**Abstracta** SPECIAL ISSUE VI, pp. 6 – 32, 2012

# FAITH IN OTHERS[1]

**Guy Longworth**

## 1. Introduction

When someone tells us something we appear to face a choice: we can accept what they tell us, or not. Insofar as we face a genuine choice—insofar as it is up to us whether or not to accept what we are told—our deciding in one way or another might be guided by any of a variety of considerations. Perhaps it is important to us, for practical, prudential, or theoretical reasons, to take a stand as to whether or not something is so. In that case, we might choose to accept what we are told because that is a way of taking such a stand, rather than remaining neutral. More typically, we hope not only to take one or another stand, but to take a stand that is correct or amounts to knowledge. In that case, we accept what we are told because we hope that it is a way to come to believe correctly, or to know, where the latter is something that we desire or need. Alternatively, perhaps we recognize that our interlocutor is competent with respect to what they tell us, so that failing to accept what we are told would amount to treating them as insincere. (Here 'recognize' takes an epistemic, rather than honorific, reading: to recognize is to know, rather than to acknowledge an entitlement.) In that case, we might choose to accept what we are told because treating a person as insincere without good reason is in conflict with the demands of morality. Or perhaps we recognize that our interlocutor is sincere, so that failing to accept what they tell us would amount to treating them as incompetent. In that case, again, there may be moral reasons for accepting what we are told. And, of course, we may recognize neither the competence nor the sincerity of our interlocutor and yet acknowledge both on moral grounds.

[1] I'm grateful for discussion and advice to Gary Banham, Paul Faulkner, Hemdat Lerman, and Matthew Soteriou.

It seems, then, that there may be prudential or moral reasons—that is, practical reasons—for accepting what someone tells us. There may also be straightforwardly cognitive or epistemic—that is, theoretical—reasons. (The reason for the adverbial qualification will become clear shortly.) For instance, we may recognize that our interlocutor is both competent and sincere, perhaps by apprehending that they speak from knowledge. But the more typical situation is one in which we have at best indecisive grounds of that sort for believing that an interlocutor speaks from knowledge. In those more typical situations, where we might seem to lack straightforwardly cognitive or epistemic reasons for accepting what we are told, it seems that so accepting in spite of that lack is an exercise of *faith*. If the appearances here are veridical, then accepting what we are told is often, and perhaps predominantly, an act of faith. Yet many people now hold that accepting what we are told in such situations can be a way of coming to know. How, if at all, can an act of faith give rise to knowledge?

To give the question bite, consider the following line of argument.

1. In order to know, we must have cognitive or epistemic reasons—that is, theoretical reasons—that are decisive.
2. There are situations in which we reflectively take ourselves to be in a position to acquire knowledge by believing what we are told and yet the cognitive or epistemic reasons to which we have access independently of faith are not decisive.
3. The reasons to which we have access are either made accessible to us independently of faith or are made available by faith.
4. Faith is not itself a source of decisive cognitive or epistemic reasons; it is a source only of practical reasons.
5. Faith cannot furnish access to decisive cognitive or epistemic reasons. (The only reasons to which one has access in the situations operative in 2. are either indecisive or have their source in faith.)

Therefore:

6. The situations described in 2 are situations in which the cognitive or epistemic reasons to which we have access are not decisive.

7. In those situations, we cannot come to know by believing what we are told.

As noted, many people now hope to resist the conclusion in 7. That is, many people hope to defend the claim that we can know on the basis of accepting what we are told, even where the reasons to which we then have access, independently of faith, are not decisive. Disagreement within that group concerns two questions:

(Q1) Which of the operative premises, 1–5, are to be rejected?
(Q2) On what grounds are those premises to be rejected?

I'll focus here mainly on premises 4 and 5, considering some of the options for resisting those premises, and some of the challenges that those options entail. My discussion is a variation on some central themes in Paul Faulkner's important and insightful book, *Knowledge on Trust*. My aim is to outline some questions that remain open concerning the terrain that Faulkner seeks to map. First, I'll attempt to indicate some areas that remain to be explored (Sections 2 and 3). Second, I'll try to indicate some ways in which some of the paths that Faulkner argues to be impassable might yet be navigated (Sections 4 and 5). I'll conclude with some questions.

**2. Faith**

The claim at issue in this section is that faith is not itself a source of cognitive or epistemic reasons. (Premise 4 in our opening argument.) The claim has an impressive pedigree, with Kant as its most articulate proponent. Kant distinguishes faith from knowledge by appeal to the status of their respective grounds and, thence, the sources of those grounds.[3]

According to Kant, someone's grounds for taking something to be true may be *subjective*, *objective*, or a combination of both. Where one has sufficient *subjective* grounds for taking it to be true that *p*, the question whether *p* is closed *for one*: in taking it to be true that *p* one does not allow for the possibility that it's not true that *p*. However, one's

[3] See especially Kant 1781/1787: A820/B848–A831/B859, 1785. I've been helped in my understanding of Kant's views in this area by Stevenson 2003 and Chigwell 2007, although our readings differ at various points.

possession of subjective grounds for taking it to be true that *p* is compatible with one's lacking objective grounds. Where one has, in addition, sufficient *objective* grounds for taking it to be true that *p*, one has grounds that would determine *for anyone* operating in accord with theoretical reason that it is true that *p*: one has access to theoretical grounds that demonstrate truth. On the basis of his distinction between subjective and objective grounds, Kant distinguishes three categories of taking to be true. One *knows* that *p* where one takes it to be true that *p* on grounds that are both subjectively and objectively sufficient. One *opines* that *p* where one takes it to be true that *p* in the consciousness that both one's subjective and one's objective grounds are insufficient. Faith is then the middle category: one *has faith* that *p* where one takes it to be true that *p* on sufficient subjective grounds, in the consciousness that one's objective grounds do not furnish a theoretical demonstration of truth.

Suppose that one were rational—that is, that one were operating in accord with reason. In that case, wouldn't one's consciousness that one lacked sufficient objective grounds for taking it to be true that *p* undermine one's subjective grounds, by revealing to one that one's theoretical grounds leave open that it may not be true that *p*? And in that case, isn't rational faith impossible? Not according to Kant. For Kant allows that reason takes practical as well as theoretical form. Where one has faith, one's conviction is held in place by the demands of practical, rather than theoretical, reason. Those demands have their source in one's own will, rather than in factors that are impartially accessible to theoretical reason. One's rational grounds overall therefore can be impervious to the travails of one's merely objective grounds.

