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ON THINKING AND THE WORLD

John McDowell's *Mind and World*

Sandra M. Dingli

Ph.D. Thesis

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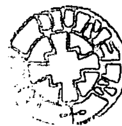
University of Durham

Department of Philosophy

2002



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On Thinking and the World
John McDowell's *Mind and World*

Sandra M. Dingli

Abstract

How do concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world? This is the main topic of John McDowell's *Mind and World* where McDowell attempts to dissolve a number of dualisms making use of a particular philosophical methodology which I identify as a version of Wittgenstein's quietism.

This thesis consists of a critical analysis of a number of dualisms which McDowell attempts to dissolve in *Mind and World.* These include the Kantian dualism of sensibility and understanding, the dualism of conceptual versus nonconceptual content, the dualism of scheme and content and the dualism of reason and nature. These dichotomies are all intricately intertwined and can be seen to be subsumed by the main topic of this thesis, namely, thinking and the world.

McDowell persuasively draws attention to the unsustainability of particular philosophical positions between which philosophers have 'oscillated' such as coherentism and the given. However I claim that he does not go far enough in his attempt as a quietist to achieve peace for philosophy as traditional dichotomies such as that of realism and anti-realism still appear to exert a grip on his thinking. In this regard, I argue that, although McDowell's work indicates the viability of quietism in addressing seemingly intractable philosophical positions, it would have gained by incorporating insights from European phenomenologists, such as Heidegger, who have been as intent as McDowell on reworking traditional dualisms.

McDowell's quietist methodology plays an important role in *Mind and World* and some of the criticism that has been directed towards his work displays a lack of appreciation of this method. I claim that a proper understanding of McDowell's version of quietism is important for a correct understanding of this text.

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Introduction

The subject of thinking has been approached in a variety of ways by a number of philosophers. The diverse views range from Cartesian scepticism, Berkeleyan idealism, Kantian transcendental philosophy to Rylean dispositions and two Wittgenstenian treatises, the picture theory of language, expounded in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, and the views of the later Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Although the approaches, as well as the conclusions, are different, yet one basic problem seems to lie at the bottom of most enquiries into "thinking" and "the mind". The problem still faces philosophers today. It concerns the rationality of human beings and their interaction with a law-governed world. Nobody would deny that human beings are capable of thinking, although thinking may be described (or explained) in a number of ways (such as dispositions to behave or neurophysiological processes in the brain). Whenever we think, we feel as though we are interacting with an 'outside' world, a world which is external to ourselves, a world which is often the cause of our beliefs, desires, hopes, fears and other intentional states.

The physical sciences have provided considerable evidence that the external physical world is subject to natural laws. On the other hand, most people (but admittedly not all) would admit that our thinking is not dependent on the same physical laws which govern the world which is external to ourselves. Thinking and reasoning appear to belong to a sphere of their own which is not subject to natural laws, but, rather, to a special 'rational' sphere. This is evident when one thinks of the difficulties involved in accurately predicting human behaviour, as well as the difficulties concerning individual idiosyncrasies, moods, emotions and behaviour which appear to be illogical, irrational or simply inexplicable. Expressed in simple terms, the problem which will be addressed is: how can our thinking be linked to an external world and how can we know whether the subject

matter of our thoughts pertains to a reality which is independent and separate from our thinking?

An example may give better expression to this problem. As I walk through the park one evening, I sit down on a bench. It is a beautiful clear summer night. Darkness has fallen and, as I look up into the sky, I see the evening star, shining brilliantly in the darkness. It is obvious that the star is physically separate from myself, from my body, from my thoughts. I can think about the star in a manner which is different from the way I think about myself. I can form a number of beliefs about the star which include its physical and chemical composition, its size, its movement in the night sky. I can believe that the star does not form part of myself, even though I can use my imagination to think about the star's appearance when I close my eyes. I can believe that the star continues to shine in the clear night sky, even when I am not looking at it, or when it is hidden from my view by a cloud. I know that the star will not disappear or disintegrate with the rising sun, but will appear in another hemisphere. I know that if I return to the park on another clear night, I will see the star in the sky once again, even though I know it is innumerable light years away and may no longer exist at this present moment in time in spite of the fact that its brilliance continues to be visible from earth. I can fantasise about the star, thinking, for example, the star conveyed some sort of message to me, and yet knowing that these thoughts are only part of my vivid imagination. I can further believe that the star is subject to physical laws and that it belongs to a world which is external to myself.

The presence of the star and my visual experience of it may, therefore, give rise to a number of beliefs. Admittedly, the experience I have when I actually see the star differs from the experience I have when I entertain thoughts about the star. The difference is that in the first case there is a "continuing informational link" between myself and the light which the star emits.[1]

---

[1] Gareth Evans makes use of this notion. See, for example, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 146.

My thoughts about the star differ from the thoughts about my own self and I form beliefs about myself in a different way. I am certain about particular facts about myself, such as my particular beliefs and desires, without having to use my visual apparatus - or any other sensual apparatus for that matter - to observe them as I do the star. I can make accurate predictions about the star's behaviour but I cannot make predictions about myself based on logical reasoning in the same way. It somehow seems as though my thinking about myself differs in a substantial manner from my thinking about the star. But why is that so? Is it because my thinking is organised so as to conceptualise the star and myself in different ways? Can I even think of either the star or myself in a non-conceptualised manner? If one admits that 'star' and 'self' are two different concepts, is my thinking of either of them influenced by the actual 'star' or by 'myself', or are these merely words which form part of my conceptual repertoire? Why is it that I consider myself to be a rational person capable of free and spontaneous thought and action, as opposed to the star which is governed by physical laws? Are my thoughts and actions also governed by physical laws or are they subject to another realm of law (apart from the physical, if any other can be conceived as existing)?

The point of the above example is to show that thinking is a particular 'special' capacity which we as human beings are capable of exercising, and which we can direct at objects external to ourselves as well as at ourselves, albeit in different ways. But how does a thinking human person manage to get a grip of reality? How are we capable of thinking about that which exists separately from our thinking capabilities? How can thinking get a grip on the external world which is governed by physical laws? How does thinking, which is often considered to be *sui generis*, interact with the physical world? Is there an interface between thinking and the world?

Some of these problems are verbalised by Robert Brandom in this way:

> we [human beings] are distinguished by capacities that are broadly cognitive. Our transactions … *mean* something to us, they have a *conceptual content* for us, we *understand* them in one way rather than another. It is this demarcational strategy that underlies the classical identification of us as *reasonable* beings.

> Reason is as nothing to the beasts of the field. We are the ones on whom reasons are binding, who are subject to the peculiar force of the better reason.[2]

Brandom claims that since human beings are bound by their rationality, they are further constrained by "a species of *normative* force, a rational 'ought'."[3] The result of this constraint involves "treating ourselves as subjects of cognition and action."[4] Rather than merely reacting to stimuli in our environment we hold beliefs which are backed by reasons, we perform actions and our behaviour exhibits "an intelligible content" which "can be grasped or understood by being caught up in a web of reasons, by being inferentially articulated."[5]

This thesis is not intended to be a general treatise on the subject of thinking. It will, rather, focus on a text which proposes an intriguing way of dealing with the subject of thinking and the world – John McDowell's *Mind and World.*[6] The focus of this thesis is a number of dualisms which are interrelated and which McDowell attempts to 'dissolve'. These include the Kantian dualism of sensibility and understanding, the dualism of conceptual versus nonconceptual content, the dualism of scheme and content, the dualism of reason and nature and the debate on realism and anti-realism. These dichotomies can all be seen to be subsumed by one main issue with which this thesis is concerned, that of thinking and the world, which is the focus of John McDowell's *Mind and World.* I shall claim that McDowell makes use of a particular methodology, namely, quietism, in his attempt to "exorcise" philosophical problems and to cure philosophical "anxieties" instead of engaging in "constructive" philosophy. In this regard, McDowell espouses minimal empiricism and takes on the stance of an avowed direct realist. Both McDowell's quietism and his direct realism should play an important role in any discussion of *Mind and World.*

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2 Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Harvard University Press, 1994) pp. 4 – 5.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

6 There have been two editions of *Mind and World*, published in 1994 and 1996 by Harvard University Press. The work consists of six lectures which John McDowell delivered as John Locke Lectures in Oxford in Trinity Term 1991. The lectures are followed by a four-part 'Afterword'. The first and second editions are identical except for an Introduction which is to be found only in the second edition. The Introduction provides an overview with the intention of making the publication easier to understand. All references to this publication will be given in the text in brackets, with the page number preceded by MW.

The divisions of this thesis are, to a certain extent, arbitrary, as some of the themes which are dealt with, such as the unboundedness of the conceptual and the issue of realism and anti-realism, flow throughout the thesis. This is mainly due to the fact that McDowell's ideas in *Mind and World* are interrelated and should be viewed as threads which overlap and criss-cross one another. Chapter One includes a brief analysis of a number of historical and contemporary sources which McDowell makes use of in order to draw attention to the philosophical problems he intends to "exorcise". These include Kant's views concerning the cooperation between sensibility and understanding, Wilfrid Sellars' attack on the Myth of the Given and Donald Davidson's coherentism. A summary of McDowell's narrative in *Mind and World,* together with a critical analysis of his quietist approach to doing philosophy, which, I shall claim, plays an important role in *Mind and World*, conclude Chapter One.

McDowell's *Mind and World* draws on a number of historical antecedents in order to trace the root of the "anxieties" which, in his view, give rise to perceived problems in present-day philosophy. These include Kant and Hegel, and the extent of their influence on McDowell, together with an analysis of the subsequent implications, will be discussed in detail in Chapter Two.

Chapter Three explores McDowell's view of the conceptual as unbounded and asks whether it is possible for McDowell to concede the possibility of experience containing non-conceptual content when his position claims that all experience is conceptual. Chapter Four analyses the debate on the dualism of scheme and content which, when viewed at face value, appears to have serious implications for McDowell's position as a direct realist. Chapter Five tackles McDowell's putative reconciliation of the dualism of reason and nature, which includes the introduction of concepts such as "second nature" and *Bildung*. Chapter Six deals with the issue of realism and anti-realism and investigates whether McDowell's claims in favour of direct realism can be maintained.

Chapter Seven concludes by revisiting the subject of McDowell's unusual methodology, that is, quietism, and questions the implications of this method

which, according to McDowell, can lead to the "dissolving" of particular philosophical problems. It will be claimed that an in-depth understanding of McDowell's methodology is essential to a proper understanding of the philosophical issues he discusses in *Mind and* World. The question whether attaining peace for philosophy implies giving up philosophy, together with a discussion on the reworking of dichotomies, concludes the thesis.

It must be admitted from the start that my thinking on the subject has been greatly influenced by John McDowell's *Mind and World*. This thesis analyses a number of issues raised by this important publication and deals with a number of questions which arise from a close reading of this text. My investigation will not, however, deal with *all* the philosophical problems which McDowell discusses in *Mind and World*. It will, rather, place particular emphasis on those which are most closely related to the subject of this thesis, that is, those philosophical problems which are directly related to dissolving the dichotomy between thinking and the world.

CHAPTER ONE

On Thinking and the World

Historical Background

> If the *receptivity* of our mind, its power of receiving representations in so far as it is in any wise affected, is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge, should be called the understanding. Our nature is so constituted that our *intuition* can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to *think* the object of sensible intuition is the understanding. To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.
>
> Immanuel Kant[1]

This passage has generated, directly or indirectly, a host of questions concerning the relationship between thinking and the world, or thoughts and their content. Can we know the world independently of our human perspective, that is, independently of how it appears in thought, language or experience? Can there be a relation between language and reality without a relation between thought and reality already existing? Can I speak about the world only because a relation already exists between the language I use (and therefore my thinking) and the world? Could anything really count as thinking if such a relation did not exist?

---

[1] *Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75. Kant's quotation is taken from John McDowell's *Mind and World*, (1994, U.S.A.: Harvard University Press), p. 4n. McDowell makes use of Norman Kemp Smith's 1929 translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. References to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* will refer to the Kemp Smith translation, unless otherwise indicated.

McDowell tackles some of these issues in *Mind and World* and, making use of a particular philosophical methodology, traces the 'anxieties' which lie at the basis of the main problem with which he deals – that of thinking and the world – to a number of historical influences. His claims include the statement that Kant's first *Critique* comes very close to showing us a way out of the dichotomy between mind and world and that there is a great deal we can learn from Kantian 'insights' (or, rather, from a Hegelian 'completion' of Kant).

The main aim of this chapter is to provide a clear picture of both the historical background and the philosophical methodology which form part of *Mind and World,* together with a summary of McDowell's narrative. I shall claim that McDowell's methodology plays an important role in *Mind and World* and, therefore, merits a thorough analysis as a prelude to the discussion of the main issues which are raised. Kant is, however, not the only influence on McDowell. Two other important influences on McDowell are Wilfrid Sellars who is well-known for his attack on the Given, and Donald Davidson. McDowell takes Davidson's views in 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' as being representative of coherentism, even though Davidson has, in subsequent publications, adamantly rejected this label. A brief outline of these three positions, that is, Kant on understanding and sensibility, Sellars' rejection of the Myth of the Given and Davidson on coherentism follows. All three are key issues which play an important role in an in-depth analysis of *Mind and World.*

The problem concerning the dualism of thinking and the world can be traced back to a number of philosophers including Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Spinoza and Schopenhauer. Although a starting point in an analysis such as this is not simple to demarcate – should one start from Descartes, or from Kant? – the major influence on present day thinking on the subject is generally taken to be Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.* This does not imply that other philosophers, including Descartes, did not have a contribution to make to the subject of thinking and the world. On the contrary, Descartes' contribution was substantial, but his awareness of the mental as normative and rational is not sufficiently appreciated, as Brandom states:

> the line between Cartesian and Kantian approaches should not be drawn so sharply as to imply that Descartes had no inkling of the significance of normativity, which becomes an explicit concern for Kant. His idea of the mental as a special stuff can be seen as a response to those issues, as yet only dimly appreciated. Descartes's sense of the mental as special is precisely an inchoate awareness that its essence lies in rational, hence normative, interconnectedness. This makes it impossible to fit into what we now think of as nature, according to a conception of nature that was being formed around Descartes's time.[2]

McDowell takes Kant and, in particular, the quotation from Kant's first *Critique* cited at the beginning of this chapter, as the starting point for his historical analysis of the issues concerning thinking and the world. His reason for doing so is mainly because he claims that Kant came very close to resolving the dichotomy which he is also concerned with dissolving, that of thinking and the world, and that this is closely related to Kant's discussion on understanding and sensibility.

