mistaken view that in order to know or believe, there must be a necessary (either logical or contingent) link between the possession of grounds (good or otherwise) and truth. Epistemic justification underwrites, warrants, entitles, causes, belief – it does not verify *that p*. I will not reiterate, here, what I have already had to say about the concept of truth. We adjudge a believer’s grounds to be ‘good’, ‘sound’, etc, when we acknowledge that these grounds produce a belief which is meaningful and coherent – meaningful and coherent in the sense that we can see why someone would believe *that p* in the light of these grounds and that these grounds entitle someone to believe that the object of his/her belief is true. In Chapter Two we considered the normative and evaluative nature of the concept of epistemic justification. In this chapter, I want to consider whether or not testimony meets the standards set by us as individuals (Internalism) and the

standards set by others (Externalism) when claims are made that one is justified in believing *that p* in virtue of testimony-caused belief.

I will argue that testimony does meet these standards and I want to argue for this position by exploring the relationship between the concept of education and the concept of testimony. My reason for electing to examine the relationship between testimony and education is multi-layered.

First, 'education', as it may be understood in both its formal and informal contexts<sup>2</sup>, seems to be a fundamental enterprise for human beings. Whatever 'education' is, at its very conceptual heart lies the notion of the transfer of (purported) knowledge, and even a cursory examination of the mechanism and nature of this transfer, shows that testimony, testimonial epistemic dependence, is *the modus operandi*. In other words, I am claiming that education provides us with a paradigm example of the relationship between knowledge and testimony; the enterprise of education demonstrates the connection between the fulfilment of the evidence condition of propositional knowledge *through* testimony. Children and students are *told* by their chronological and epistemological elders what is the case. Given how crucial the 'handing on' of beliefs is from one generation to another, the fact that this enterprise makes so much use of testimony entitles us to examine the relationship between education and testimony in detail. I believe that such an examination will not only reveal important aspects of the nature of education, but it will also reveal much about the relationship between belief, testimony, and knowledge.

Second, I believe that the educational process (in both its informal and formal settings) plays a central role in the emergence of mind itself. Therefore, if I can demonstrate the centrality of testimony in the educational process, I will also have demonstrated the significance of testimony in the emergence of mind.

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<sup>2</sup> I later explain the distinction between informal and formal education.

I want now to begin this exploration by noting some fundamental aspects of the concept of testimony and epistemic dependence.

### ***Epistemic Dependence***

In the first chapter, I referred to a description by John Hardwig of an extensive physics experiment which set out to determine the half-life of a charmed particle. For the sake of clarity and to maintain the continuity of my argument, I repeat this here and then relate a description of a geography lesson as reported by Jim Mackenzie.

#### John Hardwig's Story

In an important paper entitled 'Epistemic Dependence'<sup>3</sup>, John Hardwig described an experiment which sought to determine the half-life of a sub-atomic particle. Hardwig reported that the experiment cost \$10 million, 50/human years were spent making the necessary equipment and improvements to the Stanford Linear Accelerator. Fifty physicists worked for 50/human years collecting the necessary data. When the experiments were completed, the experimenters divided into five geographic groups to analyse the data, a process that involved looking at two and half million pictures and measuring 300 000 specific events. The so called West Coast Group, which analysed a third of the data, included 40 physicists and technicians who spent about 60/human years on their analysis.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Hardwig, J. 'Epistemic Dependence'

*The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume LXXXII, Number 7, July 1985

<sup>4</sup> What appears in this paragraph is in part a direct quotation and in part a paraphrase of Hardwig, *ibid.*, p. 347

At the conclusion of all this work, the international team determined the half-life of the particular charmed particle they were looking for – as a scientific community, each member would have claimed to know the half-life of the sub-atomic particle, but no one person could have undertaken this experiment alone, each member of the team had to rely on, was dependent on, the highly specialized expertise of other members of the team. No one scientist knew what others knew, they all had to rely on the testimony and expertise of each other. At the conclusion of his paper, Hardwig asks – do we now know what the half-life of this particular atomic particle is? If we say we do, then we have to accept that much of what we claim to know is based on the testimony of others. If we want to say that we can never claim to know something when our grounds for knowing is the testimony of another, then much of what is undertaken in modern science does not lead to knowledge. If we want to say that we can only claim to know things through our own direct perception of the world, then, Hardwig argued, we would have to accept that we don't know very much at all.

#### Damien Hynes' (Jim Mackenzie's) Story

In 1988 Jim Mackenzie published a paper entitled 'Authority'<sup>5</sup> in which he related the following event:

In 1985 an incident took place at Laverton High School, Victoria, Australia. The school was participating in the Project to Enhance Effective Learning (PEEL), when a geography teacher, quite spontaneously, decided to have his students copy down from the blackboard complete nonsense. I think it will be useful to quote the description of this incident in full.

#### *The teacher's description of the incident*

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<sup>5</sup> Mackenzie, J.

'Authority'  
*Journal of Philosophy of Education* Volume 22, Number 1, 1988

The turning point came on 27 February. After encouraging students to ask questions, think about what they are doing, show initiative, etc. and getting passive or negative results, I wrote notes on the board which students mechanically copied down. I held a geography book in my hand and pretended to copy the two paragraphs shown below from the text.

### *Water*

The degree of rainfall for each half year and the annual seasonal deficit are the systems which determine which areas will receive rain and which won't. However, in planning where to plant crops it is not enough to know the system, one must also take account of the different levels within each seasonal system. We must also know how much of the soil will be lost by evaporation.

### *Length of the daylight period.*

Plants depend on light. The daylight hours vary from town to town depending on altitudes. Towns in low lying areas depend largely on the degree of photosynthesis and rainfall-clouds create shade which affects people's vision. The plant's visionary cycle and light condensation greatly affect the amount of hydration that can exist in a certain town at a certain time. Melbourne's hydration can vary by 20cm from Sydney's at any particular time.

This procedure was a spur of the moment decision. I made the nonsense notes up on the spot. My instructions were 'to copy the notes down from the board'. The topic under study was 'Agriculture', where students could be expected to use technical terms and definitions. I waited until all students had copied the notes and then asked if anyone had any questions – I asked this a number of times, and, to my recollection, out of two Year 10 classes only one student per class had a question. One asked the meaning of a term used, the other hesitantly questioned whether soil could evaporate.<sup>6</sup>

Mackenzie goes on to ask:

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<sup>6</sup> Hynes, Damien (1986) [my experience of PEEL], in John R. Baird & Ian J. Mitchell (eds) *Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning: an Australian case study – The PEEL [Project for Enhancing Effective Learning] Project* pp 28-44 (Melbourne, Monash University)

[W]e want to know the conditions under which 'A says that *p*' gives us reasons to accept that *p*. This plainly depends both on the relation of A to '*p*', and on the nature of *p* itself. The rule is simply this: is it the case that A, from situation, experience, background, training, or knowledge, is more able than we who are discussing the matter to judge whether or nor that *p*? If so, the testimony of A is worth having, though not always decisive in itself. We can then go on to test A's claim that *p* according to ordinary methods of critical discussion: the antecedent probability that *p*, A's reasons for '*p*', and conflicting testimony, the possibilities for mistakes about whether *p*, A's motives for care in investigation or for deceit, independent evidence, and so on.<sup>7</sup>

In the light of these two reports and before we go on to examine the *relationship* between testimony and education, I want first to look closely at the notion of epistemic dependence, testimony, and epistemic authority.

I find that I believe a number of things as a consequence of someone else either being *an* authority or being *in* authority. I believe, for example, that my employer does send some of my salary to the taxation office. I believe that I suffer from tachycardia and that one can determine either the position or the velocity of an atom, but that one cannot determine both the position and the velocity of an atom at the same time. I believe these things with some justification. The grounds I have for believing them, however, would involve an appeal (on my part) to an authority or expert. I believe them because *someone else believes them*. I believe Hardwig was the first person to characterise these 'epistemic chains' as cases of 'deferred epistemic dependence'. Schematically, they may be shown thus:

(P1) S believes that T believes *that p*

In the case of my tachycardia, the epistemic chain is quite simple. I believe that my doctor believes that I have tachycardia – P1 above. I observed my doctor

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<sup>7</sup> Mackenzie, J., op.cit., p. 60



gathering what I took to be the necessary evidence for *p*, I watched him peruse the E.C.G. and listened to him as he interpreted it for me. I believe that I have tachycardia as a consequence of my doctor believing it. If someone wanted to determine whether or not my belief *that p* was justified, then, s/he would have to be satisfied that my appeal to the authority of my doctor did, in fact, provide me with good grounds. However, if my justification for believing *that p* is dependent upon the expertise of someone else, Hardwig would want to say that I had deferred my epistemic independence. I have deferred my epistemic independence to my doctor, whom I have reason to believe is, in the case of *p*, epistemically independent. Hardwig writes:

If I am correct, appeals to epistemic authority are essentially ingredient [sic] in much of our knowledge. Appeals to the authority of experts often provide justification for claims to know, as well as grounding rational belief. At the same time, however, epistemic superiority of an expert to the layman implies rational authority over the layman, undermining the intellectual autonomy of the individual and forcing a reexamination of our rationality.<sup>8</sup>

Here Hardwig claims that deferring one's epistemic independence to another undermines one's intellectual autonomy. I am not sure I know what he means by this but we may infer two possible reasons for his claim. First, it may be that he is considering the possibility that someone who has deferred his/her epistemic independence to another is not in possession of justified belief – that is, to believe *that p* on the say-so of another means that the degree of epistemic justification discussed in Chapter Two has failed to meet the normative standards required. Second, Hardwig may be reflecting on the strong inclination in our post-Kantian world to hold the view that each of us should strive for the highest standards of intellectual autonomy and rationalism and that relying on someone else's grounds for believing something is to commit some sort of epistemic sin – one should strive (as much as it is possible) to hold beliefs where one has accessed grounds which stand independently of other believers, that is, one

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<sup>8</sup> Hardwig, J., op.cit., p. 336

should hold grounds that do not depend on the beliefs of any other person. Let us consider these matters further.

Hardwig acknowledges that in many cases involving experts, S may not have the necessary ability to interpret the evidence for him/herself. This would certainly be the case in the example I have given of my medical condition. Even if I had access to all the equipment needed to measure my heart-rate whilst resting, I would still not be competent to understand and make sense of the evidence before my eyes. I am, however, epistemically independent with respect to something else pertaining to this example. Whilst I may be unable to interpret medical evidence, I am able to determine whether or not my doctor is competent. To be sure, I would not have the ability to set him (my doctor) an examination of his medical knowledge, for this would require that I already have the necessary medical knowledge myself, but I am able to determine through certain avenues of enquiry, whether or not my doctor has met the requirements of my community for becoming a medical practitioner. But even if I am able to do this, what do I gain in terms of improving my justification for believing that I have tachycardia?

Hardwig thinks such an investigation into my doctor's competency would not gain me very much at all – and I agree with him, but for different reasons. He argues:

I am also in no position to determine whether the person really is an expert. By asking the right questions, I might be able to spot a few quacks, phonies, or incompetents, but only the more obvious ones. For example, I may suspect that my doctor is incompetent, but generally I would have to know what doctors know in order to confirm or dispel my suspicion.<sup>9</sup>

I do not think this right – I think it is possible for an intellectually able adult who is not an expert in a given field to conduct investigative research into someone's purported expertise and actually determine the competency of an expert. If one could not rely on the usual public standards for determining whether or not an

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 340

individual was a competent medical practitioner (and these standards would not only include his/her appropriate registration but also his/her ability to actually cure people), then we would have to accept that in cases where the justification for believing anything involved an appeal to authority or to an expert, we may, in fact, not be justified in believing anything that experts say – this would seem to be absurd.

It seems to me that the more pertinent issue within the context of this discussion is that in conducting investigative research, I will not advance my epistemic status from epistemic dependence to epistemic independence (with respect to my heart condition, that is). I am simply not in a position to do so - it will still be the case that I must rely on the knowledge, belief, and reasons/grounds others have with respect to the abilities of my doctor. I may 'feel' more assured (or less assured), but this will not be because I have become epistemically independent with respect to the question of what my doctor does or does not know. It may seem at first blush, that I have gained some evidence *for myself* that my doctor is competent, but this evidence that I have acquired for myself will, nonetheless, rely on the testimony and beliefs of others.

And then there are cases where some people will not be in a position to conduct even such an investigation into the competency or otherwise of an expert.

We turn to a consideration of the episode described by Mackenzie (above). Teachers (like many other professionals) are not only *in authority* but are also *an authority*. Most teachers who work in schools in first-world developed countries are licensed by the state – it is not the case that anyone who wants to step into a classroom and teach is entitled to do so. Students who enter a classroom in a registered school (along with their parents who send them there) do so against a backdrop of presumed beliefs. Amongst these are the beliefs that the teacher has had to be trained in a place of higher learning; that s/he had to reach a level of competency in both a given discipline or disciplines as well as a level of

competency in the science and art of pedagogy, and that reaching the required degree of competency was determined by people authorised by the state to make such a determination. In the light of this, students believe that what their teachers tell them is true. Further, the actual say-so of their teachers is what provides the grounds for believing *that p*. When we reflect on the ability of some to carry out an investigation into the competency of an expert, we note that in the context of a school, particularly a school where very young children are taught, it would seem that such people are not, in virtue of their age and intellectual abilities, able to carry out such an investigation. Within the context of a school, then, children *just believe* what their teachers tell them. It is not, then, all that surprising, that the geography teacher's story of Year 10 students uncritically accepting his say-so occurred. (Though, of course, we do aim to produce critical, higher-order thinkers by the latter stages of secondary schooling and it seems a pity that the students described by Mackenzie seem to have been so intellectually passive.)

This observation suggests that cases of epistemic dependence involve trust and this deepens our epistemological problems. We are already concerned that beliefs acquired through testimony undermine intellectual autonomy. If it now turns out that such epistemic transactions also involve trust, it would appear, *prima facie*, that we have moved even further away from any legitimate claim to know as a consequence of the say-so of another. As such, we will examine the concept of trust and its role in epistemology in the next chapter.

First, however, let us examine in greater detail the role of testimony and the nature of epistemic dependence within the context of schooling and education.

## ***Education and Testimony***

We assume that the transaction between teacher and learner within the school environment involves the transfer of knowledge. Analyses of the concept of education hold that, at the very least, the application of the concept has something to do with both the imparting and acquisition of knowledge. The transfer of knowledge from the one who knows, the teacher, *T*, to the one who does not know, the student, *S*, is the paradigm of the educational process. But let us consider the epistemology of this transaction as it might occur in the most straight-forward of cases.

*T* tells *S* *that p* with the intention that *S* learn *that p*. For the sake of the argument, we stipulate that the logical and material conditions of teaching and learning are met, such that we are satisfied that *T* is actually teaching (in the task sense of the concept) and *S* is consciously engaged in the activity of learning.<sup>10</sup> In this particular transaction, we stipulate further that *T* is teaching *S* in an environment that we would readily describe as being a place of education. It is, at least, a place where education is intended to take place, namely, a school.

Let us add that *S* believes *that p*, the object of his/her teacher's lesson, and believes this as a consequence of being told *that p* by his/her teacher. Given these parameters, then, we are able to determine the following:

*S* learned *that p*

*S* believes *that p*

*S* learned *that p* as a consequence of *T*'s actions

*T*'s actions are rightly described as the activity of 'teaching'

*S* believes that *T* believes *that p*

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed and thorough analysis of the logical and material conditions for the application of the concept of learning, see, Fleming, K.G., 'Criteria of Learning and Teaching' *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Volume 14, Number 1, 1980

*T believes that p*  
*T believes that p as a consequence of Q's actions (Q is T's teacher)*  
*T believes that Q believes that p*  
*that p*

What I now want to consider is this: do we allow *S knows that p*? *S* believes that *T* believes *that p*. *S* believes *that p* on *T*'s testimony *that p*. *T* believes *that p* on *Q*'s testimony *that p*. *S*'s grounds for believing *that p*, are that *T* told him/her so. Under these circumstances do we permit knowledge; in such a case of epistemic dependence does *S* know? In asking this question I want to note also that the epistemic chain described here is simple – it is my belief that the epistemic chains that actually occur in places of formal schooling and education are so long and complex, that only a few (if any) of the 'knowers' on the chain would know who the primary 'knower' is, let alone be epistemically *independent* with respect to *p*.<sup>11</sup>

I want to suggest that if we do not allow that *S* knows within the above setting, then we are faced with some unpalatable alternatives. We must accept that the transaction between a teacher and learner, as it is set out in this example, does not result in knowledge and therefore, we must call into question the place of knowledge in the application of the concept of education. (I claim this because it is my argument that the setting described above is typical and paradigmatic of the teaching and learning process within schools – that is, we hold that teachers intend to pass on justified true beliefs to their students and hold that this is called educating.) Or, we must consider the possibility that what is described here is not education *because* *S* cannot know as a consequence of being told by *T*, who in turn was told by *Q*. Or, we consider the possibility that the concept of knowledge is (perhaps) a little weaker than we may have first thought it was and that what we have above is a legitimate transaction in the educational process, but that one or both of these concepts (education and knowledge) is not as

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<sup>11</sup> It is critical to note that I am, in fact, going to argue that the very notion of 'epistemic independence' is incoherent – at least on one level.

strong as we thought it was. Or, we accept that education entails knowledge and that knowledge entails belief, truth, and adequate, relevant grounds and that testimony and being epistemically dependent meet the standards of good epistemic justification.

Clearly, we do not want to say that schools are not in the business of educating. That is what they are there to do, and if they are failing in this task, then, it will be for contingent reasons and not because *they* do not conform to *our* analyses of the concept of education and the concept of knowledge. If they are not educating for this reason, then, it is not schools that have failed, but we as epistemologists, because the *raison d'être* of schools *is* to educate. It is we who will have to change our analyses, schools do not have to fit a prescriptive conceptual analysis of the concept of education.

If we begin, then, by conceding that schools are educating, and if the basic unit of activity in these places is that teachers tell their students that certain things are the case with the intention of educating them, then, we must examine the epistemology of these transactions which involve teller and auditor, teacher and learner, with a view to explaining why and how these transactions involve the transfer of knowledge.

It seems to me that a great deal of what *appears to be a philosophical problem here*, rests on what it means to possess good grounds, particularly in cases of epistemic dependence. *If* we concede (at least for the sake of this argument) that (a) knowledge is possible and (b) that knowing *that p* entails belief, truth and adequate, relevant grounds, then, the question of whether or not a student knows in virtue of his/her teacher's say-so, seems to pivot not upon the question of whether or not s/he believes *that p* (for s/he does), nor on the question of whether or not it is, in fact, the case *that p* (for we have stipulated that it is), but on the issue of whether or not a teacher's declaration *that p* provides *S* with adequate relevant grounds.

We have already devoted quite a lot of space to the question of what it means to be justified in believing *that p*. It seems that part of our problem is that terms like *adequate*, *relevant grounds*, or *good grounds* are ambiguous. We have already noted in the previous chapter that the evidence condition of the standard analysis of propositional knowledge is evaluative and normative. We have considered Internalism, Externalism and the theses of Cohen and Achinstein. What else may we add here?

We include justification in our analyses of the concept of propositional knowledge believing that it would be absurd for *A* to claim to know *that p* if s/he had no grounds (or poor grounds) for his/her belief *that p*. Yet, what does it mean to possess good grounds, or relevant adequate evidence?

I would like to suggest first, that having good grounds means that any rational, reasonable person presented with the same reasons would be both inclined, entitled, or caused, to believe *that p* for these reasons. Put more strongly, any reasonable rational person in possession of these grounds, could not fail to form the belief *that p*.

In saying this, I realise, of course, that the concept of belief does not work quite like this. I am mindful of the fact that individuals can believe anything they like, with or without reasons. (Not in the sense that we choose what to believe, but in the sense that people believe all sorts of things, including, things which are mutually contradictory – such is the nature not only of our doxastic structures but of human beings in general. Sometimes, perhaps often, we don't even realise or see that we believe things which are mutually contradictory, or just logically impossible.) I am mindful that people can believe things on a whim. What I want to argue here, however, is that given *r*, these reasons, *A*, as a rational and reasonable person, is more likely to believe *that p* than fail to believe *that p* and that any rational and reasonable person would do the same.



When we consider notions like ‘rational’ and ‘reasonable’ I restate the view expressed in the previous chapter. We are belief-forming beings and the world in which we live presents ‘itself’ to us in such a way that *we come to believe* because of the epistemic *interrelationship* that exists between ‘us’ and ‘it’. Just as we have evolved in such a way that we are able to survive biologically in the world, that is, its way of being does not kill us (very often), there is a symbiotic, epistemological ‘fit’ which produces in us beliefs. It is in this sense that we must acknowledge the relationship between what grounds our beliefs, and *meaning* itself. We cannot ignore the connection between these two aspects of our being. In *Religion Within the Limits of Language Alone – Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion*, McCutcheon writes:

Accounting for the possibility of meaning, therefore, must include not only that one undergoes a certain training, but that one possesses the natural capacities which make the mastery of a technique possible and that we share the same capacities. These are the grounds Wittgenstein identified as that on which meaning depends. Wittgenstein came to call them “natural facts” or “forms of life”. So one of the answers to his question as to what makes meaning possible, as yielded by a posteriori rather than an a priori enquiry, is that we share natural capacities, ways of going on. Certain facts of nature ground the possibility of meaning and understanding...”<sup>12</sup>

And Puddefoot, making the same observation notes:

*Intellectual* order – at least for *homo sapiens* – arises from the dialectic of the separation of life from the world and essential continuity between life and world: we are part of the world, and our intellectual apparatus has been shaped by the evolutionary processes that form the embodied complement to the incident information with which the world surrounds us. [Incident information which could include testimony.] Our intellectual order is inescapably shaped by the need to adapt our imaginings to the structures which can be generated from the flux of the world’s affordances.<sup>13</sup> [Italics all Puddefoot’s]

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<sup>12</sup> McCutcheon, F.

*Religion Within the Limits of Language Alone – Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (2001) (Ashgate, Aldershot) p. 76

<sup>13</sup> Puddefoot, J.

‘Information Theory, Biology, and Christology’ in

As epistemic beings we are in dialogue with the Universe, with the world that produced us. We are *in it and we are part of it*. Yet part of the human condition is that we feel separate from it also. And it is within this disjunction between *being and knowing* that our epistemic enquiries occur. This feeling of separation may be merely an observation about our psychology, or it may be a genuine metaphysical and ontological fact about ‘us’ and ‘it’. Or it may be to do with a sense of estrangement. Nietzsche thought it was an absurdity – Tillich did not. In the *Gay Science* Nietzsche writes:

The whole pose of “man *against* the world,” of man as a “world-negating” principle, of man as the measure of the value of things, as judge of the world who in the end places existence itself upon his scales and finds it wanting – the monstrous insipidity of this pose has finally come home to us and we are sick of it. We laugh as soon as we encounter the juxtaposition of “man *and* world,” separated by the sublime presumption of the little word “and”.<sup>14</sup>

In direct opposition, Paul Tillich writes:

Every being participates in the structure of being, but man alone is immediately aware of its structure. It belongs to the character of existence that man is estranged from nature, that he is unable to understand it in the way he can understand man... Being a self means being separated in some way from everything else, having everything else opposite one’s self, being able to look at it and to act upon it. At the same time, however, this self is aware that it belongs to that at which it looks. The self is “in” it.<sup>15</sup>

It is this *connection* between being and knowledge that, in my view, lies at the very core of our central concern. We believe things and surely some of what we believe is true, true in that our belief about the world corresponds with its facticity,

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, F.

*Religion and Science – History, Method, Dialogue* (1996) (ed W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman)  
(Routledge, New York) p. 311

*The Gay Science* (1974)  
(Vintage Books, New York, Translated by Walter Kaufmann)  
§ 347

<sup>15</sup> Tillich, P.

*Systematic Theology* (1968)  
(James Nisbet & Co Ltd, Great Britain) Vol 1 p.186 & 188

true also in the sense that what we believe is meaningful *in virtue* of the dialectic which characterises the relationship we have with the world – that is, that which makes meaning possible. *This* is the connection between the way the world is and what grounds our beliefs and this is part of what it means for a person to be rational, to be reasonable. This is Reid's *principle of credulity*.<sup>16</sup> It just seems to make sense and yet we can transcend it and stand in awe of its mystery, that is, we can wonder at its apparent actuality. This fact, however, that is, our realisation of its mystery, does not discount its meaningfulness, in the sense that we can operate and function within it. How we come to be able to do this involves the processes and mechanisms that produce in us beliefs. And the set of our beliefs emerge as a network of interconnected propositions about the world. We may call at least one significant part of that process – *becoming educated*.

In the light of this, then, I want to argue that, at least within the context of formal education, we allow a teacher's say-so to (a) count as fulfilling what is required for a student to possess adequate relevant grounds and (b) given the nature of this epistemic context, what a teacher says, we can expect to produce beliefs in his/her students. This is because the say-so of teachers forms a legitimate aspect of the world in belief-forming beings. It is (often) rational and reasonable to believe what we are told.

Let us now examine in this in more detail.

As noted in the first chapter, I have argued elsewhere<sup>17</sup> that one of the distinguishing characteristics of indoctrinated people is that the beliefs they hold in virtue of being indoctrinated, are always the beliefs of other people. They are never 'self-generated' beliefs, that is, beliefs that have formed through the autonomous thinking and reflection of the believer as a consequence of his/her

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<sup>16</sup> Reid, T.

*An Inquiry Into the Human Mind* (1970)  
(University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

<sup>17</sup> Bennett, P. H.

'A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Indoctrination'  
(Thesis, Master of Education, University of Melbourne, 1989)

experience of the world divorced from teaching. Whilst there are other things that mark out the indoctrinated person, the beliefs which underwrite his/her indoctrinated state, are acquired as a consequence of someone else's teaching, and these beliefs, therefore, are the beliefs of others. The indoctrinated person is *epistemically dependent* with respect to what s/he believes.

When I undertook that analysis of the concept of indoctrination, I not only argued that the beliefs indoctrinated people hold are the result of teaching, and, therefore, the beliefs of others, but also that this was one of the things that distinguished indoctrinated people from educated people. I have come to see that such a view is wrong. It seems to me now, that whilst we can (and should) make a distinction between education and indoctrination, that the beliefs held by those indoctrinated are always someone else's beliefs, cannot be the thing that marks out the difference between indoctrination and education, for it now seems to me, that the beliefs people acquire in virtue of becoming and being educated, are just as much a consequence of the say-so of others, as is the case in indoctrination. This may, at first, seem obvious, but we do have the notion of the autodidact and the idea that one can pursue one's education through self-reflection, independent and autonomous research. The concept of education seems to permit the idea of the self-educated wo/man; a self-indoctrinated person, I would argue, cannot exist.

It may be objected, of course, that one could engage in a study that was so narrow that one could become self-indoctrinated, but this, I would argue, is really a form of what might be called 'learning through vicarious teaching'. The thing about the self-educated wo/man, is that through reflection, thought-experiments, personal experience, empirical research, s/he will come to hold beliefs which, *prima facie*, seem to be independent of the beliefs of others. That is, it seems that educated people come to believe certain things autonomously and in virtue of being educated, which is never the case with indoctrination. I think there is a truth to this and is probably the result of a sort of dispositional stance educated

people acquire in becoming educated, but I now want to argue that the very notion of epistemic independence, in the 'deep' sense of that concept, has no purchase, even in the case of education. If the educated wo/man sees further, it is, as Isaac Newton noted, because s/he stands on the shoulders of giants; beliefs, even new ones, don't occur in epistemic vacuums. I hope the truth of this claim will become apparent as this chapter unfolds.

Since the publication of C.A.J. Coady's book, *Testimony – a philosophical study*<sup>18</sup> in 1992, epistemologists have given more attention to the role of testimony as a source of knowledge and justification of beliefs. It has not always been so. In the opening chapter of *Testimony*, Coady writes:

Plato (relies) upon some sort of 'obviousness' about testimony's not being a source of knowledge and about its inferiority...to perception. Subsequent thinking about knowledge, at both the casual and the philosophical level, has been for the most part remarkably consistent with this intuition; either it has ignored testimony altogether or it has been cursory and dismissive. Modern epistemologists tirelessly pursue the nature and role of memory, perception, inductive and deductive reasoning but devote no analysis and argument to testimony although prima facie it belongs on this list.<sup>19</sup>

A review of journal articles over the last ten to twelve years (i.e., since the publication of Coady's book), however, shows that this situation has been redressed. Epistemologists have become interested in testimony and analyses of its place in theory of knowledge now abound. If a leitmotif can be found amidst this literature, it seems (not unsurprisingly) that the focus has been on the question of whether or not testimony provides good grounds for claims to know. Here, I will iterate arguments that testimony does justify claims to know, but also want to go further and argue that testimony is our primary source of knowledge.

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<sup>18</sup> Coady, C.A.J., op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp 5-6

## ***Epistemic Dependence and Testimony***

Epistemic Dependence and Testimony are not one and the same thing though they are closely related. Let us distinguish between the two.

Audi,<sup>20</sup> following Coady, distinguishes between Formal Testimony and Informal Testimony<sup>21</sup> - both see Formal Testimony as that which occurs in courts of law and semi-legal contexts, whilst Informal Testimony is that which occurs in our day-to-day epistemic practice of telling others what we believe to be the case. Coady opens his analysis of Informal Testimony (or, as he would have it, Natural Testimony) thus:

(N)atural testimony...is to be encountered in such everyday circumstances as exhibit the 'social operations of mind': giving someone directions to the post office, reporting what happened in an accident, saying that, yes, you have seen a child answering to that description, telling someone the result of the last race or the latest cricket score. In all such situations we have a speaker engage in the speech-act of testifying to the truth of some proposition which is either in dispute or in some way in need of determination and his attestation is evidence towards the settling of the matter.<sup>22</sup>

Audi expresses it as follows:

For the casual giving of information, say in telling someone where one was last night, 'testimony' is a heavy term. We could speak of 'informing', but this is too narrow, both in suggesting a prepared message (as in 'Yesterday she informed me of her intention') and in (normally) implying its truth. We might regard all testimony as a kind of saying, but not all saying – even apart from what is said in fiction – is testimony. Someone who says,

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<sup>20</sup> Audi, R.

'The Place of Testimony in the Fabric of Knowledge and Justification'  
*American Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 34, Number 4,  
October, 1997

<sup>21</sup> What Audi calls 'Informal Testimony', Coady (op. cit.) calls 'Natural Testimony', but we can take it that in making this distinction they mean essentially the same thing.

<sup>22</sup> Coady, C.A.J. op. cit., p. 38

'Ah, what a magnificent tree!' is expressing a sense of its magnificence, but not giving testimony that it is magnificent.

As a broad rubric for the oral or written statements that concern us, I propose *attesting*. This covers both formally testifying that something is so and simply saying, in the relevant informational way, that it is so. It also captures the idea of saying something *to* someone. Testimony is always given to one or more persons...<sup>23</sup>

We note, then, that both Coady and Audi, in saying what counts as testimony, use the verb *to attest*. I think this is useful, for it connotes that the speaker is making a claim about the world which s/he takes to be true and in attesting, one offers such a claim to others with the further belief that they (i.e. the auditors) will accept that one's claims about the world are true.<sup>24</sup> I suppose, as an aside, this is why lying is viewed as so problematic, for lying violates Reid's *principle of credulity*,<sup>25</sup> namely, our (human) tendency to operate on the assumption that the attestations of others are faithfully given and generally, can be relied upon. We must hold that testimony is (generally) trustworthy because a lie is only possible upon a world-view built by original and trustworthy testimony.

George Campbell, in his response to Hume also makes use of the *principle of credulity* by rejecting the Humean view that we accept testimony because our direct experience of the world tends to confirm that the world is (generally) as others say it is.

Campbell's opening move against this argument is to reject Hume's premiss that we believe testimony solely on the basis of experience. For, according to Campbell, there is in all of us a natural tendency to believe other people. This is not a learned response based on repeated experience but an innate disposition. In practice this principle of credulity is gradually finessed in the light of experience. Once testimony is placed before us it becomes the default position, something that is true unless or until proved false, not false unless or until proved true. The credence we give to testimony is much like the

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<sup>23</sup> Audi, R. op cit., pp. 405-406

<sup>24</sup> Later, I will argue that testimony operates on two distinct levels, it is the speech-act of attesting and it is also the speech-act of 'informing'. I will elucidate this distinction in the fifth chapter.