Kant holds that faith, when so understood, is possible only where three conditions are met. First, as noted, one's taking something to be true must be decided on practical, rather than theoretical, grounds. Second, its practical grounds must be unconditioned. Only in that circumstance can the grounds provided by practical reason be subjectively *sufficient*. That is, the only practical grounds that can serve rationally to *close* a question are grounds that are available independently of answers to further practical or theoretical questions. For Kant, that means that faith is restricted to what one is required to hold true in order to implement the demands of *categorical* morality. Third, and in effect a corollary of the

second condition, there must be no possibility that the question at issue might be decided theoretically. It must be impossible for the question to be answered theoretically in a way that conflicts with practical requirements, on pain of irreparable discord between the demands of practical and theoretical reason. And, for Kant, it must also be impossible for practical and theoretical reason to determine the same answer. For if that were possible, then grounds that were practically decisive would nonetheless leave open the possibility of discord, and so reveal the practical grounds to be, at best, conditional.

In addition to cases of faith proper, Kant allows for other cases of taking something to be true on practical grounds, where those grounds do not close the question at issue. For instance, Kant provides the following example of what he calls *pragmatic belief*:

> The doctor must do something for a sick person who is in danger, but he does not know the illness. He looks to the symptoms, and judges, because he does not know of anything better, that it is consumption. His belief is merely contingent even in his own judgment; someone else might perhaps do better. (Kant, 1781/1787: A824/ B852.)

In this case, the doctor's taking it to be true that the patient has consumption is based upon theoretical grounds that are neither subjectively nor objectively sufficient. It is held in place by the practical demand that the doctor acts, and acts on relevant theoretical beliefs. But the doctor's practical grounds are doubly insufficient to decide what he should take to be true. First, they are insufficient in that the doctor's practical end—treating the patient—is contingent: the doctor might not have set that end for himself. If he had not, then he may have lacked practical grounds for taking it to be true that the patient has consumption. Second, they are insufficient in that, having set for himself that end, the doctor's practical grounds still leave open for him the question, whether the patient in fact has consumption.

Returning to premise 4, it would be natural to take the notion of faith that appears there to correspond, not with Kant's very demanding technical notion of faith, but rather with his notion of pragmatic belief. Where we take what we are told to be true, in the sorts of cases at issue here, our doing so is decided for us, in part, on practical grounds. We are aware that it is impossible for us decisively to close the question at issue on purely theoretical grounds. And yet our broadly practical ends—including, most minimally, the

contingent end of attaining an answer to the question at issue—incline us to adopt an answer to the question. Assume that our being told what we are provides us with some, albeit indecisive, grounds to adopt one rather than another answer—grounds that may themselves be theoretical or practical. In that case, our practical ends decide for us that we will adopt that answer, while leaving open that there may be further theoretical grounds that either support or undermine that answer. There would therefore be at least two reasons for denying that our taking what we are told to be true would amount to faith in the demanding Kantian sense. First, the operative practical ends would be contingent: we might have lacked the ends that induce us to adopt an answer to the question at issue. Second, the operative ends are anyway indecisive: adopting them leaves open that the question may be answered differently, or more effectively, on other grounds.

On the construal of faith as (Kantian) pragmatic belief, it would be over-determined that faith could not provide decisive theoretical grounds. For pragmatic belief is held in place by grounds that are practical, rather than theoretical; and—for the reasons outlined above—it is held in place only provisionally. On the assumption that knowledge must be based upon decisive theoretical grounds—premise 1 in our target argument—it would therefore be over-determined that faith cannot on its own sustain knowledge.

A response to that interim conclusion might take any of the following forms. First, one might accept the interim conclusion and so—assuming acceptance of the target argument's other elements—accept that taking what one is told to be true is itself a form of pragmatic belief rather than knowledge. Second, one might accept the interim conclusion but avoid accepting that taking what one is told to be true is itself a form of pragmatic belief by rejecting another element in the target argument (most plausibly, by seeking to reject premise 5, and attempting to argue that faith can provide access to reasons that are constituted independently of that faith). Third and fourth, one might reject the interim conclusion by accepting that one's grounds are partly practical, while denying that one's practical grounds are indecisive, giving rise to analogues of the consequences of response one and two with Kantian faith in place of pragmatic belief. Fifth and sixth, one might reject the interim conclusion by denying that the practicality of one's grounds is inconsistent with their also being, or giving rise to, theoretical grounds. Holding in place

the rest of Kant's taxonomic scheme, that response has two subdivisions, depending on whether the theoretical grounds provided by faith are themselves decisive or indecisive. Fifth, then, if it is held that faith can give rise to *indecisive* theoretical grounds, then the result will be that our taking what we are told to be true is, at best, the adoption of opinion. Sixth, if it is held that faith can give rise to *decisive* theoretical ground, then the result will be that our taking what we are told to be true may comprise our acquiring knowledge. Notice that only the sixth position sustains the view that faith can amount to knowledge.

Faulkner's view is that the form of faith involved in accepting what one is told—what he calls *trust*—is not itself a form of knowledge. This is so, in part, because he holds that reasons that are grounded in trust are indecisive. On his view, trust need not comprise decisive grounds, since its primary role in the justificational architecture of testimonial belief is not to provide grounds for those beliefs. Rather, its function is to ground one's acceptance of what one is told and so to provide one with access to reasons that are constituted independently of trust. Thus, Faulkner seeks to reject premise 5 by adopting a combination of the second and fifth options sketched in the last paragraph. As we'll see in the next section, those options bring in train a range of explanatory burdens due to the way in which they threaten to pull apart subjective and objective reasons.

