SECOND-HAND KNOWLEDGE

AN INQUIRY INTO COGNITIVE AUTHORITY

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PREFACE

This book had its origin in a nagging concern about the apparent unconcern of librarians and information scientists for the difference between information and misinformation, joined with the apparent assumption that libraries are simply storehouses of knowledge, and the literature of science and scholarship simply the written record of the continual production of knowledge. How could one account for the strange unconcern? Was the assumption perhaps not so naive as it seemed? Satisfactory answers to these questions turned out to require looking not just at librarians and information scientists but at almost everyone else too: at those who claim to have or to produce specialized knowledge and at all those faced with the question of whose claims to believe. What was needed was a general examination of the phenomena of cognitive authority and the production of knowledge before addressing the particular situation of the information professional.

Although knowledge is its central concern, this work is not one of philosophical epistemology; philosophers will quickly see that I am not addressing their questions.[1] This is, rather, a work of social epistemology. Social epistemology presumably is what the sociology of knowledge is about, but sociologists have no monopoly on the subject. The phrase *social epistemology* was used thirty years ago by Egan and Shera to refer to study of the production, distribution, and utilization of intellectual products.[2] It is highly appropriate that the phrase should have been introduced in an essay on the theory of bibliography, for the reflective bibliographer is naturally interested in the ways in which graphic records emerge out of the attempt to increase knowledge and enter into its dissemination and utilization. Any study of these subjects leads quickly to questions of cognitive authority, or would be halfhearted and incomplete if it did not.

A writing about knowledge is likely to raise questions about whether what it says applies to itself, and I am aware that this book raises such questions. It is at several points an example of what it is talking about; I will let others decide where those points are.

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Notes

1. However, see the last paragraph of the Bibliographical Essay at the end of this work.

2. Margaret E. Egan and Jesse H. Shera, "Foundations of a Theory of Bibliography," *Library Quarterly* 22 (1952): 125-37. Shera says that Egan coined the phrase: Jesse H. Shera, *The Foundations of Education for Librarianship* (New York: Becker and Hayes, 1972), p. 112.

SECOND-HAND KNOWLEDGE

1 FIRST-HAND AND SECOND-HAND KNOWLEDGE

Perspectives

Our talk about what we think and what we learn is pervaded by metaphors, especially spatial and visual ones. We make points, take lines, occupy positions; we have views, we see others' points, but from our own angle of vision. Seeing stands for understanding and for learning in general: the way things look to me, from my point of view, from where I stand, is the way I understand things to be. Mental life is an affair of seeing and standing—and of sitting, for as people say, where you stand depends on where you sit, at least in bureaucratic circles. It is also, almost obsessively, an affair of perspective: your perspective differs from mine, narrow perspectives differ from wide ones, partial from comprehensive ones, insiders' perspectives from outsiders'.[1]

There is a difference in emphasis conveyed by the spatial and the visual metaphors. Positions and standpoints, along with points and lines, suggest location in an imaginary space of ideas, while perspectives and points of view suggest both location and what one sees from the location or how things look from the location. Sometimes when we talk metaphorically, there is available a solid literal alternative way of talking, and the metaphors are used just for stylistic reasons—to give variety and vivacity to talk. But when we talk of the mind, the metaphors are not easily replaceable by nonmetaphorical terms. The metaphors are really almost our basic vocabulary for talk about thinking and learning. It is especially hard to eliminate talk of perspectives in favor of nonmetaphorical alternatives. There is no particular reason to want to do so if the perspectival talk is understandable. But it is good occasionally to explore our metaphors because

they can mislead us. One linguist has made a persuasive case that much careful as well as casual thought and talk about human communication is warped by a faulty basic metaphor, and perhaps our thoughts about thought are also warped by pervasive but faulty metaphors.[2]

Let us look closely at the metaphor of perspective. The place to start is with the most literal case of perspective: visual perspective. The basic facts about visual perspective are these. First, what you can see, what will appear in your field of vision, depends on where you are and in what direction you are looking. Second, apparent size diminishes with distance; the farther away an object is, the smaller it looks. Third, you cannot see around corners; you see the front of a thing, but not its back or its insides. Fourth, angular relationships vary with position in the visual field. A square object looked at from an angle does not look quite square and looks less so the greater the angle between it and the viewer. We can take these as the most important facts about visual perspective.

Now let us ask how well the perspectival metaphor fits social experience, our direct involvement with the world of human thought and action. Are there analogous rules of social perception? So it seems, and quite striking analogies too. First consider the relation of apparent size and distance. The closer we are to some feature of social life, the bigger it seems to us—bigger in the sense of importance, salience, significance, bigger in the sense that it occupies a larger share of attention, effort, interest, reflection. My family, my job, my friends, my school, my town: these are big; or they naturally seem bigger to me than your family, your job, and so on. By an effort I may manage to correct for this natural illusion of size, but it does not come easily, and we are all familiar with people who absurdly overestimate not only their own importance but the importance of the things they are personally involved with. We all are egocentric and have to learn to correct for the illusions of social perception due to egocentrism. But it is doubtful that we succeed very well. Evidence of failure is everywhere. It appears, for instance, as the aggrandizement effect, "a tendency for group members to assign unrealistically high ratings to their own groups in comparison with competing groups," to think one's own school among the leading schools, one's own business among the leading businesses, and so on.[3] Apparent size varies not only with social distance but with temporal distance too. Events seem smaller the more remote they are in time. We sometimes say to ourselves that we are too close to events or situations to see them in their proper perspective and expect the passage of time to put enough distance between us and them to see them properly. The variation of apparent size with distance surely qualifies as one of the basic facts about human experience.

The corner rule applies too in a way. We encounter only the "front" that others present to us. Social encounters are managed so that each party sees only what the other permits. The dramatological view of social relations is based on the corner rule. The angular distortion rule seems to apply as well: your view of the situation differs from mine because though we are both involved, I am centrally involved and you are peripherally involved, or a bystander. What is central and what is a side issue is a matter of the angle from which one approaches it. What one faces directly and what one encounters only by witnessing from the sidelines depends on the angle of one's involvement.

Most important is the basic rule that what we can experience of the social world depends on our social location: our location in time and in space and in the network of social relationships. Whom I will encounter and what the encounter will be like depend on who and where I am: a middle-aged academic in northern California in the late twentieth century, a penniless Scottish immigrant in New York in the late nineteenth century. As we move from one social location to another, the range and character of experience change accordingly. Moving from the bottom of the heap to the top, or conversely, or from one social circle to another, we move from one range of experience to a very different one. All in all, the perspectival metaphor seems strikingly appropriate for social experience.