<sup>25</sup> Reid, T., op.cit.

credence we give to memory. It is the default position as regards beliefs about the past, even though in the light of experience we might withhold belief from some of its deliverances.<sup>26</sup>

This 'principle of credulity' may even bear the weight of a naturalistic explanation. An evolutionary psychologist, for example, may not find it at all surprising that the default position for social, belief-forming creatures like us is to believe what we are told. It may be that one's survival depends on it. Further, the Philosopher and Cognitive Scientist, Andy Clark, whose research interests lie in Artificial Intelligence has noted that an intelligent machine would be one that acted on beliefs whose truth value had not been determined. If a machine only acted on that which was certain, Clark argues, it would never act, for it would spend all its time checking its assumptions. It seems, then, that a 'principle of credulity' may even be a necessary characteristic of an intelligent machine, rather than some kind of epistemic weakness.<sup>27</sup>

Coady argues that if we accepted testimony as grounds for knowing only because our own direct experience of the world tended to confirm that what others say is generally true, we would be caught in a vicious circularity.

Evidently then, the R.T. [Reductionist Thesis] as actually argued by Hume is involved in vicious circularity, since the experience upon which our reliance upon testimony as a form of evidence is supposed to rest is itself reliant upon testimony which cannot be reduced in the same way. The idea of taking seriously someone else's observations, someone else's experience, already requires us to take their testimony...equally

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<sup>26</sup> Broadie, A.

'Scottish Philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century'  
*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2001 Edition),  
Edward N. Zalta (ed.) URL =  
<[http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2001/entries/scottish-18<sup>th</sup>/](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2001/entries/scottish-18th/)>

<sup>27</sup> Clark, A., see MDC Production *Testing God*, episode 3 'Credo Ergo Sum', Channel 4 Television, Director and Producer David Malone, 2001. See also 'Artificial Intelligence and the Many Faces of Reason' in Stich, S. and Warfield T. (eds) *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind* (2003) (Blackwell) and 'Reasons, Robots and The Extended Mind' in *Mind and Language*, 16:2: 2001, pp 121-145



seriously. It is ludicrous to talk of their observations being the major part of our justification in taking their reports seriously when we have to take their reports seriously in order to know what their observations are.<sup>28</sup>

As I hope to show, the circulatory of which Coady speaks underwrites my argument. If one's experience of the world and one's ability to make sense of it *depends* on the testimony of others, it cannot be one's experience of the world that confirms the veracity of the testimony of other people.

And while Wittgenstein is arguing a different point, he too, thinks (along with Reid) that we accept the testimony of others as fundamental starting position, for if we didn't, we simply couldn't proceed to build a picture of the world.

I am told, for example, that someone climbed this mountain many years ago. Do I always enquire into the reliability of the teller of this story, and whether the mountain did exist years ago? A child learns there are reliable and unreliable informants much later than it learns facts which are told it. It doesn't learn *at all* that that mountain has existed for a long time: that is, the question whether it is so doesn't arise at all. It swallows this consequence down, so to speak, together with *what* it learns. [italics all Wittgenstein's]<sup>29</sup>

There are a number of other salient features of testimony which we need to note and I offer Coady's analysis in summary.

First, (and following Austin<sup>30</sup>) Coady argues that testimony is a speech-act and as such, its standing as evidence is to be found in its illocutionary force.<sup>31</sup> He

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<sup>28</sup> Coady, C.A.J. op cit., p. 81

<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein, L. *On Certainty* (1979)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe) § 143

<sup>30</sup> Austin, J.L. *How to do things with words* (1962)  
(Clarendon Press, Oxford.)

<sup>31</sup> In the posthumous publication *How to do things with Words* (ibid.), J.L. Austin sets out a theory of speech-acts. In this seminal work he argues that a person's saying *that p* may be understood as an action and as such is no less an act than is piano playing or ball bouncing. The core of his work, and an aspect of which Coady makes significant use, is Austin's notion of an *illocutionary act*. The term 'illocutionary act' came about with Austin's recognition that any meaningful

argues that testifying, like promising, is a category of commitment – promising commits one to some state of affairs in the future, testifying commits one to some state of affairs that exists. One who testifies must be “seen as providing evidence for the truth of the relevant proposition *p*...”<sup>32</sup>

Second, Coady argues that a person who testifies must be in a position to speak in an informed way on *p*. *T* must, in some sense, be an authority with respect to *p*. When *T* states *that p*, the auditor, *S*, infers that *T* believes *that p*. This is a crucial factor in Coady’s analysis. When I ask a stranger what the time is, and I see him look at his watch, I infer that because he looked at his watch he is an authority with regard to the time in a way that I am not (given the absence of my watch).

Third, Coady argues the testimony which is offered must occur in a context where *p* is at issue or is not known by the auditor. *T*’s stating the time to *S* is not testimony if *S* already knows the time. Testimony is only testimony in those circumstances where evidence is required with regard to a disputed or unknown state of affairs.

Finally, I note that Coady recognises that a person can (unintentionally or intentionally) testify to that which is false, but, he argues, this does not mean that the testimony fails as evidence. He believes, then, that *T*’s testimony *that p* is the evidence, *e*, which sanctions *S*’s belief *that p*, including those cases when, in fact, it is the case *that ~p*.

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utterance could be described as the performance of some act *over and above* its locutionary status. Thus a saying may be one of pleading, ordering, informing, describing, assessing, asking, appealing, etc...Austin distinguished between (a) the “performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to (b) (the) performance of an act *of* saying something.” (ibid., pp. 99-100)

<sup>32</sup> Coady, C.A.J. op cit., p. 43

We take it then, that testimony is a speech-act which attests<sup>33</sup> to some state of affairs. Testimony is only offered when the speaker believes the auditor does not know that the purported state of affairs exists. Testimony also operates as *evidence*. That is, when we believe what we are told, our grounds for believing are that we have been told. On this point, Reid, Campbell, Wittgenstein, and Coady all seem to disagree with Hume, who (as intimated above) argued that we believe what we are told because testimony tends to be supported by our own direct observation of the world. This is what Coady calls the Reductionist Thesis. It seems to me also that Hume was wrong in this view and for the reasons put up by Wittgenstein and Coady. To accept the Reductionist Thesis condemns us to a vicious circle; we must begin somewhere if we are going to make sense of the world and we begin by believing what we are told. My experience of the world is, itself, meaningful in virtue of the testimony of others. We all have to begin building our doxastic structures by believing what we are told.

This analysis of testimony, however, does not distinguish it from epistemic dependence. Epistemic dependence always involves testimony (in some form – that is, testimony is not just the spoken word, a telephone directory is, for example, testimony), but testimony does not always involve epistemic dependence.

When our reason (grounds) for believing something, say *p*, is the say-so or attestation of someone else, then, we may say that we are epistemically dependent on the person who has told us *that p*. When the object of our belief, *p* is held in virtue of another's attestation *that p*, then we are epistemically dependent. In some cases, however, we are able to become epistemically independent, with respect to *p*. If, for example, Jones tells me that Black is migrating to England and I believe this as a consequence of Jones' attestation to this state of affairs, I am epistemically dependent on Jones and this is also a

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<sup>33</sup> I will later argue that testimony is properly understood as the speech-act of 'attesting' and 'informing'.

case of testimony. Later, however, when I ask Black to confirm that he is migrating to England, then, I will have ceased to be dependent on Jones' testimony with respect to Black's migratory plans – I've checked it out for myself and have become epistemically independent<sup>34</sup>. This fact, however, does not 'cancel' Jones' testimony, though I am no longer epistemically dependent on Jones. It seems, then, that there may be a temporal matter at work here. Jones' testimony was testimony at  $t^1$ . When I become epistemically independent at  $t^2$ , it remains that Jones' say-so was still a case of testimony. We recall, also, that Coady argues that testimony is only testimony when there is some epistemic matter at issue. He believes that T's telling S *that p* is only a case of testimony if S does not know or believe *that p*. I agree that this is the illocutionary force of testimony, but I would be inclined to say that T's telling S *that p*, where S already knows *that p*, is still a case of testimony – though perhaps, in some sort of neutral sense. T is still attesting to some state of affairs.

We note, however, that there are things we believe as a consequence of testimony which have the epistemic status such that we can never, in principle, be epistemically independent with respect to the object of the testimony. Testimonies about private states of mind and past events, for example, cannot be verified by the auditor's direct observation or unmediated experience. In these cases we have no choice but to rely on the testimony of others as providing our only grounds for believing. There are other cases in which we are epistemically dependent where it is possible, in principle, for us to become epistemically independent, but it is unlikely that we will ever be in a position to do so – here I am thinking of cases like the one exemplified earlier where we rely on the knowledge of experts and specialists in various fields of human endeavour and where it would be completely impractical for us to acquire the knowledge and understanding held by the expert in order for us to verify what we have been told.

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<sup>34</sup> I realise, of course, that in a sense I now rely on Black's testimony that he is moving to England, but I think the point is made.

I now, however, want to argue that there is another sense in which the relationship between testimony and epistemic dependence is such that we can never be epistemically independent, if that notion (i.e. the notion of epistemic independence) suggests some kind of epistemological autonomy such that we can know as a consequence of our own direct perception of the world, if that purported perceptual knowledge is held to arise outside of our first having acquired language.

Let me first state, as clearly as I can, what I am *not* saying. I am not arguing that perceiving the world is impossible without language. I take it as axiomatic that knowing (as against perceiving) entails believing and that believing entails the ability to form propositions. Kant showed (I think convincingly) that we can only make sense of the pouring in of raw sense-data if we come into the world able to order and ‘codify’ that experience, if we are able to bring what we experience through our direct apprehension of the world under the ordering of the categories.<sup>35</sup> The world that we ‘see’, the world that is understood, is seen, is understood *by us* and therefore, we see it as we are and not how it is, *in itself*. This was Kant’s seminal distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal. “(T)he whole nature of the world *as we experience it* is dependent on the nature of our apparatus for experiencing, with the inevitable consequence that things as they appear to us are not the same as things as they are in themselves.”<sup>36</sup> [Magee’s italics] This Kantian discovery is also neatly expressed by McCutcheon when she writes:

Kant’s transcendental conditions of subjectivity are the rules of the understanding which must be presupposed if knowledge is to be possible. Any intelligible judgement we make accords with the conditions of intelligibility and these are conditions in our thinking, not conditions of nature.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kant, I.

*Critique of Pure Reason* (1969)  
(Everyman, New York, Translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn) p. 79

<sup>36</sup> Magee, B.

*Confessions of a Philosopher* (1997)  
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London) p. 181

<sup>37</sup> McCutcheon, F. op.cit., p. 81

This is the first step. We do not merely perceive, we perceive *as*, and what we perceive is determined by the kind of apparatus we bring into the world – understanding this was Kant’s great achievement. He writes:

That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt. For how is it possible that the faculty of cognition should be awakened into existence otherwise than by means of objects which affect our senses, and partly of themselves produce representations, partly rouse our powers of understanding into activity, to compare, to connect, or to separate these, and so to convert the raw material of our sensuous impressions into a knowledge of objects, which is called experience? In respect of time, therefore, no knowledge of ours is antecedent to experience, but begins with it.

But, though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows, that all arises out of experience. For, on the contrary, it is quite possible that our empirical knowledge is compound of that which we receive through impressions, and that which the faculty of cognition supplies from itself (sensuous impression giving merely the *occasion*), an addition which we cannot distinguish from the original element given by sense, till long practice has made us attentive to, and skilful in separating it. It is, therefore, a question which requires close investigation, and is not to be answered at first sight – whether there exists a knowledge altogether independent of experience, and even of all sensuous impressions. Knowledge of this kind is called *a priori*, in contradistinction to empirical knowledge, which has its sources *a posteriori*, that is, in experience.<sup>38</sup> [italics Kant’s]

In the case of human beings, one of the first encounters with the physical Universe outside the womb, is that which sees language make up that “raw material” of which Kant speaks. Most of us don’t arrive in the world only to be abandoned. Most of us arrive in, and remain in, communities where we are spoken to from the moment of our first breath, and in consequence we enter into what Wittgenstein called a ‘form of life’; and what Reid (I believe with the same notion in mind) called ‘social operations of mind’<sup>39</sup>. We enter a practice that lays the foundations which will ensure that we continue *to perceive alone, but believe*

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<sup>38</sup> Kant, I. op.cit., p. 25

<sup>39</sup> Reid, T.

*Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*  
as quoted by Coady, C.A.J. op cit., pp 54-55

*together*. A father watches his young daughter unwrap a present. She points to the paper and says: "What colour dis?" "Don't you know what that colour is(?), that's purple." "Pupple," repeats the child. "That's right," says her father, "that's purple"<sup>40</sup>. Now the child perceives the colour of the wrapping paper alone and independently. Her father's testimony, however, has laid the foundations of a new belief, *this is purple*. The child believes *that p* as a consequence of her father's testimony; further, she is epistemically dependent on him with respect to her belief, and if we think about her new belief, 'this is purple', what would it mean for her to be epistemically independent? When old enough she could go and ask ten other people, or a million other people 'what is *this* colour? Would this make her epistemically independent? There is no way that she can step outside of her community of (epistemic) practice, the community of shared beliefs, of shared concepts. In twenty years time when this child tells a nurseryman she is looking for a particular purple flower she saw in someone's garden the previous day, do we say that she knew it was purple because she perceived it directly? Well, 'yes' and 'no'. We accept that she *saw it*, but with respect to her *belief* that what she saw was a purple flower, we must conclude that her belief that 'this is purple' is one which she holds in virtue of someone else's testimony (twenty years earlier) and further, it seems that there is no way in which she can be epistemically independent with respect to this belief. In fact, whatever the term 'epistemic independence' actually means, it seems that that notion itself has *no* application within the context of the acquisition and formulation of primary beliefs. If it has any application at all, it is a superficial or trivial one, as in the example given above of Black's plans to migrate. At a deeper level no-one is epistemically independent. We are immersed within a community of believers who testify to us, who tell us how the world is, or at least, how they believe it is, and in order for us to get on, as it were, we must accept their testimony and come to share their world-view.

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<sup>40</sup> This dialogue was witnessed by the author in December 2004 when a Christmas gift was taken to a friend's house. The friend's young child was allowed to open the present.

I think Wittgenstein's insight, with respect to the above, was the realisation that this practice was not merely to do with our coming to believe, but that this practice had even more profound implications – namely, it was what made meaning possible. Whatever 'meaning' means, it cannot be understood outside of our linguistic practice. Whenever I ask for the meaning of a word, what I am told will presuppose a language in which the meaning can be presented, it will presuppose that I am a being capable of receiving such explanations, it will presuppose that I am a language user, it will presuppose that I already believe certain things about the world and how it works, and it is the compilation and ensemble of these practices and capacities that arise out of my operation within a community that functions upon shared beliefs. Hence, I am epistemically dependent to such an extent that even my ability to understand what meaning means is founded on my acceptance of the testimony of others and my immersion in an epistemic community. To this extent, then, I live in an interpreted world. I come into the world capable of ordering my experience, I have *a priori* understandings. I understand negation, causal relations, unity, plurality, limitation, etc and I have these understandings in virtue of being the kind of being I am. These I possess independently of others. But upon these *a priori* 'filters' I grow and emerge within a community that speaks to me and tells me how the world is, and *their* beliefs about how the world is were acquired from those who went before them. What arises here is a web of epistemic *interdependence* whose interrelations and complexity is breathtaking, yet it is a web which establishes my epistemic co-ordinates, it enables me to orient myself in the world, but I cannot step out of this web of belief and come to know anything outside of the shared beliefs and understandings of my fellow human beings. Thus, I am not only limited to seeing the world in terms of my biological structure as a human being, but I am also 'condemned' to see the world through the lens of a set of beliefs which have emerged within a vast and complex practice of testimony. I am epistemically dependent on others. As I learn, I come to reject the testimony of some, but when I do this, on what grounds do I reject it? What are the foundations of my beliefs? All my beliefs are founded on



testimony. It seems to me that I reject the testimony of some because I have come to believe that they are unreliable, or that their attestations do not cohere with my other beliefs, or that their attestation is incoherent (in the sense of being logically inconsistent), or even, that their attestation does not correspond to my own direct observation of the world. But in all these cases, my grounds ultimately are reduced to 'other beliefs' I have, and so it seems that I operate within a kind of epistemic closed loop. My only 'salvation' is to acknowledge that this is the way it is, but this too is a belief. If there are such things as non-propositional beliefs, then even these will be 'held' (whatever that might mean) as a consequence of the 'right ordering'<sup>41</sup> of my experience, and by that, I mean to refer again to Kant – such beliefs will be a consequence of the way in which human beings are structured, a structure which enables our apprehension of the world. McCutcheon writes:

Necessity becomes a grammatical affair for Wittgenstein: concepts are neither grounded in mind nor matter but are operative in contexts of behaviour and practice and beyond that, there is nothing more to be said. Their necessity is just their place in our practice.<sup>42</sup>

In this chapter I have already considered something of the relationship between testimony and education, I now want to try and draw some of these considerations together.

I do not, here, want to undertake yet another conceptual analysis of the concept of education. Nor do I want to survey the myriad of largely successful attempts made by others to say what education is, particularly over the last forty years. It seems to me that beginning with Dewey, and moving on to the so-called London School, a vast and important amount of philosophical work has sufficiently dealt

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<sup>41</sup> In using the term 'right ordering', I am borrowing an expression from the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) who use it with reference to the organisation of, and adherence to, their processes of worship and business. By 'right ordering' Quakers do not simply mean, following protocols, 'right ordering' includes this but goes down deeper to include Quaker ways of acting in the world; the notion is part of what it actually *means* to be a Quaker.

<sup>42</sup> McCutcheon, F. op cit., p. 82

with the concept of education. Nonetheless, before proceeding here, I will note again certain matters which I take as 'settled' with respect to education.

1. Education involves the transfer of knowledge from one person to another.
2. Education involves the transfer of knowledge that is held to have value – either intrinsic value or instrumental value.
3. Education is a process – people are not born educated; it is a teleological concept that aims at certain ends.
4. Education is a concept that can be applied in both a task and achievement sense.
5. Education involves teaching and learning.
6. Education can be both formal and informal – it is 'formal' when the task of educating is carried out in institutions which are licensed by communities, administered under the law of the land, and are funded by communities. It is 'formal' when those who have met the standards set by these institutions are credentialed and where those credentials 'carry weight', as it were, within the community that licensed them. It is informal in that education can occur in non-formal settings.
7. Education involves initiation into a way of life, a life that a given community sees as worthwhile, and this initiation underwrites and contributes to the very development of mind itself.<sup>43</sup>

With respect to the idea of seeing education as testimony, it will be useful, to quote R.S. Peters at some length:

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<sup>43</sup> I will argue for this claim about the relationship between education and mind in Chapter Six.

A child is born with a consciousness not as yet differentiated into beliefs, purposes, and feelings. Indeed it is many months before consciousness of his mother as an entity distinct from himself develops. His 'mind' is ruled perhaps by bizarre and formless wishes in which there is no picking out of objects, still less of 'sense-data', in a framework of space and time, no notion of permanence or of continuity, no embryonic grasp of causal connection or means-ends relationships. The sequence of children's questions – 'What is it?', 'Where is it?', 'When did it happen?', 'Why did it happen?' mark the development of this categorical apparatus. The differentiation of modes of consciousness proceeds *pari passu* with the development of this mental structure. For they are all related to types of objects and relations in a public world.

...In the history of philosophy Kant rightly achieved fame for outlining this structure of concepts and categories by means of which order is imposed on the flux of experience; this he attributed to an active reason at work in the experience of all individuals. Later on, in the early part of the twentieth century, the psychologist Piaget, much influenced by Kant, labouriously mapped the stages at which these concepts and categories develop. *But neither of these thinkers speculated about the extent to which the development of mind is the product of initiation into public traditions enshrined in a public language...The objects of consciousness are first and foremost objects in a public world that are marked out and differentiated by a public language into which the individual is initiated. The learning of language and the discovery of a public world of objects in space and time proceed together.*<sup>44</sup> [italics mine]

Education involves the transfer of knowledge, one person to another. If one accepts that knowledge is Justified True Belief, then knowledge is a species of belief. This 'transfer' of knowledge and belief occurs through testimony. We may say that the process of educating begins, for the individual, at the moment of birth and so whilst it is not a part of the logic of the concept of education to say that it involves an epistemic relationship between older and younger members of a community, it seems contingently true to say that the first stages of education do involve older members of a community telling younger members how the world is. When educating does not involve an age differential, it always involves

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<sup>44</sup> Peters, R.S.

*Ethics and Education* (1981)  
(George Allen & Unwin, London) pp. 49-50

an epistemic differential. Even when education is viewed in terms such that the relationship between teacher and learner appears to have a less obvious epistemic differential, as in the more dialectical models of teaching and learning as they occur between supervisor and higher degree candidates, there still remains a fundamental dimension such that the teacher is held to know and understand more than the student. This does not preclude the possibility of a student teaching his teacher, but even then it is the student who has become the teacher and the teacher has become the student. For that is what these terms mean. In order for *T* to educate *S*, *T* must, at the very least, know something *S* does not know. This 'epistemic transaction' can only occur through testimony, for this is the only means which we, as humans have, of sharing our beliefs with each other. I want to argue that when this sharing of beliefs occurs in an educational context, there are many matters epistemological at work, matters such as the role of pedagogical authority and the role of trust in epistemic transactions.

I noted above that when testimony is at work, we find that one person tells another 'how the world is'. If this is done sincerely, then, when someone tells another how the world is, s/he intends to convey that which is true; s/he intends to say what is real, what is reality. When this 'saying', this attestation is accurate, then testimony involves the transfer of knowledge, for if there is a resulting belief in the auditor, then, according to our earlier analysis of the concept of testimony, we have fulfilled the conditions for the application of the concept of propositional knowledge; *S* believes *that p*, *S* is justified in believing *that p*, and it is true *that p*. We can, and do, come to know in virtue of another person's say-so. In the early stages of our lives we must begin by taking this attestation as true, in fact, we never entertain any questions as to the veracity of what we are told; we do not, or we would not proceed, we would learn virtually nothing. "The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes *after* belief."<sup>45</sup> At this time, we are epistemically dependent and there is no sense in which we could be

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<sup>45</sup> Wittgenstein, L., op cit., § 160

epistemically independent – we cannot step ‘outside’ what we have been told in order to check and see if it is correct. I would need beliefs and knowledge to do that, and all my beliefs rest on the shoulders of what I have been told about the world.

Thus, even when I move into more formal processes of learning, of becoming formally educated, I remain embedded in a community of epistemic practice. If I am a university student, or a Year 12 student at school and my teacher tells me *that p*, I am now in a position to question the truth of what I have been told and I possess all sorts of intellectual skills for carrying out this checking. As noted above, I may question the internal consistency of what I have been told, I may be in a position to check empirically, I may have testimonial evidence that is weighted against my teacher’s say-so, I may, simply, just not believe him/her for no reason at all. In all these cases, however, if I do not accept what I have been told, I am still operating in an epistemic mode – that is, I believe, or don’t believe, or suspend either believing or not believing, however, if I am operating as a being capable of functioning in the world on the basis of some epistemic position, then, I am acknowledging my epistemic heritage which has arisen out of the testimony of others. This is the deep role and purpose of testimony in the formulation of beliefs and a world-view. It is in this sense that I am epistemically dependent and can never be epistemically independent. When Magee is explaining Kant he writes:

Physical identity, location in space, location in time, propensity for causal interaction - none of these are concepts derived from experience, nor are they logical concepts: they apply to experience because they are constitutive of experience *as such*, and must characterize it if it is to be experience at all. Having this character, they constitute certain knowledge. So it is they that are the third component in human knowledge that we were looking for: they are what there has necessarily to be in addition to empirical observability and logical consistency for us to have knowledge of the world around us. They are the forms of all possible experience. If we think in terms of the metaphor of catching things in the network of experience, these are the meshes of our nets. Only what can be caught in them is available to us. Anything that passes through them untouched will not be picked

up by us, and nor will whatever falls outside our nets altogether. Only what these nets catch will be ours, and only what they *can* catch *can* be ours. What they *do* catch is a contingent matter, depending on what there is to be caught, but what they *can* catch is determined by the nature of the nets themselves, and we live permanently with their capacities and their limitations.<sup>46</sup> [italics Magee's]

It is my argument that layered upon this fact of our being, there is a second epistemic structure. It is the tier of testimony, of passed on beliefs about the world. The acquisition of these beliefs also affects what it is possible for us to know and believe - just as Magee's (Kant's) 'net' does. In this sense we are epistemically dependent.

So, then, what is the significance of any of this? Is the above philosophically important; is it important with respect to what we take education to be?

First, let's be clear that 'testimony', as a purported source of knowledge, has been viewed for much of the history of philosophy as problematic – as noted above and observed by Coady, there has been, since the time of Plato, a general reluctance to afford it a substantive place in providing sufficient grounds for our claims to know. That is, the problem of testimony and knowledge is to do with justification, with what justifies us in our claims to know. Our intuition is that our knowing, our coming to know, is to do with 'seeing for ourselves', to do with epistemic autonomy, being epistemically independent, coming to know *without* relying on anyone else. I have attempted to argue here that testimony not only provides us with good grounds for claiming to know, but that it is the primary source of our beliefs about the world, and that it is the means by which we come to attach meaning to experience.

Second, how ever we are to understand 'education', it involves, at the very least, the transfer of knowledge. It is my argument that we must consider the

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<sup>46</sup> Magee, B., op cit., p. 182

implications of that with respect to the role of testimony, not just in relation to our claims to know, but in relation to that practice we call education.

Paradigmatically, we take 'education' to be a virtuous enterprise – what is it that makes it such? I suggest that its 'virtue' lies within the central place knowledge has in becoming educated. Knowledge, from the time of Plato, was the goal of education; in Plato's marvellously rich metaphor of the cave, the prisoner who is released from the chains which bind him and keep him seeing only shadows, is led into the light of knowing; this knowing is virtuous because it entailed apprehension of the truth, of reality, even of Ultimate Reality – to see the Form of the Good. Do we dare to believe in such a concept of education today? Is this what we are about? Many of us would like to think so. But if our knowledge is embedded within our testimony, within our claims to each other about the world, in what sense do we, can we, leave the cave? Are we not still chained down, facing the wall and not the light?

It seems to me that the centrality and 'legitimacy' of testimony, of education as testimony, is that education is fundamentally about the human condition. It is human beings who form beliefs and have beliefs; when we educate one another, we are, in the end, helping each other to make sense of the experience of being human, of being in the world, even if it is a world which we can only have access to phenomenologically. Education is about learning to be, it is about the 'right ordering' of experience, and yet 'experience' may only ever be 'an experience as...', an experience of...' if the happenings of this Universe and the way they impact upon us, are understood, made sense of, in some way. Through testimony, we share our understandings, we enable each other to achieve this 'right ordering'. This 'enabling' of each other, to enable another to be in the world, is perhaps not only virtuous, but perhaps the only true virtue, in that all moral questions can only acquire meaning within relationships, and in this, we may see the true value of education.

My provisional conclusion, then, is this: testimony is central and fundamental in the formulation of our doxastic structures. Testimony is a source of knowledge and it is the primary source of our knowing and of our beliefs. Education, as that concept is applied in both its formal and informal contexts, is testimony. The virtue of education is not so much that it enables people to be epistemically independent, but that it provides a framework that makes meaning possible, makes the experience of being human possible, makes experience possible, as distinct from mere happenings. To the extent that education can take us to some place that lies beyond or 'outside' of our epistemic *interdependence*, to the extent that education can take one outside the cave, it is only in the sense that it can lead us to *consider the possibility* of an 'outside', to know that we may not know it all.

My examination here of the relationship between education and testimony has not been undertaken for the purpose of arguing for a particular conception of education. What I have sought to do is to take an enterprise fundamental to our humanity, namely, educating, and show that this enterprise is (a) founded on the transfer of knowledge and (b) that these transfers occur primarily through testimony. In consequence, if we discount the role of testimony as a legitimate source of knowledge, then, we have to say that what goes on under the rubric of education does not involve knowledge – a position I imagine we would be unwilling to embrace.

Whilst Fricker would not agree with my views about the centrality of testimony, she does concede the following:

Each of us, in becoming an adult master of our commonsense scheme of things, has been through a historical process of development during which her attitude towards her teachers and other informants was one of simple trust. No one of us satisfies the condition satisfied by the individual *M* described above whose testimonial knowledge reduces to perception and inference. Instead, each of us has, mixed up in her total web of belief, many beliefs acquired through testimony which at the time of acquisition were



accepted uncritically. Bearing in mind the role of teaching by others whom we trust unquestioningly in our learning of language (which is not separate from our learning about the world), this seems inevitable (though there is a deep issue here about the possibility of an isolated thinker and speaker of a self-invented language). At any rate, this phase of simple trust in others, and its input into our resulting world-conception, characterises all of *us*.

If, moreover, our conceptualising framework is itself socially determined, during our acquisition of language, then *all* perception is essentially dependent on testimony.<sup>47</sup>

And yet, there seems to remain a number of difficulties – there seems to be an intuitive (cf Plato) reluctance to allow the say-so of others to provide grounds deemed as adequate and relevant. Perhaps this is because we are uneasy about being held to be justified in our claims about the world when we have had to accept on trust what others tell us. If this is so, it seems we need to examine the relationship of the concept of trust, with that of testimony – a task we shall undertake in the next chapter.

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<sup>47</sup> Fricker, E.

‘Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony’  
*Mind, New Series* Volume 104, Number 414, April 1995 pp. 401&402

## Chapter Four

*The more mistrust, the more philosophy*<sup>1</sup>

Nietzsche

That the concept of trust should play any part in knowledge seems, at first glance, to be anathema to a tradition that seeks to embed knowing within the highest intellectual practice of reasoning, noetic reflection, critical intellectual autonomy and truth-seeking. It is arguable that the origin of this tradition emerges from Plato and his strong arguments for knowledge being conceptually linked with the apprehension of an Ultimate Reality and accessed by pure reason, *noesis*, dialectic. Adding weight to this heritage is the philosophy of Kant and the Western scientific tradition that was driven by The Enlightenment which saw the systematic undermining of the great mound of religious claims proposed by the Christian Church, and the formulation by Hume of what came to be refined by the Vienna Circle and the Logical Positivists into the infamous Verification Principle. (A principle, it is worth noting, which could not withstand its own conditions of application.)

Kieron O'Hara writes:

René Descartes' philosophical breakthrough nearly four centuries ago lay in his *doubting* of the outside world. The development of the critical, Enlightenment mind owed everything to suspicion of authority, not blind deference to it. Immanuel Kant even defined the European Enlightenment as such: 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another.'<sup>2</sup> [italics O'Hara's]

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science* (1974)  
(Vintage Books, New York, Translated by Walter Kaufmann)  
§ 346

<sup>2</sup> O'Hara, K. *Trust from Socrates to Spin* (2004)  
(Icon Books, Cambridge) p.ix

For those who are the inheritors of this tradition, the notion that one is 'entitled' to claim strong epistemic grounds for assenting to a belief as a consequence of the say-so of another, is jarring. "Think for yourself" is the catch-cry of this strong Western, analytical tradition. "Think for yourself" is the epistemic slogan of the educated, first-world, Occident. On the crest of this tradition, we have become wary, sceptical, apprehensive, mistrustful. As far back as 1882, Nietzsche declared: "The more mistrust, the more philosophy."<sup>3</sup>

We have witnessed the intellectual (and bodily) damage done by repressive political regimes whose schooling processes produce not the educated, but the indoctrinated – indoctrinated in virtue of what learners have been told and told to accept on trust. In the light of the abuses of Nazi Germany and Soviet brain-washing, South Africa's Nationalist government's iron-fisted control of curriculum, China's denial that anything at all took place in Tiananmen Square in 1989, the absence in Japanese texts books of any (or very little) reference to its army's activities in China between 1937 and 1945, the Australian, American, and British governments' insistence that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq (and one could list a multitude of other perversions of the truth), how can it be that the say-so (or failure to say-so) of another can form the basis of a well-justified doxology, particularly when one is asked to accept this saying on trust?