**3. Architecture**

Suppose that the acceptance of what we are told, *per se*, is at best a form of faith or pragmatic belief. That is, suppose that we have been forced to adopt either the first, second, or fifth responses to Kant's position that were outlined at the end of the previous section. In that case, accepting what one is told does not alone amount to knowing that which one is told. And one's faith in one's interlocutor's competence and sincerity with respect to what they tell one does not alone amount to one's knowing that they are competent and sincere. For similar reasons, faith that a combination of one's interlocutor and their sources, or their sources' sources, etc., are competent and sincere does not alone amount to knowledge. On those suppositions, there will be a range of cases with the following five characteristics. First, they will be cases in which a speaker *S* tells an audience *A* something. Second, they will be cases in which *S* is in fact sincere and competent with respect to what they tell *A*:

their telling *A* what they do is an expression of their knowledge. Typically, we would take *A* to be in a position to come to know *p* in those circumstances, by accepting what they were told. Third, then, *A* can come thereby to know *p*. Fourth, *A* accepts what they are told on faith—that is, their acceptance of what *S* tells them is based only on faith in *S*'s competence and sincerity, on their having spoken from knowledge. Fifth, then, since *A*'s acceptance is based only on faith in *S*'s having spoken from knowledge, and since faith is not a form of knowledge, we have the following:

(I) *A* knows *p*

(II) *A* does not know that *S*'s telling *A p* is based on knowledge.

Many philosophers hold that one can acquire knowledge on the basis of accepting what one is told only if one's interlocutor meets conditions in addition to simply speaking the truth. One natural view is that, in the most normal cases, if one is to come to know *p* on the basis of accepting what one is told, one's interlocutor must know *p*. This view is subject to plausible (though indecisive) counterexamples. For example, someone who knows that smoking is carcinogenic—say, our family doctor—tells me that it is. I do not accept what they tell me, because I believe that they are simply propounding government propaganda. Nonetheless, I wish to discourage my daughter from smoking, so reliably transmit what I am told, on grounds that it will not be corrected by our family doctor. Plausibly, at least, if my daughter accepts what I tell her, she can thereby come to know that smoking is carcinogenic. If we take the case to be normal, then the case arguably presents a counterexample to the natural view.[4] According to a less demanding view, not threatened by the plausible counterexample, one's interlocutor's telling one what they do must be reliably based on knowledge, without that requiring that the knowledge is wholly in the interlocutor's possession. Since the details won't matter, and since Faulkner accepts a similar requirement, I'll assume that the less demanding view is correct.

[4] See e.g. Graham 2000.

According to the less demanding view, it's a necessary condition on someone's acquiring knowledge by accepting what they are told that what they are told is based on knowledge. Suppose that *A*'s reasons for accepting *p* are exhausted by reasons that *S* makes available by telling them *p*. In that case, we have (III):

(III) If *A* knows *p*, then *S*'s telling *A p* is based on knowledge.

Now, supposing (III) to be true, it's plausibly something that someone might know, at least when framed at the current level of detail. Let's suppose, then, that *A* knows (III). (The argument might be reconstructed on the weaker assumption that *A* merely believes (III), but it can be presented more simply if we make the stronger assumption that *A* knows (III).) So, we have (IV):

(IV) *A* knows that (if *A* knows *p*, then *S*'s telling *A p* is based on knowledge).

Now we would ordinarily expect a subject who is rational, and who possessed normal conceptual competence, to be able to progress beyond (I)–(IV) in at least two ways.

First, we would ordinarily expect a subject who knows something to be in a position to attain reflective knowledge to the effect that they know that thing. There is a range of cases where that expectation may not be met. For one example, self-knowledge might be blocked by idiosyncrasies in a subject's conceptual competence, for instance by their imposition of conditions on applications of the concept of knowledge that are too demanding. For another example, self-knowledge might be ruled out because the subject holds misleading beliefs, for instance to the effect that their first order belief is at best accidentally true. For a third example, self-knowledge might be foreclosed because the subject's first-order cognition is only just safe enough to count as knowledge so that correlative second-order cognition would not be.[5] However, although there plausibly are

[5] For instance, suppose that a subject's belief underwrites knowledge, because the belief is true in a range of nearby possible cases, but in many of those cases the belief is true but unsafe—for instance, because in too many cases near to those cases, the belief is false. So, although the first-order belief is safe enough to underwrite knowledge, it does not *safely* underwrite knowledge: there is significant danger that the subject

cases where one can know without being in a position to know that one knows, it is perfectly normal, at least with respect to ordinary cases of first-order knowledge, to be in a position to know that one knows. Hence, in many normal cases, one would expect *A* to be able to progress from (I) to (V):

(V) *A* knows that *A* knows *p*.

Second, we would ordinarily expect a normal subject who knows *p*, and knows that if *p*, then *q*, to be in a position competently to deduce *q* on the basis of those two pieces of knowledge. And it would be very natural to expect that, in normal cases, a competent deduction based on knowledge would result in knowledge. Again, there might be a range of more or less special cases in which those expectations are not met, but in normal cases, it would be natural to expect such a subject to be in a position to know *q*.[6] If *A* were in such a case, we would therefore expect them to be in a position to arrive, by competent deduction based on the knowledge ascribed in (IV) and (V), at the knowledge ascribed in (VI):

(VI) *A* knows that *S*'s telling *A p* is based on knowledge.

However, (VI) contradicts (II). Holding fixed our other assumptions, it appears that we have two *prima facie* unhappy options. First, we might reject (V), and claim that, in the type of case at issue—cases in which one knows only through faith-based acceptance of what one is told—one cannot know that one knows. A natural replacement position leaving intact as much as possible of the remaining structure, would then be that we can have only faith, and not knowledge, concerning our first-order knowledge. Second, we might reject (VI), and claim that, again in the type of case at issue, one cannot acquire the type of knowledge attributed in (VI) on the basis of competent deduction from things that one

---

might believe what they do without knowing it. Now suppose that the second-order belief—to the effect that the first-order belief underwrites knowledge—co-varies with possession of the first-order belief. In that case, the second-order belief may not be safe enough to underwrite knowledge, since there is significant danger of the subject having that second-order belief when, at first-order, they have only a true belief and not knowledge. See Williamson 2000, chapters 4 and 5.

[6] For discussion see e.g. Drestke 1970, Nozick 1981, Sherman and Harman 2011, Stine, 1976, Vogel 1990.

knows. Perhaps in such cases, the subject is in a position to see that something *must* be so, given what they know—or in order that what they take themselves to know can be so—but is not in a position to *know* that it is so. Again, a natural replacement position would be that competent deduction in such cases is a way of extending the reach only of faith, and not of knowledge.