Lenses

It is not so clear that the perspectival metaphor works as well in other contexts in which it is frequently employed. People talk of the Marxist perspective, the clinician's perspective, the "early

symbolic-interaction perspective," the Catholic perspective, different perspectives on personality, the sociological perspective, and so on. The world as seen from the perspective of an economist looks different from the world as seen from the perspective of a psychologist; the Christian's perspective differs from the atheist's. Such talk is familiar, but it may be misleading, for these perspectives are actually baggage one carries from one social location to another. They condition not what sorts of encounters one will have, but what one will notice in them and how one will interpret them. There is another familiar metaphor that fits better. Rosa Luxemburg complained that Eduard Bernstein, having spent too much time in England, saw the world through English spectacles.[4] That is, he had acquired English ways of thinking. The concepts and theories and habitual modes of thought one carries around will determine how the world looks and what one makes of what one sees, as much as will the social location from which one views the world.

Concepts and theories constitute a sort of lens through which we look at the world.[5] If the Marxist perspective differs from others, it is because of a difference in the conceptual and theoretical apparatus employed to interpret experience, not because of a difference in location. And if we forget this, we are likely inadvertently to make a serious mistake. Different visual and social perspectives are not in conflict with each other even though what things look like from different perspectives differs enormously. Moving from one social location to another, one will see different things with varying apparent sizes and appearances, but these are just different aspects or sides of the whole complex of social life, and the more aspects or sides one can see, the better one's view of the world. The way the world really is might be thought of as the sum of the ways it looks from all possible locations, but it cannot be thought of as the sum of the ways it appears when viewed with all possible sorts of conceptual and theoretical apparatus, all possible theoretical lenses. Many of those lenses give inaccurate as well as distorted pictures of the world. They lead one to think one is seeing things that are not there, and they prevent one from seeing things that are there. There are certainly mistakes of judgment to which we are prone simply by virtue of the laws of social perspective. The

egocentric illusion of apparent size is the most obvious. We can at least partly overcome those illusions without giving up having experience entirely. But the mistakes of judgment to which we are led by bad theories and inapplicable concepts have to be overcome by giving up the theories and concepts. We have to discard the faulty lenses for better ones.

We have to beware thinking that all the different partial perspectives provided by different conceptual approaches to the world can somehow be coordinated and merged to arrive at a single, consistent, total view of the world. There are certainly many different conceptual and theoretical approaches to the world that are mutually consistent though they provide different pictures. What an economist sees is likely to differ from what a sociologist sees, but we may be able easily enough to add them together to get a more complete view. But there are plenty of approaches that give results that cannot be added together; they give pictures that are not pictures of this world at all. The perspectival metaphor is likely to lead us to underestimate or play down conceptual conflict; "you and I have different views, but that's all right; it's simply a difference in point of view and no doubt we're each right in our own ways." That would be fair enough if our conceptual schemes were the same or at least consistent with each other but not if they are not.

If concepts and theories are metaphorically lenses through which one sees the world, is there anything corresponding to sight without glasses? We put on spectacles to correct our vision, but the wrong pair of glasses can make things worse. Sight without glasses must be simply use of common sense. A person must always have some theoretical approach to experience, some conceptual framework, just as he must always occupy some social location or another. Experience is inconceivable apart from both. Common sense is simply one's basic supply of notions of what the world is like—what kinds of things there are, how they work, how one can learn about them. A basic metaphysics and epistemology are parts of everyone's mental furniture. The name for them is common sense. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz says, common sense is a theory of the world—a thin theory but nevertheless a theory.[6] Of course, there is not just a single commonsense theory of the world; what is common sense to one

group is madness to another. But common sense, whatever its content in a particular case, does represent the "natural" conceptual approach to the world. Unaided common sense can be helped by appropriate conceptual and theoretical apparatus that, as lenses or spectacles, extend the range of perception and improve its acuity; it can also be hindered by distorting lenses.

The View From The Top

In one respect the metaphor of perspective is misleading when applied to social experience. As I move away in space from a particular point, objects seem smaller and smaller, but I can also see a wider and wider area. As I move up into space, the cities and towns look smaller and smaller, but I can see more of the world until, on a spaceship headed for the moon, I can see the whole planet (though only one side of it and only the outside). Our perspective or field of vision widens. We come closer to seeing objects in their true proportions as we see the things we were previously close to in the context of a larger range of territory. Now do we not do the same in social perception? As we move away from a social situation, does it not only seem smaller but also part of a wider field? Not really. Social encounters and social perception are short-range phenomena. The visual analogy would hold if there were a limit, say ten feet, to the distance beyond which we could not see an object at all, even in the best light. Except for the crucially important possibility of long-range communication by mail or telephone, when we leave a situation, we are no longer experiencing what we did when in the situation, only in an attenuated way. We cease to have those experiences at all. We may come back for a visit from time to time and others may report to us what is going on, but it is now outside the range of our personal experience. Others' reports are a pale substitute for being there ourselves, as others' reports of what they can see but we cannot are only a pale substitute for seeing, even at a great distance. The perspectival metaphor fails at a crucial point.

All of this goes against common notions. When we move up in a hierarchy, from clerk to district manager to chairman of the board of directors, is there not a sense in which we move to a position from which we can, and are indeed obligated to, see

the big picture? And as we move away from events in time, is it not true that we can see an entire large pattern of events better than we can when we are in the middle of them? Is this not the advantage of the historian over the journalist? And does not the detached spectator think he is better able than those caught up in the excitement of active participation in a political campaign to see the campaign in its proper perspective? No. The right way to describe the situation is to say that the director, the historian, the detached spectator deliberately construct pictures of the situation, trying to include significant features while omitting insignificant ones, trying to give each feature its proper share of space.

The picture is constructed from materials provided by others' reports and observations, as well as by one's own direct experience, and memories of previous occurrences. The detached spectator is not simply spectating; he is painting a picture, constructing a representation, which he works over, erasing this part and adding that, enlarging this feature and diminishing that, as he revises his notions of proper proportion in the light of his readings of the reports that reach him. The farther he is from the scene, the more he has to rely on reports from others, and the less his experience can guide him in preparing his picture. The view from the top is not a view seen from the top but a picture drawn from the vantage point of responsibility (perhaps self-imposed) for getting a good picture of a large scene, based in part on what one has oneself observed and in part on what others tell one. The larger the scene to be depicted, the more one has to rely on what others tell one. The view from the top is a picture drawn largely at second-hand; we can paint a picture of the world as it looks from ten thousand miles up that is based entirely on what we ourselves see, but our pictures of the social world have to be based on hearsay if they are to be big pictures.

Experientia Docet?