In this chapter I want to examine the role of trust in testimony. I hope to show that trust is fundamental in epistemic transactions and that this does not mean that we must forgo our desire for critical, intellectual autonomy. It seems to me that whilst our doxastic structures can only emerge out of a trusting acceptance of the say-so of others, such practices do not undermine our ability to post epistemic sentinels at the gateway to our brains. Just because we understand how the world works, means that we can believe *and* be cautious when it comes to propositions to which we will give assent.

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<sup>3</sup> op.cit., § 346

We shall begin by undertaking a somewhat technical analysis of the concept of trust, and then move to examine its role in broader terms.

### ***The Concept of Trust***

Let us consider the following locutions:

1.     *X trusts S*  
          (*X trusts the S; X trusts his S*)
2.     *X trusts that p*
3.     *X trusts in S*

Let us refer to (1) as the *Declarative Case*, (2) as the *Propositional Case*, and (3) as the *Prepositional Verb Case*.

Examples of (1) are:

*X trusts God; X trusts Jones; X trusts the government; X trusts his wife.*

Examples of (2) are:

*X trusts that:*

*he will be resurrected*

*his business partner will repay the money*

*the drugs will cure his illness*

*his son is at school and is not playing truant*

*the history book speaks truly.*

Examples of 3 are:

X trusts in the State, X trusts in the Lord, X has trust in his doctor.

To what degree these various locutions are different from each other, with respect to the *meaning* of the word 'trust' is what I want to consider here. I will argue that (1) may be an expression of the Prepositional Verb Case with the preposition omitted, but when it is not an expression of (3), it is reducible to (2). I will argue that the Prepositional Verb case is not reducible to the Propositional Case, though there is a family resemblance. Further, I hope to demonstrate that the concept of 'trust' is an epistemic concept, in that it points to certain kinds of beliefs, but I will also argue that a dispositional analysis of the concept is required. By 'dispositional' I mean that 'trust' involves a describable attitude in the one who trusts.

Let us consider the Declarative Case and the Propositional Case.

First, we note that when we say "X trusts God" or "X trusts his friend" both locutions may be expressions of the Prepositional Verb Case with the preposition omitted, as in "X trusts (in) God", or "X trusts (in) his friend". What these *mean* we shall consider later. Alternatively, 'X trusts S' may be Propositional with the proposition itself un-stated or implied. In other words, perhaps 'X trusts S' means that X entertains a range of propositions with respect to S, following the illustrations given above.

Second, I want to note that all three cases (above) show that the word 'trust' operates grammatically in the same way as the verb 'to believe'.

X trusts S	X believes S	(Declarative)
X trusts <i>that p</i>	X believes <i>that p</i>	(Propositional)
X trusts in <i>p</i>	X believes in <i>p</i>	(Prepositional Verb)

In the Propositional form, 'X trusts *that p*' seems, *prima facie*, to be the expression of a belief – X *believes that p*. X trusts that: he will be resurrected; his business partner will repay the money; the drugs will cure his illness, his son is at school and is not playing truant, the history book speaks truly, all seem to entail: X believes that a certain state of affairs obtains. Further, if the Declarative Case is *not* an expression of *trusting in*, then it seems that to say 'X trusts S' means (at least) that X holds certain beliefs with respect to S, though the epistemic dimension of this is not (as I will argue later) sufficient in characterising this case.

If 'X trusts *that p*' means: 'X believes *that p*', then is it the case that the beliefs which form the content of X's state of trust, beliefs of a certain kind? If we say that 'X trusts *that p*', and we choose to say *this* instead of 'X believes *that p*', what are we choosing to include (or leave out) in our description of X that would not be accurately described by simply saying: 'X believes *that p*'?

First, 'X trusts *that p*', seems to imply that whatever it is that will count as the fulfilment of *p* is uncertain. (Not that what would *count* as the fulfilment of *p* is not understood, but that the required state of affairs to which X's trust is directed is uncertain, as a reality.) Whilst X knows what would count as the fulfilment of *p*, to say that X trusts *that p*, is to say that s/he does not know whether or not *p* has been fulfilled, is currently being fulfilled, or will be fulfilled. If we know *that p*, would it ever make sense to say, with respect to the same object, that we trust *that p*? I want to suggest it would not. If X trusts that his son is at school and not playing truant, or that he (i.e. X) will be resurrected after death, or that the history book speaks truly, does this not imply that X does not *know that p*? If X knows *that p*, I suggest, then, the issue of 'trust' does not arise. In saying that X trusts, I think we want to say that the object of X's trust is not certain as an actual state of affairs. That is, there is a question mark as to whether or not the various states of affair that would count as the fulfilment of X's trust, actually obtain. If this is the case, then the beliefs which form the content of X's trust are of a certain kind – they are beliefs whose truth is not known (at least by X); they may also be beliefs

held with a degree of evidence that falls short of being adjudged as adequate, such that *X* would be *justified* in believing *that p*. If this is correct, then, the concept of trust has purchase only with reference to states of affairs whose actual reality is not certain. But if this is so, why would we ever use the word 'trust' if we can say the same thing by simply using the word 'believe' in those cases where we want to distinguish between *mere* belief and knowledge? This observation suggests that whilst trusting entails beliefs whose truth is not known (to the one who trusts), and possibly beliefs that are held with insufficient grounds, there is something else 'captured' by the concept that goes beyond the (mere) holding of a belief. It is this that leads us to consider the possibility that 'trusting' involves a disposition to do *q*.

Our second observation, then, is that the concept of trust is *evaluative*. To say that '*X* trusts *that p*' or '*X* trusts *S*', or '*I* trust him', involves an evaluation of the relationship between *X* and what (or who) it is that s/he trusts. It involves a judgement about *S*'s disposition towards *p*. What is this disposition? I want to suggest that it is a positive attestation that asserts that *X* is prepared to do more than merely *claim* to believe *that p*, or more than merely entertain the proposition *that p*. "I don't know why she's going away with him." "Well, she is because she trusts him." Here, the concept of trust is being applied in an affirming way. Something is being said about the kind of relationship that exists between *X* and that which she trusts, and this 'something' is *more than* what we have said about the epistemological relationship between *X* and that which s/he believes.

If we say that *X* trusts (*that*) *p*, and we say this means more than *X* believes *that p* (though it is at least a belief), then, I suggest the 'more than' is directed towards a certain disposition in *X* which requires *X* not merely to entertain the belief *that p*; it requires *X* to act on the belief which underwrites his/her trust. In saying this, I recognise that many have argued that the concept of belief is dispositional, in that '*X* believes *that p*' is to be understood as *X* is disposed to act, with reference to *p*, such that s/he holds *p* to be true.<sup>4</sup> With respect to the

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<sup>4</sup> See Price, H.H., 'The Dispositional Analysis: Believing and acting as if', in *Belief* (1969) (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London)

concept of trust, however, I am arguing for something stronger. I am suggesting that if we say *X trusts that p*, then, we are evaluating the *force* and *strength* of *X*'s belief with respect to *p*. That is, we acknowledge that there can be varying degrees of belief, one can believe things strongly or not, however, to say that *X trusts*, is to give voice to the strength of *X*'s belief *that p*; it is to say that there is a level of commitment on the part of *X* in relation to *p* that is not expressed by merely saying *X believes that p*. If one trusts, one must not merely be disposed to do *q* if certain circumstances arise, that the issue of trust has arisen, intimates that the circumstances already do exist, and so one *must* act for it *to be a case of trust*.

In other words, when we say that '*X trusts S*', or '*X trusts that p*', we are expressing an evaluation of a particular relationship which is *actionable*. That is, in order for the statement: '*X trusts S*' to be true, *X* must act on his/her belief, a belief which does not reach the standards required for knowledge (Justified True Belief). It is the fact that *X* assents to the belief in question, understanding that that which s/he believes may not be true, or that that which s/he believes is not held with sufficient grounds, that lies at the heart of the meaning of the Declarative and Propositional Cases. It seems then that trust necessarily requires uncertainty, that is, uncertainty with respect to the truth, or the reality of that state of affairs which is the object of one's trusting, but it also requires one to act on this uncertain belief. This requires further analysis.

If *X trusts that p* means (at least) that *X believes that p*, this does not mean that all of *X*'s beliefs involve matters of trust. (We have already excluded knowledge from trust.) If, for example, *X* believes (but doesn't know) that molecules consist of an arrangement of atoms, the issue of 'trust', may never arise with respect to *X*'s belief in this matter. Yet many beliefs, and certainly the formation of our first beliefs, are accepted without question, without doubt, even though these beliefs do not reach the standard of knowledge. Wittgenstein states that "(t)he child learns by believing the adult. Doubt



comes *after* belief.”<sup>5</sup> [italics Wittgenstein’s]. Does this mean that when the child believes the adult, s/he trusts the adult(?) or does it mean that trust doesn’t come into the equation at all? The child simply believes. If ‘uncertainty’ is a necessary condition of trust, does this mean that trust necessarily involves doubt? What is the relationship between uncertainty and doubt? If doubt is a necessary condition of the concept of trust, (as suggested above) then Wittgenstein’s consideration suggests that when children believe what they are told by adults, they do so *not* as an act of trust – they just believe. They must begin by simply believing, by accepting *that p*, otherwise they cannot even proceed to acquire concepts such as ‘trust’, ‘doubt’, ‘certainty’ – doubt comes after belief. And yet a few sections before the one just quoted, Wittgenstein writes: “Must I not begin to trust somewhere? That is to say: somewhere I must begin with not-doubting; and that is not, so to speak, hasty but excusable.”<sup>6</sup> This throws new light on the problem. If Wittgenstein is right here, then it seems that the concept of trust has as a necessary condition, not-doubting, and yet above, it seemed that the concept of trust was applied only in cases where the object of what one believed was not certain, or, open to doubt. If Wittgenstein is correct, however, then it seems we are forced to conclude either that believing that uncertain states of affairs will obtain has nothing to do with the concept of trust, (for Wittgenstein asserts that ‘trust’ involves not-doubting) or, that ‘uncertainty’ does not necessarily require ‘doubt’. Intuitively, we may think that ‘uncertainty’ entails ‘doubt’, but here it seems that one can be uncertain, in the sense that one does not know whether or not a given state of affairs obtains, and yet entertain no doubts about the reality of the given state of affairs. In fact, I contend that Wittgenstein’s observation that trust involves not-doubting, supports my argument (above) that that application of the concept of trust necessarily requires that one *act on one’s belief that p* such that one entertains no doubts with respect to the veracity of *p*, even though *p* is not known. It is this condition (epistemic and psychological) of being

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<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*On Certainty* (1979)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by Denis Paul and  
G.E.M. Anscombe) § 160

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, § 150

uncertain but not doubting, that we call 'trust'. It seems, then, that 'trust' requires not-doubting the reality of past, present, or future unknown states of affairs. It is possible to believe that a given state of affairs will (did/is) obtain without doubting that it will, even though the actual state of affairs is not yet known. This, I contend, is what we call trusting.

Let us now turn our attention to the concept of trust as it is expressed in what I have called the Prepositional Verb Case.

Many epistemologists hold that 'X believes *in p*', is reducible to 'X believes *that p*'. Does the same hold for the Prepositional Verb form of X trusts *in p*? 'X trusts *in* God'; 'X trusts *in* his/her doctor'; 'X trusts *in* him/herself', seem equivalent to X trusts *that* his/her doctor is good/capable/reliable, etc.. On the face of it, it looks as if the concept of 'trust', when expressed in the Prepositional Verb form, is reducible, as with the concept of belief, to the Propositional form. I want to argue that it includes the conditions for 'trusting *that p*' but that the Prepositional Case conveys more; the Prepositional Verb Case is expressed with the intention that it convey more than 'X trusts *that p*'. Let us consider this.

If X says: "I trust *in* God" or "I trust *in* my doctor", is it plausible that what this amounts to is more than a list of propositions (whose veracity is uncertain) that X believes about his/her God/doctor(?) and also requires more than that X act on these beliefs? First, we note that if the locution 'X trusts *in* God' means that X holds a range of beliefs with respect to God, then the locution 'X trusts *in* God' is, in a sense, incomplete – not syntactically incomplete, but semantically incomplete. That is, if 'X trusts *in* God' is reducible to the Propositional Case, then its expression omits something, or rather, its expression implies something not stated, namely, the 'that' clause which states that which X believes, in virtue of his/her trusting. This in itself, however, does not amount to much – it is not uncommon in English to find the expression of grammatically complete locutions that leave un-stated that

which is required for a given locution to have meaning.<sup>7</sup> The locution ‘X trusts *that* God’ is incomplete syntactically and is also semantically deficient. “I trust that God...” requires both semantic and syntactic completion. “I trust *in* God”, is syntactically and semantically complete – it is not left ‘hanging’, as it were.<sup>8</sup> And this observation, I want to suggest, points to a particular meaning of ‘trust’ as it is applied in the Prepositional Verb form, a meaning that is not inherent in the Propositional form. I want to posit the view that whilst the expression of the Prepositional Verb form entails all that I argued for in the Propositional and Declarative forms, I wish to contend that the locution ‘X trusts *in* S’ adds a further condition to the application of the concept of trust. ‘X trusts *in* S’ implies not only that X believes certain propositions about S whose truth is uncertain, it implies not only that X must act on these beliefs, the locution also carries a sense of what I want to call, *personal critical investment* on the part of X.

In using the term ‘personal critical investment’, I want to draw attention to the locutionary *force* of the utterance ‘X trusts *in* S’. When we assert that X trusts *in*... I contend that we want to say something quite specific, something ‘critical’ about X’s *relationship* with S. I say ‘critical’ because I want to suggest that in such cases we recognise that a breakdown in trust (in this sense) has consequences that have the potential to harm the well-being of the one who trusts. The ‘harm’ may occur to the psychological well-being of the person; it may affect fundamental epistemic structures, such that the breakdown in trust may seriously undermine a person’s basic understandings of how the world works; it is even possible that the breakdown in trust in this sense may result in harm to the physical well-being of the one who trusts. It is for this reason that I say trusting *in* is ‘critical’.

I use the term ‘personal investment’ in order to draw attention to the sense of ‘trusting *in*’ which implies that one *invests something of oneself* in deciding to

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of such locutions are: *Do you have one?; You told me at the time.; That’s correct.* See Greenbaum, S., Complete and Incomplete Sentences, 6.1) in *The Oxford English Grammar* (1996) (Oxford University Press, Oxford)

<sup>8</sup> The same, of course, applies to the locution ‘X believes in God’.

trust *in*. The force of 'I trust *in*' implies that one 'lets go' of the uncertainty with respect to the object of one's trust. In this sense, trusting becomes an overtly conscious decision upon which one acts. It is not an implied trust, or some form of tacit trust, which the Propositional Case can be. By trusting *in*, one acknowledges the uncertainty spoken of earlier and in so doing, one becomes personally vulnerable – vulnerable in the sense that should the trust one has invested *in* *S* be misplaced, the consequences will have the potential to profoundly affect the well-being of the one who trusts.

And this leads to another observation about trusting *in*. The Prepositional Verb Case evokes a sense that 'trusting' (perhaps in all its locutionary forms) has moral implications. It certainly seems that when we say 'X trusts *in* *S*', the apparent *critical* force of this utterance may be grounded upon the notion that should *X*'s trust be misplaced (not in the sense that *X* ought not to have trusted in the first place but in the sense that *X* was justified in his belief that s/he could trust *in* *S*), then there is an implication that some sort of ethical issue has arisen. There is the implication that something (morally) wrong has happened.

Man's trust of God...is made concrete by the rainbow, which symbolises God's trustworthiness (it's like a little label attached to a rainstorm saying 'don't worry, I haven't forgotten' – perhaps we might see it as the first logo). This is an important early development in the history of trust – it brings with it a strong implication that, even when the person you are trusting has undoubted authority and power over you, your trust of him or her is dependent on his or her obligations to you being carried out.<sup>9</sup>

I hold, then, that 'trusting in...' involves *more than*, 'trusting that...'

In summary, then, I have argued for the following:

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<sup>9</sup> O'Hara, K. op.cit., p. 27

The concept of trust entails the holding of certain beliefs – beliefs whose truth is unknown. We never say we trust *that p* when we know *that p*. ‘Trust’ involves the holding of beliefs the object of which is uncertain.

Trust is an evaluative concept, to say that one trusts is to express a judgement about the relation between the one who trusts and the object of one’s trust. To say that one trusts *that p* is to say something over and above what would be expressed in saying that one believes *that p*.

‘Trust’ is a dispositional concept, trust requires that one act on the beliefs that one holds in virtue of one’s trust. If one claimed to trust someone or something, but was not prepared to act on this alleged trust, we would have good reason to doubt the veracity of the claim that one trusts.

Although ‘trust’ involves acting on uncertain beliefs, ‘trust’ involves not-doubting. Although a state of affairs is uncertain, when one trusts, one does not doubt that the state of affairs obtains. Trust involves not-doubting that uncertain states of affairs actually obtain.

To say that one trusts *in*, is to give expression to an additional dimension of the concept of ‘trust’ not evident in the application of the concept when it is expressed in Propositional form. Trusting *in* carries a particular locutionary force. Trusting *in* implies personal critical investment. Trusting *in* involves an overt conscious decision to act on one’s beliefs *that p*, understanding that should such trust be misplaced, the consequences will be harmful in some way. Trusting *in* evokes a moral dimension. It implies that some ethical principle may be violated should one’s trust be misplaced.

We make one further observation.

That which is trusted can take many forms. A person can be trusted, states and institutions can be trusted, machinery and structures can be trusted, animals can be trusted, information can be trusted. What are the implications of these observations for my assertion that the concept of trust has moral

implications? If only humans have moral agency, what does it mean to say that one trusts the brakes, or the bridge, or a piece of information? Is it the information or the informant that is trusted? Is it the bridge that we trust, or those who designed and constructed it? What does it mean to say that 'the report was trustworthy'? When I trust the street directory, does this mean that I believe that it represents the lay-out of the city correctly(?) or does it mean that I trust the processes (i.e. people) who put the directory together? When I say I trust the brakes on this car, does that mean that I believe the car will stop efficiently and effectively when I apply the brakes(?) or does it mean that I trust the processes (i.e., the people) who worked to create the brakes in my car? I think in many of such cases when we say that we trust buildings and brakes, etc, what we mean is that we trust the people who stand behind them. But it is clear that this is not always so. It is perfectly intelligible to say that one trusts the branch of a tree to take one's weight, or that one trusts a naturally formed bridge. We may say that such examples are 'eccentric', in that whilst they are meaningful, their intelligibility is grounded upon cases that are conceptually prior, that is, those cases where trust is placed in people, God, or animals<sup>10</sup>. If this is so, then, it seems that in expressing trust, we are not just saying something about the one who trusts, but we are also saying something about the one who is trusted. In saying this, I want to draw attention to the possibility that the one who is trusted has to do something (or refrain from doing something), or *be* something in order for trust to 'work'. This points again to the moral dimension raised above. If one trusts another, this does seem to imply that 'the other' is under some sort of obligation and that failure in this obligation carries moral implication. Of course, such a possibility creates real difficulties with respect to trusting in God. If God exists and one trusts in Him/Her do we want to say that God has acted immorally if our trust is in vain? It is possible that this is the question at the very heart of the so-called problem of evil, or problem of pain and suffering which theodicies seek to address and give an account of.<sup>11</sup> Namely, that the

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<sup>10</sup> Although I have included animals here (I trust the dog won't bite me) I do not hold that animals are moral agents. Trusting a dog, however, seems to suggest something more than trusting a rope or a tree branch to take my weight.

<sup>11</sup> One could say, for example, that it was this that drove C.S. Lewis' thinking when he wrote *A Grief Observed* following the death of his wife Joy. Although the book (though he didn't set

problem only arises because God does not act as we expected S/He would, God does not do what our trusting anticipated. Because those who believe in the Judeo/Christian/Islamic God do not want to hold that God has acted immorally, they (i.e. the believers) must develop an understanding of God's apparent 'failure' to act in such a way that God's failure to act is not equivalent with misplaced trust. It is a fact that much time and energy is devoted to developing theodicies within the Abrahamic faith traditions and this fact supports my argument that the concept of trust entails a moral obligation on the one who is trusted [cf O'Hara]. We may say, then, that trusting *in* points not only to the one who trusts, but it seems to impose some obligation on the one who is trusted. But how can the branch of a tree have a moral obligation(?) – well, quite clearly, it cannot. So what are we to make of talk about trusting tree branches and ropes, etc.? I think, in the light of our analysis thus far, we have to say that the intelligible notion of trusting entities that are not moral agents is really evidence of the application of the concept as *derivative*, that is, to say that one trusts in the rope or the branch of a tree, is merely to express a degree of confidence in its weight-bearing properties and nothing more. Here we encounter the on-going challenge that lies as a constant in conceptual analysis – the tension between description and prescription. J. L. Austin notes that: "(e)ssential though it is as a preliminary to track down the detail of our ordinary uses of words, it seems that we shall in the end always be compelled to straighten them out to some extent."<sup>12</sup>

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out to write a book) was primarily his 'working through' of his grief, much of what is expressed is a reflection of trust betrayed. It seemed to Lewis, at least for some time after Joy's death, that the trust he had in an omnipotent, omni-benevolent and interventionist God, had (perhaps) been misplaced. The possibility that God had failed to live up to His/Her promises gave rise to Lewis' consideration that God either does not exist, or is a sadist. See Lewis, C.L., *A Grief Observed* (1961) (Faber & Faber, London)

<sup>12</sup> Austin, J.L., *Philosophical Papers* (1970) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (ed. J. O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock) (Oxford University Press, London)

## ***Trust, Believing and Knowing***

In the light of this analysis, let us now turn our attention to the issue of what role trust plays (if any) in the epistemology of testimony. We will consider what the implications are for our understanding of testimony as a source of knowledge, if believing *that p* on the say-so of another demands that we trust S's assertion *that p*.

John Hardwig has formulated a *principle of testimony* such that:

(PT) If A has good reasons to believe that B has good reasons to believe *p*, then A has good reasons to believe *p*.<sup>13</sup>

Hardwig also considers a stronger version of PT as:

(PT<sup>S</sup>) If A knows that B knows *p*, then A knows *p*.<sup>14</sup>

H.H. Price in discussing testimony puts up the following:<sup>15</sup>

(A) What there is said to be (or to have been) there is (or was) more often than not.

Later, after noting the difficulties in establishing the truth of A, Price 're-works' A in the imperative mood and in non-propositional form presenting, instead, a policy for belief:

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<sup>13</sup> Hardwig, J.

'The Role of Trust in Knowledge'  
*The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume LXXXVIII, Number 12,  
December 1991 p. 697. cf. 'Epistemic Dependence' *The  
Journal of Philosophy*, Volume LXXXII, Number 7, July 1985,  
pp. 335-49

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 698

<sup>15</sup> Price, H.H.

*Belief* (1969)  
(George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London) Lecture 5



- (B) Believe what you are told by others unless or until you have reasons for doubting it.
- (C) Conduct your thoughts and your actions as if (A) were true.<sup>16</sup>

Let us consider these various formulations within the context of what it means, in general, to trust someone, and, particularly, what it means to trust someone with respect to epistemic claims. The fact that testimony is a part of our epistemic practice shows us that we very often do believe what we are told, and I have been labouring the point that this raises questions about epistemic justification, and in particular, it raises questions about the relationship between trust and the holding of good grounds. When *A* believes *that p* on the shoulders of *B*'s testimony *that p*, then it must be the case that *A* does not have *B*'s grounds, for if *A* had *B*'s grounds then s/he would not be relying on *B*'s testimony with respect to *p*. Both Coady and Hardwig have noted this point when they observe that testimony is only testimony when it is offered as *the evidence* in support of *p*, and testimony is only testimony when *A* does not have access to the sort of evidence for *p* that *B* holds.<sup>17</sup> On this account testimony is only testimony when someone is epistemically dependent on what another says about a purported state of affairs [cf my discussion on the relationship between testimony and education in Chapter Three]. *A* must be in need of evidence with respect to *p*, and it is *B* who supplies this evidence. But it is within this very notion of '*B* "supplying" the evidence' that our problems arise.

We have noted that in order for testimony to be testimony, *A* cannot already have *B*'s reasons. If s/he did, then there would be no need for testimony. But what is it that *B* 'gives' or 'supplies' to *A*? In some cases it is possible for *B* to provide *A* with exactly the same evidence that *B* has for justifying his/her claim. For example, if *B* knows that Simmonds dropped off the drugs to

<sup>16</sup> I have followed Coady's (pp. 102 and 104) setting out of Price's formulations here.

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter Three for a full exposition of Coady's view on the necessary and logical conditions for the application of the concept of testimony. Hardwig writes: "...in order for testimony to be useful, *A* cannot already have *B*'s reasons. So, if *A* accepts *p* on *B*'s say-so,

Mason at Station Pier, and *B*'s evidence for this belief is a video recording made by the police, then, if *B* chooses, s/he is able to do more than merely tell *A* about Simmonds and Mason – *B* can also show *A* the video recording. I suppose in such cases one must accept that whilst the initial epistemic transaction is one of testimony – *B* tells *A* about Simmonds and Mason - once *A* sees the video then *A* ceases to be epistemically dependent, for s/he now has exactly the same grounds *B* has for his/her belief; and I suppose if *A* is no longer epistemically dependent with respect to *p*, then the various epistemological questions surrounding the nature and force of testimony as justification cease to be an issue. What we are here interested in, however, are those cases where *B*'s assertion that *p* is all the grounds that *A* will get. In his discussion of the role of trust and epistemic dependence in scientific and mathematical communities of research, Hardwig notes:

Sometimes it is feasible for *B* to share with *A* all the evidence necessary to justify the claim that *p*. But usually not. Indeed, if *A* and *B* come from different disciplines or even different specialties within the same discipline, *A* often will not know what *B*'s reasons are, much less why they are good reasons for believing *p*.<sup>18</sup>

And here's the rub, for it is clearly the case that it is not just within communities of academic research that this situation occurs, for the very point of examining the force of testimony in epistemology is to wonder at its potential as a form of justification. When the auditor is in no position to acquire the evidence of the primary believer in a chain of epistemic dependence, but rather, must rely upon *B* in order to have grounds for assenting to *p*, it is then that the notion of trust in epistemology takes centre stage. And this observation becomes even more pertinent when *A* is not even in a position to *understand* the reasons *B* has for believing *that p* (as in when *B* is an expert and *A* is not, or when *A* is *in authority*, in the sense of being an epistemic elder, as with the relationship between teacher and student, or parent and child). And so it is within the context of these cases that we should ask why we believe what we are told(?), or, to phrase the question in a

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those reasons (*B*'s reasons) which are necessary to justify *A*'s belief are reasons which *A* does not have." Hardwig, J. op.cit., pp. 698 to 699

<sup>18</sup> Hardwig, J. op.cit., p. 699

way that looks more like philosophy than psychology, when we believe what we are told, are we justified in doing so? What would make us justified in believing *that p* on the word of another? Is it sufficient to operate on Price's policy formulations? The philosophical problem is this:

- (1) it is a fact that testimony plays a significant part in our epistemic practice
- (2) in many cases of testimony one is (and always will be) epistemically dependent – that is, there are cases where the auditor, for various reasons, cannot access the testifier's grounds for believing *p*
- (3) critical appraisal of the evidence in cases where we are epistemically dependent can only go so far, it has its limitations, and if we are to operate within epistemic communities it seems that we must, at some point, trust that what we are told is true.

It seems, then, that there is a tension between our views on the importance and virtues of critical appraisal and intellectual autonomy (when one considers another person's say-so), and the fact that in many, many cases of testimony we are epistemically dependent and we simply cannot appraise the testimony of *B*. And yet in order to get on, that is, in order to operate as belief-forming and belief-assenting beings, it would seem that we have little choice but to trust that what *B* says is true. But how can trusting what another says provide us with epistemic justification? Ought we not critically appraise what we are told, rather than merely trust that what is said is true?

This question, of course, in its very formulation, implies that trust and critical appraisal are antithetical and I want to note that such a supposition is itself in need of critical appraisal (an appraisal we shall undertake). Hardwig's point, however, is that in some cases of epistemic dependence (maybe in most cases) the auditor is in no position to appraise the evidence; if *B* is an expert on certain matters that are completely beyond my understanding, I simply cannot have his/her reasons. What can I do in such situations? I can entertain the proposition and reject it because I have high epistemic standards

and refuse to accept anything I am told unless I have verified it for myself; or I can entertain the possibility *that p* but suspend my judgement; or I can trust *B* and accept that s/he speaks truly with respect to *p*. Hardwig's argument is that if we adopted the first two options we would have to abandon much of the things we claim to know and (justifiably?) believe. Hardwig's main interest is in the philosophy of science and mathematics, and his argument is that as the enterprise of science and mathematics now involves massive communities of enquiry, they simply would not come to any conclusions unless scientists adopted the third position, viz., to trust that what others (i.e. other scientists and experts in the field) say is correct. He writes:

Even more important for the purposes of epistemological analysis, research is increasingly done by teams because no one knows enough to be able to do the experiment by herself. Increasingly, no one could know enough – sheer limitations of intellect prohibit it. The cooperation of researchers from different specializations and the resulting division of cognitive labor are, consequently, often unavoidable if an experiment is to be done at all. No one particle physicist knows enough to measure the lifespan of charm particles. Indeed, Bugg reports that no one university or national laboratory could have done their experiment. None of the authors of such a paper is in a position to vouch for the entire content of the paper.<sup>19</sup>

Our concern, then, is not with those cases where a person, in virtue of his/her intellectual virtues, education, sceptical world-view, age, learning and so on, is able to critically appraise everything s/he is told, but rather, with those cases where the auditor simply believes, at face value, what s/he is told, because his/her only choice is either to believe, or to have very few beliefs at all and live in what Price calls a permanent state of suspended judgment. Hardwig's observation that sometimes we are left no alternative but to simply trust, leads him to observe that:

(T)hose who do not trust cannot know; those who do not trust cannot have the best evidence for their beliefs. In an important sense, then, trust is often epistemologically even more basic than empirical data or logical arguments: the data and the argument are available only through trust. If the metaphor of foundation is still useful, the

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 695

trustworthiness of members of epistemic communities is the ultimate foundation for much our knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

I hope it is already apparent that this dissertation is focused on the last claim in the above quotation and I am endeavouring to present an argument in support of such a claim and to go even further than the possibility Hardwig considers above. From the point of view of epistemic justification, then, the problem is clear. Since, when we claim to know something, we are required to be justified in our belief, how can we be justified if we are epistemically dependent upon another when that very state of dependence is such that we have no choice but to trust that the person who tells us *that p*, is speaking truly? I want to argue that we are justified in believing *that p* in such circumstances, and although we have spent some time considering technical aspects relating to the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept of trust, we must now examine more closely the operational 'mechanisms' involved in trusting and believing.

Let us begin by examining what might be thought of as the epitome of trust in action and see if we can distinguish any salient features of the concept that we have not yet been able to elucidate. In particular, I think we should consider whether or not 'trust' excludes, by definition, critical appraisal.