A different style of response would involve denying that the standing of (II) is fixed once and for all by its genesis in faith. Instead, an attempt might be made to argue as follows. First, it is accepted that (II) holds at the point at which *A* first acquires knowledge from *S*. At that point, although *A* knows that which *S* tells them, *A* has only faith, and not knowledge, concerning the epistemic basis of the telling. However, second, it is argued that, having now acquired that knowledge, it is possible for *A* to use it in order to bootstrap their way into knowledge, rather than faith, concerning the epistemic pedigree of what they were told. Such a response might be motivated by reflection on the special nature of our knowledge of our own minds. For, on the one hand, it is apt to seem plausible that one can know things about one's own mind that depend upon connections with our environment. For example, it is apt to seem plausible that one can know that one knows that it's currently sunny, where one's knowing that depends on it's being sunny and on one's being appropriately sensitive to that fact. And, on the other hand, it is apt to seem plausible that one can have such knowledge prior to checking that the required environmental connections obtain. For example, it is apt to seem plausible that one can know that one knows that it's currently sunny without testing whether one is appropriately sensitive to its being so.

The viability of such a response appears to depend essentially on the partial independence of the acquired first-order knowledge from the faith on which its initial acquisition is based. That is, it requires that, although faith may play an essential role in instituting knowledge, its role cannot be that of a lemma in an argumentative justification for that which is known. For if it were, then *A*'s faith in the epistemic basis of what they were told would figure as an essential supporting element *throughout A*'s derivation of the knowledge ascribed in (VI). And that would make mysterious how the derivation could result in knowledge, rather than faith, concerning that epistemic basis. By contrast, if faith

functions as something more akin to an *enabling* condition for the acquisition of knowledge that is sustained independently of faith, then it is possible to at least make out the shape of a position able to sustain (V) and (VI).

If such a position can be made out, then we have a pleasing convergence with Faulkner's preferred view of the role of faith, or trust, in providing access to independently constituted reasons. However, it remains to be seen whether such a position is defensible. I would be interested to know more about Faulkner's own preferred response to the issue sketched in this section, and his reasons for preferring that response to other available responses.

**4. Responsibility**

The position to this point is this. It's plausible that faith in others figures essentially in many cases in which we take ourselves to acquire knowledge by accepting what we are told. However, large questions remain open. In particular, it remains an open question whether faith can comprise, or give rise to, theoretical reasons for taking something to be true. And it remains an open question what precisely the role of faith is in underpinning knowledge. However, in advance of more detailed examination of the various options for answering those questions, the following is plausible. With respect to the first question, it's plausible that faith cannot *alone* give rise to knowledge of what one is told, either directly, or via knowledge that the telling is appropriately based on knowledge. Insofar as it is possible to acquire knowledge by accepting what one is told, the underpinning of the knowledge must plausibly go beyond what is independently available to the faithful and make reference also to the epistemic pedigree of the telling. With respect to the second question, it's plausible that the role of faith is, not to provide lemmas in argumentative justifications for accepting what one is told, but rather to furnish an epistemic environment that is suitably hospitable to reasons that are constituted independently of one's faith.

Let's assume that the epistemic underpinnings of one's taking to be true what one is told are constituted independently of one's faith in the speaker. Whether those underpinnings can sustain knowledge is a matter of whether or not the telling is appropriately based on knowledge. When one is told something, one is either presented

with an opportunity to know, through accepting what one is told, or—because the telling is not appropriately based on knowledge—one is not. Let's call instances of the former type *good cases* and instances of the latter type *bad cases*. Thus far, we've been assuming that one lacks *decisive* theoretical grounds for taking it that one is in a good case—one in which acceptance will grant one knowledge—rather than a bad case. And that is, of course, consistent with one's having *indecisive* theoretical grounds for accepting what one is told. However, if one's grounds were entirely neutral—either because on lacked grounds for accepting or rejecting what one was told, or because, although one had grounds of both sorts, they were in equilibrium—one would lack any reason for accepting, rather than refusing to accept, what one was told. In that case, accepting what one was told, rather than remaining neutral about it, would evince doxastic irresponsibility.[7]

Now, we are treating faith-based acceptance of what one is told as serving, in effect, to enable one's belief to draw on the epistemic credentials of the telling, rather than as partly constituting that belief's epistemic underpinnings. It is not, therefore, entirely obvious that the doxastic irresponsibility of acceptance *must* have a negative effect on the epistemic standing of beliefs formed on its basis. However, although it is not obvious, it is plausible. Consider cases in which, despite the proper functioning of a resource, one has weighty evidence that the deliverances of that resource are *not* to be trusted. For instance, consider a case in which one knows that one's visual system is malfunctioning in such a way that it regularly seems to one visually as though there is movement at the periphery of one's visual field even though there is no such movement in one's environment. One seems to see such a movement and takes the seeming to be the upshot of the malfunction. In this particular case, one in fact glimpsed a cat leaving the room. Nonetheless, it's plausible that one is precluded from coming to know, on the basis of one's visual experience, that something moved. Generalizing, it's plausible that, even in cases wherein one's faith in an epistemic source would normally play only an enabling role, in allowing one to draw on reasons made available by the source, reasons for thinking that the resource is malfunctioning can preclude the source from playing that role. And it's plausible that the

[7] One way of thinking about issues of doxastic responsibility is as concerned with the appropriate connections between subjective and objective reasons.

same would hold with respect to cases of *genuine* neutrality—cases in which one really lacked *any* positive reason to accept the deliverances of an epistemic source.

It's therefore natural to wonder, with respect to cases of the sort we are considering, where we take ourselves to be in a position to acquire knowledge by accepting what we are told, whether any of them are cases in which our reasons for acceptance are in equilibrium, or even deficit. (More generally, we might consider whether any of them are cases in which we are sufficiently close to equilibrium that what would otherwise be an opportunity to acquire knowledge is screened off from us.) Faulkner considers, and rejects, a number of proposals according to which we have general, positive grounds for accepting what we are told, before offering in their place his own trust-based account. In the remainder, I want briefly to consider two of the accounts that Faulkner rejects, and raise some questions about his grounds for rejecting them.

