

5-2013

# Content and Concept: An Examination of Transcendental Empiricism

Charles Macmillan Urban  
*University of Arkansas, Fayetteville*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Theory and Philosophy Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Urban, Charles Macmillan, "Content and Concept: An Examination of Transcendental Empiricism" (2013). *Theses and Dissertations*. 596.  
<http://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/596>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UARK. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UARK. For more information, please contact [ccmiddle@uark.edu](mailto:ccmiddle@uark.edu), [scholar@uark.edu](mailto:scholar@uark.edu).



## Content and Concept: An Examination of Transcendental Empiricism

# Content and Concept: An Examination of Transcendental Empiricism

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

By

Charles M. Urban  
University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, 1999  
University of Arkansas  
Master of Arts in Philosophy, 2001

May 2013  
University of Arkansas

## **ABSTRACT**

In this dissertation, I critically examine the philosophy of transcendental empiricism. Transcendental empiricism is, among other things, a philosophy of mental content. It attempts to dissolve an epistemological dilemma of mental content by splitting the difference between two diametrically opposed accounts of content. John McDowell's minimal empiricism and Richard Gaskin's minimalist empiricism are two versions of transcendental empiricism. Transcendental empiricism itself originates with McDowell's work.

This dissertation is divided into five parts. First, in the Introduction, I state the Wittgensteinian metaphilosophical orientation of transcendental empiricism. This metaphilosophical approach provides a plateau upon which much of the rest of this work may be examined. Second, I offer a detailed description of McDowell's minimal empiricism. Third, I critique Gaskin's critique and modification of McDowell's minimal empiricism. I argue that (1) Gaskin's critiques are faulty and that (2) Gaskin's minimalist empiricism is very dubious. Fourth, I scrutinize the alleged credentials of McDowell's minimal empiricism. I argue that McDowell's version of linguistic idealism is problematic. I then comment on a recent dialogue between transcendental empiricism and Hubert Dreyfus's phenomenology. The dialogue culminates with Dreyfus's accusation of the "Myth of the Mental." I argue that this accusation is correct in which case McDowell's direct realism is problematic. I conclude that minimal empiricism does not dissolve the dilemma of mental content. Finally, I argue that Tyler Burge successfully undermines the doctrine of disjunctivism, but disjunctivism is crucial for transcendental empiricism. Ultimately, however, I aim to show that transcendental empiricism is an attractive alternative to philosophies of mental content.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation  
to the Graduate Council.

Dissertation Director:

---

Dr. Edward Minar

Dissertation Committee:

---

Dr. Jack Lyons

---

Dr. Barry Ward

**DISSERTATION DUPLICATION RELEASE**

I hereby authorize the University of Arkansas Libraries to duplicate this dissertation when needed for research and/or scholarship.

Agreed

---

**Charles M. Urban**

Refused

---

**Charles M. Urban**

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

There are many people who helped me complete this work. First, I would like to thank Joseph Palombo. Among my teachers, I would like to thank Keith Booker, Alice-Taylor Colbert, Edward Minar, Christopher McMahon, Kathy Nutt and Thomas Senior. Among my friends, I would like to thank Jimmy Clausen and Dan Snazelle.



## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1. McDowell's Minimal Empiricism	11
Minimal Empiricism in Outline	11
Davidson <i>qua</i> Coherentist	20
Evans's Concept of Nonconceptual Content	28
Naturalism and Second Nature	35
Conclusion	49
2. Gaskin's Minimalist Empiricism: A Critique	52
Preliminary Remarks	52
Judgment and Perceptual Experience: McDowell's Transcendental Argument for Minimal Empiricism	56
Individualism and Intellectualism	66
Animal and Infant Mentation	72
Sense, Reference and Kantian Things-in-Themselves: Elements of Gaskin's Linguistic Idealism	77
Conclusion	88
3. Does Minimal Empiricism Dissolve the Dilemma of Mental Content?	90
Two Varieties of Conceptual Content	90
Direct Realism and Linguistic Idealism	99
Minimal Empiricism <i>vis-à-vis</i> Phenomenology	103
Sensation, Perception and Belief	117
Conclusion	126
4. Transcendental Empiricism, Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology	128
References	151

## Preface

This dissertation was originally a writing sample for graduate school. At that time I did not expect to write a dissertation on John McDowell's minimal empiricism, much less Richard Gaskin's critical engagement. This book is pleasantly unexpected.

McDowell's philosophy of content is profound---and his work is not limited to the philosophy of mind and language. He has also published important papers in the history of philosophy and value theory. This work, for better or worse, is exclusively concerned with McDowell's theoretical philosophy.

McDowell's writings are stimulating. They exhibit an unusual combination of analytic philosophy and a comprehensive understanding of the history of philosophy. The influences of Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein are the impetus for his analysis, whereas Aristotle, Kant and Hegel situate his analyses within a broad historical context. I view this work as a contribution to what is sometimes known as post-analytic philosophy. Post-analytic philosophy is, roughly, analytic philosophy in the wake of Quine, Sellars and the later Wittgenstein.

This dissertation was enriched by Edward Minar's Spring 2008 semester on the philosophies of language and mind. It was a generous seminar. He also provided invaluable feedback on earlier drafts. Without his supervision, this dissertation would not be possible. In addition, I am indebted to the courses, seminars and conversations I have had over the years with graduate students and professors at the University of Arkansas and the University of California, at Santa Barbara. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to study at these institutions.

I am most indebted to my friends and family for sitting with me through this difficult process. It seems to me that Merleau-Ponty was absolutely right when he wrote: "Man is but a

network of relationships, and these alone matter to him.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Merleau-Ponty (1962/1995; citation omitted), p. 456.

## Introduction

John McDowell's philosophy is Wittgensteinian. That is, McDowell, following Wittgenstein,<sup>1</sup> is deeply suspicious of so-called philosophical "problems."<sup>2</sup> Such problems induce unnecessary anxiety and discomfort. The philosopher's task is plain: he or she should cure the anxious 'patient' of undue turmoil. In other words, a philosopher should show that deep-seated philosophical worries are really rooted in false and stubborn conceptions of reality. Strictly speaking, philosophical problems do not admit of solutions, since talk of solutions implies that there are genuine problems. A philosopher can only *dissolve* philosophical questions; that is, a philosopher can only show that urgent philosophical concerns are merely apparent:

The therapeutic method McDowell prefers is to expose and question the assumptions generating the tension: once we clearly see that we are not driven to theorize our way out of the problem, anxiety will subside, and everything will be left 'open to view'.  
(MacDonald & MacDonald, 2006, p. ix)

The quintessential philosophical question asks, "How is x possible?"---where "x" is satisfied by some structural feature of reality. McDowell focuses on the question, "How is *content* possible?," with an eye to dissolving the entire question. Here is a nice programmatic statement:

My aim is to propose an account, in a diagnostic spirit, of some characteristic anxieties of modern philosophy---anxieties that centre...on the relation between mind and world. Continuing with

---

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, Wittgenstein's (1953) *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>2</sup> McDowell's project has an obvious affinity with Richard Rorty's (1979) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. For the classical pragmatist statement of Rorty's philosophical program, see Dewey's (1925/1958) *Experience and Nature*. Indeed, McDowell has moments where he sounds like Dewey. For instance: "We must think of empirical rationality in a dynamic way, in terms of a continuing adjustment to the impact of experience" (McDowell, 1996, p. 135).

the medical metaphor, we might say that a satisfactory diagnosis ought to point towards a cure. I aim at explaining how it comes about that we seem to be confronted with philosophical obligations of a familiar sort, and I want the explanation to enable us to unmask that appearance as illusion.

It matters that the illusion is capable of gripping us. I want to be able to acknowledge the power of the illusion's sources, so that we find ourselves able to respect the conviction that the obligations are genuine, even while we see how we can, for our own part, reject the appearance that we face a pressing intellectual task. (McDowell, 1996, p. xi)

At the outset, our metaphilosophical orientation toward philosophical problems should be examined. There is a sense in which our manner of approaching philosophical questions can be either proper or improper. Improper philosophical procedure yields confusion. To McDowell's mind, a "sideways-on" approach is faulty. The sideways-on approach says, roughly, that the mind and the world are fundamentally distinct; nevertheless, somehow both make contact from a sideways-on perspective. "Sideways-on accounts say or imply that there is 'an outer boundary around the sphere of the conceptual, with a reality outside the boundary impinging inward on the system'" (Peacocke, 1998, p. 387). It is a spatial metaphor.

A sideways-on orientation naturally lends itself to the idea that philosophy ought to reach an "Archimedean" standpoint from which to view sideways-on interactions. An Archimedean aspiration or temptation is that which approximates to an ideal standpoint, one which is somehow "external" to sideways-on occurrences, one which somehow transcends the interplay between conceptuality and non-conceptuality: "...an 'Archimedean point', from which a comparison could be set up between particular representations of the world and the world itself" (McDowell, 1998b, "Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World," p. 126). We want to attain: "... 'a synoptic vision which will somehow synthesize every other possible view,

will somehow bring the outside and the inside points of view together” (McDowell, 1996, p. 154). McDowell sometimes dubs this the “cosmic exile” perspective. He writes: “...the perspective of a cosmic exile—a perspective, that is, that is not to any extent coloured or affected by the occupant’s own involvement in a form of life...” (McDowell, 1998c, “Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding,” p. 329). It is a Peircean aspiration, really. Indeed, the very practice of science presupposes Peirce’s principle:

Scientific enquiry must be conceived as defined by a determinate method---one capable of yielding its practitioners some sort of assurance that they are on a path that, if properly followed, would lead at the limit to the ideal convergence Peirce envisaged. (McDowell, 1998b, “Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World,” p. 119)

There is nothing wrong with a thoroughgoing scientific Peirceanism. Science seems to operate according to Archimedean standards, and unbridled relativism is silly. Unfortunately, it is a short step from scientific Peirceanism to a much stronger metaphysical form of Peirceanism:

Once we have the idea of the Archimedean point, it is irresistible to suppose that all *genuine* truth about the world and our relation to it should be discernible from there. And since the Archimedean point has been introduced on the basis of the Peircean conception of scientific enquiry, we seem now to have been given a metaphysical foundation for the view that science constitutes the frame for all reflection on our relation to reality... (ibid., p. 128; McDowell’s emphasis)

The entire project of approximating to an Archimedean standpoint is misguided, according to McDowell. The notion of unadulterated or unvarnished objectivity is exceedingly

problematic, because the Archimedean aspiration is rooted in an improper metaphilosophical orientation.<sup>3</sup>

What exactly is wrong with a sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation? Well, a sideways-on metaphilosophy asserts that there is a fundamental distinction between mind and world. The mind is that which is conceptual. The world is that which is nonconceptual. A consequence of a sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation is that there is an objective, detached vantage point from which one may 'understand' conceptuality and nonconceptuality. In principle, we may understand conceptual and nonconceptual content from an Archimedean perspective, a perspective which is 'outside' of conceptuality and nonconceptuality. And this implies that there is a third kind of content which is neither conceptual nor non-conceptual. Call it *a-conceptual* content. But what exactly is this kind of content supposed to look like? Where exactly does one understand conceptuality and nonconceptuality? It cannot be from somewhere, for it is outside that which is somewhere, namely, the mind and the world. Thus the overarching perspective must be from nowhere. But where is nowhere? The question doesn't even make sense. In short, a sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation seems nonsensical. Therefore it is not proper.

McDowell is offering us a different metaphilosophical procedure:

It cannot be a matter of picturing the system's adjustments to the world from sideways on: that is, with the system circumscribed within a boundary, and the world outside it. That is exactly the shape our picture must not take. (McDowell, 1996, p. 34)

And:

---

<sup>3</sup> Despairing of a "God's-eye view" is an existentialist motif. See Charles Guignon and Derek Pereboom's (1995) "Introduction: The Legacy of Existentialism," section 4.



The facts that are made manifest to us...or at least seem to be, are not beyond an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere, and the impingements of the world on our sensibility are not inward crossings of such a boundary. My point is to insist that we can effect this deletion of the outer boundary without falling into idealism, without slighting the independence of reality. (ibid., p. 34)

We may erase the (illusory) boundary between the mind and the world without falling prey to idealism. We may eat our cake and have it, too. McDowell is a realist of sorts.<sup>4</sup> It is not the case that, if we want to adopt a realistic stance, we must assume a sideways-on perspective. A sideways-on approach simply harbors superfluous perplexity. McDowell's orientation, on the contrary, dissolves unsolvable questions.

In effect, McDowell is recommending a strong dose of quietism. Quietism is an antidote to a confused aspiration, which is rooted in an improper metaphilosophical orientation. Quietism itself is a non-sideways-on approach to philosophical questions; it rejects the claim that the mind and the world are fundamentally distinct; it rejects the initial distinction between conceptuality and nonconceptuality. But notice that quietism need not lead to idealistic consequences. There is an implicit assumption that, if we tackle philosophical questions from a non-sideways-on perspective, we are obliterating the world. Conceptuality is unbounded, and this smacks of idealism. But this assumption is presumptuous, for a non-sideways-on orientation is fully compatible with realism:

[S]ince the world is everything that is the case...there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world. Of course thought can be

---

<sup>4</sup> But not in a philosophical sense: "...McDowell sees himself as pursuing a more quietist agenda, and...he regards his writings as springing from an opposition to anti-realism (taken as a positive thesis), and so as pursuing an anti-anti-realistic programme, rather than as aiming to argue directly for realism" (Gaskin, 2006, p. vi).

distanced from the world by being false, but there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought. (ibid., p. 27)

There is no gap between thought and world; but it does not follow from this that our thoughts about the world cannot sometimes be false. On the contrary.

(Notice that McDowell's non-sideways-on approach is related to his modest theory of meaning.<sup>5</sup> The latter says, very roughly, that we cannot step outside of our linguistic practices, contrary to Michael Dummett's espousal of "full-blooded" theories of meaning.<sup>6</sup>)

There are two benefits associated with quietism. First, through releasing the grip of familiar philosophical anxieties, quietism can affect an exorcism of the philosophical tradition. And this is good because the philosophical tradition is an agent of unnecessary psychic tension. If we can attain temporary relief from philosophical anxieties, we can then dismantle the corrosive categories of traditional philosophy. We need not be shackled to traditional dichotomies. Second, and most importantly, if our intellectual discomfort is intermittently uplifted, we can then invest our energies in other intellectual activities. The net result is greater perspicuity:

Without the anxieties there is no need for reduction and thus no need for constructive philosophy at all....McDowell's work is intended, therefore, to contribute towards transcendence or overcoming of the philosophical tradition---an exorcism of the dualistic oppositions that have given rise to the traditional 'problems of philosophy'. (Friedman, 2002, p. 29)

Further:

---

<sup>5</sup> See McDowell's (1998c) "In Defense of Modesty," "Another Plea for Modesty," "Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of the Understanding" and "On the Sense and Reference of a Proper Name," section 10.

<sup>6</sup> See Dummett's (1993) "What is a Theory of Meaning (I)?" and "What is a Theory of Meaning (II)?"

...‘quietism’, the avoidance of any substantive philosophy, is really the point. Questions such as ‘How is meaning possible?’ express a sense of spookiness, and Wittgenstein’s point is that we should not indulge the sense of spookiness, but rather exorcize it....[P]hilosophy’s task is...to dislodge the assumptions that make it look difficult to find a place for meaning in the world. Then we can take in our stride meaning’s role in shaping our lives.  
(McDowell, 1996, p. 176)

McDowell’s minimal empiricism is the product of proper procedure; it accomplishes a non-sideways-on orientation. It establishes our unmediated contact with reality. Once the proper approach is in place, we may experience a sense of quietude. “In Wittgenstein’s poignant phrase, it would be to have achieved ‘the discovery that gives philosophy peace’” (ibid., p. 86). Furthermore, minimal empiricism yields a thorough exorcism of the philosophical tradition, according to McDowell. If minimal empiricism is the case, epistemological and/or semantic anxieties wane, and then our practices may proceed uninterrupted. McDowell’s minimal empiricism dissolves philosophical questions, thereby resolving unnecessary discomfort and anxiety. “Minimal empiricism promises to cast light on certain sorts of philosophical anxiety” (McDowell, 1995, p. 232). In particular, minimal empiricism allegedly portrays content in a more revealing light. If minimal empiricism is the case, the issue of content dissolves---and then we cease to worry. And if we stop worrying so much about content, we can then integrate our energies into different intellectual practices.

Richard Gaskin’s (2006) *Experience and the World’s Own Language* is, among other things, a significant contribution to McDowell studies. Indeed, as Julian Dodd reports: “[Gaskin’s] command of McDowell’s *oeuvre* is nothing short of magisterial” (Dodd, 2007, p. 1118). His book offers an extended interpretation and modification of McDowell’s theoretical

philosophy. Moreover, Gaskin provides an arresting (albeit highly controversial) framework within which semantic issues may be examined. All of this is to be expected, given that: “Gaskin has thought hard about a range of challenging topics---perception, content, knowledge, singular thought, reference---and he has insightful and suggestive things to say about them” (Bridges, 2007, para. 28).

With respect to minimal empiricism, Gaskin states:

McDowell likes to think of his philosophy of experience [= minimal empiricism] as enjoying pre-theoretical plausibility, as a position which it is natural to adopt in advance of being exposed to traditional philosophy’s corrupting influence, and as the default position to which we automatically revert when we have escaped its allurements: he likes to think of his philosophy of experience as achieving the Wittgensteinian ideal of doing no more than reciting truisms. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 119, see note 129)

The enterprise of philosophy ‘questions’ the legitimacy of truisms, generating the so-called traditional problems of philosophy. McDowell’s quietistic orientation yields a dissolution of philosophical problems, reminding us of the truistic fact that the content of thought is *necessarily* rooted in the senses. This fact seems intuitively obvious; for, without the senses, what content is there to our concepts? The very notion of content seems inextricably tied to the deliverances of the senses. “I take it to be intuitively obvious---if only philosophy did not distort our thinking---that empiricists are right to want what they do” (McDowell, 2002a, p. 285). And what empiricists want is an acknowledgment of the truistic fact that the content of thought is necessarily dependent on sensory experience; that without experience, there is no content to our concepts.

Gaskin is sympathetic to a minimal or transcendental empiricism. For the purpose of understanding mental content, some transcendental form of empiricism must be the case.

Nevertheless, he is opposed to McDowell's version of transcendental empiricism. He writes:

I am not...opposed to the very idea of a minimal empiricism, so long as it is set up in the right way--- provided it is, as I put it in the course of my study, not *minimal* in McDowell's sense, but *minimalist* in a sense I will make clear....[T]o that extent my critique of McDowell's attempt to establish a minimal empiricism seems to me at any rate, despite the many points on which I criticize his manner of executing the project, to be co-operative and constructive in overall tenor rather than merely destructive or hostile. (Gaskin, 2006, p. vii; Gaskin's emphasis)

Gaskin's critique of minimal empiricism is a means toward the end of improving upon transcendental empiricism. As such, it is an attempt at laying further groundwork for transcendental empiricism. Gaskin argues that McDowell's minimal empiricism is not minimal enough. Gaskin's minimalist empiricism attempts to subtract the purportedly faulty elements of McDowell's minimal empiricism, and thereby establish a viable transcendental empiricism. Thus Gaskin's positive account of minimalist empiricism is essentially a negative account. I will argue that Gaskin's critique and modification of McDowell's minimal empiricism is inaccurate.

I then present my own misgivings with McDowell's minimal empiricism. While minimal empiricism is trenchant, I do not think it is entirely consistent. Still, transcendental empiricism is promising. I view my contribution as that of improving upon the theoretical underpinnings of transcendental empiricism. Although I am critical of both minimal empiricism and minimalist empiricism, my principle thesis is that transcendental empiricism is a significant contribution to

the philosophy of mental content. Wittgensteinian approaches toward content remain illuminating.

**1****McDowell's Minimal Empiricism**

## § 1.1 Minimal Empiricism in Outline

In addition to the cosmic exile perspective, the sideways-on approach invariably leads to a constructive dilemma. If the mind, or conceptuality, is distinct from the world, or non-conceptuality, then we are faced with two undesirable ways of understanding the epistemic status of mental content. On the one hand, if content is rationally justifiable, intentionality problems ensue. If, on the other hand, content is involuntarily received in sensation, epistemological problems emerge. Now recall that a sideways-on orientation is the characteristic posture of modern philosophy. Modern philosophy is replete with epistemology, partly because it assumes a sideways-on stance. Indeed, the first horn of the dilemma could be seen as representing classical rationalism, while the second horn encapsulates classical empiricism. As we will see, the dilemma itself deepens our understanding of mental content in general.

The first horn of the constructive dilemma discounts the idea that discrete experiences yield individual thoughts (or sentences). We cannot parse out mental content thought by thought (or sentence by sentence), for the meaning of an epistemologically significant thought is a function of its place within a totality of interwoven thoughts. Epistemological notions such as justification make sense only within a system of logically interrelated concepts. Meaningful thoughts cannot be principally segregated into neat packages of content. But now content is

indeterminate;<sup>1</sup> now we encounter serious intentionality problems. Mental content cannot be individuated. We have derived an epistemologically rich notion of content at the expense of determinacy. But this doesn't seem right.

The second horn of the dilemma asserts that the content of any given thought is determined by its corresponding sensory experience. The content of thought is essentially beholden to sense experience, and since sensory experiences are discrete, the content of thought is individuated. But now we encounter epistemological problems. Namely, how can discrete sensory impressions *justify* corresponding empirical thoughts or beliefs? There is nothing justificatory about merely *having* a given sense impression, for we are justified in thinking something only if we exercise voluntary reflection.

McDowell walks us through this familiar, and uncomfortable, sort of dilemma:

Suppose we are inexplicitly aware that our thinking is subject to both these forces; that makes it intelligible that we should find thought's being about the empirical world philosophically problematic. (McDowell, 1996, p. xvi)

McDowell's minimal empiricism is supposedly an antidote to this worry:

If philosophical anxiety about the very possibility of being in touch with the world can be traced to the tension between...two forces, a cure would require resolving the tension. Obviously the description I have given leaves various options available for doing that. In this book I recommend one way of resolving [better:

---

<sup>1</sup> This is an allusion to W. V. Quine's linguistic behaviorism. See Quine (1960), chs. 1-2. *Word and Object* argues, among other things, that "radical translation," i.e., translation of a hitherto unknown language, is indeterminate. That is, there is no behavioral fact of the matter which determines what exactly a native speaker means through his or her utterances. In McDowell's (1998c) "Anti-Realism and the Epistemology of Understanding," there is a suggestion that Michael Dummett's brand of anti-realism is really an unconscious reaction to Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis---see, in particular, pp. 338-340. Also see Dummett (1981), chapter 17.



*dissolving*] this tension. I shall briefly locate it by distinguishing it from a couple of others. (ibid., pp. xvi-xvii)

Minimal empiricism effectively escapes between the horns of the dilemma. Minimal empiricism is roughly the view that mental content is both rationally and causally rooted in experience. The world is amenable to thoughts; and thoughts are *about* the world. The first point demands comment. By “the world is amenable to thoughts” I mean that independent reality is structurally thought-like or propositional. Gaskin adumbrates this kind of philosophical analysis:

Fundamental to McDowell’s minimal empiricism is the claim that the world-directedness of empirical thought involves both rational or normative connections between world and thought on the one hand, and causal connections on the other. Putting it in general and abstract terms for the moment, we can say that the rational connections ensure that empirical thought can be *correct* or *incorrect*, while the causal connections guarantee that empirical thought is genuinely *about* the empirical world: taken together, these connections ensure that empirical thought is not empty---that it is not, as McDowell likes to put it, mere “frictionless spinning in a void.” (Gaskin, 2006, p. 7; Gaskin’s emphasis)

Here is McDowell’s statement of minimal empiricism:

[This] is what I mean by a 'minimal empiricism': the idea that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as it must be if we are to make sense of thinking at all. (McDowell, 1996, p. xii)

With respect to the issue of content, McDowell is an empiricist. And he thinks that a workable form of empiricism must incorporate a minimal requirement. The requirement is that experience must be conceived of as a “tribunal.” If we conceive of experience as a tribunal, then experience can determine whether our empirical beliefs are true or false. Moreover:

[O]ne's control over what happens in experience has limits: one can decide where to place oneself, at what point to turn one's attention; and so forth, but it is not up to one what, having done all

that, one will experience. This minimal point is what I am insisting on. (ibid., p. 10, see note 8)

So, although the tribunal conception of experience provides a rational constraint to our empirical beliefs, experience must causally constrain our beliefs. The tribunal of experience must be causally given (not Given, as we will see in a moment). Otherwise content would be ungrounded. However, notice that there is no elaboration on this basic empiricist principle. In fact, McDowell's empiricist philosophy of content is somewhat rationalistic, since experience is conceived of as a tribunal. Our judgments are answerable to the deliverances of experience. Judgments are either correct or incorrect, according to the verdicts of sensory experience. For a classical rationalist like Leibniz, mental contents are not brute reflexes conditioned by given sense-data. On the contrary, contents necessarily utilize reflective capabilities. Sensations are conceptually structured.

McDowell's minimal empiricism incorporates Kantian terminology. For Kant (1787/1929), the mind possesses two interrelated faculties: sensibility and understanding. Sensibility is a receptive faculty; it receives intuitions. Understanding is a spontaneous faculty; it entertains concepts. Knowledge occurs only when sensibility and understanding co-operate. Put another way, concepts are meaningful only if they incorporate received intuitions; and intuitions are received only if they are conceptually structured:

Kant makes his remark about intuitions and concepts in the course of representing empirical knowledge as the result of a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity, between sensibility and understanding. (ibid., p. 4)

Kant's terminology is ostensibly epistemological. The interrelation between sensibility and understanding is a way of representing empirical *knowledge*. However, Kant's epistemological story is at bottom an unconscious worry regarding *content*:

It is true that modern philosophy is pervaded by apparent problems about knowledge in particular. But I think it is helpful to see those apparent problems as more or less inept expressions of a deeper anxiety---an inchoately felt threat that a way of thinking we find ourselves falling into leaves minds simply out of touch with the rest of reality, not just questionably capable of getting to know about it. (ibid., p. xiii)

More importantly, Kantian terminology *does* account for the content of thought, according to McDowell. Content emerges only if the faculty of understanding is informed by the faculty of sensibility; but the faculty of understanding is informed by the faculty of sensibility only if sensibility is conceptually structured. Thus content is the product of an interdependent relationship between sensibility and understanding:

So the picture is this: the fact that thoughts are not empty, the fact that thoughts have representational content, emerges out of an interplay of concepts [= the faculty of understanding] and intuitions [= the faculty of sensibility]. (ibid., p. 4)

The sideways-on orientation basically divorces the interconnected relationship between sensibility and understanding. The idea is that sensibility is *not* conceptually structured. Sensations are nonconceptual. Something nonconceptual is brutally given (= Given) in sensory experience. Sensory impacts harness the spontaneous nature of the faculty of understanding. Not surprisingly, McDowell dissents from this view:

...an alien force, the causal impact of the world, operating outside the control of our spontaneity. But it is one thing to be exempt from blame, on the ground that the position we find ourselves in can be traced ultimately to brute force; it is quite another thing to

have a justification. In effect, the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications. (ibid., p. 8)

The Given, for McDowell, is a term of disparagement. It is a by-product of sideways-on thinking; it is the insistence on rendering sensations as nonconceptual. But insisting on sensibility's independence from understanding merely substitutes exculpation for justification. Consequently, we encounter epistemological difficulties. And problematic epistemologies are usually symptomatic of faulty accounts of content. Again, sideways-on approaches cannot adequately explain mental content.