Kant's project in the *Critique of Pure Reason* was to explore the conditions that must be met for our perceptions to qualify as knowledge of objects, to determine the necessary conditions for objective knowledge and to determine whether any of these necessary conditions originate from the mind. Kant's Copernican revolution consisted in his revealing that the objects of our cognition must conform to the way our mind is structured. Kant assumed that there are two faculties, sensibility and understanding, through which we obtain knowledge.[3] These faculties are distinct, one from the other, and sensibility, or perception[4] involves the sense organs while understanding, or conception, involves the manner in which the mind conceptualises or makes sense of the information it receives. Kant suggested that empirical knowledge results from a cooperation between sensibility and understanding. He further claimed that we possess a number of *a priori* concepts, which he calls *categories*, which are necessary for cognition, and which describe universal and necessary features of all the objects of which we can ever

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2 Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Harvard University Press, 1994) p. 655, 1n. In this footnote Brandom thanks John McDowell "for emphasizing this important point."

3 Kant, *Critique*, A19/B33.

4 Patricia Kitcher interprets 'sensibility' and 'understanding' as 'perception' and 'conception' "in contemporary terminology" in her Introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge, U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999) p. xxxii.

have any knowledge. Moreover, certain *a priori* forms of sensibility, such as those of space and time, are necessary for cognition to be possible.

How did Kant deal with the problem of whether objects really exist or whether they are merely illusions? Continuity of existence is one of Kant's answers to this question, as is their being associated with the categories, such as objects which one can comprehend being subject to the category of causality. Kant acknowledged the fact that objects which undergo change can be recognised as such only if some causal force is evident and explicable. Kant's ideas were opposed to those of Hume not only with regard to scepticism, but also on the subject of causality. As Kitcher claims, "By Kant's lights, it is the very universality and necessity of causal connections that entitle us to claim that we have perceived actual change in objects, and not mere changes in our own subjective presentations."[5]

However, the main outcome of Kant's *Critique* relevant to the subject under discussion is that empirical knowledge involves a combination of *both* sensibility (perception) and understanding (conception). Our minds have a particular way of dealing with the information presented in sensible intuition. Kant's *Critique* accentuates the problem that arises when we compare simple perception with thinking about an object which we are simultaneously perceiving, and thinking about the object when we are not perceiving it. It draws attention to the problem regarding the manner in which interaction occurs between sensibility and understanding. Kant's famous quotation states "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[6] This quotation encapsulates the problems I have just mentioned, and it has been the cause of a great deal of controversy. It has been the subject of countless interpretations which have led to a number of debates by philosophers who attempt to unravel the mystery of whether and, if so, how our particular conceptual scheme plays such a role in our perception of empirical content.

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5 Patricia Kitcher, Introduction to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1996) p. li. The fact that causal connections relate to 'forces' which, in turn, link to actual changes in objects is one main argument which leads Rae Langton in *Kantian Humility, Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) to argue that Kant was a realist.

6 Kant, *Critique*, A51/B75.

McDowell deals with this topic in *Mind and World* and his main ideas regarding Kant's quotation and the issues which arise are discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Before moving on to that topic, however, I intend to briefly discuss another key issue which McDowell tackles in *Mind and World,* that is, Wilfrid Sellars' critique of the Given.[7] McDowell links Sellars' rejection of the Given to Kant as he states: "I derive from Sellars, and trace to Kant, a rejection of the idea that something is Given in experience, from outside the activity of shaping world-views." (MW 135) A correct understanding of this statement is crucial for a proper understanding of *Mind and World*, in particular, because McDowell points towards a picture of experience as belonging to the logical space of reasons and, it therefore follows, to the role experience plays in shaping our world view. This will lead McDowell, as we shall see, to conceive experience as conceptual and the realm of the conceptual as 'unbounded'.

Normativity, which plays an important role in this regard, is linked to Sellars' view which can be summed up in his own words: "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; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says."[8] McDowell describes the Given as "the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought." (MW 7) Is it possible for the space of reasons or the space of justifications to extend more widely than the conceptual sphere? Adherents of the Given maintain it can, and that it does so through our encounters with things. Sellars' critique of the Given is a serious attempt to demolish these arguments.

Sellars notes that adherents to the Given take it to include a number of things, such as "sense-contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real

[7] I follow McDowell in *Mind and World* by making use of 'Given' to refer to the problematic conception of that which is given in perceptual experience.

[8] Wilfrid Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', in *Science, Perception and Reality*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963) p. 169.

connections, first principles, even givenness itself," although most critics of 'the given' "are really only attacking sense data".[9] Sellars' critique in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' starts with an attack on sense-datum theories, although he admits this is "only a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness".[10] Sense datum theories normally distinguish between an act of awareness and the object itself, and it is usually the act which is called sensing. The problem arises, Sellars states, as classical sense-datum philosophers "have taken givenness to be a fact which presupposes no learning, no forming of associations, no setting up of stimulus-response connections. In short, they have tended to equate *sensing sense contents* with *being conscious.*" In their view, sensing sense contents such as feeling pain or seeing a colour is *not* acquired and does *not* involve a process of concept formation, but is immediate (unmediated). The problem arises as "most empirically minded philosophers are strongly inclined to think that all classificatory consciousness, all knowledge *that something is thus-and-so*, or, in logicians' jargon, all subsumption of particulars under universals, involves learning, concept formation, even the use of symbols".[11] A distinction arises as on one hand the ability to know is acquired, and on the other hand the ability to sense is not acquired.

As a faithful believer in all that science entails, Sellars' claims are based on arguments consonant with his assertion that "science is continuous with common sense, and the ways in which the scientist seeks to explain empirical phenomena are refinements of the ways in which plain men, however crudely and schematically, have attempted to understand the environment and their fellow men since the dawn of intelligence."[12] In his view, "the metaphor of 'foundation' [of empirical knowledge] is misleading," mainly "because of its static character.... For empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once".[13]

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[9] *Ibid.*, p. 127.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 128.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 131.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

Sellars' attack on the Given is mainly an attack on the framework in which traditional empiricism claims that the perceptually given is the foundation of empirical knowledge. In his view, we are not justified in taking perceptual episodes as contributions to knowledge. Knowledge belongs to the logical space of reasons, which is also the realm of justification, and in order to say that we know something we should be in a position to justify and to give reasons for what we say. In perceptual experience, our judging something to be thus-and-so consists in our placing its content under concepts. According to the 'Myth of the Given', the senses function causally (outside the conceptual sphere) and provide the 'foundation' for empirical knowledge. Sellars' critique attempts to dislodge this myth.

In Sellars' view, there is more to perception than merely being experientially receptive to sense-data, due to the fact that perception is always of something *as* something and its content therefore is classified under concepts. Considered on their own, the senses do not grasp any facts. Sellars states: "*For we now recognize that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it.*"[14]

Kantian influence on Sellars is evident in his assertion that "Kant was on the right track when he insisted that just as concepts are essentially (and not accidentally) items which can occur in judgements, so judgements (and therefore, indirectly concepts) are essentially (and not accidentally) items which can occur in reasonings or arguments."[15]

McDowell acknowledges making use of Sellars' attack on the Given[16] as well as Sellars' concept of "the space of reasons." He does not, however, agree with

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14 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

15 Wilfrid Sellars, 'Inference and Meaning', reprinted in *Pure Pragmatics and Possible Worlds: The Early Essays of Wilfrid Sellars*, Ed. J. Sicha, (Reseda, California: Ridgeview Publishing, 1980) p. 262.

16 McDowell's interpretation of the Myth of the Given at times appears to ignore the fact that some versions of the Myth do not present such strict intermediaries or interfaces between mind and world as he claims that they do. One such version is phenomenalism where although unconceptualised raw data are 'given', yet they do not in any way act as a veil or barrier between mind and extra-mental reality.

Sellars' contrast between giving an empirical description of something and placing it in the logical space of reasons, mainly because he maintains that it is possible to be both a minimal empiricist and to give central importance to the theme of placing things in the space of reasons. McDowell's arguments against the Given arise mainly because of his claim that acceptance of the Given would allow for non-conceptual impact on our perceptual experience.

Some brief remarks on the origin of the Given are pertinent at this stage in order to better comprehend the role it plays in *Mind and World.* The main proponent of the Given is C. I. Lewis who, in *Mind and the World Order,* gives an explicit statement of the Given and the dualism from which it arises. He states: "There are, in our cognitive experience, two elements; the immediate data, such as those of sense, which are presented or given to the mind, and a form, construction or interpretation, which represents the activity of thought."[17]

"The Given", according to Lewis, is not a human projection, rather, "the given is independent of the activity of thought."[18] Moreover, the Given is that which "we do not create by thinking and cannot, in general, displace or alter."[19] It is an epistemological intermediary between us and the world which cannot be expressed in language as doing so would make use of concepts.[20] This is reinforced with Lewis's statement that "we cannot describe any particular given *as such*, because in describing it, in whatever fashion, we qualify it by bringing it under some category or another, select from it, emphasize aspects of it, and relate it in particular and avoidable ways."[21]

Lewis's conception of the Given does not allow for the use of demonstratives or other such words to name or to refer to the Given. In his view, "even that minimum of cognition which consists in naming is an interpretation which

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17 C. I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order* (New York: Dover, 1929) p. 38.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 46n.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
20 C. I. Lewis, 'The Pragmatic Element in Knowledge,' *Collected Papers of Clarence Irving Lewis*, eds. John D. Goheen and John L. Mothershead Jr., (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1926, 1970) p. 248n.
21 C. I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order*, p. 52.

implicitly asserts certain relations between the given and further experience."[22] Lewis's Given exemplifies a version of empiricism which both McDowell and Donald Davidson renounce as part of their rejection of the dualism of scheme and content. Moreover, it raises a barrier which prevents our thinking from making direct contact with an external world.

Davidson's coherentism has also been criticised for putatively separating thinking from the world. According to Davidson, we should not look for justification for beliefs outside the totality of our belief system. In other words, justification where belief is concerned does not come from the external world but from a system of beliefs conceived holistically.

McDowell takes Davidson's views in 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge' as a paradigm case of coherentism. Davidson argues that experience cannot constitute "a basis for knowledge outside the scope of our beliefs."[23] In this respect, "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief."[24] His main argument is that if many of our beliefs cohere with others, then many of our beliefs are true. In this regard, the justification of a belief with something other than a belief would be open to criticism as it would be confusing justification with causation. A coherentist theory treats justification as a relation exclusively among beliefs.

Davidson's thoughts on this subject are based on his theory of 'radical interpretation' which maintains that an interpreter must interpret the discourse of respondents so as to attribute to them beliefs which are, on the whole, true. This turns on Davidson's 'Principle of Charity' which "directs the interpreter to translate or interpret so as to read some of his own standards of truth into the pattern of sentences held true by the speaker."[25] Moreover, the interpreter is "to interpret what the speaker says as true whenever he can" and "most of the sentences a speaker holds to be true ... *are* true, at least in the opinion of the

22 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
23 Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' pp. 307 – 19, *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Ed. Ernest LePore, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) p. 310.
24 *Ibid.*, p. 310.
25 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

interpreter."[26] Davidson further adds an 'omniscient interpreter' who uses the same method as the fallible interpreter and finds the fallible speaker "largely consistent and correct". He states:

> By his own standards, of course, but since these are objectively correct, the fallible speaker is seen to be largely correct and consistent by objective standards. We may also ... let the omniscient interpreter turn his attention to the fallible interpreter of the fallible speaker. It turns out that the fallible interpreter can be wrong about some things, but not in general; and so he cannot share universal error with the agent he is interpreting.[27]

This leads Davidson to a position where he maintains that it would be impossible to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong in their beliefs. His attempt to ground belief in objective reality involves a process of 'triangulation' as he states:

> If I were bolted to the earth I would have no way of determining the distance from me of many objects. ... Not being bolted down, I am free to triangulate. Our sense of objectivity is the consequence of another sort of triangulation, one that requires two creatures. Each interacts with an object, but what gives each the concept of the way things are objectively is the base line formed between the creatures by language. The fact that they share a concept of truth alone makes sense of the claim that they have beliefs, that they are able to assign objects a place in the public world.[28]

This statement implies that beliefs take precedence over objects in Davidson's coherence theory, even though Davidson does not negate the existence of a reality outside belief.

Davidson's coherence theory of truth has generated a great deal of criticism which attacks it for being limited to the sphere of the rational and for having no apparent grounding in the external world, in spite of his views on triangulation.[29] In a more recent publication, however, Davidson candidly admits that he regrets having called his view a 'coherence theory' and ought not to have done so. He states: "I also regret having called my view a 'coherence theory'. My emphasis on

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

28 Donald Davidson, 'Rational Animals,' pp. 473 – 80, in *Actions and Events*, Eds. E. LePore and Brian McLaughlin (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) p. 480.

29 McDowell thinks that Davidson's drawing on 'triangulation' "to build the concept of objectivity" is brought into the picture "too late" as he states that "if subjects are already in place, it is too late to set about catering for the constitution of the concept of objectivity." (MW 186)

coherence was probably just a way of making a negative point, that 'all that counts as evidence or justification for a belief must come from the same totality of belief to which it belongs'."[30] Davidson further states that "coherence is nothing but consistency" and that "the main thrust of 'A Coherence Theory' has little to do with consistency; the important thesis for which I argue is that belief is intrinsically veridical."[31] He admits that his emphasis on coherence was "misplaced" and that "calling my view a 'theory' was a plain blunder."[32] McDowell does not appear to have taken these remarks into consideration.