One putative source of positive reasons for accepting what one is told would be what is presented to one, or made manifest to one, by a speaker who tells one something. On one such account—developed by John McDowell—a speaker, in telling one $p$, can thereby present one with whatever reasons underpin the telling.[8] Obviously, the speaker need not present one with an *independent* articulation of those reasons. They need not present the claims $q$ and $r$ ($\neq p$) as reasons for accepting $p$. Rather, in telling one $p$, a speaker can *manifest* their possession of a piece of knowledge, where that piece of knowledge carries with it whatever reasons constitute it as knowledge. (As noted above, it might be allowed that a speaker can manifest a piece of knowledge that they do not possess, if their telling is appropriately dependent upon those who do possess it.) The genuine manifestation of knowledge in a telling, as understood here, requires that the telling be *constitutively* dependent on its epistemic bases: that very telling could not have occurred without its being based in the same way on knowledge. Insofar as it's possible for a speaker, in telling one that $p$, to manifest a piece of knowledge, it's thereby possible for them to manifest reasons sufficient for that knowledge. (Compare: insofar as it's possible for one to see water, it's possible for one to see Hydrogen and Oxygen, whether or not one can see Hydrogen or Oxygen independently of seeing water.) Hence, according to such

[8] McDowell 1980, 1981, 1994.

accounts, an appropriately based telling might make manifest reasons that tip the balance in favour of acceptance by deciding the issue.

However, even if we are prepared to endorse such an account, there are at least two apparent reasons for doubting its ability fully to explain how one can responsibly accept what one is told. First, doxastic responsibility requires that one's accepting what one is told way be based upon reasons. Those reasons must therefore be available to one in advance of one's accepting what one is told. And yet it's plausible that in cases in which reasons are made available to one by some source, one's initial access to those reasons is dependent upon one's faith in the source. It may be that once those reasons are accessible, they can then be used to consolidate one's initial grounds for faith in the source. However, they cannot serve as the initiating basis for faith. (This is not intended to constitute an objection to McDowell's *overall* account. I think that McDowell would accept that the aspect of his account characterized above requires supplementation. His overall account of doxastic responsibility incorporates additional elements, akin to those in the second account described below.)

Second, it is arguable that the claim that a speaker can manifest their knowledge to an audience by telling the audience something carries implausible implications concerning what a speaker ordinarily makes available to their audience. The claim requires that the reasons that are made available to an audience by one who speaks from knowledge are different from the reasons that are made available by one who doesn't. And if the reasons that are available in the good case are to enable an audience to meet the demands of doxastic responsibility, then those reasons must make a difference to how things are from the audience's perspective. Minimally, it seems to be required that an audience who is normally cognizant of a telling in a good case will thereby be put in a different epistemic position from an audience who is normally cognizant of a telling in a bad case. And it is natural to expect that requirement to have broadly phenomenological ramifications. That is, it is natural to predict that the way things seem to the audience in the good case will differ from the way things seem to the audience in the bad case. However, many theorists will be inclined to reject the claim that there is such a phenomenological difference between being in a good case and being in a bad case. Faulkner is amongst them:

> …there is no significant phenomenological difference between being told something (by a speaker who knows what she tells) and being told a fiction. (Faulkner, 2011: 132)

Unless there is a way either to defend the phenomenological claim to which Faulkner is opposed, or to detach it from the proposed account, we will have to look elsewhere for an explanation of the doxastic responsibility of accepting what we are told.

A natural reaction to the first difficulty with the proposed account suggests a way forward. The difficulty was that, where access to reasons depends upon one's faith in a putative source for those reasons, those reasons are not able to ground one's initial faith in the source. But the difficulty is apt to generalize. If we assume that reasons for faith in a source must themselves have a source, it is natural to query the standing of faith in the latter source. To avoid the gloomy prospect of an interminable regress, we must therefore hold either that some sources may be trusted without reason, or that some reasons have no source. Crudely, we must hold that we are *pro tanto* entitled to faith in some putative sources. And having made that admission, the question naturally arises whether others' testimony is amongst the sources on which we are entitled to rely. If it is, then in the absence of reasons *not* to accept what someone tells us, we will be in a position responsibly to accept what they say.

Tyler Burge has developed an account on which we are *pro tanto* entitled to faith in others' testimony.[9] In outline, Burge's view is this. The presentation and uptake of testimony is based on the operations of a number of sources. For instance, a subject, *S* might come to know *p* on the basis of the operation of one source—their perceptual faculty—and then retain that knowledge on the basis of the operation of another source (or resource)—their memorial faculty. *S* might then make use of another source to manifest their knowledge in the presence of an audience *A*. That is, *S* might exercise their faculty of speech so as to tell *A p*—to present *p* to them as true. *A* is then in a position to grasp that which *S* told them, as having been presented by another as true, on the basis of the

[9] Burge 1993, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 1999.

operation of *A*'s own speech faculty. If each of the sources that is involved in the transaction has functioned correctly, then *A* will be in the following position: if they responsibly accept what they grasp in that way—*p*, presented by another as true—they will thereby be accepting *p* on the basis of responsible and correct operations of various epistemic sources. Plausibly, that is a way for *A* to come to know *p* (at least on the assumption that *A*'s acceptance of what they are told is doxastically responsible). *A*'s acceptance of what they are told will be doxastically responsible just in case *A* is entitled to accept what they are told. *A* is *pro tanto* entitled to rely on the proper functioning of each of the various sources that participate in the transaction. So, as long as that *pro tanto* entitlement is not undermined, *A* can responsibly accept that which *S* tells them. *A* can come thereby to know *p*.

Faulkner objects to Burge's account in a way that mirrors, and bolsters, his phenomenological objection to McDowell's account. According to Faulkner, the basic difficulty for Burge's account resides in the presumed connection between belief (or knowledge) and its expression in speech. On Burge's account, we are entitled to rely upon the proper functioning of rational agents, and hence upon the proper functioning of their sub-systems. Suppose that there were a systemic connection between an agent's knowledge and its expression in speech, such that the function of the system was to make knowledge available through telling. In that case, an audience would be entitled to rely upon the proper functioning of the system, and so in a position responsibly to treat what they were told by a speaker as manifesting the speaker's belief. Put another way, audiences would be entitled to faith in speakers' sincerity.