Additionally, McDowell enthusiastically employs Wilfrid Sellars's (1956/1997) distinction between the logical space of reasons and the logical space of nature. Indeed: "[T]he contrast Sellars draws [between the logical space of reasons and the logical space of nature] can set an agenda for philosophy" (McDowell, 2009a, "Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind," p. 258). Here is Sellars's well known characterization of the distinction:

The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state [unlike entities within the space of nature]; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says. (Sellars, 1956/1997, p. 76; Sellars's emphasis)

For Sellars, the space of nature is *descriptive*. It comprises empirical facts, facts which are captured by the natural sciences. The space of reasons, on the contrary, is a *normative* domain. Items in the space of reasons are either *correct* or *incorrect*. The space of reasons does not concern itself with empirical facts; rather, it focuses on justification. McDowell writes:

I think we capture the essentials of Sellars's thinking if we take it that the logical space of nature is the logical space in which the natural sciences function, as we have been enabled to conceive them by a well-charted, and in itself admirable, development of

thought. We might say that to place something in nature on the relevant conception, as contrasted with placing it in the logical space of reasons, is to situate it in the realm of law. (McDowell, 1996, pp. xiv-xv)

And:

The relations that constitute the logical space of nature, on the relevant conception, do not include relations such as one thing's being warranted, or---for the general case---correct, in the light of another. That is what Sellars is saying when he insists that 'empirical description' cannot amount to placing something in the logical space of reasons. (ibid., p. xv)

Gaskin canvasses Sellars's distinction between the space of nature and the space of reasons in terms of external and internal relations, respectively:

My perception of a ginger cat sitting on a black and white mat, say, has its space-of-reasons cause in that particular cat's sitting on that particular mat (the very fact that, when observed by me, ultimately justifies my judgment that that cat is sitting on that mat), but that cause is not "logically distinct" from the effect, in the relevant sense, since a statement of the existence of the effect (my perceiving that cat sitting on that mat) entails a statement of the existence of the cause (that cat's sitting on that mat). In other words...while realm-of-law causation is an external relation, space-of-reasons causation is an internal relation. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 32)

How is this relevant to McDowell's minimal empiricism? Well, McDowell wants to claim that Sellars's distinction is a false dichotomy, as the space of nature and the space of reasons are interconnected. The thought is this. The space of reasons is shaped by the space of nature. Sensory experiences possess conceptual content which sculpts the conceptuality of the space of reasons. McDowell warns against the tendency toward interiorizing the space of reasons. "The deformation is an interiorization of the space of reasons, a withdrawal of it from the external world" (McDowell, 1998c, "Knowledge and the Internal," p. 395). We deform the

space of reasons if we isolate it within an interiorized sphere. In fact, if we withdraw the space of reasons from the space of nature, we obliterate content. “If the space of reasons as we find it is withdrawn from the objective world as it makes itself manifest to us, then it becomes unintelligible how it can contain appearances, content-involving as they must be, either” (ibid., p. 410). Concurrently, experience delivers determinate and descriptive content. Sensations are discrete. And the determinate and descriptive content of sensory experiences can enter into justificatory relations, for it is conceptual or propositional. Robert Brandom (1995) claims that: “[J]ustification [= space of reasons] and truth conditions [= space of nature]...are treated as independent of one another. But being justified in holding a belief just is being justified in taking it to be *true*” (Brandom, 1995, p. 900; Brandom’s emphasis). There is thus a reciprocal relationship between the space of nature and the space of reasons:

If one succumbs to the temptation to identify the logical space that is set off against the space of reasons as the logical space of nature, one will take the idea of sensibility and the idea of actualizations of conceptual capacities to belong in logical spaces that are alien to each other. [But they are not alien to each other---quite the contrary.] (McDowell, 1998a, p. 367)

Gaskin depicts this as a non-sideways-on maneuver:

Now it is indeed one of McDowell’s principal aims to insist that impressions, though rightly conceived as “transactions in nature,” are nevertheless within the space of reasons, and hence able to provide a grounding for judgments. And impressions can only provide that grounding if they have conceptual content, the content (to put it schematically) *that things are thus and so*, which is the content of the judgment they ground. Since *that things are thus and so* is also how things (schematically) are in the world, if the judgment is true, there is in general “no ontological gap” between thought and world. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 22; Gaskin’s emphasis)

Nevertheless, McDowell assents to Sellars's rejection of classical empiricism, since classical empiricism is committed to "The Myth of the Given." The Myth of the Given is the idea that something sensory is given to the mind outside the conceptual sphere. But this idea is epistemologically problematic. If content is entirely sensory, it cannot stand in justificatory relations. But content *does* stand in justificatory relations, since content is a semantic notion. So a purely space of nature rendition of 'justification' (= "The Myth of the Given") does not provide a satisfying picture:

The Given is introduced into the dialectic as offering us one superficially attractive way to provide an exogenous grounding for something recognizable as empirical thought (judgment)...But, McDowell argues, the Given cannot satisfy our just demand for an endogenous constraint on judgment. For nothing which is no more than a non-conceptual "bare presence" is fit to ground judgment. (ibid., p. 55; citation omitted)

An exogenous constraint on judgment does not confer justification. An external relation is merely causal, not rational. An exogenous constraint or external relation is inarticulate. An endogenous constraint or internal relation, on the contrary, is articulate or rational. And a justificatory relation is, necessarily (or by definition) articulate. So the Myth of the Given is the erroneous thought that an exogenous constraint is sufficiently epistemological.

Now according to McDowell, Donald Davidson's (1984, 2001) philosophy, while illuminating the issue of content, ultimately embraces the first horn of the dilemma. Davidson's philosophy of content adopts the indeterminacy of content---contrary to Davidson's intentions. Similarly, Gareth Evans's (1982) philosophy of content is a highly innovative approach; still, Evans's philosophy illicitly adopts the notion of the epistemological Given---contrary to Evans's intentions:

[O]ne has two options: either, like Davidson, to insist that experience is only causally related to empirical thinking, not rationally; or else, like Evans, to fall into the Myth of the Given, and try to credit experience, conceived as extra-conceptual, with rational relations to empirical thinking. (McDowell, 1996, pp. 62-63)

Further:

There is a danger of falling into an interminable oscillation [between Davidson's position and Evans's position]... We can dismount from the seesaw if we can achieve a firm grip on this thought: receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation. The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity. It is not that they are exercised *on* an extra-conceptual deliverance of receptivity. We should understand what Kant calls 'intuition'---experiential intake---not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content. (ibid., p. 9; McDowell's emphasis)

McDowell wants to claim that minimal empiricism incorporates the best of both Davidson and Evans while avoiding their respective pitfalls. Moreover, an understanding of the failures of Davidson and Evans affects a deeper appreciation of the illusive power of the dilemma. Let us begin with Davidson's account of content.

### § 1.2 Davidson *qua* Coherentist

Davidson's philosophy of content is illuminating but ultimately unsatisfying, according to McDowell. It is illuminating (for McDowell) because it achieves a non-sideways-on understanding of the relations between mind and world. Davidson's non-sideways-on orientation follows from his philosophy of truth. For Davidson, truth is an irreducibly *semantic* concept.



The *epistemological* sense of truth is secondary. Truth, epistemologically speaking, is a function of representations accurately or inaccurately representing an external (and internal) reality. If the world is fundamentally distinct from the mind, it follows that our access to the world is necessarily mediated by representations. Talk of accurate or inaccurate representations, then, is rooted in a sideways-on approach. The semantic sense of truth is *not* dependent on the concept of representation. “Truth is beautifully transparent...and I take it as a primitive concept” (Davidson, 2001, p. 139). So-called T-sentences exhibit the transparent nature of truth. All T-sentences have the following structure:

- (1) ‘Snow is white’ is true if, and only if, snow is white.

T-sentences, as exemplified by (1), show that truth *is* disquotation. And disquotation does not turn on the concept of representation. Disquotation is transparent or diaphanous. It is tautologous. Davidson states: “[A] theory of truth *confers* a clear content. That it does so without introducing meanings as entities [= representations] is one of its rewarding qualities” (Davidson, 1984, “In Defense of Convention T,” p. 71; Davidson’s emphasis).<sup>2</sup>

Now, we can account for meaning via truth-conditions, according to Davidson.<sup>3</sup> And content is a meaning-theoretic notion. So we can account for content in terms of truth-conditions. Moreover, truth-conditions are diaphanous, as we have just seen. Thus Davidson’s philosophy of content, which is parasitic on his philosophy of truth, is couched within a non-

---

<sup>2</sup> This is grossly simplified. For a careful and critical discussion of Convention T, see Richard Heck (2004).

<sup>3</sup> See Davidson’s (1984) “Truth and Meaning.” For a Wittgensteinian interpretation of Davidson’s program, see Evans and McDowell (1976).

sideways-on metaphilosophical framework. Davidson is able to account for content without assuming a sideways-on stance, and this is a virtue of his philosophy:

[Davidson's] meaning-theory assumes meaning---the right-hand side of the 'T-sentences' *use* a sentence to provide the meaning of the sentence named on the left-hand side. It is not the aim of the project to provide a theory of meaning from 'the outside', as it were, by giving an analysis of the concept of meaning in terms that reduce it to something else. Such an aim McDowell characterizes as trying to get a 'sideways-on' perspective, and he believes it is a characteristic temptation to try and attain such a perspective, a temptation to be resisted by seeing that such a perspective is both impossible and unnecessary. We have to learn to be more modest in our ambitions. (MacDonald and MacDonald, 2006, p. xi; their emphasis)

Furthermore, Davidson argues that traditional empiricism's epistemological given is a myth; so he agrees with Sellars. For Davidson, the Myth of the Given is a corollary of the *third* dogma of empiricism. The first dogma of empiricism asserts that there is a sharp distinction between truths which are analytic and truths which are synthetic. The second dogma of empiricism claims that there is an isomorphic relation between empirically meaningful sentences and sense-data. But, according to Davidson, W.V. Quine has established that (i) there is no principled distinction between truths which are analytic and truths which are synthetic, and that (ii) there is no one-to-one correspondence between empirically meaningful sentences and sense-data.<sup>4</sup> Davidson wholeheartedly accepts Quine's lessons here. He parenthetically stated: "(On all these points [= (i) and (ii)], I am Quine's faithful student.)" (Davidson, 2001, p. 144). However, he thinks that Quine mistakenly accepts the third (and final) dogma of traditional empiricism. The third dogma of empiricism, according to Davidson, is the false assertion that there is a principled distinction between organizing scheme and uninterrupted content. The

---

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Quine (1953/1980).

distinction is bogus because distinguishing between uninterpreted content and propositional schemes (or languages) presupposes the first disreputable dogma of empiricism---namely, that propositional schemes are analytically constituted while uninterpreted contents are synthetically constituted. So the third dogma of classical empiricism is false, and this, in turn, dismantles traditional empiricism as a whole:

Davidson has identified the dualism of scheme and content as ‘the third dogma of empiricism’, and accordingly he has suggested that when we abandon the dualism, as we must, we are thereby discarding the last vestige of empiricism. By ‘empiricism’ here, he means the thesis that the deliverances of the senses are epistemologically significant: they stand in relations of justification or warrant to world views or theories. (McDowell, 1999, p. 90)

Davidson succinctly summarizes the structure, and fatal consequence, of his argument:

My target was the idea that on the one hand we have our world picture, consisting of the totality of our beliefs, and on the other hand we have an unconceptualized empirical input which provides the evidence for and content of our empirical beliefs. I urged that this dualism of scheme and content, ‘of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible’. I thought that if this dogma were abandoned, there would be nothing worth calling empiricism left. (Davidson, 1999, p. 105)

If there is a *bona fide* distinction between scheme and content, then something nonconceptual is given---awaiting schematization, so to speak. But since Davidson has dismantled the third dogma of empiricism, we have an immediate disproof of the epistemological Given, since it is a corollary of the third dogma’s untenable distinction.

In addition, the Given is epistemologically useless, because (to use Sellars’s helpful terminology) it resides in the space of nature, not the space of reasons. Again, the space of reasons is normative, whereas the space of nature is descriptive. Alternatively, the space of

reasons is conceptual, whereas the space of nature is nonconceptual. Since the space of nature comprises experience or that which is nonconceptual, it follows that experience is neither normative nor conceptual. In other words, sensory experience is *not* epistemologically significant:

Davidson is clear that if we conceive experience in terms of impacts on sensibility that occur outside the space of concepts [= the space of reasons], we must not think we can appeal to experience to justify judgments or beliefs. That would be to fall into the Myth of the Given, with its confusion of justification and exculpation. (McDowell, 1996, p. 14)

Again, experiences do not *justify* corresponding beliefs:

According to Davidson, experience is causally relevant to a subject's beliefs and judgments, but it has no bearing on their status as justified or warranted. Davidson says that 'nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief', and he means in particular that experience cannot count as a reason for holding a belief. (ibid., p. 14; citation omitted)

And:

The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in *this* sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified. (Davidson, 2001, p. 143; Davidson's emphasis)

Consequently, Davidson advocates an extreme form of coherentism (according to McDowell). A belief is justified only by another justified belief. Experience cannot justify a given belief, for it is nonconceptual. At best, experience exerts a causal influence on the totality of our empirical beliefs; but this causal influence plays no justificatory role. The result of

dismantling the three dogmas of empiricism is Davidsonian coherentism. Davidson's coherentism, then, is fundamentally anti-empiricist.

There is one big problem, however. If we adopt a non-sideways-on approach, if we adopt Davidsonian coherentism, how do we preserve the intuition that our beliefs are about some things rather than other things? How do we account for intentionality within Davidson's picture? How does Davidson's coherentism account for the determinacy of thought?

Well, Davidson propounds a transcendental argument purporting to show that thought determinacy is a necessary condition for mutual understanding. The claim is that our interpretative practices necessarily attribute mostly true beliefs to those we are interpreting (and *vice versa*). “[B]elief is in its nature veridical” (Davidson, 2001, p. 146). Rationality dictates that our interpretations must be charitable. This is often known as the “principle of charity” or the “constitutive ideal of rationality.” We must deem one another as uttering by and large true or correct beliefs. Otherwise we could not make sense of one another. But we do make sense of one another. Hence most of our beliefs are true. “Charity is forced on us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters” (Davidson, 1984, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” p. 197). Or: “The question 'how do I know my beliefs are generally true'? thus answers itself, simply because beliefs are by nature generally true” (Davidson, 2001, p. 153). Now a true belief has a determinate meaning. Therefore our beliefs are individuated. We know that most of our beliefs are intentional, because our interpretations must be charitable:

Davidson's picture is that we cannot get outside our beliefs.

Of course Davidson knows that such confinement imagery tends to prompt a recoil to the idea of the Given, the idea that truth and knowledge depend on rational relations to something outside

the conceptual realm. He thinks he can allow free rein to confinement imagery, but pre-empt the recoil by arguing, within his coherentist framework, for the evidently reassuring thesis that ‘belief is in its nature veridical’. Davidson argues for that thesis by connecting belief with interpretation, and urging that it is in the nature of interpretation that an interpreter must find her subjects mostly right about the world with which she can observe them causally interacting. (McDowell, 1996, p. 16; citation omitted)

Metaphilosophically speaking:

Davidson’s radical interpreter starts with a sideways-on view of the relation between her subjects and the world. But she finishes with a theory whose point is exactly that it is not from sideways-on: a theory that enables her to capture some of her subjects’ relations to the world from their own point of view, though in her terms rather than theirs. It is just the beauty of the notion of disquotation in the extended sense that it is available for this capturing of the inside viewpoint. (ibid., pp. 152-153)

McDowell is both satisfied and dissatisfied with Davidson’s philosophy of content. On the one hand, McDowell applauds Davidson’s metaphilosophical orientation. And he thinks that Davidson’s argument from scheme/content dualism goes through. As a consequence, the epistemological Given is rendered obsolete. This is further confirmation of Sellars’s results. On the other hand, Davidson’s coherentism is flawed, according to McDowell. The problem is this. Davidson’s transcendental argument---that which is supposed to establish that thought is necessarily intentional or bounded or determinate---begs the question:

Davidson’s well-known transcendental argument that a system of beliefs must be mostly true “comes too late,” by McDowell’s lights, because it presumes---what it has not yet earned the right to presume---that observational beliefs or judgments do indeed have empirical content. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 110)

It is a subtle point. According to Davidson, beliefs are contentful, since beliefs are by and large true. And according to Convention T, truth is epistemologically divorced from perceptual

experiences. The act of interpreting beliefs as largely true is independent of perceptual experiences. So even though beliefs are epistemologically independent of experiences, they are fully contentful. But this assumes what is at issue, namely, whether or not content metaphysically depends on determinate experiences. For Davidson, true beliefs are determinate, and therefore contentful. However, according to McDowell, determinacy cannot depend on the mere act of interpretation. Rather, determinacy demands individual experiences. So although Davidson's transcendental argument is valid, it is unsound, because it begs the question. And if Davidson's argument begs the question, then he has failed to account for the determinacy of beliefs. Therefore Davidsonian coherentism is impaled on the first horn of the dilemma.

Davidson's circular reasoning stems from his excessive rationalism. The latter implies that mental contents do *not* require discrete experiences. But this is false, according to transcendental empiricism. For the transcendental empiricist, contentful beliefs require experiences, and experiences require beliefs. Beliefs can be both true and justified because they are transcendently conditioned by experiential content. Experiential content, in turn, is amenable to beliefs, given that it is transcendently conditioned by conceptual capacities. The point is that we need to reintroduce involuntary sensory impressions in order to avoid begging the question. Yet we must conceive of these impressions as a tribunal, as entities which are answerable to our beliefs. With a minimal empiricism in place, we can achieve a valid non-sideways-on orientation toward mental content. And then we may see things aright.

To recapitulate, McDowell depicts Davidson as aligned with Sellars in the project of dismantling traditional empiricism. "There is a correspondence between Sellars's attack on the Given and Davidson's attack on 'the third dogma of empiricism'---the dualism of conceptual

scheme and empirical content” (McDowell, 1995, p. 234). And McDowell endorses Davidson’s argument from scheme/content dualism. However, he dissents from Davidson’s transcendental argument. Davidson has shown that the second horn of the dilemma is bankrupt, but he fails to adequately accommodate for determinate content. And so, in the final analysis, Davidsonian coherentism succumbs to the first horn of the dilemma. Let us now turn to Evans’s philosophy of content.

### § 1.3 Evans's Concept of Nonconceptual Content

Evans believes in the reality of an epistemologically respectable form of nonconceptual content. According to Evans, nonconceptual content is epistemologically significant; it can justify corresponding beliefs. It is not the case that experience is intrinsically conceptual. Experience delivers nonconceptual content, and this content can stand in justificatory relations. “[Evans’s concept of nonconceptual content] takes...judgments and beliefs to be *rationally grounded* in nonconceptual content possessed by experience” (McDowell, 1996, p. 162; emphasis added). An epistemologically respectable form of nonconceptual content immediately follows from Evans's notion of an “informational system.”<sup>5</sup>

The informational system is a receptacle of experiential information. The informational system receives, encodes and stores three types of information: (a) perceptual information; (b) memorial information; and (c) testimonial information. For the purposes of this study, I will solely discuss (a). Here is McDowell’s austere description of the informational system:

---

<sup>5</sup> See Evans (1982), section 5.2 ff.



[The] informational system is a physical mechanism, connected to its surroundings by transducers that convert physical impacts from outside into events of the sort that the system can work on, and perhaps by transducers that convert the system's end products into physical interventions in the exterior. The system knows nothing even about the character of the immediate physical impacts on the input transducers, or the immediate physical interventions in the exterior that result from its operations by way of the output transducers, let alone about the nature and layout of the distal environment. (McDowell, 1998b, "The Content of Perceptual Experience," pp. 350-351)

More to the point, states of the informational system are explanatorily prior to conceptual states. Evans wrote:

In general, it seems to me preferable to take the notion of *being in an informational state with such-and-such* content as a primitive notion for philosophy, rather than attempt to characterize it in terms of belief. ...[T]he subject's *being* in an informational state is independent of whether or not he believes that the state is veridical. (Evans, 1982, p. 123; Evans's emphasis)

The content of perceptual experience, which is a product of the informational system, is nonconceptual in an epistemologically respectable sense. It is not the case that all epistemologically significant content must be conceptual. Evans is suggesting that there is a biased inclination toward epistemologically privileging conceptual content. What is unjustly dismissed is the idea that nonconceptual content is equally epistemic. Nonconceptual content can justify corresponding beliefs. Indeed, conceptual content is based upon, or rationally related to, the nonconceptual content of the informational system. Hence beliefs, paradigmatic examples of conceptual contents, are rationally rooted in the nonconceptual content of experience. In short, the content of a perceptual (or memorial or testimonial) experience is fully contentful, even though it is nonconceptual.

McDowell is pretty clearly opposed in principle to Evans's informational system, since it disconnects the interconnected relationship between sensibility and understanding, between receptivity and spontaneity, between the space of nature and the space of reasons:

In Evans's account of experience, receptivity figures in the guise of the perceptual element of the informational system, and his idea is that the perceptual system produces its content-bearing states independently of any operations of spontaneity....So the independent operations of the informational system figure in Evans's account as a separable contribution made by receptivity to its co-operation with spontaneity. (McDowell, 1996, p. 51)

So, for Evans, receptivity *does* make a separable contribution to its co-operation with spontaneity. But this contradicts McDowell's interpretation of Kant's dictum. As we saw at the very end of section 1.1, one of McDowell's most basic principles is that receptivity does *not* make an even notionally separable contribution to its cooperation with spontaneity---quite the reverse. McDowell writes: "Sellars's dictum [= McDowell's interpretation of Kant's dictum] implies that it is a form of the Myth to think sensibility by itself, without any involvement of capacities that belong to our rationality, can make things available for our cognition" (McDowell, 2009b, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given," p. 257).

Evans offers three arguments for nonconceptual content. Each argument is supposed to lend further credence to Evans's nonconceptual content thesis. I will state McDowell's response to each argument. The first argument is "the richness argument" (Heck, 2000). Here is a vivid expression of the argument's phenomenological point:

Consider your current perceptual state---and now imagine what a complete description of the way the world appears to you at this moment might be like. Surely a thousand words would hardly begin to do the job. And it is not just that the description would be long: Rather, it seems hard to imagine that your perceptual state, as it is now, has any specific articulation corresponding to the

conceptual articulation of a particular one of the many different Thoughts that might capture its content; and it seems at least as hard to imagine that you now possess all the concepts that would be expressed by the words occurring in such a description, even if one could be framed. (Heck, 2000, p. 489; Heck's capitalization)

The phenomenology of content is simply too rich. Propositional or conceptual categories fail to do justice to much of the contents of perceptual experiences. For example, enormously complex visual graduations and spatial arrangements often elude verbal description. And it is not just that we don't have enough time to, as it were, conceptually enumerate the phenomenological content of a perceptual experience. It is a stronger point. The point is that visual--spatial aspects of perceptual experiences are not conceptual. Suppose you are at the Art Institute of Chicago, enjoying Paul Cezanne's celebrated *Basket of Apples*. It seems that the content of your experience is nonconceptual through and through. The intricacies of the painting's disjointed perspective, say, seem entirely nonconceptual; that is, they seem unnamable.

McDowell argues that this is a *non sequitur*. To wit, demonstrative concepts (e.g., "this" or "that") can capture the content of your seemingly nonconceptual experience. If you are discussing the disjointed perspective of *Basket of Apples* with a friend, you may refer to features of the painting's perspective by uttering "this" or "that." Similar remarks apply to other aspects of the painting, such as its hue and geometrical complexity. Minimal empiricism says that determinate and descriptive sensations can justify corresponding judgments---because sensations are conceptual. Symmetrically, judgments can capture the contents of perceptual experience, since the contents of perceptual experience are conceptual. So McDowell is basically offering a transcendental argument. The necessary condition for the applicability of demonstrative expressions is that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual. Our demonstrative

concepts *do* apply to perceptual experience. Thus the content of perceptual experience is conceptual.

The second argument turns on the well known Muller-Lyer illusion. The Muller-Lyer illusion is supposed to show that perception is independent of judgment; for the appearance persists, even though the subject does not judge that the appearance is as it appears. Muller-Lyer-type illusions seem to show that the content of perception is fundamentally different from the content of thought. According to Evans, judgments are active exercises of conceptual capacities. “Evans is here insisting that the active business of making up one’s mind is the proper context in which to place conceptual capacities...” (McDowell, 1996, p. 60). Yet perceptual illusions seem to elicit so-called non-active judgments. We immediately judge that one line is longer than the other. The (false) judgment is passively induced by the perception. But the idea that there are passive judgments is absurd. Judgments are nothing if not active. Hence the best explanation of perceptual illusions is that the content of perceptual experience is nonconceptual. In fact, without the concept of nonconceptual content, perceptual illusions render judgments unrecognizable. Perceptual illusions serve as nice counterexamples to McDowell’s claim that experience and judgment are internally related. The Muller-Lyer illusion strongly suggests that there must be two kinds of contents: nonconceptual content and conceptual content.

McDowell thinks that Evans’s second argument for nonconceptual content reveals a “blind spot.” Specifically, Evans never considers the very real possibility that conceptual capacities are necessarily implicated in perceptual occurrences. Again, receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to its cooperation with spontaneity. To Evans’s mind,

if conceptual content is governed by the generality constraint, it must be exemplified in active judgments. The informational system is pure receptivity in operation; so its content is nonconceptual. But this ratiocination reveals a blind spot, since there is a principled distinction between conceptual capacities operative in perception and conceptual capacities operative in judgments. It is a formal distinction.<sup>6</sup> The conceptual content of judgments is voluntary and reflexive, whereas the conceptual content of perception is involuntary and passive. But they are equally actualizations of conceptual content. They both involve the same sort of conceptual capacities. “[E]xperience is a *passive* actualization of capacities whose core actualization is *active*, namely their exercise in judgment” (Gaskin, 2006, p. 67; Gaskin’s emphasis). Given the formal distinction between experiential and judgmental conceptual capacities, minimal empiricism offers an adequate account of the Muller-Lyer illusion (and similar illusions). The initial illusory experience *just is* conceptual. We don’t have to posit a theoretically suspect notion of nonconceptual content in order to account for perceptual illusions.

The third and final argument for nonconceptual content is from animal and infant mentation. Evans is intrigued by the fact that we share elementary perceptions with animals and infants. He recognizes that animals and infants seem to perceive and interact with their sensory environs. For example, an animal can successfully navigate around a room (or maze) without hurting itself. An animal, then, must perceive rudimentary spatial relationships. So there is an important commonality between mature adults and animals *vis-à-vis* elementary spatial

---

<sup>6</sup> A formal distinction “has a real basis in the thing, but does not imply the presence of more than one independently existing thing” (Back, 2000, p. 413). So, for example, Socrates’s animality and rationality are formally distinct, but Socrates *just is* a rational animal. Furthermore, Gaskin argues (successfully, to my mind) that Frege’s celebrated sense/reference distinction is really just an application of Scotus’s formal distinction. See Gaskin (2004), p. 497.

perceptions (or cognitive maps). And yet animals are nonpropositional creatures, quite unlike mature adults. Therefore the content of elementary spatial perceptions cannot be conceptual. We must accept the reality of nonconceptual content.

McDowell's response is swift. He states:

[I]t is not compulsory to attempt to accommodate the combination of something in common and a striking difference in this factorizing way: to suppose our perceptual lives include a core that we can also recognize in the perceptual life of a mere animal, and an extra ingredient in addition. And if we do take this, there is no satisfactory way to understand the role of the supposed core in our perceptual lives. (McDowell, 1996, p. 64)

We need not factor out a common denominator between ourselves and animals. In fact, a factorizing explanation is detrimental, since it neglects and obscures the conceptual content of our perceptual experience. A factorizing explanation is simply *ad hoc*.

Overall, Evans's theory of content is both good and bad. It does a good job of accommodating the intentionality intuition, the intuition that our thoughts are about some things rather than other things. A desideratum on a theory of content is that it ought to accommodate the intentionality intuition. Evans dubs this "Russell's Principle."<sup>7</sup> Russell's principle states that: "a subject cannot make a judgment about something unless he knows which object his judgment is about" (Evans, 1982, p. 89, see note 1). Evans respects Russell's principle and constructs his philosophy of content accordingly. In this respect, Evans's approach is anything but a mere "frictionless spinning in a void," *contra* Davidson. Russell's principle is directed at securing the determinacy of thought. Unfortunately (according to McDowell) Evans's philosophy of content is impaled on the second horn of the dilemma. Evans's nonconceptual

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Evans (1982), chapter 4.

content is really a subtle form of the Myth of the Given. In a word, so-called nonconceptual content is “blind,” and therefore not a species of content:

If experience is pictured as input to spontaneity from outside, then it is another case of fraudulent labeling to use the word ‘content’ for something we can even so take experience to have, in such a way that reason-constituting relations can intelligibly hold between experiences and judgments....

I am claiming that although Evans does take care to credit experiences with content that does not save them from being intuitions in a sense that entitles us to apply the Kantian tag to them: since they are without concepts, they are blind. (McDowell, 1996, pp. 53-54)

Nonconceptual ‘content’ acts as an exogenous constraint on judgment; but as we saw earlier, this is highly problematic. An exogenous or external constraint is a “bare presence,” but a bare presence does not represent anything. But if it does not represent anything, it is not a type of content, i.e., nonconceptual content is *not* a form of representational content. In a slogan, if there is no conceptual integration, there is no representation. Now consider the conceptual content of experience. The conceptual content of sense experience is amenable to conceptual integration, for it is seamlessly integrated into active, conceptual capacities. Contrast this with the nonconceptual content of experience. Nonconceptual content is not amenable to conceptual integration, for it is not seamlessly integrated into active, conceptual capacities. Hence the nonconceptual content of experience does not represent anything. It is not a species of content. Therefore there is no epistemologically respectable form of nonconceptual content. And so Evans’s position is necessarily committed to something like the Myth of the Given or the second horn of the dilemma.

Naturalism is an intriguing response to the dilemma of mental content. In a nutshell, naturalism dissolves the dilemma through undercutting its key assumption, namely, that conceptual content is unique or of its own kind. The naturalist essentially disavows Sellars's logical space of reasons. For the naturalist, the space of reasons is a species of the space of nature. Now, *prima facie*, this is counterintuitive. After all, the space of reasons certainly seems normative. But this misses the point. The naturalization of content is supposed to affect a paradigm shift. Just as Copernicus's sun centered solar system affected a paradigm shift in astronomy, so a naturalistic portrayal of normativity is supposed to affect a paradigm shift in our understanding of mental content. There is nothing unique about the content of thought; it is amenable to naturalistic description and systematization. Notice that neither Davidson nor Evans is sympathetic to a naturalistic portrayal of the space of reasons. For Evans, conceptual content is governed by the generality constraint, and the generality constraint is a unique condition on thought. Similarly, for Davidson, the content of thought is governed by the "principle of charity" or the "constitutive ideal of rationality," and the constitutive ideal of rationality or the principle of charity is of its own kind. Naturalism leaves something important out. Be this as it may, the generality constraint, or the constitutive ideal of rationality---or any other kind of normative constraint, for that matter---is both describable and systematizable in strictly naturalistic terms, according to the naturalist. In brief, normativity *is* normality, and normality is a species of the logical space of nature. As stated in section 1.1, the space of nature comprises descriptive (as opposed to prescriptive) facts. Descriptive facts are cataloged and systematized by the natural sciences, viz., chemistry, physics, biology and psychology. So, since normativity reduces—or, better: *quasi-*



*reduces*<sup>8</sup>---to normality, normativity (or the space of reasons) is rendered tractable. By “quasi-reduction” I mean translating the space of reasons into the space of nature.

