In the Introduction to his Human Knowledge Bertrand Russell writes as follows. "If I believe that there is such a place as Semipalatinsk, I believe it because of things that have happened to me; and unless certain substantial principles of inference are accepted, I shall have to admit that all these things might have happened to me without there being any such place." ¹ This seems to be true in some sense, and if true to have important implications which have not been explored; but in what sense cannot be gathered merely from context; and so it is the purpose here to examine the inferences which flow from the statement.

We should perhaps begin by examining the question of the grounds for belief, since that is the point on which the argument turns. Note the form of the first part of Russell's sentence. "If I believe that ..., I believe it because ..." Probably in the case of Semipalatinsk if we have not been there we believe it exists because of what we have heard about it from those who have. And their language is intended to convey to us something of their experiences which we assume to be analogous to what our own would have been had we ourselves made the trip. Our belief, then, is to be determined by the functioning of empathy through language. What has happened to Russell presumably is that he has heard about Semipalatinsk; that is, he has listened to sentences containing descriptions which give them a meaning. But, as Wittgenstein has pointed out, language does not lose its meaning when the referent is destroyed.² If Semipalatinsk were obliterated by a hydrogen bomb, "Semipalatinsk" would not thereby be rendered unintelligible. The situation has repercussions which are felt to be of the utmost concern to the stability of belief, but we are not yet in a position to say what these are.

The later work of Wittgenstein may have been intended to show how it was the demands of usage under which the great natural languages

² Philosophical Investigations, 1, 55.
developed that enabled them to contain systems which reflect the world. They grew up by naming things or events – operations – and then inventing words to connect the names, just as there are relations in the world between the things or events named. The next step, in which philosophy consists, means learning about the world by studying these languages.

For this purpose we are going to reason backward, that is, from the facts to the specific presuppositions which would allow for there to be such facts. Now a system in which the theorems are actions and the axioms are implicit presuppositions has nevertheless well-defined rules of inference. In the case of knowing, these include the criteria which shall determine belief. We are in the perplexing situation of recognizing this and still of not being able to decide about knowing until we have decided about knowledge, and perhaps not only about what knowledge is but also about what knowledge there is. So our position is reversed: from having thought to find out about Semipalatinsk from the conditions of knowing, we have come to understand that we shall have to find out about the conditions of knowing from what we know about – among other places – Semipalatinsk.

It is clear from this, then, that we shall not go the whole way toward accomplishing our task but that instead we must learn to be satisfied with piecemeal accomplishments. For the world is always larger than any increase in our knowledge. We pursue it at a respectful distance, shedding our subjectivity along the way as best we can, and we do this by gathering alleged increments of information until what we have accumulated will stand by itself without having to gain its unity from our knowing about it in some integrated process of awareness. And when we do this we find all at once that we have made a system.

Thus a new difficulty arises. There is nothing accumulative or incremental about systems of this type, unless we consider proving additional theorems an exception, though even without these the system already exists. We were occupied by the cautious enterprise of creeping up on belief painstakingly collecting bits of evidence for statements that could be accepted as true, when we were surprised by the discovery that all the while we had been working inside a system. What happened, we want to know, to the question of the ground for belief, to the evidence for the acceptance of knowing?

Any thing, any event, can be pointed to. It may be an operation or an independent happening, but whatever it is it must exist in some space; and if it does then it must exist also in connection with some