However, as Faulkner emphasizes, speaking is a practical activity, undertaken by agents. The faculty of *practical* reason is therefore implicated in the transition from belief (or knowledge) to telling. Whether or not what a speaker says appropriately reflects what they believe depends, not only upon the proper operation of their faculty of speech, but also upon the dictates of the speaker's practical reasoning. On Faulkner's view, the question posed for practical reason is whether it would best serve the speaker's ends for them to speak their mind, or whether those ends would be better served by their speaking artfully—through lying, evasion, or some other form of insincerity. The answer to that question may

well be that the speaker's ends are best served by their speaking artfully. According to Faulkner, then, the connection between belief and speech is unsuitable to figure in Burge's account. Although an audience is entitled to rely on the proper functioning of each of the faculties implicated in a speaker's telling them something, that entitlement will ground faith in the speaker's sincerity only if the proper functioning of the faculties is inconsistent with artfulness. But the faculty of practical reason can function properly while exploiting the faculty of speech at the service of whatever the speaker's practical ends happen to be. Since those ends might mandate artful speech, the proper function of the system as a whole is consistent with artfulness. Hence, an entitlement to rely upon proper functioning cannot sponsor faith in a speaker's sincerity. Given suitable ends, a speaker might function perfectly and yet speak artfully.

Reflection on the role of practical reason in mediating the transition from belief to speech can serve to bolster Faulkner's phenomenological objection to McDowell's account. The objection, recall, was that there need be no accessible difference—no difference that impacts upon how things strike an audience—between a telling that is sincere and one that is insincere. Now one might counter that, although the difference need not everywhere be reflectively accessible to an audience, still an epistemically relevant difference can be made out. For one might argue that the appearance of a good case telling is constituted as a manifestation of knowledge, while the bad case telling presents what is merely a misleading appearance of being so constituted. However, that line requires that a good case telling amounts to the emergence of knowledge in action—i.e. that the telling could not have taken place had it not been a manifestation of the same piece of knowledge. And that arguably requires either that the expression of knowledge in speech be unmediated or that, if it is mediated, the mediator does not screen off the speech from its ultimate source in knowledge. However, as Faulkner characterizes the role of practical reason as mediating between belief and speech, it looks to sever the required connection between belief and speech. An episode of speech is shaped immediately by the operation of practical reason, where that operation may take any of a variety of configurations, depending upon the speaker's particular, idiosyncratic ends. Although some of those possible configurations will reflect the speaker's knowledge, and will lead to acts of speech that correspond with

that knowledge, not all will. So, at best, a good case telling is constituted as a manifestation of the immediate practical aims that it expresses. But those immediate practical aims are consistent with a variety of further ends and means. Hence, the telling is consistent with the speaker's having any of a variety of beliefs (or pieces of knowledge). Practical reason serves to screen off belief from speech. Hence, if Faulkner's objection to Burge were cogent, then the putative response to his phenomenological objection would be blocked.

**5. Reason**

Let's suppose for the moment that Faulkner's objections to Burge and McDowell are cogent. The supposition has two immediate consequences. First, and most obviously, we are owed an alternative account of how accepting what one is told in advance of positive grounds for doing so can meet the demands of doxastic responsibility. Faulkner's account of trust (a form of faith) as providing *evidence* of trustworthiness is designed to discharge that debt.[10] Second, we are forced to adopt a particular form of *externalism* with respect to knowledge that is acquired on the basis of accepting what one is told. I shall focus here on the second, less obvious consequence.

Consider a particular subject, *A*, who knows *p*, and consider all the reasons that figure in making it so that *A* knows *p*. Amongst those reasons, some may be reflectively accessible to *A*: they are such that, just by reflection, *A* is able to know that they have that reason. Let's call reasons that are reflectively accessible in that way *internalist* reasons. And let's call reasons that are not so accessible *externalist*. Now, Faulkner's objection to McDowell relies on three claims. First, it relies on the claim that any (normal) good case telling is paired with at least one matching bad case telling. (A minimal characterization of matching might proceed along the following lines: cases match just in case it is not reflectively accessible to one that one is not in a good case.) Second, it relies on the claim that no reflectively accessible reason is available in a good case that is not also available in every matching bad case. That is, it relies on the claim that the internalist reasons that are available in a good case cannot outstrip the reasons that are available in the worst matching

[10] Arguably, Faulkner's account is subject to one of the difficulties that Burge's account is designed to address. Suppose that one's trust in a speaker can serve as evidence for their trustworthiness, by conditioning them to be trustworthy. It's not clear how that evidence could ground the *initiation* of that trust.

bad case. The first two claims deliver the result that the internalist reasons available to *A* in a (normal) good case are consistent with *A* being in a bad case. That is, the internalist reasons that are available to *A* leave open that the telling with which they are presented is not knowledge-based. Hence, if *A* comes to know in the good case, that is in part because of the *externalist* reasons that are made available in the good case. It is the first two claims that impose a form of externalism on Faulkner's position. Although reasons can be transmitted from speaker to audience, internalist reasons cannot always be so transmitted. A speaker *S* may possess internalist reasons, but be blocked from transmitting those reasons to an audience *A*, because *A* would be unable reflectively to distinguish the case they're in from one in which *S* lacked those reasons.

The third claim on which Faulkner's objection to McDowell relies is that questions of doxastic responsibility must be settled by appeal only to internalist reasons. The first two claims aim to demonstrate the parity of internalist reasons across matching good and bad cases. The third aims to convert that result into an objection to the proposed account of doxastic responsibility.

There is a difficulty for Faulkner at just this point. It would be natural to expect facts about what one knows or doesn't know to play a role in determining whether or not one meets the demands of doxastic responsibility. Indeed, it would be natural to expect that to be one central reason for taking an interest in whether or not one knows something. However, with respect to the cases of knowledge that are of greatest interest to Faulkner—the normal cases in which one acquires knowledge from another—the expectation is not met. Some of the reasons that play an essential role in determining whether or not one knows are externalist reasons. And those externalist reasons are precluded from figuring in the determination of whether or not one's beliefs meet required standards of doxastic responsibility. On Faulkner's account, wherever one knows just on the basis of (responsibly) accepting what one is told, it is one's belief only, and not one's knowledge, that figures in determining whether one is, in further cases, being responsible in believing as one does.