The three positions which have just been described – the cooperation between sensibility and understanding, the Myth of the Given and coherentism – all play an important role in McDowell's *Mind and World*. In his view, coherentism and the Given are philosophical positions which are unsatisfactory and which give rise to 'anxieties' concerning whether our thoughts are in unmediated contact with an external world. He therefore attempts to uncover the flaws which he claims are inherent in both of these philosophical positions in order to 'relieve' the tension which has been built up and which requires 'diagnosis', followed by 'therapy' in order for it to be 'dissolved'. On the other hand, commitment towards the cooperation between sensibility and understanding is crucial for McDowell who draws on Kant in his attempt to provide a picture of thinking and the world which will no longer give rise to philosophical 'anxieties' but which will allow us, following Witgenstein's platitude, to stop doing philosophy when we wish to.

Questions however arise as to whether McDowell succeeds in his attempt to provide 'therapy' and whether the philosophical position or 'picture' which ensues really allows us to stop doing philosophy. In order to analyse the situation in more detail, the following section will give a brief summary of McDowell's *Mind and World*. An analysis of his methodology which, I shall claim, is a version of Wittgenstein's quietism, and which, I strongly maintain, is crucial to a correct understanding of McDowell's views on thinking and the world, follows.

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30 Donald Davidson, 'Afterthoughts, 1987' [to 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge'] pp. 134 – 138, *Reading Rorty*, Ed. Alan Malachowski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) p. 135.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

John McDowell's *Mind and World*

In *Mind and World* McDowell attempts to tackle a particular philosophical problem: How does spontaneity fit into our view of the world which is mainly explained in terms of "scientific" facts and figures. In other words, how does "mind" (or "thought" to be more specific) fit into a scientific view of the world? At present the mainstream conception of the world is generally composed solely of facts described by the physical sciences.

Mind and World is concerned with the relationship between subjective and objective aspects of being, and with the relation of thinking to the world. The problem of interaction between our autonomous rationality and other more law-like "natural" features of human beings has plagued philosophers for centuries, and McDowell's views exhibit a strong Kantian influence. The "receptivity of our mind" and the "spontaneity of knowledge" are the terms McDowell uses which appear to be derived from Kant's "sensibility" and "understanding". McDowell strongly believes that "the original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a cooperation between receptivity and spontaneity." (MW 9)

McDowell's main objective is to present readers of *Mind and World* with a 'picture' which reconciles spontaneity and receptivity. He acknowledges the difficulty of his task as he admits: "My main point ... is to bring out how difficult it is to see that we can have both desiderata: both rational constraint from the world and spontaneity all the way out." (MW 8n) Most attempts to tackle this problem generally fall victim to one of two positions, either the Myth of the Given or coherentism. However, adherence to the Given, in McDowell's view, renounces spontaneity, while a coherentist viewpoint renounces rational constraint from the world. In the Myth of the Given, the problem of the grounding of knowledge is seen as being solved by bare experiential givens, or "bare presences that are supposed to constitute the ultimate grounds of empirical judgements." (MW 24) These act, however, as epistemological intermediaries and, since they are "outside the conceptual realm altogether," (MW 25) they are, according to McDowell, unacceptable.

On the other hand, coherentism, where beliefs cannot be justified by reference to the external world, renounces rational constraint. Davidson's coherentism, as interpreted by McDowell, "threatens to disconnect thought from reality" (MW 24) and it turns the "space of reasons" into a "self contained game." (MW 5)

McDowell's solution to this impasse is to "avoid the Myth of the Given without renouncing the claim that experience is a rational constraint on thinking." (MW 18) This comes about as a result of the recognition that "*the world's impressions on our senses are already possessed of conceptual content.*" (MW 18, emphasis added) In order to avoid the interminable "oscillation" between the Myth of the Given and coherentism, McDowell claims it is necessary to refashion our conception of the understanding. We are to "delete the outer boundary [around the sphere of the conceptual] from the picture," (MW 34) and to see experience as a literal interpenetration of mind and world. This move attempts to reconcile "the realm of law" with "the space of reasons".[33] In McDowell's words, "the world itself [exerts] a rational constraint on our thinking." (MW 42)

If, however, the world has its own mind-independent nature, why should our thoughts about the world prove to be an accurate guide to reality? Although our capacity for passive receptivity in perception is one reason which McDowell provides concerning the possible objective content of our thinking, yet he maintains that genuine spontaneity includes a perpetual obligation to reflect on and, where necessary, reform one's conceptual scheme in the light of ongoing thought and experience. (MW 40) McDowell explicitly states that "Although reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere," (MW 26) which is a clear expression of his commitment to direct realism. He further maintains that "there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can think and the sort of thing that can be the case." (MW 27) Constraint from external reality comes about, he claims, because our perception is both passive and receptive. The picture which

[33] McDowell uses the terms "the realm of law" and "the space of reasons" to refer to two separate and distinct realms, that of nature (or the world) and that of mind (or thought).

emerges is one where, "in enjoying experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility." (MW 29)

McDowell's attempt to refashion the concept of naturalism is part of his endeavour to account for spontaneity, that is, the presence of mind in the natural world. As a proponent of naturalism, he is aware of the challenge that "A sane naturalism recognises that human beings are part of nature, and their mental capacities require a certain specific sort of mental embodiment."[34] Yet a reductionist position would not be acceptable: the space of reasons or spontaneity cannot simply be reduced to the realm of law, or vice-versa. McDowell feels that "our philosophical anxieties are due to the intelligible grip on our thinking of a modern naturalism, and we can work at loosening that grip." (MW 177) He therefore introduces the concept of "second nature" which, he claims, goes back to Aristotle. "We need to recapture the Aristotelian idea that a normal mature human being is a rational animal but without losing the Kantian idea that rationality operates freely in its own sphere." (MW 85) McDowell's concept of "second nature" is a brave effort to broaden the meaning of what is normally conceived as "natural" in order to accommodate spontaneity and thought – in other words, to accommodate the space of reasons.

A concept which McDowell utilises in this respect is that of *Bildung*, which he describes as the process of "having one's eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature." (MW 84) McDowell claims that non-human animals lack spontaneity and live in an *environment* as opposed to a *world*, and the fundamental difference comes about because although human beings "are born mere animals [they are] transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity." (MW 125) McDowell describes *Bildung* as a "central element in the maturation of human beings" where language "already embodies putative rational linkages between concepts." (MW 125) He clearly states that "*there is no problem* about how something describable in those terms could emancipate a human individual from a merely animal mode of living into being a full-fledged subject, open to the world." (MW 125, emphasis added)

[34] Hilary Putnam, 'Realism without Absolutes', pp. 179 – 92, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 1, (2), p. 187.

Second nature and *Bildung* both play an important role in the picture which McDowell presents in *Mind and World.* They should not, however, be understood as theories or as part of a theoretical framework as McDowell does not wish to engage in constructive philosophy. Instead, he presents the reader of *Mind and World* with a picture of a philosophical problem which he then proceeds to 'deflate'. At times one gets the feeling that McDowell's views are presented as "work-in-progress" which may be amended and expanded upon in later publications. This feeling is reinforced by remarks which McDowell makes in response to critical commentaries on *Mind and World.*[35] Constructive philosophy, or system-building, is not on McDowell's agenda, and his approach can be considered as "therapeutic" because of his claim to be concerned with formulating positions by means of which we can "immunize ourselves against the familiar philosophical anxieties." (MW 180) This position is in line with that of Richard Rorty, who states: "For McDowell and I are both therapeutic, rather than constructive, philosophers."[36] McDowell states, "If we could achieve a firm hold on a naturalism of second nature ... that would not be to have produced a piece of constructive philosophy of the sort Rorty aims to supersede." (MW 86) He later states that "Naturalized Platonism," which is the name he gives to the picture he favours, "is not a label for a bit of constructive philosophy." (MW 95)

My claim is that McDowell presents a quietist approach to philosophical problems and acknowledging this method leads to a better comprehension of the issues he draws attention to and the subsequent alternative picture he presents. One of the implications of this methodology when doing philosophy is that McDowell's views in *Mind and World* have been subjected to a great deal of criticism as a

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[35] One example is 'A Précis of *Mind and World*' pp. 365 – 68, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, June 1998, where McDowell clarifies his meaning of 'transcendental' and states that in *Mind and World* he reserved "the word [transcendental] for a specific kind of philosophical story, often found in Kant. (I also regret having joined in saddling Kant with such a story)" (p. 365n). In his 'Reply to Commentators' (pp. 403 – 31 in the same journal) McDowell discusses the unity of intuitions and states: "I wish I had exploited this thought in *Mind and World*" (p. 414). He further states (p. 414n) that he discussed the Kantian remark which gave rise to this discussion in his Woodbridge Lectures (*The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume XCV, No. 9, September 1998, pp. 431 – 491) delivered in April 1997.

[36] Richard Rorty, 'McDowell, Davidson and Spontaneity,' pp. 389 – 94, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, June 1998, p. 390.

result of a lack of appreciation of this particular approach. Due to the fact that very little has been written on the subject of quietism in the philosophical literature, I shall attempt to examine the meaning and implications of adopting this unusual methodology.

What is Quietism?

It is rather difficult for a commentary on quietism to avoid a particular element of dissonance because quietism implies the abandonment of theory building, the renunciation of philosophy as 'system-building' or Philosophy with a capital 'P'. Yet one cannot do justice to this intriguing subject without falling into one of the pitfalls that it warns against – that is, making quietism appear as though it were some kind of meta-theory which could be utilised to present a particular theoretical position.

In this regard, I shall attempt to put forward a picture of quietism which, while not adopting a quietist stance, describes in a practical and down-to-earth manner the implications of such a position. To adopt quietism would imply utilising quietist vocabulary either explicitly or implicitly. A quietist, for example, presents a 'picture' rather than a *theory*. It is the role of a quietist to show the 'anxieties' and 'temptations' which some generally accepted philosophical positions may make one succumb to. Instead of proposing a *solution* or an alternative *theory*, the quietist attempts to 'dissolve' the 'apparent impasse', or to 'exorcise' questions such as 'What is meaning?' that give rise to philosophical puzzlement. It is the duty of the quietist to identify 'anxieties' in modern philosophy, to 'diagnose' blockages, and to suggest a 'therapy' or 'cure' for such 'anxieties'. The alternative would be the continuous repetition of arguments in favour of one position, alternating with arguments in favour of a contrasting or opposing position, 'oscillating' (in McDowell's terminology) between one particular position and that which opposes it.

Due to the fact that quietism appears to take an approach which goes against system-building in philosophy, and because it appears to threaten the very existence of 'traditional philosophy', it has attracted a great deal of criticism, most

of which is concerned with views which have given rise to the 'anxiety' that quietism may mean the end of philosophy as it has been practiced to date. This may, possibly, be one reason why the word 'quietism' is rarely, if ever, to be found in book indices, philosophical dictionaries or in the work of its main exponents. Nor does it result in any significant information when one attempts to search for 'quietism' in on-line web searches.[37]

It is not easy to define what quietism *really* is about, neither is it possible to give one paradigm example of quietism and assume that other versions do not exist, or are unimportant anyway. Defining quietism goes against the grain of the quietist stance itself, which is to avoid constructive philosophy or the so-called theoretical attitude. In other words, quietism is not a theory which can be adopted, but should be viewed as a number of possible stances that one can adopt when doing philosophy. Quietism is concerned with 'showing' rather than 'saying', and two proponents of quietism, Wittgenstein and McDowell, who both use very different approaches, both appear to (perhaps deliberately) generally omit the word 'quietist' from their work.

The origin of the word 'quietism' goes back to a religious movement in the late seventeenth century, although elements of quietism are found in medieval devotion, in sixteenth century Spanish spirituality and in Christian and Buddhist mystical sources. Quietism as a religious movement advocates an entirely disinterested insight into God which is permanent and free from images and affects. It emphasises the mystical as opposed to the prophetic elements in religion as importance is attributed to the grace of God which is bestowed on quietists who do not actively seek religious favour. In religion, quietism eliminates the necessity of the established church which is viewed as an obstacle, in a similar manner to that in which quietism in philosophy, as we shall see, attempts to eliminate the need for theoretical philosophy and aims to bring peace to philosophers. There are evident similarities which are exhibited between

[37] One on-line search resulted in a 'hit' when 'quietism' was keyed in. This is the on-line version of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Version 1.0, London: Routledge, Ed. Edward Craig, with the entry 'Meaning and Rule-Following' by Barry C. Smith where 'quietism' is discussed (sub-section no. 5, 'McDowell's quietism') as part of McDowell's challenge to Kripke's reading of Wittgenstein on Rule-Following.

quietism as a religious movement, which attempts to do away with the established church, and quietism in philosophy which attempts to arrive at a position where one can stop doing philosophy when one wishes.

The word quietism was used by the enemies of a Spanish priest, Miguel Molinos (1628-1696), who settled in Rome. It is perhaps ironic that it is the opponents of quietism in philosophy who seem to use the word *against* those who take a quietist position. This could possibly be one main reason why the advocates of quietism rarely, if ever, use the word itself and may well be the reason why McDowell, as we shall see, always uses the word 'quietism' in scare quotes.

A description of the quietist stance is to be found in Strawson's Chapter 1 of *Analysis and Metaphysics*. Strawson, who appears to be influenced by Wittgenstein's later work, likens the role of the analytic philosopher to that of a *therapist* who is concerned with straightening us out and with helping us to see clearly that which is in front of us. Strawson quotes Wittgenstein who states: "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness."[38] Strawson states that the disorders which the therapist attempts to cure only arise when our concepts are idle, not when they are at work. That is why, he claims, it is important to assemble 'reminders' of the actual employment of the words and concepts with which we are concerned. Two quotes from Wittgenstein which Strawson cites clarify this stance. Wittgenstein states, "Don't look for the meaning, look for the use"[39] and "What *we* do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday usage."[40] Strawson, like many others who address this subject, does not mention the word 'quietism' in his text.