Experience teaches, but not much.[7] Most of us go through life occupying a narrow range of social locations. If all we could know of the world was what we could find out on the basis of first-hand experience, we would know little. But what we can

find out from first-hand experience itself depends crucially on the stock of ideas we bring to the interpretation and understanding of our encounters with the world. If we had to depend entirely on ideas that we ourselves invented, we would make little sense of the world. We mostly depend on others for ideas, as well as for information about things outside the range of direct experience. Others supply us with new theoretical perspectives as well as with information from other social perspectives. Much of what we think about the world is what we have second hand from others. The phrase *second hand* is especially appropriate in suggesting second best, not so good as first hand; for in an obvious way, finding out by being told differs from finding out by seeing or hearing or living through an experience.[8] Being told about a piece of music is no substitute for hearing it, reading about being in love is no substitute for being in love, and in general, the more remote anything told us is from our own experience, the thinner, more abstract, and purely verbal it is. Since there are plenty of experiences we would like to avoid having, the thinness of a merely verbal description is often not to be lamented. Second best is quite good enough. But elsewhere, verbal reports are not quite satisfactory substitutes for first-hand doing and observing. Yet we have to make do with them if we are to transcend the limits of personal experience.

What leads us to seek second-hand knowledge, and to whom are we led? Necessity is part of the answer to the first; "to those whom we think know something we do not know" is the short answer to the second. But what explains the fact that different people seem to need such different kinds and amounts of second-hand knowledge, and the fact that different people seem to have such different notions of who the people are from whom they can learn? We have to explore not what is known about the world, but rather what people think about knowledge—how they decide who knows what about what. That is a question about cognitive authority.

Notes

1. See Robert K. Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (1972): 9-47;

and Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Kegan Paul, 1936). The historian Peter Gay calls the perspectivist view "the stock in trade of historiography, which justifies its existence with the argument that historians are doomed to limited perspectives." See his *Style in History* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), p. 197. For one of many of the discussions of perspectivism, see Gene Wise, *American Historical Explanations* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1973), pp. 36-53.

2. Michael J. Reddy, "The Conduit Metaphor--A Case of Frame Conflict in Our Language about Language," in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 284-324.

3. Theodore Caplow and Reece J. McGee, *The Academic Marketplace* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1965), p. 37. Amusing confirmation is found in Frank R. Westie, "Academic Expectations for Professional Immortality: A Study of Legitimation," *Sociological Focus* 5 (1972): 1-25.

4. David McLellan, *Marxism after Marx: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 23.

5. Use of this metaphor is found everywhere. See, for instance, Oscar Handlin, *Truth in History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 1: "The scholar's vision is subjective, at least to the extent that his own point of observation and the complex lenses of prejudice, interest, and preconception shape what he discerns and therefore what he can portray."

6. Clifford Geertz, "Common Sense as a Cultural System," *Antioch Review* 33 (Spring 1975): 5-26.

7. See Berndt Brehmer, "In One Word: Not from Experience," *Acta Psychologica* 45 (1980): 223-41, for a fascinating discussion of failures to learn from experience.

8. Good discussion of this is Jerome S. Bruner and David R. Olson, "Learning through Experience and Learning through Media," in *Communication Technology and Social Policy*, ed. George Gerbner et al. (New York: Wiley, 1973), pp. 209-27.

2 COGNITIVE AUTHORITY

Authority, Influence, Credibility

All I know of the world beyond the narrow range of my own personal experience is what others have told me. It is all hearsay. But I do not count all hearsay as equally reliable. Some people know what they are talking about, others do not. Those who do are my cognitive authorities.

It is tempting to avoid using the word *authority* entirely when talking of the relation between a person and those others from whom he thinks he can learn. The very mention of authority is likely to produce strong emotions, usually hostile. But *cognitive authority* is the right name for the phenomenon we want to explain. The best alternative is *epistemic authority*, which is no less offensive.[1] Passions may be dampened by realizing that what is at issue is not whether those who claim authority actually deserve it but simply what cognitive authority is and on what basis people do recognize it.

It is easier to start by talking of people as abstract A's and B's. We shall say that person A is a cognitive authority for person B with respect to sphere of interest S to the degree that what A says about questions falling within the sphere S carries weight for B. A is a cognitive authority for me in matters of politics to the degree that what A says about political questions carries weight with me. If what A says carries a lot of weight, he has a lot of authority: if it carries no weight, he has no authority.[2]

The first point to notice is that authority is a relationship involving at least two people. No one can be an authority all by himself; there has to be someone else for whom he is an authority. Having authority is thus different from being an expert, for one can be an expert even though no one else realizes or recognizes that one is, and even if one were the last person on

earth. The second point to notice is that cognitive authority is a matter of degree; one can have a little of it or a lot. The third is that it is relative to a sphere of interest. On some questions, one may speak with authority; on other sorts of questions one might speak with none at all. A person might be an authority for many people but in different degrees or in different spheres. What A says about politics might carry great weight with me and a few others; what he says about religion might carry considerable weight with others, who ignore what he says about politics. If we speak about the authorities on a subject, we might mean either those whom everyone recognizes as cognitive authorities on the subject or those whom we recognize and whom everyone else ought to recognize, whether or not they actually do. It is one thing to find out who is recognized as an authority, quite another to decide that he ought or ought not to be recognized. The second is the question on which passions are aroused.

Cognitive authority is curiously different from the other familiar kind of authority, that of the person who is in a position to tell others what to do. Administrative authority, as we can call it, involves a recognized right to command others, within certain prescribed limits.[1] But the world's leading authority on butterflies, say, has no power to command. He cannot tell people what to think. One can acquire administrative authority by being appointed or elected to a position, but one cannot be appointed or elected the world's leading authority on butterflies, nor can one acquire that status by conquest or inheritance. Rather, cognitive authority is a kind of influence. Those who are my cognitive authorities are among those who influence my thinking.[4] Others who are not cognitive authorities may also influence me. The difference between them and the cognitive authorities is that I recognize the latter's influence as proper and the former's as not proper. Advertisements on television may influence my thoughts about which products are best or which political candidates deserve my vote. If I knew this was happening, I would try to counteract this effect, for I do not think they should be allowed to influence on my thinking.[5] The person whom I recognize as having cognitive authority is one whom I think should be allowed to have influence on my thinking, for I suppose he has a good basis for saying what he does. Whether he does explain to me why he thinks as he does or how he knows what he claims, I suppose that he could do this, and that whether or not I could follow him perfectly, his story would be satisfactory.

Cognitive authority is influence on one's thoughts that one would consciously recognize as proper. The weight carried by the words is simply the legitimate influence they have. Since we are only imperfectly aware of the ways and the degrees to which what others say influences our thoughts, we are likely to be unaware of the degrees of others' cognitive influence over us and hence of their authority. If we did know, we might feel that we were influenced less or more than we should be. If we lose faith in one of our authorities, he ceases to fill this role as we cease to believe that he has a good basis for saying what he does. He might continue to have an influence on us, but it would be one we would, if we realized the fact, think improper.