When a child is told, and believes, that the tooth fairy will take the tooth and leave money in its place, we have what might be thought of as a paradigm example of trust with respect to a specific epistemic claim. We may also be inclined to think that we have *prima facie* reason to hold that no appraisal of any kind has occurred. For is it not the case that children are very trusting, even too trusting? Is it not because of their trusting nature that we tend to think of children as being vulnerable; is it not the case that children are completely unaware of the notion of gullibility? Our beliefs about the inherently trusting nature of children run deep throughout our mythical narratives, culture, psyche, and history. There is a multitude of fairy stories which aim to teach children about the dangers of gullibility (wolves and foxes

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 693-694

in children's literature are the very icons of deceit), and yet it was once observed that unless one "receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein."<sup>21</sup> Reflecting on the significance of trust in parent-child relationships and inherent trust displayed by children, Misztal writes:

It seems that there is no doubt among social scientists that the family is one of the main groups securing the individual's self-identity. At the heart of lasting ego-identity is basic trust, which creates a sense of ontological security that will carry the individual through periods of change and crisis. The role of the family in the development of trusting and trustworthy personalities has recently been reconstructed by Giddens (1990 and 1991), Hardin (1993) and Baier (1986). The argument connects the assumption of D. W. Winnicott and Erik Erikson about the importance of the early childhood experience of basic trust with that about the formation of an inner sense of trustworthiness, which subsequently provides the basis of a stable self-identity. Infant trust, which 'normally does not need to be won but is there unless and until it is destroyed' (Baier 1986: 242) is *blind and uncritical*, and points to the relative power of parents on whom a young child is totally dependent. The infant learns to rely upon the consistency and attention of its providers and this constitutes the basis of its capacity to be trusting and the elaboration of self-identity. *Infants' translation into competent adults proceeds via learning, and learning presupposes trust in the reliability of knowledge-sources – that is, parents.*<sup>22</sup> [italics mine]

There is no doubt that children are trusting – we even have them symbolise trust; they come into the world ready and willing to accept what they are told, and all this may lead one to think, along with Hardwig, that "trust, in order to be trust, must be at least partially blind."<sup>23</sup> But, I want to suggest, (and *pace* Misztal) it would be a mistake to think that even in the case of the conceptually immature child, that his/her apparent, inherent, willingness to trust is blind. We recall Wittgenstein's point that trust has no purchase in the first stages of learning, it comes later. Once children begin to trust, I claim, they appraise trustworthiness all the time. Perhaps there is no appraisal of the quality of the evidence the testifier presents, but, I want to suggest, there is an appraisal of the *testifier*, for it is certain that the authority and position of

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<sup>21</sup> The Gospel According to St Mark, 10:15, (KJV)

<sup>22</sup> Misztal, B.A. *Trust in Modern Societies* (1996)  
(Polity Press, Cambridge) p. 160

<sup>23</sup> Hardwig, J. *op.cit.*, p. 693

the testifier is significant to the child. Whilst this is an empirical claim that demands empirical support, (support I am unable to provide) I want to assert that children believe what they are told by adults simply because they are told *by* adults. (And I think this point *is* supported by Misztal above.) I not only hold that this assertion is true, I hold that if it were not true, then, human communities would never establish, or have established, any epistemic structures at all; there would be no belief systems; there would be no shared conceptual framework upon which and through which we come make sense of the world. In short, there would be, for us, no meaning, no questions about meaning, no understanding *that...* Children trust that we adults speak truthfully about the way of the world, not because they (children) have checked out the quality of our evidence, but because we are adults and they are not. Children believe what they are told by adults because they have a special understanding (an *a priori* understanding perhaps) about the epistemic relationship that exists between adults and non-adults, they have an understanding about those who are in authority and those who are not. It may well be true that the child does not consciously appraise the epistemic authority of an adult, but rather, implicitly understands that this is the way the world works - but 'implicit understanding' does not discount an appraisal. It is the child's recognition that 'this is an adult not a non-adult' that underwrites the trust s/he has in the adult's assertions about the world. And it is this recognition itself, which, I want to suggest, is a form of appraisal. One might even go so far as to assert an anthropological point and note that children must come into the world ready to accept what adults say because their survival depends on it. Price, in arguing for his policies of belief makes a similar point (more sociological than anthropological) when he says that believing what others say is "socially expedient and even socially indispensable...We must either accept what others tell (us) for what it may be worth; or else (we) must remain in a state of suspended judgement, unable to find any answer at all to many of the questions which (we desire) to answer."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Price, H.H. op.cit., p. 114 and p. 125

It is my contention, then, that trust does not exclude appraisal, *for one chooses to trust*. Many parents (including this writer) will have had the experience of finding that their child doubts, if only momentarily, that what the parent declares about the world is true.<sup>25</sup> An example of this is the case of the father encouraging his child to launch him/herself off the wall into his safe and loving arms. Even though most children trust their fathers, the fact that even the most trusting child hesitates and considers his/her options in such a situation, serves to show, I believe, that trust is an act of will – it involves a decision, and therefore it does not exclude appraisal. Children do not just trust, they trust *someone*, and the someone they trust, is trusted in virtue of his or her status.

A further observation from the world of childhood reveals that children trust first the testifier before they are cognitively able to ask questions about the trustworthiness of the testimony. Consider the child who has started to entertain real doubts about the veracity of the claims his or her parents make about Father Christmas. A colleague's daughter is, at the very time I write this chapter, struggling to reconcile her mother's statements about the world with the growing evidence she has that her mother's testimony regarding Father Christmas is incoherent. The initial trust lies in the person, rather than what the person says. And this is the very point, for this is how it is for us all when we are epistemically dependent. Our interest in the role of trust in epistemology is with respect to those cases where we have to trust because, like the cognitively immature child, we cannot access the primary believer's evidence. We recognise that appraisal can be directed either towards the testifier or towards the testimony itself, but it is when we are unable to fully understand the testimony, or unable to access the grounds that gave rise to the testimony for reasons other than lack of understanding, that we must trust *the person* who tells us *that p*. This may at first seem like a false distinction, for in our analysis of the concept of trust I argued that the logically prior concept sees its application with respect to moral agents, not 'things'. But we do, in fact, see that the concept of trust is applied not just to people and things

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<sup>25</sup> We noted that earlier in this chapter it was argued that trust excludes doubt, therefore, if the child doubts s/he is, if just momentarily, not trusting that...



like the branches of trees, but to *evidence* itself (we recall Achinstein's notion of *potential evidence*). Thus, if the engineer can be said to trust the 'numbers', or the doctor can be said to trust that the image on the CT scan is correct, then the actual say-so of another can be the object of trust just as much as the speaker him/herself can be the object of trust. We recall Coady's point that testimony *is the evidence*. When we talk of not trusting our eyes, or not trusting the avowals of an expert even though we trust *the expert*, it is, I suggest, because we are alerted, by some mechanism, to some sort of incoherence in the evidence being presented to us, and this itself, suggests the birth of intellectual autonomy with respect to epistemic appraisal.

The point I am labouring is this: our decision to trust is not blind, but rather (particularly in the early stages of life<sup>26</sup>) is founded upon either an explicit or implicit appraisal of the testifier. Later, as with the child who is starting to entertain real doubts about the existence of Father Christmas, one can start to mistrust the evidence *itself*. In appraising the testifier, I may be concerned to know about his/her authority to speak on *p*, in appraising his/her testimony, I may be concerned to determine its coherence and intelligibility, but where I cannot do the latter, I most certainly do the former. Although I have already quoted Mackenzie, I think it is worthwhile doing so again when he makes the observation in his paper on the authority of teachers that:

(W)e want to know the conditions under which 'A says that *p*' gives us reasons to accept that *p*. This plainly depends both on the relation of *A* to '*p*', and on the nature of '*p*' itself. The rule is simply this: is it the case that *A*, from situation, experience, background, training, or knowledge, is more able than we who are discussing the matter to judge whether or not that *p*? If so, the testimony of *A* is worth having, though not always decisive.<sup>27</sup>

Mackenzie's view draws our attention to the interplay between critical appraisal, testimony, and trust – though he does not specifically mention that

<sup>26</sup> Although I have used the term 'early stages of life', I am referring to that period where 'trust' has emerged as an aspect of one's way of being.

<sup>27</sup> Mackenzie, J., 'Authority'  
*Journal of Philosophy of Education* Volume 22, Number 1  
 1988 p.60

concept. And it is because of this, that I feel the need to reiterate a point I made early in this chapter on the dispositional aspect of trust, for it seems to me that despite all that has been said about the relationship between the concept of trust and critical appraisal, there remains a suggestion that critical appraisal and the concept of trust are antithetical. For surely if I trust Jones, I take some sort of leap, I appraise and yet *despite* my appraisal, I still chose to trust in Jones. Isn't this what trust is? It may not exclude appraisal, but it demands that we act in a certain way *despite* our appraisal. Isn't it then the case that although appraisal can (and maybe always does) precede trust, the very nature of trust is that we become believers in spite of our appraisal? And so we should ask again: is the concept of trust the antithesis of critical appraisal?

Both Coady and Hardwig note that the notion of trust is, somehow, embedded in chains of epistemic dependence. As already noted, Hardwig declares, and without further examination or explanation, that the concept of trust "...in order to be trust, must be at least partially blind."<sup>28</sup> Coady, however, notes that:

When we believe testimony we believe what is said because we trust the witness. This attitude of trust is very fundamental, but it is not blind. As Reid noted, the child begins with an attitude of complete trust in what it is told, and develops more critical attitudes as it matures. None the less, even for adults, the critical attitude is itself founded upon a general stance of trust...<sup>29</sup>

A few paragraphs later, however, Coady, goes on to say that "(c)ontrary to what we are inclined, unreflectively, to suppose, the attitudes of critical appraisal and of trust are not diametrically opposed, though in particular cases, one cannot, in the same breath, both trust what a witness says and subject it to critical evaluation."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hardwig, J., op.cit., p. 693

<sup>29</sup> Coady, C.A.J., *Testimony – a philosophical study* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992) p. 46

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47

Is it the case then, that although trust may involve appraisal, the actual force of trust is that it is a concept we apply in those cases where we believe, or act, in spite of the appraisal? We note that Coady, in speaking of trust, uses phrases like ‘attitude of trust’ and ‘general stance of trust’ in this appraisal of both *B* and *B*’s evidence and this, I think, supports my inclusion of a dispositional condition in the application of the concept and also reveals some other general features of it.

1. When we say that we trust someone it seems that we have, at the very least, *chosen to adopt a conscious state of mind* with respect to the person we say we trust, in virtue of the fact that we trust him/her. Children do not trust everyone and everything they are told – even they choose, as Coady would put it, to adopt an ‘attitude’ or ‘stance’ of trust.
2. This conscious state of mind that we have adopted with respect to the person we trust seems to be directed towards: (i) the things the person we trust says and (ii) the things the person we trust does.<sup>31</sup>
3. This *conscious state of mind* which we adopt with respect to someone we trust may be understood as a *belief* whose object is that the person we trust will speak truly<sup>32</sup> to us on states of affairs and will act in the way s/he says s/he will act.
4. *Apropos* my first and third points, it seems that in some cases one may trust another without choosing to adopt a certain belief about the person we trust. When a child jumps off a wall into the arms of his/her father, we take it that s/he trusts that his/her father will catch him/her,

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<sup>31</sup> I realise that ‘saying something’ is ‘doing something’, but what I want to separate out here is (a) the things a trustworthy person says about the world, and (b) the things a trustworthy person does when s/he says that s/he will do them. If I say I will repay you the money then I am saying something about a state of affairs which can only be true if I do, in fact, repay the money. And yet, it seems we may need to distinguish between a trustworthy person’s assertion that, for example, ‘Two thirds of China’s population live in rural areas’ and ‘I will repay the money’.

<sup>32</sup> When I say that the person we trust will speak truly to us, I do not mean that everything someone we trust says will be true, but only, that someone we trust will not lie to us. That is, the person we trust will tell us what s/he truly believes to be the case.

though the child may be unable, in virtue of his/her age, to state that s/he trusts his/her father, let alone that s/he has made a conscious choice to believe *that p* – daddy is trustworthy. To this extent, we may say that trust is a dispositional state that one is in with respect to the person we trust. That is, it may be that a person who trusts another doesn't entertain any beliefs on the matter of trustworthiness, but simply *acts in a trusting way*. Yet even if this is the case, it seems that the child is consciously choosing, for it is observed that sometimes children encouraged to jump off walls into the arms of a loving and encouraging adults do not jump, and we may, not unreasonably, suppose that the child who does not jump has some doubts about being caught and held safely.

We may say, then, that when I claim that I trust John, I am revealing that I have certain beliefs about John, or if I was the sort of being who did not have concepts expressible in propositional form, we may say that I am disposed, through conscious choice, to act in such a way that we would characterise my acting as 'trusting' and, in the case of my holding beliefs, that an examination of the object of these beliefs would show that I have adopted a certain position on the things that John says and does. That is, if I trust John, then I have the belief that I can believe him when he says it is the case *that p*, and when he says, he will do *q*.

Nonetheless, the force of trust is such that although we choose to trust, a part of the very meaning of the concept is that trust involves some sort of uncertainty *about* a person, (or thing [derivative]) and absence of certainty, in order to be that which is *uncertain*, cannot entail 'no doubt', for surely, if one were certain, then one would not entertain doubts. Yet we have maintained that the concept of trust points to uncertain states that are acted upon without doubt.

It seems, then, that trust does involve some sort of choice and that in choosing to trust, we are appraising. I want to argue, then, that trust does involve choice and therefore appraisal, and further, I want to suggest that our

concept of trust finds its first application with respect to people. It is true that we do talk of trusting our senses, and trusting the Bible, and trusting the results of the medical test, and trusting the brakes of the car, trusting the dog and the rope and the bridge, but behind all these, stands the logically prior concept of trusting a person.

When I am told by someone that a certain state of affairs obtains, the default position I take is to believe him/her. This position, that I take, is the result of my immersion into a way of being in the world that has occurred in virtue of my being human and the way in which humans function within epistemic communities. My preparedness to accept what I was told about the world when very young did not involve trust – I was just told and at some point the words spoken to me started to become meaningful. Once I gained some sense of self, once I reached a stage of conceptual development such that I knew that this was my hand and my foot, that there was a ‘me’ and a ‘world’, that my mother and others were separate beings from me, then, I suppose, there emerged some sort of ability to judge and to trust. It seems to me that we can talk intelligibly of animals being trusting or not, and so I would hold that ‘trust’ as a disposition is basic, and that fundamental to the concept is the relationship between appraisal and acting, doing. At some point in our development, our critical and analytic faculties emerge and we are able to apply the concept of trust and *know* that we are so doing. But the fact of my willingness to trust what others say to me, most of the time, is due, I contend, to that period of my life when I just *was in the world* and the world was acting upon me. This default position, with respect to believing what others tell me, does not seem to be any different to the default position I take with respect to other sources of knowledge. Sometimes, I do not trust my senses, my inferences, my recollections, but these abilities (that is, to question, to not trust) came some time after my very early childhood.

I want to maintain, then, that although trust plays a fundamental role in our preparedness to accept the say-so of others, its operation in such transactions is fundamentally no different from its function in other non-testimonial purported sources of knowledge. An attitude of trust is

fundamental to the human condition, in all aspects of our being, not just our epistemology, and the reality of this in no way diminishes our ability to be critical and intellectually cautious with respect to what we are told by others.

In the light of this analysis, then, we have come to see how fundamental the say-so of others is in the first stages of life and the emergence of a doxastic structure, a conceptual framework. In the next section of this work I want to examine the relationship between this say-so and the concept of information. I hope to show that testimony is not just the speech-act of attesting, but of informing – informing in a most fundamental and basic way.

## Chapter Five

*In the beginning was information. The word came later.*<sup>1</sup>

Fred Dretske

We have now examined the nature and role of testimony in epistemic transactions. We have compared that concept to the closely related one of epistemic dependence and considered how testimony and epistemic dependence are related to the concept of evidence (grounds) and belief acquisition. In the last chapter we were led to analyse the concept of trust, in itself, and then to consider how that concept operates in the epistemology of testimony and belief acquisition in general. We have considered the ubiquitous nature of testimony within our epistemology and I hope I have been able to demonstrate that the say-so of others is a legitimate source of justified belief.

Throughout this work I have intimated that testimony plays a fundamental and primary role in the emergence of our doxastic structures. I have noted my agreement with both Coady and Audi who say that testimony is the speech-act of attesting, but I now want to begin my argument that testimony operates on another level that would be better described as the speech-act of informing. In so doing, I will start by undertaking an analysis of the concept of information; this is the subject of this fifth chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Dretske, F.I.,

*Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (1981)  
(Blackwell, Oxford) p. vii

## ***'Bits', Information and Meaning***

What is information? What is the process, the mechanism by which 'bits'<sup>2</sup> acquire meaning within an entity or system; an entity like a microchip, a cell, a human being? What is the relationship between knowledge and information? What is the relationship between information and formation? Is 'information' merely a synonym for knowledge? Can there be 'false information? In this chapter I will address these fundamental questions.

In this thesis I have set out to explore the relationship between testimony, epistemic dependence, belief, and the emergence of mind. I hold that this relationship (between testimony, belief, and mind) is possible because testimony is fundamentally and logically linked to the concept of information; and so I now want to examine both the nature of this relationship and how the relationship 'emerges'.

Testimony is possible in virtue of our capacity to say things to each other. The sounds (noise) that emerge from our mouths and the black squiggles we produce on paper are, at one level, *just that* – sounds and marks, but, of course, they are *more than* sounds and marks, for they have *meaning*. It is not the place of this work to explore the various explanatory theories which seek to show how this extraordinary process works, suffice to say that if I had to commit myself to any of them, I would embrace a Gricean<sup>3</sup> analysis and most certainly reject any

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<sup>2</sup> The word 'bit' is used in information theory to denote the fundamental mathematical unit of which incident information consists, thus, the binary string: 0010011, would be held to consist of 7 'bits'. Whenever using the word in this sense, I shall write it enclosed with single inverted commas.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Grice's analysis of meaning is expressed and developed over a period of forty years. His seminal paper 'Meaning' (1957) distinguishes between meaning *natural* and meaning *non-natural*. Grice's notion of meaning *natural* would include statements like: "That north wind means it's going to be a blistering hot day." or "The presence of those marks means HIV infection." In contrast to this Grice says that meaning *non-natural* is evidenced by such occurrences as the sign ♀ means 'female' or the statement "The ringing bells mean that there is a wedding at the church." In particular, however, in saying that I embrace a Gricean analysis of meaning, I wish to



causal theory of naming, being persuaded that Popper adequately demonstrated that such a notion could not be sustained.<sup>4</sup> What I am concerned to explore, however, is this: when someone says something to another and we view the utterance *as information*, what criteria need to be satisfied for the utterance *to be* information? Further, and at an even more fundamental level, if a 'bit' is information to a cell or a microchip, what criteria must be satisfied such that the 'bit' *is* information. What makes a 'bit' information(?), what makes a sound or a mark information? My reason for pursuing these questions is that I want to argue that whilst Audi's and Coady's notion of testimony as the speech-act of 'attesting' is accurate when testimony is operating on a particular epistemic level, I wish to contend that in certain contexts testimony is the speech-act of 'informing', not merely 'attesting', for the epistemic status of testimony is that as a speech-act, it is aimed at the *formation* of a conceptual framework in fellow human beings. Herein lies the difference between 'attesting' and 'informing'. The act of *attesting*, I want to argue, can be viewed (understood) to be epistemically neutral in the sense that in attesting, I may or may not intend that those to whom I speak *necessarily* consider themselves to have been *informed* by what I have had to say – in attesting, I am merely saying *that p*; in attesting one merely states what one takes to be the case, the truth. Attesting can be viewed as a 'one way street', as it were. When it is my intention to *inform*, however, then I am acting with the intention that those to whom I speak will acquire a different epistemic status in virtue of what I have had to say to them. When I speak with the intention of informing (as distinct from merely attesting), I seek to bring about a belief (or set of beliefs) in my audience. This is why informing is different from attesting. If testimony is merely the act of attesting, then, the testifier has no

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give voice to my commitment to his general thesis of the relationship between a speaker's intentions, and an auditor's recognition of those intentions.

See Grice, P.

'Meaning' re-printed in

*Studies in the Way of Words* (1989)

(Harvard University Press Cambridge, Mass.)

<sup>4</sup> See Popper, K.

*Conjectures and Refutations – the growth of scientific knowledge*  
(5<sup>th</sup> ed.) (1989)

(Routledge, London) Chapter 12 'Language and the Mind-Body Problem'

*necessary* intention to produce a new belief in the auditor; if testimony, however, is the act of informing, then, the speaker intends the auditor to believe that to which the speaker has testified. Testimony, as *testimony*, includes attesting, but there is a sense and context in which testimony is more than attesting, when the speaker intends to inform the auditor that it is the case *that p* and, even more strongly, intends that the auditor will come to see the world in a certain way in virtue of his/her testimony, then we need a stronger term to describe what is going on, and I believe that *informing* is an apt characterisation for this intention. Testimony, along with perception, memory, and inference, is a source of knowledge and, therefore, when one testifies, one informs.

The significance of testimony, then, is to be found in seeing how critical is the relationship between epistemology and ontology, between meaning and reference – between one's statements, and one's relationship to the world that is, and the world *that is*, includes the world of other minds – others who also make statements. When I testify to what is the case, there are conditions under which my testimony will be adjudged to be *meaningful*, and there are conditions under which my testimony will be held to be true. When I testify, it is my intention to say what *is*, and it is my intention that others will believe that such-and-such is the case *because I said it*. In other words, it is my intention *to inform*. There is a critical aspect here with respect to what it *means* to inform – 'information', or rather, *informing*, occurs within relationships. Lyotard writes:

A *self* does not amount to much, but no self is an island, each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and more mobile than ever before. Young or old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal points" of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent. One's mobility in relation to these language game effects (language games, of course, are what this is all about) is tolerable, at least within certain limits (and the limits are vague); it is even solicited by regulatory mechanisms, and in particular by performance. It may even be said that the

system can and must encourage such movement to the extent that it combats its own entropy; the novelty of an unexpected “move”, with its correlative displacement of a partner or group of partners, can supply the system with that increase performativity it forever demands and consumes.<sup>5</sup> [italics Lyotard's]

To testify, then, is to have the intention to inform, it is not merely to ‘say that...’, but to ‘inform that...’; testimony is given with the intention of inducing new beliefs in the auditor, it is given with the intention of contributing to the *formation* of a new ontological status in the mind of the listener.

Thus, if my saying *that p* is a case of testimony, then, I am committing myself to a particular state of affairs (ontology), and further, I have the intention that those to whom I testify will believe that the state of affairs of which I have spoken, exists. That is, in testifying *that p*, it is my intention to inform my audience that it is the case *that p*. The epistemic concept of testimony points to the relationship between ontology and epistemology, a relationship that I think is being noted here with respect to this connection between informing and inducing beliefs in others.

### ***The Concept of Information***

Research suggests that apart from the obvious sphere of information technology, the most recent source of serious academic work on the nature of information has emerged from those exploring the relationship between science and religion. In 1990 the Third European Conference on Science and Theology (Geneva, March 29 to April 1)<sup>6</sup> devoted itself to the questions raised above, and within this colloquium, the most systematic examination of the nature of information is to be

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<sup>5</sup> Lyotard, J-F

*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984) (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi) p. 15

<sup>6</sup> See

*The Science and Theology of Information – Proceedings of the Third European Conference on Science and Theology, Geneva, March 29 to April 1*, Wassermann, C., Kirby, R, and Rordorf, B (ed) (Labor Et Fides 1992)

found in the work and thought of the mathematician and theologian, John C. Puddefoot. Further, Fred Dretske's thorough and rigorous work *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*<sup>7</sup> provides a detailed and extensive analysis of information theory and the relationship between information and knowledge (in particular – perceptual knowledge). Below, we note some of the salient aspects of Puddefoot's and Dretske's arguments.

Both Puddefoot and Dretske begin by acknowledging the work of a seminal paper written in 1948 by Claude Shannon on communication theory which puts up an analysis of information purely in terms of probability theory.

Puddefoot begins thus:

[We] set out to establish a vocabulary that will underline the distinctive uses of information, and in so doing, demonstrate the inadequacies of a solely mathematical approach. These distinctions may enable us to give an account of how significance can emerge from meaninglessness through *embodied* and *interactive information*, by which the world is able to progress.<sup>8</sup>

Dretske undertakes a detailed analysis of information and argues forcefully that there is an important distinction between information and meaning, arguing that there is a 'raw' sense (my term, not Dretske's) of the concept of information which can be understood in purely mathematical terms. He *is* concerned to explore the relationship between information and meaning, but he clearly believes this relationship can only be comprehended on the shoulders of a detailed probabilistic conception of information. It will be useful and expedient to quote Dretske at some length:

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<sup>7</sup> Dretske, F. I., op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Puddefoot, J. C.

'Information Theory, Biology, and Christology' in *Religion and Science – History, Method, Dialogue* (ed. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman) (Routledge, New York, 1996) p. 301

There are eight employees and one of them must perform some unpleasant task. Their employer has left the nasty business of selecting the unfortunate individual up to the group itself, asking only to be informed of the outcome once the decision is made.

...Information theory identifies the amount of information associated with, or generated by, the occurrence of an event (or the realization of a state of affairs) with the reduction in uncertainty, the elimination of possibilities, represented by that event or state of affairs.

...Imagine that the group agreed to make their [sic] selection by flipping a coin. In order to accomplish this, they divided themselves into two groups of four and flipped the coin to determine the group from which a further selection would be made. Once this was decided by the first flip, they subdivided the unlucky group of four into two smaller groups, each consisting of two individuals. A second flip of the coin determined from which of these two groups the final selection would be made. A third toss of the coin settled the matter between the two remaining contestants, and Herman was the unhappy survivor. If we treat tosses of the coin as the number of decisions or choices that are made in reducing the competitors from eight to one, we get the number three. This is the number of *binary decisions*, choices between two competing (and equally probable) alternatives, that must be made in reducing eight alternatives to one. According to information theory, *this* is the proper...measure of the amount of information contained in the reduction of eight possibilities to one. Since a binary decision can be represented by a binary digit (0 or 1), we can represent Herman's selection by a sequence of three binary digits. It takes three *binary digits* (bits), one binary digit (0 or 1) for each flip of the coin (letting 1 = heads, 0 = tails), to completely specify the reduction of eight possibilities to one. The amount of information associated with the fact that Herman was selected is 3 bits.<sup>9</sup>

This probabilistic account of information is referred to by Puddefoot as 'counting-information'. His account runs thus:

*Counting-information* is mathematical information as defined by Claude Shannon in an epoch-making paper on communication theory written in 1948; it has nothing directly to do with meaning: it relates solely to an arbitrary measure based upon the theory of probability.<sup>10</sup>

In seeking to explain how counting-information is to be distinguished from other senses of the term, Puddefoot sets out the following figures:

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<sup>9</sup> Dretske, F. I, op. cit., p. 60

<sup>10</sup> Puddefoot, J.C. op.cit., p. 302



These diagrams are useful in focusing our attention on the relationship between information (counting-information) and meaning, or significance, for this is our central problem, namely, the transformation of meaningless ‘bits’ into that which has significance, that which has meaning. In each of these figures, the counting-information is the same, namely, 100 ‘bits’ (the grids are 10X10). There is a 20:80 “split, the counting-information is  $\log_2 ({}^{100}C_{20})$ ”<sup>11</sup> Puddefoot argues that to a human being, Figure 1 is disordered, Figure 2 is ordered, but not significant, and Figure 3 is ordered and significant. But why? Puddefoot argues that ‘bits’ “do not determine their own significance.”<sup>12</sup> A string of ones and zeroes, a single gene on a strand of DNA, an electric pulse passing through a microchip, do not, *in and of themselves*, have meaning. In order for ‘bits’ to have significance, to be meaningful, in the sense that *they inform*, something else must be occurring – this ‘something else’, Puddefoot argues, is provided by a complementary aspect of the system, or entity, which is to be acted upon by the ‘bits’, such that *the ‘bits’ are meaningful in virtue of something already embodied within the system*. This is a remarkably important point, for it shows that that which *is* information, is information as a consequence of the nature *both of* the ‘bits’ *and* also the nature of the entity being acted upon by the ‘bits’. Puddefoot notes that this “can be summarized by the dual principle: *nothing is self-interpreting because meaning is distributed over systems*.” [Puddefoot’s italics]<sup>13</sup>

At this fundamental level, then, we must take care to note that anything that *is* information must, itself, be of a certain nature and the entity for which this ‘thing’ is information must have a certain nature such that some kind of ‘fit’ is evoked between the nature of the ‘bit’ and the nature of the entity for which the ‘bit’ is meaningful, or significant. Meaning, or significance, does not reside in the ‘bit’, in and of itself. A ‘bit’ becomes information because there is some sort of *relationship* between the ‘bit’ and the entity for whom this ‘bit’ is meaningful or significant. This observation is of great importance to the thesis I am

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, p. 304

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 301

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p. 301

endeavouring to run with respect to the relationship between the say-so of others and the emergence of doxastic structures which ultimately make the world intelligible and meaningful to human beings. Puddefoot writes:

(T)he arrival of a string of bits or nerve pulses at a receptor on the boundary of a system, whether of an electronic or organic nature, is not sufficient to do anything (assume significance, effect change) unless the receiving system “knows” what to make of it. The incident information must resonate with the information embodied in the system to produce some effect that may result in the system using its power to shape some other aspect of the world.<sup>14</sup>

But how does this relationship emerge; what is meant here by ‘embodied’, ‘resonate’, ‘power’ and ‘shape’? This description of the relationship between a ‘bit’ and an ‘entity’ raises questions of the utmost significance and importance because such a description asserts that there is some sort of symbiotic ontology with respect to the nature of a ‘bit’ and that which it can inform; there is a symbiotic ontology whenever we speak of anything *being information*, or rather, *being informed*. Puddefoot was careful to put inverted commas around the word ‘know’ in the above quotation, but what other word could he have used here? The matter to which he points in using this word reveals something mysterious about the nature of information, and in saying this I don’t mean to suggest that there is something supernatural, or irresolvable about the nature of information, only, perhaps, that there might be something inexplicable going on – in the true sense of that word – something beyond saying. (I will have some more to say on this in the final chapter.) That is, can we speak of a single cell, or a microchip knowing? How does a structure emerge such that it is able to be informed by ‘bits’, particularly if the structure exists in virtue of the ‘bits’ being what they are, as is the case with the nexus between genes and the cell they inhabit? Do microchips and cells exhibit intentional (in the philosophical technical sense) states? Further, and perhaps at an even deeper level, does this apparent symbiotic ontology give rise to axiological matters – does an entity for whom ‘bits’

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 302



are informative, value, in some sense, the 'bits', and if so, in what sense are they valued? Is this axiology to be seen purely in terms of workability (pragmatics/utility/functionality), or in terms of survivability (perhaps this is the same as workability), or in terms of 'coming to know', or in terms of 'understanding', or having a 'sense of being' – self consciousness?

Dretske also notes the importance, or rather, significance, of the relationship between 'information' and what an entity or system already knows with respect to incident information. He writes:

(W)hat information is transmitted may depend on what the receiver already knows about the possibilities existing at the source.<sup>15</sup>

But how does this knowledge (at the source) arise?

Let us explore these fundamental and critical questions by noting three senses in which the concept of information is applied.

It will be useful to quote Puddefoot in full here. Following his definition of counting-information (given above) he notes two others:

## 2. Meaning-information

*Meaning-information* is information in the colloquial sense of knowledge; it is completely different from Shannon's concept of information and largely language and culture-dependent.

## 3. Shaping-information

*Shaping-information* denotes information as a noun describing the action of giving form to something. It is the oldest sense of the word, originating in the Latin verb *informo*are,(sic<sup>16</sup>)

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<sup>15</sup> Dretske, F.I., op.cit., p. 65

<sup>16</sup> See footnote 16 in Chapter One

further reflected in current usage in the German *informieren* and the French *informer*. In this sense we can speak of the “information” of a piece of Plasticine when it is given specific form.

An incident pattern of counting-information will be recognized in two circumstances: when it is *familiar* (when it *belongs* to the system upon which it falls); and when it *familiarizes* (when the system is sufficiently flexible to allow the incident information to induce new embodiment so that the incident information habituates itself and comes to belong). Without the second process (involving conditioning, programming, teaching, learning, selecting), the first is impossible (since the origins of familiarity become unintelligible; the system cannot get started). So although familiarization seems the more remarkable (as has appeared again and again in the philosophical problem of how newness arises and can be appropriated and accommodated), it is in fact the more basic. The world progresses through familiarization; the capacity for familiarization is absolutely fundamental.<sup>17</sup> [All italics and parentheses Puddefoot's]

It is important to note as relevant to my argument, the references to ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ mentioned above as this observation by Puddefoot goes to the heart of what I am here advocating. Testimony is fundamental to teaching and (propositional) learning – *learning that...* - and testimony is the speech-act of informing.