Strawson distinguishes two ways of doing philosophy. He attributes the therapeutic position to Wittgenstein, and sees it as being conceived in a negative spirit, where philosophy is concerned only with the source of our confusions and how they arise, besides being concerned with reminding us of that which we knew

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38 Peter Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics, An Introduction to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 3 quotes Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §255.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 4. Strawson quotes Wittgenstein, *op.cit.*, §127.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 4. Strawson quotes Wittgenstein, *op.cit.*, §116.

all along. On the other hand, the second way of doing philosophy is conceived on an analogy with grammar. Strawson introduces elements of theory into this position which involves the suggestion of a system, that is, of a general underlying structure to be laid bare. He further states that the grammatical analogy involves the suggestion that "we might come to add to our practical mastery something like a theoretical understanding of what we are doing when we exercise that mastery."[41] The analogy is in place because the philosopher, like the grammarian, "labours to produce a systematic account of the general *conceptual structure* of which our daily practice shows us to have a tacit and unconscious mastery."[42]

In another publication Strawson reveals his own philosophical preferences where methodology is concerned. He distinguishes between "descriptive metaphysics" and "revisionary metaphysics" which he describes as follows: "Descriptive metaphysics is content to describe the actual structure of our thought about the world, revisionary metaphysics is concerned to produce a better structure."[43] Strawson concedes that "no actual metaphysician has ever been, both in intention and effect, wholly the one thing or the other," thus only a broad distinction is possible.[44] In a later publication Strawson describes "[t]he whole task of the metaphysician" as "really to make clear to us the character of our thinking, both now and in the past, by making clear what these sets of ideas actually are, or have been."[45] By "sets of issues" Strawson implies "the buried, basic framework of ideas within which the scientific thinking – and, some would add, the social and moral thinking – of an epoch or society is conducted."[46] Strawson specifies that, rather than providing a solution to a definite problem these ideas supply "the very terms in which, in the epoch or society in question, problems are raised and competing theories constructed." The ideas are, furthermore, "silently abandoned when scientific (or social) thinking enters a new phase."[47] These ideas concerning philosophical methodology are relevant to the present discussion as I believe they

41 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
42 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
43 Peter Strawson, *Individuals, An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1959, 1961) p. 9.
44 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
45 Peter Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense, An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966, 1982) p. 119.
46 *Ibid.*, p. 119.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

raise questions such as whether it is possible for a quietist in philosophy to avoid theory building or constructive philosophy altogether.

A philosopher who claims to take on a "*quietist* response" to the challenge of the realism/anti-realism debate is Jane Heal. Her use of italics for the word *'quietist'* is unusual and unexplained. Heal defines a *'quietist'* as "conforming to the Wittgensteinian injunction to be content with description and with assembling reminders."[48] Her main concern is *'quietist'* realism where questions such as 'Is so and so really the case?' involve a re-examination of our grounds for such affirmations and where *'quietist'* realism is confirmed when, if "we see good reason to affirm this particular sentence, then that is enough to say, 'Yes, so and so *is* really the case'."[49] Heal is, in the quietist spirit, against theoretical philosophy and she insists that "we need to be coaxed out of the impulse to metaphysical speculation, to be persuaded that we can and should be content with that understanding of our concepts which comes from seeing how judgements using them are placed in a context of actions, interests and other judgements, so that together they constitute the only sort of life that we have any idea how to live."[50]

In an analysis of McDowell's *Mind and World*, Jonathan M. Weinberg notes that a quietist first *observes* and *argues* that no traditional philosophical answer to a question will ever be forthcoming. This is followed by an attempt to provide "the intellectual means to annul the philosophical impulse that lay beneath the question."[51] A necessary condition for the success of a quietist solution would be, according to Weinberg, to present a rival picture to the views which have been seen to be unworkable which does not threaten to create new problems of its own, in order for it to be preferable to the old picture. According to Weinberg, quietism has the vindication of common sense as its stated goal.

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48 Jane Heal, *Fact and Meaning: Quine and Wittgenstein on Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989) p. 4. Heal's is one of the few publications to include the word 'quietist' in the index.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

51 Jonathan M. Weinberg, 'John McDowell, *Mind and World*' in *NOÛS*, 32:2, 1998, pp. 247 – 64, p. 250.

Weinberg remarks that quietism provides a framework from which to take seriously the anxiety which various philosophical problems can create. It shows, Weinberg notes, that not all philosophical questions are framed in the best manner possible and it provides a powerful tool for steering clear of irresolvable philosophical disputes. Quietism futher looks into the motivations and intellectual needs which can be uncovered behind particular questions in an attempt to clarify and uncover the source of philosophical complexities. Weinberg is one of the few philosophers who 'dares' to use the word quietism in their work. He views the 'metaphilosophy' behind McDowell's *Mind and World* as a version of Wittgensteinian quietism.

Wittgenstein's Quietism in the *Philosophical Investigations*

Although the word quietism is rarely mentioned in the philosophical literature, there appears to be general consensus that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* presents one example of quietist philosophy. A random search for the word 'quietism' through the indices of a number of commentaries of the *Investigations* does not bear any results, neither does it appear in the index to the *Investigations* themselves. There is, however, one particular section which is often quoted as, it is claimed, it epitomises the methodology of the later Wittgenstein. This states:

> The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to. – The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. – Instead, we now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off. – Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a *single* problem.
> There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies.[52]

This implies that there are a number of methods which can be used in the same manner as therapy could, to 'dissolve' philosophical problems and, it follows, to give philosophy peace. The question however arises as to whether it is possible to utilise a particular technique with the aim of giving philosophy peace and of ceasing to do philosophy at one's will? One fact which is certain is that

[52] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §133.

philosophy is still tormented by questions and that it does not look as though philosophy will be attaining peace for itself in the foreseeable future. This does not, however, imply that quietism does not have its merits.

Philosophers are still concerned with questions that have tormented them for centuries and Wittgenstein's example has, unfortunately, not been promulgated or emulated to the extent one might have expected. In any case, an examination of the philosophical method which Wittgenstein suggested should be used to give philosophy peace may perhaps shed light on the merits of this particular way of doing philosophy and lead to a reappraisal of its place in modern day mainstream philosophy.

There appear to be elements of affinity between the position of quietists who may be considered as mystics (keeping in mind the religious origins of this term) and Wittgenstein. According to Russell, "what he [Wittgenstein] likes best in mysticism is its power to make him stop thinking."[53] It is known that Wittgenstein was influenced by William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and that he developed an interest in authors such as Saint Augustine, St. John of the Cross, Tolstoy, Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky.[54] It is likely that these thinkers influenced Wittgenstein's move towards quietism.

Marie McGinn acknowledges the relevance of Wittgenstein's method to his philosophical style, as against other commentators such as Crispin Wright who claim that Wittgenstein's methodology should be conveniently ignored and that only the issues he raises should be investigated. McGinn notes that Wittgenstein sees the theoretical attitude as a major obstacle to the achievement of understanding. She quotes Wittgenstein in the *Blue and Brown Books* as stating that "Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and to answer questions in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics and leads philosophers into complete

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53 Wilhelm Baum, 'Ludwig Wittgenstein's World View', pp. 64 – 74, *Ratio*, Vol XXII, No. 1, June 1980, p. 67.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

darkness."[55] Philosophical questions tend to be framed in similar ways to scientific questions such as when, for example, we ask "What is truth?" and consider it to be analogous to "What is the specific gravity of gold?" This makes us feel as though we have to "uncover" something when in actual fact endeavors to do so only lead to a frustrating dead-end.

McGinn takes Wittgenstein's quote from Augustine's *Confessions* as crucial to understanding the direction towards which Wittgenstein is pointing:

> Augustine says in the *Confessions* "quid est ergo tempus? Si nemo ex me quaerat scio; si quaerenti explicare velim, nescio." ["What, then, is time? If nobody asks me, I know well enough what it is; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled."] – This could not be said about a question of natural science ("What is the specific gravity of hydrogen?" for instance). Something that we know when no one asks us, but no longer know when we are supposed to give an account of it is something we need to *remind* ourselves of. (And it is obviously something of which for some reason it is difficult to remind oneself.)[56]

This implies that there are a number of things which we know when nobody asks us, but which become confusing once we stop and consider them with a theoretical attitude. Such a position could, McGinn states, lead to our thinking that the fault lies in our explanations and that we need to work harder to construct "ever more subtle and surprising accounts"[57] with the result that we end up "going astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties which in turn we are after all quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal. We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers."[58]

McGinn interprets Wittgenstein as indicating that philosophical problems are a result of our misusing language and of the manner in which language presents traps for the understanding which we are liable to fall into when we adopt a reflective attitude. She maintains that Wittgenstein challenges the pictures which we construct in an attempt to release us from a particular way of thinking. She further states that Wittgenstein encourages us to explore the pictures which attract

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55 Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 17 quotes Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, p. 18.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 18. McGinn quotes Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §189.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 19. McGinn quotes Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §106.

us, with the aim of discovering their futility on our own. Moreover, "Wittgenstein tries to draw our attention towards the neglected details of our concrete practice of using language. Simply by putting these details together in the right way, or by using a new analogy or comparison ... we find that we achieve the understanding that we thought could come only with the construction of a theory."[59]

Wittgenstein's aim was to bring about a gradual acceptance of the fact that "since everything lies open to view, there is nothing to be explained."[60] The practical examples which he presents in the *Philosophical Investigations* are evocative of the manner in which this is to be achieved. Philosophical problems can completely disappear by means of a series of clarifications as opposed to futile attempts to arrive at challenging conclusions. This is what Wittgenstein meant by 'reminders' as "the work of the philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose."[61] McGinn draws attention to the fact that the presentation of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, that is, its dialectical structure with different 'voices', should be acknowledged as "an essential part of his method" and not merely as a stylistic device. By acknowledging this novel manner of doing philosophy and by discarding the theoretical attitude we will, according to Wittgenstein, be in a better position to bring about a change in our attitude that goes against our conventional inclinations, especially where philosophy is concerned. In this way we can finally achieve the understanding we seek and procure for philosophy the peace it deserves.

Neither McGinn nor Wittgenstein use the word 'quietism' when discussing the philosophical stance which they portray. This could be the result of a number of implications, the major one being the unease a quietist may have when applying a 'theoretical label' to their own style, when anything that smacks of 'theory' goes against their fundamental principles. Yet, it should be acknowledged that the 'label' can act simply as a 'reminder' to jog us out of our conventional and theoretical way of doing philosophy.

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59 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 29. McGinn quotes Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §126.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 29. McGinn quotes Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §127.

Cora Diamond presents an approach which differs from that of McGinn as she discusses Wittgenstein's claim that philosophy leaves everything as it is. Inconsistency in this regard only arises, she claims, as a result of "removing remarks like the one about leaving everything as it is from their context: the discussion of philosophy's interest in 'foundations'."[62] Diamond claims that "[t]he sense in which philosophy leaves everything as it is is this: philosophy does not put us in a position to justify or criticize what we do by showing that it meets or fails to meet requirements we lay down in our philosophizing."[63]

Criticism towards quietism has also been forthcoming from A.C. Grayling who, in a discussion on realism, criticises those who attribute this way of doing philosophy to Wittgenstein. Grayling claims that the views of commentators on Wittgenstein who maintain that we should untangle philosophical problems by investigating how language is used in ordinary speech are "profoundly unsatisfactory." On his part, he disagrees with the claim that "philosophical problems prompted by reflection on the relation of thought (etc.) to the world just have no content."[64] Grayling describes the position he opposes as follows:

> They [philosophers who he calls 'non-anti-realistic anti realism of these writers'] retreat into such claims as that we can help ourselves to philosophically unproblematic, deflated senses of 'truth' and 'reference'; that there are ordinary, 'humble', uses of 'represent', 'justification' and the like, that only seem philosophically problematic because philosophers wilfully made them so; that everything is all right with our concepts (so claims Wittgenstein, followed by Putnam), just as they seem to be when we are sufficiently unreflective about them.[65]

These comments could easily be directed towards what I shall claim is McDowell's quietism, and Grayling's position is similar to that of Crispin Wright whose views contrast with those of McDowell.

One label which has been directed towards Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that of "postmodernism" and he has been acknowledged as one of the heroes of

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62 Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit, Wittgenstein, Philosophy and the Mind* (MIT Press, 1995) p. 22.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

64 A.C. Grayling, *An Introduction to Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1982, 1990, 1997) p. 293.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 293.

postmodernist writers.[66] Cooper states that Wittgenstein's dictum 'nothing is hidden' could be one of the slogans of postmodernist thought. He notes that Wittgenstein's particular manner of doing philosophy by means of assembling reminders rather than by offering better theories "obviate the need for theory."[67] This position exhibits similarities to the one I am describing as quietist. It draws attention to the fact that quietism in philosophy could be viewed as a postmodernist way of doing things which contrasts with traditional constructive philosophy or Philosophy with a capital 'P'.

The link between Wittgenstein and McDowell is evident in a number of papers where McDowell comments on the controversy surrounding Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following in the *Philosophical Investigations*. McDowell is, without doubt, influenced by Wittgenstein and Crispin Wright remarks: "Although Wittgenstein is not the most explicitly prominent of the cast of characters in *Mind and World*, I believe McDowell would freely acknowledge Wittgenstein's influence on his discussion in this general respect."[68] On his part, McDowell has criticised Wright's interpretation of Wittgenstein's methodology on a number of occasions, as he states that "he [Wright] cannot understand Wittgenstein's refusal to engage in constructive philosophy except as a quietism whose consistency with Wittgentstein's central thinking must come into question."[69] McDowell further criticises Wright for "massively" missing Wittgenstein's point and for complaining that

> he [Wittgenstein] ought to have shaken off his quietism and grappled constructively with the apparent philosophical problems about meaning and intention that the inability [to shake off his quietism] generates. The apparent problems are reflections of something that, intelligibly by all means, stands in the way of our seeing things clearly; if we could dislodge the block, a relaxed common sense could simply reclaim the field.[70]

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66 David E. Cooper, 'Postmodernism and 'The End of Philosophy',' pp. 49 – 57, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Volume 1, No. 1, March 93, p. 57.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 57.

68 Crispin Wright, 'Human Nature?' Review Article on John McDowell's *Mind and World,*' pp. 235 – 53, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 4:2, 1996, p.251.

69 John McDowell, 'Intentionality and Interiority in Wittgenstein: Comment on Crispin Wright', pp. 148 – 69, *Meaning Scepticism*, Ed. Klaus Puhl (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1991) p.168, reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) pp. 297 – 321, p. 320.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 169, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 321.