Simply stated, most naturalists are exceedingly suspicious of so-called *sui generis* kinds. Unique kinds seem to float mysteriously free of naturalistic anchoring. And this is epistemologically, not to mention semantically, threatening. For it would appear that biological entities are necessarily disbarred from cognitively inhabiting a supernatural realm:

It is intelligible that the resulting sense that knowledge and thought are *sui generis*, by comparison with what can present itself as a compelling conception of the natural, should generate metaphysical anxieties about them, which crystallize in a felt threat of supernaturalism. (McDowell, 2009a, “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” p. 260)

The “threat” of supernaturalism is unacceptable, for two reasons. First, it is false. Indeed supernaturalism is comparable to believing in ghosts or witches. Second, it is an agent of superfluous intellectual discomfort; but (according to McDowell) philosophy is supposed to diagnose and treat intellectual distress---not create it. It is basically a *reductio ad absurdum* point. If we assume that supernaturalism is true, we encounter absurdity. So it must be false that the content of thought is *sui generis*. Conceptual capacities must reside wholly within the space of nature. There is thus no dilemma of mental content.

---

<sup>8</sup> I borrow the term from Crispin Wright. See Wright (2002), p. 140, see note 3. Strictly, intentional discourse does not reduce to naturalistic discourse, because intentional discourse does not constitute a scientific theory. Reduction proper involves at least two scientific theories. The experimental and theoretical laws of one theory are said to reduce to the experimental and theoretical laws of another theory. This sense of reduction is not usually used by naturalists. By reduction, naturalists usually mean “naturalistic descriptions of intentional phenomena.” This is different from the sense of reduction used in the philosophy of science. Hence the term quasi-reduction. For an elementary discussion of reduction in the philosophies of science and mind, see Kim (1998), ch. 9.

Quine's (1969) "Epistemology Naturalized" is arguably the principal programmatic statement of naturalism. According to Quine, epistemology's emphasis on normativity is entirely mistaken. Instead, we ought to *naturalize* epistemological notions, such as justification or rationality. By "naturalize" Quine means render in descriptive terms. And whatever is describable is capturable by the natural sciences. For instance, a justified belief is to be understood in terms of facts pertaining to memory/learning. Scientific theories of memory/learning tell us what a justified belief is. This sense of justification is descriptive. Epistemological concepts can be fruitfully couched in psychological terms. We can translate epistemology into descriptive psychology (or the space of nature). Therefore we should supplant normative vocabulary with the nomenclature of behavioral psychology:

Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input--- certain patterns of irritation in assorted frequencies, for instance--- and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. (Quine, 1969, pp. 82-83)

Quine's approach generalizes to mental content. If epistemological terminology is translatable into naturalistic terminology, it stands to reason that the mind and its contents are naturalizable *mutatis mutandis*. Especially since (for McDowell) epistemological anxieties are epiphenomenal; the real problem is content. But mental content is not a real problem, since it is naturalizable. Intentional or normative discourse admits of a naturalistic description and systematization. Hence we can quasi-reduce normative discourse to descriptive theory.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> For a brisk presentation of the naturalization program, see Barry Loewer (1997).

A brief digression may be in order. To repeat a theme, if the mind/world distinction holds, the epistemic status of mental content falls prey to an “interminable oscillation” between Davidson’s coherentism and Evans’s nonconceptual content:

...the tendency to oscillate between two unpalatable positions: a coherentism that loses the bearing of empirical thought on reality altogether and a recoil into a vain appeal to the Given. (McDowell, 1996, p. 108)

Equivalently:

[E]ither we must see our way to supposing that...operations of sentient nature can stand in rational relations to thought (the Myth of the Given), or we must accept that sensibility has no epistemological significance at all (a radical coherentism). (ibid., p. 98)

The dilemma of mental content seems inescapable. But according to the naturalist, we can dismount from the oscillation or “seesaw,” provided that we naturalize content. Unless we naturalize content, our worries will persist indefinitely. Naturalism, then, is a form of philosophical therapy. Naturalism allegedly dissolves philosophical worries. If we naturalize content, our intellectual discontents will dissipate. Thus, since normativity is a subset of normality, or because the space of reasons is a subset of the space of nature, naturalism sidesteps the dilemma of mental content.

With respect to the naturalism/anti-naturalism debate, McDowell deploys the rhetorical device of terminological abuse. Quine's naturalism is labeled “bald naturalism.” Platonism or anti-naturalism is dubbed “rampant platonism.” Bald naturalism is basically an extreme form of scientism. Scientism is the thesis that all legitimate inquiry is exhausted by the natural sciences. Bald naturalism baldly declares that the natural sciences are the touchstones of intellectual activity. Clearly bald naturalism is too myopic. There exist perfectly legitimate fields of study

which do not fall under the rubric of natural science. As an example, sociology is an intellectually respectable discipline even though it is not a natural science. Rampant platonism is antithetical to bald naturalism. Rampant platonism rampantly situates non-natural kinds within a non-natural realm. For the rampant platonist, the content of thought is essentially non-natural. But what does it mean to say that the contents of thoughts are directed toward a supernatural realm? The idea is deeply mysterious at best. McDowell writes:

In rampant platonism, the structure of the space of reasons, the structure in which we place things when we find meaning in them, is simply extra-natural. Our capacity to resonate to that structure has to be mysterious; it is as if we had a foothold outside the animal kingdom, in a splendidly non-human realm of ideality. (ibid., p. 88)

Clearly rampant platonism is far too opaque. Thus neither bald naturalism nor rampant platonism is adequate.

Characteristically, McDowell strives for a middle way. McDowell considers himself a naturalist, but his naturalism is of a very different stripe. He refers to his position as “naturalized platonism.” A naturalized platonism lies between bald naturalism and rampant platonism:

We should aim not to solve the difficulties of locating rational thought and intentional activity [= the space of reasons] within the modern naturalistic view, but to finesse them by accomplishing an improved---‘relaxed’---conception of what should rank as *natural*--one which allows us to ‘take in stride’, without any sense of eeriness or mystification, an acceptance that Spontaneity is *sui generis*, by emphasizing the thought that its distinctive concepts capture patterns in our natural way of living. (Wright, 2002, p. 141; Wright’s capitalization and emphasis)

And:

Naturalized platonism [= liberal naturalism] is platonistic in that the structure of the space of reasons has a sort of autonomy; it is not derivative from, or reflective of, truths about human beings that

are capturable independently of having that structure in view. But this platonism is not rampant: the structure of the space of reasons is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being's eyes to them. (McDowell, 1996, p. 92)<sup>10</sup>

Gaskin situates McDowell's naturalized platonism within the traditional square of opposition:

[W]e should take it that the rampant Platonist denies *both* that it is essential to us (living, biological beings) that we can have our eyes opened by our upbringing to the demands of reasons, *and* the converse, that it is essential to the demands of reason that our upbringing can open our eyes to them. The naturalized Platonist will then presumably *assert* both these conjuncts, and will accordingly adopt a position which is the contrary, not the contradictory, of rampant platonism. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 47; Gaskin's emphasis)

According to the naturalized platonist, we can naturalistically accommodate the space of reasons, provided that we broaden the scope of the space of nature. If we equate the space of nature with natural-scientific understanding, we limit our capacity to understand conceptual or propositional content. But this is not to suggest that the natural sciences have nothing to offer. On the contrary, behavioral psychology is instructive. Still, it fails to fully capture the space of concepts. Behavioral psychology may be necessary for understanding mental content, but it is not sufficient. It is a mistake to think that bald naturalism can provide both necessary and sufficient conditions for content.

---

<sup>10</sup> Strictly, Platonism proper says that the space of reasons is *not* in "splendid isolation" from the space of nature. On the contrary, the space of nature is an imperfect image of the space of reasons (or the domain of Forms). For Plato, normality metaphysically depends on normativity. McDowell mentions in passing that: "[N]aming the position after Plato must do him an injustice" (McDowell, 1996, p. 110). Fortunately, for our purposes, we may safely ignore this complication.

On the one hand, McDowell thinks that naturalism exhibits the right sort of motivation, since it aims at dissolving the dilemma of mental content. For the naturalist, it is false that the mind and the world are fundamentally distinct, because there is no mind to speak of. Everything is “physical” or “naturalistic.” On the other hand, McDowell believes that naturalism goes about dissolving the dilemma the wrong way. Speaking clinically, naturalism administers the wrong sort of treatment. We should appreciate the intuition that the conceptual or propositional domain is special. A naturalistic quasi-reduction of the conceptual utterly fails to capture this intuition. “We can understand and exercise the philosophical impulse [= intuition], not just repress it” (McDowell, 1996, p. 183). Repressing epistemological and/or semantic issues is contraindicated, so to speak:

Opting out in the sense I disparage is not just discarding the apparent problems, but doing so without, as I do, granting force to the distinctive intuition that---in a certain context---makes it seem as if they are genuine: the intuition that the conceptual apparatus that centers on the idea of objective purport belonging in a logical space of reasons that is *sui generis*, by comparison with the logical space in which the natural sciences function. When I speak of bald naturalism as opting out, the point is to contrast the baldly naturalist way of deconstructing those apparent problems with mine. (McDowell, 1998d, p. 421)

Now, it is a remarkable fact that human beings are capable of responding to reasons. We are: “[C]ontinually reshaping a world-view in rational response to the deliverances of experience...” (McDowell, 1996, p. 114). Our “responsiveness to reasons” seems to occur within the space of reasons. Indeed: “[P]lacing something in the space of reasons is seeing it as an exercise of rationality, a case of responsiveness to reasons as such” (McDowell, 2002a, p. 271). This is in sharp contrast with animals. Animals are incapable of responding to reasons, because they lack the faculty of spontaneity; their sensations are not conceptually structured.

But if their sensations are not conceptually structured, it follows that they do not enjoy perceptual experiences, in the strict Kantian sense:

Mere animals do not come within the scope of the Kantian thesis, since they do not have the spontaneity of the understanding. We cannot construe them as continually reshaping a world-view in rational response to the deliverances of experience; not if the idea of rational response requires subjects who are in charge of their thinking, standing ready to reassess what is a reason for what, and to change their responsive propensities accordingly. It follows that mere animals cannot enjoy ‘outer experience’... (McDowell, 1996, p. 114)

McDowell’s Kantianism states that infants and animals do not have an outer sense, because they lack the faculty of understanding or concepts. “[A]nything that does not have concepts does not have perceptual experience [= outer sense] either” (Brandom, 2002, p. 92). Outer sense is possible only if the faculties of understanding and sensibility are intertwined. But animals do not possess the faculty of spontaneity. Thus animals are incapable of an outer sense. Bluntly stated: “Dumb animals are natural beings and no more. Their being is entirely contained within their biological nature” (McDowell, 1996, p. 70).

This ramifies to inner sense. Since animals lack the faculty of understanding, they are incapable of “full-fledged subjectivity.” Subjectivity or inner sense requires an interconnected relationship between the faculties of sensibility and understanding. Because animals lack the faculty of concepts, they are incapable of an inner sense or subjectivity. Moreover, animals are incapable of an inner sense because they are incapable of an outer sense; conversely, they are incapable of an outer sense since they are incapable of an inner sense. “Creatures without conceptual capacities lack self-consciousness and---this is part of the same package---experience of objective reality” (ibid., p. 114). Or: “In the absence of spontaneity, no self can be in view,

and by the same token, the world cannot be in view either” (ibid., p. 114). Since animals lack an outer sense, they *ipso facto* lack an inner sense. Subjectivity and outer sense are interconnected.

Instead of subjectivity, McDowell attributes a “proto-subjectivity” to animals. The concept of proto-subjectivity is delineated in terms of Gadamer's (1975) distinction between living in a world---i.e., subjectivity---and living in an environment---i.e., proto-subjectivity:

In mere animals, sentience is in the service of a mode of life that is structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives....[A] merely animal life is shaped by goals whose control of the animal's behaviour at a given moment is an immediate outcome of biological forces. A mere animal does not weigh reasons and decide what to do. Now Gadamer's thesis is this: a life that is structured only in that way is led not in the world, but only in an environment. (McDowell, 1996, p. 115)

Animals merely respond to biological needs. They lack the faculty of understanding. As such they inhabit an environment, and therefore lack the capacity for subjectivity. Human beings, on the other hand, can make decisions which are rationally responsive to their environments. As such we reside in a world, and therefore have the capacity for subjectivity.

But this does not imply that animals do not experience inner sensations:

It would be hopeless to claim that sensations and emotional states are there for a mere animal in the way problems and opportunities thrown up by the environment are there for it....But in any case nothing I have said about the inner world prevents us from acknowledging that mere animals can feel pain and fear. (ibid., p. 120)

Further:

[N]othing in the concepts of pain or fear implies that they can get a grip only where there is understanding, and thus full-fledged subjectivity. There is no reason to suppose that they can be applied in non-first person way only to something capable of applying them to itself in a first-person way. (ibid., pp. 120-121)



Just as with Wittgenstein's famous beetle in the box,<sup>11</sup> we are not saying that animals experience something or nothing. Phenomenology dictates that we cannot know either way. The 'qualia' of different creatures are inaccessible in the sense that we cannot *subjectively experience* their qualia (Nagel, 1979). However, animals certainly seem receptive to sensations. When a steak is given to a dog, the dog certainly appears to have very powerful gustatory experiences. Thus, given the conceptual, phenomenological and anecdotal data, the most reasonable course of action is to attribute a "proto-subjectivity" to animals. And then we may say that animals have quasi-inner perceptual experiences.

It is important to notice that the distinction between proto-subjectivity and subjectivity does not postulate a "highest common factor conception of experience."<sup>12</sup> It is not the case that the perceptual experience of human beings and the perceptual experience of animals factor out a common denominator. Consider pain. Without conceptual capacities, the contents of pain states are not possible. Animals do not perceptually experience pain proper, because they lack the capacity for subjectivity proper. They lack the faculty of understanding. Human beings *do* have the capacity for subjectivity, since their inner sensations are necessarily carved by the faculty of understanding. The capacity for subjectivity minimally presupposes a faculty of understanding. Human beings, then, do experience pain proper. Hence the concepts of subjectivity and proto-subjectivity share nothing in common.

---

<sup>11</sup> See Wittgenstein (1953), sections 293 and 304.

<sup>12</sup> In epistemology, McDowell is against the idea that veridical perceptual experiences and illusory perceptual experiences share a "highest common factor." A veridical perceptual experience and a non-veridical perceptual experience share nothing in common, according to McDowell. For more on this, see McDowell's (1998c) "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge," section 3.

What follows from these reflections is an ontological distinction between first nature and second nature. First nature phenomena fall squarely within the space of nature. Laws of nature exclusively subsume first nature phenomena. But mature human beings are unique in that they enjoy both a first nature and a second nature. Second nature---although naturalistically embodied or instantiated---does *not* fall squarely within the space of nature, as second nature is *sui generis*. It resides within the space of reasons. So laws of nature cannot subsume second nature phenomena. Empirical evidence for the existence of second nature comes from developmental psychology. Developmental psychologists talk about a maturation process for which other animals are incapable of. In addition, large canons of cultural traditions exist, everything from poetry to puppetry, which attest to an overarching ontology of second nature. Although puppetry and poetry are naturalistically instantiated, they are of their own kind. In the philosophy of mind, the naturalistic fallacy is to think that human beings and their activities can be explained and understood in terms of laws of nature, since human beings and their activities have one foot in the space of nature, in a manner of speaking. This is a myth, because scientific laws of nature have no application to things which are of their own kind, even though unique kinds are naturalistic entities.

For McDowell, the paradigmatic second nature phenomenon is natural language. Natural language is the vehicle upon which canons of tradition are transmitted:

The feature of language that really matters is this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it....But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, which is the same thing as acquiring a mind, the capacity to think and act

intentionally, at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as it stands. (McDowell, 1996, p. 126; citation omitted)

Cultural traditions, human development and the space of reasons in general are exemplifications of second nature. And their existence is preserved through natural language. Hence natural language is the paragon of second nature.

McDowell continues:

Initiation into a language is initiation into a going conception of the layout of the space of reasons. That promises to make it intelligible how, beginning as mere animals, human beings mature into being at home in the space of reasons. On this view, a shared language is the primary medium of understanding. It stands over against all parties to communication in it, with a kind of independence of each of them that belongs with its meriting a kind of respect. (ibid., p. 184, see note 3)

Our ability to respond to reasons is a function of natural language. Natural language is thus necessarily rational. More importantly, the unique phenomenon of nature language can account for how sheer animals---more specifically: primates---have a place in the space of reasons. The actualization of second nature necessitates natural language. Human maturation does not make sense independently of natural language. Second nature requires natural language. And natural language is naturalistically instantiated.

McDowell frequently uses the German expression “*Bildung*” (upbringing). *Bildung* seamlessly transforms our first nature into a second nature. Because the process is often seamless: “[W]e tend to be *forgetful* of the very idea of second nature” (ibid., p. 85; emphasis added). “Plain facts” from developmental psychology (say) tend to be forgotten in the course of our philosophizing. McDowell’s use of *Bildung* serves as a reminder of our second nature.

Furthermore: “[N]othing occult [or mysterious] happens to a human being in ordinary upbringing” (ibid., p. 122):

The bare idea of *Bildung* ensures that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman, and that should eliminate the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason. This leaves no genuine questions about norms, apart from those that we address in reflective thinking about specific norms, an activity that is not particularly philosophical. (ibid., p. 95)

And:

[A]lthough the structure of the space of reasons cannot be reconstructed out of facts about our involvement in the realm of law, it can be the framework within which meaning comes into view only because our eyes can be opened to it by *Bildung*, which is an element in the normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are. Meaning is not a mysterious gift from outside nature. (ibid., p. 88)

McDowell’s ontology of second nature is supposed to “partially reenchant nature.” We can never have a fully enchanted experience of nature as involving final causes or angels or whatever. What we can do is partially reenchant nature via second nature. As the story goes, Descartes extruded nature of enchantment. Naturalistic facts are three-dimensional objects which you can point to on a Cartesian grid. And that’s it—there is nothing to add here. With Descartes, the space of nature is a matter of strict external, not internal, causation involving three-dimensional objects. “Modern science understands its subject matter in a way that threatens, at least, to leave it disenchanting...” (ibid., p. 70). Previously, with Aristotle, nature was inherently meaningful. Even gravity was enchanted. For better and for worse, Descartes abolished this state of affairs. Consequently, modern philosophy is beset with anxieties surrounding the apparent disenchantment of nature. There is a felt loss of content. McDowell’s concept of second nature promises to infuse Descartes's space of nature with meaning. The

content of perceptual experience is conceptual. Our upbringing or development affects a second nature, which saturates our first nature with content or meaning. While second nature is *sui generis*, it is naturalistically instantiated. There is nothing supernatural about second nature.

Thus second nature does not violate Occam's razor. Again, we may eat our cake and have it, too:

One of McDowell's leading ideas is that if we conceive the receiving of an impression as what he calls "a transaction in nature," we can easily seem to be confined to one of two unappealing options, either a substantial empiricism in which judgments are implausibly grounded in impressions taken as entities or occurrences located exterior to the space of reasons, in the realm of law, or a Davidsonian coherentism in which judgments are cut off from impressions, so conceived, and are accordingly ungrounded in experience. But once we see that a transaction in nature can be a transaction in second nature---a transaction within the space of reasons---we can avoid having to make that unpleasant choice. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 29)

More generally:

McDowell argues for a partial re-enchantment, one depending on the idea that 'second nature' has just as much right to be included in what is deemed to be natural as does law-governed first nature. Second nature arises as the result of our development and maturation as humans, such maturation being dependent upon our biological heritage, a social environment, and relevant training. The acquisition of a language is paradigmatically something acquired in this way; that humans are linguistic creatures is thus part of their second nature, as are the conceptual and rational capacities that come along with language. (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2006, p. xix)

## § 1.5 Conclusion

Now let us connect the dots. As we have seen, there are three standard responses to the dilemma of mental content: 1) Davidsonian coherentism; 2) Evans's nonconceptual content; and 3) naturalism. As mentioned in section 1.2, 1) is an inadequate resolution of the dilemma. Specifically, Davidson's transcendental argument for content begs the question, since it presupposes what it attempts to prove, namely, that thought adheres to the intentionality intuition. Davidson's principle of charity is too charitable. McDowell's notion of second nature, however, can account for how content is already in place:

...Davidson's mutual interpreters must come to their cognitive task already equipped with a sense of the layout of the space of reasons, a substantive conception of what 'the constitutive ideal of rationality' requires. Now I think we should be suspicious of the thought that we can simply credit human individuals with this equipment, without benefit of anything like my appeal to initiation into a shared language and thereby into a tradition. (McDowell, 1996, pp. 186-187)

Without a shared language, Davidson's transcendental argument fails to secure determinate content. McDowell is opposed to Davidson's individualistic approach to mental content. Individualism is the idea that thought and/or language can be understood individualistically. The concept of a shared language is diametrically opposed to individualism. In section 1.3, it was argued that 2) was plagued with epistemological givenness. More precisely, nonconceptual content is nonpropositional, but this entails that nonconceptual content is epistemologically dubious. So Evans's nonconceptual content fails to resolve the dilemma. Finally, in section 1.4, we saw that 3) provides an incorrect dissolution of the dilemma of mental content. Conceptual content is *sui generis*, but a naturalistic dissolution does not acknowledge this fact.

McDowell's minimal empiricism is a dialectical exploration of the dilemma of mental content. That is, minimal empiricism engages with the dilemma via philosophical dialectic.

Each horn of the dilemma has been exhaustively examined, and an attempted dissolution was revealed as defective. McDowell's dissolution is different. "McDowell recommends his own view as the only way to avoid these three unsatisfactory alternatives" (Brandom, 1996, p. 245). Minimal empiricism is the fourth (but not final) response to the dilemma of content: It escapes between the horns of the dilemma. The content of thought is both rationally and causally constrained; in other words, the content of perceptual experience is conceptual. Human beings possess a second nature. McDowell's minimal empiricism, therefore, constitutes a meditation on a dilemma.

## Gaskin's Minimalist Empiricism: A Critique

### § 2.1 Preliminary Remarks

Gaskin's (2006) *Experience and the World's Own Language* is a sophisticated interpretation and critique of McDowell's minimal empiricism. It is composed of three parts. The first part (Chapters I-III) provides a critical discussion of McDowell's minimal empiricism. Gaskin argues that McDowell's account of judgment prevents the subject from directly experiencing the world. Additionally, Gaskin claims that McDowell's alleged individualism and intellectualism interferes with the subject directly experiencing the world. The second part (Chapter IV) is concerned with McDowell's treatment of animal and/or infant mentality. A chief criticism (if not the chief criticism) of minimal empiricism is that it distorts animal and infant experience. Minimal empiricism says that infants and animals do not enjoy perceptual experience, since they lack concepts. Recall the rigid Kantian sense of perceptual experience touched on in section 1.4. Without the application of concepts, there is no perceptual experience. But this seems false. Animals and infants *do* seem to enjoy perceptual experience, even though they are nonconceptual creatures. More precisely, Gaskin claims that McDowell unintentionally provides a noumenal account of animal and infant mentality. But this undermines his goal of establishing a rational relation between mind and world in experience, at least for animals and infants. McDowell's noumenal account of animal and infant experience renders their perceptual



experience indirect, as their experience is mediated through things-in-themselves. The last part (Chapters V-VI) offers a critical interpretation of McDowell's philosophy of language. Gaskin argues that McDowell's philosophy of language does not provide a sound semantic framework, given that it is committed to things-in-themselves. But this also undermines the goal of achieving a direct relation between mind and world in perceptual experience, since mind and world are now indirectly related via a noumenal realm. Gaskin's *minimalist empiricism* is supposedly free from these purported deficiencies with McDowell's minimal empiricism. Let us begin with a few of Gaskin's initial characterizations of minimal empiricism.

According to Gaskin, minimal empiricism is primarily a transcendental account of mental content. "In [McDowell's] hands empiricism becomes a doctrine about the possibility of *content*" (Gaskin, 2006, p. 2; Gaskin's emphasis). Content is possible if and only if minimal empiricism is the case. More specifically: "[T]he existence of a subject conceived [of] as an empirically uncontaminated locus of [non-empirical] thought is, for McDowell, not a conceptual possibility" (ibid., p. 5). Empiricism is a necessary condition for content, but it is not sufficient--as we saw with Evans's concept of nonconceptual content. McDowell's minimal version of empiricism, on the contrary, allegedly acts as both a necessary and sufficient condition for content.

Very well, but what does McDowell mean by "experience?" According to Gaskin, there are two competing conceptions of experience: (1) the interface conception, and (2) the conduit conception. (1) is used by traditional or classical empiricists; (2) is employed by McDowell's minimal empiricism. The interface conception of experience posits three relata: world, experience and judgment. It conceives of experience as an interface or intermediary squarely

situated between world and judgment. Gaskin refers to this as a “complex model of empirical content.” The conduit conception of experience is simpler than the interface conception of experience, since the conduit conception of experience posits just two relata: world and judgment. The conduit conception of experience conceives of experience “not as a further *relatum* in this picture but as the *relation* connecting the two posited relata” (ibid., p. 11; Gaskin’s emphasis). Experience is a relation comprising two relata: judgment and world. Judgment and world form a union within the realm of sensory experience. Consequently, experience does not fall short of the world. “McDowell wants us to conceive of experience, when all goes well, as a kind of openness to the world, ensuring that the mind’s contact with the world is direct...” (ibid., p. 10). For McDowell, experiences are transparent. Gaskin refers to this conduit picture of the relation between thought and world as a “simple model of empirical content.” Speaking metaphilosophically, the complex model approaches content from within a sideways-on framework, whereas the simple model approaches content from within a non-sideways-on framework.

Gaskin is especially interested in what McDowell calls “the order of justification.” By “order of justification” Gaskin means that which primarily confers epistemic justification to some given mental content. He presents what I will refer to as the “dilemma of justification”; it is a minor variation on the dilemma of mental content. The dilemma is: Either experience is ultimate in the order of justification or the world is ultimate in the order of justification. The complex model of content, with its commitment to empiricism, tells us that experience is ultimate in the order of justification. The simple model of content tells us that the world is ultimate in the order of justification. Now, if experience is ultimate in the order of justification,

we become ensnared in skepticism, since our so-called knowledge of the external world is rendered essentially indirect. If, on the other hand, the world is ultimate in the order of justification, we seem to abandon empiricism. But we cannot make sense of content unless some form of empiricism is the case. Thus neither model of content is satisfactory. Something is amiss.

Fortunately, we may dissolve the dilemma of justification; but only if we logically proceed from the complex model of content to the simple model of content. The suggestion is that, if the simple model of content is not rooted in the complex model of traditional empiricism, there is no point in referring to the simple model of content as a form of empiricism. The simple model of content or minimal empiricism must exhibit some crucial aspect of traditional empiricism. After all, minimal empiricism is supposedly in the tradition of empiricism proper. The idea is that we must begin with an integral element of traditional empiricism---namely, that mental content must be rooted in sensory experience---and arrive at a minimal empiricism. If we can finesse the deduction of minimal empiricism from traditional empiricism, we may say that the *experienced world* is ultimate in the order of justification. “What is ultimate in the “order of justification,” we might say, is not the world just as such, nor experience just as such, but the *experienced world*” (Gaskin, 2006, p. 17; Gaskin’s emphasis).<sup>1</sup> According to the simple model of content, the experienced world is ultimate in the order of justification. And then the dilemma of justification dissipates.

---

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Gregory McCulloch (2002) claims that minimal empiricism is the thesis that worldly, external content is intensional or phenomenological. McCulloch dubs this “phenomenological externalism.”

The deduction of the simple model of content depends on McDowell's transcendental argument for minimal empiricism. "The supposed entitlement to move [dialectically] from the complex to the simple model of empirical content is earned...by a transcendental argument which McDowell offers in several places" (ibid., p. 65). Let us now turn to an examination of this argument.