Let us, then, unravel what we have to this point.

First, in order for a ‘bit’ to inform an entity or system, the entity must already ‘embody’ the information. We take it that by ‘embody’, Puddefoot means that the ‘bits’ already ‘belong’, in some sense, to the system or entity. This is what he means by information being ‘familiar’ to the system or entity.

Second, in order for a ‘bit’ to inform an entity or system, when the information is not *familiar*, the entity or system must be able to embrace the ‘bits’ such that new embodiment comes into being. This is what Puddefoot calls ‘familiarization’, he notes, further, that familiarization is fundamental and that it is how the world

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 302-3

progresses. With respect to this process he notes the work of J.J. Gibson who explains familiarization as being possible in virtue of a system or entity's potential to discern incident information.<sup>18</sup> According to Gibson, an entity or system "acts by trying to construct possible patterns out of"<sup>19</sup> the stream of incident information. With respect to my observations above regarding axiology, Puddefoot (speaking of Gibson) writes:

Organisms with the ability actively to construct significant order out of the information in an incident array possess selective advantage; the more appropriate the order they construct, the greater that advantage. The roots of imagination lie in the structure of perception itself...A flux of bits or pulses is meaningless unless it flows in the context of structures which already embody the capacity to respond to it by recognizing the changes inherent in it as they present themselves at its receptors (on the boundaries) as either already familiar or potentially significant.<sup>20</sup>

Such assertions seem both profound and profoundly unclear – what is 'order'(?), what is pattern(?), and even if we can give an account of these, what is their *significance* in terms of the relationship between information and meaning? We may, for example, want to claim that pattern/order *is* meaning – but does this not say more about that which is the benefactor of purported information than it does about information itself? Meaning for whom, to whom? There is a vicious circularity here and it seems inescapable. This is the mystery of information, when it is no longer understood (merely) as a string of 'bits' and becomes meaningful, when it acquires significance. Puddefoot (above) talks about an entity's ability to "construct significant order in an incident array" – does this mean 'order' only for the entity? Perhaps we can stipulate, mathematically, what we mean by order and pattern. For example, we may assert that 'symmetry' *is* pattern, that 'balance' *is* order, that 'unity', or 'one-ness', or 'wholeness' *is* order. Puddefoot argues that there is no mathematical technique for differentiating

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<sup>18</sup> By 'incident information', Puddefoot means the arrival of 'bits' on the boundary of a system or entity which may or may not be familiar or familiarized. Incident information is 'significant' or 'meaningful' if and only if the incident information is 'familiar' or can be 'familiarized'.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 303

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 303

between counting-information and significance. “That the counting-information of these three patterns [Figures 1-3 above] is the same shows that counting-information is inadequate to embrace or describe the differing *significances* of these figures. *Either* we need an additional mathematical technique that reflects the differences between the figures, *or* we must acknowledge that the differences are not reducible to mathematics.”<sup>21</sup> [Italics, Puddefoot’s].

It seems, then, that there is a *necessary* and (apparently) inscrutable link (I am not sure ‘link’ is the right term) between counting-information and entities or systems for whom the counting-information is meaningful, or significant. In one sense, the previous sentence is absurdly obvious – there would be nothing to discuss in terms of the relationship between information and meaning if there was no incident information (i.e. counting-information), in another sense, however, it is not obvious: meaning, or significance, arise in virtue of an as yet to be explained (by this writer) interface between the nature of counting-information and the nature of that which encounters counting-information. It is not just that counting-information arrives at the boundary of an entity or system and then, in virtue of its arrival, becomes meaningful and significant. What we are trying to understand, what we are trying to explain and give an account of, is the nature of the relationship between counting-information and that which becomes meaningful and significant. Puddefoot notes that:

To discern significant order is to *resonate* to a complementary aspect of oneself.<sup>22</sup>

But we have yet to explicate this phenomenon, and further, the complexities and philosophical problems do not end with these questions and observations. What is required of the entity for incident information to have potential significance and meaning? Is there something the entity must *do* or must *be*? Further, *if* an entity finds meaning in potential information, how does it ‘know’ that it is *real* information and not hallucination, or illusion? What would be real information(?)

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 304-305

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 305

– anything that has meaning, significance? Under such an ascription, the schizophrenic's delusions become meaning-information.

There is no more point in feeding a microchip a binary string that is not part of its instruction set than in presenting an eye with an ambient array outside the wavelength of visible light. We facilitate such embodiment by theorizing, speculating, imagining, fantasizing, until we find a context of sufficient conceptual power to make sense of it, or until we exhaust our powers, or until we conclude that there is no meaning-information to be found, that the signal is pure noise, meaningless. The latter two options are difficult to distinguish, as the figures above and the example of the string of digits form the expansion of  $\perp$  demonstrate: how can I tell whether my failure to make sense of an incident array full of information arises from the inadequacy of my intellect or from the fact that the array is meaningless? And how can I tell whether the meaning I discern is made or found (imaginary or real)? As I shall remark in another context, there are no criteria that will distinguish these possibilities.<sup>23</sup>

In the light of these questions, I want to suggest that we may find one way forward by turning to the third sense in which we can conceive of information, namely, shaping-information.

### ***Informare***

*Shaping-information* denotes information as a noun describing the action of giving form to something. It is the oldest sense of the word, originating in the Latin verb *informare*, further reflected in current usage in the German *informieren* and the French *informer*. In this sense we can speak of the “information” of a piece of Plasticine when it is given specific form.<sup>24</sup>

I propose the following: the testimony of others operates on two levels – one is epistemically significant, but ‘surface’; the other is epistemically profound and ‘deep’. It now seems relatively uncontroversial to say that we come to form a myriad of beliefs as a consequence of what people say to us. The degree to

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 305-306

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 302-303

which these beliefs become knowledge is something we have already considered and is the subject of on-going philosophical investigation. What is *not* uncontroversial is to make the claim that what people say to us plays a pivotal role in the actual *formation* of mind itself, and though this may be controversial, it is, in fact, what I am arguing for – testimony not only accounts for what we know, but for what we *are*, what one *is*. I do not deny the role of chemistry, the role of biological determinacy in what we ultimately want to say it means to be human, but we are more than our genetic make-up. What we become, how we come to view the world, what we make of experience, in fact, what makes experience possible, what *meaning* we derive from experience cannot be explained purely in terms of the individual chemistry of each man and woman, there is sufficient evidence to show that in addition to our chemistry, we are highly social, interacting beings and that these interactions shape who we are and what we become.

There is reason to believe that testimony, along with other dimensions of the reality in which we function, actually transforms, maybe even creates, neurological structures. As noted above, Puddefoot argues that familiarization occurs when a “system is sufficiently flexible to allow the incident information to induce new embodiment so that the incident information habituates itself and comes to belong.”<sup>25</sup> But this is a philosophical thesis, not a scientific one, and therefore I cannot show that this is the case.<sup>26</sup> What I hope to show, is that the emergence of mind (and it does not matter whether one adopts a materialist or dualist conception of mind) is *formed* by our immersion in a community of linguistic practice. The testimony of others is aimed not only at expressing beliefs which are held to be true, with the speech-act of testimony *being* the evidence, but testimony, in virtue of its purported veracity, *informs* the auditor what *is*, thus testimony not only makes claims about what is purportedly real, what is the case, it *shapes* us. On this view, there is an ontological commitment

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p.302

<sup>26</sup> Though refer to footnote 16 in Chapter One

being made by a speaker and if the auditor is duly *informed*, s/he embraces this ontology, this view, about what *is*, and to do such, is to form and shape mind itself.

This is not to say that testimony can ‘reveal’ reality, this is exactly what Wittgenstein wanted to deny when he recalls that he was wrong in his early understanding of how one acquires language, when talking about the purported relationship between ostensive definition and meaning. He notes that the German word for ‘meaning’ – *Bedeutung* – is derived from the German word for pointing – *Deuten*,<sup>27</sup> but this etymological legerdemain does not enable experience to have meaning, because, as Wittgenstein later showed, meaning itself cannot transcend our linguistic practice to something ‘outside’ of itself. McCutcheon writes:

We saw...that for Wittgenstein, the confusion lies in appealing to reality in order to justify meaning claims. Because rules of grammar are construed as meaning-constituents, the distinction emphasises what for Wittgenstein is a trivial truth; that it makes no sense to think that we can coherently explain or justify meaning by appealing to a reality independent of it because to do so implies the possibility of getting outside meaning and that idea is incoherent. Outside meaning there is not further meaning, but no meaning at all. The idea of explanation in connection to meaning is therefore suspect (I “explain” nothing if I say “this is (means) ‘red’ because this is red”).<sup>28</sup>

In recalling Wittgenstein’s central thesis, it is critical to note that he was not denying the existence of a Universe independent of human concepts, but he was denying that when we speak of it and when we understand each other, we are ‘seeing’ it ‘outside’ of the concepts we have acquired and acquired in virtue of the fact that we are immersed in a shared linguistic practice. McCutcheon again:

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<sup>27</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*Philosophical Investigations* (1958)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe) p. 56

<sup>28</sup> McCutcheon, F.

*Religion Within the Limits of Language Alone – Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (2001)  
(Ashgate, Aldershot) p. 109

Our task...is...to understand Wittgenstein's central claim that we cannot access a reality independent of the concepts we use to think about it. Furthermore, these concepts themselves find their meaning through their application in contexts of use. A philosophical question that seeks to understand the nature of something, call it *x*, can only be answered by examining how *x* is spoken of or thought about. This speaking or thinking occurs in language and so the philosopher must examine the use of language if an understanding of the nature of *x* is to be attained...Wittgenstein's insistence that questions about the nature of *x* can only be answered by thinking through the language that forms our concept of *x* has been greatly misunderstood. It is most often seen as a denial that we can get outside language and access Reality.<sup>29</sup>

The nexus between 'truth' and 'reality' has a long and difficult history, but I do not believe it is one that needs to be explicated here given the time devoted to the nature of this relationship in the first and second chapters of this dissertation. I believe it is sufficient that we come to see that when people (sincerely) say things to each other, when parents and teachers tell their children and students '*that p*', they *intend* that the auditor believe that what is asserted is true and what *is* true we take to be what *is*. In saying this, I am not committing myself to a particular metaphysical framework, I am merely arguing that when we inform, and I have argued that on a certain level and in certain contexts, testimony is the speech-act of informing, we are making a claim *that p is the case*, that this is how the world *is*. The child or adult who believes what s/he is told believes necessarily, in virtue of being told, that this is the way of the world. In the next chapter I will argue that mind is the sum total of what one takes to be the case; mind is, at least, the sum total of one's beliefs, the meaning of one's experiences. But in the case of *experiencing as...*, *what* one experiences will be informed by what one believes, and I have argued that our beliefs emerge within a community of language users.

The claim that our concepts are the right ones (the metaphysical must) cannot be justified. It cannot even be rendered intelligible if by "right" we mean that they match a

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 20-21



reality independent of them. It is not only confused to attempt a justification by appealing to the world that we somehow see or think we can imagine independently of our concepts. Equally confused is the attempt to explain necessity in terms of mind.<sup>30</sup>

As such there are inextricable links between what is said to us, what we come to believe, how we see the world through the prism of our doxastic structures and therefore how we are and come to be in the world.

There is, then, a profoundly deep sense of the term ‘epistemic dependence’. My capacity for increasing levels of autonomy in learning emerges on the shoulders of my acquired prior understandings and knowledge – but my emerging consciousness of how the world is, is only possible within a framework of previously acquired meanings. Kant showed that we come into the world ready to go, ready to learn, but not *tabula rasa*, yet our own propositional learning begins with and is sustained by testimony. To testify is to inform. Testimony is information; it is, sometimes, *meaning-information*, it is, sometimes, *shaping-information*. Meaning-information can only occur on the shoulders of shaping-information. How this process occurs, as an empirical dimension of this world, is beyond the scope of this work, but I think the arguments put up by Puddefoot are cogent and I also think that they reflect the insights of Kant some four hundred years earlier. Whilst he did not use the language derived from modern information technology, he understood that there must be a special relationship between the kind of beings we are and the way the world presents itself to us. When Puddefoot talks of what an entity must already ‘know’ if it is going to find significance and ultimately meaning in incident information, he is, in my view, talking of the *a priori*. Kant writes:

Besides, without seeking for such examples of principles existing *a priori* in cognition, we might easily show that such principles are the indispensable basis of the possibility of experience itself, and consequently prove their existence *a priori*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80

<sup>31</sup> Kant, I.

*Critique of Pure Reason* (1969)

And one of the ways Puddefoot attempts to explain this special relationship between information that is presented to us and the way we are, is analogously, by considering the kind of relationship that exists between a key and the lock it opens. He writes:

I can trace my own interest in information to a seemingly abstruse question which first occurred to me when I was about twelve: what is it about *this* key that makes it open *this* lock? The obvious answer, which is as uninteresting now as it was then, is that the key is the right shape. But what exactly does this mean? It fits! Yes, of course, but what is it about its “fitting” that we need to grasp?

Part of the answer lies in the principle that *the meaning-information of any system is distributed throughout the system as a whole.*<sup>32</sup> [italics Puddefoot's]

We are then, *informed* by the world, that is, we are shaped by it. This shaping is a cognitive shaping, it is what enables us to function and what produces, ultimately, shared understandings and ways of seeing. Incident information can only become meaningful if there is the potential within an entity to utilize that information in some sort of symbiotic manner. If, when incident information arrives on the boundary of an entity or system, it cannot utilize that information, if it is not ‘familiar’ with it, then the incident ‘array’ will be useless, unless the entity has the potential to ‘familiarize’ itself with it – the technical term Puddefoot uses to advert to the capacity of information to induce new embodiment in an entity or system.

If this is correct, then, we can infer that not everything that arrives on the boundary of the human entity is information – counting, meaning, or shaping information. Incident Information only becomes that, namely, Incident Information, if it can be utilized. In this sense, all that which *is information* must, in some sense, have the potential to be meaningful, or to induce meaning. This may lead us to ponder what ‘things’ may arrive on the boundary of our system,

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(Everyman, New York, Translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn) p. 27

<sup>32</sup> Puddefoot, J.C. op.cit., p. 309

that are never recognised or utilized, but which, nonetheless, are actualities and constituent of our Universe. It also raises the question of whether or not there can be 'wrong information' or 'false information'.

I do not think we have any grounds for holding that the terms 'wrong information' or 'false information' or mis-information are oxymorons. These terms are meaningful. The policeman who shoots the innocent man because he is wrongly informed that he is a terrorist with a bomb strapped to his body has simply been wrongly informed. What was said to him via his radio had meaning, even though what it asserted about the world was false. On this account, and following Puddefoot, I think we would want to say that such cases, the term 'information' is being used in this context as 'meaning-information', that is, it is being used in a "colloquial" way as a synonym for knowledge, to assert what someone takes to be the case. Of course in this example, it is not knowledge, because the man who was shot was not a terrorist, but just as people can sometimes claim to know when they do not, so people can inform that it is the case *that p*, when in fact it is the case *that ~ p*. Where the concept of meaning-information is different from the concept of knowledge, however, is that whilst there can be wrong information, or false information, there cannot be false knowledge, or wrong knowledge. There is no such species as a 'false fact'.

The first words spoken to new-born babies, on this analysis, constitute genuine information, even if these words are, in the first instance, meaningless. As I observe in the last chapter, these first words cannot be testimony because in order for them to be such the baby must be able to understand them, and it is clear that one-day-old babies do not know what is being said to them. Yet, what is being said to them (on this account of information) is, quite surprisingly and unexpectedly, information. These first spoken words are information because they "resonate with the information embodied in the system to produce some

effect that may result in the system using its power to shape some other aspect of the world.”<sup>33</sup>

And this is the point – our immersion into a linguistic practice that ultimately produces beings that have beliefs and can know things is due to the role informing plays. Over a rather short period of time, what begins as shaping-information becomes, for the child, meaning-information and then, and in consequence, we see the emergence of mind, and it is with the emergence of mind that we can, in turn, shape that which has shaped us. It is this claim that I want to argue for in the next and penultimate chapter.

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<sup>33</sup> See footnote 14

## Chapter Six

*For thou hast granted to man that he should come to self-knowledge through the knowledge of others, and that he should believe many things about himself on the authority of the womenfolk.<sup>1</sup>*

St Augustine

### **Review and Preliminaries**

Thus far I have argued that:

- P1 Testimony is a source of knowledge and belief.
- P2 With the exception of what we come into the world knowing *a priori*, testimony is our first source of knowledge and belief; perceptual knowledge, inferential knowledge, and knowledge through recollection would not be possible without testimony.
- P3 Accepting the testimony of another involves trust; testimony does not work without trust.
- P4 Testimony is a speech-act. The speech-act of testimony operates on two levels: (a) *attesting* to a given state of affairs and (b) the *formation* of doxastic structures in the auditor
- P5 Testimony is fundamental to education.

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<sup>1</sup> St Augustine

*The Confessions* (2004)  
(Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts) Bk 1,  
Chapter 6:10

P6     Meaning emerges as a consequence of the formation of our doxastic structures and a commitment to a given ontology – meaning is possible only when we have accepted that the world *is* as we believe it is.

In this chapter, I want to develop my argument further on the relationship between belief, meaning, and mind. I will argue that the phenomenon we call ‘mind’ is, to a significant extent, produced by testimony. By including the caveat “to a significant extent” I want to advert to my belief that whilst I hold that the mind *is* the sum-total of our beliefs, I hold that the acquisition of beliefs would not be possible without *a priori* knowledge and a myriad of human capacities that make it possible for one to actually *experience* the world’s ‘given-ness’, the world’s ‘is-ness’. Kant has shown that although sentience and being able to experience is a necessary condition of coming to know, the acquisition of *a posteriori* knowledge is not merely due to experience but to that which is known *a priori*. With Kant I am arguing that not only is the *a priori* necessary for the acquisition of *a posteriori* knowledge (and belief), so is testimony. Thus, I will endeavour to make explicit how this relationship between mind and testimony emerges. It will be important that we also give our attention to related concepts such as the concepts of ‘consciousness’, ‘awareness’, and ‘understanding’. How these concepts are related to each other will present philosophical difficulties not unlike untying the Gordian knot. Nonetheless, we must endeavour to make things as clear as possible if the position I am advocating is to be seen as coherent and plausible.

The claim that mind is the result of testimony is a cornerstone of my thesis. When I entitled this project: ‘On the Deeper Purposes of Testimony’, it was this claim that I had in mind. In arguing that mind is produced by testimony, I am claiming something more than that argued by a number of epistemologists regarding testimony, namely, that the utterances and attestations of others

provides auditors with good grounds for believing that certain states of affairs obtain. I am in total agreement with this claim, but I am arguing for something more – I am arguing that the utterances and attestations of others forms our minds, informs us and continues to transform us throughout life. The dynamic state of the mind means that *we are*, at least to some extent, our minds. That entity we call ‘the mind’ is in a state of constant change and flux – it is not a static entity – it is transformed and moulded through its encounter with the world, it is shaped by this encounter and it, in turn, shapes the world. That we are, to some extent, our minds, is the subject of the next and final chapter of this work and so I shall return to these reflections then. For the moment, we recognise that the utterances of others are *part* of that encounter with the world, and in positing the view that our encounters with what others say is pivotal, I want to begin here by making four preliminary observations.

First, this project does not need to demonstrate a commitment to a conception of mind along traditional dualistic or materialist lines. It simply does not matter within the framework of this work whether one believes that the mind *is* the brain and the result of the way in which neural pathways are connected, or that the mind is an epiphenomenon, or that the mind resides in the pineal gland, or that the mind is some sort of mysterious non-material entity – a ghost in the machine. It just does not matter, for I am arguing that that entity we call ‘mind’, is the sum-total of our beliefs and experiences, beliefs and experiences which are ‘layered’ upon a given, pre-testimonial neural-structure, a neural-structure which *makes possible* the acquisition of beliefs. Where those beliefs and experiences reside, how they are stored, processed, ‘held’, what constitutes their ontological status, is of no relevance to this work. I do not deny, then, the existence of *a priori* knowledge and that this *a priori* knowledge forms, *in part*, what we call mind – in fact, throughout this work I have done more than not deny this position, I have embraced it. Along with Kant, however, I am arguing that the *a priori* is what makes the ordering of our first raw sense experience possible, and for human beings, the utterances, the say-so of others, forms a part of that first experience.

It is our capacity *to do* something with those utterances, however, that transforms us into beings who are, to a large extent, distinguished by the kinds of minds we have – we are beings capable of entertaining propositional beliefs. I am, then, asserting (without argument) that they (beliefs) exist and I am asserting (with argument) that they are produced, in fact, that they are made possible, due to the testimony of others. I sought to establish the first premises of this view in the previous chapter, where I argued that testimony is, on one level and in certain contexts, rightly thought of as information, and following Puddefoot's analysis of information, I endeavoured to show that when testimony *is* information, it is shaping information – *informoare* – that is, it induces new embodiments, new structures. That this is possible is due to the actual nature of information – for something to be information, 'bits' that arrive on the boundary of an entity or system, must, in some way, (and to use Puddefoot's term) 'resonate' with that entity or system. It seems clear, that whilst the first words spoken to new-borns are, in the strict sense, not testimony, they are information – in the strict sense.

Second, when I speak of 'mind', I wish to stipulate that I am referring to that entity which consists not only of desires and the will, not only of the Kantian *a priori* categories, not only of concepts acquired through learning, and not only of experiences understood as *experiences of...* and *experiences as....* I mean also that entity which makes possible the human (perhaps, uniquely human) capacity to be self-conscious; that entity which makes it possible for a human being to say, *and understand*: 'I know that I exist'. Our ability to know this, I contend, is also what makes it possible for us to engage in abstract and meta-cognitive thinking, and it is a capacity that some have seen as the distinguishing characteristic of being human. Polkinghorne writes:

The existence of consciousness is a fact of fundamental significance about the world in which we live. Each of us experiences it, and only the most sceptical of philosophers would question that we rightly extrapolate from our individual perception of it to the belief that its possession is shared by other humans and, to a lesser degree, by higher animals. It is one of our glories; Pascal wrote that 'All bodies, the firmament, the stars, the earth



and its kingdoms are not worth the least of minds, for it knows them all and itself too, while bodies know nothing.' The essence of consciousness is awareness rather than mere ratiocination...The lunar landscape of a reductionist science, dismissive of all but the material, is not the home of humanity...It flies in the face of our direct experience of mind and treats as uninteresting what is in fact the most significant development of cosmic history: *a universe become aware of itself*.<sup>2</sup> [italics mine]

By 'mind', then, I mean the rational, self-conscious entity which emerges *in virtue* of its organic 'hard-wiring' and *in virtue* of its interaction with the world in which it exists, allowing us to engage in propositional learning which in turn enables the acquisition of language and propositional beliefs. It is the mix and synthesis of the *a priori* and our wonderfully advanced capacity for propositional learning that allows human minds to emerge in the 'fullest' sense of that term, 'mind' – the entity that knows that it exists. It may be, as hinted by Polkinghorne (above), that the single most remarkable feature of our Universe, is that it has, in us, come to know that it exists.

Third, I want to acknowledge that the link I will draw between belief acquisition and the emergence of mind is not original, though I believe that the relationship I describe between mind and testimony is. I want, then, to acknowledge the person I believe set out to argue (in a systematic and rigorous way) for a concept of mind as the sum-total of one's beliefs. I shall address this shortly.

Fourth, given that I am arguing for a particular relationship between testimony and the emergence of mind, I do not think I can ignore the question of whether or not 'mind' exists in non-human beings. Questions about the nature of (purported) animal consciousness are notoriously murky, difficult and fraught with philosophical complexities, traps and cul-de-sacs. Nonetheless, I believe that I must give some consideration to these questions given that I am arguing that the existence of mind, in the sense presented above, is, to a significant degree, due

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<sup>2</sup> Polkinghorne, J.

*Science & Christian Belief – Theological reflections of a bottom-up thinker* (1994)  
(SPCK, London) pp. 11& 12

to, and a consequence of, testimony, and it seems true, on the available evidence, that the phenomenon of testimony is unique to the human condition. It is true that primatologists have known for some time that certain primates use calls that produce different responses to different forms of predation. Vervet monkeys, for example, use one call for raptors, another for snakes, and yet another for large cats and other terrestrial predators. The snake call results in members of the troop standing up on their hind legs, the large cat call sends members of the troop running towards the trees, the call warning of avian predators, sends infant monkeys running for cover and hiding under their mothers' bellies. It is clear that such forms of animal communication are a form of testimony. Although such happenings are noteworthy, we must say that they are examples of testimony of the most basic form. These animals do not seem to be able to testify to any state of affairs, other than what is happening in the immediate moment. Consider also the difference between the noise that is interpreted as 'threat above' from the noise that is interpreted as 'energy is equal to mass times the speed of light squared' or the orchestral conductor who says during a rehearsal of a Beethoven symphony: "between bars 133 and 157 he wants you to play with the deepest longing and yearning." Further, research into similar primate behaviours amongst infant squirrel monkeys has suggested that both the calls and the response are innate, rather than learned.<sup>3</sup> Whether or not the empirical evidence for non-human animal communication is veridical, human forms of life and social operations of mind are such that what we say to each other in a fully formed grammatical language which is capable of communicating abstract, not merely concrete concepts, is clearly a condition of our way of being that is substantively more advanced than the communications of non-human animals. This, however, does not obviate the need to deal with any possible objections to my thesis which may emerge from those who believe that 'mind' (that is, a rational, self-conscious mind) is not unique to human beings. We will, therefore, need to give further consideration to these matters.

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<sup>3</sup> See *Science News*, Vol. 154, No. 11. p. 174 'The Science of EEEEEK!' and <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/abstract/110502802/ABSTRACT?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

## ***Testimony and the Emergence of Mind***

It is arguable that along with John Dewey and Richard Peters, Paul H. Hirst was one of the most influential philosophers of education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His book, *Knowledge and the Curriculum - a collection of philosophical papers* <sup>4</sup> was a core text for studies in the Philosophy of Education during the latter part of the last century, and it is arguable that his work on Forms of Knowledge has had a lasting influence on curriculum organisation in the United Kingdom and Australasia. Yet, it is not his work on Forms of Knowledge that I want to draw upon, but rather, his observations on the relationship between belief and the existence of mind.

In the second chapter of the work noted above, Hirst argues persuasively that our ability to find meaning, to make sense of experience, is possible in virtue of our capacity to acquire concepts. The cognitive schemata (what I have called 'doxastic structures') that emerge in our heads is produced by the collection of concepts we acquire, concepts we acquire because we are creatures capable of recognising and responding to symbols, and the primary symbolic system we acquire is, of course, a natural language. Further, Hirst is at pains to point out and remind us that language is a public entity and so our participation in linguistic practices produces what he calls 'public embodiment' of our concepts. He writes:

Whatever else is implied in the phrase, to have a 'rational mind' certainly implies experience structured under some form of conceptual scheme. The various manifestations of consciousness, in, for instance, different sense perceptions, different emotions, or different elements of intellectual understanding, are intelligible only by virtue of the conceptual apparatus by which they are articulated. Further, whatever private

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<sup>4</sup> Hirst, P. H.

*Knowledge and the Curriculum – a collection of philosophical papers* (1974)  
(Routledge and Kegan Paul, London)

forms of awareness there may be, it is by means of symbols, particularly in language, that conceptual articulation becomes objectified, for the symbols give public embodiment to the concepts. The result of this is that men are able to come to understand both the external world and their own private states of mind in common ways, sharing the same conceptual schemata by learning to use symbols in the same manner.<sup>5</sup>

Here we see Hirst drawing our attention to the fundamental logical relationships between the concepts of 'mind', 'meaning', 'understanding' and 'belief'. I do not need any of the concepts I have acquired *a posteriori* to have experiences, but if I am to attach some sort of *meaning* to my experiences, and therefore *understand* them as x-type experiences, to *experience as...*, or *experiences of...* then, I must be capable of bringing these experiences under the ordering of a given conceptual framework, and within the context of the human condition, this conceptual framework is public, not private. It is a shared framework. It is what gives, in Hirst's terms, "public embodiment to the concepts" and what makes possible our ability to understand the experience of being human as a shared and common experience. That conceptual structure (or framework) will, in turn, be the result of acquired *beliefs*, and these beliefs can only arise in belief-forming beings like us. Now belief-forming beings like us are belief-forming beings because we are capable of learning and using language – this is a contingent, not a logical point. It is possible that there are other belief-forming beings who acquire beliefs in completely different ways. In the case of human beings, however, belief-acquisition is a consequence of our ability to lay down a conceptual structure, and this is possible only because we can use language. I take this to be axiomatic. We may wish to extend the concept of belief to include non-propositional mental states, but the primary orthodox epistemic position on 'entertaining a belief' is that such a mental disposition is only possible in beings capable of forming propositions. In discussing the possibility that animals can have beliefs without language, MacIntyre notes a point made by Malcolm:

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<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39

Malcolm [distinguished between] what it is to ascribe thinking and what it is to ascribe having a thought. We can say of a dog who has pursued a cat that has climbed a tree, and who now waits expectantly beneath the tree, that it thinks that the cat is in the tree. But we cannot say of a dog, or of any other being without language, that it has the thought that...

For “although we apply the word ‘think’ to animals, using it as a transitive verb taking a propositional phrase as its object, we do not thereby imply that the animal *formulated* or *thought of* a proposition” ...Malcolm thus equates having a thought with holding before one’s mind some proposition and a proposition must be expressible in language.<sup>6</sup> [italics MacIntyre’s. Double inverted commas indicate MacIntyre’s quotations of Malcolm.]

Further, and, *a fortiori*, Donald Davidson argues that only beings capable of having the concept of ‘belief’ itself can truly be said to have beliefs.<sup>7</sup> On this view, pivots the question of ‘meaning’ and concepts like ‘understanding’. Hirst argues that the relationship between ‘mind’ and ‘knowledge’ is, in fact, a logical relationship, not merely a metaphysical one. He writes:

...[T]here is once more the acceptance of some kind of ‘harmony’ between knowledge and the mind. This is, however, not now being maintained on metaphysical grounds. What is being suggested, rather, is that the ‘harmony’ is a matter of the logical relationship between the concept of ‘mind’ and the concept of ‘knowledge’, from which it follows that *the achievement of knowledge is necessarily the development of mind* – that is, the self-conscious rational mind of man – in its most fundamental aspect.<sup>8</sup> [italics mine]

For humans, the relationship between ‘meaning’ and ‘experience’ is to be found in our linguistic practices, not in some sort of assertion that our utterances ‘point to’ (*Bedeutung/Deuten*) a clearly perceived and recognised world or ontology that exists independently of human minds (which is *not* to say that such a world does not exist), but rather that our utterances embody shared understandings and

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<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, A.

*Dependent Rational Animals – Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (1999)  
(Duckworth, London) p. 32

<sup>7</sup> Davidson, D.

*Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (1984)  
(Clarendon Press, Oxford) p.170

<sup>8</sup> Hirst, P.H. op.cit., p. 39

agreements on the interpretation of experience. With Kant, I maintain that experience is *possible* first because of the categories, but I hold also that *that* experience is ‘interpreted’ within learned schemata, a doxastic structure and framework which consists, itself, of concepts acquired *a posteriori*. These concepts are learned and acquired by being immersed into a form of life made manifest through a public and shared language, and this public and shared language is not ‘known’ *a priori*, it has to be learned. It is learned by the young and it is taught to the young by those who have gone before. Our linguistic and epistemic elders, *testify to the ‘way of things’*. Wittgenstein showed convincingly that the concept of meaning only has meaning for human beings within certain ‘forms of life’ – and forms of life arise amongst human beings who have learned and accepted the ‘rules of the game’, a game which Wittgenstein called the Language Game, a game which we may call: The Application of Concepts. Unless one has learned the rules and plays according to the rules, there simply is no meaning.