In another publication, McDowell summarises Wright's dilemma where Wittgenstein's methodology is concerned: "if Wittgenstein reveals tasks for philosophy [such as about meaning and understanding], he cannot appeal to what now looks like an adventitiously negative view of philosophy's scope to justify not engaging with those tasks."[71] In other words, Wright reads Wittgenstein as offering a programme of constructive philosophy, and this appears to be diametrically opposed to his quietism. McDowell insists, time and again, that Wittgenstein is *not* concerned with positive or constructive philosophy, but, rather, with "forms of life" which should be taken as "reminders" of

> something we can take in the proper way only after we are equipped to see that such [theoretical] questions are based on a mistake. His point is to remind us that the natural phenomenon that is normal human life is itself already shaped by meaning and understanding. As he says: "Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing" [*PI* §25]."[72]

McDowell takes Wittgenstein to hold the explicit view that "philosophy embodies no doctrine, no substantive claims", this being "what Wright describes as quietism."[73] This appears to be an implicit accusation directed towards Wright for describing Wittgenstein as a quietist, and it may possibly be one of the reasons why, one may suppose, McDowell may think the term is derogative with the consequence that he only uses it in *Mind and World* when citing Wright's unsympathetic views towards Wittgenstein's method.

McDowell's Quietism in *Mind and World*

A first reading of *Mind and World* gives one the feeling that something is missing, or that this is work-in-progress and, possibly, requires further refinements. An in-depth investigation will, however, disclose that this feeling arises as a result of the unusual methodology which McDowell adopts. McDowell does not give any indication of the unusual method which he will be adopting until one is far into

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71 John McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', pp. 40 – 52, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XVII, The Wittgenstein Legacy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) p. 51, reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp. 263 – 78, p. 277.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 51, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 277.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 51, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 277.

the book, although the terminology he uses includes words such as 'anxiety', 'picture', 'temptation', 'uncaniness', 'spookiness', 'tension' and 'exorcise', together with claims that we should not ask the wrong questions and expressions such as "philosophical puzzlement, should lapse," (MW xxi) "achieve an intellectual right to shrug our shoulders at sceptical questions" (MW 143) and "[t]he impulse finds peace." (MW 177) The word 'quietism' does not appear in the index to *Mind and World*, and although the word itself is used occasionally (very rarely!) it is *always* presented in scare quotes, which gives the impression that McDowell would possibly not be very happy to be labeled in such a manner. I can trace nine occasions on which McDowell makes use of the word "quietism" and, on each occasion, besides being presented in scare quotes it refers to Wittgenstein's "rejection of any constructive or doctrinal ambitions" (MW 93) and to the on-going debate between McDowell and Crispin Wright.[74]

Wright is an unsympathetic critic of McDowell's *Mind and World.* In a review article he ironically states: "But McDowell seems to recognize no definite theoretical obligation in this direction. (Naturally not: philosophers aren't supposed to *construct* anything.) This makes his treatment, to this reader at least, almost wholly unsatisfying."[75] Wright maintains that the main problem in *Mind and World* is McDowell's refusal to engage in constructive philosophy. He states: "If analytical philosophy demands self-consciousness about unexplained or only partially explained terms of art, formality and explicitness in the setting out of argument, and the clearest possible sign-posting and formulation of assumptions, targets, and goals, etc., then this is not a work of analytic philosophy."[76] It is only fair to remark, however, that McDowell does *not* claim to be engaged in analytic philosophy, and that McDowell and Wright have been engaged in debate on the subject of Wittgenstein's rule-following remarks where they often appear to be at loggerheads with each other.

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74 Although Crispin Wright, who does not have any apparent sympathy towards quietism, entitles Chapter 6 in his *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994) 'Quietism', he barely discusses the subject directly. Wright defines quietism as "the view that significant metaphysical debate is impossible." (*Truth and Objectivity*, p. 202).

75 Crispin Wright, 'Human Nature?' p. 251.

76 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

McDowell urges, against Wright, that "we must miss Wittgenstein's point if we read him in a way that makes his "quietism" an awkward fact about a set of texts that actually set substantive tasks for philosophy, and even give hints as to how to execute them." (MW 175) This implies that McDowell considers the methodology used by the later Wittgenstein, whether it is to be called "quietism" or by any other name, to be crucial to a correct understanding of those texts.

It is interesting to note the manner in which McDowell views Wittgenstein's "quietism". He describes "quietism" as "the avoidance of any substantive philosophy" (MW 176) and sets philosophy's task as that of dislodging assumptions which lead to anxieties or to a sense of spookiness. He admits to doing philosophy in *Mind and World* in a way that is similar to that of Wittgenstein, as he claims that the diagnostic moves he proposes in the lectures play a role "in a style of thinking that is genuinely Wittgensteinian in spirit." (MW 177) Moreover, in a reply to a critical review, he states:

> I would prefer Wittgenstein's image: showing the fly the way out of the fly-bottle. (Or at least a way.) I take for granted that it would be a good thing to be liberated from the sort of merely apparent (I believe) intellectual problems that are characteristic of epistemology when it is non-ironically engaged in the manner of the Cartesian and British-empiricist tradition.[77]

Although McDowell is concerned with the Wittgensteinian goal of achieving peace for philosophy and with arriving at a position where one can choose to stop doing philosophy whenever one wishes, he is realistic in his acceptance of the fact that this does not necessarily imply the end of "ordinary philosophy". He credits Wittgenstein with seeing through the apparent need for ordinary philosophy and claims that the dialogical character of Wittgenstein's later work is evidence of the depth of the "intellectual roots of the anxieties that ordinary philosophy addresses" (MW 177). Peace for philosophy, according to McDowell, is only occasional and temporary, and he attempts to demonstrate that it is possible to identify the source and anxieties that underlie apparent philosophical difficulties and that this identification "can be one of our resources for overcoming

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[77] John McDowell, reply to Huw Price's review of *Mind and World*,pp. 177 – 81, *Philosophical Books*, Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1997, p. 181.

recurrences of the philosophical impulse: recurrences that we know there will be." (MW 178)

How does McDowell attempt to carry out this programme? He starts off by identifying two positions which are potential candidates for resolving philosophical problems concerning the manner in which "concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world" (MW 3) which is, he claims, the overall topic of *Mind and World.* The technique which McDowell adopts is to first identify the root of the anxiety concerning the philosophical problem which arises as a result of this dualism. According to McDowell, they consist of coherentism on the one hand, and the Given on the other. McDowell exposes the shortcomings of each of these positions and argues that this situation gives rise to an oscillation where one position takes over from the other, followed by the inverse situation, in a similar manner to a see-saw with a recoil from one position to the other, and back again.

The culprit in this case is, according to McDowell, "a conception of nature that can seem sheer common sense, though it was not always so". (MW 70) This is what McDowell calls the naturalism of modern science which understands phenomena by situating them in the realm of law. This results in "bald naturalism" where all phenomena are explained in the nomological terms of natural science.

McDowell's version of quietism can be seen to proceed in the following manner. He first presents a dilemma, where the "standard picture" is the "oscillation" between coherentism and the Given, and argues that neither provide sufficient grounds to persuade us that rationality can be grounded in experience and yet be possessed of freedom in accordance with the idea of Kantian spontaneity. A potential solution is offered, where the conceptual is conceived as unbounded, with the result that the space of reasons extends all the way out to experience, which is itself conceived as conceptual. What prevents us from reconciling the dualistic forces of reason and nature, or spontaneity and receptivity, is our conception of nature as regulated by a *picture* which modern scientific naturalism presents. The stage is therefore set for McDowell to *show* that an alternative

picture is possible, and this comes about by means of his *'reminding'* us of a concept which he draws from Aristotelian ethics – that of second nature. We are initiated into second nature through our upbringing or, following Hans-Georg Gadamer, our *Bildung*, as McDowell prefers to call it, through which we acquire our rational faculties. Since *Bildung* or second nature actualises a potential which is present in the first nature of human beings, it is perfectly natural and allows for the possibility which McDowell proposes, that is, experience conceived as fully conceptualised.

McDowell proposes that questions such as "What is meaning?" and "What constitutes the structure of the space of reasons?" should not be taken seriously but should be met with a shrug of the shoulders as "[t]heir sheer traditional status cannot by itself oblige us to take such questions seriously." (MW 178) His manner of doing philosophy should have the effect of exposing and dissolving the assumptions and background behind such questions in order for them not to be considered pressing any longer. McDowell does not explain how second nature interacts, if at all, with first nature. This is because his alternative position, naturalised platonism, serves merely as a "reminder". McDowell's concepts, such as second nature and naturalised platonism, cannot be viewed as names of theoretical positions, neither can they be conceived as theories which could form part of traditional constructive philosophy. His quietism is successful if it could be seen as having the result of making questions which looked pressing under the previous picture no longer seem so.

There is no doubt that McDowell's position has its merits but it has also been criticised on a number of counts. McDowell insists that "naturalised platonism" is not a label for constructive philosophy but "serves only as shorthand for a "reminder", an attempt to recall our thinking from running in grooves that make it look as if we need constructive philosophy." (MW 95) His invocation of "second nature" is meant "to dislodge the background that makes such questions [as "So what does constitute the structure of the space of reasons?"] look pressing." (MW 78) Yet he has been criticised for not giving answers to such questions and for not explaining in greater detail exactly what he means by second nature. These are the aspects of *Mind and World* which initially give one the impression that

something important is missing, or that it may be work-in-progress. In a critical review of *Mind and World*, Brandom states that "McDowell contents himself with making his *commitments* explicit ... without showing just how he would propose to show himself *entitled* to them."[78]

Crispin Wright accuses McDowell of putting before the reader "barriers of jargon, convolution and metaphor" which are "hardly less formidable than those characteristically erected by his German luminaries." Wright ironically links this to McDowell's methodology as he states: "Is it that he views the kind of deconstruction of existing research programmes in analytical philosophy to which his work is directed as something which cannot be accomplished save by writing of quite a different – rhetorical or 'therapeutic' – genre?"[79] Wright further accuses McDowell of being influenced by Wittgenstein's 'jargon' and encouraging "too many of the susceptible to swim out of their depth in seas of rhetorical metaphysics."[80]

Not all critics are, however, of the same opinion. Gregory McCulloch, in a critical review of *Mind and World*, enthuses:

> This is philosophy in the grand style, conducted at a very high level of abstraction: an exhilarating exercise in intellectual therapy – part metaphor, part persuasive redefinition; a wrenching of philosophical attention away from the obsessions that drive contemporary debate and on to more satisfying objects.[81]

It is to be admitted that quietism has its merits, and Weinberg points to a number of lessons which can be learnt from McDowell's attempt to adopt this philosophical method. He notes that McDowell has demonstrated that quietism can be used to tackle traditional philosophical problems in a manner which differs from Wittgenstein's remarks or from Richard Rorty's "purely destructive philosophy."[82] McDowell provides a writing style for quietism that can be

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78 Robert Brandom, 'Perception and Rational Constraint', pp. 369 – 74, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, June 1998, p. 370.

79 Wright, 'Human Nature', p. 252.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

81 Gregory McCulloch, 'Dismounting from the see-saw', Critical Notice of *Mind and World*, pp. 309 – 27, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 4, (1), 1996, p. 318.

82 Weinberg, *op.cit.*, p. 263.

generally followed and productively engaged, as well as "pointing towards strong methodological possibilities."[83] Moreover, McDowell's diagnosis of the anxieties of modern philosophy can be viewed as a model of how quietism could be carried out in a coherent, plausible and practical manner.

One aspect which emerges as a corollary of quietism, which Weinberg draws attention to, is that quietism maintains that it is enough for constructive philosophy to be discredited, and that after that has been done, everything else remains in its place. Weinberg notes that this is not necessarily the case as, for example, "it is unclear what, under McDowell's picture of human nature, is to become of the various disciplines which claim to study humans scientifically"[84] such as psychology, history and sociology. Weinberg therefore warns that quietism's basic premise, that metaphysics stands alone, and that it can be demolished with no effects to other disciplines, requires more serious examination.

In my view, McDowell's major merit in *Mind and World* is his identification of pressing problems and anxieties and of unnecessary postulations which have been advanced in various attempts to get to grips with these problems, together with his pointing towards a direction which could possibly relieve the tension which the unacceptable alternatives he identifies are susceptible to.