## § 2.2 Judgment and Perceptual Experience: McDowell's Transcendental Argument for Minimal Empiricism

McDowell's dialectical maneuver turns on whether or not his transcendental argument is sound. The conclusion of the argument is: There is no perceptual experience without judgment and there is no judgment without perceptual experience. "[T]he faculties of spontaneity (judgment) and receptivity (perception) are interdependent" (Gaskin, 2006, p. 66). The argument is: Neither judgment nor perception is possible unless they are interdependent. Judgment and perception are not only possible, they are actual. Therefore they are interdependent. The argument is valid. And the argument entitles the dialectical move, because:

[I]f experience, as that figures in the complex model, is essentially structured by conceptual capacities involved in judgment, and if (empirical) judgments are answerable to the deliverances of experience, so conceived, that seems to license the claim that experience mediates between world and judging subject not as an intermediary or interface, blocking the subject's direct view of the world, but as a conduit, securing the subject's answerability, in empirical judgment, to the way the world is. (ibid., p. 68)

According to Gaskin, austere empiricism makes use of the traditional empiricists' concept of experience, but it extrudes that concept of its complexity. Experience is a relation comprising two relata: mind and world. It is not itself a third relatum. This is a simple model of content. McDowell's transcendental argument is a deduction of the simple model from the complex model of content, because, given that judgment and experience are interconnected, it necessarily follows that perceptual experience acts as a conduit rather than an interface. Mind and world are directly related in perceptual experience. So McDowell will have established content via a simple model if and only if his transcendental argument is sound.

McDowell's transcendental argument is not sound, according to Gaskin. First, the argument assumes that judgment, or the faculty of spontaneity, is characterizable in terms of freedom. A spontaneous faculty is presumably a "free" faculty. But this presumption is a mistake, according to Gaskin. Indeed the motivation for the transcendental argument is rooted in this assumption, for if judgment is spontaneity in operation, it requires external constraint. Moreover, McDowell's mistaken characterization of judgment generates an equally mistaken characterization of outer perceptual experience, one which implicitly adopts an interface conception of experience. Let us take each difficulty in turn.

According to Gaskin, McDowell's argument presupposes that judgment is a freely adopted attitude toward sense experience. The idea is that:

Not only are we free, by virtue of our possession of a faculty of spontaneity, to make up our minds what to think; it is also the case that we are under a "standing obligation" to do so. [McDowell] is at some pains to stress that, after experience has presented the subject with an appearance, the subject both *can* and *must* decide whether "to take the experience at face value." He is impressed by the existence of visual illusions, such as the Muller-Lyer illusion, which continue to present their illusory appearance after the

subject has decided not to take their appearance at face value: such cases serve as a warning against a naïve identification of appearances with the judgments we can form on the basis of those experiences....Hence even if one has not actively reflected on the credentials of a given judgment, the fact that one forms one's judgments under a standing obligation to be prepared, if necessary, to scrutinize their credentials has the effect of fixing on the subject what we might, borrowing a piece of legal terminology, call *constructive responsibility* for the judgment in question. (ibid., pp. 69-70; Gaskin's emphasis)

Judgment is spontaneity in operation; it is voluntary activity. Judgment is also worthy of accountability. Our judgments are deliberate responses to perceptual experiences. And we can be held accountable for our deliberate responses to stimuli. So the picture is this. First there is a perceptual experience. Then there is a freely adopted judgment toward the perceptual experience in question. And then there is a "standing obligation" to critically assess one's freely adopted judgment. With the Muller-Lyer illusion, there is an initial perception. Then there is a corresponding judgment that one of the two lines is longer than the other. But this judgment is false. The lines are equal in length. And we are epistemologically (and perhaps morally) obligated to recognize this fact. Furthermore, McDowell's notion of judgment is connected to his "responsiveness to reasons" slogan. Our responsiveness to reasons, our capacity to judge, is a function of our freedom and responsibility (which is a function of a shared language).

To Gaskin's mind, this is all wrongheaded. First of all, freedom pertains to action, not thought. Thoughts or judgments are merely elicited from corresponding experiences. Our freedom resides in our ability to act on the basis of a given judgment:

[McDowell] *ought* to have taken the line that experiences bring judgments, and not merely inclinations to apply concepts in judgment, from the subject (regardless of whether the former is an implication of the latter or not). In general, McDowell's persistent identification of what freedom we enjoy with freedom to make

judgments is surely a mistake: our freedom, insofar as we have it, is freedom not to *judge* on the basis of experience but to *act* on that basis; it is not as subjects of experience, and as thinkers who can base judgments on our experience, that we enjoy freedom, if and to whatever extent we do, but as agents. (ibid., p. 72; Gaskin's emphasis)

We cannot decide how to judge, since experiences elicit judgments. Our freedom resides in our ability to *act* according to the deliverances of our judgments. This is the correct understanding of judgment, according to Gaskin. It is not the case that experiences induce dispositions to form judgments. On the contrary, experiences elicit judgments.

If the faculty of judgment is understood in terms of freedom, it follows that perceptual experiences provide us with “mere opportunities to know” which a subject may freely accept or reject (according to Gaskin). Perceptual experiences induce dispositions to form judgments. Perceptual experiences, then, are akin to testimony. Now a testimonial account of perceptual experience is surely an emissary account. If experience acts as a piece of testimony, then experience is, in effect, an emissary. It is testifying to the fact that things are thus and so. But an emissary understanding of perceptual experience is an interface conception of experience rather than a conduit conception of experience: “McDowell is of course officially hostile to the idea that experience might function as a mere emissary. But his...assimilation (in effect) of the case of experience to that of testimony...show[s] that his rejection of the emissary model of experience is at best half-hearted. McDowell (often) assimilates experience to testimony” (ibid., p. 79). And: “[R]eceiving testimony, unlike having an experience, is genuinely being faced with an intermediary, an emissary from the world, and not with the relevant bit of the world itself” (ibid., p. 86).

A non-veridical perceptual experience, as with the Muller-Lyer perceptual illusion, is an instance of false testimony, according to Gaskin. A veridical perceptual experience is, on the contrary, an instance of accurate testimony. So: “[I]f perceptual experiences only provide us with opportunities to know---opportunities that we are free to accept or reject---then experience assumes the guise of a mere emissary: a provider of something akin to testimony. And if this is right, then experience does, indeed, seem to serve as an intermediary rather than as a conduit” (Dodd, 2007, p. 1115). McDowell inadvertently treats the Muller-Lyer perceptual illusion as an interface between judgment and the freedom to critically assess one's judgment. Hence McDowell's account of perceptual experience, which is parasitic on his understanding of judgment, is an interface account, in which case he is not offering a simple model of content.

Accordingly, Gaskin has a different interpretation of perceptual illusions:

In epistemologically peripheral cases such as that presented by the Muller-Lyer illusion, we should say that the (incorrect) judgment which the experience constrains us to form is, or can be (in the knowing subject), canceled by a second-order judgment, itself constrained by further experiences. There is no call to accommodate such cases by opening, quite generally, a deliberative gap between experience and judgment. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 75)

The Muller-Lyer perceptual illusion constrains us to form a false judgment. Call this a first-order judgment. But we may form a correct judgment regarding the content of the perceptual illusion. The correct judgment is that the content of our experience is illusory. Call this a second-order judgment. Now a first-order judgment and a second-order judgment are equally determined by perceptual experiences. All empirical judgments must be informed by sensations. However, we can decide to *act* on the content of a first-order judgment via a second-order judgment.

“[Gaskin] is strongly committed to denying that there is any freedom involved in exercising the



capacity for judgment. If freedom comes in anywhere, according to Gaskin, it is in action” (Bridges, 2007, para. 18). We should not characterize judgment in terms of freedom, given that freedom is relevant to action theory, not the philosophy of mind. “[W]e should say that the space between experience and judgment is not a locus of freedom: the formation of beliefs and judgments based on experience is, contrary to McDowell’s official doctrine, not voluntary” (Gaskin, 2006, p. 74). Judgments are like sensations; we just have them. Gaskin's hierarchical understanding of judgment can accommodate for perceptual illusions without placing freedom between judgment and experience. The world and the correct second-order judgment are directly related in the Muller-Lyer perceptual experience. This secures a simple model of content. McDowell's emissary account of judgment should be replaced, since it generates a complex model of content.

Now this might seem to render perceptual experiences as pieces of testimony. Experiences are emissaries which a subject may freely accept or reject. But then perceptual experience is an interface rather than a conduit. However, the doctrine of disjunctivism implies that there is no epistemologically relevant common denominator between perceptual experiences which are revelatory and perceptual experiences which are not. There is no epistemologically relevant common denominator between accurate and inaccurate testimony. So equating freedom with judgment, and the concomitant notion of perceptual experiences as testimonial, is entirely consistent with a simple model of content. That is, the thesis of doxastic responsibility does *not* entail a complex model of content; rather, the thesis is fully consistent with a simple model of content.

Furthermore, Gaskin thinks that McDowell overlooks the idea that experiences elicit judgments. But it seems that McDowell pretty clearly recognizes that perceptual experiences elicit judgments---even though his concept of judgment is elucidated in terms of spontaneity. As we saw in section 1.4, McDowell has a hierarchical picture of judgment. First there is a perceptual experience, then there is a judgment, and then there is a “standing obligation” to critically assess one's first-order judgment. Doxastic responsibility emerges as a collection of second-order judgments. This is very similar to Gaskin's picture of judgment. The only difference is that Gaskin thinks second-order judgments are involuntary. Freedom is a function of action, not judgment. But this idea is problematic, for it seems that a second-order judgment *just is* an action. There may be a subtle distinction between bodily actions and judgmental actions, but they both merit the term “action.” And if this right, then judgments are not mere differential responses to stimuli.

Given these difficulties with Gaskin's position, I conclude that McDowell's account of judgment and outer perceptual experience does not adversely affect the soundness of his transcendental argument. Mind and world are directly related in outer perceptual experience. That is, the simple model of content holds for outer perceptual experience.

What about inner perceptual experience? Here things are more nuanced. For we can conceive of an external world existing apart from our external sensations and perceptions; but matters are different with inner sense. With inner sense, a subject's awareness of his or her internal world is *not* distinct from the internal impressions themselves. We are not aware of an internal world existing apart from internal sensations and perceptions. Given this fact, it seems

that our knowledge of the internal world is infallible, since it seems that we are infallibly aware of internal sensations and perceptions.

According to Gaskin, McDowell appeals to Russell's principle of acquaintance in order to account for inner perceptual experience. Russell's principle of acquaintance states that: "I am acquainted with an object when I have a direct cognitive relation to that object, i.e., when I am directly aware of the object itself" (Russell, 1911/2004, p. 165). We are directly acquainted with the internal world via inner perceptual experience.

Now there are two kinds of direct acquaintance: epistemological and metaphysical. As far as I know, the distinction is not explicitly drawn by either McDowell or Gaskin. The epistemological notion of direct acquaintance says that we infallibly know the contents of our sensations. So, for example, if it seems to me that my leg itches, then, infallibly, I know that it seems to me that my leg itches. One is immediately justified in believing that a felt sensation seems to be the case. This is an epistemological point about sensations; it is a Cartesian principle. There is no appearance/reality distinction with respect to sensations, since we are directly acquainted with our own sensations. Gaskin maintains that McDowell uses the epistemological sense of Russell's principle of acquaintance.

There are fatal difficulties with the epistemological version of Russell's principle of acquaintance. First, as Wittgenstein's private language argument teaches us, inner mental states are *not* infallibly known by the subject of inner mental states.<sup>2</sup> One way of stating the conclusion of the private language argument is that all mental states are necessarily amenable to empathetic

---

<sup>2</sup> See Wittgenstein (1953), §§ 243-271.

understanding.<sup>3</sup> Wittgenstein's private language argument is directed against Russell's principle of acquaintance and similar principles which deny that there is an appearance/reality distinction *vis-à-vis* sensations. Even pain states elude infallibility. The apparent immediacy and privacy of pain states is an illusion. "I can be wrong not only about whether or not I am in pain, but also about whether or not it seems to me that I am in pain" (Gaskin, 2006, p. 85). One can be wrong about whether one is in the throes of real pain, as when it is psychogenic. In addition, one can be wrong about whether one is experiencing psychogenic pain. More generally: "[W]hat has escaped [McDowell] is the fact that...fallibility attaches to my capacity to know *my own* meaning" (ibid., p. 86; Gaskin's emphasis). We do not know (with certainty) the meanings of the words we use.<sup>4</sup> An epistemological rendition of the principle of acquaintance utterly fails to appreciate this datum. Hence McDowell fails to account for inner perceptual experience via a simple model of content.

Yet there is a metaphysical sense of direct acquaintance, which Gaskin seems to overlook. The metaphysical sense of direct acquaintance is not committed to epistemological certainties. Although we are directly acquainted with internal objects, this does not entail that we have infallible *knowledge* of internal objects. While it is true that we cannot conceive of internal objects existing apart from internal impressions, our inner perceptual experience can be illusory. It appears that McDowell implicitly recognizes this metaphysical sense of direct acquaintance when he writes. "[O]ne can be under the illusion of standing in a relation to an object that would count as acquaintance, the impression being illusory because there is no such object"

---

<sup>3</sup> "Empathy is the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person" (Kohut, 1984, p. 82).

<sup>4</sup> See Saul Kripke (1982).

(McDowell, 1998c, "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space," p. 232). This remark logically follows from McDowell's disjunctivism. The doctrine of disjunctivism applies to inner perceptual experience as equally as outer perceptual experience. An inner perceptual experience is either epistemologically revelatory or it is not. We are as fallible about the internal world as we are about the external world---although we are directly acquainted with both worlds via perceptual experience. So the metaphysical interpretation of direct acquaintance allows for a disjunctive understanding of inner perceptual experience. Furthermore, the metaphysical version of Russell's principle accounts for how the internal world and judgment are directly related in inner perceptual experience.

Moreover, if one is directly acquainted with an internal object via an inner perceptual experience, one can refer to their inner perceptual experience by using a demonstrative expression. A subject can state that one is experiencing "this" inner perceptual experience or "that" inner perceptual experience. Now all uses of demonstrative expressions are either correct or incorrect. So, although we are directly acquainted with the internal world, this does not entail that our inner perceptual experience is infallible. On the contrary. And none of the standard critiques of the epistemological notion of direct acquaintance apply to the metaphysical notion, since the metaphysical sense of direct acquaintance has no truck with infallibility. Therefore the simple model of content holds for inner perceptual experience (as well as outer perceptual experience).

In any case, the purported deficiencies with McDowell's transcendental argument share an illegitimate commitment to the internalist doctrines of individualism and intellectualism, to which we now turn.

### § 2.3 Individualism and Intellectualism

As stated in section 1.1, a causal relation between mind and world is merely external or exogenous. As such it is merely symptomatic and therefore lacks epistemological legitimacy. A causal relation does not preserve a direct relation between mind and world. Contrast this with a rational relation between mind and world. A rational relation is internal or endogenous. As such it is criterial or definitional and is therefore epistemologically legitimate. It secures a direct relation between mind and world. But, according to Gaskin's interpretation of McDowell, a rational relation obtains only if the tenets of individualism and intellectualism hold:

[T]he rational connection [between mind and world] must both obtain at the level of the individual's experience and judgment (individualism), and be available to introspection and verbal articulation by the individual for whom an experience serves as a reason for a judgment [intellectualism]---that in order to have an experience which justifies a judgment one must be able to state, with understanding, what the justification is. (Gaskin, 2006, pp. 93-94, see note 85)

For Gaskin's McDowell, individualism and intellectualism are necessary for a conduit conception of experience or the simple model of content. If there is an epistemological or rational relation between mind and world, if the content of a perceptual experience justifies a judgment about that perceptual experience, two conditions must be satisfied. First, the rational relation must obtain at the level of the individual's experience and judgment. The content of a perceptual experience can justify a corresponding judgment only at the level of an individual's perceptual experience and judgment. This is the thesis of individualism. Second, a subject of

perceptual experience must be able to specify, with introspective and verbal understanding, how the content of a perceptual experience justifies his or her corresponding judgment. Perceptual experience is thus permeated with intellectual faculties. This is the thesis of intellectualism.

Dodd states:

Gaskin...makes a convincing case for McDowell's being committed to an individualistic, intellectualistic construal of the thesis that experience rationally constrains judgment: a construal that has it that the said rational connection "must obtain at the level of the individual's experience and judgment..., and be available to introspection and verbal articulation by the individual for whom an experience serves as a reason for a judgment." (Dodd, 2007, p. 1115; citation omitted)

Unfortunately, both individualism and intellectualism are antithetical to a simple model of content, according to Gaskin. With individualism, the individual subject essentially mediates the relation between mind and world. But if this is right, then mind and world are no longer directly related in experience, as the individual subject is now acting as an interface rather than a conduit. The ontology of mind and the ontology of world are related via an individual subject.

But this generates an undesirable complex model of content:

[I]n the context of the individualism in [McDowell's] position...that, official intentions notwithstanding, the individual appearances which figure pivotally in the "order of justification," as McDowell construes that, are epistemic intermediaries... (Gaskin, 2006, p. 108)

And:

[I]t follows that, by insisting that each individual subject establish, or actualize, the "order of justification" at the point of his or her individual experiential engagement with the world, McDowell in effect (and unintentionally, of course) traps the individual subject behind experiential

proxies which...are not guaranteed simply to disclose the world. (Dodd, 2007, pp. 104-105)

With intellectualism, the subject's verbal and introspective understanding essentially mediates the rational relation between mind and world. The rational relation between mind and world is effected by intellectualized perceptual experience. Hence the subject's verbal and introspective understanding acts as a third relatum. But this is not a conduit picture of perceptual experience. Therefore McDowell's transcendental argument is inadvertently committed to a complex model of content.

Moreover, individualism and intellectualism are internalist doctrines. Roughly, internalism says that mental content is a function of internal states relative to an individual's intellectual capacities. Gaskin's explicit opposition to the internalist doctrines of individualism and intellectualism lends itself to a thoroughgoing externalistic approach. He writes: “[S]hould we, as theorist, follow McDowell in putting an internalist construction on these individual experiences, or should we instead look favourable on a position which combines some form of (no doubt minimal) empiricism with externalism? I shall endorse the latter option” (Gaskin, 2006, p. 111). Roughly, externalism says that mental content is, at least in part, a result of external social and physical facts. Externalism jettisons the onerous doctrines of individualism and intellectualism, and thereby vouchsafes a simple model of content.

Now, although Gaskin eschews McDowell's alleged individualistic and intellectualistic interpretation of the conceptual content of perception, he grants that the content of perception *is* conceptual:

The key point is this: from the agreed fact that experience is essentially conceptual in the modest sense---that is, that it has a



propositionally structured content expressible in language (that it has a content of the schematic form: *that such and such is the case*)---it does not follow that it is conceptual in the richer sense that its conceptual content (modestly understood) is necessarily available to a critical and reflective faculty possessed by the subject of the experience. (ibid., p. 118; Gaskin's emphasis)

Both Gaskin and McDowell are against Evans's notion of nonconceptual content. It is false that the content of perception is nonconceptual. They supposedly differ in that Gaskin is opposed to an individualistic and intellectualistic interpretation of the conceptual content of perception. Instead, Gaskin offers an externalist or "modest" account of the conceptual content of perception. (Gaskin's modest account of the conceptual content of experience is employed to account for animal/infant experience. See section 2.5 below.)

Be that as it may, McDowell would willingly accept this analysis. As mentioned in section 1.5, McDowell's minimal empiricism is opposed to individualism. For McDowell, understanding necessarily involves a "shared language." And a shared language is possible only if there is a long-standing community. More exactly, the concept of a shared language is understood in terms of the notion of a "fusion of horizons":

Understanding...is always the fusion of [historical] horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves....In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new continually grow together to make something of living value, without either being explicitly distinguished from the other. (Gadamer, 1975, p. 273)

Understanding is a fusing of horizons. A fusing of horizons is where a past canon of traditions interpenetrates a present canon of traditions. The present tradition is a result of its fusion with the past tradition. Conversely, the past tradition is a result of its fusion with the present canon. This interpenetration proceeds indefinitely. Thus understanding is mediated by a historically

conditioned community, not an individual. Understanding occurs within a communal framework, not outside of that framework. This is a reminder or rediscovery of a truistic fact from hermeneutics. Gaskin's entire study seems to miss this very important feature of transcendental empiricism. Now obviously the notion of a fusion of horizons is not possible if individualism is the case. The very idea of a fusion of horizons entails anti-individualism. So Gaskin's charge of individualism must be wrong.

Gaskin might object as follows. Horizons can be fused only if there are individual horizons which exhibit understanding. Thus the transcendental condition for a fusion of horizons is a single horizon. An individual horizon precedes and underpins historical horizons.

This sort of objection seems inaccurate, for it presupposes the validity of a sideways-on metaphilosophical approach. The idea that an individual's horizons underwrite a community's horizons is a sideways-on maneuver, because it assumes that there exists a cosmic exile perspective which miraculously provides for communal understanding. Gaskin's objection assumes that an individual's horizons transcend the community's horizons, and that this somehow yields communal understanding. The assumption is that an individual can step outside of a communal framework and deliver understanding for the community at large. But this is not how understanding occurs within a hermetical framework. In fact, from a hermetical perspective, this 'understanding' of understanding has things completely backwards. Furthermore Gaskin's transcendental empiricism prohibits him from approaching philosophical matters from sideways-on.

What about the charge of intellectualism? Well, recall that McDowell's minimal empiricism adopts a non-sideways-on metaphilosophical approach to philosophical issues. This

metaphilosophical stance is an indispensable pillar of transcendental empiricism in general. Now the metaphilosophical orientation of minimal empiricism aims *inter alia* to dissolve philosophical dichotomies. And it seems that the externalism/internalism dichotomy in the philosophy of mind is a dichotomy, if anything is. This kind of dichotomy from the philosophy of mind is the result of assuming a sideways-on stance toward philosophical issues. Sideways-on metaphilosophical orientations grapple with philosophical issues under the assumption that mind and world are distinct. The externalism/internalism dichotomy tumbles out of this assumption. Internalism claims that mental content is the result of a mind, whereas externalism asserts that content is a product of the world. If we assume a sideways-on metaphilosophy, the tenets of externalism and internalism become irreconcilable.

McDowell's metaphilosophy suggests that externalism and internalism are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are interconnected. Intellectual capacities are determined by external facts, and external facts are determined by intellectual capacities. In other words, the world's intellectualized conceptuality is determined by a subject's intellectual capacities; and a subject's intellectual capacities are determined by the conceptually intellectualized world. As we saw in section 1.1, McDowell claims that the logical space of nature, or the world, and the logical space of reasons, or intellectualized conceptuality, are intertwined. Hence a subject's intellectual faculties do not act as an interface, since the world itself is inherently conceptually intellectualized. So even assuming that McDowell's transcendental argument is covertly intellectualistic, this interdependent picture preserves a direct relation between mind and world. Although there is an element of internalism within McDowell's philosophy, this does not entail a complex model of content. To the contrary, McDowell's intellectualism is entirely consistent

with a simple model of content. Therefore, contrary to Gaskin's claim, intellectualism does not affect the soundness of McDowell's transcendental argument for the simple model of content.

#### § 2.4 Animal and Infant Mentation

McDowell's alleged individualistic and intellectualistic constraints on content supposedly distort animal and infant mentality: "These [internalist] requirements [= individualism and intellectualism] have unacceptable implications for infant and animal mentality" (Gaskin, 2006, pp. 94-95). Because animals and infants cannot individually verbalize and reflect on the contents of their experiences, two things immediately follow. First, infants and animals do not have an outer sense, because they cannot articulate and reflect on the contents of their so-called outer perceptual experiences. Second, animals and infants do not have an inner sense, because they lack the conceptual capacities for subjectivity proper. In short, animals and infants do not partake of perceptual experience in the rigid Kantian sense. McDowell's transcendental argument claims that content is not possible unless the faculties of receptivity and spontaneity are interconnected. So, since animals and infants lack a faculty of spontaneity, there is no content to their perceptual experience. A "chunk of brute receptivity" is insufficient for the purpose of securing content. In other words, animals and infants do not fall within the scope of McDowell's transcendental argument. Reverting to previous terminology, infants and animals possess a first nature, but they lack a second nature. The content of their experience is not conceptual in McDowell's individualistic and intellectualistic sense. Now, as we saw in section 1.4, first nature and second nature belong to the same naturalistic genus. Creatures with a first

nature, and creatures with a second nature, are both perceptually sensitive to their environments. Animals and infants can 'see' objects or 'feel' sensations. But infants and animals cannot see *that* an object is present or feel *this* pain sensation. These are propositional states, and propositional states are enjoyed only by mature human beings or creatures with a second nature. So, speaking philosophically, there are two types of outer perceptual experience, and there are two types of inner perceptual experience.

But, according to Gaskin, McDowell holds that we cannot meaningfully talk about nonconceptual outer and inner perceptual experience, for they are dark. Intuitions without concepts are blind. Hence the so-called contents of infant and animal experience are Kantian things-in-themselves. But if they are Kantian things-in-themselves, the idea that animal experience belongs to the same genus as mature adult experience is worthless; for things-in-themselves do not belong to any genus. Thus McDowell is debarred from talking about cats seeing milk (say), even in a limited sense. Infants and animals are not in the domain of McDowell's transcendental argument. However, we do seem to successfully talk about animals and infants perceiving an external and internal world. Recall the idea from section 1.3 that animals seem to perceive extremely elementary visual--spatial relations. But how? What is going on here?

Somewhat surprisingly, Gaskin claims that infants and animals *do* fall within the scope of McDowell's transcendental argument. Gaskin offers the following solution to our perplexity:

Infants and animals, we might say, do indeed have conceptual capacities actualized in their sensory consciousness, and to that extent are in the target area of the transcendental question.... They do not themselves possess the conceptual capacities which are

actualized in their sensory consciousness, but there is another route which they can exploit to achieving the needed actualization of conceptual capacities in their sensory consciousness. For infants and animals can benefit (transcendentally) from the fact that we mature human subjects possess the requisite conceptual capacities: *our* conceptual capacities are actualized in *their* sensory consciousness. (ibid., pp. 138-139; Gaskin's emphasis)

More concisely:

That a dog [say] is incapable of articulating or reflecting upon its experiences is no bar to assigning those experiences conceptual content, modestly understood: it suffices to justify that assignment that *we* can sensibly make "that"-clause ascriptions such as, 'The dog sees that the dish is empty'. (Bridges, 2007, para. 24; Bridges's emphasis)

The content of a dog's perception is conceptual in the sense that we can see that a dog sees food.

This is supposed to be a "modest" sense of conceptual content. We can begin to understand how animals and infants enjoy mentality, provided that we construe the conceptual content of their experience in a modest or transcendental manner. Transcendentally speaking, the content of animal/infant experience is conceptual:

A dog's entitlement to feel pains (or be in any other experiential state with conceptual content) depends on the possibility of formulating in language correct characterizations of its mental states. Since dogs do not themselves possess the requisite conceptual powers to formulate these characterizations, they in effect depend for their entitlement to mentality on the possible existence of other creatures, who do possess those powers. But that dependence is only on the possibility of such existence, not its actuality: that is what is meant by saying that the dependence is merely transcendental. Dogs could feel pains, taking this as a fully conceptual state in which an object is present in a canine consciousness, even if there did not actually exist any humans or other subjects with the requisite conceptual powers to classify objects of canine experience in language. (Gaskin, 2006, p. 144)

For Gaskin's McDowell, canine pain is not actually conceptually structured. But if it is not actually conceptually structured, it is an intuition without a concept, in which case it is a Kantian thing-in-itself, in which case it is false that canines feel pain. However, given Gaskin's transcendental solution, we do not have to settle for this skewed view. The mere possibility of assigning propositional content to canine experience is entirely sufficient. Canine pain is conceptual in the sense that it *can* be propositionally expressed by someone. Therefore:

[I]nfants and animals can “have objects in view” and have “bits of the world perceptually manifest to them as materials for a world view”; that they can live their lives “in a world,” and not merely “in an environment”; that when a dog feels pain or in another such “inner” state, the pain or other sensation is indeed “a matter of an object for the dog’s consciousness.” In the sense in which we have an “inner world”---a world of felt sensations---dogs have such a world too. (ibid., p. 148)

It appears that Gaskin misinterprets McDowell's account of animal/infant mentation. Animals and infants cannot articulate the contents of their perceptions. Nevertheless, this does *not* unintentionally imply that the contents of their experiences are noumenal. There are reasons for thinking this is the case.

First, with respect to outer experience, it was noted that animals seem to perceive elementary visual--spatial relationships; and these perceptions engender self-preserving actions. A rat is able to move around a maze without hurting itself. (Cf. Section 1.3.) And these observations do not depend on the claim that the content of animal experience is conceptual in a “modest” or transcendental sense. This follows from the fact that McDowell's transcendental argument for content has no application to animals. Still, McDowell acknowledges the observation that animals sense and perceive an environment and act accordingly. So it would seem that the contents of a rat's outer perceptual experiences are not noumenal.

Second, with respect to inner perceptual experience, it seems that animals and infants *do* experience or perceive something akin to pleasure and pain; and these perceptions induce actions or behaviors. An infant's response or behavior to a painful stimulus is, at least in part, a result of its sensation of pain. The behavior of crying is not merely a response to a painful stimulus; it is also a response to a sensation of pain. But the contents of the sensation cannot be articulated by the infant, even in principle. Similarly, an infant's laughter is a response to a sensation of pleasure, even though the infant cannot state the contents of his or her sensations. And McDowell acknowledges these appearances, too. Granted, animal/infant inner (and outer) perceptual experience is not propositional or conceptual. An infant's sensation of pain is not identical with a mature adult's sensation of pain, since McDowell's transcendental argument does not apply to infants. However, it seems false to claim that an infant's perceptual experiences are entirely empty.