Cognitive authority is clearly related to credibility. The authority's influence on us is thought proper because he is thought credible, worthy of belief. The notion of credibility has two main components: competence and trustworthiness. A person is trustworthy if he is honest, careful in what he says, and disinclined to deceive. A person is competent in some area of observation or investigation if he is able to observe accurately or investigate successfully. In common sense and in a court of law, we distinguish between the ordinary competence of the average person and the special competence of the expert. There is a range of events and situations that we expect that any person of sound mind and normal faculties could report on correctly, matters in which we are all roughly equally competent observers and reporters because they require no special skill or knowledge to arrive at a correct description. This is the basis of ordinary social life. We are largely able to go on the assumption that our friends, neighbors, and work associates are generally trustworthy and of at least ordinary competence so that we can believe what they report of their own experience.[6] Insofar as we do make this assumption, we recognize these people as cognitive authorities in the sphere of their own experience, on matters they have been in a position to observe or undergo. (There may be some who would prefer not to speak of cognitive authority in this kind

of case, but it is hard to see why one should not.) But we also recognize some people as having more than ordinary competence in particular spheres, and the spheres within which we think them competent are those in which they might come to have cognitive authority. Our cognitive authorities are clearly among those we think credible sources, but we might recognize someone as credible in an area even though he did not in fact have any influence on our thoughts. Those we think credible constitute the potential pool of cognitive authorities on which we might draw.

Knowledge and Opinion

What is the nature of the special competence that we attribute to whose whom we recognize as cognitive authorities? We naturally say that they are people whom we think know more than others. It is not a question of intelligence. A person of quite ordinary intelligence may have a special competence that we recognize as giving his words great weight. Neither is it a question of a stock of information. Significantly, in a classic treatise on the law of evidence, the expert is described as one especially fitted to acquire knowledge on the matter he speaks about.' It is not enough that he already have knowledge. This is understandable, for the point of introducing expert testimony into a trial is not to learn some body of previously accumulated knowledge but to get opinion on a new question arising in a particular case. The special competence that justifies cognitive authority amounts to more than a good and well-stocked memory. But what more?

It will help if we reflect on the old commonsense distinction between knowledge and opinion. This is the distinction between questions that have been settled beyond a doubt and questions on which doubt remains: between closed and open questions. The distinction is rough and practical, not subtle and speculative. There are hosts of questions that for the ordinary purposes of ordinary life we count as settled for all practical purposes: things we cannot seriously doubt, matters in which doubt seems capricious or abnormal. Epistemologists may debate endlessly whether we really do know the things we claim to know, the things we think have been settled beyond a doubt. That we can

and do have a large stock of beliefs that we treat as closed questions is obvious. A question that is closed at one time may, of course, open up at another time; closure is not necessarily a permanent condition, and although we may be quite sure that a question will stay closed forever, we can easily be mistaken. What was a matter of knowledge may come to be a matter of opinion.

Whether a question is closed may itself be a closed question, but it may also be wide open. One group of people contends that the correctness of the theory of evolution, at least in general outline, has been established; its correctness is a closed question for them. Another group believes that it is very much an open question. The latter will hold that it is a matter of opinion whether the theory of evolution is correct; the former will hold that it is a matter not of opinion but of knowledge. It is precisely on this sort of question that we may consult our cognitive authorities. We want to know the status of a question: whether it is open or closed, settled or unsettled. The cognitive authority may have an answer. We can, if we like, treat this as knowledge about knowledge: the authority is one who knows about the status of questions within his sphere. Or we can, and this seems preferable, treat this as a matter of cognitive posture, as if expressed this way: "The appropriate stance to take is to treat this as a closed question to which the answer is such and such." Taken in that way, then, the cognitive authority's competence consists not only in being able to give us information about the world (first-level information) but in being able to advise us on how we should treat certain pieces of information.

If a question is open, there may be few or many competing and currently available answers, all of which will have the status of opinion. An opinion may be "almost knowledge"—the question being almost closed, one opinion having very strong support, almost enough to settle the question. If we treat a question as open, we next want to know the status of the various competing answers. Which is best? Are they evenly matched? Can any be ignored completely? Here too, different individuals and groups will have different answers, strenuously arguing the merits of their own view and denigrating those of others. In this sort of situation, we turn to our cognitive authorities for advice

on which opinion to prefer or what attitude to take toward several competing opinions. Again we can treat this as knowledge about knowledge, and the authority as one who has second-order knowledge about the merits and defects, strengths and weaknesses, of opinions on an open question. Or, better, we may treat it as a matter of cognitive posture, and the ability to give good advice on what should be our stance toward the competing opinions. Taken in this way, we seek advice about a practical attitude, which might be expressed this way: "The best thing to do is to take this opinion as so well supported as to amount almost to knowledge, and ignore the others," or "The best thing to do is to treat them all as speculative and unfounded."

The cognitive authority is one to whom we turn for information but also one to whom we turn for advice, even (or particularly) in cases where it is clear that there is no knowledge to be had at all. Cognitive authorities are valued not just for their stocks of knowledge (answers to closed questions) but for their opinions (answers to open questions) and for their advice on the proper attitude or stance on questions and their proposed answers. Cognitive authority is not limited to the provision of knowledge or information, stopping when the limits of available knowledge are reached. Cognitive authority can extend to any sort of question: moral, religious, political, aesthetic, technical, scientific, philosophical—and be exercised in areas where all questions are open and expected to remain open indefinitely. Cognitive authority can extend over any province of thought, and although the authority cannot tell us what to think, he can influence us as in any other belief or attitude.

Degrees of Authority

The weight that one of my authorities' words carry for me might be so great as to settle questions for me. That he says this is so is enough to close the question. An absolute authority in a given sphere would be one whose answers to questions within that area were always taken as settling the question. This is the limiting case, not the ordinary case. Perhaps the hostility that many people feel toward the idea of authority in matters of thought comes from the notion that authority must be either absolute or nonexistent. But everyone takes other people's opin-

ions and advice with different degrees of seriousness, depending on who the people are, and the essence of cognitive authority is simply that: taking people's opinions and advice more or less seriously. A cognitive egalitarian might hold that on some matters, or even on all matters, everybody's word should carry equal weight; in practice no one acts as if he thought this. Instead everyone recognizes others as unequal in judgment, even if equal in voting power. A cognitive nihilist might hold that no one's word should carry any weight, that we should never admit any influence of others on our thoughts as proper. In practice it would be hard to find many cognitive nihilists. We do trust others in varying degrees; we rely more or less heavily on other people as sources of information and advice, and the phenomenon of cognitive authority is just as real for those who recognize no absolute authorities as for those (if there are any) who recognize only absolute authorities.

Spheres of Authority

Authority is limited to spheres. On questions falling within the sphere, one speaks with authority, but on questions outside it, one may speak with no authority at all. But spheres of authority cannot always be defined precisely. We must not expect to find a neat geography of authority, with different individuals occupying well-specified areas. Some spheres of authority undoubtedly are fairly well defined, others exceedingly ill defined. The difference between a specialist and a generalist is a difference between more and less well-defined and circumscribed spheres of authority. But even when the specialist can define quite sharply a sphere within which he claims expertise, his authority may in fact extend well beyond that area, with diminishing degrees.