It may be that Faulkner is willing to accept that result. If he is willing to accept it, then it would be good to hear more about what he takes the value, or explanatory function,

of knowledge to be, given that it is inefficacious with respect to questions of doxastic responsibility. Alternatively, however, he may wish to respond by amending one or another of the claims that figure in his objection to McDowell. First, he might consider dropping (or weakening) the internalist requirement on determinants of doxastic responsibility. That is, he might consider allowing that reasons that are not reflectively accessible to a subject may yet figure in determining whether or not they count as doxastically responsible in believing as they do. That would allow for a variant of the account considered above, on which one might be doxastically responsible in accepting what one is told because the telling manifested externalist reasons. However, one might well be unwilling so brutally to sever the connection between internalist reasons and the standards of doxastic responsibility. Second, then, Faulkner might consider dropping (or weakening) the parity principle, according to which the reasons that are reflectively accessible in a good case are restricted to those that are also accessible in any matching bad case. Taking that line would be to endorse McDowell's own way past the phenomenological objection.

If we're to pursue the second line, we'll need to reconsider Faulkner's objection to Burge. For in the absence of Burge's account, it would remain unclear how initial faith in a putative source of reasons can be doxastically responsible. And we would also lack a response to Faulkner's attempt to bolster his objection to McDowell by appeal to the practical nature of speech.

Faulkner's objection to Burge makes two large assumptions concerning practical reason. The first large assumption concerns the role of practical reason in mediating between knowledge and speech. The second concerns the nature of practical reason itself.

The first assumption is that, even in the good—or best possible—case, practical reason is responsible for the constitution of speech in a way that excludes the linguistic *manifestation* of knowledge. (Recall that, as understood here, the manifestation of knowledge in a telling requires that the telling be *constitutively*, and not merely causally, dependent upon the knowledge.) In outline, the assumed model is one on which practical reason and its sub-systems have access to what the subject knows, and may operate with due regard to that knowledge, but on which practical reason and its sub-systems shape the subject's activities in a way that is only indirectly responsive to that knowledge. In

particular, the immediate precursors of speech, and the speech itself, would have had the same nature even if it had not been based on knowledge. According to an alternative model, one form of activity available to a subject is the linguistic manifestation of knowledge. On the alternative model, there is a direct connection between knowledge and the power to act, so that action forged via that connection would be a manifestation of knowledge. One role of practical reason on the alternative model would be, not to *mediate* between knowledge and action, but rather to exploit the standing power of the system to manifest knowledge. On the alternative model, practical reason would be in a position to *trigger* manifestations of knowledge, and wouldn't be restricted to mirroring knowledge through its own repertoire of proprietary activities. If it were possible to develop and defend the alternative model, it would be possible at least to defend McDowell's position.[11] For in a good case, where practical reason triggers the manifestation of knowledge in a telling, what was triggered would differ in epistemic kind from any bad case telling.

Furthermore, with one addition, such an account might provide the resources to defend Burge's account. An addition is required because, as it stands, the alternative account leaves open that the system might function perfectly and yet fail to manifest knowledge. For the fact that the power to manifest knowledge is available to the system imposes no functional requirement on its exploiting that power. And we have as yet seen no reason for making it a requirement on the proper functioning of practical reason that it exploits any particular power. As things stand, the question whether practical reason should exploit that power, rather than exploiting different powers in order to issue artful speech, can be answered only by appeal to subjects' idiosyncratic ends. Hence, for all we have said to this point, the *pro tanto* entitlement to faith in proper functioning furnishes no grounds for faith in a speaker's sincerity. In order to shore up the account we would need to defend the claim that a function of the speech system is to manifest knowledge. It would follow that, in those cases in which practical reason intervenes between belief and speech in order to produce artful speech, the intervention would evince a malfunction in the speech system.

Faulkner's second assumption is that the nature of practical reason is such that its optimal functioning is consistent with its determining an agent to issue speech that is both

[11] McDowell 1981 attempts to articulate such a position.

insincere and apt to mislead. (Notice that it is not enough for Faulkner's purpose that practical reason should give rise to artful speech where that is made suitably manifest to the audience. In that case, there would be no obstacle to exploiting one's *pro tanto* entitlement to faith in sincerity in those cases in which a speaker's artfulness was not made manifest.) Faulkner doesn't explain why he holds that practical reason has such a nature, but his comments about the basic interests of a speaker and their audience are suggestive:

> The testimonial situation, which is a conversation whose ostensible purpose is the giving and receiving of information, always involves a confluence of practical interests. …[A]n audience's basic interest is learning the truth whereas a speaker's basic interest is being believed. That is, a speaker's basic interest, qua speaker, is not informing but exerting an influence. (Faulkner, 2011: 118–9)

Faulkner's idea appears to be that agents have, as their overriding practical interest, the furthering of their own egocentric ends. The audience has certain ends for the service of which they require certain information. The speaker has certain ends for the service of which they require their audience to take something to be true. The audience and the speaker therefore have different mediate ends. Moreover, the speaker's mediate end is shaped, not by the end of helping the audience, but rather by the end of exerting a cognitive influence on them. The speaker's end therefore may not coincide in its satisfaction conditions with the end of helping the audience.

The view of practical reason that Faulkner assumes may be correct. But it is not obviously so. For while it is certainly true that individual agents' ends may fit the pattern he describes, Faulkner's argumentative purposes require that they may do so without that evincing a malfunction in practical reason. And it is not obvious that a speaker's failure to respond to the epistemic needs of an audience would not constitute such a malfunction.

According to an alternative account, the basic function of practical reason is the selection and attainment of ends that are *good*. (We can leave open for present purposes whether or not the goodness of ends is taken to be determined independently of the nature of practical reason.) On the alternative account, practical reason would not merely be at the service of ends that were selected, independently of practical reason, by agents'

idiosyncratic needs and desires. Rather, one task for practical reason would be to select the right ends, those that are consistent with moral requirements. And a secondary task would then be to select means to those ends—mediate ends—in a way that was similarly consistent with those moral requirements. Where practical reason failed in its tasks—where it selected ends or means that were inconsistent with the demands of morality—that would constitute a malfunction.