I think Gaskin is overlooking McDowell's concept of "proto-subjectivity." As witnessed in section 1.4, the concept of proto-subjectivity is (among other things) non-committal. With the concept of proto-subjectivity, we are not saying that animals/infants have sensations or not. At best we may attribute a proto-subjectivity to animals and infants. Infant/animal mentality is 'contentful' in a first nature sense. It is neither contentful nor nothing. Call it "proto-content." Our subjectivity or inner sense allows us to approximate to an understanding of an animal's 'subjectivity' through the notion of 'proto-subjectivity'. Analogously, our conceptual contents allow us to approximate to an understanding of first nature content via the notion of 'proto-content'. Now if infant/animal perceptual experiences are neither something nor nothing, then they cannot be noumenal, for the noumenal just is nothing. In accordance with the very concept



of proto-subjectivity, we are not entitled to make the claim that animal/infant experience is noumenal. So there is nothing noumenal about the concept of proto-subjectivity. And if this is the case, then Gaskin's critique of McDowell's account of animal and infant mentation is just false.

Barring these reservations, what is potentially worse is that: “There is a symbiosis, hitherto unnoticed either by McDowell himself or...any of his critics, between a construal of infant and animal experience to which he is unintentionally committed [namely, that the contents of their experience are noumenal] and a thesis in the philosophy of language which he willingly espouses” (ibid., p. 174). McDowell’s unwittingly noumenal account of animal and infant mentation is symbiotically related to his thesis in the philosophy of language, namely, that concepts do not belong to the realm of reference, for this thesis has the unintended affect of rendering objects noumenal. How? The more basic question is, What is McDowell’s philosophy of language, and how does it relate to his minimal empiricism? Gaskin claims that we should supplant McDowell’s semantic theory with a transcendental version of linguistic idealism. What is Gaskin’s linguistic idealism, and how does it relate to his minimalist empiricism? Let’s now turn to complete answers to these questions.

#### § 2.5 Sense, Reference and Kantian Things-In-Themselves: Elements of Gaskin’s Linguistic Idealism

According to Fregean semantic theory, concepts are functions. An argument or object either satisfies the concept in question or it does not, and this yields a corresponding truth-value.<sup>5</sup>

Consider the concept “red.” The concept of redness is understood in terms of the function “R(x).” The latter is either true or false, for any given value for “x.” Relational concepts such as “love” are understood in terms of the two-place function “Lxy.” “x loves y” is either true or false, for any given values for x and y. All concepts are to be understood along these lines.

Concepts are functions.

Additionally, objects are purely referential or extensional entities. And since objects are entirely referential, they cannot satisfy a concept unless concepts are themselves referential.

Hence concepts must reside at the level of reference:

[T]o put the point in Fregean terms, we must say that the object in question has to be thought of as falling under a concept, where the latter kind of entity is to be conceived, as Frege did conceive it, as a denizen of the level of reference and not at the level of sense.

(Gaskin, 2006, p. 177)

Concepts are static. By “static” I mean that an object either satisfies the concept in question or it does not. The static nature of concepts allows us to say that concepts are referential.

Still, concepts are not objects. Frege draws a distinction between objects and concepts. Objects are complete or “saturated.” Concepts are different. Concepts are predicative entities. As such, they are incomplete or “unsaturated.” “A concept...is predicative. On the other hand, a name of an object, a proper name, is quite incapable of being used as a grammatical predicate” (Frege, 1997, p. 182, see note 6). And: “The two parts into which a mathematical expression is thus split up, the sign of the argument and the expression of the function, are dissimilar; for the

---

<sup>5</sup> See Frege’s (1997) seminal “Function and Concept,” “On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*,” “[Comments on *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*]” and “On Concept and Object.”

argument is a number, a whole complete in itself, as the function is not” (ibid., p. 134). So, although both concepts and objects reside within the realm of reference, they are distinct entities.

Gaskin contends that McDowell adopts a different position. For Gaskin's McDowell, concepts reside at the level of sense, not reference. Gaskin writes:

[McDowell] regularly talks of *exercising, using, deploying* and *exploiting* concepts, language which is inappropriate to a Fregean understanding of what concepts are: for concepts at the level of reference cannot be *exercised* or *deployed*, but merely grasped. He talks of our standing obligation to “refashion concepts and conceptions”: but concepts at the level of reference cannot be refashioned; they are simply there, like Fregean objects, for subjects to grasp or not. (A purported refashioning of a Fregean concept would change the concept.) (Gaskin, 2006, p. 176; Gaskin’s emphasis)

McDowell’s conception of concepts is dynamic. Concepts are fluid as opposed to static. They are continually refashioned; they indefinitely evolve or devolve, according to our uses of them. So concepts are amenable to change, according to McDowell.

Unfortunately, McDowell’s notion of concepts places objects outside the realm of the conceptual, according to Gaskin. And this entails that objects are, in effect, Kantian things-in-themselves or “bare presences.” According to Gaskin, McDowell should follow modern semantic tradition and locate concepts at the level of reference; otherwise the objects of the world are rendered noumenal:

In seeking to utilize Fregean sense to effect the needed connection between thought and world--that is, in seeking to exploit the fact that objects of thought are necessarily thought about in some way, in order to ensure that object-directed thinking is conceptually structured--McDowell confines the conceptual to the level of sense, leaving objects [or the world], taken as entities at the level of reference, out in the cold as Kantian things-in-themselves. (ibid., p. 177)

Now, according to Gaskin, McDowell's account of concepts is symbiotically related to his account of animal and infant mentation. McDowell's account of infant and animal experience is unintentionally noumenal, because the contents of their experience fall outside of the conceptual. Animals and infants fall outside of McDowell's transcendental argument. They reside within an environment, not a world. The same sort of thing holds with respect to McDowell's treatment of concepts. Since concepts reside at the level of sense rather than reference, objects fall outside of the realm of sense; they fall outside of the realm of the conceptual. But if this is the case, then objects are unintentionally noumenal.

More globally, McDowell's treatment of concepts is extremely problematic for his metaphilosophical orientation (according to Gaskin):

For if the conceptual is being located at the level of sense, and if, what seems to be a corollary of this, objects in the realm of reference are intrinsically noumenal with respect to the conceptual, and given that experience is essentially a conceptually structured phenomenon, there will be a clear sense in which experience does not function as a conduit to objects---at least, not to objects as they intrinsically are---but as a means of processing whatever input we may (incoherently, of course) conceive as emanating from objects, which taken in themselves are no more than “bare presences,” to yield a conceptualized output. When objects are conceived as noumenal in this sense, experience cannot but be conceived as an interface between minds and objects, for there is no such thing as confronting noumenal objects directly. (ibid., p. 187)

Further:

For if objects are not joined---and “structured”---by concepts in the realm of reference, then those objects are “banished from the precincts of the conceptual,” and our thinking can only fall short of them. The very idea of thinking about an object becomes problematic because such object-directed thought would require thought to be carried beyond the boundary enclosing the realm of concepts. (Dodd, 2007, p. 1116; citation omitted)

Ironically and tragically, then, a non-sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation leads to a sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation, according to both Gaskin and Dodd. If mind and world form a union in the realm of sense, the realm of reference (or the world) is no longer bound by the conceptual. Indeed, the realm of reference falls outside the conceptual as something which impinges on the conceptual. So the very metaphilosophical orientation McDowell wanted to avoid arises in virtue of his own metaphilosophical orientation.

Gaskin's proposed solution is this. Frege was right, as against McDowell, to locate concepts at the level of reference. But Frege's conception of concepts did not go far enough:

Frege's "advance" on McDowell is certainly to be welcomed, because the locating of concepts at the level of reference is a necessary condition of overcoming an unacceptable Kantian transcendental idealism; but it is not a sufficient condition. Unless the concepts located at the level of reference structure and characterize the objects located at the same level, there will be no prospect of overcoming an intolerable idealism. To overcome that idealism we need first to identify the world with the level of reference and not, as on McDowell's Fregean approach, with the level of sense, and secondly we need to populate the level of reference with the right kind of entity---propositionally structured combinations of objects and concepts or properties (including of course relational concepts or properties). (Gaskin, 2006, p. 202)

If concepts are not referential entities, then they cannot be saturated with objects. But objects do satisfy their corresponding concepts. Hence concepts must reside at the level of reference, not sense. Unfortunately, however, Frege's account of concepts is yet another unacceptable form of Kantian transcendental idealism; for the realm of reference is not conceptually structured. The idea is that, if the objects of the world are not conceptually structured, then they are mere quasi-collections of Kantian thing-in-themselves. But this is a version of an untenable Kantian

transcendental idealism. However, if objects are propositionally structured combinations, it follows that they must be conceptual. And then the objects of the world become intelligible.

Now a semanticist or theorist of meaning aims to account for how meaning is possible. Meaning is possible only if a speaker, listener, writer or reader can understand an indefinite number of sentences from a finite stock of terms and syntactical rules. So linguistic meaning is essentially compositional. This is a truism from semantics. Moreover, meaning is a function of reference. If a sentence does not refer to anything, it is not about anything. But if it is not about anything, it does not mean anything. So, to Gaskin's mind:

[I]n order to devise a theory with the requisite deductive power---in order to model what is often called creative language use, the ability of speakers to form and understand, an indefinite number of novel sentences on the basis of finite training---the semanticist must discern *structure* in the object-language sentences [or the referents of sentences]... (ibid., p. 205; Gaskin's emphasis)

Gaskin's interesting claim is that the referents of sentences necessarily exhibit propositional structure. Senses determine referents, not *vice versa*. The world is permeated with senses.

Hence the referent of any given sentence is not a Fregean truth-value; rather, it is a Russellian proposition:

[S]entences are referring expressions: a thesis driven by a conception of reference as "the semantic relations which the [meaning-] theorist [for a language L] posits to model the semantic properties of sentences and their parts." With this premise in place, Gaskin goes on to claim that, since the aim of such a meaning-theorist is to provide a compositional meaning theory for L (i.e. something which tells us what understanding each expression of L consist in), understanding an expression of L must consist in thinking of (i.e. being acquainted with) its referent. And what this means is that the referent of a *sentence*---acquaintance with which is both necessary and sufficient for understanding the sentence in question---must be a (Russellian) proposition rather

than a truth-value. (Dodd, 2007, p. 1118; Dodd's emphasis; citation omitted)

If the referent of a sentence is a Russellian proposition rather than a truth-value, the world, in a sense, speaks its own language. This is, in essence, Gaskin's linguistic idealism. Linguistic idealism is the claim that reality is essentially linguistic. Nothing exists outside of a linguistic framework:

Sentences, whether true *or* false, refer to unified combinations of objects and properties. Here we have a doctrine that rehabilitates the much maligned notion of *the world's own language*, for, according to Gaskin, "the locating of propositions at the level of reference surely provides a sense in which the world itself speaks, it speaks the propositions---true and false---which inhabit the realm of reference." (ibid., p. 1116; Dodd's emphasis; citation omitted)

And:

Following ancient tradition rather than Frege's radical departure from that tradition, McDowell locates concepts at the level of sense rather than at the level of reference. But this...is a mistake. Correcting it requires us to follow Frege in his location of concepts at the level of reference, but also to go beyond Frege and locate not only concepts but also propositions at that level; and doing so requires us, I suggest, to take seriously an idea which McDowell mentions only to reject, that of objects as speaking to us "in the world's own language." (Gaskin, 2006, p. vii)

To cite just one concrete example, water speaks the language of chemistry. It "says," in effect, that it is H<sub>2</sub>O. Similar remarks apply *mutatus mutandis* to the other objects and subjects of the world. Every object and subject of the world---indeed the world itself---attests to some incredibly complex chemical structure. And understanding a complex chemical structure essentially depends on linguistic capacities. Gaskin's linguistic idealism is the cornerstone of his minimalist empiricism.

Notice that Gaskin's linguistic idealism is a transcendental form of linguistic idealism. The propositional structure of the world does not depend on actual languages; rather, it depends on the possibility of expression in some language. "[T]he world's 'testimony' is delivered not in an empirical language, as testimony strictly so called is, but in its own language, which...is not one empirical language among others, but the transcendental basis of all empirical languages" (ibid., p. 227). Further: "The world is propositionally structured; but it does not have any particular syntax" (ibid., p. 229). Gaskin's transcendental version of linguistic idealism is in alignment with his transcendental account of animal/infant mentality, which is in alignment with his interpersonal or relational account of content.

To my mind, there are serious problems with Gaskin's linguistic idealism. First, I think Gaskin's critique of McDowell's philosophy of language is guilty of a straw man fallacy. It seems that the alleged noumenal problem with McDowell's philosophy of language is a product of Gaskin's unbridled imagination. For one thing, McDowell's philosophy of language does *not* incorporate notions from Kant's transcendental idealism, since McDowell is not a Kantian transcendental idealist. He is a Hegelian transcendental idealist; that is, McDowell agrees with Hegel; the notion of a transcendental object makes no sense. And the notion *is* incoherent; for, to assert that things-in-themselves are unknowable is to assert something that we know about them, namely, that they are unknowable---but this is plainly incoherent. McDowell explicitly states: "I would like to conceive this work [*Mind and World*] is as [*sic*] a prolegomenon to a reading of the *Phenomenology [of Spirit]*..." (McDowell, 1996, p. ix). McDowell's prolegomenon to Hegel basically embraces transcendental idealism as a working metaphysical framework while jettisoning things-in-themselves. (For more on this, see section 3.2.) So McDowell's (partial)



Hegelianism prevents him from entertaining the so-called notion of things-in-themselves. Hence McDowell would and should reject the noumenal categories which Gaskin unabashedly applies to his philosophy of language.

Second, it seems that Gaskin misses an important distinction between two senses of the word “conceptual.” There is a difference between the orthodox understanding of concepts as predicates and the heterodox understanding of concepts as that which belong to the realm of Fregean sense. McDowell explicitly draws this distinction when he forcefully states: “If we want to identify the conceptual realm with the realm of thought, the right gloss on 'conceptual' is not 'predicate' but 'belonging to the realm of Fregean sense'. (The stupid idea that those come to the same thing is unfortunately still widespread.)” (McDowell, 1996, p. 107). Gaskin clearly assumes that “predicative” and “belonging to the realm of Fregean sense” refer to the same thing. Indeed his noumenal critique crucially depends on this assumption. But the assumption is false. Frege's discovery that concepts are predicates has to do with the nature of concepts, not the world. The world is conceptual in that it belongs to the realm of Fregean sense. And yet the world is clearly not predicative in nature. Hence the two meanings of the word “conceptual.”

Now if by “conceptual” McDowell means predicative, then his heterodox account of concepts *does* unintentionally render objects noumenally. But this is not what McDowell means by conceptual. By “conceptual” McDowell means the realm of Fregean sense, and this realm contains everything that is the case. Consequently, his notion of the conceptual does not render objects as things-in-themselves.

McDowell's concept of the conceptual may be expressed in terms of his notion of *de re* Fregean senses. The latter are demonstrative modes of presenting singular referents or objects.

Objects, in turn, possess *de re* senses. Thus there is an isomorphic relation between objects and *de re* senses. Content and concept are interconnected. McDowell writes: “[A *de re* sense is] not a specification that is intelligible independently of the object specified; the presence to the mind of the object itself enters into any understanding of these demonstrative modes of presentation” (McDowell, 1998c, “Intentionality *De Re*,” p. 265). More concisely: [A]n irreducibly *de re* propositional attitude is one whose content would not be thinkable if the relevant object did not exist” (ibid., p. 274). More completely:

In the right circumstances, namely, that one is having a visual experience, the experience itself can enter into determining a mode of attention or directedness [or *de re* sense] that one might indicate...by 'this visual experience'. This is not a specification that is intelligible independently of the object specified; the presence to the mind of the object itself enters into any understanding of these demonstrative modes of presentation. (ibid., p. 265)

As a lesson in the history of analytic philosophy:

It is time philosophers stopped taking it for granted that the notion of singular sense is a half-baked forerunner of the Theory of Descriptions, and started considering the possibility that the fineness of grain that Frege was basically concerned to register can be had with senses that are not independent of the objects they present. (ibid., p. 269, note 15; McDowell's capitalization)

Russell's theory of descriptions tried to show that proper names are disguised definite descriptions. And definite descriptions (according to Russell's analysis) are non-referring expressions, because non-referring expressions are unsaturated concepts. But it would appear that proper names are directly referring expressions. It seems that a proper name directly refers to its referent. However, direct reference must be mediated by modes of presentation or *de re* senses. Otherwise the referent would be opaque. McDowell claims that there is a distinction

between the way an object is presented and a set of definite descriptions which characterize the object in question. The former is captured through demonstrative expressions, and clearly demonstrative expressions are different from definite descriptions. They are different modes of conceptualization.

The *de re* notion of “conceptual” is obviously independent of the predicative sense of conceptual, given that *de re* senses necessarily involve the objects of the world. Gaskin presupposes that these two senses of conceptual refer to the same thing. But they do not. Hence Gaskin's nouemenal critique falls on deaf ears.

Moreover, recollect that McDowell's philosophy of language is *symbiotically* related to his account of animal/infant mentation, according to Gaskin. The contents of animal experience are noumenal, given McDowell's heterodox account of animal/infant mentation. Symbiotically, the realm of reference of the world falls outside the realm of the conceptual, given McDowell's heterodox account of concepts. In the last section I argued that Gaskin provides a misinterpretation of McDowell's account of animal and infant experience. But if the noumenal problems are symbiotically related, and one problem is not a genuine problem, it follows that the other problem is not a genuine problem, either. This is the logical structure of all symbiotic relationships.

Finally, from methodological considerations alone, semantic notions and metaphysical notions should operate on separate planes. Semantics, although theoretical, is primarily concerned with understanding the uses of languages. It is permissible for a semanticist to analyze the uses of a language in terms of sense, reference, concept, object, compositionality, etc. But it is impermissible for a semanticist to analyze these semantic notions in terms of reality “as

it is in-itself.” Semantic notions such as concept, object, sense and reference are *not* metaphysical notions; but Gaskin’s entire critique conflates these two different types of entities. Metaphysical notions such as “reality as it is in-itself” have no place in semantics. And yet Gaskin treats concepts from semantics as if they were *bona fide* metaphysical notions from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. With the methodological distinction between semantics and metaphysics in place, the idea that objects are noumenal in relation to the conceptual loses much of its meaning.

The apparent allure of Gaskin’s philosophy of language is a result of misplacing distinct conceptual kinds. It is an ill-conceived exercise in what Rorty referred to as “impure philosophy of language.” I submit that Gaskin’s entire semantic edifice is unnecessary for the project of understanding content via transcendental empiricism.

## § 2.6 Conclusion

The putative benefits of a minimalist empiricism are threefold: (i) a retention of the conduit conception of experience; (ii) an elucidation of the metaphysics of infant and animal experience; and (iii) a correct semantic framework.

As for (i), I argued that McDowell’s conduit conception of experience holds with respect to both outer and inner perceptual experience. Gaskin’s criticisms of McDowell’s account of judgment and perceptual experience are wrong. Furthermore, I do not see how McDowell’s transcendental argument for the simple model of content is implicitly committed to the doctrine of individualism. McDowell’s Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” principle is thoroughly anti-individualistic. Gaskin seems to neglect Gadamer’s contribution to McDowell’s philosophy.

With respect to intellectualism, I argued that, even if McDowell's transcendental argument tacitly employs intellectualism, this need not engender a complex model of content. As to (ii), I argued that, contrary to Gaskin's accusation, McDowell's account of animal/infant experience is tenable. Finally, as far as (iii) goes, I argued that Gaskin's critique of McDowell's semantic theory is exceedingly uncharitable and misplaced. Consequently, Gaskin's daunting semantic theory is superfluous. Therefore minimalist empiricism does *not* act as a "constructive foil" to McDowell's minimal empiricism. In other words, minimalist empiricism does not dissolve the dilemma of mental content.

Gaskin's criticisms of minimal empiricism fail to appreciate the scope and significance of McDowell's metaphilosophical orientation. McDowell's non-sideways-on metaphilosophy automatically rules out Kantian transcendental idealism, because noumenal entities are products of a sideways-on metaphilosophy. Things-in-themselves are nonconceptual entities which impinge the boundary of appearances; and appearances are things which are constrained by conceptual categories. In addition, McDowell's metaphilosophy would immediately dispense with the idea that there is an interface between judgment and perceptual experience, as this is a sideways-on approach. Thus Gaskin's own version of transcendental empiricism must be fallacious, since it stems from a fundamentally incorrect interpretation of McDowell's transcendental empiricism.

My aim in this chapter has been to show what is *not* wrong with McDowell's minimal empiricism. In this vein, it has been a defense of McDowell against Gaskin's criticisms. The question becomes, assuming McDowell's metaphilosophy, what, if anything, is wrong with minimal empiricism?

## 3

**Does Minimal Empiricism Dissolve the Dilemma of Mental Content?**

## § 3.1 Two Varieties of Conceptual Content

Both Gaskin's minimalist empiricism and McDowell's minimal empiricism are versions of transcendental empiricism. Transcendental empiricism says that there are two conditions for mental content. First, the content of thought must be determined by sense impressions. Mental content must be anchored in sensations. This is a minimal condition on content, and it is supposed to satisfy the intentionality criterion for mental content. At the same time, sensations must be conceptual. Otherwise transcendental empiricism is just another rendition of the Myth of the Given. This is the second condition for content. Impressions or sensations must be conceptual. The claim is that these two conditions dissolve the dilemma of content. There is no issue of content, according to transcendental empiricism. To think that there is a 'problem' with content is to engage in constructive philosophical theorizing which is anathema to the transcendental empiricist. An adequate dissolution acts as an important reminder of an important set of truistic facts, facts which show us that there is no issue of mental content.

In the last chapter, I argued that Gaskin's minimalist empiricism is inaccurate. Gaskin emphasizes the second transcendental condition to the exclusion of the first transcendental condition; but both conditions are equally necessary. Because minimalist empiricism neglects the first transcendental condition for content, it is impaled on the first horn, along with Davidsonian

coherentism. Indeed, minimalist empiricism could be viewed as a “mere frictionless spinning in the void.” So transcendental empiricism *qua* minimalist empiricism is unsuccessful. But what about McDowell’s minimal empiricism? Does it actually dissolve the dilemma of mental content? A brief review is in order.

First of all, as stated in section 1.1, traditional empiricism represents the second horn of the dilemma of mental content. The second horn of the dilemma says that content is causally, not rationally, induced. But if this is the case, content is simply a brute reflex. A causal relation between mind and world is hardly sufficient for content; indeed, the idea that it *is* sufficient is the Myth of the Given. “Perceptual judgment cannot in the end be *warranted* simply by its origin in a disposition; causal constraint is not enough” (Brandom, 1996, p. 249; Brandom's emphasis). In section 1.3, we saw that Evans’s concept of nonconceptual content is necessarily Given. Evans's notion of nonconceptual content is *not* constituted by rational or articulate or discursive relations, and so it is an inarticulate or meaningless or arbitrary dropkick to the head, so to speak. Therefore Evans's notion of nonconceptual content does not grasp the horns of the dilemma of content; it does not resolve the dilemma of content. The real problem with Evans's philosophy of content, however, is that it adheres to an untenable sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation. Sideways-on orientations typically sever the interconnected relationship between the Kantian faculties of sensibility and understanding. The deliverances of sensibility occur along the boundary of conceptuality. But this yields the Given, the epistemologically troubled notion of a nonconceptual or nonpropositional sensation.

As mentioned in section 1.2, the problem with Davidson *qua* coherentist is that Davidson's transcendental argument for intentionality “comes too late.” Its conclusion, viz., that

beliefs are largely true or individuated or determinate, begs what is at issue. So it fails to meet the first transcendental condition for content. Consequently, Davidsonian coherentism is impaled on the first horn of the dilemma of content. The first horn of the dilemma says that, if content is purely rational, then it is epistemologically indeterminate. Davidson's hyper-rationalistic account of content is a mere frictionless spinning in the void, because Davidson's transcendental argument does not vouchsafe determinate content. And so Davidsonian coherentism (along with Evans's concept of nonconceptual content) does not grasp the horns of the dilemma of content; it does not resolve the dilemma of content. Nonetheless, Davidson's non-sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation is proper. With Davidson's cherished Convention T, the used sentence (or metalanguage sentence) and the mentioned sentence (or object language sentence) are internally related; so the relation dispenses with representations. The same can be said for the relation between mind and world. Mind and world are internally or endogenously or rationally related in experience. This is the second transcendental condition for content. "When we say, and *mean*, that such-and-such is the case, we---and our meaning---do not stop anywhere short of the facts; but we mean: *this---is---so*" (Wittgenstein, 1953, section 95; Wittgenstein's emphasis). Our meanings are not mediated by representations. Reality is transparent. (In fact, this is precisely the point of McDowell's direct realism. See below.)

Minimal empiricism neither succumbs to the first horn nor the second horn of the dilemma of content, for it supposedly combines the best of both Evans's and Davidson's philosophies of content, and thereby dissolves the dilemma. Content is both causally and rationally constrained. Sensations are conceptual. Mature human beings enjoy a second nature.



In more recent papers, McDowell argues that there are two kinds of conceptual contents. I think the purpose of the distinction is to acknowledge that not all content is propositional or linguistic. There exists a type of content which is not propositional---yet it is essentially conceptual. McDowell dubs it “intuitional content.” So there are two kinds of conceptual contents: propositional content and intuitional content. Here is a concise statement of the distinction: “[I]ntuiting is not discourse, even in the extended sense in which judging is. Discursive content [= propositional content] is articulated. Intuitional content is not” (McDowell, 2009b, “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” p. 262). By “discursive” content McDowell means content which depends on inferential capacities. These capacities reside within the space of reasons. Judgments which are responsive to reasons exemplify discursivity. Propositional content is linguistically articulated. Intuitional content is not linguistically articulated. Intuitional content can be usefully thought of as visual--spatial content. It certainly seems to be different from propositional content.

Now, although intuitional content is not actually articulated, it has the capacity for articulation. Intuitional content *can* be articulated. In fact, this conceptual possibility is the transcendental condition for intuitional content. So, while intuitional content is nonpropositional, it is a species of conceptual content, because it is determined by conceptual capacities. The grammatical structure of intuitional content is visual--spatial, but its logical structure is conceptual. Hence the two varieties of conceptual contents. More compactly:

If intuitional content is not discursive, why go on insisting it is conceptual? Because every aspect of the content of an intuition is present in a form in which it is already suitable to be the content associated with a discursive capacity, if it is not---at least not yet---actually so associated....The unity of intuitional content reflects an operation of the same unifying function that is operative in the

unity of judgments, in this case actively exercised. That is why it is right to say the content unified in intuitions is of the same kind as the content unified in judgments: that is, conceptual content. We could not have intuitions, with their specific forms of unity, if we could not make judgments, with their corresponding forms of unity. We can even say that the unity providing function is essentially a function for discursive activity, a power to judge. But its operation in providing for the unity of intuitions is not itself a case of discursive activity. (ibid., p. 264)

The idea is that, in principle, one could sententially articulate the content of an intuitional presentation. Without this possibility, intuitional content would not be unified. But intuitional contents are unified presentations. So intuitional content is conceptual in a transcendental sense. McDowell grants that there are two kinds of unitary presentations. One kind is discursive; the other kind is non-discursive. However, both intuitional content and propositional content “contain” unified claims. And, according to McDowell, all unified presentations presuppose the space of concepts. He writes: “[I]ntuitions belong together with judgments in this respect: what makes their objective purport possible is that they have categorical unity. To put a Kantian thought in a contemporary idiom, the content of intuition is of the same general kind as the content of judgments” (McDowell, 2009b, “Conceptual Capacities in Perception,” p. 127). A unified presentation entails the space of concepts, for content without concept is blind. And blind 'content' is certainly not unified or determinate. Hence, although intuitional content is not explicitly discursive, it is a species of conceptual content, since its content is unified.

Another way of understanding the distinction between propositional content and intuitional content is in terms of Aristotle’s passive/active distinction. “[O]stensible seeings 'contain' their claims in a distinctive way, one that distinguishes them from other conceptual [better: propositional] episodes; they 'contain' their claims as ostensibly visually *imposed* or *impressed*

on their subject” (McDowell, 2009b, “Sellars on Perceptual Experience,” p. 12; McDowell's emphasis; citation omitted). Both intuitional content and propositional content contain unified claims, but intuitional content is passively etched on the mind, whereas propositional content is actively conceptualized by the mind. The passivity of intuitional content is connected to the faculty of sensibility. The latter passively receives sensations. Sensations are not actually linguistically articulated. Its claims are passively received by a knowing subject. Contrast this with judgments. Judgments are actively articulated by a knowing subject. They are products of the faculty of understanding. However, as we saw in section 1.1, receptivity is necessarily implicated in spontaneity. There is no genuine distinction between the faculties of sensibility and understanding, as they are interdependent. Thus the passive faculty of sensibility is necessarily conceptual. And so, again, while intuitional content is different from propositional content, intuitional content is actually a form of conceptual content.

But what exactly accounts for the unity of intuitional presentations? What about the claim that the “logical togetherness” of visual--spatial contents is of the same kind as the unity of judgments? What exactly does McDowell mean by logical togetherness? What about the idea that, although intuitional content is non-discursive, it is transcendently conditioned by propositional content which is intrinsically discursive?