The well-defined sphere is actually a core area in which authority is at a maximum, surrounded by a penumbral area in which authority holds, but in smaller degrees. It is common for specialists to explain to others that the questions being put to them fall outside their area of expertise, a situation in which others are prepared to give a weight to their words that the specialist thinks they should not give. But although

sphere of authority; that is for others to do, with his help. Spheres of authority can be negotiated. The specialist offers to speak for the record on a certain range of matters, his audience urges him to widen the range, the specialist reluctantly agrees, and so on until no further adjustments are conceded. Or in the opposite situation, the specialist bluffly declares himself ready to speak on a broad range of matters; the audience tries to persuade him to confine his remarks to a narrower range. It is finally for the audience to decide on the scope of the sphere within which it would value the authority's words.

There are exceptions to this general rule. In what may be the extreme case, the authority is the one granted the right to define his own sphere of authority. This is the situation for one who believes in the authority.[8] Belief in is, or essentially involves, trust in the other, and trust may be so complete that one says, "Tell me what it is you know about; I trust you not to claim anything you do not possess." One who comes to believe in a religious leader, a prophet, a political messiah, may willingly and eagerly submit to the will of the leader and ask to be supplied with a definition of the sphere within which the leader wishes to be taken as authoritative. The highest degree of authority is likely to be authority that is in this way self-defining, authority that extends to the question of the scope of the sphere of authority itself.

We might recognize a person as an authority on everything: a universal authority. Perhaps children at some stage think their parents know everything; they take them to be universal authorities. An adult might also suppose that another adult already knew or was able to find out just about anything worth knowing at all, and treat him as a universal authority. If our authority is not supposed to know everything already but simply to be able to find out what others know, then one might indeed have some reason to think him worth taking seriously on all subjects. If he does not already know about some matter, he can consult someone who does or some book that will tell him. And are not libraries supposed to be storehouses of knowledge, in which one might be able to find answers to any question that can be answered at all?

Bases of Authority

People come to have influence over our thoughts in a variety of ways. However they acquire such influence, as long as we think it right that they should have it, we will be prepared to defend and justify their influence. We will have answers to the questions," Why do you listen to him?" and "Why do you let him influence you so?" The answer "because he knows so much" will not be enough, for the question then becomes, "What makes you think so?" Our task now is to explore the available answers to that question: the kinds of answers conventionally recognized as appropriate. The situation is not one in which we, as ourselves knowledgeable in a certain sphere, have examined others to see how much they know about this sphere. Whatever our reasons for thinking the others deserving of cognitive authority, it is not that we have conducted a direct test of their knowledge. Rather, we have to cite indirect tests or indexes of credibility. The situation is one in which we may be faced with a number of different people all claiming to be knowledgeable but all having different things to say on the same subject. Given that we ourselves are not knowledgeable on the subject, how can we choose among them, or how can we defend our choice once made?

There are quite conventional ways of answering these questions, as there should be, for the questions come up repeatedly in ordinary life. A standard answer to the question, "What qualifies him to speak on the subject?" is that it is his business; he makes his living dealing with that subject. The old practical rule is that *cuique in arte sud credendum*, each one is to be trusted in matters of his own metier; occupational specialization provides a basis for recognition of cognitive authority. An equally familiar answer is that he has studied the subject systematically and deeply and has earned advanced degrees in the subject. To the old occupational rule we have added the new rule of formal education, with its corollary, the credential or degree, as evidence of successful completion of programs of formal study. These two bases for cognitive authority are recognized in our courts of law. Expert witnesses must be shown to be qualified as experts by "knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education." Barring a direct test of knowledge or skill, which we

cannot administer when we are not ourselves already knowledgeable, evidence of training or education or of practical experience, especially in an occupational role, provides support for claims to expert status.*

One can be an expert without being a great expert. Experience and education are taken as evidence of a basic but not outstanding competence. As a practical matter, we take reputation among others who are supposed to be experts in the same line of work or study as indication of outstanding competence. A "leading expert in the field" is recognized as such simply by discovering that other practitioners in the same field think highly of him. Dependence on peer opinion means that we have no way of identifying those neglected or unrecognized geniuses who are unduly or improperly ignored or denigrated by their peers, but there is nothing we can do about that if we lack independent tests of competence.

The reputation rule for identifying great experts is not a simple one, for a reputation may be high in one group of supposed peers and low in another, and it is not always reputation among peers that is taken to count. One might have a great reputation among those outside the peer group and a lesser one inside. The outsiders' opinions may outweigh the insiders'. The reputation rule will work unambiguously in many cases but in others will give different results depending on how one chooses the appropriate group, the reference group, whose collective opinion is taken as an index of competence.

There is another reputation rule, of the greatest practical importance. If those of whom I myself think well think well of person A, then I will incline to think well of A and think myself justified in doing so. If those whose word counts heavily with me say that A's word counts heavily with them, I will be inclined to recognize A as having cognitive authority. Those already established as my cognitive authorities can transfer authority to another. I believe him because I believe them, and they say that he can be believed. As reputation among peers unknown to me can be taken to provide an indirect test of competence, so can reputation among the special group of people who are already trusted as knowledgeable. This is simply the omnipresent phenomenon of personal recommendation. As the old boy network,

it has a bad name, but as the principle that one can trust those who are trusted by those one trusts, it is a central and ineradicable feature of social life. We cling to this rule to find our way through the confusion of life.

We should make a special place for common consent as a basis of cognitive authority. If everyone recognizes A as an authority in a sphere, I am likely to do so as well and think myself justified in doing so. This amounts to a generalization of the two other reputation rules. First, if my own authorities and everybody else say that A is wise, that is a good reason for me to think him wise. Second, if A's colleagues all think him wise and everyone else does too, that is good reason for me to think him wise. Reputation is not proof of wisdom, knowledge, or competence, but we take it as a reasonable basis for preferring to listen to one person rather than another.

Any kind of successful accomplishment may be taken as an index of special competence. Quite apart from the reputation a person has among various groups, we may think ourselves able to evaluate the person's performances and may use the evaluation as a basis for recognition of cognitive authority. The general principle is this: If a person can achieve striking results of whatever kind in some area of life, then he must have whatever knowledge it takes to do this and is deserving of being recognized as a cognitive authority in that area. Of course, this performance rule is applicable only when the performance to be judged is something other than the creation or articulation of theory or doctrine, for that is just the sort of performance we will be unable to evaluate for ourselves. To make predictions that we ourselves can verify, to produce startling effects—miracles, prodigies—that we ourselves can witness, is to give us an indirect ground for supposing that the performer has some special competence. The doctor who cures patients (especially those given up for lost by other doctors), the general who wins campaigns (especially if quickly, or at little cost in life, or against great odds), the entrepreneur who founds great business empires, may be held by virtue of these performances to have what it takes to do these things and to be eligible as cognitive authorities. Those who attain great power or wealth by their own efforts may qualify under the same principle. Just what will be

the sphere within which authority is recognized is another matter.