“So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” – It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but forms of life.<sup>9</sup> [italics Wittgenstein’s]

The question, then, of whether something is true or false, rests fundamentally and exclusively within contexts of that which is held to be meaningful, and meaningfulness emerges amongst beings who have a shared understanding of the way of the world, of the way things ‘are’. We recall my reference to Tillich’s recognition of the fundamental relationship between epistemology and ontology.<sup>10</sup> McCutcheon writes:

It is important to recognise that Wittgenstein does not enforce a substantive distinction between grammatical and non-grammatical propositions of the Carnapian kind. He does not insist that it belongs to the nature of the proposition that it defines rather than

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<sup>9</sup> Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations* (1958)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe) § 241

<sup>10</sup> see Chapter One, footnote 15

describes. This is important because it rules out the more positive thesis that rules of grammar *cannot* be truths. Certainly when functioning as rules, it is either inappropriate to think of them being true or false, or we must think of their truth as unassailable (this is the sense in which they are necessary). But to acknowledge this is just to recognise an uncontroversial feature of grammar. To function as grammatical rules these propositions must be removed from the possibility of doubt and hence remove themselves from questions of truth and falsity. Clearly, if someone were to doubt whether in chess the pawn can move forward, it would be impossible for them [sic] to play chess. Accepting the rule is a condition for playing the game.<sup>11</sup> [italics McCutcheon's]

With Hirst, then, I want to contend that *human* minds, that is, rational self-conscious minds, are the product of acquired concepts. Concepts are acquired due to one's immersion in a form of life which consists of adopting, and participating in, a shared and public linguistic practice, the rules of which are largely non-negotiable – one has to agree to the language game, the rules of application, *before* one can begin to dispute correct application of the rules. Meaning is embedded in participation in this form of life. Most human beings cannot avoid immersion in this state of affairs.<sup>12</sup> Men and women, then, live in an interpreted world. The very notion of 'meaning' only has application within contexts of experience understood to be an *experience of...* One understands an experience to be of certain kind in virtue of certain beliefs about the world, and these beliefs are the result of the testimony of others. Wittgenstein makes a powerful remark in *Culture and Value* which, on first reading, may seem unconnected to my argument, but which, in fact, underwrites my claims. He writes:

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<sup>11</sup> McCutcheon, F. *Religion Within the Limits of Language Alone – Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (2001) (Ashgate, Aldershot) p. 105

<sup>12</sup> There have been some notorious and tragic cases of so-called 'wild or wolf' children who have been raised in total isolation from other human beings. To the best of my knowledge, the results have been devastating for the child. Amongst the many 'disabilities' these children display, is their inability to acquire language with a fully formed grammar. Probably the most celebrated and infamous recent case is that of 'Genie'. See Curtiss, S., *Genie – a Psycholinguistic Study of a Modern-Day 'Wild Child' (Perspectives in neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics)* Academic Press, 1977

We keep hearing the remark that philosophy really does not progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. Those who say this however don't understand why it is so. It is because our language has remained the same & keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there is still a verb 'to be' that looks as though it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink', as long as we still have the adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', as long as we continue to talk of a river of time & and an expanse of space, etc., etc., people will keep stumbling over the same cryptic difficulties & staring at the something that no explanation seems capable of clearing up.<sup>13</sup> [underscoring and ampersands Wittgenstein's]

This remarkable passage exposes the limits of our world-view and being. We 'see' the world through our language and the strictures that 'it' imposes upon us. All (natural) language is metaphor. Language, which is acquired through testimony, is both enabling and disabling; it plays a fundamental role in inducing human minds and allows for understanding and makes it possible for experience to be shared and communicated. But that very aspect of a shared understanding means a limited understanding, a limited 'seeing'. I note later that perhaps our occasional sense of the transcendent and ineffable is produced by experiences which we cannot 'order' under the matrix of our linguistic understanding, and it is telling that the passage by Wittgenstein just quoted (above) is followed by a short paragraph which notes: "And this satisfies besides a longing for the supernatural for in so far as people think they can see the 'limit of human understanding', they believe of course that they can see beyond it."<sup>14</sup> I will have more to say on this in the last chapter.

These considerations, reflections and claims about the relationship between language, meaning, understanding, belief and knowledge, are not new to Philosophy. The contention, however, that these fall under the rubric of testimony, or perhaps, more accurately, stand on the foundation of testimony, is to argue that how one comes to 'see', and what one 'sees' are determined by

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<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*Culture and Value* (ed. G.H. von Wright) (1998)  
(Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, Translated by Peter Winch) p. 22e

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22e



what others say to us. The idea that knowledge and meaning may be founded on an immensely complex and historically determined matrix of epistemic dependence may be jarring, or it may simply be that this is part of what it means to be human. Fricker writes:

If...our conceptualising framework is itself socially determined, during our acquisition of language, then *all* perception is essentially dependent on past testimony. [Note my second premise at the beginning of this chapter.] The issue is deep and difficult, but it is certainly not safe to claim, without further investigation, that we have any beliefs at all which are not in some way contaminated by dependence on past simply-trusted testimony. But if there is no testimony-free belief-base to isolate, then the project of justifying our acceptance of testimony-infected remainder by building up from it cannot get started.<sup>15</sup>

It would seem (from the above) that Fricker would not agree with my central project, given the clinical pejoratives of ‘contaminated’ and ‘infected’ she includes in her reflections here. Nonetheless, she has, at least, considered the possibility of what I want to argue and has suggested that if what is being contended here is true, it certainly needs ‘further investigation’ – something I am endeavouring to do. Although she seems to hold the view that if there are no testimony-infected beliefs, then the epistemological issue of beliefs being held with good grounds due to testimony doesn’t arise (a view with which I do not concur), she certainly acknowledges the centrality of testimony in the formative stages of human development. She writes:

It is important to see that this key feature of testimony – the multi-stage causal chain through the teller’s mind, and consequent contingency of the link between any state of affairs and her report of it obtaining – is consistent with the fact we acquire various of our concepts, *perhaps all of them* and certainly the labels for all of them, initially, through

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<sup>15</sup> Fricker, E.

‘Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony’  
*Mind, New Series* Volume 104, Number 414, April 1995, pp. 402-403

learning our language in a process of simple trust. Conceptually speaking, if not epistemically, we climb up the ladder of testimony, to then throw it away. Mummy saying 'red' was how I learned what is called 'red'. But as I become a master of folk physics and folk psychology, I appreciate Mummy's saying something is red is one thing, its being so is another – even if she is in fact always truthful and accurate.<sup>16</sup> [*italics mine*]

*Pace* Fricker, how does one know that this is red(?), “It would be an answer to say: ‘I have learnt English.’”<sup>17</sup> (We recall also my discussion in Chapter Three of a friend's child learning what constituted the colour purple.)

I conclude this section, then, with the claim that there is a fundamental and logical relationship between the concepts of 'belief', 'meaning', 'mind' and 'testimony'. I need, however, to argue for this further by considering the question of the existence of mind in beings that do not have a language.

### ***Non-Human Beings and Mind***

If what I have argued to this point is plausible, then what, if any, are the implications for language-less non-human beings, that is, what implications are there with respect to the possession of mind, the notion of meaning and understanding for beings who do not possess language? I feel the need to deal with this question because (and as noted above), I want to maintain that it is through the vehicle of testimony, of that which is said to us, that immersion in this form of life takes place and rational, self-conscious mind emerges, and we have *prima facie* reason to believe that animals do not talk to each other. Given that

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<sup>16</sup> Fricker, E.

'Knowledge from Trust in Testimony in Second-Hand Knowledge  
[Final Draft for Presentation at Rutgers Epistemology  
Conference, May 2005 – cited with permission of the author,  
received via e-mail, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2007]

<sup>17</sup> Wittgenstein, L. op.cit.,

*Philosophical Investigations* § 381

they do not engage in testimonial transactions,<sup>18</sup> should it be demonstrated that they have minds, then serious harm will have been done to my thesis. We turn our attention, then, to the question of whether or not non-human beings think, have minds, and understand their world.

Both Aristotle and Descartes held that possession of a 'rational soul' was a special part of being human. For Aristotle, it was what defined humans (see *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 1, Chapter 7) and for Descartes it was the (rational) soul – *animus* - (along with the possession of a genuine language) that would make it impossible for anyone to produce a thinking automaton (contra Turing) (see *Discourse on Method* Part V, last four paragraphs). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes:

Is it an accident that in both their [i.e., ancient Greeks] pre-philosophical and their philosophical ways of interpreting Dasein, they defined the essence of man as ζῶον λόγον ἔχον? The later way of interpreting this definition of man in the sense of the *animal rationale*, 'something living which has reason', is not indeed 'false', but it covers up the phenomenal basis for this definition of "Dasein". Man shows himself as the entity which talks. This does not signify that the possibility of vocal utterance is peculiar to him, but rather that he is the entity which is such as to discover the world and Dasein itself.<sup>19</sup>  
[italics Heidegger's]

I would like to begin my answer to the question of whether or not non-human beings possess minds, then, by looking again at the notion of 'meaning'.

My commitment to a Wittgenstenian philosophy of meaning does not mean that I hold the view that non-human beings do not have *meaningful experiences* (as distinct from experiences which 'mean...X'). It is my contention that dogs and cats can have 'meaningful experiences' in the sense that their encounters with the external world (and perhaps even their inner world [I am certain, for example,

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<sup>18</sup> Though see the caveat I included in footnote 3 of this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Heidegger, M. *Being and Time* (2003)  
(Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson) pp. 208-209

that many higher-order mammals experience emotions]) are successful, and by 'successful', I mean that such beings function and operate efficaciously – they are able to live, or more accurately, and to use a term advanced by MacIntyre, they are able to flourish<sup>20</sup>. The extent to which dogs and cats can operate successfully in the world is likely to be the result of at least two operational factors. First, they, like us, are able to make sense of sense experience due to a *priori* knowledge. What do I mean by 'make sense' of sense experience(?), I mean merely that beings like my cat seem to have no trouble 'understanding' certain fundamental aspects of the world, for example, he seems to 'understand' the difference between solid and liquid, I've never seen him make the mistake of trying to walk on the water in the fish pond - when hunting gold fish he is careful to maintain his balance; he doesn't try to walk through solids, like glass doors, he yells when you step on his tail and purrs when you scratch him behind the ears (and he respectively avoids and seeks out both of these experiences). Although he possesses these dispositions and 'understandings', I have no reason or evidence to support a belief that he possesses the concepts of 'liquid' and 'solid'.

MacIntyre, referring to an argument advanced by Stephen Stich writes:

Stich's example is the same as Malcolm's, except that the dog, Fido, has now chased a squirrel up an oak tree: "it would be perfectly natural to say he believes that the squirrel is up in the oak tree" ...But is this really what the dog believes? "Are there not indefinitely many logically possible creatures which are not squirrels but which Fido would treat indistinguishably from the way he treats real squirrels?" Moreover the dog does not distinguish the living from the non-living or animals from plants. "How can you say that he believes that it is a squirrel if he doesn't even know that squirrels are animals?" And the problems that arise over ascribing to the dog a belief about squirrels arises equally over ascribing a belief about trees. Given that the dog does not have a language for which community usage determines the application of 'squirrel' and 'tree', how are we to characterize the dog's belief?<sup>21</sup> [double inverted commas indicate MacIntyre's quotations of Stich]

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<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, A. op.cit., Chapter 3 'The Intelligence of Dolphins'

<sup>21</sup> ibid., pp. 34-35

MacIntyre agrees with Stich, holding that animals do not have beliefs which are ordered under the rubric of a conceptual scheme. He does argue, however, that animals possess what he calls 'indeterminate' beliefs. He argues that non-linguistic and pre-linguistic beings can be said to have beliefs because they exhibit behaviours which are suggestive of a sense of that which is true and that which is false. MacIntyre gives by way of support for this claim the example of young cats learning with remarkable efficiency that mice are good to eat but shrews are not. He argues that in distinguishing between mice and shrews, the cat has a sense of truth and falsity – it is true that mice, when eaten don't make one sick whilst eating shrews does make one (very) sick. Of course, he does not suggest that the cat 'thinks' this sentence, but he holds that the cat does believe something about mice and shrews and that the 'something' is analogous to 'true' and 'false'. MacIntyre acknowledges that the application of the concepts of 'truth' and 'falsity' are unquestionably only possible for beings with a fully formed language, but he holds, nonetheless, that the ability of non-linguistic and pre-linguistic beings to make perceptual distinctions between things like mice and shrews amounts to, in certain contexts, a distinction between that which is true and that which is false.<sup>22</sup>

It seems to me that MacIntyre's argument does not affect my fundamental contention with respect to the relationship between belief acquisition through testimony and the formation of rational, self-conscious minds and further, that the example of cats distinguishing between mice and shrews supports the second observation I wish to make about animals and thinking.

Whether or not the ability of animals to make perceptual distinctions supports an argument that they have beliefs, it seems certain that non-human beings are capable of learning from experience. My dog has learned that there is a connection between the appearance of walking shoes and going for a walk –

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 36-38

even to the extent that he will sometimes get the shoes out of the cupboard and bring them to me; birds learn how to fly, and lions learn how to hunt, and although I just referred to my dog's learning in propositional terms, I want to maintain that what is learned by non-human beings is dispositional, not propositional – they 'know how', they do not 'know that...' propositional knowledge requires the ability to form propositions, which in turn requires language. Non-human animals, or more accurately, beings without a genuine language, cannot form propositions. And yet, not being able to form propositions may prevent the emergence of propositional knowledge, but not (necessarily) the ability to think. What then, do we mean by thinking?

It seems that we can, without absurdity, embrace a minimalist definition of 'thinking' along the following lines: let us stipulate for the sake of the argument that thinking involves the application of some cognitive executive function which enables a being to make sense of information derived through its ability to sense its external and inner worlds, and respond to this information to such a degree that a human being would describe these responses as involving problem-solving. I describe such a definition of 'thinking' as 'minimalist', because it sets a lower standard than Turing's, which would require an entity to persuade a human being, whilst playing the Imitation Game, that 'it' was human.<sup>23</sup> Here is an example of the sort of thing that I mean.

Ravens gather at the end of lunchtime each day in the quadrangle of the school in which I work. They collect the bits of bread that our students have discarded. The ravens, however, seem to find the bread too tough to swallow, so they carry each piece to the top of the fountain (which is located in the Quad), soak it thoroughly, and then eat it. It seems to me that the ravens are engaged in some sort of problem solving. I have no idea what goes on inside a raven's head, but I

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<sup>23</sup> Turing, A.

'Computing Machinery and Intelligence' in  
*The Mind's I – Fantasies and Reflections on Self and Soul* (ed.  
Douglas R. Hofstadter and Daniel C. Dennett)  
(Bantam Books, New York, 1988)

do not think my describing their behaviour as problem solving and therefore the result of some sort of 'thought', to be an outrageous ascription. I think it is a plausible explanatory theory to say they are 'thinking' – I acknowledge that it is not an argument. On the basis of such observations, I have come to believe that some form of thinking may be possible without the need for propositional thought. I think it is possible that some non-human animals may think in the mode of mental pictures; I make the heuristic claim that it is likely that they have visual recollections of the way places look, they have auditory recollections (my cat always runs inside the house when I take the lawn mower out of the shed), and they certainly have powerful olfactory recollections. The hypotheses I am putting up here are a consequence of the behaviour of animals and my speculative interpretation of it - my understandings, interpretations and explanations of what animals do and seem to be are embedded in behaviourism. If some non-language using beings have beliefs, then, these are non-propositional beliefs. The problem is, is *that* notion (a 'non-propositional belief') incoherent, false, or the application of a concept in an eccentric way? I have no way to determine this because any conclusions I reach about the purported state of animal consciousness falls victim to both the problem of private states of consciousness and the problem of induction. Given that these considerations are inductive, then, I hold them to be of the form: 'argument to the best explanation'. Yet, and in the light of these caveats, it does seem that non-human beings 'know how' and, in some cases, 'think' – at least in the sense suggested above. In my discussion of the emergence and formation of human minds, then, I do not want to deny that some species of non-human beings 'feel', maybe 'know' (in the sense that they function successfully in the world, that is, 'know' in the dispositional sense) and maybe even 'think' (in the sense that they solve problems and may even make future-oriented plans). Through inner reflection, I am aware that I sometimes 'think' in pictures, and in the first chapter I cited Bryan Magee's claim that he has experienced the ability to solve problems without thinking in language. Further, (and, interestingly, in a preliminary discussion of

Animal Consciousness) Roger Penrose claims that he does most of his mathematical thinking with the use of mental pictures. He writes:

Almost all my mathematical thinking is done visually and in terms of non-verbal concepts, although the thoughts are quite often accompanied by inane and almost useless verbal commentary, such as 'that things goes with that thing and that that thing goes with that thing'. ...Also, the difficulty that [some] thinkers have had with translating their thoughts into words is something that I frequently experience myself. Often the reason is that there simply are not the words available to express the concepts that are required. In fact I often calculate using specially designed diagrams which constitute a shorthand for certain types of algebraic expression. It would be a very cumbersome process indeed to have to translate such diagrams into words, and this is something I would do only as a last resort if it becomes necessary to give a detailed explanation to others. As a related observation, I had noticed, on occasion, that if I have been concentrating hard for some while on mathematics and someone would engage me suddenly in conversation, then I would find myself almost unable to speak for several seconds.<sup>24</sup>

Penrose also cites Einstein, whom, it would seem, also thought in pictures.<sup>25</sup>

The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements of thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined...The above mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously only in a second stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will. [letter to Hadamard from Albert Einstein, quoted by Penrose, see footnote 16]

Given this human experience and my interpretation of some aspects of animal behaviour, I wish to contend that some non-human animals have dispositional knowledge, experience emotions (maybe nothing more than pleasure, pain and desires), and can think, in the sense that some can understand causal connections and solve simple problems. None of this, however, is to suggest

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<sup>24</sup> Penrose, R.

*The Emperor's New Mind* (1999)  
(Oxford University Press, Oxford) p. 549

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 548



that they have minds. If we want to assert that animals have minds, then we cannot mean anything like what we mean when we say that wo/men have minds. If one has a mind, then, one can think – the ability to think, in the sense asserted above, but this is not the same thing as having a mind; that beings with mind can think does not mean that being able to think entails having a mind; this needs further argument and elucidation.

I begin by considering some observations from both Roger Penrose and Raimond Gaita:

Penrose writes:

...I find myself believing strongly that, on this planet, **consciousness** is *not* restricted to human beings. In one of the most deeply moving of David Attenborough's television programmes was an episode that leaves us hard pressed not to believe that elephants, for example, not only have **strong feelings** but that these feelings are not far removed from those that instil **religious belief** in human beings. The leader of a herd – a female whose sister had died some five years earlier – took the herd on a long detour to the place of her sister's death, and when they came upon her bones, the leader picked up her skull with great tenderness, whence the elephants passed it from one to another, caressing it with their trunks. That elephants also possess **understanding** is convincingly, if horrifically, displayed in another television programme. Films from a helicopter, engaged in what was generously termed a 'culling' operation, showed clearly the elephants' terror as **full knowledge** of the impending slaughter of their entire herd was convincingly portrayed in the frighteningly agonized awful cries.<sup>26</sup> [italics Penrose's, bold script mine –see below]

Gaita writes:

In his book *The Lives of Animals* J.M. Coetzee gives these words to his main character, Elizabeth Costello – a woman who is driven to the edge of madness by her horror at our incomprehension of the suffering and dishonour that we inflict on animals. She speaks in

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<sup>26</sup> Penrose, R.

*Shadows of the Mind – a search for the missing science of consciousness* (1994)  
(Oxford University Press, Oxford) pp. 407-408

response to a philosopher who said, as many philosophers do, that animals cannot **know** that they die and therefore cannot fear death because they do not **possess the concepts** – of self and of the future, for example – necessary for such knowledge.

Anyone who says that life matters less to animals than it does to us has not held in his hands an animal fighting for its life. The whole of the being of the animal is thrown into that fight, without reserve. When you say that the fight lacks a dimension of intellectual or imaginative horror, I agree. It is not the mode of being of animals to have an intellectual horror; their whole being is in the living flesh.

If I do not convince you, that is because my words, here, lack the power to bring home to you the wholeness, the unabstracted, unintellectual nature, of that animal being. That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language; and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to its executioner.

You say that death does not matter to an animal because the animal **does not understand death**. I am reminded of one of the academic philosophers I read in preparing for yesterday's lecture. It was a depressing experience. It awoke in me a quite Swiftian response. If this is the best that human philosophy can offer, I said to myself, I would rather go and live amongst the horses.<sup>27</sup> [bold script mine – see below]

I recognise that my heuristic musings on animal mental processes are just that, 'heuristic musings' – as noted above, the 'problem of private states of consciousness' takes on vast and new proportions when we consider the nature of mental events in the purported 'minds' of non-human beings. A first reading of the passages quoted above may seem acutely anthropomorphised, and I have emboldened some words to draw attention to the application of both epistemic concepts and concepts about alleged states of mind to animals. I do not want to deny the existence of thought in some non-human beings, however, I do want to deny that non-human beings attach meaning and order to the experience of life through the prism of a doxastic structure which can only emerge through a public language and the ability to form concepts, mental templates, whose application to experience requires the ability to apply rules, that is, the logical criteria for the

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<sup>27</sup> Gaita, R.

*The Philosopher's Dog* (2002)  
(Text Publishing, Melbourne) pp. 67-68

application of a concept. In other words, I am arguing for a conceptual link between 'belief', 'meaning' and 'mind'. Davidson writes:

Since we cannot hope to interpret linguistic activity without knowing what a speaker believes, and cannot found a theory of what he means on a prior discovery of his beliefs and intentions, I conclude that in interpreting utterances from scratch – in *radical* interpretation – *we must somehow deliver simultaneously a theory of belief and theory of meaning.*<sup>28</sup> [italics mine, except the word 'radical']

I am persuaded that the concept of meaning, as in the ability to say: '*this means* x...', or the ability to *experience as...* necessitates the ability to form and hold a belief. There is a logically necessary connection between the concept of belief and the concept of meaning. Beliefs are induced by immersion into an epistemic milieu which is, itself, born out of the practices and ways of being of belief-forming beings. That sentence may appear tautological but I hold that the concept of 'meaning' only has meaning within this context. Its tautological tenor is due to the logically necessary connection between 'belief' and 'meaning'. The description and considerations of human thinking in pictures, or in non-linguistic modes discussed above, present deeper problems than may be apparent at first blush. If there are times when I, or anyone else, is 'viewing' inner pictures and wants to describe this 'viewing' as 'thinking', then, how are we to determine that those inner pictures are not themselves ordered under the framework of a conceptual doxastic structure which exists in virtue of the acquisition of language? We consider the following. Recently, I had to work out how to sit 28 people for a dinner by arranging four tables. I know that I did this by imagining the arrangement of the tables and the way I would position the chairs. I did this visually and it was, unquestionably, a mode of thinking. Yet, I was imagining 'tables' and 'chairs', and 'people', and how much 'space' was needed to set 'knives' and 'forks', entities for which I possess concepts that I acquired through the testimony of someone – 'this is a chair'. When I imagined the table, or the

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<sup>28</sup> Davidson, D.

*Inquires into Truth and Interpretation* (1984)  
(Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984) p. 144

chair, I was picturing an object for which I have a concept – it was not *merely* an image – it was *an image of...* In describing this situation I am *not* suggesting that my mental images and the words I know are operating in accordance with an Augustinian<sup>29</sup> description of language learning; I am just adverting to my inability to escape ‘seeing’ the world divorced from my first language and the world-view it has produced in me. So it seems to me, that even when I ‘think’ in pictures, even this mode of problem solving is underwritten by the doxastic structure that emerges within and out of a public linguistic world. Hirst writes:

...[T]he crucial point here is that understanding the world in sense-perception itself involves the use of symbols or images of some kind, for only in this way can the elements of perception be identified.<sup>30</sup>

That is, I do not merely have experiences, I *experience as...* and I do so due to testimony.

In the first chapter I committed myself to a Kantian position with respect to the existence of synthetic *a priori* judgements – I do believe we come into the world (as do non-human beings) ‘knowing’ some things, being able to make sense of certain aspects of the way the world presents itself *to us*. Here we stand on the same ground as non-human beings – we simply could not function, could not live, unless we entered this world able to understand certain aspects of its fundamental ontological status and how we ‘fit’ with that ontology. Human beings, however, have layered upon this *a priori* ‘hard-wiring’ a super-structure which is produced by the things we say to each other, beginning from the moment of our birth. What we say to each other, *informs*, that is, it literally *forms* a world-view such that most of what we experience comes to be filtered through that super-structure. Any ‘*experience as...*’ or *experience of...* is due to this formation. *Experiences as... or of...* are what they are because they are shared experiences – this is what it is for us to attach meaning to raw sense experience,

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<sup>29</sup> Wittgenstein, L. op.cit.,

*Philosophical Investigations* §1

<sup>30</sup> Hirst, P.H. op.cit., p. 76

and I now want to claim that the ability to find meaning, to *experience as... is* what it is to have a rational, self-conscious mind, I claim this because to be able to *experience as... is* to be *mindful of...* and it does not seem to me that it is possible to be mindful without possessing mind, that is, a self-conscious mind, a mind that is aware of its own existence. Aristotle may have been the first to explicitly recognise the fundamental importance of *being with others* when, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he notes that “man is a social animal”.<sup>31</sup> Although he is arguing for what is necessary for a person to attain *eudaimonia*, I am arguing that the emergence of human minds would not be possible without the ‘other’; it is not possible, I maintain, to become *mindful of...* without belonging to a community of beings who possess the public concept of meaning – and one needs shared beliefs for that. The mindfulness of which I speak, is due to the way we stand in relation to each other. In his discussion of Heidegger’s *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, MacIntyre writes:

[Heidegger] insists [that] we can *only* understand nonhuman animals by contrast with our own human condition and what all nonhuman animals share is a lack of what human beings have: a relationship to beings in which not only are beings disclosed, but the difference between beings and being is disclosed. That relationship depends upon the ability of human beings to apprehend what they apprehend “*as such and such.*”

The “as” that nonhuman animals lack is the “as” without which there cannot be *logos*, discourse... So that for Heidegger, just as for those analytic philosophers who have denied the possibility of belief to nonhuman animals, the presence or absence of language is of crucial importance.<sup>32</sup> [italics MacIntyre’s]

Human minds, then, emerge within human relationships.

I am persuaded, therefore, that whilst some non-human beings may be able to think and possess (non-propositional) beliefs, and even have minds in the sense that they experience desires, exercise will, and have *a priori* understandings,

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<sup>31</sup> Aristotle *The Nicomachean Ethics* (1953) Bk.1 Ch. 7  
(Penguin Books, London, Translated by J.A.K. Thomson)

<sup>32</sup> MacIntyre, A. op.cit., pp. 45-46

non-human animals cannot be said to be mindful in the sense noted above because we have *prima facie* reason to believe that they do not engage with each other on a cognitive platform of shared and publicly expressed concepts. That this is so can be seen by noting a rather remarkable aspect of some human experiences and the way in which they are spoken of, or rather, not spoken of, in that they are said to lie beyond saying. From time-to-time, people have experiences which they describe as 'ineffable', 'indescribable', 'unutterable'. What may explain these descriptions? I suggest that we have categories (terms) for such experiences because they cannot be catered for, understood, recognised, through the filter of the doxastic structure formed by testimony, and I further suggest that this provides another reason to believe that there is an inextricable link between what we experience and the way we see the world. Maybe, (and this is entirely speculative) the often referred to 'transcendental dimension' of such experiences is produced by their liberating nature; liberating in the sense that we are freed from interpreting these experiences under the conceptual structure produced and formed in us through testimony. In other words, I am arguing that the very fact that humans attempt to describe experiences that are beyond description, itself gives us further reason to hold that there is a fundamental link between the way we have learned to see the world due to the attestations of others, and the way we endeavour to make sense of experience. If I am right about this, then this serves to demonstrate how pervasive is the nature of testimony in forming human minds. Hirst argues:

Knowledge...must never be thought of merely as vast bodies of tested symbolic expressions. These are only the public aspects of the ways in which human experience has come to have shape. They are significant because they are themselves the objective elements round which the development of mind has taken place. *To acquire knowledge is to become aware of experience as structured, organised and made meaningful in some quite specific way*, and the varieties of human knowledge constitute the highly developed forms in which man has found this possible. To acquire knowledge is to learn to see, to experience the world in a way otherwise unknown, and thereby come to have a mind in a fuller sense. It is not that the mind is some kind of organ or muscle with its own inbuilt forms of operation, which if somehow developed, naturally lead to different kinds of

knowledge. It is not that the mind has predetermined patterns of functioning. Nor is it that the mind is an entity which suitably directed by knowledge comes to take on the pattern of, is conformed to, some external reality. *It is rather that to have a mind basically involves coming to have experiences articulated by means of various conceptual schemata.*<sup>33</sup> [italics mine]

It is my view that the proposition expressed by Hirst in the last sentence of the above quotation is of critical importance. To have a mind, that is, a human mind, is to bring the experience of being under a particular conceptual schemata, it is the mechanism by which we make sense of experience, it gives rise to understandings, it is what transforms raw sense experience into an *experience of...*, an *experience as...* 'Mind' does not have a pre-determined shape or form – new-born babies do not have minds. We come into the world with brains – brains constructed in such a way that they can begin to order experience - but not with minds. We can (and should) make a distinction between 'thinking', 'mind' and 'consciousness'. I have argued that to have a mind, is to be mindful, it is *to be able to attach meaning to the experience of being in the world*, and it seems to me that a contingent condition for the emergence of mind is consciousness; but being conscious is not the same thing as having a mind. "One often speaks, after all, of the 'unconscious mind'. This shows that we do not regard the terms 'mind' and 'consciousness' as synonymous."<sup>34</sup> To this extent, I want to embrace a conception of consciousness such that we may say that consciousness requires, at least, the possession of a rudimentary nervous system and the ability, the capacity, to respond to the external world and one's internal world. By 'respond' I mean the ability to react to external and internal stimuli in such a way that one improves the probabilities of one's own survival, and to do this *in virtue* of the possession of a central nervous system. In stipulating a definition of consciousness along these lines, I am able to 'rule in' ants as conscious beings, but rule out thermostats and trees. Further, It seems to me that when we talk of beings who have minds, as distinct from beings who

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<sup>33</sup> Hirst, P. op.cit., pp. 40-41

<sup>34</sup> Penrose, R. op.cit., p. 524

are merely 'conscious', we are alluding to some degree of awareness, though the complexities in distinguishing between concepts like 'mind', 'consciousness' and 'awareness' can be seen when we note that sometimes (perhaps often) the term 'being conscious' is used to mean 'being aware' – we note that when sick people are described as 'unconscious' we seem to be implying some lack of awareness.<sup>35</sup> And what of the connection between 'thinking' and the possession of 'mind'? Given the view I have expressed in an attempt to explicate what it means to think (above), and given the application of concepts like 'thinking' and 'belief'<sup>36</sup> to animals – we all recall Norman Malcolm's dog barking up the wrong tree – I think it is safe to assert that animals think; I believe that we have good reason to believe that thinking can occur without entertaining propositions (cf Magee, Penrose and Einstein) – though, I have argued that for humans, even this thinking cannot avoid 'seeing' through a learned conceptual structure. The concept of mind, however, may be said to connote notions of higher-order and abstract thinking, self-awareness, critical reflection, and creative ability in the form of a Bach, Da Vinci, Orville Wright, Einstein and Gödel, and, most critically and importantly, the ability to attach meaning to experience – meaning, in the sense of a shared, public meaning. As stated above, *if* animals have minds, then, they do not have minds in the sense in which humans are said to have minds. Davidson argues that thinking can only occur in beings that can interpret what another says. He writes:

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<sup>35</sup> D. M. Armstrong, for example, argues in his paper 'The Nature of Mind' (1965) that "consciousness is nothing but *perception or awareness of the state of our own mind.*" [Armstrong's italics]. Such a conception of consciousness, however, limits consciousness to beings who have minds and beings who are aware of their minds. This seems to me very limiting. I count dogs as being conscious, and if they do have minds, I have no evidence that they are aware of their minds, I have no evidence that they are self-conscious.