McDowell's account of the unity of intuitional contents is Kantian. McDowell writes:

The point is simply that it does not take cognitive work for objects to come into view for us. Mere synthesis just happens; it is not our doing, unlike making judgments, deciding what to think about something. This is quite consistent with holding that objects come into view for us in actualizations of capacities that are fully conceptual, capacities whose paradigmatic mode of actualization is in

the exercise of cognitive responsibility that judging is.  
 (McDowell, 2009b, "The Logical Form of an Intuition," p. 35)

Objects are seen or come into view through the "mere synthesis" of the manifold of sensations. The mere synthesis of intuitional content is unconscious. It simply occurs without our conscious awareness. As such the conceptual content of sensations is passive, unlike the conceptual content of judgments.

Now the mere synthesis of intuitional content is bound by the faculty of imagination. The faculty of the imagination is a special faculty because it schematizes purely sensory and purely conceptual entities. As such it acts as a mediator between two totally separable kinds of faculties. It seems like for McDowell's Kantian view the faculty of imagination is partially conceptual, in which case it follows that intuitional content is a species of conceptual content. In fact, the interdependence of the faculties of sensibility and understanding is a product of the faculty of imagination. The faculty of imagination allows for the application of completely conceptual categories to sensory kinds. This yields contentful categories. Sensory objects, in turn, are determinate and meaningful because of conceptual categories. Moreover, this 'activity' simply happens. It is not a result of reflective deliberations. Hence Kant's "blind but indispensable function of the soul."

McDowell's thoughts are in accord with Sellars's regarding the unity of visual--spatial contents. Sellars wrote: "[P]erceptual consciousness involves the [unconscious or passive] constructing of sense-image models of external objects. This construction is the work of the imagination responding to the stimulation of the retina....The most significant fact is that the construction is a unified process. The complex of abilities is a unified process. The complex of abilities included in this process is what Kant calls 'productive'...imagination" (Sellars, 1978, sec.

26). Furthermore: “[T]he phrase 'cube of pink (from a certain point of view)' refers both to an actual feature of the image-model *and* a component of the conceptual center of the demonstrative thought” (ibid., sec. 38; Sellars's emphasis). And yet: “[T]he image-model does not have grammatical [or propositional] structure” (ibid., sec. 39). The unity of intuitions involves both a surface structure and a deep structure. The surface structure is the image. The deep structure is a demonstrative expression, which is conceptual. The thought here is that the surface structure of intuitional content is transcendently conditioned by conceptual capacities. In summation:

[F]or Kant intuitions are complex demonstrative thoughts which have implicit grammatical (and hence *categorical*) form. [A]n intuitional representation...contains in embryo the concept of a physical object *now*, over *there*, interacting with other objects in a system which includes *me*. It embodies a proto-theory which contains perceivers of objects in that world. (ibid., sec. 49; Sellars's emphasis)

There are at least two difficulties with McDowell's Kantian account of the unity of intuitions. First, the account is vague, because it depends on a deeply mysterious faculty: the faculty of imagination. The so-called faculty of imagination is nebulous, for how exactly does a faculty neatly intertwine two seemingly opposed faculties? The faculty of sensibility is essentially passive; it passively receives sensory impressions. The faculty of understanding is essentially active; it actively entertains concepts. How exactly does the faculty of imagination seamlessly combine these two very different faculties in such a way as to yield a three-dimensional perceptual experience? The feat remains unexplained and is perhaps inexplicable. McDowell owes us an exacting explanation of how the purported accomplishment of the faculty of imagination is both possible and actual. Unfortunately, his minimal empiricism does not provide an answer to this question. But if his minimal empiricism does not provide an answer to

this pressing question, we are left without an adequate explanation of the unity of intuitions. Within the framework of minimal empiricism, Kant's faculty of imagination is merely posited and therefore unaccounted for.

Moreover, since McDowell's transcendental condition for experience is itself very unclear, this calls into question whether there even are transcendental conditions for experience. The idea that there are transcendental conditions for experience is obviously a guiding assumption of transcendental empiricism. Mental content is not possible unless experience is transcendently conditioned by rational and causal constraints. Content necessarily depends on the tribunal of experience, which is causally given to a subject. Unfortunately, McDowell's transcendental account of perceptual experience is unclear, since it depends on the nebulous faculty of the imagination. In fact, it may be the case that there are no transcendental conditions for experience, as Hume's philosophy suggests. Thus the most important question from modern philosophy persists, How are the categories schematized in such a way as to justify empirical knowledge?

Second, the simpler account of mental content is that intuitional content *is* different in kind from propositional content. Instead of one kind of content, there are two kinds of contents. To be sure, this seems absurd. Nevertheless, it is simpler to recognize two kinds of contents rather than one kind, because in the latter case we have to posit three faculties instead of two. And as we have just seen, the relations among these three faculties appear unnecessarily complex. In addition, an account of these two kinds of contents need not revert to Kant's faculties of sensibility and understanding. It is not as if these two kinds of contents would be ungrounded without Kantian speak. Now Occam's razor tells us that *ceteris paribus* the simpler

explanation is probably more correct than the complex explanation. The elementary probability calculus says the same thing. Therefore there are probably two kinds of contents instead of one kind of content. McDowell's procrustean distinction between intuitional contents and propositional contents is questionable.

A big problem for minimal empiricism is that it never specifies how a unifying function can be non-discursive. Sure, both intuitional contents and propositional contents exhibit unity, and the understandable intuition is that one reduces to the other. But this intuition has to be shown, not just assumed or "intuited." McDowell merely stipulates that propositional content and intuitional content are bound by the same unifying function. But this stipulation is hardly obvious. In fact, it would be very surprising if this stipulation were the case. It seems that there are at least two fundamentally different kinds of unified mental contents.

### § 3.2 Direct Realism and Linguistic Idealism

There are two interconnected metaphysical consequences to McDowell's minimal empiricism. The first metaphysical consequence is the doctrine of direct realism. McDowell's direct realism claims that mind and world are directly related in perceptual experience. Perceptual experience provides us with direct access to the world and other minds. There does not exist a "veil of perception." McDowell wrote: "[O]ur access to environmental objects in perception is direct" (McDowell, 1998c, "Intentionality *De Re*," p. 274).

Indirect realism is a metaphysical consequence of traditional empiricism. Indirect realism claims that there are representations which mediate our access to an external and internal

reality. Now, either direct realism is the case or indirect realism is the case. Assume indirect realism. If indirect realism is the case, the Given immediately follows, as we have repeatedly seen. Thus the metaphysical doctrine of indirect realism has intolerable, or nearly absurd, epistemological consequences. Therefore direct realism must be the case. What is more, the metaphysical doctrine of direct realism has acceptable epistemological consequences.

Specifically, direct realism avoids the Given by substituting a conduit conception of experience for an interface conception of experience. A conduit conception of sensory experience secures a direct connection between mind and world. Traditional brands of empiricism fail to understand how mind and world are directly related in experience. For traditional empiricists', the external or nonconceptual world casually impresses itself on the conceptual subject. Consequently, traditional empiricism posits something Given---a representation---which supposedly bridges the gap between conceptuality and nonconceptuality. But this sort of account of mental content entails skepticism. We can never know, for certain, whether our representations are truly isomorphic to the states of affairs they purport to represent.

What follows from McDowell's direct realism is a version of linguistic idealism. Linguistic idealism is the thesis that reality is fundamentally linguistic or propositional or conceptual. Gaskin writes: "[O]ur access to any sector of the world is essentially linguistic" (Gaskin, 2006, p. 87, see note 67). What is striking is that the entailment is bidirectional. Linguistic idealism entails the thesis of direct realism; and direct realism entails the thesis of linguistic idealism. This is surprising, since direct realism and linguistic idealism are usually opposed to one another. Nonetheless, McDowell insists that we can secure a direct connection between mind and world only if perceptual experience is conceptual. If mind and world are



directly related in perceptual experience, then the content of experience itself must be infused with mind-like attributes, viz., conceptuality. Conversely, the content of perceptual experience is conceptual only if there is a direct connection between mind and world. Hence linguistic idealism is the case only if mind and world are directly related in perceptual experience. This harmonizes with McDowell's system of interdependencies.

More to the point, a causal and rational relation between mind and world requires this metaphysical biconditional, for the causal and rational relations between mind and world are themselves interconnected. Mind and world are causally connected via direct realism; and mind and world are rationally connected via linguistic idealism. This metaphysical interconnection yields mental content.

(Actually, this has a Hegelian ring to it, at least in accordance with one influential interpretation of Hegel:

...absolute true knowledge, in which the real and the ideal coincide. But [Hegel] says that, in finding oneself in possession of the Truth---that is, of the 'Science' or 'System'---one must not forget their origin, which is not coincidence, but opposition and interaction of the independent real and ideal. (Kojève, 1969/1980, p. 153; Kojève's capitalization)

Absolute true knowledge (for Kojève's Hegel) involves the unification of the real and the ideal. However, before absolute knowledge, the independent real is distinct from the ideal. We can hash this Hegelian idea out in terms of sense and reference. Before "absolute true knowledge," mind and world are referentially distinct. At the consummation of absolute knowledge, however, mind and world form a union within Fregean sense. Now, unfortunately, Hegel's notion of absolute knowledge is yet another Archimedean aspiration. Absolute knowledge is a synoptic achievement; but synoptic achievements are unattainable. However, we can dislodge this

Archimedean inclination, without jettisoning Kojève's Hegelian principle. Minimal empiricism thus “domesticates Hegelianism.”<sup>1</sup>)

McDowell's linguistic idealism is closely associated with Sellars's doctrine of psychological nominalism. Rorty reported:

As Sellars says...: *all awareness of sorts, remembrances, facts, etc., in short all awareness of abstract entities---indeed, all awareness of even particulars---is a linguistic affair. This doctrine, which he called 'psychological nominalism', entails that Locke, Berkeley, and Hume were wrong in thinking that we are 'aware of certain determinate sorts...simply by virtue of having sensations and images'.* (Sellars, 1956/1997, p. 4; Rorty's emphasis; citation omitted)

Traditional empiricism is false, for it missed Sellars's point. Sellars's point is that awareness of sensations and perceptions is necessarily conceptual or linguistic or propositional. Traditional empiricists' thought that awareness of sensations and perceptions was an entirely nonconceptual affair. But it is not. On the contrary, Kant's critical philosophy demonstrated that the knowing subject actively imposes conceptual structure onto sensations and perceptions. This is a transcendental condition for sensations and perceptions. McDowell basically accepts Sellars's claim. And if Sellars's claim is correct, then experience is conceptual. This is the thesis of psychological nominalism and linguistic idealism.

There are two types of linguistic idealism: strong and weak. Gaskin's minimalist empiricism is a strong version of linguistic idealism; it is an unmodified version of Sellars's psychological nominalism. Strong linguistic idealism claims that awareness of content is necessarily propositional. Gaskin's strong linguistic idealism is implicated in his location of propositions at the level of reference. The world speaks its own language. In effect, Gaskin

---

<sup>1</sup> For an entertaining and edifying expansion on this idea, see Richard J. Bernstein (2002).

takes McDowell's "unboundedness of the conceptual" slogan to its logical conclusion. But he should not take it to its logical conclusion, as we saw in section 2.4. Even if the content of perception is propositional in Gaskin's "transcendental" sense, this does not entail a strong version of linguistic idealism. Just because we can articulate, say, a whale's perceptual experience in propositional terms, it does not follow that a whale's perceptual experience is propositional in a transcendental sense.

Weak linguistic idealism is the assertion that there is a distinction between intuitional content and propositional content; and yet both are forms of conceptual content. We have witnessed the difficulties confronting Gaskin's strong linguistic idealism. And in the last section I presented reasons for doubting that there is a genuine distinction between intuitional content and propositional content. So neither strong nor weak linguistic idealism is correct. (Incidentally, one might wonder whether there is a corresponding distinction between strong direct realism and weak direct realism? No. Direct realism does not admit of degrees. You are either a direct realist or you are not.)

### § 3.3 Minimal Empiricism *vis-à-vis* Phenomenology

Why phenomenology? There are at least two good reasons. First, Hubert Dreyfus, a prominent phenomenological existentialist, has recently critiqued McDowell's minimal empiricism. Second, Dreyfus's phenomenology represents a distinct alternative to the dilemma of mental content. He allegedly resolves, not dissolves, the dilemma by taking the second horn---but the second horn is conceived from a non-sideways-on perspective, so it is not Given in McDowell's

objectionable sense. Dreyfus maintains minimal empiricism's non-sideways-on metaphilosophy, but he does not go so far as to say that all content is conceptual. There *is* an epistemologically respectable form of nonconceptual content, provided that it is placed within a non-sideways-on framework. McDowell assumes that if there are two kinds of contents, they must interact from sideways-on. But this does not necessarily hold. It is perfectly consistent to claim that there are two kinds of contents which are related from within a non-sideways-on framework.

Dreyfus offers nothing less than “a phenomenological analysis of the nonconceptual embodied coping skills we share with animals and infants” (Dreyfus, 2005, p. 47). For Dreyfus, mental content is determined by embodied copying. We are embodied agents, coping with a world saturated with relevance (or meaning). In order to successfully cope with a contextual situation, one must “know how” to finesse it, as it were. In contemporary epistemology, “know how” is typically distinguished from “know that.”<sup>2</sup> Knowing that something is the case requires conceptual capacities, whereas knowing how to do something demands nonconceptual capacities. For example, if one successfully drives his or her car to work, one knows how to do it. It is not the case that, in order to know how to drive to work, a person must know that they drive to work. This would not make sense. Certainly one knows that one drives to work, but this knowledge is conceptually dependent on knowing how to drive to work. This is just one quotidian example. For the phenomenologist, know how is ubiquitous. Indeed, know how generates know that, not *vice versa*: “[I]f you strip away relevance and start with context-free facts [= conceptual content], you can't get relevance back. Happily, however, we are, as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty put it, *always already* in a world that is organized in

---

<sup>2</sup> The distinction originates with Gilbert Ryle. See his landmark (1949/1984).

terms of our bodies and interests and thus permeated by relevance” (ibid., p. 49; Dreyfus's emphasis).

Know how involves nonconceptual capacities. When these nonconceptual capacities are actualized, we have an instance of nonconceptual content. For example, riding a bicycle requires nonconceptual capacities. Once the capacity is actualized, the action of riding a bicycle is an instance of nonconceptual content. One knows how to ride a bicycle, and this knowledge is prior to knowing that one can ride a bicycle. In other words, nonconceptual content is prior to conceptual content.

Notice how this dovetails with Piaget's theory of cognitive development. For Piaget, formal operational development is rooted in sensorimotor development. Similarly, for Dreyfus, propositional content is rooted in nonconceptual content. For both Piaget and Dreyfus, content of any kind begins with motor intentionality.

The phenomenological notion of nonconceptual content more or less reduces to the crucial notion of embodied coping. The content of embodied coping is very similar to the content of sensorimotor development. An infant is embodied in an environment. Consequently, the infant has to learn how to cope with his or her environment. Furthermore, the notion of embodied coping is constructed within a non-sideways-on metaphilosophy. With embodied coping or Heideggerian “being-in-the-world,” there is no room for two relata (mind and world), much less a third relatum. Here is Charles Taylor's (2002) synopsis of the phenomenologists' point:

We are able to form conceptual beliefs guided by our surroundings, because we live in a pre-conceptual engagement with these which involves understanding. Transactions in this space are not causal processes among neutral elements, but the sensing of and response

to relevance. The very idea of an inner zone with an external boundary can't get started here, because our living things in a certain relevance can't be situated 'within' the agent; it is in the transaction itself....The understanding is in the interaction; it can't be drawn on outside of this, in the absence of the relevant surroundings. (Taylor, 2002, p. 114)<sup>3</sup>

This passage contains three claims. First, conceptual content depends on embodied coping or nonconceptual content. Conceptual content is just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. Second, nonconceptual content is meaningful, since it is the result of a relevant transaction. Third, the notion of embodied coping discards the subject/object dichotomy, because embodied coping is a unitary phenomenon. These three claims collectively resolve the dilemma of mental content. Nonconceptual content is given to us, but it is meaningful because it is saturated with relevance. In other words, the second “horn” of the dilemma is not in fact a horn. For it is false that, if content is given, it must be epistemologically problematic.

According to Dreyfus, McDowell's minimal empiricism is guilty of what he refers to as the “Myth of the Mental.” Here is an evocative statement of the Myth of the Mental: “For McDowell, *mind* is everywhere the pure *given* is not, that is to say, 'all the way out'. Precisely because the myth of the pure Given is dead, we must understand our experience as conceptually permeated through and through. Thus, like a vulture, the Myth of the Mental feeds off the carcass of the Myth of the Given” (Dreyfus, 2005, p. 57; Dreyfus's emphasis). Dreyfus grants McDowell's objections to the Given, but this need not entail that the content of perceptual

---

<sup>3</sup> It should be mentioned that some of these phenomenological facts are encapsulated in contemporary relevance theory, which was initiated by Paul Grice. See his pathbreaking (1957/2001) “Meaning” and (1975/2001) “Logic and Conversation.” McDowell's relation to Grice's conversational implicatures is strained and complex. It is beyond the parameters of this dissertation.

experience is conceptual. To think that there is such an entailment is to substitute the Myth of the Mental for the Myth of the Given. Hence there must be something to the idea of nonconceptual content. Not Evans's notion of nonconceptual content---which *is* a form of the Myth of the Given---but a phenomenological notion.

Ironically, minimal empiricism is the result of a false dichotomy. This is ironic because minimal empiricism is supposed to dissolve dichotomies. Dreyfus states: “A 'bare Given' and the 'thinkable' are not our only alternatives. We must accept the possibility that our ground-level coping opens up the world by opening us to a *meaningful* Given---a Given that is *nonconceptual* but not *bare*” (ibid., p. 55; Dreyfus's emphasis). Minimal empiricism asserts that all content is either conceptual or Given. But there is a third way. There exists a meaningful kind of nonconceptual content which is Given. “[T]he Given needn't be understood as *bare*. It can be *pure* in the sense of nonconceptual, and yet...still have motivating content” (ibid., p. 58; Dreyfus's emphasis).

Dreyfus's concept of nonconceptual content is elucidated in terms of “affordances.” An affordance is an aspect of the world which allows a subject to act on it. It affords an opportunity for action. These actions are initially nonconceptual, given that they are incapable of conceptualization. Infants and animals cannot conceptualize the motivating content of an affordance, even though the content of the affordance is meaningful. Consider an infant learning to use his or her elbows in order to move his or her body forward. An infant's motor behavior, which is a result of sensations and perceptions, is a rational response to his or her environment. And yet the content of these sensations and perceptions cannot be conceptualized.

Additionally, Dreyfus's conception of perception is holistic. He states: “We directly perceive affordances and respond to them without beliefs and justifications being involved. Moreover, these affordances are interrelated and it is our familiarity with the whole context of affordances that gives us our ability to orient ourselves and find our way about” (ibid., p. 59). An “affordance” is meaningful only within the context of an interrelated package of other affordances. As such its content is inherently holistic. Conceptual content, on the other hand, is not holistic; it is particulate or individuated or determinate. Just think of Frege's context principle. Roughly, Frege's context principle asserts that conceptual content is meaningful only within the context of a determinate sentence.

So, to repeat, it turns out that conceptual content *does* depend on nonconceptual content. And this dependence is epistemologically decent. In fact, this dependence is epistemologically necessary, for perceptual experience and perceptual beliefs would not be possible unless embodied coping were the case:

Minimally, nothing could be a percept without a surrounding sense of myself as perceiving agent, moving in some surroundings, of which this bit of yellow is a feature. If we try to think all this orientation away, then we get something which is close to unthinkable as an experience, 'less even than a dream', as Kant puts it. (Taylor, 2002, p. 112)

A distinct yellow percept presupposes a holistic context of interrelated affordances. Distinct perceptual experiences do exist, as demonstrated by yellow percepts. Therefore there must exist a holistic context of interrelated affordances. Thus a phenomenological account of content is transcendental, just like minimal empiricism. The transcendental condition for determinate content is a holistic context which comprises interlocking affordances. Nonetheless, Dreyfus's and McDowell's transcendental accounts are extremely different. A phenomenological account



of content is transcendental in the sense that content is not possible unless embodied coping is the case. Minimal empiricism's account of content is transcendental in the sense that content is not possible unless content and concept are interconnected.

Now according to Dreyfus, embodied coping or nonconceptual content is something we share with animals and infants. What makes our perceptual experience *sui generis* is our capacity for conceptual or analytical thought. Dreyfus acknowledges that mature, human perceptual experience is imbued with conceptual content. But he heavily qualifies this fact:

[A]nalytic attention brings about a radical transformation of the affordances given to absorbed coping. Only then can we have an experience of objects with properties, about which we can form beliefs, make judgments and justify inferences. At the same time, however, this transformation covers up the nonconceptual perception and coping that made our openness to the world possible in the first place. (Dreyfus, 2005, p. 61)

Conceptual content is a function of our capacity for analytical thought. Still, analytical thought presupposes that we are “always already” coping with an embodied context. Alternatively, formal operational thought presupposes the actualization of sensorimotor capacities.

Dreyfus considers a McDowellian objection to his phenomenological account of content and presents a quick response. Consider a chess master:

[T]here must be one structure in common to situations that reliably solicit one type of tactical response, and another to those situations that reliably solicit another. It seems that one ought to, at least in principle, be able to articulate this structure in terms of reasons. But all we have a right to conclude from our phenomenology of expertise is that there must be some detectable invariant features in what J.J. Gibson calls the ambient optic array and that human beings and animals can learn to respond to them. *These features, although available to the perceptual system,*

*needn't be available to the mind.* (ibid., p. 54; Dreyfus's emphasis)

The tactical responses of a chess master are rational responses to a holistic affordance, even though he or she cannot specify those responses in propositional terms. A chess master rationally responds to an “ambient optic array,” which is perceptual in a nonconceptual sense. An ambient optic array is meaningful. It is saturated with relevance, but it is not propositional, even in principle. Thus, because of contextual considerations, there is a genuine distinction between perception and conception, between content and concept. The content of perceptual experience is not conceptual, but it is relevant---and this relevance cannot be linguistically articulated, even in principle.

McDowell claims that Dreyfus's response is not satisfactory, since “detectable invariant features” would not be available to a perceptual system unless those features were themselves conceptual. Dreyfus's response to the McDowellian objection begs the very question against the transcendental empiricist. In fact, McDowell argues that there is no Myth of the Mental, because embodied coping is conceptual. More specifically, the Myth of the Mental is rooted in what McDowell dubs the “Myth of the Disembodied Intellect.” It is a myth to think that bodily or motor content is distinct from conceptual content. In keeping with McDowell's interdependency thesis, bodily and conceptual content are interconnected. They both belong to Sellars's space of reasons. “[Phenomenologists] tackle the phenomenology of embodiment in the context of the assumption I have attacked, that the phenomenology of embodiment must be kept free of involvement on the part of conceptual rationality” (McDowell, 2009a, “What Myth?” p. 322).

But the phenomenology of embodiment is necessarily conceptual. This follows from McDowell's concept of second nature:

[W]hy should we accept that embodied coping skills are, just as such, nonconceptual? If they are not, Dreyfus has no ground for his claim that to find mind everywhere in a distinctly human perceptual engagement with the world is to fall into a myth. I do not have to ignore embodied coping; I have to hold that, in mature adult human beings, embodied coping is permeated with mindedness. And that is exactly what I do hold. (ibid., p. 309)

Coping with a contextual situation is inherently conceptual. We could not successfully cope with a contextual situation unless the situation were itself conceptual. In order to successfully cope with a contextual situation, one must bring to bear discursive capacities. Dreyfus's phenomenological account of content misses this important point.

Invoking Gadamer's distinction between being oriented toward the world and merely inhabiting an environment, McDowell writes:

Dreyfus dismisses the thesis that mind is pervasive in a distinctively human life as myth, on the ground that the thesis cannot be combined with a proper phenomenology of embodied coping skills and a proper placement of embodied coping skills in an account of our orientation towards the world. But I have been arguing that this is wrong. Acknowledging the pervasiveness of mind in a distinctive human life is consistent with appreciating these phenomenological insights.

This is nicely illustrated by Gadamer's...distinction between being oriented towards the world and merely inhabiting an environment. (ibid., p. 317)

An animal's life is merely embodied; it merely inhabits an environment. An animal has a first nature but lacks a second nature. A distinctively human life is both embodied and rational. A

human being is freely oriented toward the world he or she inhabits. A person enjoys a second nature.

Now Dreyfus accepts Gadamer's distinction, but he thinks that the distinction lends further support to his phenomenological account of content, rather than McDowell's:

[C]onsider the case of Chuck Knoblauch. As second baseman for the New York Yankees, Knoblauch was so successful he was voted best infielder of the year, but one day, rather than simply fielding a hit and throwing the ball to first base, it seems he stepped back and took up a 'free, distanced orientation' towards the ball and how he was throwing it---to the mechanics of it, as he put it. After that, he couldn't recover his former absorption and often--- though not always---threw the ball to first base erratically---once into the face of a spectator. (Dreyfus, 2007a, p. 354)

Chuck Knoblauch's baseball career illustrates Gadamer's concept of being freely oriented toward the world. Instead of inhabiting his environment, Knoblauch freely chose to distance himself from his environment. Consequently, his conceptual capacities interfered with his nonconceptual capacities. So the Myth of the Mental is *not* rooted in the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect, since conceptual content clearly depends on embodied coping. Therefore the Myth of the Mental holds:

McDowell says that reflection just makes explicit the conceptual content one was already implicitly acting on in coping (and the implicit 'I think' attached to it). But reflection must introduce some other sort of content. If it was the same sort of content as before reflection, there would be no way to explain why Knoblauch performs so well under one condition and so poorly in the other. (*ibid.*, p. 360)

Knoblauch's conceptual capacities disrupted his nonconceptual capacities. If nonconceptual content were not distinct from conceptual content, this would not have occurred. But it did.

Thus conceptual content is materially distinct from nonconceptual content or embodied coping.

Dreyfus concludes that:

[A]bsorbed bodily coping, its motor intentional content, and the world's interconnected solicitations to act provide the background on the basis of which it becomes possible for the mind with its conceptual content to think about and act upon a categorically unified world. (ibid., pp. 360-361)

McDowell rejoins:

[T]he sad case of Chuck Knoblauch is no problem for me. Knoblauch has an ability to realize a certain practical concept (the concept of throwing efficiently to first base). But he lost his ability because he started thinking about 'the mechanics', about how throwing efficiently to first base is done. The effect was that throwing efficiently to first base stopped being a basic action for him. The most this case could show is that when mindedness gets detached from immersion in activity, it can be the enemy of embodied coping (to echo Dreyfus's wording). It cannot show that mindedness is not in operation when one is immersed in embodied coping. When Knoblauch still had the bodily skill that he lost, his mindedness was in operation in exercises of his skill. His throwing efficiently to first base was his realizing a concept of a thing to do....When Gadamer talks of a 'free, distanced' orientation, he is not talking about an attitude that is contemplative as opposed to practically engaged. (McDowell, 2009a, "Response to Dreyfus," pp. 325-326)

Knoblauch chose to freely distance himself from his embodied coping. Knoblauch's choice was a result of his mind, but his subsequent actions were fully embodied. After his choice was implemented, he began incorrectly coping with his world. So while Knoblauch's freedom was a product of his mind, his freedom necessarily displayed itself in his faulty bodily behavior. His

embodied coping became pathological. But if this is the case, then McDowell is *not* fallaciously separating the mind from the body. The choices of the mind cannot be principally distinguished from the actions of the body. Thus McDowell's minimal empiricism is not guilty of the Myth of the Mental. McDowell concludes that:

We should not start with the assumption that mindedness, the characteristic in virtue of which I am the thinking thing I am, is alien to unreflective immersion in bodily life. If we let our conception of mindedness be controlled by the thought that mindedness is operative even in our unreflective perceiving and acting, we can regain an integrated conception of ourselves, as animals, and---what comes with that---beings whose life is pervasively bodily, but of a distinctively rational kind. (ibid., p. 328)

An “integrated conception” of humanity affirms that body and mind are interdependent. These affirmations follow from the ontological thesis that we possess a second nature.

Dreyfus's response:

[The] pervasiveness claim [i.e., the claim that perceptual experience is conceptual]...seems to be based on a category mistake. Capacities are exercised on occasion, but that does not allow one to conclude that, even when they are not exercised, they are, nonetheless, 'operative' and thus pervade all our activities. Capacities can't pervade anything. So, to describe the status of concepts that are somehow “operative” even when they are not “experienced” as operative, McDowell introduces the technical term “conceptuality.” But without any phenomenological description of what it is like for our absorbed coping to be pervaded by conceptuality, it is not clear what meaning we should give to this term. (Dreyfus, 2007b, p. 372; citation omitted)

A “capacity” is not “operative.” As it is only a capacity. It has the potential to be operative, as when we actually exercise judgments. But it is wrong to think that conceptual capacities are somehow mysteriously operative in perceptual experience. To think this thought is to commit a

category mistake. We can meaningfully talk about conceptual capacities which are operative in judgments, but we cannot meaningfully talk about conceptual capacities which are 'operative' in perceptual experience. But if this is correct, then McDowell is guilty of intellectualizing perceptual experiences---and his intellectualism is a result of a category mistake. Thus the Myth of the Mental still holds.

