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A belief is justified if and only if it is communally believed to be justified. This *community thesis* is arguably the central contention of the “communitarian epistemology” Kusch develops in *Knowledge by Agreement*. The thesis should be understood as claiming that epistemic justification accrues primarily to what is communally believed and that it is conferred by communal belief. This epistemological position is developed in three sections. First, Kusch reaches the community thesis via a theory of testimony. Second, he develops this thesis into a substantial epistemology along the lines noted. Third, he defends the relativism this thesis implies (in conjunction with the premise that communities could diverge in belief).

In some cases, testimony is purely performative: it constitutes the facts it reports. Kusch’s central example is that of marriage, “The registrar *a* tells the couple *b* that they have now entered a legally binding relationship of marriage; and by telling them so ... the registrar makes it so that they *are* in the legally binding relationship of marriage.” (p. 65.) The registrar’s testimony brings about a new social status and this situation can be generalised: “All social statuses ... are due to performative testimony.” (p. 67.) That is, a social status is created by reference to it, and recognition of it, within a community. Knowledge, just like marriage, is a social status. “Knowledge is a social status like ‘married’ ... to acquire this status for one of my beliefs is for this belief to be shared by others.” (p. 147.) Testimony, therefore, doesn’t function to transmit knowledge so much as to generate knowledge. In the first instance, when an audience *b* accepts a speaker *a*’s testimony to *p*, both acquire the social status of knowing that *p*. This is because it is “*b*’s agreement with *a* as to whether *p* [that] constitutes them as a community of knowledge”. (p. 73.) And forming this community of knowledge “is tantamount to initiating and maintaining the communal performative ‘we hereby declare ourselves to be the epistemic subject of *p* and are thereby committed and entitled to use *p* in the ways in which the general institution of knowledge suggests’.” (p. 73.) Knowledge is a social kind. It is

generated in the first instance by agreement; “although individuals can lay claim to the social status in isolation they cannot actually be granted this status.” (p. 71.) To be granted this status, the individual believer must be able to get others to agree with them. Justification, Kusch claims, is therefore contextualist and ‘dialectical’. To be justified in one’s belief that p is to be able to convince another that p , and since what it takes to convince another is contextually variable so too is the justification of belief.

An immediate worry is that there are other ways of convincing people than argument and people can fail to be convinced even by epistemically good arguments. This worry might be developed in the following way. Certain things an individual can seem to be in a position to know without sharing belief; for instance, in order to know that there is a jar of beer in front of me I only need to look up. However, Kusch could be defended, to retain this knowledge I must be able to convince another, since were they to reject my testimony to there being jar of beer in front of me, their rejection should constitute a defeater of my knowing this fact. And whatever I must be able to do in order to retain knowledge I must be able to do in order to acquire this knowledge. But then the problem can be posed: were another’s rejection of my testimony *unreasonable*, I possess a cheap defeater of any defeat their rejection constitutes: I can simply claim them to be not open to *rational* conviction.

The problem is it seems that — contrary to the community thesis — an action can be unreasonable, or conversely a belief justified, irrespective of what is agreed. So the final section of *Knowledge by Agreement* is given over to arguing against such “‘realist’ or ‘absolutist’ intuitions”. (p. 3.) The community thesis holds because it is an instance of the more general communitarian claim that “normative phenomena can only exist within communities”. (p. 175.) Where this general claim Kusch takes to be established by Wittgenstein’s private language argument. One could suppose being justified is a matter of following certain epistemic rules. But the only standard against which success and

failure in following a rule can be measured is community agreement. Alone I cannot tell whether I've seen that jar of beer as opposed to dreamt it, say. So only community agreement is sufficient for being justified because "what seems right to almost everyone — that is, the collective 'seems right' — is the most we can get in terms of an 'is right'". (p. 98).

This is a bold claim. And in general *Knowledge by Agreement* is a bold, and thoroughly worked through, book. It is of interest to anyone doing epistemology. But it left my 'absolutist', and one might add prosaically individualist, intuitions unscathed. I'd as soon suppose that communal agreement is sufficient only for merely communally seeming to follow a rule as suppose that I am wrong in thinking that, having finished, I am not about to enjoy this beer.