When available, this performance rule is a powerful one for justifying recognition of cognitive authority. Since reputations are based on performance (not exclusively, but in large part), this rule underlies the reputation rule. We use the reputation rule in cases where we cannot ourselves evaluate the performances on which reputation is based. But the performance test is often unavailable and often inconclusive. The scholar makes no predictions that others might confirm or disconfirm, cures no ills, performs no miracles, but simply tries to discover what is true and what is false in his area of inquiry. There is no external test of successful accomplishment for the outsider to apply. Where there is an external performance, success is often ambiguous. It is not clear that the patient has benefitted from the doctor's treatment; we cannot tell whether the economist's advice has improved matters, for it is not clear that matters are improved. Or improvement is not clearly due to treatment: the patient feels better but we cannot tell if it was the doctor's treatment that was responsible. Or we are sure that treatment produced results but wonder if treatment really was based on a special fund of knowledge at all, rather than on luck or on an ability the doctor has but does not really understand. Or results of the performance will show up only in the long run, and we cannot now tell whether it was a success. Or results of performance are closely guarded secrets or discoverable only by an effort that is too great to be practical. There are so many cases in which the performance rule is not available at all or is inconclusive that it cannot serve us as the principal basis for justifying cognitive authority.

We have been considering indirect ways of justifying the recognition of cognitive authority, but there is one crucial direct way that cannot be ignored. Authority can be justified simply on the ground that one finds the views of an individual intrinsically plausible, convincing, or persuasive. If a source repeatedly tells me things that I find illuminating and that ring true, I may come to expect more of the same from him, to count on him, refer others to him, quote him to others. He will have acquired cognitive authority over me. As can any other authority, he can lose it too by failing to continue to say things that impress me

in the same way. And one who on other grounds—of experience, training, reputation, ostensible performance—might claim cognitive authority will not acquire it if what he tells me fails the test of intrinsic plausibility. I simply cannot take seriously views that are so blatantly implausible.

The test of intrinsic plausibility is not available for many spheres of interest. What a specialist has to say may be so remote from my own experience and so distant from any of my established beliefs about the world that it is neither plausible nor implausible. The closer the specialist comes to talking of matters on which I already have a stock of beliefs and convictions, the more likely it is that the plausibility test will be available and will discriminate among opposing views. Our prior beliefs set limits to what we can accept as new beliefs and guide us in the acceptance of others as cognitive authorities. What we cannot believe and what we find it easy to believe among the new things we are told depend heavily on what we already believed. The plausibility test, where it applies, overrides all other reasons for accepting or rejecting authority—or all but one.

Finally, authority can be acquired and defended on the basis simply of personal trust, belief in a person. Particularly striking cases are those of what Max Weber called charismatic authority.[10] The prophet, the hero, the saint may attract a complete personal devotion that carries with it a readiness to let the individual define his own sphere of cognitive authority. In less extreme cases, we may be so impressed by a person, so attracted or mesmerized by him that we are prepared to believe whatever he says. We need no external tests of extraordinary performance (though these may be available), no evidence of reputation (though this may in fact influence us), no credentials or degrees; the direct impression of the individual personality may be enough. Even the ordinarily final test of intrinsic plausibility may be overridden. We may be converted to new views. In conversion we undergo the sort of internal revolution that makes nonsense into sense, the implausible plausible, the odious attractive, and all—at least apparently—in the twinkling of an eye. Not only religious and political figures acquire cognitive authority in this way; the followers of a founder of a scientific school may become followers in the same way and for the same

reason that the followers of a religious prophet become followers, though they will probably be adept at finding other reasons for adhering to the doctrine of the great teacher.

Any of these various bases of authority might be cited in defense of one's reliance on the word of another; clearly any of them might be challenged. They are all recognizably legitimate or appropriate to mention. We all at one time or another appeal to experience, training, publicly appraisable accomplishment, reputation among peers, reputation among our other cognitive authorities, intrinsic plausibility, and think it proper to do so. The final appeal, to one's trust in an individual, may seem the least rational or objective but may also be recognized as the most compelling and unchallengeable—unchallengeable not because trust proves anything but because it is uncontrollable, irresistible, and so outside the realm of deliberate choice. But they are all inconclusive, mere signs or indexes of legitimacy of cognitive authority. None of them is sufficient to establish authority beyond any challenge and none of them is sufficient to determine either the sphere of authority or the degree of authority even when recognition of some authority in some sphere is not challenged. It is worth dwelling on the degree to which justifications of cognitive authority can be porous. We will concentrate on the difficult relationship between expertise and authority.

Expertise and Authority

We generally use the terms *expert* and *authority* interchangeably; the authorities on a subject are the experts in that subject, and vice versa. This is natural enough since we take expertise to mean the possession of some special body of knowledge and authority to rest on the possession of knowledge. But it is a good idea to put some space between the ideas of expertise and authority and to be cautious about the connection between them. Although the expert may have some special body of knowledge, it may not be knowledge about the world and may not warrant recognition of authority. We can comfortably ignore the difference between expertise and authority only by assuming that the experts are not only experts about something but that what they are expert about is some field of real knowledge of the world. If we no longer recognize authorities in astrology, it is because

we no longer believe that astrologists possess a special body of knowledge about the world; but we can still recognize a difference between inexpert and expert astrologists. The experts may not know anything special about the world, but they do know something that novice astrologists do not. Astrology has bodies of doctrine, and some people are (or were, especially when astrology was an academic subject) better than others at the exposition, development, and application of doctrine.[11] The question is whether one should believe even a very expert astrologist, whether expertise warrants cognitive authority. For most of us (or most sensible people—there are huge numbers of people for whom astrology is still a serious subject with serious authorities), the answer is that it does not.[12] There is expertise without authority. Neither long practical experience nor systematic study leading to higher degrees in astrology will support a claim of cognitive authority, though they will support a claim of expertise.

The question arises whether there are not other examples of expertise without knowledge, expertise that does not justify authority. Not only are there brands of expertise no longer regarded as corresponding to any real knowledge; there are numerous instances of competing brands of expertise all claiming authority in the same sphere, and the question arises which brand, if any of them, is the right brand of expertise to warrant cognitive authority. It is not just that there are different people claiming expertise, among whom we may want or have to choose, but that there are different kinds of expertise among which we may have to choose. So we have a double problem: first, to choose among competing brands of expertise, and then to select a particular expert representing the chosen brand.