Should the philosophical method which has been described be called 'quietist'? If one were to take on quietism, the answer should probably be 'no'. However, if one takes the name 'quietist' to depict a particular *'picture'*, or a *'reminder'* of a particular attitude one can adopt, then there should be no serious opposition to the use of this particular name. McDowell makes his aim clear in the Introduction to the second edition of *Mind and World.* This is "diagnosis with a view to a cure" (MW xvi) and he intends to "recommend one way of resolving this tension." (MW xvii) He is, without doubt, concerned with showing that philosophical puzzlement arises as a result of a particular way in which we view the tension which arises as a result of attempts to answer particular philosophical questions such as "How is

83 *Ibid.*, p. 263.
84 *Ibid.*, p. 263.

empirical content possible?" (MW xxi) McDowell is adamant that "we need not seem obliged to set about *answering* the questions that express the anxieties." (MW xx) Rather, he is concerned with "exorcising" as opposed to answering the questions that give expression to philosophical puzzlement or anxiety. (MW xxi) This comes about, in his view, by examining closely the reasoning behind the questions which are posed, in order to disclose shortcomings, with the result that it becomes obvious that "the topic of the question is not possible at all." (MW xxi)

The question, however, arises whether this particular method could be applied to all philosophical problems or whether it should only be applied to particular ones. McDowell is concerned with exorcising "How possible?" questions rather than "engaging in constructive philosophy" which he defines as "attempting to *answer* philosophical questions of the sort I have here singled out: "How possible?" questions whose felt urgency derives from a frame of mind that, if explicitly thought through, would yield materials for an argument that what the questions are asked about is impossible." (MW xxiii) McDowell's aim is to "dislodge" this frame of mind and to exorcise such questions rather than answering them. Attempts to answer such questions, he claims, would be futile and not succeed in removing the "philosophical anxieties" which initially gave rise to such questions. He states: "if I am right about the character of the philosophical anxieties I aim to deal with, there is no room for doubt that engaging in "constructive philosophy" ... is not the way to approach them. ... we need to exorcise the questions rather than set about answering them. ... that takes hard work: if you like, constructive philosophy in another sense." (MW xxiv)

It is not an easy task for philosophers to decide which questions need to be exorcised, in spite of McDowell's assertion that questions such as "What constitutes the space of reasons?" should not be "taken to be in order without further ado, just because it is standard for such questions to be asked in philosophy as we have been educated into it." (MW 178) In a critical account of *Mind and World*, Pietroski, who acknowledges McDowell as being an "advocate

of Wittgensteinian 'quietism',"[85] draws attention to the fact that "the question of which questions are bad ones is itself a matter for inquiry and debate."[86]

Could McDowell's method be viewed as a way of engaging in therapeutic philosophy? Michael Williams distinguishes between therapeutic and theoretical diagnosis when doing philosophy and he defines the former as aiming, "in its purest form", to expose epistemological problems as illusory and "thus making them disappear without theoretical residue."[87] This is not a position which Williams endorses, as he maintains that "effecting an exit from all philosophical commitments is an attempt to place oneself beyond criticism. There is no reason to suppose that this can be done."[88] The description of "therapeutic diagnosis" which Williams gives exhibits a great deal of similarity to the position which I have been describing as McDowell's quietism. Although he admits that the distinction between theoretical and therapeutic diagnosis is "far from sharp", Williams commits himself to theoretical diagnosis where, he claims, the hidden assumptions in traditional sceptical arguments are identified and criticised, thus resulting in the diagnosis "inevitably" suggesting "an alternative picture of knowledge, which we cannot guarantee to be problem-free."[89]

This position sounds extremely similar to that of McDowell, who also attempts to identify and "dissolve" hidden assumptions after which an alternative "picture" emerges. McDowell, like Williams, is concerned with acknowledging "the power of the illusion's sources, so that we find ourselves able to respect the conviction that the obligations are genuine." (MW xi) In my view, this statement demonstrates that McDowell's methodology does not commit him to a position where, in Williams terminology, he can effect an exit from all philosophical commitments. Rather, he demonstrates that he is actively engaging in philosophical debate, albeit making use of a methodology which is different to

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85 Paul M. Pietroski, 'Critical Notice of John McDowell's *Mind and World,*' pp. 613 – 36, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 26, No. 4, December 1996, p. 621. Note that Pietroski also places 'quietism' in scare quotes.

86 *Ibid.*, p. 625.

87 Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge, A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 253.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 253.

that which we are accustomed to when we engage in traditional or "constructive" philosophy.

Should we therefore still insist on calling McDowell's methodology in *Mind and World* quietist? One problem that arises is that this particular 'label' could entail negative consequences, such as attracting the type of dismissive criticism of the type: "Oh! That's *just* being a quietist!" This would be pronounced in a disparaging tone, giving the impression that someone was just *refusing* to engage in a serious philosophical discussion. One of the aims of this section is to argue for a 'rehabilitation' of quietism and I believe that McDowell has demonstrated the validity of a particular way of doing philosophy which can be adopted when dealing with philosophical problems which appear to be insoluble and which arise as a result of our incorrectly framing particular philosophical questions. Quietism offers a number of novel and exciting possibilities when looking at traditional or modern philosophical problems which are seemingly intractable, and it may help to clarify and to untangle certain knots in which philosophers tend to get entangled. Quietism should, in my view, serve as a *'reminder'* for an alternative way of doing philosophy, an alternative attitude one can take towards philosophical problems, and an alternative method which can offer a great deal of potential, as McDowell's *Mind and World* demonstrates.

Quietism, as I hope to have shown, does not involve one particular way of doing philosophy, and the differences between Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and McDowell's *Mind and World* are evident. It is relevant to note that whereas Wittgenstein's quietism is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to emulate, McDowell's method in *Mind and World* demonstrates that it is possible to adopt quietism and yet produce readable and exciting philosophy which covers new ground. This does not imply that other ways of doing philosophy are to be put aside and that the only right way of doing things is to adopt quietism. Rather, as Peter Strawson states, "extreme positions are rarely right" and he further states that "it would equally be a mistake to embrace the therapeutic position to the exclusion of everything else or to repudiate it utterly."[90]

[90] Peter Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, p. 5.

The picture which McDowell presents in *Mind and World* and the methodology he uses raise a number of interesting questions, some of which have already been briefly mentioned. Questions which a serious investigation of thinking and the world must deal with include: Can one reconcile the spontaneity of thought, which includes its submission to reasons, with a view of mind as just causally engaged with the world? If one grants, as McDowell does, that experience already contains conceptual content, and that "receptivity" can be reconciled with "spontaneity", does it follow that knowledge obtained as a result of experience is knowledge of a world which is separate and which exists apart from our thought? These questions will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

The questions with which I shall begin, however, concern McDowell's identification of the historical anxieties that lead to the present philosophical 'impasse' where thinking and the world are concerned, including his claim to be elaborating and improving upon important insights of Kant and Hegel. Such questions include: How faithful is McDowell to Kant's original ideas, and what is the extent of Kant's (and Hegel's) influence on McDowell's resulting views? Another important factor which emerges from an in-depth investigation of McDowell's interpretation of Kant and Hegel is whether it is relevant or not that his interpretation is correct or otherwise. What would the implications for McDowell's position be if his interpretation of Kant and Hegel is found to be flawed?

CHAPTER TWO

Kantian Control on our Thinking

McDowell's use of Kant and Hegel

There is no doubt that a number of historical influences have had an impact on McDowell's ideas in *Mind and World.* The basis of this influence appears to be an offshoot of McDowell's quietism which incorporates the assumption that an examination of ideas from the past could offer new approaches to contemporary problems that may seem to be irresolvable when considered within contemporary frameworks. McDowell claims that Kant's philosophy could offer valuable insights and that it should play an important role in any discussion of how thinking can relate to an external world. His affinity with Kant is reinforced as he states: "I have followed Kant in taking thought to be an exercise of the understanding, "the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge." [*Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75]" (MW 124) Kant's arguments in the *Critique of Pure Reason* regarding the relationship between the understanding and sensibility recur in *Mind and World* and are used as a basis for the quietist 'insights' which McDowell claims to uncover.

McDowell is not content merely to make use of Kant's ideas. At times he prefers to consider the Hegelian "completion" of Kant in order to sustain arguments in favour of one of his basic claims that "the conceptual is unbounded on the outside." (MW 83) This is the outcome of "substantial marks of [Robert] Brandom's influence ... [and] his eye-opening seminar on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* which I [McDowell] attended in 1990." (MW *ix*) Hegelian influence on McDowell is so powerful that he declares he would like to

conceive of *Mind and World* "as a prolegomenon to a reading of the *Phenomenology*." (MW *ix*)

The main thrust of McDowell's philosophical project is poignantly addressed as he remarks:

> I have described a philosophical project: to stand on the shoulders of the giant, Kant, and see our way to the supersession of traditional philosophy that he almost managed, though not quite. The philosopher whose achievement that description best fits is someone we take almost no notice of, in the philosophical tradition I was brought up in ... : namely, Hegel. (MW 111)

This statement reveals a number of important objectives which include McDowell's aim to "improve" on Kant's ideas as well as his own quietist ambition – to supersede traditional philosophy. The latter is an aspiration which, McDowell maintains, was unsuccessfully attempted by Kant as he states: "Kant cannot succeed in his admirable aim, to supersede traditional philosophy". (MW 110) McDowell believes that there was something which restrained Kant from arriving at a satisfactory philosophical position. He draws attention to the fact that Kantian philosophy provides a valuable insight which can only be freed from the "distorting effect" of the transcendental framework if it is viewed "in the context of a naturalism of second nature," (MW 110) which is what McDowell's philosophy aims to provide.

What is Kant's "insight" which impressed McDowell so strongly? Is the correctness or otherwise of his interpretation of the Hegelian "completion" of Kant relevant to his final position? What implications arise from McDowell's use of Kant and Hegel? If McDowell's interpretation of Kant and Hegel is not justified, one may be led to investigate whether the kind of criticism which he directs at what he perceives to be opposing trends in philosophy could be directed at his own final position. The main aim of this chapter is to analyse McDowell's use of Kant and Hegel and to attempt to fill in the blanks in McDowell's narrative where his use of ideas drawn from the work of these two philosophers is concerned. A number of implications will emerge from this analysis since the historical sources which McDowell acknowledges constitute the backbone of his views in *Mind and World*.

A close reading of *Mind and World* reveals that McDowell is, more often than not, dependent on secondary sources when it comes to discussing the views of past philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. His ideas evolve from the works of philosophers including Robert Pippin, Peter Strawson and Robert Brandom. It is important to note that *Mind and World* contains hardly any mention of Hegel's work, although McDowell refers to secondary sources which discuss Hegel's "completion" of the Kantian project.[1]

What are the explicit aims with which Kant and McDowell claim to be concerned? While Kant's first *Critique* enquires whether it is possible to isolate a set of conditions related to the possibility of our knowledge of things that can be distinguished from things-in-themselves, McDowell's *Mind and World* is concerned with the manner in which concepts mediate the relation between thinking and the world and with 'dissolving' the dualism of reason and nature.

A number of similarities can be traced in the ideas of Kant and McDowell. One common element in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and McDowell's *Mind and World* is that both philosophers deal with persistent philosophical problems concerning the relationship between thinking and the world. A particular issue which concerns both philosophers is the dichotomy between understanding and sensibility, or, in McDowell's terms, spontaneity and receptivity. McDowell claims that an examination of Kant's views on the manner in which understanding and sensibility cooperate during perceptual experience led him to the Kantian 'insight' which, when properly understood, constitutes a better formulation of the relationship between thinking and the world.

McDowell and Kant are both concerned with the limits of our knowledge although their ideas in this regard differ. Kant's main concern, as described by Patricia Kitcher, is that "philosophy errs when it tries to draw metaphysical conclusions

[1] This is evident in a footnote which is typical of the very few references which McDowell makes to Hegel in *Mind and World*: "In view of how I exploited Strawson's reading of Kant ... Strawson's Kant is more Hegel than Kant. For a reading of Hegel that takes very seriously Hegel's own idea that his philosophy completes a Kantian project, see Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*." (MW 111n)

about the way the world is apart from our knowledge on the basis of epistemological arguments about how we do or must acquire knowledge of the world."[2] Whereas McDowell, who advocates minimal empiricism, believes that we can have direct contact with the external world through experience and, thus, that we can know things as they really are, Kant acknowledges a reality outside the sphere of the conceptual, that is, the "thing-in-itself". However, in an expression of "epistemic humility",[3] he limits our knowledge to appearances as he claims that we can have no knowledge of things-in-themselves or of the intrinsic properties of substances. On his part, McDowell claims that "since our cognitive predicament is that we confront the world by way of sensible intuition (to put it in Kantian terms), our reflection on the very idea of thought's directedness at how things are must begin with answerability to the empirical world." (MW *xii*) An investigation of thinking, in McDowell's view, should start by examining how it is "answerable to how things are in so far as how things are is empirically accessible." (MW *xii*)

This position, which is key for a correct understanding of McDowell's ideas concerning the relationship between thinking and the world, is reinforced in a more recent publication where McDowell attempts to dislodge the idea of the world as being out of our reach. In a discussion on how objectivity can be achieved and on how we can be answerable to the world in spite of the fact that we speak from within our distinctively human practices, he states:

> But Kant precisely aims to combat the threat of a withdrawal on the part of the world we aspire to know. Kant undermines the idea that appearance screens us off from knowable reality; he offers instead a way of thinking in which ... appearance just is the reality we aspire to know (unless things have gone wrong in mundane ways).[4]

Kant and McDowell are in agreement on the cooperation between the faculties of sensibility and understanding that is required for knowledge. They both agree that

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[2] Patricia Kitcher, 'Introduction' to Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. xvii – lix, (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1996, Translated by Werner S. Pluhar) p. xxviii.

[3] Rae Langton, *Kantian Humility, Our Ignorance of Things in Themselves* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) p. 2.

[4] John McDowell, 'Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity,' pp. 109 – 23, *Rorty and His Critics*, Ed. Robert B. Brandom, (Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2000, second edition, 2001) p. 112.

all knowledge must be a conjoint product of sensory evidence and the mind's own principles for dealing with that evidence. The indebtedness of McDowell towards Kant and the Kantian "insight" is evident as he states: "I have urged that the way to stop oscillating between those pitfalls [coherentism and the Myth of the Given] is to conceive empirical knowledge as a co-operation of sensibility and understanding, as Kant does." (MW 46) This key statement expresses McDowell's conviction that sensibility and understanding should be viewed as cooperating in order to provide justificatory relations for empirical knowledge. In other words, McDowell states: "the idea of an interaction between spontaneity and receptivity can so much as seem to make it intelligible that what results is a belief, or a system of beliefs, about the empirical world – something correctly or incorrectly adopted according to how things are in the empirical world – only if spontaneity's constructions are rationally vulnerable to the deliverances of receptivity." (MW 138-39)

However, McDowell and Kant hold different views as to how the mind deals with the evidence with which we are presented. Kant puts forward transcendental principles such as the *a priori* conditions for knowledge and the categories to which all knowledge is subject, in addition to the forms of sensibility, that is, space and time. McDowell, on the other hand, exhibits Hegelian influence as he limits the mind's principles to a form of rationality and further claims that the conceptual is unbounded. This brings along with it a number of implications, in particular concerning his claims to ground thinking in an external reality, especially when it is conjoined with another claim which McDowell makes that "The impressions on our senses that keep the dynamic system in motion are already equipped with conceptual content." (MW 34)

The fact that we get to know the world we live in through a process which involves both invention and discovery is another subject which both Kant and McDowell agree upon, although this is not discussed in an explicit manner in their work. We discover the world through our receptive facilities through which objects in the world affect our sensibility and we interpret (or understand) the world due to the fact that, according to Kant, our thinking is subject to the categories, while according to McDowell, the impressions of the world on our

senses are conceptual. Both Kant and McDowell put forward a philosophy which strives to have the best of both worlds – we can learn about things in the world while at the same time constructing an external world which conforms to the structure of our faculty of understanding.