McDowell would respond by insisting that conceptual capacities are actually operative in perceptual experience. Yes, there is a distinction between that which is operative and that which is a capacity. The latter is possible; the former is actual. But conceptual capacities actually are operative in perceptual experience. Hence perceptual experience is pervaded with conceptual capacities. No category mistake is committed. And so Dreyfus's accusation of the Myth of Mental is false.

This is all well and good, however, it seems that McDowell's response does not sufficiently appreciate the vastness of context. According to phenomenology, all perceptual experiences are contextual in Dreyfus's holistic sense. Even the simplest perceptual experiences are holistic entities, as with red patches. The perceptual experience of a red patch presumably incorporates the geometry of the red patch, the gradations of redness, the amount of light on the red patch, its nearness to the perceiver's body, its background, its foreground, etc. Assume that these aspects can be fully captured by language, either with definite descriptions or demonstrative expressions. In addition to these features, the perceptual experience of a red patch is also determined by the perceiver. The perceptual experience of a red patch involves the perceiver's own conscious and unconscious judgments; it involves the perceiver's history of perceptions and sensations; it involves the perceiver's temperament, personality, motivations,

talents, skills, physical appearance, intelligence, political affiliation, etc. And these multifaceted factors are determined, in part, by a cultural tradition for which the perceiver participates in. The entire transaction is truly non-enumerable.

The context makes the perception possible. And since aspects of the perception are not enumerable, even in principle, it follows that important elements of perceptual experiences are nonconceptual.

To think that an entire contextual situation can be articulated is to assume something like an Archimedean perspective, a perspective which is outside a given context. It is the thought that one can transcend one's context and conceptually enumerate all of its elements. But this presumes a prohibited sideways-on metaphilosophical approach. It assumes that there exists an a-conceptual perspective from which one can conceptualize all aspects of the holistic context of a given perception. However, this assumption is not only false, it neglects the Heideggerian point of "being-in-the world." With the concept of being-in-the world, there is no room for removing oneself from one's embodied coping. Perceptual experiences are not transcendentally conditioned by judgments or concepts. Rather, they are transcendentally conditioned by embodied coping, elements of which do not admit of conceptualization.

For McDowell, embodied coping basically reduces to conceptual content. McDowell grants that perception is a function of the entire context from which the content of the perception is embedded. Yet he thinks that the surrounding context can be completely conceptualized. But the surrounding context cannot be completely conceptualized, as we have just seen. This is not to say that none of the perceptual content embedded in a holistic context is conceptual. Many elements of a context are conceptual. And Dreyfus acknowledges this. But it is false to think



that all aspects of a holistic context are conceptual. This is a hasty generalization. McDowell's minimal empiricism becomes *ad hoc* in the face of Dreyfus's phenomenological results. I conclude that McDowell is guilty of the Myth of the Mental. It is a myth that perceptual experiences are either conceptual or nothing to us. To believe otherwise is to intellectualize perceptual experiences. Dreyfus's accusation of the Myth of the Mental says in effect that McDowell is guilty of intellectualism. However, as stated in section 2.3, an intellectualized account of perception produces an intermediary between mind and world, in which case McDowell's minimal empiricism does not establish a direct realism.

Dreyfus's phenomenology reminds us of the centrality of context with regard to mental content. Context undergirds both content and concept. This fact is a result of phenomenological analyses of experiences. A phenomenological analysis of experience reveals an astonishingly complex and holistic occurrence, aspects of which are nonconceptual if not ineffable.

### § 3.4 Sensation, Perception and Belief

Since minimal empiricism asserts that direct realism is the case if and only if linguistic idealism is the case, it is actually a form of Kantianism. Here is a statement of McDowell's version of Kantianism, which is expressed in term of Wittgenstein's early philosophy:

The form of thought is already just as such the form of the world. It is a form that is subjective and objective together...Here we have, at least programmatically, an idealism that does not diverge from common-sense realism. Given its claim to match common sense, it is appropriate that the slogan that expresses this idealism "The world is everything that is the case" should be truistic...not an expression of some contentious metaphysics. (McDowell, 2009b, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception," pp. 143-144)

Common sense realism maintains that we have unproblematic knowledge of an external world. This claim from common sense realism would be false unless idealism were the case. More specifically, we have unproblematic or direct knowledge of an objective world only if subject and object, or mind and world, share the same logical form. Both mind and world partake of conceptual content. Thus linguistic idealism is an exposition of the thesis of direct realism. The very first sentence of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* is not some grand metaphysical claim; it is a semantic claim (according to McDowell). It is articulating the content of the concept “world.” It is explicating what we mean by an independent world. Our common sense notion of the world is clarified in terms of semantic facts. (Debatably, Wittgenstein's early and later work is philosophy of language without metaphysics.)

Earlier in the same section, McDowell writes:

Any idealism with a chance of being credible must aspire to being such that, if thought through, it stands revealed as fully cohering with the realism of common sense. Kant, for instance, has that aspiration for his transcendental idealism...However, because of the way he treats the forms of our sensibility, he fails to entitle himself to that claim. In his picture, the world as we experience it seems, in respect of its apparent spatial and temporal organization, to be a mere reflection of self-standing features of our subjectivity. So the aim at a coincidence with realism fails. (ibid., p. 141)

Kantian transcendental idealism, with its commitment to a noumenal realm, does *not* achieve a correspondence between common sense realism and idealism. Common sense realism is surely *not* the belief that there is a noumenal reality external to an empirical reality. So Kant's idealism is anything but an explication of common sense realism. But a “credible” form of idealism must logically imply common sense realism. If an idealistic philosophy does not imply common sense realism, it is just childish metaphysics.

Put another way, McDowell embraces Strawson's Kant: "I am not sure that Strawson's Kant is really Kant, but I am convinced that Strawson's Kant comes close to achieving what Kant wanted to achieve" (McDowell, 1996, p. viii).<sup>4</sup> Strawson's Kant is Kantian philosophy without things-in-themselves, and Strawson's Kant allows Kantian philosophy to achieve a vindication proper of common sense realism. Kantian idealism *can* coincide with realism---but only if we extrude the incoherent notion of noumena. Still, common sense reality is transcendently conditioned by the categories and pure intuitions.

Most brands of realism assume that idealism can be avoided, but only if phenomenal content is underwritten by noumenal 'content'. The latter supposedly acts as a transcendental object underwriting phenomenal content. Yet so-called noumenal 'content' is nonsensical, for noumenal 'stuff' is, by definition, contentless. It cannot serve a useful purpose in a philosophical theory of content. What is more, noumenal content is unnecessary for common sense realism, since weak linguistic idealism entails common sense realism (and *vice versa*). (These reflections reinforce my critique of Gaskin's critique of McDowell's philosophy of language, since Gaskin's critique presupposes that McDowell's philosophy of language smuggles in noumenal speak. The fact of the matter is: things-in-themselves are repellent to McDowell.):

McDowell does not of course deny any of the common-sense thoughts about observation. Indeed, it is part of his project to establish them. But he thinks he can only do so by firmly placing the facts about butter, cars and cats "within" the conceptual sphere. More precisely, it is the very things that Mary knows---that the butter is in the fridge and so on---that are to be enfolded in the sphere or space of concepts. (Blackburn, 2006, p. 207)

---

<sup>4</sup> For Strawson's Kant, see Strawson (1966).

There is no gap between perceptual beliefs and perceptual experiences, as they are both conceptual kinds. Beliefs possess propositional content. They exhibit active conceptual content. Perceptions, on the other hand, are intuitional. They possess passive conceptual content. So there are two species of the same genus. This is the thesis of McDowell's direct realism. But notice if perceptual beliefs are directly related to perceptual experiences, then it must be the case that perceptual experiences are themselves direct or immediate. Thus it would appear that McDowell's direct realism entails that perceptual experience is immediate.

Here is a statement of McDowell's direct realism:

I [do] not mean to imply that experience yields premises for inferences whose conclusions are the contents of perceptual beliefs. On the contrary, I think experience directly [or immediately] reveals things to be as they are believed to be in perceptual beliefs, or at least seems to do that. But it is hard to make that cohere with supposing experiences have the same kind of content as beliefs....

Taking experience to comprise intuitions, in the sense I have explained, removes this problem. It should not even seem that the way intuitions entitle us to beliefs involves an inferential structure. If an object is present to one through the presence to one of some of its properties, in an intuition in which concepts of those properties exemplify a unity that constitutes the content of a formal concept of an object, one is thereby entitled to judge that one is confronted by an object with those properties. The entitlement derives from the presence to one of the object itself, not from a premise for an inference, at one's disposal by being the content of one's experience. (McDowell, 2009b, "Avoiding the Myth of the Given," pp. 270-271)

Beliefs based on experiences are not inferential derivations, since the content of judgments and the content of intuitions are both bound by the same unifying function. And this unifying

function is thoroughly conceptual. This is indeed a simple model of content. Mind and world are directly related in perceptual experience, which itself is presumably direct.

McDowell also expresses his direct realism in terms of the space of rationality:

I have connected responsiveness to reasons as such, and hence conceptual capacities, with reasoning. That is to put the relevant notion of rationality in the context of a notion of inference, understood broadly enough to cover acting in consequence of practical reasoning as well as coming to believe something in consequence of theoretical reasoning....

But my aim was to spell out how the idea of rationality is in play when we explain perceptual beliefs in terms of experience. And here the notion of inference gets no grip. When one acquires beliefs in this way, one comes to believe that things are as one's experience reveals, or at least seems to reveal, that things are. The content that the explanation attributes to the experience is the same as the content of the belief explained, not a premise from which it would make sense to think of the subject as having reached the belief by an inferential step. (McDowell, 2009b, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception," p. 131)

Our ability to respond to reasons is a function of our ability to infer one belief from another belief. That is, our capacity to act within the space of reasons is a function of our capacity to rationally infer one judgment from another. Beliefs based on reason are deductively inferential. Beliefs based on perceptions are different. Beliefs based on perceptions are immediate as opposed to inferential. It may seem that perceptual beliefs are inferences from perceptual experiences, but this is not the case. There is no inference from an impression to a perceptual belief, since impressions and beliefs are equally conceptual. Again, this is a consequence of McDowell's direct realism.

Moreover, McDowell claims that his direct realism is part and parcel of empiricism in general:

[There is] a respectable empiricist ancestry..., according to which what is “given” in a sensation of a green light flashing is just that, a green light flashing. The sensory states enjoyed by a perceiver themselves already have intentional content, and the sense in which perceptual beliefs are grounded in sensation is that they derive their intentional content from the intentional content of the sensory states they are based on. That, on this view, is what believing one’s senses is. No inference is involved, and there is no intermediary. We just accept what the senses conjointly give.

I think this is just the shape an acceptable empiricism must have....It is precisely to provide for the thought that perceptual experience can directly open us to the world that I claim we must see experience as an actualization of conceptual capacities, capacities that belong to our special character as rational animals. (ibid., p. 140)

A “respectable empiricist” denies that we initially have an immediate experience of a flashing green light, and then infer a belief about the content of the experience. To the contrary, perceptual beliefs are immediate. Perceptual beliefs are not conclusions logically derived from perceptual experiences, because there is no logical inference from perceptual experiences to perceptual judgments.

More broadly, minimal empiricism's non-sideways-on metaphilosophical orientation implies that perceptual beliefs and perceptual experiences are directly related. Otherwise there is an unacceptable gap between mind and world.

Now it might seem that Berkeley’s understanding of perceptual experience is markedly distinct from McDowell's. For Berkeley, perceptual experience itself is inductively inferential. According to Berkeley, it is not the case that we immediately perceive a three-dimensional world. While sensations are immediate, perceptions are not. A two-dimensional sensation is immediate, but three dimensional perceptions are not, as we will see presently. Sensations, then, are different in kind from perceptions. McDowell’s direct realism, however, depends on the

claim that perceptual experience is itself immediate. But since perceptual experience is not immediate, McDowell's direct realism must be false. Before adjudicating this matter, what can be said for Berkeley's seemingly opposed picture?

Several things. First, let's quickly consider the psychology of perception. The latter strongly suggests that perceptual experience itself *is* inferential. According to the psychology of perception, we infer a third dimension from the two dimensions of sight to our three-dimensional perceptual experience. Sight provides the two dimensions of height and width. "[W]hat is immediately seen is a two-dimensional spatial arrangement of light and colour" (Armstrong, 1960, pp. 6-7). And our tactile modality provides the third dimension of volume. These two distinct sensory modalities are interwoven, yielding a three-dimensional perceptual experience. Three-dimensional perceptual experiences seem immediate only because the process of integrating these two sensory modalities is an unconscious learning process.

Or consider the classic thought experiment from the philosophy of perception. Imagine a blind man who can distinguish a cube and a sphere by his sense of touch. Then imagine that the blind person gains sight. Without touching the object, would he still be able to distinguish a cube from a sphere by his newfangled sense of sight? No. The blind man would not have a perceptual experience of a cone. He would have to *learn* how to perceive cones. It would take him a very long time to integrate his visual sensations and his tactile sensations in such a way as to perceptually experience cones. (It might not even be possible.) The point is that the blind man would have to learn how to perceive three-dimensional objects. And this shows that our perceptual experiences *are* inferences from visual sensations. We *do* empirically infer a third

dimension from our visual sensations. We unconsciously associate sensations in such a way that perception becomes possible.

Although the phenomenology of perceptual experience suggests that three-dimensional perceptions are immediate, this is empirically false. Berkeley wrote: “[T]he ideas of space, outness, and things placed at a distance, are not, strictly speaking, the objects of sight...” (Berkeley, 1709/1910, p. 33). Distance and volume essentially depend on our sense of touch, which is closely associated with our sense of sight. Visual sensations do not suffice for three-dimensional perceptual experiences. Hence our senses of sight and touch reveal profoundly different aspects of the same object. “[T]here is an important sense in which visible and tangible qualities “of the same thing” are never strictly qualities of the same thing, but qualify two different objects which, because they are closely connected together (but not by any spatial relation), we speak of as one single thing” (Armstrong, 1960, p. 34). Hence perceptual experience is empirically inferential as opposed to immediate. But if this is right, then McDowell's direct realism is wrong, since McDowell's direct realism depends on the claim that perception itself is immediate.

Furthermore, if we take empiricism to its logical conclusion, we must say that perceptual experience itself is acquired or learned. According to empiricism, beliefs are a product of experience. As such beliefs are acquired. In turn, perceptual experience itself is acquired or learned. We learn how to perceive a three-dimensional world. “[T]he reason we make [the] immediate passage from seeing a certain [object] to thinking that there is an object at a certain distance...need be no more than previous experience of the conjunction of [visible objects and tactile objects]” (ibid., pp. 17-18). Berkeley's empiricism predicts that this is the case, and the



psychology of perception provides some confirmation of Berkeley's theory of vision. Armstrong stated that: "Empirically, Berkeley's theory has been confirmed" (ibid., p. 62).

Now recall the metaphysical interpretation of Russell's principle of acquaintance from section 2.2. In a metaphysical sense, we are directly acquainted with our sensations. But we are not metaphysically directly acquainted with our perceptions, according to Berkeley.

McDowell might object as follows. Berkeley claims that idealism and common sense realism are conceptually interdependent. But common sense realism says that perceptual experiences are immediate, whereas Berkeley's inferential view of perception implies that perceptual experiences are *not* immediate. So how is Berkeley's inferential view of perception consistent with his alleged defense of common sense realism?

I think that there is a distinction between direct realism and common sense realism. Common sense realism claims that sensations are immediate---and they are. This is in accordance with the metaphysical interpretation of direct acquaintance. But common sense realism need not think that three-dimensional perceptual experiences are immediate. In fact, common sense realism recognizes a difference between having a two-dimensional sensation and perceiving a three-dimensional object. For the common sense realist, sensations are immediate, but perceiving a three-dimensional object is not. McDowell's direct realism, however, entails that three-dimensional perceptual experiences are immediate. But this is incorrect as a matter of fact.

In any case, I do not think Berkeley's discoveries regarding the nature of perception undercut McDowell's account of the immediate relation between perception and belief. First of all, notice that Berkeley's sense of inference is very different from the sense of inference used in

logic. The inference is inductive, not deductive. The third dimension of volume does not *necessarily* follow from tactile and visual premises. Three-dimensional perceptual experiences are inferential in an inductive sense. We inductively infer a third-dimension to our perceptual experience. But McDowell's direct realism is not denying this. McDowell is denying that there is a deductive inference from perception to belief. McDowell's direct realism is asserting that there is an immediate or direct relation between beliefs and experiences, given that they are both conceptual. Whether or not perception itself is inductively inferential is beside McDowell's point that beliefs are not deductive inferences from perceptions. Berkeley's account of perception has nothing to do with the idea that perception and belief are tokens of the same conceptual type, and are therefore directly related. In short, even if perception itself is inductively inferential, this does not affect McDowell's transcendental claim. McDowell's transcendental account of the direct relation between perception and judgment is untouched by Berkeley's empirical conjectures pertaining to the sensory mechanisms involved in perception itself.

### § 3.5 Conclusion

Minimal empiricism does not dissolve the dilemma of mental content. There are a couple of difficulties confronting minimal empiricism. First, McDowell's account of the conceptual content of intuitions is spurious. His account is buttressed with a distinction between propositional content and intuitional content. Both species of content allegedly fall under the rubric of conceptual content. That is, both are bound by the "same unifying function." They differ in that one is unified in a discursive manner, whereas the other is unified in a non-discursive manner.

But this postulation seems either false or imprecise. In addition, Dreyfus's critique of minimal empiricism is onto something. It appears that minimal empiricism is guilty of the Myth of the Mental. But if McDowell's minimal empiricism is guilty of the Myth of the Mental, he is offering an intellectualized account of perception. But if McDowell is inadvertently committed to intellectualism, his attempt at attaining a direct relation between mind and world fails. Hence minimal empiricism's interrelated metaphysical consequences---namely, weak linguistic idealism and direct realism----are problematic. But if the metaphysical consequences of a philosophical theory of content are problematic, the *prima facie* plausibility of the theory is immediately called into question. There is also an issue about whether or not perception itself is immediate. In accordance with Berkeley's teachings, I argued that perception is not immediate. But if perceptual experience is not immediate, it may appear that McDowell's direct realism is doubly false, since McDowell's direct realism must assume that perceptual experience is immediate. I argued that McDowell can accept Berkeley's theory regarding the sensory ingredients of perception while maintaining that perception and belief are immediately related in a transcendental sense. It might seem that Berkeley's position undercuts McDowell's direct realism, but it does not. Berkeley's empirical account of perception itself is irrelevant to McDowell's transcendental account of the relation between perception and belief. It turns out that McDowell's direct realism does not depend on the claim that perception itself is empirically immediate. In fact, Berkeley's understandings serve to illuminate McDowell's position with respect to the empirical nature of perceptual experience. Nonetheless, there is a contemporary approach to perception which does undermine McDowell's version of direct realism, along with another central tenet of transcendental empiricism---to which we now turn.

### **Transcendental Empiricism, Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology**

On McDowell's account, the well known doctrine of “disjunctivism” is a transcendental condition for transcendental empiricism. Without a vindication of disjunctivism, there is no transcendental empiricism to speak of. Why? How? What exactly is disjunctivism, and why is it so important for transcendental empiricism?

Here is McDowell's canonical description of disjunctivism:

[A] disjunctive conception of perceptual appearance: perceptual appearances are either objective states of affairs making themselves manifest to subjects, or situations in which it is as if an objective state of affairs is making itself manifest to a subject, although that is not how things are. Experiences of the first kind have an epistemic significance that experiences of the second kind do not have. They afford for knowledge of objective states of affairs. (McDowell, 2009a, “The Disjunctive Conception of Experience as Material for a Transcendental Argument,” p. 231, see note 9)

A veridical perceptual experience affords knowledge of objective states of affairs. The objective state of affairs presented by the veridical perception directly manifests itself to the subject. A non-veridical perception is not epistemologically significant. It offers the appearance of direct, objective knowledge. But this offer is illusory. Moreover, for McDowell's disjunctivism, perceptual experience is differentiated in terms of epistemological significance. A veridical perceptual experience is epistemologically significant. A non-veridical perceptual experience is not.

McDowell's concept of "epistemic significance" is obviously crucial for his distinction between veridical perceptual experience and non-veridical perceptual experience. So what does McDowell mean by epistemic significance?

I think we can understand what McDowell means by epistemic significance in terms of an epistemological example. As an epistemological example, there is nothing epistemologically in common between the perceptual experience of Descartes's bent stick in a pool of water and the perceptual experience of a stick which is actually bent in a pool of water. The appearances are identical, but the disjunctivist claims that there is nothing in common between the two perceptual experiences, since the first perceptual experience is epistemologically significant, whereas the second perceptual experience is not, although it appears to be. The veridical perceptual experience affords direct, objective knowledge of a bent stick in a pool of water. The non-veridical perceptual experience appears to afford direct, objective knowledge; but this is an optical illusion. The stick is not actually bent.

According to Gaskin, the disjunctivist asserts that:

[W]hen I seem to see (to put it neutrally) that such and such is the case, my mental state is *either* one of really seeming that such and such is the case, *or* of merely seeming to do so. That disjunctive characterization is held to be fundamental: it does not supervene on a more basic characterization in terms of a "common core" of experience, supplemented in the veridical case by some relational fact about the subject's placing in his or her environment. That is, the left-hand disjunct is not to be conceived as constructed out of the right-hand disjunct together with some such relational fact. (Gaskin, 2006, pp. 95-96; Gaskin's emphasis)

A disjunctive understanding of perceptual experience is conceptually prior to a "common core" conception of perceptual experience. However, the common core conception of experience, or what McDowell calls "the highest common factor conception of experience," states (roughly)

that: “[W]e are confronted, in experience, not directly with features of the world, but with mere proxies for such features, “inner” appearances [= representations] whose status and content are not dependent on the veridicality or otherwise of the associated experiences...” (ibid., p. 95). The highest common factor conception of experience says that perception is essentially representational. Both a veridical perception and a non-veridical perception purport to represent states of affairs. So both kinds of perceptions *do* share something in common, namely, a representational state. This is an expression of an interface conception of experience. The interface conception of experience says that a perception is a representation which acts as an interface between mind and world. With a veridical perceptual experience, mind and world are mediated by an accurate representation. With a non-veridical perceptual experience, mind and world are mediated by an inaccurate representation.

Contrast this with McDowell's disjunctivism. For McDowell's disjunctivism, experience does *not* act as an interface between mind and world, since the highest common factor of conception of experience is epistemologically empty. According to McDowell's disjunctivism, perceptual experience is essentially nonrepresentational. Neither veridical nor non-veridical perceptions are representational. Either a perception directly affords objective knowledge of facts, or it does not. Fundamentally, there are no representations involved in either kind of perception. This is a conduit conception of experience. Either a perceptual experience acts as a conduit between mind and world, or it does not. So, again, for the disjunctivist, a veridical perceptual experience and a non-veridical perceptual experience share nothing epistemologically in common with one another. “One mind has a bit in it (the referent of the “that” clause, construed as telling of the fact that is ‘within’ the mind) and the other does not. Their minds are

unlike, as unlike as a nest with an egg in it and a nest without one” (Blackburn, 2006, p. 213).

The two minds are different in terms of epistemologically significant content. One mind is directly related to an external (or internal) object; the other mind is not. In footnote 12 to McDowell's “The Disjunctive Conception of Experience as Material for a Transcendental Argument” he states: “The essential thing is that the two sides of the disjunction differ in epistemic significance...” (McDowell, 2009a, p. 232).

A consequence of disjunctivism is that perceptual experience need *not* involve internal representations. On the contrary, veridical perceptual experiences are diaphanous, just as truth is diaphanous. We need not postulate representations, since there is a distinction between presentation and representation. Perceptual experience *presents* us with empirical facts; it need not *represent* empirical facts. For McDowell's disjunctivism: “[E]xperience is intrinsically or fundamentally 'presentational'....This is the doctrine that an experience could not be what it is did it not present things to us as being one way or another” (Blackburn, 2006, p. 213).

Disjunctivism, then, represents an alternative to representationalism.

For the purpose of understanding the nature of perceptual experience, we should opt for disjunctivism rather than representationalism (according to McDowell). The former can account for our direct, immediate access to the objective world; the latter cannot. Representationalism or the “highest common factor” conception of experience can only establish an indirect relation between mind and world. McDowell's disjunctivism promises more than this:

If we adopt the disjunctive conception of appearances, we have to take seriously the idea of an unmediated openness of the experiencing subject to 'external' reality, whereas the 'highest common factor' conception allows us to picture an interface between them. (McDowell, 1998c, “Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge,” p. 392)

Furthermore: “Without the 'highest common factor' conception of experience, we can leave the interface out of the picture, and the traditional [epistemological] problems lapse” (ibid., pp. 393-394). The traditional problems of epistemology, e.g., the problem of the external world and the problem of other minds, are a result of an interface conception of experience. If the relation between mind and world is mediated by representations, it becomes epistemologically problematic as to how we know external (and internal) objects, or how we know whether another person is experiencing a certain mental state. The disjunctive conception of experience jettisons these problems, as its “good” disjunct provides immediate, direct access to the external world and other minds. Again, a veridical perception is epistemologically significant.

Tyler Burge (2005) offers a more specific formulation of disjunctivism:

Disjunctivism makes two closely related negative claims. It claims that there is never an explanatorily relevant mental state type in common between (and specific to) a veridical perception and a referential illusion. And it claims that there is never a mental state type in common between (and specific to) perception of an object and perception of a would-be duplicate substitute for the object that would, in the context, perceptually indiscernible to the perceiver....Disjunctivism makes these claims because it holds that the particular environmental objects (or lack of objects) that are involved in perception are essential to type-identifying all explanatorily relevant perceptual state types and perceptual belief types. (Burge, 2005, p. 25)

Disjunctivism is very important for transcendental empiricism. There are two reasons. First, disjunctivism claims that a veridical perceptual experience affords direct knowledge of external objects. A non-veridical perceptual experience does not, yet it appears to. Thus the thesis of disjunctivism is pivotal for the direct realism of transcendental empiricism. Indeed,



without disjunctivism, there is no direct realism. If disjunctivism is false, then McDowell's direct realism must be false, too.

Second, recall from section 1.4 and section 2.4 that there is nothing epistemologically in common between the content of our perceptual experience and the content of an animal's perceptual experience. The content of our perceptual experience is conceptual. The content of an animal's perceptions are proto-conceptual. An animal's perceptions reside within the space of nature, not the space of reasons. Animals are merely first nature creatures. The 'contents' of their perceptions are nonconceptual. In fact, since the content of an animal's perceptions is nonconceptual, we are not even entitled to the thought that an animal can enjoy contentful perception. What follows from this is that an animal cannot have justified beliefs which are based on their 'perceptions'. The point is that animals do not partake of a disjunctive conception of perception, given that their perceptions are not conceptual. On the other hand, the content of human perceptual experience is conceptual, and McDowell's disjunctivism supposedly offers an adequate explanation of our special kind of perceptual experience. The ontology of second nature is mapped by the disjunctive account of perception. Therefore disjunctivism is an absolutely critical foundation of transcendental empiricism.

Burge has employed contemporary perceptual psychology in order to argue against McDowell's disjunctivism. In some ways, Burge's account of perceptual experience and mental content is pretty straightforward. For Burge, content is a result of an interaction between a perceptual system and its environment. He writes: "Perceptual anti-individualism holds that the nature of perceptual beliefs are constitutively associated with relations, including causal relations, between capacities in the perceptual system and aspects of the physical environment"

(*ibid.*, p. 1). The capacities of a perceptual system are representational capacities. However, the physical environment determines the contents of these representations. Hence anti-individualism. Burge continues: “I believe that perceptual anti-individualism provides the only acceptable framework for understanding conditions under which perceptual representation is possible. Perceptual anti-individualism is embedded in the practice of the empirical psychology of perception” (*ibid.*, p. 9). Burge claims that his version of anti-individualism accords with perceptual psychology, since the latter is committed to representations which are caused by the external environment. We need to postulate representations of the perceptual system in order to make sense of mental content. However, McDowell is an anti-representationalist of sorts. McDowell's anti-representationalism follows from his rejection of the highest common factor conception of experience, along with his disjunctivism. Indeed, as we have just seen, McDowell's disjunctivism jettisons representations in its account of content. McDowell's anti-representationalism claims that the environment determines mental content. Representationalism, on the other hand, claims that representations of the environment determine mental content. Thus, for McDowell, representationalism and anti-individualism are incompatible concepts. For Burge, however, anti-individualism and representationalism are compatible concepts.

Burge presents a helpful thought experiment to illustrate the proximity principle and its incompatibility with McDowell's disjunctivism. Imagine that there is an object which a subject sees. Then imagine that the subject is told to close his/her eyes and during this time a very similar yet different object is put in its place. The subject incorrectly believes that he or she is seeing the original object. Finally, imagine that the subject is told to close their eyes again and

during this time a hologram produces the original object. Once again, the subject incorrectly believes that he or she is seeing the original object. According to the disjunctivist, the perceptual experience is either of the first kind, the second kind, or the third kind. There is nothing epistemologically in common among the three kinds because they involve three different referential kinds. For the disjunctivist, this thought experiment represents three different kinds of perceptions. The first kind of perceptual experience is veridical, whereas the other two are non-veridical perceptual experiences. And the non-veridical perceptions are different from each other. The first non-veridical perception is of a duplicate object. The second non-veridical perception is of a hologram.