In practice the two problems may not be seen as two: the jury members, faced with conflicting expert testimony from representatives of two conflicting brands of psychotherapy, may telescope the two questions into a single one, of what weight (the term used in discussions of the law of evidence) to give the testimony of each. But the distinction remains. Different theologies compete to be recognized as authoritative in matters of the supernatural. Different brands of economic analysis compete to be recognized as authoritative in matters of diagnosis and

therapy for economic ills. Different psychotherapies compete in the sphere of questions of mental health and illness. We can recognize a person's expertise in a particular line of doctrine and inquiry while still wondering whether he should be taken seriously on substantive questions within the sphere he claims to occupy. And we may decide that the leading experts in their field really have nothing to tell us that is worth knowing. If evidence of experience or training is evidence of expertise, it is a long jump from expertise to authority. We may often make the jump without thinking; it may take the emergence of a public controversy over the rival claims of competing brands of expertise to make us wonder whether we should make it.

Even when recognized expertise is taken to warrant cognitive authority, the sphere of authority remains to be settled. The law is careful to insist that one's claim to expert standing is valid only within one's specific field of expertise. The doctor is not asked to testify as an expert witness on matters outside the range of his medical specialty. Outside the court of law, things are not so clear. There the sphere of cognitive authority is often negotiated by the authority and his audience to extend far beyond what the specialist thinks is the core area of his expertise, or to be restricted to a small part of the area over which he is willing to claim authority. We may be inclined to think that there is an objective or at least universally recognized rule governing the scope for which expertise justifies cognitive authority: a rule of specialization, that authority must not be claimed or recognized on any question outside the area within which one can claim expertise. But the rule is not generally accepted and is not very solid in any case. Authority is recognized far beyond the limits of specialization.

We recognize the existence of generalists, people to whom we can turn for advice on a wide range of questions, much wider than that within which they would claim to be specialists. It is to the generalist, for example, that one has to turn for advice on how to treat competing specialties; it is no good asking the specialists. The people whose views on social, political, and ethical matters we value most are unlikely to be people who speak strictly as specialists and only on questions falling within the scope of a specialty. But there are interesting individual and

national differences of attitude to different kinds of generalists. One of the striking differences between France and the United States, to take a glaring instance, concerns public expectations of eminent literary artists and intellectuals. As one perceptive European observer notes, "No American would think of going to a novelist or dramatist for advice on civic or social questions, for such questions fall within the competence of 'experts' only". In France, by contrast, the great writers are *maîtres à penser*, teachers of thinking, and recognized as sources of serious opinion and advice on a wide range of social and political topics.[13] A French commentator provides an American-like version of the same situation: in France "writers with no authority whatsoever can obtain large audiences even when they treat of subjects about which they quite openly boast of knowing nothing—a phenomenon which is inconceivable in the United States."[14] But Americans, or many of them, would think it appropriate to turn to a successful businessman for advice on civic or social questions, or to a successful general for advice on political or administrative questions. Successful accomplishment is taken to justify recognition of cognitive authority in areas far from the immediate field of accomplishment, though people (and nations) differ as to what sorts of accomplishment justify what sort of sphere of cognitive authority.

But the rule of specialization is at best elastic. An area of specialization can be variously described and interpreted. Taking the narrowest view, one might suppose a person qualified as an expert only with regard to questions that one had already answered oneself by original, independent research; a person would be an expert only on his own original work. At the other extreme, one might be supposed to be qualified as an expert with regard to questions that one's own work had put one in a position to illumine, if not to settle, questions to which the point of view and the training and experience acquired as a specialist were relevant and helpful. In that case, the businessman, the general, the artist might all plausibly claim that their work in their home fields did indeed qualify them as experts in relation to questions remote from home. After all, they have to deal with human nature, social organization, plans, and implementation of plans, and their experience allows them to make sense of a

wide variety of human situations. Such a claim of transferable competence or wide-ranging expertise may be ridiculous in any particular case, but the general claim is not obviously nonsensical. So whether by ignoring or bending the rule of specialization, we recognize cognitive authority far beyond what a narrow reading of the rule would warrant.

By now it will be apparent that as appeal to expertise does not settle the question of spheres of authority, neither does it settle the question of degrees of authority. How much weight it is appropriate to give to the words of an expert specialist or a generalist within the appropriate sphere of authority is a practical question to which there appear to be no ready conventional answers. The members of the jury are left to decide for themselves what weight should be given to expert testimony, with no instruction on how this can or should be done. The problem is serious, but any attempt to clarify it immediately takes us into deep and dark waters of ignorance. Let us cautiously try for some small advance in understanding.

Do We Believe Our Authorities?

We have to talk about memory. Much of what we have heard or read remains in memory with a label attached, recording where and when we heard or read it. Of course we immediately forget much of what we hear or read. Of the part that we remember, we tend to recall the source as well as some version of the content. After a while we may forget the source while retaining the content, though after we forget who told us or where we read it, we will still remember that someone told us or that we read it somewhere. It is as if the source label was defaced or faded beyond reading. Something heard from several sources may be remembered simply as something "they" say, the "they" being no longer individually identifiable after a while. Information acquired a long time ago may be recalled as "what they taught us in school," "what the books tell you to do in a case like this," and "what people used to say about him."

Do we believe what we are told? Certainly not everything. I recall hearing Smith say that Brown was vindictive, but I do not believe it. I have heard people say that Jones is ambitious, and

I do think that is right. I am told that Green is going to run for president, but I have no idea whether that is so. Clearly we need not have an opinion on the truth or falsity of something we have heard, even when we recollect hearing it and remember where and when we heard it.

What about things we have heard from those who are cognitive authorities for us? What happens to those bits of information or advice? One might have supposed that cognitive authorities served as automatic sources of new beliefs—that if one whom I recognize as an authority tells me that so and so, I immediately acquire the belief that so and so, which I would then explain or defend as something I now know because I heard it from my authority on the subject. This can indeed happen, and if it always happens with that authority, he is an absolute authority for me. But we have already argued that this is a limiting rather than the usual case. The most obvious and, for many people, most attractive alternative view is that the authority's word changes the probability that I assign to the statement or proposition that the authority asserts.[15] If my authority tells me that bacon causes cancer, the degree of probability that I assign to the proposition that bacon causes cancer goes up and the greater his authority, the more it goes up. Since my beliefs are not discrete, independent items, when the probability of one such proposition changes, the probabilities of other logically related propositions will have to change too if I am to maintain consistency. Thus one word from the authority sets in motion (or should do so) a whole train of mental readjustments.