Both philosophers believe that a satisfactory explanation of traditional philosophical problems will finally give philosophy "peace", a task to which they are both dedicated. They would both like to put forward a position which would stop the "oscillation" between two opposing positions which have dominated traditional philosophical discussions on the relationship between mind and world and which occupy opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. Kant was concerned with combating dogmatic metaphysics and scepticism, while McDowell aims to discredit theoretical or constructive philosophy due to his quietism. Both Kant and McDowell attempt to put forward a position which, they hope, will finally eliminate the tendency philosophers have had to swing from one extreme position to an opposing one.

McDowell draws on parallels between his thinking and that of Kant in a discussion where he concludes that "Kant comes within a whisker of a satisfactory escape from the oscillation. He points the way to undermining the central confusion in the Myth of the Given." (MW 42) This statement confirms that McDowell conceives of Kantian philosophy in a similar manner to the way he conceives his own philosophy – as a means of providing peace for philosophy. While Kant's attempt to stop the "oscillation" involves his drawing limits around what we can claim to know, McDowell takes on quietism in an attempt to "exorcise" or to "dissolve" philosophical problems by drawing attention to the manner in which they are incorrectly conceived, thus proposing a "diagnosis" which will lead to a "cure" for our present "anxieties" once their illusory influence has been exposed.

There are a number of major contrasts between McDowell and Kant that will be highlighted and discussed in this chapter. These include Kant's claim that we can never know "things-in-themselves" which McDowell interprets as implying that

"the 'in-itself' cannot be anything for us",[5] and his subsequent contention that our receptivity gives us a window on how things really are. The Kantian transcendental distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, or between appearances and things-in-themselves, is therefore meaningless for McDowell who follows Strawson in rejecting this dichotomy. This move has a number of implications for McDowell's philosophy. If, on the one hand, he were to maintain the distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, he could risk being accused of commitment to some form of idealism, which is a position he explicitly wishes to avoid. On the other hand, his rejection of the Kantian noumenal world, in comparison with which the empirical world is a mere shadow, does not eliminate accusations of idealism, unless additional arguments are provided which demonstrate that we are in direct unmediated contact with a reality which exists beyond and apart from our perception of it. McDowell, however, does not respond to the challenge to provide such arguments, due to the fact that it would go beyond his ambit as a quietist to do so. Moreover, he does not appear to pay sufficient attention to the fact that Kant postulated the thing-in-itself mainly as a consequence of his claim that our perception is subject to constraint from the categories and from the forms of sensibility, that is, space and time.

In *Mind and World* McDowell asks how we can know that our subjective thoughts really are about things that exist in the objective world. The particularly human freedom which forms an integral part of Kantian "spontaneity" plays an important role in this regard, as does the grounding of our thought in an objective reality, and one of McDowell's main aims is "to bring out how difficult it is to see that we can have both desiderata: both rational constraint from the world and spontaneity all the way out." (MW 8n) He intends to demonstrate, following Kant, that knowledge is yielded by both intuitions and concepts acting in cooperation, and this will lead him to a position where spontaneity *and* rational constraint from the world can peacefully coexist.

5 John McDowell, 'Intentionality and Interiority in Wittgenstein: Comment on Crispin Wright,' pp. 148 – 69, *Meaning Scepticism*, ed. Klaus Puhl (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1991) p. 157. Reprinted in *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998) pp. 297 – 321, p. 307.

McDowell's solution to this problem is to 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." (MW 9) Conceptual capacities are thus not limited to the faculty of understanding, that is, to subjective states of thought, but are *already* present in experiences since *experiences already have conceptual content.* Empirical knowledge can be attained, according to McDowell (who claims to be following Kant in this regard), by means of a conception of sensibility and understanding which cooperate in such a manner that the understanding is viewed as "always inextricably implicated in the deliverances of sensibility themselves." (MW 46) This is clearly expressed in McDowell's analysis of Kant's famous dictum, "Thoughts without content are empty,"[6] as he states:

> Now when Kant says that thoughts without content are empty, he is not merely affirming a tautology .... "Without content" points to what would *explain* the sort of emptiness Kant is envisaging .... Thoughts without content – which would not really be thoughts at all – would be a play of concepts without any connection with intuitions, that is, bits of experiential intake ....
> 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 and intuitions. (MW 3 – 4)

In Kant's *Critique*, the contribution of the understanding to the cooperation between intuitions and concepts is described in terms of spontaneity. McDowell links this view to Sellars's conception of the space of reasons and states:

> A schematic but suggestive answer is that the topography of the conceptual sphere is constituted by rational relations. The space of concepts is at least part of what Wilfrid Sellars calls "the space of reasons". When Kant describes the understanding as a faculty of spontaneity, that reflects his view of the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it. In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom. (MW 5)

McDowell is concerned with providing an account of the cooperation between sensibility and understanding which "combine so as to provide for the intentionality of perceptual experience" and "to provide for how perceptual

6 Kant, *Critique*, A51/B75

experience figures in the acquisition of a knowledgeable view of the world."[7] His views on the importance of both sensibility and understanding are in line with those of Patricia Kitcher who views Kant's "basic insight" as involving the fact that "cognitive achievements such as perception are *a conjoint product* of sensory data and the mind's ways of interpreting those data."[8]

The key to exploiting the Kantian insight involves recognising the vacuity of the "in-itself". In this regard, McDowell believes one has to arrive at the "right thought" as he states:

> But the right thought is not that there are two inseparable contributions to the constitution of the world, but that one cannot do anything at all with the idea of a contribution from an ineffable 'in itself' beyond the limits of 'ordinary knowledge'. And it is only if one thinks one needs to do something with that notion that it can seem that, in order to be critical, one must talk about a contribution from us.[9]

What is it that blocks Kant from arriving at the right insight? McDowell makes a distinction between Kant's transcendental views and his empirical realism and follows Strawson in suggesting that the transcendental stands in the way of a satisfactory framework. Kant's empirical realist position is described as follows: "For Kant, experience does not take in ultimate grounds that we could appeal to by pointing outside the sphere of thinkable content. In experience we take in, through impacts on the senses, elements in a reality that is precisely not outside the sphere of thinkable content." (MW 41) On the other hand, "In the transcendental perspective, receptivity figures as a susceptibility to the impact of a supersensible reality, a reality which is supposed to be independent of our conceptual activity in a stronger sense than any that fits the ordinary empirical world." (MW 41) This exhibits a similarity between Kant's empirical realism and McDowell's own position where experience is conceived as remaining within the conceptual sphere rather than being implicated with either the Given or with elements of a transcendental or supersensible nature. It seems, however, that McDowell does not recognise Kant's intentions in adopting a transcendental

7 John McDowell, 'The Woodbridge Lectures 1997: Having the World in View: Sellars, Kant, and Intentionality,' p. 437.

8 Patricia Kitcher, 'Introduction' to Kant's *Critique*, p. xxxix, emphasis added.

9 John McDowell, 'Intentionality and Interiority in Wittgenstein,' (1991) pp. 156 – 57, 19n, (1998) 307, 21n.

standpoint and postulating the "in-itself" as a consequence of the fact that we experience the world through the categories and through our forms of sensibility.

What does Kantian transcendental philosophy involve? Kant himself states: "I entitle *transcendental* all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible *a priori*."[10] He further states:

> Not every kind of knowledge *a priori* should be called transcendental, but that only by which we know that – and how – certain representations (intuitions or concepts) can be employed or are possible purely *a priori*... what can alone be entitled transcendental is the knowledge that these representations are not of empirical origin, and the possibility that they can yet relate *a priori* to objects of experience.[11]

Kant's use of the transcendental, in McDowell's view, leads towards idealism which "is quite contrary to Kant's intentions." (MW 44) McDowell asks why Kant's insight is located in such an unsatisfactory context and claims that Kant retains the transcendental in order to "protect the interests of religion and morality," (MW 96) although the transcendental framework "also gives the appearance of explaining how there can be knowledge of necessary features of experience." (MW 96) Kant's transcendental framework therefore prevents him from arriving at the insight which would lead to an acceptable conception of experience.

Another obstacle which McDowell claims Kant encounters is his "lack of a pregnant notion of second nature [which] explains why the right conception of experience cannot find a firm position in his thinking." (MW 97) As Kant did not have the resources available to recognise the notion of *Bildung* "as a background for a serious employment of the idea of second nature" (MW 96) we can "marvel at his insight" (MW 97) while maintaining that the transcendental distinction can be rejected. One notes once again, however, the fact that McDowell appears to conveniently ignore Kant's *a priori* conditions for cognition which play an important role in his retention of the transcendental distinction and the thing-in-itself.

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10 Kant, *Critique,* B25
11 *Ibid.*, A56/B80.

According to McDowell, "[Kant's] transcendental framework forces a qualification. Transcendentally speaking, our responsible freedom in empirical thinking seems to fall short of the genuine article". (MW 43) McDowell considers this to be an unsatisfactory aspect of Kant's philosophy. McDowell is influenced by Strawson in his belief that Kant's transcendental distinction can be done away with and maintains that "Strawson's Kant is more Hegel than Kant." (MW 111n)

The elimination of Kant's transcendental framework from Kantian philosophy results in the emergence of a picture which McDowell claims is similar to his own: "if we abstract from the role of the supersensible in Kant's thinking, we are left with a picture in which reality is not located outside a boundary that encloses the conceptual." (MW 44) McDowell suggests that Hegel's remark, "In thinking, *I am free*, because I am not in an other," (MW 44) should be added to this picture, together with Wittgenstein's claim that "We – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact" (MW 44) in order to arrive at an image of the conceptual as unbounded. In a statement which reflects the importance which McDowell attributes to the unboundedness of the conceptual and to the normative element in the lives of beings endowed with the faculty of understanding he states:

> We cannot satisfactorily splice spontaneity and receptivity together in our conception of experience, and that means we cannot exploit the Kantian thought that the realm of law, not just the realm of meaningful doings, is not external to the conceptual. The understanding – the very capacity that we bring to bear on texts – must be involved in our taking in of mere meaningless happenings. (MW 97)

This statement reveals in no uncertain terms what McDowell really means when he claims that the Kantian insight should be viewed in "the context of a naturalism of second nature." (MW 110) By means of incorporating *both* "the realm of law" *and* "the realm of meaningful doings" (MW 97) under the umbrella of the conceptual, McDowell is well on his way to dissolving the dichotomy of reason and nature. All he needs to add to this picture is a reminder – second nature – which he draws from another historical source, namely, Aristotelian ethics.

McDowell's main claim is that we should broaden our normal conception of nature as restricted by the "realm of law" and introduce a conception of "second

nature", a concept which Kant did not possess but which could have freed "his insight about experience from the distorting effect of the framework he tries to express it in." (MW 99) Moreover,

> Kant's insight would be able to take satisfactory shape only if he could accommodate the fact that a thinking and intending subject is a living animal. But with his firm conviction that conceptual powers are non-natural, in the sense that equates nature with the realm of law, and with his lack of a seriously exploitable notion of second nature, he is debarred from accommodating that fact. (MW 104)

This key statement clearly implies that conceptual powers are natural, but that nature is not to be constrained by the realm of law. In this manner, the realm of the natural is expanded to incorporate normativity and thought, as a consequence of the recognition that *conceptual powers are natural*, but in a special way, as also are human beings together with their capacities for thinking, rationality and spontaneity. It is important to acknowledge, as McDowell states in the above quotation, that "a thinking and intending subject is a living animal." (MW 104)

Kantian influence on McDowell and McDowell's project to "improve" Kant's ideas should now be quite clear. McDowell is, however, more concerned with Hegel's completion of the Kantian project and he states that Hegel is the philosopher "we take almost no notice of" and whose achievement helps us to "see our way to the supersession of traditional philosophy" which Kant "almost managed, though not quite." (MW 111) This statement points towards an analysis of Hegelian influence on McDowell and to a discussion of Hegelian ideas on thinking and the world.

McDowell's interpretation of Hegel's completion of Kant forms the basis of his ideas in *Mind and World*. His major claim in this regard is that "The way to correct what is unsatisfactory in Kant's thinking about the supersensible is rather to embrace the Hegelian image in which the conceptual is unbounded on the outside." (MW 83) Such a 'picture' eliminates the necessity for the Kantian 'thing-in-itself' and leads McDowell to a resolution of the seemingly irresolvable dualism of reason and nature as it incorporates both the realm of law and the space of reasons into the conceptual sphere.

How correct is McDowell's interpretation of Kant and Hegel? If McDowell's interpretation of Kant and Hegel is found to be flawed, inconsistencies in his philosophy could be revealed, from which it could follow that his criticism of coherentism and of the Kantian transcendental distinction cannot be substantiated. The upshot would be an anti-realist point of view, where our only knowledge is of appearances, a view in stark contrast to his wholehearted endorsement of direct realism. It could, however, be the case that Hegel's completion of Kant may lead us out of such difficulties as a consequence of his view on the unboundedness of the conceptual, although McDowell does not provide an account of the relationship of his ideas to those of Hegel in this regard.

The main point which emerges from a Hegelian completion of Kant is the realisation that the thing-in-itself is meaningless. McDowell maintains that "Kant's successors saw … that the fundamental thesis, that the world cannot be constitutively independent of the space of concepts, does *not require this residual recognition of an 'in itself'*."[12] McDowell further claims that Kant had recognised the fact that the 'in-itself' cannot be anything for us and that is why, in his view, the discarding of the 'in-itself' by 'German Idealism' should not be taken as leading to idealism. He maintains that "the crucial post-Kantian move – discarding the 'in-itself' – need not be idealistic in any obvious sense."[13]

The foregoing discussion clearly reveals the manner in which McDowell extends Kant's realm of spontaneity, which incorporates the conceptual sphere, so as to conceive it as "unbounded." McDowell arrives at this conclusion after having re-interpreted Kant's dualism of understanding and sensibility, following Rorty's advice (and influence) in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, a text which McDowell admits to having "excitedly read" three or four times (MW ix) and which (one may hazard to guess) may also have influenced McDowell's quietism.