Burge thinks that this disjunctivist understanding is badly misleading. As a matter of course, these perceptual experiences are token distinct. They differ with respect to the referents involved. But the perceptual experiences are not type distinct. They are of the same kind. For the perceptual experiences incorporate virtually the same kind of proximal stimulations. What is common among the three perceptual experiences is the proximal stimulation. Consequently, there is a common denominator to perceptual experience. Burge states: “Disjunctivism derives...from conflating type and token elements in individuating mental states and their associated representations” (ibid., p. 34). Thus disjunctivism runs contrary to perceptual psychology, in which case disjunctivism is a mistaken philosophy of perception:

Disjunctivism is incompatible with the Proximality Principle, which is basic to nearly all scientific study of perception.

Given that different distal causes can yield proximal stimulation that is relevantly the same, perceptions of entities in the distal environment is fallible. The Proximality Principle, together with this empirical fact, entails that the same type of perceptual state can be

veridical or non-veridical, perceptually referential and non-referential. (ibid., p. 27)

Moreover, Burge argues that disjunctivism is unmotivated. We do not need to be disjunctivists in order to secure a direct relation between mind and world. McDowell's version of anti-individualism is unnecessary for direct realism. Burge writes:

The usual motivation [for disjunctivism] is a concern to insure that we make 'direct' perceptual contacts with the world. The doctrine was originally an overreaction to veil-of-perception views of the British empiricists.

The veil-of-perception view holds that the primary objects of perception are internal mental items---or other non-environmental items. The primary referents are sense data or phenomenal qualities in the mind. On such a view, experience of the physical world is held to be indirect, both in not being the first object of perceptual reference and in being the product of an epistemically evaluable inference from more fundamental objects of perception.

The veil-of-perception view is certainly mistaken. It fails to understand that the representational content of perceptual representations is fixed by the function of the perceptual system in providing information about and aiding interaction with the physical environment. (ibid., p. 29-30)

According to Burge, disjunctivism is a response to the epistemologically problematic notion of a “veil-of-perception.” The latter is essentially a representational account of perception. There is a veil (or representation) which blocks our immediate access to the world. According to disjunctivists, the only alternative to this unattractive state of affairs is disjunctivism. That is, there is either a disjunctive account of perception or a veil account. But Burge claims that there is another option. According to Burge, perceptual psychology's proximity principle can account for the direct relation between mind and world. He writes:

Perceptual representation does not produce a 'veil of ideas', because the first objects of perceptual reference are physical entities in the environment. This is a sense in which perceptual

representations are 'directly' about the environment: They are *referentially non-derivative*....

Perception is 'directly' about the environment in a further, corollary sense: It is *non-inferential*. Perceptual representations are the products of a complex set of transformations that begin with registrations of light arrays. Registrations are not perceptions....[And] [n]one of these transformations begins with the perceptions of, or as of, anything more basic than those physical entities in the environment. (ibid., p. 30; Burge's emphasis; citation omitted)

When a representational perception is veridical, it directly relates to an external object. That is, when the representational information provided by a perceptual system in fact stands in the right causal connection with the environment, then the information has been directly provided to the subject. The representational information is “referentially non-derivative.” A veridical perception must stand in a one-to-one correspondence with the three-dimensional external world. For the very idea of a veridical representational perception depends on the concept of isomorphism. That is to say, the concept of veridicality presupposes that the veridical perception actually corresponds to that which is represented. Moreover, the concept of isomorphism depends on the concept of veridicality. A three-dimensional perception and a three-dimensional object are isomorphic only if the perceptual representation is veridical. Veridical perceptual representations, then, directly inform an agent of his or her environment. Hence Burge's representational account of perception is direct. Veridical representations of a perceptual system directly relate to the world. In turn, this direct relation allows a subject to successfully interact with their environment. Burge's direct realism is epistemologically significant, since it entails that a subject can correctly interact with their environment.

To recapitulate, anti-individualism and representationalism are compatible concepts, contrary to McDowell's anti-individualism. Furthermore, according to Burge, the proximity

principle demonstrates that there is a common factor between veridical and non-veridical perceptions. Finally, the representationalism propounded by the proximity principle secures an epistemologically significant direct realism.

McDowell (2010) has responded to Burge's critique. First, McDowell argues that although there is a sub-personal commonality between animal and human perceptual experience, there is no personal commonality. Human experience and animal experience involve different types of perceptual states. They are not just token distinct. For McDowell, perceptual psychology is only talking about sub-personal mechanisms. But personal states are what matter for content. Content is a result of the perceptual states of an individual perceiver. The content of human perceptual experience is conceptual. Animal perceptual experience is not. Although the registration of sensory input is the same, the perceptual content is different in kind. What we share with animals is a first nature, which is (among other things) a sub-personal registration of sensations. But, again, the results of these registrations are widely distinct.

In addition, perceptual psychology is consistent with disjunctivism, according to McDowell. Perceptual psychology is not denying that there is a distinction between animal experience and human experience on a personal level. On the contrary. Animal perceptual experience is not imbued with a second nature. Perceptual psychology is merely talking about sub-personal states of animal perception and human perception (which are the same)---but this has no bearing of the right kind on perceptual states which are saturated with conceptual meaning. Sub-personal accounts of 'content' lack the necessary conceptual structure that McDowell is at pains to stress. Therefore there is nothing epistemologically in common between the content of an animal's perception and the content of a human's perception. Although the

sensory contents of animal perception and human perception are the same, the characters of these contents are widely distinct. So, although the proximity principle empirically obtains, McDowell's transcendental empiricism is talking about two different kinds of mental states, in which case perceptual psychology is consistent with McDowell's transcendental point.

“[Burge's] implicit principle here---same content, same state---seems remarkably insensitive to the possibility that it might matter who or what is in a state” (McDowell, 2010, p. 250).

More generally, McDowell argues that the 'content' of *perceptual systems* is distinct from the content of individual perceivers. The content of individual perceivers can be epistemologically significant. But the content of perceptual systems cannot be epistemologically significant:

The conceptual framework in which talk of perceivers operates is in many ways very different from the conceptual framework in which talk of perceptual systems operates.... [F]or [a] state of a perceptual system cannot have the epistemic significance of a perceptual experience that consists in having an aspect of objective reality perceptually present to one. (ibid., p. 250)

An animal's perceptions are mere products of their perceptual systems. As such, they are incapable of having an aspect of objective reality perceptually present. That is, their perceptions lack epistemological significance. A mature human being, on the other hand, is capable of having aspects of objective reality perceptually present. As such human perception is epistemologically significant. Consequently, sub-personal accounts of content do not establish an epistemologically significant direct realism. A direct relation between mind and world occurs only at a personal level. But, again, perceptual psychology is only reporting on sub-personal mechanisms. Sub-personal mechanisms are necessary for understanding the contents of an

individual perceiver, but they are hardly sufficient. And they certainly do not establish an epistemologically significant direct realism.

What is potentially worse, a sub-personal account of information processing is problematic, according to McDowell:

The [sub-personal] equipment [does not] processes *information* about arrays of light into *information* about the presence of [external objects]. The equipment hardly processes information at all...but rather simply reacts to any small moving speck. (McDowell, 1998b, "The Content of Perceptual Experience," p. 348; emphasis added)

According to McDowell, Burge's sub-personal understanding of the concept of information is nonconceptual, and therefore epistemologically problematic. A viable concept of information essentially depends on conceptual content. Information without concepts is blind; and concepts without information are empty. In fact, it is a stronger point. The point is that there is no information without concepts. Content and concept are interconnected. This is another way of stating McDowell's direct realism.

Nonetheless it seems that Burge could reasonably claim that sub-personal mechanisms *do* process contentful information as a matter of fact. Sensory information need not be conceptually structured in order to be meaningful. Perceptual psychology's proximity principle tells us that sensory information is not conceptual. And yet its description of nonconceptual sensory information assumes that this information is meaningful. Although this sensory information cannot be articulated, it is meaningful in virtue of the fact that is amenable to a meaningful conversion by a perceptual system. That is, sensory information must be contentful, since it is converted into contentful perceptual experience which can be articulated. In consequence, it is not the case that Burge's notion of sub-personal mechanisms processing information is



epistemologically problematic. McDowell's transcendental empiricism implies that the concept of information must be conceptual; otherwise it is blind. But according to Burge, McDowell's assertion is a philosophical dogma, for McDowell appears oblivious to the fact that although sensory information is nonconceptual, it is contentful.

Be that as it may, assuming that sub-personal mechanisms do process sensory information, there remains a potential problem:

The sub-personal account of a sensory system, which treats it as an information-processing device that transmits its informational results to something else inside an animal, cannot adequately characterize what its sensory systems are for the animal (as opposed to what they are...for the internal parts that receive the results of the information-processing): namely, modes of sensitivity or openness to features of the environment [better: world]---not processors of the information, but collectors of it. (ibid. pp. 349-350)

Burge's proximity principle describes the processing of sensory information. But the processing of sensory information does not deliver direct perceptions of the world. The reason is this. McDowell thinks that there is an important distinction between the processing of information and the collecting of information. The activity of processing information does not act in the capacity of directly opening a subject to its world. The processing of sensory information occurs for a perceptual system that is not specifically designed to stand in direct relations to the world. This holds for animals and infants. The collection of information, on the other hand, does act in the capacity of directly opening a subject to his or her to the world. The collecting of sensory information occurs for a perceptual system that is aimed at perceptual openness to the world. This holds for human beings. Thus, collecting sensory information is geared toward epistemologically significant perceptions. The perceptions of a human perceptual

system, which initially collects sensory information, can yield a direct relation between mind and world. In short, perceptual psychology's notion of sensory information processing does not yield a workable direct realism. But if this is correct, then Burge's form of anti-individualism neither secures a direct realism nor provides a meaningful account of mental content. McDowell's understanding of a human perceptual system, which utilizes the concept of collecting sensory information, does provide for an adequate direct realism. Therefore McDowell is not "ignorant" of perceptual psychology. The so-called results of perceptual psychology do not disprove transcendental empiricism.

To sum up, according to McDowell, the proximity principle is merely speaking of sub-personal mechanisms. Sub-personal mechanisms may be the same for human beings and animals, but the contents of these two kinds of mental states are very different. One kind can be epistemologically significant; the other kind cannot. Also, McDowell has argued that the distinction between the contents of perceptual systems and the contents of perceptual states of individual perceivers renders perceptual psychology irrelevant to McDowell's disjunctivism. Finally, a sub-personal account of content does not account for the fact that persons are collectors of information; but this notion is necessary for a direct realism. Burge's sub-personal account of content, then, is not a workable theory of direct realism.

Burge's (2011) rejoinder addresses McDowell's objections. Burge begins by responding to McDowell's claim that there is no common factor of experience between animal and human perception. Recall that McDowell argued that although there is a sub-personal commonality between animal perception and human perception, but there is no personal commonality. According to McDowell, perceptual psychology is merely reporting on sub-personal mechanisms

of perceptual systems. These reports are irrelevant to McDowell's disjunctivism, for McDowell's disjunctivism is primarily concerned with the personal contents of individual perceivers. At this most important level of perception, there is nothing in common between humans and animals.

Burge argues that, contrary to McDowell's understanding of perceptual psychology: “[It] is simply a mistake to hold that none of the perceptions in a perceptual system are perceptions by an individual....[Perceptual psychology's] methodology depends on attributing to the individual perceptions that are integrated in the *individual's* perception and in the *individual's* carrying out his, her, or its basic activities (Burge, 2005, p. 45, Burge's emphasis, see note 51). Most of the perceptions produced by an individual's perceptual system serve the individual perceiver. And an individual's perceptions depend on the operations of his or her sub-personal perceptual system. So there is no sharp distinction between sub-personal perceptual content and personal perceptual content. More specifically:

I claim that necessarily and constitutively, some perceptions in an individual's perceptual subsystem are perceptions by the individual....And I claim that all perceptions, including any that are not strictly attributable to the individual, serve perception by the individual. Fundamentally, it is the individual that perceives. (Burge, 2010, p. 369)

Perceptual psychology is interested in the perceptual states of individual psychologies. It is not interested in physiological mechanisms purely for their own sake---although these mechanisms do yield perceptual states of individual perceivers. In other words, perceptual psychology is not physiology; it is psychology. Its methodology is geared toward explaining how individual perceiver's in fact perceive. And the science of perceptual psychology tells us that the perceptions of individuals are a result of unconscious operations of an individual's perceptual system. Burge concludes that:

Perceptual psychology attempts to explain the formation of perceptual states, conceived as representational states. Explanation adverts to detailed laws or law-like patterns of transformations that yield specific kinds of perceptual states. The principles governing formation laws (or law-like patterns) make reference not only to non-perceptual types of sensory states but also to perceptual states marked by representational contents. That is, the explanations take the representational states as participants in the formation process....Thus reference to perceptual states with representational content that sets veridicality conditions and that constitutes perceivers' perceptions of the environment help ground explanation [of mental content] in the science. (ibid., pp. 394-395)

More completely:

The science takes perceptual systems to be systems of states, including perceptual states, of perceivers---states that are fruitfully studied as members of a unit. For example, the system of perceptual states that are initiated through registration of light stimulation in the retinas of the eyes is fruitfully studied as a unit. Similarly, for the auditory system of perceptual states. These systems interact; there are cross-modal influences that are also fruitfully studied. Moreover, there are amodal systems that take input from the various systems associated with the perceptual modalities---vision, hearing, touch, and so on---that are fruitfully studied as units. (Burge, 2011, p. 68)

Further:

Commonly, the units or systems are taken to be groups of states of a single perceptual modality. However, it is obvious that none of these systems or groups of perceptual states can ultimately be understood in complete isolation from the others. In fact, cross-modal relations and amodal representational states are among the most intensely studied topics in current perceptual psychology. One might take vision, touch, and hearing to participate in a multi-modal perceptual system. (ibid., p. 69)

According to Burge, both animals and human beings (unconsciously) integrate their senses of sight and touch (and perhaps hearing) in such a way as to generate a three-dimensional experience. Perceptual psychology explains three-dimensional perceptual experience by studying

the “cross-modal” relations among sight and touch. These cross-modal relations yield a three-dimensional perceptual experience. Animals and humans both enjoy three-dimensional perceptions. Thus animal and human perception is of the same kind, since both are a result of the same kind of cross-modal relations as adduced by perceptual psychology’s notion of a perceptual system. A perceptual system provides information about shapes, for individual perceivers:

The perceptual states in perceptual systems are, one and all, perceptual states that are individual perceiving and misperceiving. There is no difference in conceptual framework of the sort that McDowell invokes....The science's attributing conscious perceptual states to individual perceivers does not involve claiming that perceptual systems are aware of the environment. Perceptual systems are just groups of states of the perceiver. The perceiver is the only one that is aware of or conscious of anything. Perceivers are aware of the environment through having conscious perceptual states (experiences) that represent the environment....No one claims that perceptual systems---groups of perceptual states---are aware of anything. Individuals are perceptually aware of particulars and features in the environment. Their having this awareness consists in their being in the conscious perceptual states that occur in perceptual systems---the groups of states described and theorized about in perceptual psychology. (ibid., pp. 69-70; citation omitted)

McDowell argued that the conceptual frameworks of disjunctivism and perceptual psychology are different. The latter is exclusively concerned with perceptual systems, whereas the former is concerned with perceptual states of individual perceivers. Hence perceptual psychology is irrelevant to McDowell's disjunctivism. And recall that McDowell claimed that his disjunctivism is talking about the contents of human perception. Perceptual psychology, on the other hand, is merely talking about the 'contents' of perceptual systems. McDowell thought that his disjunctivism and perceptual psychology were operating within different conceptual frameworks.

But Burge has just demonstrated that there is no principled distinction between perceptual systems and perceptual states of perceivers. That is, there is no difference in the conceptual frameworks which McDowell envisages. Perceptual psychology *is* relevant to McDowell's disjunctivism, because perceptual psychology shows that McDowell's disjunctivism cannot be true.

Therefore, at the most important level of perception, the content of human perception is the same as the content of an animal's perception. Both animals and humans register proximal stimulations, which are then rendered as perceptual states of the organism in question. The proximity principle applies to all animals with perceptual capacities. And the principle tells us that the kinds of perceptions formed by widely different animals are fundamentally the same. But this is deeply damaging to McDowell's notion of second nature; for McDowell's ontology of second nature depends on the claim that human perception is *sui generis*.

I think Burge's critique and rejoinder are sound. First, the belief that there is a common factor between adult perceptual experience and infant/animal perceptual experience does cohere with the science of perceptual psychology. Perceptual psychology reports that an animal's perceptual experience of a ball shares something in common with our perception of a ball. The proximity principle offers a scientific account of how there is a common factor of perception. There is thus no reason to offer a counter-intuitive disjunctive understanding of perceptual experience. In addition, perceptual psychology recognizes that an animal can have warranted beliefs regarding the ball. For example, an animal can correctly believe a ball is near to it or far from it; the animal can believe it is rolling toward it, etc. In a given context, if an animal's perceptual system delivers a veridical perceptual experience, then the animal's corresponding

perceptual belief is thereby warranted. The exact same thing can be said for human beings. Hence there is an epistemological commonality between animal perception and human perception. And this belies McDowell's disjunctivism.

Second, it appears that disjunctivism is unmotivated. Disjunctivism is motivated by the desire to establish a direct relation between mind and world. But Burge's version of direct realism is sufficient. McDowell claimed that Burge's direct realism is another version of the myth of the Given. The information provided by the perceptual system is not conceptually structured, in which case Burge's direct realism is not epistemologically significant. However, I argued that Burge does not have to accept this accusation. (Cf. pp. 140-141.)

What about McDowell's objection that Burge's sub-personal account of content does not acknowledge that persons are collectors of sensory information as opposed to processors of sensory information? And what about McDowell's concomitant claim that collecting sensory information sets the stage for perceptual openness to one's world? McDowell seems to assume that a philosophically adequate direct realism must involve the concept of collecting sensory information.

But this assumption is not necessarily correct. Perceptual psychology describes how mind and world are directly related in perception, even though it makes use of the concept of processing nonconceptual sensory information. This sensory information gives rise to representational perceptions via the workings of a perceptual system. And this would not be possible unless sensory information were itself contentful. Moreover, perceptual representations are either veridical or non-veridical. A veridical perception directly relates a subject to his or her

environment. This, in turn, allows subjects to correctly interact with their environments. And this picture yields an epistemologically significant direct realism.

Hence, McDowell's distinction between processing information and collecting information is unfounded, because the concept of processing sensory information and the concept of an epistemologically direct realism are compatible concepts. Furthermore, a direct realism that is supported by scientific evidence is certainly preferable to a direct realism which is not supported by scientific evidence, as with McDowell's disjunctivism.

Finally, McDowell's insistence on the distinction between sub-personal mechanism and personal content seems wrongheaded. Since perceptual psychology can adequately account for an individual's mental contents, and since perceptual psychology is a sub-personal account of content, there is no reason to uphold the distinction. According to perceptual psychology, an individual perceiver processes sensory information and then (unconsciously) converts this sensory information into representational perceptions. This accomplishment is a product of the perceiver's perceptual system. More importantly, the perceiver's perceptions are both direct and epistemologically significant. McDowell's transcendental empiricism is sometimes too *a priori*. Nothing from science can dissuade the transcendental convictions of McDowell's minimal empiricism. Burge states: “[Disjunctivism] is a doctrinal and methodological aberration. Philosophical progress will continue to pass it by” (Burge, 2011, p. 71).

It should be mentioned that at a certain point in the dialogue, McDowell offers analyses of perceptual experience, perceptual belief, warrant, defeasibility and indefeasibility. McDowell argues that because Burge does not accept the reality of indefeasibly warranted perceptual beliefs, Burge's direct realism cannot be correct. For McDowell, there is no epistemologically



significant direct realism if perceptual warrant is defeasible. According to McDowell, an epistemologically significant direct realism must involve the epistemological notions of a veridical perceptual experience and a corresponding perceptual belief that is indefeasibly warranted. Otherwise the rational relation between mind and world is arbitrary. However, this alleged epistemological issue is beside the point. The important point is that perceptual psychology has shown that humans and animals do factor out a common denominator of perception. The common factor is the proximal stimulation. And this empirical fact is independent of McDowell's epistemological remarks. Additionally, I argued that Burge's version of direct realism is perfectly legitimate. And my argument is insulated from McDowell's arguments for indefeasibly warranted perceptual beliefs.

In conclusion, there are three crucial claims of transcendental empiricism. The first claim is that mind and world are directly related in perceptual experience. This logically follows from McDowell's disjunctivism. However, it seems that McDowell's direct realism is inaccurate, for his disjunctivism is false, according to perceptual psychology. Second, transcendental empiricism claims that there is no common factor between animal perception and human perception. However, this too is false according to perceptual psychology. Not only do animals and humans share an integral element of perception their perceptions are equally epistemologically significant. A related claim of transcendental empiricism is that human beings possess a second nature. Disjunctivism is supposed to adequately explain the ontology of second nature. Nevertheless, according to Burge, there is nothing special about our perceptual experience, because of the dictates of the proximity principle. Hence disjunctivism does not provide an adequate explanation of human and animal experience. Moreover, McDowell's

disjunctivism is unmotivated, because Burge's form of direct realism is cogent, and it can dissolve McDowellian objections. Therefore disjunctivism is false, inadequate and unmotivated--in which case a central pillar of transcendental empiricism has imploded.

## References

- Armstrong, David. (1960). *Berkeley's Theory of Vision*. London & New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Back, A. (2000). The Structure of Scotus' Formal Distinction. In L. Angelelli & P. Perez-Illzarbe (Eds.), *Medieval and Renaissance Logic in Spain* (pp. 411-438). Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
- Berkeley, George. (1709/1910). Rpt. In *A New Theory of Vision and other Selected Philosophical Writings*. New York: Dutton.
- Bernstein, Richard. J. (2002). McDowell's Domesticated Hegelianism. In N. H. Smith, (Ed.), *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World* (pp. 9-24). London & New York: Routledge.
- Blackburn, Simon. (2006). Julius Caesar and George Berkeley Play Leapfrog. In C. MacDonald & G. MacDonald, (Eds.), *McDowell and His Critics* (pp. 203-217). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Brandom, Robert. (1995). Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, No. 4: 895-908.
- Brandom, Robert. (1996). Perception and Rational Constraint: McDowell's "Mind and World". *Philosophical Issues*, 7: 241-259.
- Brandom, Robert. (2002). Non-Inferential Knowledge, Perceptual Experience, and Secondary Qualities: Placing McDowell's Empiricism. In N. H. Smith, (Ed.), *Reading McDowell* (pp. 92-105). London & New York: Routledge.
- Bridges, Jason. (2007). Review of Experience and the World's Own Language: A Critique of John McDowell's Minimal Empiricism. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, Feb. 12, 2007: 29 para. 03 Jan. 2008 <<http://ndpr.nd.edu/review.cfm?id=8743>>.
- Burge, Tyler. (2005). Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology. *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. 33, No. 1: 1-78.
- Burge, Tyler. (2010). *Origins of Objectivity*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burge, Tyler. (2011). Disjunctivism Again. *Philosophical Explorations*, Vol. 14, No. 1: 43-80.

- Davidson, Donald. (1984). *Inquires into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Davidson, Donald. (1999). Reply to John McDowell. In L. Hahn (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (pp. 105-107). Chicago & La Salle, IL: Open Court Press.
- Davidson, Donald. (2001). A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge. In *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (pp. 137-157). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Dewey, John. (1925/1958). Rpt. In *Experience and Nature*. New York: Dover.
- Dodd, Julian. (2007). Review of Experience and the World's Own Language: A Critique of John McDowell's Minimal Empiricism. *Mind*, 116: 1114-1119
- Dreyfus, Hubert. (2005). Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers Can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise. *APA Pacific Division Presidential Address*, Vol. 79, No. 2: 47-65.
- Dreyfus, Hubert. (2007a). The Return of the Myth of the Mental. *Inquiry*, 50: 352-365.
- Dreyfus, Hubert. (2007b). Response to McDowell. *Inquiry*, 50: 371-377.
- Dummett, Michael. (1981). *Frege: Philosophy of Language*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Duckworth.
- Dummett, Michael. (1993). *Seas of Language*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Evan, Gareth. (1982). *The Varieties of Reference*. (Ed.), J. H. McDowell. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gareth Evans & John McDowell (Eds.), (1976). Introduction to *Truth and Meaning*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. vii-xxii.
- Frege, Gottlob. (1997). *The Frege Reader*. (Ed.), M. Beaney. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. (1975). *Truth and Method*. (G. Barden & J. Cumming, Trans.). New York: Seabury Press.
- Gaskin, Richard. (2004). *Complex Significabilia* and the Formal Distinction. In A. Maieru & L. Valente (Eds.), *Medieval Theories on Assertive and Non-Assertive Language* (pp. 495-516). Rome: Leo S. Olschki.
- Gaskin, Richard. (2006). *Experience and the World's Own Language: A Critique of John McDowell's Empiricism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Grice, Paul. (1957/2001). Meaning. Rpt. In A.P. Martinich (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Language* (pp. 92-97). (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Grice, Paul. (1975/2001). Logic and Conversation. Rpt. In A.P. Martinich (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Language* (pp. 165-175). (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Charles Guignon & Derek Pereboom (Eds.), (1995). Introduction to *Existentialism: Basic Writings* (pp. xiii-xxxviii). Cambridge & Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Heck, Richard. (2000). Nonconceptual Content and the “Space of Reasons”. *Philosophical Review*, 109: 483-523.
- Heck, Richard. (2004). Truth and Disquotation. *Synthese*, 142: 317-352.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1787/1929). *Critique of Pure Reason*. (N. K. Smith, Trans.). London: Macmillan.
- Kim, Jaegwon. (1996). *Philosophy of Mind*. Boulder, Col: Westview.
- Kohut, Heinz. (1984). *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Ed.), A. Goldberg & P.E. Stepansky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kojeve, Alexandre. (1969/1980). Rpt. In *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. Assembled by Raymond Queneau. (Ed.), Allan Bloom. (J. H. Nichols, Jr., Trans.). Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press.
- Kripke, Saul. (1982). *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lower, Barry. (1997). A Guide to Naturalizing Semantics. In B. Hale & C. Wright (Eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language* (pp. 108-126). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cynthia MacDonald & Graham MacDonald (Eds.), (2006). Introduction to *McDowell and His Critics*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. ix-xix.
- McCulloch, Gregory. (2002). Phenomenological Externalism. In N. H. Smith (Ed.), *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World* (pp. 123-139). London & New York: Routledge.
- McDowell, John. (1995). Précis of “Mind and World”. *Philosophical Issues*, 7: 231-239.
- McDowell, John. (1996a). *Mind and World: With a New Introduction*. Cambridge, Mass.:

Harvard University Press.

- McDowell, John. (1996b). Reply to Gibson, Byrne, and Brandom. *Philosophical Issues*, Vol. 7: 283-300.
- McDowell, John. (1998a). Review: Précis of Mind and World. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58: 365-368.
- McDowell, John. (1998b). *Mind, Value, and Reality*. Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, John. (1998c). *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, John. (1998d). Reply to Commentators. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58: 403-431.
- McDowell, John. (1999). Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism. In L. Hahn (Ed.), *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (pp. 87-104). Chicago & La Salle, IL.: Open Court.
- McDowell, John. (2002a). Responses. In N. H. Smith (Ed.), *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World* (pp. 269-305). London & New York: Routledge.
- McDowell, John. (2006). Responses. In C. MacDonald & G. MacDonald (Eds.), *McDowell and His Critics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McDowell, John. (2009a). *The Engaged Intellect*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, John. (2009b). *Having the World in View*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, John. (2010). Tyler Burge on Disjunctivism. *Philosophical Explorations*, Vol. 13, No. 3: 243-255.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962/1995). Rpt. In *The Phenomenology of Perception*. (C. Smith, Trans.). London & New York: Routledge.
- Nagel, Thomas. (1979). What is it Like to be a Bat? In *Mortal Questions* (pp. 165-180). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peacocke, Christopher. (1998). Review: Nonconceptual Content Defended. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58: 381-388.

- Quine, W.V. (1953/1980). Two Dogmas of Empiricism. Rpt. In *From a Logical Point of View* (pp. 20-46). (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Quine, W.V. (1960). *Word and Object*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Quine, W.V. (1969). Epistemology Naturalized. In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (pp. 69-90). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. (1997). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Russell, Bertrand. (1911/2004). Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description. Rpt. In *Mysticism and Logic* (pp. 165-183). London: Dover.
- Russell, Bertrand. (1912). *The Problems of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ryle, Gilbert. (1949/1984). Rpt. In *The Concept of Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Sellars, Wilfrid. (1956/1997). Rpt. In *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Sellars, Wilfrid. (1978). The Role of the Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience. In *Categories: A Colloquium* (pp. 231-245). (Ed.), Henry W. Johnstone. University Park: Penn State University Press.
- Strawson, P.F. (1966). *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. London: Methuen.
- Taylor, Charles. (2002). Foundationalism and the Inner-Outer Distinction. In N. H. Smith (Ed.), *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World* (pp. 106-119). London & New York: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1922/2001). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. (Brian McGuinness & David F. Pears, Trans.). London & New York: Routledge.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. (G. E. M. Anscombe, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wright, Crispin. (2002). Human Nature? In N. H. Smith (Ed.), *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World* (pp. 140-173). London & New York: Routledge.