This view of the mind makes it too much of a logic machine. It may accurately describe what happens sometimes, or perhaps always in some people, but for some of us at least it is an unlikely story. It seems more plausible to suppose that much of what we hear from our authorities gets filed away in the "hearsay collection" in our memory, with the source duly noted on the label.[16] We neither believe nor disbelieve it; we simply file it away for future reference. Until one has to use it in some way, it can remain simply a recollected piece of hearsay. When the time comes, if ever, to take an action, make a plan, or simply answer a question to which such a remembered item is relevant, we can recall it and evaluate it. Then, but not until then, we

face the question of what weight to give to the source. But even then we need not go about assigning probabilities to the recollected item. We may simply want to decide whether to act on the assumption that what the authority said is true, to act as if we believe it. (There are those who would say that to act as if you believe it is to believe it, but this is certainly not so. We frequently have to act as if things were so that we know are not.) If the authority's word carries much weight, is not opposed by contrary authorities, and is consistent with what else we believe and think relevant, then we will take the authority's word for it, which is not the same thing as coming to believe him. In more complicated cases, we may have to engage in a quasi-judicial process, balancing what this authority says against what that authority says, adding what we ourselves believe on the basis of our own experience and reflection. And what happens in that process is something we ourselves do not understand. An interior monologue reporting on the process might run like this: "I find myself much impressed by what A said, and of course he's had a great deal of experience in matters like this. On the other hand, what B says is not implausible, it certainly might be true, and he does have impressive qualifications. But when it comes down to a decision, I find that I am more drawn to A's side than to B's." We are not deciding how much weight to give; we are finding how much we do give. The only control we have over the process is control over the attention we give to the different parties, the time we take to listen, the time we devote to reflecting on what we are told. The reason juries are given no instructions on how to assign weights to testimony is that assigning weight is not something we can do; it is something that happens to us. It can happen differently under different circumstances, and our only practical wisdom is that it happens best in circumstances under which we give careful attention to the alternative positions. The question of how much weight should be given to the words of an authority is to be settled only by giving a fair hearing to him and seeing what happens to one's thoughts. It is misleading to say that "it is for the trier of fact to decide what weight should be accorded the testimony of expert witnesses." There is no decision, but a happening of another sort.[17]

Results

Looking around the social world, we find an astonishing variety of bizarre belief systems—bizarre to us, not to their holders. Fantastic religious beliefs, repulsive moral beliefs, crazy economic theories, bigoted political creeds . . . the list goes on until we tire of adding to it. It is true that we know very little about the beliefs of most other people. That a person is, for example, a practicng Mormon or Catholic or Christian Scientist tells us virtually nothing about their religious beliefs. The ordinary adherents of a religion cannot be expected to know much about the details of the official orthodox creed to which they nominally subscribe, and we scarcely have the time, even if we had the inclination and the cooperation of the others, to make exhaustive inquiries into the content of their beliefs.

Reliance on published statements by articulate defenders of the myriad positions on religious, moral, economic, social, and other matters is a poor way of finding out what ordinary people think. Public opinion polls are superficial and unreliable tools for exploring ordinary beliefs. Our own personal samples, of the few people we know intimately enough to have acquired some detailed knowledge of their beliefs, are inevitably biased by the accident of our social location. The people we know best tend to be much like ourselves, and generalization from what our friends think to what people in general think is sure to go wrong. Still, a careful look around provides plenty of evidence that the world is full of people who are not only ignorant of things we think they should know about but also full of mistaken, often fantastic notions as well. And prominent are mistaken recognitions of cognitive authority. People are followers of false prophets, deluded theorists, leaders of pseudo-scientific cults, leaders with undeserved reputations for wisdom. How does all this happen? Why do people not share our own sensible beliefs? Why can they not recognize the truth when they see it? Does the fault lie in the way in which they acquire their cognitive authorities? Are they doing something wrong, or are they just unlucky? Whatever the cause, the results are unfortunate.

We are not yet in a position to say how it is that people come to have influence over our thoughts, but we now have the in-

ventory, or most of the inventory, of considerations that are thought to be relevant in justifying a recognition of authority. Perhaps there is something systematically wrong with our notions of what is relevant. Let us look back to the rule of reputation, either among peers or among one's own cognitive authorities. Either can lead to terrible results. This general is much admired by fellow generals, so we take his advice on how to conduct the campaign, and look what happens: terrible slaughter and final defeat. My friends tell me that that fellow Hitler is the man to listen to, so I do. But can we imagine giving up the reputation rules? Certainly we cannot simply invert the rules and always give credence to those of no reputation, or a low reputation, or despised by those we trust. Or consider the rule of plausibility, the use of one's own prior knowledge as a test of the intrinsic plausibility of cognitive claims. I am not going to pay any attention to some new messiah's claims to be in direct communication with the deity; without examination, I dismiss the claim out of hand. Similarly, I reject out of hand the idea of flying machines; they cannot possibly work, and so I need pay no attention to those Wright brothers. A chapter entitled "The Stupidity of Doubt" in a book on human stupidity is full of examples of learned men dismissing important discoveries on the ground that they could not be real, based on what one already knew.[18] These are bad results; but can we imagine not bringing our preconceived ideas to test the plausibility of new things we hear? This is one of the chief things minds are for: to tell us what is likely and what not. It is not possible for us to turn off our judgment without turning off our minds. Our prior beliefs definitely prejudice us against many new beliefs, and although we can try to give a fair hearing to novel claims, we cannot avoid the influence of prior belief. But why should we want to? Do we really think we would do better with empty heads?

The different bases for justifying cognitive authority are all accident-prone, highly fallible guides, but we cannot do without them. Perhaps, however, the trouble comes in some systematic misapplication of them. Let us think about familiar defects. Common sense and ordinary experience lead us to recognize the polar defects of credulity and excessive skepticism. Some people

regularly, and most people occasionally, are too easily persuaded of the superior knowledge of others. They tend to believe whatever they read or hear, suffer from primitive credulity, are overly impressed by credentials, overgeneralize from accomplishment in one field to competence in widely dissimilar fields, are too impressed by reputation—in general, too easily persuaded.[19] At the other end are the dour skeptics who are full of distrust for all reputations, all credentials, all so-called accomplishments, full of mulish resistance to persuasion, resentment of all authority, hostility to elitist claims to superior knowledge, sullen insistence that their opinion is as good as anyone's. Both of these defects—there is no question, is there, that they are defects?—are familiar; it is not so clear that they are remediable. Nor is it clear that there is any general way of calibrating degrees of credulity and spotting a point or region that is just right. Nor, finally, is it clear that these defects are the ones responsible for the odd patterns of belief we find around us. It is a wickedly effective propaganda weapon to accuse those who hold views we think wicked or stupid of credulity, of too easy acceptance of authority. But such charges can be made with equal ease on all sides; they are symmetrical. Are liberals more or less credulous than conservatives? Is belief in Catholic dogma, or atheism, the result of excessive credulity or of pigheadedness in rejecting other views? It seems likely that no side in any dispute has a monopoly on adherents suffering from the polar faults. Those faults are not systematically sources of bias toward error. One's credulity can lead one to the truth, and one's obstinacy can prevent one from falling into error. With equal likelihood, one's obstinacy can keep one from the truth and one's credulity lead one into error.

If we are to understand the diversity of belief, it will have to be in terms not of bases for justification or of patterns of their application but in historical terms—the historical circumstances leading to an initial outfitting with a stock of beliefs, and the subsequent history of encounters with people and ideas.

Notes

1. Bochenski and De George speak of epistemic authority rather than of cognitive authority: J. M. Bochenski, "On Authority," *Memorias*