Suppose that such an account is correct. There is arguably a *pro tanto* moral requirement to the effect that one should do one's best to service an audience's epistemic ends; or, at least, that one should do one's best not to disrupt their capacity to attain such ends.[12] (Such a *pro tanto* requirement might be undermined if, for example, an audience's epistemic ends were themselves inconsistent with moral requirements. Consider, for example, Kant's example of a person with known murderous intent who demands that one tell them whether or not a potential victim is at home.[13]) One way of failing to do one's best not to disrupt an audience's epistemic ends would be to mislead them into taking to be true something that one didn't oneself take to be true. And one way of doing that would be tell the audience something that was not appropriately based on what one believes—that is, to speak artfully or insincerely—without making manifest what one were up to. It is therefore a plausible *pro tanto* moral requirement that one should avoid telling an audience something where the telling is misleading as to its artfulness or insincerity. Putting that together with the proposed account of practical reason would then deliver the result (as plausible) that misleadingly insincere or artful telling would evince a malfunction in practical reason.[14]

It would of course take extensive reflection and argument properly to assess the prospects of such an account. And it is far from obvious what the fruits of such an assessment would be. However, if such an account could be defended, it would feed into an account on which there is a *pro tanto* entitlement to accept what one is told. For (we are assuming) there exists such an entitlement to faith in the proper operation of subject's

[12] Korgaard 1986 is a useful discussion of Kant's defence of such a moral requirement.
[13] See Kant 1797.
[14] At this level of generality, the resulting position has a recognizably Kantian caste. For relevant discussion of Kant's views in this area, see Gelfert 2006, Shieber, 2010.

faculties and sub-faculties. That entitlement to faith in proper operation plausibly extends to the faculty of practical reason. And what we have just sketched is an account on which a telling would manifest the proper operation of practical reason only if it were not misleadingly artful or insincere. So, where a telling appears—to reasonably demanding standards—to be sincere, we are *pro tanto* entitled to take it to be sincere. We therefore have a second potential plug for the hole in Burge's account revealed by Faulkner's argument from the practical nature of speech. We would be entitled to faith, not only in others' epistemic capacities, but also in the goodness of their wills.[15]

## 6. Conclusion

My aim here has been to outline some questions that remain open concerning the terrain partly mapped in Faulkner's provocative book. I've pursued that aim in two ways. First, I've tried to indicate some areas that remain to be explored. The two main questions here are these. (1) What is the nature of the distinction between faith and knowledge? (2) What is the role of faith in the justificational architecture of testimonial belief? Second, I've tried to indicate some ways in which some of the paths that Faulkner argues to be impassable might yet be navigated. The four main questions here are these. (3) Should we accept externalism about testimonial knowledge? (4) What is the function of knowledge, as opposed to other forms of cognition? In particular, what is its function with respect to conditions on doxastic or practical responsibility? (5) What is the role of practical reason in the constitution of belief based speech? (6) Is misleadingly artful telling consistent with the proper function of practical reason?

**Guy Longworth**
*University of Warwick*

G.H.Longworth@warwick.ac.uk

[15] Cp. Ross 1986.

**References**

Burge, T. (1993) 'Content Preservation', *Philosophical Review*, 102: 457–488.

—— (1997) 'Interlocution, Perception, and Memory', *Philosophical Studies*, 86: 21–47.

—— (1998a) 'Computer Proof, Apriori Knowledge, and Other Minds', *Philosophical Perspectives*, 12: 1–37.

—— (1998b) 'Reason and the First Person', in B. C. Smith, C. MacDonald, and C. Wright (eds.) *Knowing Our Own Minds: Essays on Self-Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

—— (1999) 'Comprehension and Interpretation', in Lewis E. Hahn (ed.) *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.

Chigwell, A. (2007) 'Belief in Kant', *Philosophical Review*, 116 (3): 323–360.

Dretske, F. (1970) 'Epistemic Operators', *Journal of Philosophy* 67: 1007–1023.

Faulkner, P. (2011) *Knowledge on Trust*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gelfert, A. (2006) 'Kant on Testimony', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 14(4): 627–52.

Graham, P. (2000) 'Conveying Information', *Synthese*, 123 (3): 365–92.

Kant, I. (1781/1787 [1998]) *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—— (1785 [1996]) "What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?" in *Religion and Rational Theology*. Translated and edited by A. W. Wood and G. di Giovanni. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—— (1797) 'On a Supposed Right to Lie from Philanthropy', in *Kant: Practical Philosophy*. Translated and edited by M. J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Korsgaard, C. (1986) 'The Right to Lie: Kant on Dealing with Evil', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 15(4): 325–49. Reprinted in Korsgaard 1996.

—— (1996) *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McDowell, J. (1980) ‘Meaning, Communication, and Knowledge’, in Z. van Straaten ed. *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P. F. Strawson*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Reprinted in McDowell 1998.

—— (1981) ‘Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding’, in H. Parret and J. Bouveresse eds. *Meaning and Understanding*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. Reprinted in McDowell 1998.

—— 1994. ‘Knowledge By Hearsay’ in B. K. Matilal and A. Chakrabarti eds. 1994 *Knowing from Words: Western and Indian Philosophical Analyses of Understanding and Testimony*. Kluwer: Dordrecht: 195–224. Reprinted in McDowell, 1998.

—— 1998. *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Nozick, R. (1981) *Philosophical Explanations.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ross, A. (1986) ‘Why do we believe what we are told?’, *Ratio* 27: 69–88.

Shieber, J. (2010) ‘Between Autonomy and Authority: Kant on the Epistemic Status of Testimony’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 80(2): 327–48.

Sherman, B. and Harman, G. (2011) ‘Knowledge and assumptions’, *Philosophical Studies*, 156: 131–40.

Stevenson, L. (2003) ‘Opinion, Belief or Faith, and Knowledge’, *Kantian Review*, 7: 72–101.

Stine, G. (1976) ‘Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives and Deductive Closure’, *Philosophical Studies* 29: 249–261.

Vogel, J. (1990) ‘Are there counter-examples to the closure principle?’ in M. D. Roth and G. Ross eds. *Doubting: Contemporary Perspectives on Skepticism*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Williamson, T. (2000) *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.