<sup>36</sup> I use the word 'belief' here uneasily. I would be more comfortable attributing the mental state of 'desire' to animals. I think we sometimes use the term belief with regard to animals in a derived and anthropomorphic sense. I, along with people like Donald Davidson, hold to the orthodox position that beliefs are propositional mental states and therefore require the holder to be an 'interpreter' of language. See Davidson, D., *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* Chapter



What is essential to my argument is the idea of an interpreter, someone who understands the utterances of another...a creature cannot have thoughts unless it is an interpreter of the speech of another.

...[U]nless there is behaviour that can be interpreted as speech, the evidence will not be adequate to justify the fine distinctions we are used to making in the attribution of thoughts. If we persist in attributing desires, beliefs or other attributes under these conditions, our attributions and consequent explanations of actions will be seriously underdetermined in that many alternative systems of attributions, many alternative explanations, will be equally justified by the available data. Perhaps this is all we can say against the attribution of thoughts to dumb creatures...<sup>37</sup>

Davidson, then, would certainly reject the definition of thinking I posited (above), because he holds that our explanation of such actions as ravens soaking bread, could be accounted for in other ways that do not justify the claim 'this is a thinking thing'. I suppose, then, that if Davidson rejects thinking in language-less beings, it is likely he would also deny them minds.

### ***The Concept of 'Understanding'***

We have now considered the nature of the relationship between concepts of 'thinking', 'belief', 'meaning', and 'mind'. I want to conclude this chapter by examining the epistemic concept of 'understanding'.

Let us, then, (and in support of the position Hirst has argued) link the concept of 'mind' 'meaning', 'thinking' and 'belief' with that of 'understanding'. I hope I have already shown the logical connection between meaning and belief, but we now need to explore how these notions may be related to the somewhat 'hazy' concept of 'understanding'.

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<sup>37</sup> Davidson, D. op.cit., pp. 157&164

Very often it is not helpful in conceptual analysis to take into consideration etymologies – knowing a word's origins may tell us nothing about the way in which that word is applied amongst today's speakers and for whom the word stands as a signpost to a certain concept. The word 'understanding', however, has an interesting etymology and one, which I believe, does help us with its current meaning and conceptual application.

The online Dictionary of Etymologies has the following entry for the word 'understand':

O.E. *understandan* "comprehend, grasp the idea of," probably lit. "stand in the midst of," form *under* + *standan* "to stand"...If this is the meaning, the *under* is not the usual word meaning "beneath", but from O.E. *under*, from PIE *\*inter* – "between, among" (cf. Skt. *Antar* "among, between," L. *inter* exact notion is unclear. Perhaps the ult. Sense is "be close to," cf. Gk. *Epistamai* "I know how, I know," lit. "I stand upon." Similar formations are found in O.Fris (*understonda*), M.Dan. meaning "stand before (cf. Ger. *Verstehen*, represented in O.E. b *forstanden*). For this concept, most I.E. languages use fig. Extensions of compounds that lit. mean "put together," or "separate," or "take, grasp."<sup>38</sup>

*The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* cites the same etymologies and gives as its first definition: "Perceive the meaning or explanation of; grasp the idea of."<sup>39</sup>

The notion of 'understanding', I would argue, has strong conceptual links with concepts such as 'reason' 'intelligence', 'intellect', 'meaning', 'knowledge' and 'belief'. Sometimes, we express astonishment when non-human beings *appear to* display behaviours suggestive of 'understanding'. This astonishment or amazement is due to the fact that we simply do not expect them 'to understand'. In his rigorous and detailed analysis of the concept of education, R.S. Peters puts up 'Knowledge and Understanding' as one of the criteria for the application

<sup>38</sup> See <http://www.etymonline.com/>

<sup>39</sup> *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary – On Historical Principles* (1993)  
(Clarendon Press, Oxford)

of that concept. He is at pains to make a distinction between ‘knowledge’ and ‘understanding’. He writes:

We do not call a person ‘educated’ who has simply mastered a skill even though the skill may be very highly prized such as pottery. For a man to be educated it is insufficient that he should possess a mere know-how or knack. He must have also some body of knowledge and some kind of conceptual scheme to raise this above the level of a collection of disjointed facts. This implies some understanding of principles for the organization of facts. We would not call a man who was merely well informed an educated man. He must also have some understanding of the ‘reason why’ of things.<sup>40</sup>

The epistemic status of the concept of ‘understanding’, then, is such that its application is limited to beings who do not merely ‘know how’ or even ‘know that’, but to beings whose intellectual faculties enable them to comprehend the way in which ‘stand alone’ propositions may be connected to and with each other. As Peters puts it, the educated man cannot just be knowledgeable, “for ‘education’ implies that a man’s outlook is transformed by what he knows.”<sup>41</sup> This transformation is due to understanding, not just knowing. “The *truth* of my statements is the test of my *understanding* of these statements. That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them.”<sup>42</sup> [italics Wittgenstein’s]

Of course, we do find the concept ‘understanding’ being applied to non-human beings, note above Penrose’s use of the term with respect to elephants as well as what is implied in Gaita’s writing that animals understand that they can die. When it is thus applied, and given my claim that the concept invokes a strong sense of ‘being able to see connections between propositions’, what could people mean? It seems that it would not be unreasonable to suggest that when

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<sup>40</sup> Peters, R.S.

*Ethics and Education* (1981)  
(George Allen & Unwin, London) p.30

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31

<sup>42</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*On Certainty* (1979)  
(Basil Blackwell, Oxford, Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M.  
Anscombe) § 80 and § 81

the concept is applied to non-human beings, as Penrose does in citing the terror of elephants about to be slaughtered, the concept is 'working' just as it should – it is pointing to the possibility that non-human beings can 'see', can 'perceive' how a number of events, or states of affair, might be connected with each other; the appearance of helicopters above the herd evokes memories of an horrendous emotional experience. In this sense, animals can exhibit 'understanding' without being able to entertain propositions. The concept of 'understanding', however, is a human concept, and as such its application to non-human beings is derivative, it is derived from the way the term is applied to the epistemic status of human beings. To understand is "to stand in the midst of...", to perceive and grasp the *meaning of*, this is its logically prior application. "Outside the effective use of symbols of some sort there is no understanding. To understand is to employ symbolic expressions."<sup>43</sup>

We hold the following, then:

1. There is a logical connection between the concept of 'meaning' and the concept of 'belief'.
2. Human minds are the sum-total of one's beliefs and *a priori* understandings.
3. The acquisition of beliefs is due to testimony.
4. *An experience of...* or an *experience as...* is due to the 'mindfulness' of belief-forming beings.

In the next and final chapter of this dissertation I want to draw together the various parts of my argument and also try to move a little beyond a strictly analytic and conceptual methodology and engage in a more speculative approach to our subject, particularly with respect to what the implications may be for what it means to be human in the light of my argument. I will refer to what I

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<sup>43</sup> Hirst, P.H. op.cit., p. 76

have understood to be the central concern of Philosophy and also give consideration to some counter-arguments to my position not yet entertained.

## Chapter Seven

*The significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world beside the other world, a place it took to be so firmly set that, standing upon it, it could lift the rest of the world off its hinges and make itself master of it. To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as an aeternae veritates he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world.<sup>1</sup>*

Friedrich Nietzsche

In *The Republic*, Plato speaks of philosophers as “sightseers of the truth”. In his three great metaphors of The Sun, The Cave, and The Divided Line, he argues that a person trained and educated in Mathematics and Philosophy, can ‘see’ the world of the Forms, can apprehend the Form of the Good and, therefore, everything that *It* enlightens. Of course, he also argues in that book that philosophers are more than sightseers of the truth, he maintains that they have a moral obligation to re-enter the Cave and bring others out into the Light.

This Platonic Philosophy emerges after Athens’ defeat by Sparta and after the death of Socrates. It stands as a seminal moment in the history of ideas, for it may be the first time that a philosopher gives explicit voice to the possibility of a disjunction between the world of appearances and the world that actually is, a disjunction between the way we take the world to be and the existence of a reality independent of the minds of men, a reality whose nature may be beyond our ken. In this moment, we see the birth of an intellectual revolution, an

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<sup>1</sup> Nietzsche, F.

*Human, All Too Human* (1996)  
(Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Translated by R.J.  
Hollingdale) Ch.1 aph. 11

intellectual revolution which may have been what prompted Whitehead to assert that all Philosophy after Plato is a footnote.

On the shoulders of this extraordinary moment in the history of human thought, and in the spirit of Aristotle, arose, many years later, the Scholastics who pondered how many angels could dance on a pin-head and sought to prove, with pure deductive logic, that God existed. Centuries later the great philosophical battles between Idealism and Realism emerged, and the attempt to reconcile that battle by Kant with the birth of Rationalism and his inspired critique of pure reason and theory of Transcendental Idealism. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hume's fork was 're-invented' with the advent of Logical Positivism, which, in turn, gave birth to linguistic and analytic Philosophy. In response came European Existentialism and Post-Modernism. Throughout this remarkable intellectual history there has been an underlying driving force, out of the Socratic and post-Socratic traditions arose Philosophy's *raison d'être* - the search for, and the explication of, that which is true. If anything at all can be said by way of what it is that distinguishes (Western) Philosophy, surely it must be that its entire history, perhaps beginning even earlier than Socrates with Thales, has been the desire to say that which is true about the world, the Universe.

The 'life-blood' of the queen of disciplines, then, has been the search for truth, the search for an accurate conception of reality, to speak of the world *as it is*. In the midst of this stands humankind, for it is we who are trying to make sense of it all, it we who are doing the philosophising. So we may ask now, is anything clearer to us as a consequence of this search, this history and this endeavour? To answer this, we note a particularly enlightening stage in the précised 'history' recounted above.

In the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, and beginning with the insights of Wittgenstein, philosophers began to understand that the relationship between ontology and epistemology was much more complex, subtle, and problematic than had ever

been realised, and with this realisation, came new understandings of what could be done, what could be said, with metaphysics. With these understandings, came new insights into the nature of the relationship between truth and reality; new understandings emerged in the light of the overt recognition that we needed a closer examination of the *relationship between that which is and that which is doing the investigating*. Wittgenstein showed that meaning was embedded in a form of life and that to search for some ‘thing’ outside of that form of life was an unintelligible notion. In quantum physics, Heisenberg unsettled the scientific world by showing that investigations into a purported ‘objective’ reality could not avoid a consideration of the role and impact of the observer with respect to what that purported reality was held to be. Both Science and Philosophy began to understand the centrality of the human being in the way the world was understood. Within these scientific and philosophical revelations lay the possibility that an enormous gulf lay between what we say about the world and what is the case about the world – an epistemic gulf, that is – a Kantian-like gulf, which hinted at the possibility that we could never know what a thing was, *in and of itself*. It was the recognition, the revelation, that we could not remove ourselves from the investigation into what is the case. This Wittgenstenian ‘disclosure’ must not be taken to be some form of scepticism, rather it is a positive epistemology, it is a revelation to do with what it *means* to say that we know something, not that we cannot know. It is what people say that is true or false<sup>2</sup>; what is real, is about that which either *is or is not*. And, “whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.”<sup>3</sup>

The limit of language manifests itself in the impossibility of describing the fact that corresponds to...a sentence without simply repeating the sentence.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> cf footnote 9, Chapter Six

<sup>3</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (2001)  
(Routledge Classics, London, Translated by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness) 7

<sup>4</sup> Wittgenstein, L.

*Culture and Value* (ed. G.H. von Wright) (1998)  
(Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, Translated by Peter Winch) p. 13e



Nonetheless, and despite these insights, it remains our epistemic hope, of course, that when we speak truly, it is because there is a correspondence between our utterances and the way the world actually is, our epistemic hope is that our utterances do, actually, refer to some *thing*. We understand, of course, that not everything we say corresponds to an actual, ontologically, existent ‘thing’, (look at that beautiful unicorn) and even if it did, there is the difficult matter of explaining exactly what we mean by the term ‘corresponds to...’ or ‘refers to...’? Hospers has put this point somewhat neatly when he considers the difference between saying that the colour patch on the sample paint chart corresponds to the colour of the paint in the tin, with the way in which a library catalogue card is held to correspond to the book on the shelf.<sup>5</sup> In what sense do the squiggles that make up the word ‘dog’ correspond to a furry mammalian entity with a propensity to bark? What is the correspondence between an utterance and a counter-factual? All of these questions have created a well-worn track in Philosophy. The point is this: whilst it is *necessary* that a true statement correspond with that which actually *is*, it is not *sufficient* to say that a true statement is one that corresponds to the facticity of the world. It is not sufficient because we need to say first what it is to say something at all, and for that saying to have meaning. It is for this reason that I pinned my view of ‘truth’ in the first chapter to a marriage between a Correspondence Theory of Truth, a Coherence Theory of Truth and a theory of meaning to give us a Unified Theory of Truth. In that chapter I made the claim that we “perceive alone, but believe together.” An accurate understanding of the nature of the relationship between ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ must take into account what sort of entity is making assertions about what *is*. Hirst writes:

Outside the effective use of symbols of some sort there is no understanding. To understand is to employ symbolic expressions...

If a sentence asserts something about the world, it is only because of the function these symbols have that we understand what they assert. Their use is to indicate something

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<sup>5</sup> Hospers, J.

*An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (4<sup>th</sup> ed) (1997)  
(Routledge, London) p. 44

that can be observed which they do not simply name. They say something about what is named. But the crucial point here is that understanding the world in sense-perception itself involves the use of symbols or images of some kind, for only in this way can the elements in perception be identified.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, *before* we can begin considering how our words correspond to that which actually is, we must first accept, and understand, how what we say acquires meaning, and meaning, at least the meaning that we derive in and through language, is that which coheres with the understandings of other believers. In this sense, we cannot get ‘outside’ language. McCutcheon writes:

The crucial point lies in how we understand language as referring to or being about something “outside itself”....If we loosely define meaning as semantic and existence as ontological then we can draw a rough and ready distinction between the meaning and reference of words. Some words will have meaning but no intended reference and some will have both meaning and intended reference. Indeed, the truth of a proposition will depend on it having not merely a meaning but a reference to something and it is this reference that confers on it the possibility of being true or false. The philosophical point made by Wittgenstein is that semantics is prior to reference. To speak truly or to form true beliefs, we need a meaningful language (or concepts) in which we do so.<sup>7</sup>

When we learn a language, we do not merely learn to attach verbal and written labels to ‘things’; - Wittgenstein has clearly shown the misguided naivety of conceiving of language as the sum-total of a set of ostensive definitions. When we learn a language, we learn to see the world as..., we learn to experience the world as..., we come to share a world-view, we are initiated into a form of life, even a way of being. That this is so can be observed by turning to any work that has undergone translation from one language to another, and refer to the

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<sup>6</sup> Hirst, P.H.

*Knowledge and the Curriculum – a collection of philosophical papers* (1974)  
(Routledge and Kegan Paul, London) P.76

<sup>7</sup> McCutcheon, F.

*Religion Within the Limits of Language Alone – Wittgenstein on Philosophy and Religion* (2001)  
(Ashgate, Aldershot) pp. 111-112

footnotes where the translator adverts to the serious difficulties s/he has had trying to find words and expressions that cannot be matched exactly with the language being translated. Linguists have long understood that knowing a language determines how one sees the world. And this *is* how we see the world, in and through language. When we learn a language we do not merely learn a language, we build a world-view.

How do we learn language(?), well, that is a very difficult and complex question, but it seems there is one thing we can say with certainty, we learn language through the vehicle of testimony, we enter the world, and other people begin talking to us. Of course, we would want to hold that the very first sayings to infants cannot be testimony, because it seems that a necessary condition of the concept of testimony is that the auditor must be able to understand what is being said, and I do not think hour-old babies understand what is being said to them. This exposes a deeply mysterious and complex phenomenon about the learning of language: unless we speak to babies they don't learn language, but one cannot understand what is being said unless one can speak the language. Nonetheless, the 'miracle' of language learning occurs and it may be explained, in part, by the way in which information is attended to, and accommodated by an organism like an infant human (cf Chapter Five). And so, at some point, what we say to very little children meets Coady's condition that all natural testimony involves "a speaker engag[ing] in the speech act of testifying to the truth of some proposition which is either in dispute or in some way in need of determination and his attestation is evidence towards the settling of the matter."<sup>8</sup>

It is the case, of course, that not all talking is testimony, but in our early years, (what are, most tellingly, sometimes referred to as our 'formative' years) much of what is said to us is testimony. When we speak to babies and young children, when we teach in schools, we are not merely immersing the young into a world of

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<sup>8</sup> Coady, C.A.J.

*Testimony – a philosophical study* (1992)  
(Oxford University Press, Oxford) p. 38

meaningful noises, we are building within them a world-view which is the consequence of acquired concepts, concepts which in turn produce a vast web of beliefs, a doxastic structure. Heidegger noted that: "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man."<sup>9</sup>

'Testimony', as a topic of epistemological interest, has given rise to the central question of whether or not one is justified in believing something on the say-so of another. It seems to me that that question has, to a significant extent, now been settled in the affirmative by thinkers such as Hardwig, Coady, Audi, and Fricker, to name but a few. In this project, I have wanted to support such an affirmation. It seems clear that on the level of holding true beliefs supported by the say-so of others, we do know *that p*. We have seen that testimony-caused and testimonially-justified beliefs are myriad and Hardwig has demonstrated convincingly that the notion of epistemic dependence not only exists within the world of scientific investigation, but that without reliance on the expertise of others, there would be very little that scientists could claim to know. Further, I hope that I have shown also that coming to believe and coming to know through the say-so of others is fundamental to that enterprise we call 'education', and that as the concept of education entails (logically) the concept of 'knowledge', we must either accept the role of testimony in knowledge or deny that education produces people who come to know things in virtue of that enterprise. I have suggested that we would want to adopt the former position. I noted earlier that our reluctance to 'allow' knowledge when the 'evidence' condition was fulfilled by testimony was probably due to a number of factors. First, there is the view of the importance and significance of rational autonomy in mature believers that has emerged post-Kant. On the shoulders of this tradition, we want one's grounds for believing *that p* to be, in some way, 'independent' of the beliefs of others. On this

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<sup>9</sup> Heidegger, M.

'Building Dwelling Thinking' lecture, 5 in  
*Poetry, Language Thought* (1975)  
(Harper & Row, New York, Translated by Albert Hofstadter)

view, to claim to be justified in believing something on the say-so of another is seen as some sort of failure in fulfilling one's epistemic 'duty'. Second, if one believes what others say and hold that this belief is epistemically justified, then, it seems that one must trust what one is told, and trust the one who does the telling. But the idea that dispositions such as 'trust' play a role in knowledge is anathema to many, and, no doubt, for good reason. I noted in Chapter Four the sad history of assertions made by many repressive regimes that asked people to trust the truth of their utterances where those utterances were blatantly untrue. Nonetheless, it seems that there is no way to avoid building an epistemology without embracing the role of trust. That there is the possibility of another's say-so being unreliable, does not seem to be any less (or more) likely than the possibility that our senses are sometimes unreliable and deceive us, that our recollections can be faulty and that our inferences can be wrong. And yet it seems we must trust all these purported 'sources' of belief.

Despite these concerns about the validity of relying on another's say-so, there is, of course, ample room for intellectual autonomy. To use Fricker's quaint phrase, "we climb up the ladder of testimony, to then throw it away".<sup>10</sup> As an educated and mature person, there are many situations of which I have been informed that I am capable of 'verifying' for myself. A student tells me there has been an accident on Springvale Road and I go and see for myself. Yet, we have already noted Coady's astute observation that those who hold to the general reliability of testimony because they can 'check out the world' for themselves (cf Hume), are holding to a reductionist thesis. At some point in my epistemic history I had to accept, without doubt and without any capacity for epistemic independence, that people's claims about the world were true. I had to accept – this is what constitutes a road, and this is what constitutes an accident. If I had not done this (and, in fact, I had no choice in the matter), then, my conceptual framework could

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<sup>10</sup> Fricker, E.

'Knowledge from Trust in Testimony in Second-Hand Knowledge'  
[Final Draft for Presentation at Rutgers Epistemology Conference, May 2005 – cited with permission of the author, received via e-mail, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 2007]

never have 'got off the ground', as it were. It is for this reason that the notion of 'epistemic independence' is, on one level, incoherent. In order to verify the testimonial claims of others, I had to first accept the truth of their claims without any ability to 'check out the world' for myself. My ability to confirm testimonial claims rests on my having accepted testimonial claims I couldn't verify.

We have noted also that on the level of claims about the world that lie outside, or beyond that basic level of belief acquisition in childhood, there is much we believe in virtue of the attestations of others that is not open to independent, epistemic assessment. Sometimes, this will be a matter of principle, as in the case of historical claims and claims about private states of mind, and sometimes it will be because we could not reasonably be expected to learn all that we would have to in order to become epistemically independent. We have seen also that chains of epistemic dependence of the form: S believes *that* T believes *that* *p* are unrealistically simple. The truth is that epistemic chains are so complex it would be more accurate to describe them as 'webs of dependence/belief' or 'matrices of epistemic dependence' than chains. Even if we could identify a linear chain of epistemic transactions, very often the primary 'knower' is so remote on that chain, we could not ask him/her on what grounds the testimony was based because that person cannot be located. (And even if we could, and somewhat paradoxically, I have endeavoured to argue that ultimately, all grounds are based on testimony.) All of this, as noted in Chapter One, is epistemically significant, but surface. In this thesis I have sought to show that testimony has another function, which is epistemically profound and deep.

I began this chapter by adverting to the driving force of philosophical enquiry, namely, the desire to say that which is true about the world. When I consider my argument on the fundamental role of testimony in the formation of our doxastic structures, and ultimately our very minds, I hope that I have been faithful to that noble tradition. Amongst the counter-arguments I have not yet considered, however, is this: it may be that my claims about the role of language in the

formation of beliefs and what it means to be human are uncontroversial, but I may be accused of having unnecessarily stretched the term ‘testimony’ to account for this fundamental aspect of the human condition. In other words, some may want to maintain that ‘testimony’ is a legitimate epistemic concept but only at the level described above, that is, its application is philosophically pertinent once a person has reached some sort of epistemic maturity – we could, for example, pick out some arbitrary stage of development, say, school entry age and stipulate that this is where testimony, as an epistemic concept begins – and that outside this stage of human development, the concept is wrongly applied to the formation of primary beliefs about the world. Some may claim that whilst it is clearly the case that we learn language because others speak to us, such learning is not truly testimony. I have considered this possibility, but I am persuaded that my argument is not only valid, but sound. Whilst there may be dispute as to what sort of speech-act testimony is, it is not disputed that testimony involves the utterances of others which make claims about the way the world is. On one level, it does not matter to my argument whether one wants to describe these utterances as telling, teaching, attestations, avowals, descriptions, ascriptions, definitions, informing, etc.. But when a mother says to her young child: “This is red”, she is testifying to her infant that this is the way of the world. In so doing, she is not merely saying what is, she is actually engaged in the formation of the child’s world-view, and I cannot see how this is different from the learning done by older children and even adults. In support of such an assertion, let us consider the following two locutions:

L1     T tells S that it will rain tomorrow

and

L2     T teaches S that water consists of molecules constructed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom

L1 is a simple and straightforward case of testimony and epistemic dependence. We hold that if S now believes that it will rain tomorrow on the attestation of T, then, (and given certain conditionals), S is justified in believing that it will rain tomorrow. We have maintained also, that if it does, in fact rain, then S knew, when T said *that p* and S believed *that p*, namely, that it would rain. All three conditions for the tripartite analysis of propositional knowledge have been fulfilled. It seems to me that there would be little dispute over the characterisation of L1 as a case of testimony; we may, however, be somewhat hesitant to apply the term 'learning' to L1. I suppose it would be intelligible if S were to say: 'Today I learned that it will rain tomorrow', but it would be an eccentric utterance, in the technical sense of that term. (Although, we could provide an example of L1 that would 'look' less eccentric, as in, 'Today I learned that Mary is coming home tomorrow.')

L2 is a case of teaching and learning, if, that is, S learns that water consists of hydrogen and oxygen atoms as a consequence of T's say-so. (There can be teaching [task sense] without learning.) If S has learned *that p* in virtue of T's teaching, then, S believes *that p*, and because the grounds S has for his/her belief *that p* are due to the say-so of T, then, it is not only a case of teaching, but also a case of testimony. Therefore, whilst L1 and L2 have a different logical status, I hold that they are both cases of testimony. It is not just my view that L2 is a case of testimony; we recall both Coady's and Audi's definition of testimony:

Coady:

(N)atural testimony...is to be encountered in such everyday circumstances as exhibit the 'social operations of mind': giving someone directions to the post office, reporting what happened in an accident, saying that, yes, you have seen a child answering to that description, telling someone the result of the last race or the latest cricket score. *In all such situations we have a speaker engage in the speech act of testifying to the truth of*



*some proposition which is either in dispute or in some way in need of determination and his attestation is evidence towards the settling of the matter.*<sup>11</sup> [italics mine]

Audi:

As a broad rubric for the oral or written statements that concern us, I propose *attesting*. This covers both formally testifying that something is so and simply saying, in the relevant informational way, that it is so. It also captures the idea of saying something *to* someone. Testimony is always given to one or more persons.<sup>12</sup>

I hold, then, that my description of testimony as fundamental to the acquisition of primary beliefs, is correct.

I now want to move beyond the considerations and arguments put up thus far and consider whether or not there can be, or are, *meaningful* experiences that lie outside the conceptual framework we acquire due to the say-so of others – a conceptual framework which, I have argued, *is* mind. I noted at the end of the last chapter that in concluding this dissertation, I wanted to move into a more speculative mode of Philosophy. What follows is my attempt to do this.

Testimony, at least within the Judeo-Christian tradition, plays a fundamental role in the way in which beliefs are communicated to adherents and those outside the tradition itself. Those who belong to a faith-tradition convey information about that faith-tradition's history, its social structure and organisation, its ethical framework, its symbols, rituals, stories and sacred texts. This often forms a part of the teachings of a religion offered to fellow 'believers' and those who are new to the tradition. At other times, adherents testify to what may be called 'religious experience.' Those who want to speak of a religious experience are often confronted with particular difficulties because *the experience* often lies 'outside'

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<sup>11</sup> Coady, C.A.J. op.cit., p. 38

<sup>12</sup> Audi, R.

'The Place of Testimony in the Fabric of Knowledge and Justification'  
*American Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 34, Number 4,  
October, 1997 pp. 405-406

the linguistic devices we have for describing meaningful experience. I would, however, like to look at the attempts of adherents to testify to or about these experiences. We will consider first those who claim to have perceived God directly. Second, we will consider attempts to speak of the mystical. I want to include this here because I believe such occurrences and testimonies will shed more light on our central concern – namely, the relationship between testimony, human experience, and meaning.

### ***On the Possibility of Perceiving and Knowing Directly What Is***

We begin, then, by considering whether there are aspects of human experience which, counter to my thesis, enable people to have an *experience as...*an experience *of...*that lies outside one's conceptual framework? I will investigate this question first, by examining aspects of William P. Alston's work on purported 'direct' and unmediated experiences of perceiving God.<sup>13</sup>

In undertaking this examination, let us grant provisionally that (i) God exists and (ii) that God is the sort of being who can be perceived. Further, let us ask: what sort of experiences people are talking about, or claiming to have, when they say they have perceived God, and why do they interpret or take these to be experiences of God? Do people who claim to have had a personal experience of God mean that they were (or are) acutely aware of God as being manifested in the beauty and splendour of the physical world and Universe? Do they mean that they have a sense of God in their relationships with other people? Do they mean that they have had a 'religious experience' during which they were

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<sup>13</sup> Alston, W. P.

*Perceiving God – the epistemology of religious experiences*  
(1991)  
(Ithaca, Cornell University Press, New York)

profoundly moved emotionally and *attributed* this to the presence or activity of God? Or do they mean that God actually 'appeared' to them, or presented Him/Herself to them? Let us consider the last of these, for if we can be satisfied that a person is justified in believing that God exists on the basis of direct perception of God, then, we would have some reason to hold that there are at least some experiences as... which are not filtered through the epistemic lens of testimony.

Alston provides a systematic elucidation of putative claims of the direct experience of God. His analysis is detailed and highly complex. He argues that there are sufficient grounds for taking seriously claims by people to have had direct perception of God. His purpose in investigating these is different from mine, but his research has application to my project.

Alston's analysis is structured in the following way:

First, he accepts that if God exists, then, we can certainly entertain the possibility that it is possible in principle for Him/Her to present Him/Herself to us. Second, he suggests three distinct grades of perception, and on the basis of a plethora of reports of alleged direct perception of God, argues that it is possible to extract the salient features of these and match them to the second of these grades. Third, he takes sense perception as being the paradigm of what is usually understood by perception and then, elucidating his Theory of Appearing, argues that the concept of perception can include perception of non-physical objects (that is, God). Given the thoroughness and detail of Alston's work, it will be difficult to do his arguments justice, but I will endeavour to extract the fundamental aspects of his work in an attempt to throw some light on our considerations here.

He begins by nailing his colours to the mast:

I will...undertake to answer various objections to the claim that it is *possible* for human beings to perceive God. That is, if God does really exist, there is in principle no bar to this. I will not argue...that the possibility is realized, that some human beings do genuinely perceive God. For one thing, 'perceive' is a 'success' term, entailing the existence of its object, and I will not argue that God exists. Such argument for this as will be found in this book is indirect; if beliefs "about God", entailing or presupposing that God exists, are justified by being based on putative experiential awareness of God, then so is the belief that God exists.

---(W)ithin an established doxastic...practice of forming perceptual beliefs, we can make use of standard ways of determining whether a particular subject, S, is genuinely perceiving a given object, X, and at a certain time. But in working within that practice, we are *assuming* that such perceptions do actually occur; that is a fundamental presupposition of the practice. From within the practice of forming perceptual beliefs on the basis of sense perception we have ways of determining whether S saw a bird. But these ways have been built up by taking a number of perceptions as genuine and accepting the beliefs about the environment based on those perception.<sup>14</sup>

Alston makes it clear that he *does not* want to argue that perceptions of God do actually occur – but rather, he wants to deal with those who either reject outright the very possibility of perception of God and those who readily accept that such perceptions do actually occur. That is, Alston, it seems to me, is concerned to examine the grounds one has for believing that one has perceived God. He is also interested in why certain experiences are described as perception of God.

(A)s far as I can see, the only way of arguing...that people do genuinely perceive God is to argue for the epistemological position that beliefs formed on the basis of such (putative) perceptions are (prima facie) justified. If that is the case, we have good reason for regarding many of the putative perceptions as genuine; for if the subject were not often really perceiving X why should the experience involved provide justification for beliefs about X? This reverses the usual order of procedure in which we first seek to show that S really did perceive X and then go on to consider what beliefs about X, if any, are justified in being based on perception. But we can proceed in that order only if we are working from within a perceptual belief-forming practice. The question of the

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<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9

genuineness of the alleged perception can be tackled from the outside only by defending the *epistemological* assumption embedded in the practice in question.<sup>15</sup> [italics Alston's]

If I understand Alston correctly, he seems to be saying that (i) *if* we are satisfied that S was (is) justified in the formulation of his/her belief, 'I perceived X', then (ii) we should (because we have good reason to) regard S's perception as genuine, and further – and this is the critical point – that which makes S's perception genuine in that s/he would not have perceived X if X did not appear to him/her.

Alston includes in his analysis of the epistemology of *the possibility* of perception of God a number of reports of purported direct perception of God. His purpose in doing this is to find what he calls the "salient features" of these reports of direct perception of God.

In doing so, Alston notes first that those he quotes are not describing their thoughts about God, or their imaginings, or even prayers with or to God, they are not "entertaining propositions, reasoning, engaging in overt or covert conversation, remembering,"<sup>16</sup> rather, they describe an *experience* of God. And this is a critical point for Alston, for he argues that the commonalities in these reports suggest that something was taken as *presenting* itself to the consciousness of these people, such that they are able to distinguish between their conscious state and the object they claim to perceive. They are not thinking, or reflecting, rather, they claim that something appeared to them, though the 'something' was not available to any of their five senses. Alston quotes a great many such reports, and I include three here in order to convey something of the genre of these.

