Reply to Professor Aune

It must be obvious to the reader that Professor Aune's approach is so different from mine that we hardly can be expected to agree — or even sensibly disagree — at the end. What he seems to be after is the representation, in some system of notation or other, of certain inferences that arise out of our talk about knowledge and belief. My aim, on the other hand, is to account, in terms of a coherent linguistic theory, for the grammaticality, meaning, and implications of the relevant sentences and phrases. And I do not think that his remarks bear upon this problem at all.

At the beginning of his comments he accuses me of failing to show that knowing one's suggestion (that p) entails not knowing that p. Nobody could show this, of course, since knowing that p is perfectly compatible with knowing somebody else's suggestion (that p). If Jim has suggested that Joe is the culprit, my knowledge that Joe is the culprit does not prevent me from knowing Jim's suggestion. But then I know two things: first, that Joe is the culprit, and second, what Jim's suggestion is. And these two are pretty independent: I may know the one without the other. Not so with believing Jim's suggestion. I cannot achieve this without believing that Joe is the culprit. Aune's logic may exhibit how the respective inferences go, but he does not explain why the inference patterns are distinct.

Another point. Aune (and he is not alone) claims that the verb object of believe (suggest, predict, and so forth) functions adverbially. As far as I can see, the only evidence for this view is the fact that not only the pronoun it, but also the pro-adverb so can follow believe: I believe so is as grammatical as I believe it. This prop, however, is too slender to support any conclusion. First I counter it by pointing out that in order to elicit the appropriate verb-object we ask what, and not how, somebody believes, suggests, or predicts. How will be answered by things like firmly and not by that Joe is guilty. Again, the relative pronoun, which, applies to such a verb-object without fail: He believes that p, which is false. On the other hand so is not necessarily a pro-adverb. Consider Joe kicked the tire and so did Jim. Here, again, so is interchangeable with it: Joe kicked the tire and Jim did it too. Now, surely, kicking the tire is not an adverb, but a noun phrase. And so are the objects of believe, etc.

Incidentally, believe so and believe it do not quite mean the same thing. If you ask me Will it rain tomorrow?, I may reply I believe so. If you say, however, Joe said that it will rain tomorrow, my concurring reply will be I believe it. The reason is that in this second case the appropriate verb object of believe, that it will rain tomorrow, precedes the occurrence of believe in the discourse, so it can be replaced by the pronoun (it). In the first case there is only a question before, and that is not an appropriate object of believe. So the pronoun would be out of order, and faute de mieux we fall back on the less demanding so.

Concerning say versus suggest, I agree with Aune that his sentence (4) fails. It does so, however, not because these verbs are incompatible, but simply because say, like think and unlike suggest or believe, does not take nominalizations other than the that-clause. Whereas I can suggest a solution or believe an explanation, I cannot say or think a solution or an explanation. They take, however, pronouns, hence say what you think or I believe what he said pass all right. And notice what here is that which, unlike in I know what he said. Thus say and believe are compatible, say and know are not.

The most serious objection Aune levels against me concerns the possibility of putting wh-nominals after “subjective” verbs like predict, suggest, and doubt. Notice, however, that my subjective words were prediction, suggestion, etcetera. And remember that I myself have pointed out the analogous ambivalence of state. I repeat: what one states is something objective (may be a fact); one's statement, however, even if true, is not a fact. It is something subjective. Mutatis mutandis the same thing holds of predict and suggest. What one predicts or suggests is objective (hence the possibility of the wh's); one's prediction or suggestion is not. Interestingly enough think and believe are not objective even in their straight verb form. Hence we do not have I think (believe) where (when, how . . .) . . . This is an interesting difference worth further studies.