"One day when I was at prayer...I saw Christ at my side – or, to put it better, I was conscious of Him, for I saw nothing with the eyes of the body or the eyes of the soul [the imagination]. He seemed quite close to me and I saw that it was He. As I thought, He

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14

was speaking to me. Being completely ignorant that such visions were possible, I was very much afraid at first, and could do nothing but weep, though as soon as He spoke His first word of assurance to me, I regained my usual calm, and became cheerful and free from fear. All the time Jesus Christ seemed to be at my side, but as this was not an imaginary vision I could not see in what form. But I most clearly felt that He was all the time on my right, and was a witness of the soul, because this is no imaginary vision, how then can I know and affirm that He is beside me with greater certainty that (sic) if I saw Him? If one says that one is like a person in the dark who cannot see someone though he is beside, or that one is like somebody who is blind, it is not right. There is some similarity here, but not much, because a person in the dark can perceive with the other senses, or hear his neighbour speak or move, or can touch him. Here this is not so, nor is there any feeling of darkness. On the contrary, He appears to the soul by a knowledge brighter than the sun. I do not mean that any sun is seen, or any brightness, but there is a light which, though unseen, illuminates the understanding.”<sup>17</sup> [square brackets Alston’s]

“Then, in a very gentle and gradual way, not with a shock at all, it began to dawn on me that I was not alone in the room. Someone else was there, located fairly precisely about two yards to my right front. Yet there was no sort of sensory hallucination. I neither saw him nor heard him in any sense of the word ‘see’ and ‘hear’, but there he was; I had no doubt about it. He seemed to be very good and very wise, full of sympathetic understanding, and most kindly disposed towards me.”<sup>18</sup>

*“In a state of intense inner wretchedness, of such intensity that my mind seemed on the point of breaking, I got up at 4 am and began wandering aimlessly on the wooded hillside. This went on for some time until, unexpectedly, the words of the 130<sup>th</sup> psalm sounded clearly in my mind: ‘And plenteous redemption is ever found in Him; and, from all its iniquities, He Israel shall redeem.’ With these words a light seemed to envelop me, and there flowed into my desolate heart such a flood of Love and Compassion that I was overwhelmed and overpowered by the weight of it. I was stricken by such wonder and amazement that I burst into tears of joy; it seemed to flow through my whole being with a cleansing and healing virtue. From that moment I know that Love is the nature of reality.”*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> ibid., p. 13

<sup>18</sup> ibid., p. 17

<sup>19</sup> ibid., p. 18

Alston points out that these experiences are described as if something is being “*presented or given* to their consciousness, in generically the same way as that in which objects in the environment are (apparently) *presented* to one’s consciousness in sense perception.”<sup>20</sup> [italics and bracketed words all Alston’s]. And it is this notion of presentation that is crucial to Alston’s conception of perception as described in his Theory of Appearing.

Alston is keen to deal immediately with the oft heard response to such reports that people who interpret these kinds of experiences as being ‘that of God’ are mistakenly explaining an experience caused by certain biochemical machinations within the brain that is not the result of the perception of any external object. Alston’s response to this is that there is nothing about these reports that make them any more subject to that kind of explanation – it was just your neurological chemistry doing funny things – than everyday reports involving sense perception. Those who put forward this view, he says, are “flying in the face of the unambiguous *testimony* of experience.”<sup>21</sup> [italics mine] In other words, you cannot have it both ways. *Prima facie*, there is no more reason to suppose that S’s report that he had the phenomenological experience of seeing a man in a red shirt walk passed the window was bona fide, than there is to suppose that his phenomenological experience of perceiving God was caused by some mis-firing of neurons. On what grounds would/can one make this claim?

In pointing out that mystical experience is a matter of something’s *presenting* itself to one’s experience, we are dissenting from numerous theorists who construe experiences of the sort we are discussing as purely subjective feelings or sensations to which is superadded an *explanation* according to which they are due to God, the Holy Spirit, or some other agent recognised by the theology of the subject’s tradition...It seems clear to me...that our sources are reporting a distinct sense of something’s (taken by them to be God) *presenting* itself to their awareness in generically the same way as that in which physical objects present themselves to our awareness in sense perception. Perhaps Proudfoot and his ilk think that is a mistaken way to do the phenomenology of sense

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16

perception as well. Perhaps they think that here too we have essentially subjective experiences together with a certain kind of causal explanation. If so, I suggest they are flying in the face of the unambiguous testimony of experience.<sup>22</sup> [*italics Alston's*]

In this response, Alston is hinting at his subscription to direct realism which, in his view, does not exclude external or internal objects *causing* one to perceive X. But, as he explains further into his thesis, as a direct, even naive realist, he views the internal/external analysis of perception as wrong, holding that to perceive X is a fundamental and unanalysable – the internal/external demarcation of indirect or representative realists is a false demarcation, rather, he argues, perceiving X is a seamless act-object event.

As indicated earlier, Alston holds that there are three different 'grades'<sup>23</sup> of perception. He makes the following distinctions:

*Absolute immediacy* – when one is aware of X but not through anything else, even a state of consciousness

*Mediated immediacy* (direct perception) – when one is aware of X through a state of consciousness that is distinguishable from X, and can be made an object of absolute immediate awareness, but is not perceived

*Mediate perception* – when one is aware of X through the awareness of another object of perception.<sup>24</sup>

By 'absolute immediacy' Alston means those experiences which are presented to us in such a way that they do not even involve some other state of consciousness distinct from that which is being perceived, such as one's feelings, sensations, thoughts. In cases of 'mediated immediacy' he is thinking of

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 21 & 22



the perception of objects that are immediately available to one's senses but are distinguishable from one's own state of consciousness, as in when I look at my wife's face, or hear the rain on the roof. My hearing the rain on the roof is, according to Alston, directly and immediately perceived by me and the object of my perception - the sound of the rain on the roof – is distinguishable from my state of consciousness, which is that I am listening to the rain fall on the roof. Whereas, with 'absolute immediacy' as when I feel (perceive) pain, my actual state of consciousness and that which I perceive are one and the same thing.

By 'mediate perception' Alston means to distinguish the perception of an object *through* or *via* the perception of something else, as in when I see my wife's face in a mirror, though of course, my perception of the mirror is one of mediated immediacy.

Alston argues that in the reports of perceiving God that he has quoted, each one seems to involve mediated immediacy. Each subject, he notes, seems to be capable of distinguishing between his/her own states of consciousness and the object of his/her perception. This observation seems to add weight to his earlier rebuff of those who would explain such reports of perceiving God as being attributable to a certain pathology of the brain. That is, there seems to be what might be called a meta-cognitive dimension to these reports. In these cases, the purported perception of God did not involve some sort of trance-like state, these people were not unaware of their own conscious states.

Of fundamental interest to my project, however, is why people who report perceiving God take whatever it is they have experienced to be God. How do they know that what they are experiencing is God? What makes this *experience possible*? What, if any, prior 'knowledge' does one have to have in order to know that what one is experiencing is God? It seems to me that Alston's subjects have had little or no prior experience of God presenting Him/Herself to them. Whilst I have only quoted three of these reports, the tenor of all is one of rapturous

adoration, the experiences seem to be first time, once-in-a-lifetime happenings. So what conceptual criteria are these people applying in describing their experience to be that of God? (Perhaps that question is begging the question.)

It should be noted first (and Alston does) that the reports he has chosen to examine all emerge from within the Judeo-Christian faith-tradition. He also makes it clear that he does not want to exclude the possibility that some people may not realise that God is (or has) presenting Him/Herself to them. But given that those he quotes do assert that God has presented Him/Herself to them, then the question arises, how did they know it was God? And this question is fundamental to my overall argument.

Understandably, Alston is reluctant to elucidate a set of logically and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept of God, instead, he draws on what he takes to be widely accepted *characteristics* of God as found within the three main Abrahamic and monotheistic faith traditions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. What are these?

We can just refer to the characteristics deemed to be most central to God in the leading theistic religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – and say that so long as the subject is thinking of the perceived object in some such terms, she is identifying that object as God. No doubt, there is much controversy both within each religion and between these religions on various points concerning the divine nature. Nevertheless, we can identify a (loosely demarcated and open-ended) set of characteristics on which there is a massive consensus, provided we don't insist on too much precision in the specifications of each. These would include *being the source of existence of all other than itself, goodness, justice, moral lawgiver, having a purpose for the creation, and offering salvation to mankind*. So long as S is thinking of the perceived object as being (roughly) within this (roughly demarcated) territory, she is identifying the object as God.<sup>25</sup> [italics Alston's]

Of all the passages quoted in this dissertation, this may be the most important and telling. Alston has put up a detailed and meticulous analysis on the

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 29

possibility of direct perception, a thesis I embrace and accept, but here, we see the unambiguous claim that whatever it is that people experience as being 'that of God', it is, nonetheless, interpreted through the lens of testimony.

It seems that Alston is arguing that when those who are familiar with or have come from the religious traditions noted, claim to have perceived God directly, they *interpret* their *experience* as being that of God because they have formed some prior beliefs as to what that God may be like, that is, loving, encouraging, compassionate, forgiving, etc.. There are at least two possible problems with this – the first is to do with the fundamental notion of epistemic dependence which we have discussed in detail; the second is to do with correctly 'naming' something without experience of the very thing we seek to name.

As we grow up and mature, we not only encounter new feelings, relationships, thoughts, but also, new objects. It would seem that there is ample evidence to show that people do name experiences that they have not had before in accordance with the nomenclature of their epistemic community. The most obvious example of this seems to be in relation to private states of mind. I may believe, for example, that there is an experience which is described as 'having a migraine headache', but I cannot, in principle, experience someone else's migraine for the purposes of correctly identifying the particular headache I now have. Yet, those who do suffer from migraine headaches are able to make the connection between their own private experience and the public name given to that private experience, even though no-one has ever shared any other person's migraine headache. Another example of 'correct naming' – and one that is perhaps more closely aligned with the purported experience of perceiving God, is that of 'being in love'. People do hear of 'being in love' or 'falling in love' well before they ever experience this all-consuming emotional state. There is talk of it in books, films, amongst friends, and yet, no matter how much is said about falling in love, it is not the kind of thing one can really understand until it actually happens to one. Yet, when the 'big moment' arrives, individuals seem to 'know'

what this new emotion is. Individuals with no prior experience of 'being in love', seem to have little difficulty in describing their emotional state as one of 'being in love'. I can see no reason, therefore, why a certain experience could not be interpreted as that of God presenting Him/Herself to one's consciousness. But, and most emphatically and crucially, to interpret such an experience as being that of God, that is, the appearance of a loving, forgiving and sustaining being, seems to rest entirely on a way of 'seeing', and such a way of seeing is founded upon a conceptual framework which arises out of and from testimony. I can see no way to escape this conclusion. Even when I experience something I have never experienced before, such as a migraine, but which I name as 'migraine'. I am, nonetheless, 'imposing' a description upon the experience that I have learned, in some sense, from others.

But this brings us back to a fundamental problem in epistemology and logic. *If I* am to interpret the experience of X as being that of God in virtue of my prior beliefs and acceptance that God has certain characteristics such as omnibenevolence, then, (i) I am relying on someone else's testimony that omnibenevolence is characteristic of God and (ii) the epistemic chain must have started somewhere, which gives rise to the question: how did the first, the primary 'knower' recognise that what presented itself to his/her consciousness was God, unless s/he, him/herself, was relying on someone else's testimony? In response to this I suppose we may concede a number of things. First, naming experiences, events, objects, did have a beginning and it may well be that say, Adam, decided to name *this* experience – God.<sup>26</sup> Second, there are no grounds for excluding the possibility (given that this entire discussion is based on conceding that *if* there is a God, then S/He can be perceived) that God simply made it abundantly clear to any person having an experience of X that s/he was having an experience of God. I do not, of course, believe that this is an

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<sup>26</sup> The author is *not* to be taken as holding to a literal interpretation of Genesis – the point I make is metaphorical. It is interesting to note, however, that the second of the two Creation narratives in the Hebrew Bible sees God calling on Adam to name all the animals. Such a task was not merely tokenism (in the technical sense of that word) – naming was to attribute *identity*, to say *what a 'thing' was*.

explanation of the emergence of language in our species<sup>27</sup> and for the purposes of this work, it does not matter how the entire enterprise of language was generated in our species. What is of importance is that we are a species with a fully developed grammatical language and it is through the vehicle of this language that we are able to communicate extremely complex and abstract ideas; we are able to reveal to others what is actually going on inside our heads and in so doing we are able to *attest and inform*. In other words, it is a fact that human beings have developed language which is a public discourse. Language is used to elucidate common understandings. If I have an experience of God, how do I know it is God? I know because the concept of 'God' is commonly understood – even atheists have a concept of God or they would not be able to coherently state what it is they don't believe in, and, we have seen, that concepts (including the concept of God) are acquired due to the say-so of others. So, a purported direct perception of God would be interpreted as an *experience of God* because of testimony and how that source of knowledge and belief produces concepts in human beings.

How are we taught the word "God" (its use, that is)? I cannot give an exhaustive systematic description. But I can as it were make contributions towards the description; I can say something about it & perhaps in time assemble a sort of collection of examples.<sup>28</sup> [ampersand Wittgenstein's]

I can see no reason, then, to discount the possibility that a person who has lived in a community where there is talk of God as being loving, supporting, nurturing, good, and so on, may *interpret* a particular *experience* to be that of God presenting Him/Herself to one. Of course, one may *take* an experience to be one of falling in love, or of a migraine headache, or of God presenting Him/Herself to one, when, in fact, nothing like that is happening at all. But this, in itself, is not a

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<sup>27</sup> In earlier discussions of this chapter, it was pointed out to me that language may not have 'emerged' with our species, but rather that our species may have emerged *with* language. I thank Dr Ron Goodrich (Deakin University) for this observation.

<sup>28</sup> Wittgenstein, L. op.cit., *Culture and Value* 94e

reason to reject the possibility that God does present Him/Herself to people in such a way that they come to form the belief: God is here in the room with me.

Fundamental to Alston's argument, of course, is the particular view he has of the nature of perception. He acknowledges that he takes sense perception to be the paradigm of the concept, and he makes it clear that it is our understanding of what it means to see something, to hear something, to touch something, that gives rise to our concept of perception. Alston argues that the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the concept of (sense) perception allow, or permit, us to understand perception as including the apprehension of non-physical objects. That this is possible is something I do not feel the need to respond to. My reason, however, for devoting such an extensive discussion to Alston's position is because of the primacy he gives to perception as a source of knowledge, and, more importantly, because such a view contains an implicit and vital acknowledgement of the role of testimony and epistemic communities. That is, his argument underwrites my position that direct perception which leads to an *experience of* God, or tables, or the colour red, is possible because of the testimonial, epistemic transactions that take place in human communities of shared understandings.

None of this, however, discounts the *possibility* of experiencing that which is meaningful, outside of, or beyond, that which is intelligible and real. Let us conclude our deliberations, then, by considering this possibility.

### ***On the End of Discourse***

The inexpressible (what I find enigmatic & cannot express) perhaps provides the background, against which whatever I was able to express acquires meaning.

For a human being the eternal, the consequential is often hidden behind an impenetrable veil. He knows: there is something under there, but he cannot see it; the veil reflects the daylight.<sup>29</sup>

There is a sense in which each of us is in a state of constant dialogue with the Universe. Because of the importance and significance of language in the human condition, we are always in discourse. I have argued that we think in language, even when we think in pictures, we are thinking in language. We engage in an inner discourse, that is, we talk to ourselves; we listen to others, we speak to others. We learn and teach. We read signs and interpret symbols – we lie in bed and hear the distant ringing of bells and we think, ‘the ringing of the bells *means such-and-such*.... Our discourse with all that is, seems all-pervasive and fundamental to the kind of beings we are. Some of us even talk to God and listen attentively for a response. Our perceptions of the world through our senses are all interpreted in the light of the doxastic structures that, I have argued, we acquire through our immersion into epistemic communities which arise out of the speaking and telling of others and which arise out of this discourse. It seems, on one level, that we are defined by our ability to communicate by way of a genuinely grammatical language and many in the history of Philosophy have argued that linguistic ability is the defining characteristic of being human. In the sixth chapter I made the reductionist and provisional claim that we *are our minds*. But in reductionism there is always the danger of over-simplifying the way the world actually is, and so I hinted in that chapter that I would consider the possibility that there may be meaningful experiences beyond the limits of our minds – ‘minds’ in the sense argued for earlier.

I have argued that testimony is fundamental to the human condition, holding that it is responsible for the formation of mind (*informare*). I have argued that it is the possession of mind that enables us to order the experience of being human, it is mind that enables us to understand the world, it is mind that makes meaning

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, 23e & 92e

possible and that meaning is possible in virtue of our shared understandings. I think this is what Wittgenstein meant by 'forms of life' and what Reid meant by 'social operations of mind' (see footnote 39, Chapter Three). To this extent, we may say that we are our minds. But does this reduce us to beings who cannot go beyond or outside our belief structures, are we, in some sense, impaired by the centrality of our linguistic practices? I suppose the answer to those questions lies in what one might mean by 'going beyond'.

This is what I have in mind : can we have experiences that are *not* brought under the ordering of our epistemic framework, can we have experiences that just do not 'fit' into the way we take the world to be, and yet are still held to be meaningful, in some way? In preparing to answer this question, we note the following from Puddefoot:

[F]or want of a better metaphor (and it is still wanting) we found ourselves speaking of organisms as machines. This is an example of *model inversion* by which the model begins to mould the reality which gave it birth. Model inversion is an inescapable concomitant of formalization because we see what we know, and we tend to interpret what we see in terms of the concepts we already possess. In other words, because the interpretative framework must be possessed *before* we can make sense of the world we always tend to force our experiences to fit our existing concepts and to describe it using existing metaphors. We break out of this potentially disastrous cycle by *performing intellectual constructions*. When we experience something which shatters our confidence in our existing language (as when the early Fathers tried to express what they encountered in the person of Christ, or as quantum physicists struggle to express the completely new concepts that quantum mechanics demands) we have to find the intellectual courage to say something new, to have the courage of our subjective insights without dissociating ourselves from the criticism of a community of disciplined enquirers.<sup>30</sup> [italics Puddefoot's]

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<sup>30</sup> Puddefoot, J.C.

'Information and Creation' in  
*The Science and Theology of Information* (ed. C. Wassermann,  
R. Kirby and B. Rordorff)  
(Labor Et Fides, Geneva, 1992) p. 10



What Puddefoot writes of here reflects directly on what I have been arguing and considering. Whilst disjunctions between our ability to say things and our ability to experience have been apparent throughout human history (cf Puddefoot's reflection on the early Fathers of the church), perhaps it was Thomas Kuhn who was the first to give specific expression to this as a sort of 'crisis' in his analysis of paradigm shifts within the discipline of science.<sup>31</sup> In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* Kuhn meticulously describes the processes and mechanisms which produce these crises. Scientific revolutions, that is, revolutions of meaning and understanding, occur when nature reveals an aspect of her being that cannot be accounted for within the existing paradigm of meaning and understanding. Kuhn notes that acceptance by the scientific community of a new paradigm is a slow and difficult process and that the 'shift' will only occur when certain conditions are met. He writes:

The scientific community is a supremely efficient instrument for maximizing the number and precision of the problem solved through paradigm change.

Because the unit of scientific achievement is the solved problem and because the group knows well which problems have already been solved, few scientists will easily be persuaded to adopt a viewpoint that again opens to questions many problems that had previously been solved. Nature itself must first undermine professional security by making prior achievements seem problematic. Furthermore, even when that has occurred and a new candidate for paradigm has been evoked, scientists will be reluctant to embrace it unless convinced that two all-important conditions are being met. First, the new candidate must seem to resolve some outstanding and generally recognized problem that can be met in no other way. Second, the new paradigm must promise to preserve a relatively large part of the concrete problem-solving ability accrued to science through its predecessors.<sup>32</sup>

Scientists are prepared, eventually, to make this move because the scientific *community* comes to acknowledge that there is a 'real' phenomenon that cannot

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<sup>31</sup> See Kuhn, T.S

*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (1996)  
(The University of Chicago Press, Chicago)

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135

be explained within the existing language of the discipline, within the existing paradigm. It seems to me, however, that there are at least two immediate difficulties in trying to draw an analogy between the emergence of a new paradigm in science, and having an experience which lies outside or beyond one's conceptual framework in one's ordinary, day-to-day life.

First, the type of thing I have in mind are experiences which are not shared by one's epistemic community and so they lie, in a quite strict sense, beyond any chance of *meaningful* description. They are *private experiences*. Kuhn explains that whilst unexplained phenomena may be 'seen', at first, by only one or a few professional scientists, the very nature of scientific enquiry and education means that other practitioners will eventually come to see the problem as well.

Second, one of the difficulties in answering the question of whether or not we can have meaningful experiences that lie outside our linguistic paradigm is to do with the complex nature of the concept of 'experience' itself. The history of philosophical thought on this shows that for some, 'experience' is the term given to sense-data which is processed (in some way) by sentient beings; on such a view, experience is empirical, it is produced by the ability to sense both the external world and one's inner world. On this view, experience is 'raw', it simply involves sensing the is-ness of the world and does not involve understanding that is-ness in any particular way. On such a view, the new-born baby experiences light and cold but does not think: 'that light is bright and the doctor's hands are cold'. At most, the baby may respond primordially to the light and cold by merely crying from discomfort. It would be absurd, however, to say that the baby is not experiencing something.

Another way in which the concept 'experience' has been understood, is the view that the raw sensing of the world noted above, is interpreted as being an *experience of...*, or an *experience as...*. This notion of experience, it has been argued, is possible when beings who have attained some level of cognitive

function are able to order raw sense experience “under some form of conceptual scheme.”<sup>33</sup> It has been this notion of experience which has been emphasised throughout this work.

And then, of course, we have other more trivial applications of the term ‘experience’ like “he has had a lot of experience as a Headmaster” which, broadly speaking, seems to mean only that someone has been exposed to certain states of affairs over a significant period of time and has ‘managed’ or ‘coped’ with them (or, perhaps, has failed to manage and cope with them. This would not discount his/her having experienced being a Head.)

Puddefoot says that when we encounter the world in ways that lies beyond our ability to say anything, “we have to find the intellectual courage to say something new, to have the courage of our subjective insights without dissociating ourselves from the criticism of a community of disciplined enquirers.”<sup>34</sup> We have to try and find a language to express what we take to have been a ‘real’ experience. Perhaps the ‘courage’ of which Puddefoot speaks is a reference to the possibility that some people who have spoken of experiences that others take to be meaningless or unintelligible have been regarded as mad, none-the-less, I want to conclude this project by reflecting on the possibility that whilst much (if not most) of what we experience, and certainly what we claim to know and believe, is understood, ordered and structured under our mental templates, there are experiences which are not merely raw sense data hitting neural pathways, nor are they experiences ordered by our conceptual framework, but they are, none-the-less, meaningful. These experiences are beyond discourse and they are ineffable, yet they are ‘real’, in the sense that there is ample evidence to suggest that people have these experiences and seek to say something about them, even though they find they cannot say much at all. It is because there *are* such

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<sup>33</sup> Hirst, P.H.

*Knowledge and the Curriculum – a collection of philosophical papers* (1974)  
(Routledge and Kegan Paul, London) p. 39

<sup>34</sup> Puddefoot, J.C. op.cit., p. 10

experiences for human beings that we may conclude that although almost everything we *experience as...* can be accounted for in the way argued above, we are able to go beyond our conceptual framework and 'sense' the world in extraordinary ways.

The experiences to which I refer are not those where we merely struggle to find the right word or expression for an idea. Sometimes, we are said 'to have something in mind', but cannot find the words to give it expression. How we account for this is the business of psychology and neuroscience, though a philosopher may hold that if one cannot find the word(s) then perhaps there is no idea or thought to be expressed, maybe just the 'shadow' of one. Such a view may be deemed to fall short of the truth, for it does seem to be the case that on occasion, neural pathways just don't 'fire-up' as they should and no doubt there are many ways this can be accounted for by neuro-physiology. When we speak of ineffable experiences, however, we do not mean the occurrence of moments like the ones just described. So what do we mean?

In order to answer this question I think we have no better source than the writings of mystics and contemplatives. It is true that some philosophers, religious sceptics, atheists, and physicalists, are deeply suspicious of such writings, in the sense that they would want to argue that the experiences contemplatives count as ineffable are probably nothing more than certain physical states of the brain and that these physical states produce inner sensations for which the sensor has no name. This is a view with which I cannot engage in this work, suffice to say that if it is a true view, then that which the contemplative experiences remains, from his/her perspective, ineffable. Further, such a view tells us nothing about the fundamental and underlying aetiology of such experiences. Brain scientists have observed that a photograph of an apple pie and a real apple pie cause the same neural pathways to 'fire-up'.<sup>35</sup> So, whatever it is that causes such

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<sup>35</sup> See MDC Production *Testing God*, episode 3 'Credo Ergo Sum', Channel 4 Television, Director and Producer David Malone, 2001. "Neuro-science kind of takes us up to a certain level, at which point

experiences, we remain with the concept of ineffability, a concept we apply to experiences which we cannot understand, or bring under the ordering of our doxastic structures.

In order to demonstrate attempts to describe that which is ineffable, I quote the Catholic mystic and contemplative, Thomas Merton.

Contemplation...is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It *knows* the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes both beyond reason and beyond simple faith. For contemplation is a kind of spiritual vision to which both reason and faith aspire, by their very nature, because without it they must always remain incomplete. Yet contemplation is not vision because it sees "without seeing" and knows "without knowing." It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped in images, in words or even in clear concepts. It can be suggested by words, by symbols, but in the very moment of trying to indicate what it knows the contemplative mind takes back what it has said, and denies what it has affirmed. For in contemplation we know by "unknowing." Or, better, we know *beyond* all knowing or "unknowing."<sup>36</sup>

One could quote many such passages from writers like Bede Griffiths, Karl Rahner, Thomas Kelly, St John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, and many others. What characterises all of them is the attempt to express in language a sense of the numinous, a sense that there is some transcendent meaning and purpose to life, a sense of a purported divine being, and yet in these attempts, there is an open and clear acknowledgement that what is being expressed cannot be

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we can say this is what happens in the brain when the person describes such and such an experience, but it doesn't necessarily speak to the reality of those experiences. As an example, if we were to take an image of somebody's brain while they were, let's say, looking at picture of an apple pie, well, we could show activity in the visual cortex and in the parts of the brain that would recognise it as an apple pie, but it doesn't tell you whether or not there really is an apple pie out there in reality. " Andrew Newberg, MD, Director of Clinical Nuclear Medicine, Director of NeuroPET Research, and Assistant Professor in the Department of Radiology at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania

<sup>36</sup> Merton, T.

*New Seeds of Contemplation* (1972)  
(New Directions, New York) pp. 1-2

expressed. This is because what each contemplative is endeavouring to say cannot be said, it is because *what* they experience is ineffable, it is beyond saying, beyond ascription.

I do not, in this work, want to reflect on the authenticity, veracity, or lucidity of these attempts to describe experiences of a certain kind. I do not want to consider what these experiences might mean in terms of the possibility of an existent Ultimate Reality. I have no doubt, however, that the mystics and contemplatives who write in this vein do so faithfully and, therefore, I do want to consider what such writings might mean for my project.

On one level, we can see the remarkable richness of language in such writings – that we have concepts (words) like ‘numinous’, ‘transcendent’, ‘infinite’, ‘invisible’, ‘ethereal’, ‘intangible’, ‘spiritual’, etc, serves to demonstrate that people do have experiences which they seek to describe in meaningful ways, in ways which can be understood by other humans. On another level, and perhaps paradoxically, we note that such ascriptions, in virtue of the kind of concepts and ascriptions that they are, fall short of being able give expression to what is being experienced. It is as if such concepts exist *not* to describe, but to advert to what cannot be described, just experienced. “The way you use the word “God” does not show *whom* you mean, but what you mean.”<sup>37</sup> [italics Wittgenstein’s]

We may say, then, that such experiences lie outside our descriptions, and are, therefore, beyond testimony. And yet, Merton *is* certainly saying something, he is testifying to the degree that what is quoted above meets the criteria for what is to count as testimony. The verificationists (if there are any left) would claim that what Merton has said is literally meaningless, others (including this writer) find it meaningful and profoundly beautiful. But what is he testifying to?

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein, L. op.cit., p.58e

It is his intention, I believe, to say what contemplation is – it is his testimony to contemplation, but in so doing he uses oxymorons – the contemplative ‘sees without seeing’ and ‘knows without knowing’. But surely, it is too superficial to say that this is all that he is testifying to. He is also testifying to that aspect of being human which involves experiences that lie beyond, or outside, our conceptual framework, and in so doing, he is pointing to the possibility that we are *not* merely our minds – he is *showing* us that humans cannot ever be reduced to anything that is fundamental and simple and in so doing, there is the hint, the suggestion, that the impairments of our physical being and the impairments of our epistemic structures, are not absolute.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

In this thesis I have endeavoured to argue for the centrality and primacy of testimony within the human condition. I have argued that testimony is a ubiquitous aspect of our epistemology and that it provides adequate relevant grounds for claims to know. I have argued that, in addition to the Kantian *a priori*, it is the primary (that is ‘first’) source of knowledge; I have argued also that testimony is *logically prior* to perceptual knowledge, inferential knowledge, and memory. We have explored the relationship between testimony and epistemic dependence and also given extensive consideration to the notion of epistemic justification and how that concept is related to the concept of truth. I have argued that testimony plays a fundamental and pivotal role in the formation of our doxastic structures. I have argued that our minds are literally formed by testimony and that the concepts of ‘meaning’, ‘belief’, and ‘mind’ are logically linked to each other. I have argued that what we experience as humans is interpreted, understood, brought under the ordering, of our doxastic structure and that this structure is due to testimony. In this final chapter, I have considered the possibility that we may, in some sense, go beyond discourse, and speak of that which cannot be spoken of in something approaching a meaningful way.

I believe all this serves to show the way in which language limits our understandings and world-view. I don't think this is a new insight. I think that philosophers from the time of Plato have recognised that there is a disjunction between what is, what we are, and what we think, is. "To the extent that man has for long ages believed in the concepts and names of things as in *aeternae veritates* he has appropriated to himself that pride by which he raised himself above the animal: he really thought that in language he possessed knowledge of the world."<sup>38</sup> And yet despite the recognition that there is a gap between ontology and epistemology, between the minds of men and that which exists independently of those minds, language has made it possible for us to make sense of the world to the extent that what we take it to be becomes a shared experience. The evolution of shared understandings and meaning has made every human achievement and every human failing possible. A lion may fail to catch its prey, or fail to survive, but no animal can fail in the way humans can fail. Nor can they succeed in the way we can succeed. When we succeed at propositional calculus, build heavier-than-air flying machines, compose symphonies, feed the starving and love the dying, we are achieving things that could only be achieved within a framework of shared understanding and ways of being. When we destroy cities and poison rivers and lakes and fail to feed the starving, we are failing in a uniquely human way that can only occur within this framework of shared understandings. This is both our blessing and our curse. Our ability to talk to each other, to believe (despite the problem of other minds) that your pain is like mine, that when you see blue you see what I do, is empowering and limiting, but it is fundamental to the human condition. I don't think there have been any serious solipsists in the history of Philosophy.

And finally, there is the hint and suggestion that within the human experience, there lie moments of transcendence, transcendence from *experiencing as...*

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<sup>38</sup> Nietzsche, F. op.cit.



These hints come from people like Merton, Bonhoeffer, Tillich, Bach, and Blake. In a way, a poem is not testimony, and yet surely the poet seeks to speak of what is real. The contemplative and composer both recognise the limits of language, and yet both seek to give us a deeper view. The theologian probably agonises more than any other over the relationship between his/her words and what is true and what is real. So, despite the all-pervasive aspect of our shared doxology, there remains a hint that we can see and understand, that we can contemplate the possibility, of a *more than...*, after all, when Socrates (Plato) tells Glaucon that he cannot say what the Good is, but that the Ultimately Real exists, he had no doubt.

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