McDowell's re-definition of the Kantian notion of spontaneity raises questions as to how one can claim that the conceptual is unbounded without falling victim to

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12 John McDowell, 'Intentionality and Interiority in Wittgenstein,' (1991) p. 156, (1998) p. 306.

13 *Ibid.*, (1991) p. 156, (1998) p. 306.

accusations of idealism. It is to be noted that Hegel's Absolute Idealism, as that label suggests, has evident idealist implications as it follows as a consequence of his attempt to avoid the notion of an inarticulable realm of things as they are in themselves. In order to obtain a clearer picture of Hegel's influence on McDowell, it is necessary to analyse the views of commentators in order to fill in the gaps due to McDowell's sparse comments on this subject.

Filling in the Gaps on Hegel's "completion" of the Kantian Project

McDowell acknowledges being influenced by Robert Pippin who has written extensively on both Kant and Hegel.[14] Pippin views Hegel as having turned Kantian rationality into something which must be socially constituted. He argues that the Hegelian transformation of the Kantian project involves the evolution of the Kantian claim about the apperceptive conditions of self-consciousness into the claim that "participating in a practice can count as such only if the practice is undertaken ... within ... the 'horizon' of assumptions taken by the participants to be those assumptions."[15] This is consonant with Scruton's claim that "Hegel tries to show that knowledge of self as subject presupposes not just knowledge of objects, but knowledge of a public social world, in which there is moral order and civic trust."[16]

Once Hegel has "revised the basic Kantian maxim that 'concepts without *intuitions* are empty', he must establish that there are empirical nonrevisable concepts necessarily presupposed for a subject to be able to make use of any concepts at all."[17] Moreover,

> He must *also* show that these concepts have "objective validity", although, as understood by Hegel, this Kantian term has a number of variations. It can mean something weaker, a proof that there can be no experience that is uncategorizable,

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[14] Pippin's most relevant publications are *Idealism as Modernism: Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 1995); and *Kant's Theory of Form: An Essay on the Critique of Pure Reason* (Yale University Press, 1982).

[15] Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 152.

[16] Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy: From Descartes to Wittgenstein*, (London: Routledge, 1985, 1991) p. 177.

[17] Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 38.

> ... or something stronger, that objects do exhibit the distinctions we demand. And Hegel does try to prove both the stronger and weaker versions.[18]

Hegel's tactics in this regard raise a number of problems. These include questioning what would count as an acceptable replacement of the "formal" conditions for the possibility of any apperceptive experience and the problem of how to arrive at absolute subjectivity. These problems are rendered more complicated due to the absence in Hegel's texts of any detailed anti-Kantian arguments together with the vagueness of some of his arguments.

Hegel's "enterprise", according to Pippin, can be extracted from Kant by means of the following "formula":

> Keep the doctrine of pure concepts and the account of apperception that helps justify the necessary presupposition of pure concepts, keep the critical problem of a proof for the objectivity of these concepts, the question that began critical philosophy, but abandon the doctrine of "pure sensible intuition", and the very possibility of a clear distinction between concept and intuition. [19]

These are all aspects of Hegel's philosophy which profoundly influence McDowell and which he builds upon in order to arrive at his picture of the conceptual as 'unbounded', this being a key element which he draws from Hegel.

Pippin maintains that "Hegel got so much of his Kant through Fichte."[20] He discusses the relation between Fichte and Kant "on the issue that ... determines so much of Hegel's idealism: the problem of "spontaneous" apperception."[21] Pippin maintains that this issue should be viewed as "a continuation of the properly critical theme of *transcendental* apperception in Kant."[22] Fichte "noticed the undeveloped nature of Kant's central claim about transcendental apperception" and developed Kant's claim that "such apperception must be spontaneous or self-positing."[23] Fichte's contribution was mainly to have realised that the self relies

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18 *Ibid.*, p. 38.
19 Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 9.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
22 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
23 *Ibid.*, p. 51.

on itself when it is actively experiencing or judging, an activity which Pippin describes as "the "self-positing" of apperception".[24]

Pippin stresses the importance of Fichte's influence on Hegel as he states: "Hegel's all-important appropriation of Kant was everywhere influenced by Fichte's reading of the central issues and unresolved issues in Kant" and that "the Fichtean account of subjectivity would ... remain recognizable in Hegel's later system, as would Fichte's speculative understanding of "thought" as a "self-determining activity"."[25] Fichte's key idea is that judgements are both apperceptive and spontaneous. Pippin describes this as follows:

> For Fichte, these two conditions [apperception and spontaneity] can only mean, first, that the basic structure and coherence of our experience must be seen as a *result*, a result of an original "act" whereby any subject posits itself to be in relation to objects in certain fundamental ways. ... Second, such a stress on the apperception problem helps explain *why* Fichte was so infamously unwilling to preserve the fundamental Kantian distinction between receptivity and spontaneity.[26]

Fichte's idealism therefore takes intuitions to form part of the subjective realm, the realm of thought, in a manner which is reminiscent of McDowell's view of the unboundedness of the conceptual.

Apart from McDowell's acknowledgement of Pippin's influence regarding Hegel, Pippin's views relate only inferentially to the issues raised in *Mind and World.* A clearer picture of Hegel's influence on McDowell can be gleaned from Sally Sedgwick who takes it upon herself to "fill in the details of McDowell's Hegelianism."[27] Sedgwick's "charitable" interpretation of Hegel claims that "Hegel's idealism implies neither a reduction of concepts to intuitions nor a reduction of intuitions to concepts. Like Kant, Hegel argues that experience for us requires both; like McDowell, he conceives of his form of idealism as committed to a denial of their separability."[28] Sedgwick attempts to "venture some educated guesses about the features of Hegel's idealism he [McDowell] finds particularly

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

[25] Pippin, *Hegel's Idealism*, p. 42.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[27] Sally Sedgwick, 'McDowell's Hegelianism,' pp. 21 – 38, *European Journal of hilosophy*, Vol. 5, No. 1, April 1997, p. 21.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

persuasive."[29] Her aim is "to provide support for McDowell's interpretation by drawing attention to some features of Hegel's treatment of Kant,"[30] a reading which, she claims, challenges some well established stereotypes.

Sedgwick sees that McDowell's indebtedness to Kant consists of recognition of the fact that "empirical knowledge depends on the *cooperation* of the faculties of receptivity and spontaneity."[31] If one were to add McDowell's claim that "receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the cooperation," (MW 9) one can recognise, Sedgwick claims, the Kantian insight which, she maintains, is "established in the transcendental deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason,*" that "what is given to us in receptivity *already has conceptual content*."[32]

Sedgwick analyses McDowell's views on Kant's ambivalence about the contributions of receptivity and spontaneity to experience. Following Kant's "standpoint of experience", which Sedgwick calls his "good" side, McDowell notes that our conceptual capacities are inextricably implicated or drawn on in receptivity. Kant's transcendental standpoint, however, points to another image, where spontaneity imposes its forms on to the deliverances of receptivity which does not possess conceptual content and therefore derives from the unconceptualised Given. The latter view implies that the gap between thinking and the world cannot be bridged. Sedgwick sees this implication as a consequence of Hume's influence on Kant. Kant's aim was to combat Hume's scepticism and to rescue science and morality from Hume's naturalised account of reason. This led Kant towards a conception of the transcendental which lies outside nature and which could protect reason and morality from Hume's naturalism.

Sedgwick gives an interesting interpretation of McDowell's reasons for doing away with the transcendental element in Kant. She states that McDowell considers Kant's transcendental standpoint as demonstrating that "disenchanted

29 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
30 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

nature is not a possible object of our experience." However, "Nature can be devoid neither of law nor of meaning, because, as the transcendental deduction establishes, spontaneity is *already implicated in* and therefore *not separable from* the deliverances of receptivity. This means that spontaneity's supposed reliance upon an appeal to the supersensible is based on a myth."[33] With Kant's transcendental standpoint "discredited" one is left with Kant's "standpoint of experience" which involves a "partially naturalized conception of reason" and which is "the side of Kant which McDowell claims we can find consistently elaborated in the idealism of Hegel."[34]

Sedgwick's interpretation of Hegel is clearly in line with McDowell's views on the role spontaneity plays in our cognition as well as with McDowell's attack on the Myth of the Given. She states: "What we learn from the transcendental deduction is that the 'raw' or unsynthesized data of sensation is not a possible object of thought for us; it therefore has no role to play in the justification of our empirical judgements."[35]

The key idea in Sedgwick's analysis of Hegel's influence on McDowell lies in the role which receptivity and spontaneity play in cognition. She notes that both Hegel and Kant agree that experience requires the cooperation of both receptivity and spontaneity, but that Kant believes that the contributions of each of these two faculties can be isolated. Sedgwick claims that both Hegel and McDowell argue that our cognition can bear on reality because "even though experience for us depends upon the contribution of receptivity as well as spontaneity, the contributions of receptivity and spontaneity are not separable." Thus "sensations without concepts are blind"[36] as sensations on their own cannot provide reasons to support empirical judgements, nor can sensations provide either rational or causal impingements from outside the space of concepts. Acknowledging a separate role for sensations apart from concepts would imply acceptance of the Myth of the Given. The lesson of the transcendental deduction which, according to McDowell, Hegel appreciates with greater consistency than Kant, is that there can

33 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 25. Sedgwick cites *Mind and World* p. 111.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
36 *Ibid*,. p. 33.

be no Given which is independent of thought since the realm of the conceptual is unbounded.

Sedgwick's remarks with regards to Hegel's and McDowell's criticism of Kant are based on her view that one may "charitably conclude that Kant's language occasionally obscures his doctrine."[37] This occurs, for example, in the B-preface of the *Critique* where Kant sets out to demonstrate how objects must conform to our knowledge. This could be understood to imply that our subjective contribution is separable from the object itself which could encourage us to think about what objects might be like independently of our forms of sensibility. Sedgwick warns that "In suggesting that form and content are separable rather than inseparable elements in what Hegel calls an 'original identity', we do just what Kant in the transcendental deduction warns us not to do: we give the sceptic what he most desires."[38]

Admitting to the existence of things-in-themselves, together with the separation of spontaneity from receptivity, would give rise to the implication that we could never know anything apart from appearances. Sedgwick, however, asks whether this is what Kant *really* meant and notes that Kant's insistence on the limits of what we can know are not based on his view that the categories limit that which we can think. Rather, Kant argues that human knowledge is limited because "in our efforts to know nature, we are restricted to objects given in space and time. Kant's various references to limits in the first *Critique* are intended to draw our attention to the a priori constraints which derive from the faculty of *receptivity*.[39]

Sedgwick draws attention to Kant's claim[40] that we misunderstand the status of the categories if we take them to be merely contingent or subjective conditions on our thought. Moreover, she claims that acknowledging the categories merely as subjective conditions and not as pertaining to objects would be to give in to the sceptic. Attempts to imagine what our thinking and what objects would be like without the categories involves a misunderstanding of the categories or, Sedgwick

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 35.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 34. Sedgwick refers to Kant's *Critique*, Section §27 of the B-Deduction.

states, "as McDowell put it, we misunderstand the status of the categories if we fail to see that the domain they determine is 'unbounded on the outside'."[41]

One notes that Sedgwick's interpretation of Hegel's completion of Kant draws parallels between Hegel's thought and McDowell's views which provide persuasive arguments in favour of the notion of the unboundedness of the conceptual. Her arguments against the possible introduction of any elements of the Given into Kant's or Hegel's views and her discussion of the unintelligibility of such a notion serves as a clarification of some of McDowell's more obscure arguments in this regard. A question which arises, however, concerns Hegelian idealism and whether McDowell's views can be protected against such accusations. If the realm of the conceptual is unbounded, why should our thinking bear on an external reality? And if McDowell succeeds in escaping accusations of idealism, why should we not consider Hegel to be a realist and not an idealist as he is generally made out to be?

In my view, Sedgwick has pointed towards a possible escape from accusations of idealism. If things-in-themselves and the Given are made out to be unintelligible, and if McDowell can demonstrate that the external world has the power through our passive receptivity to impinge on our experience, then he is justified in claiming that our knowledge is of a reality which is external to thought. It is to be noted that, as a quietist, McDowell does not feel the obligation to justify his position any more than he actually does. It is therefore up to commentators such as Sedgwick and Pippin to fill in the gaps, clarify and provide answers to the issues raised by a close reading of the Kantian and Hegelian references in *Mind and Word.*

Sedgwick's interpretation of Kant's transcendental deduction offers an alternative to that of Pippin, although she states that her aim is to demonstrate that Pippin's arguments require further support and that Pippin's interpretation of Hegel's completion of Kant is not a necessary consequence of a closer reading of Kant's first *Critique*. Rather, Pippin's reading of Hegel assumes a great deal of what it

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41 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

eventually claims to prove. This includes the assumption on Pippin's part that "Kant's distinction between concepts and intuitions, and his resulting conception of the thing in itself, commit him to skepticism about the scope of our knowledge."[42] Although this may be true, Sedgwick argues that "Hegel does not demonstrate that it is true – at least not in his treatment of the Transcendental Deduction. In my judgement, the most he demonstrates is how heavily the weight of his own claim to have superseded transcendental idealism rests upon it."[43]

Does the analysis of views which have been discussed provide enough evidence for one to conclude that McDowell's interpretation of Hegel as having completed a Kantian project is justified? Criticism directed at McDowell's claim in this regard includes Bowie's remarks that McDowell ignores important aspects of early Romantic epistemology. Bowie maintains that "Hegel's Absolute Idealism was not in fact the culminating solution to key post-Kantian dilemmas, and that arguments already proposed by Novalis and Fredrich Schlegel ... can be used to question ... re-interpretations of Hegel that have appeared in the work of Klaus Hartmann, Alan White, Terence Pinkard and others."[44]

At this point there appears to be a cacophony of conflicting opinions, and controversy is evident. This implies that the present discussion requires further analysis. For this reason, the following section will analyse secondary sources and their influence on McDowell.

The Influence of Secondary Sources on McDowell

This section will address the possibility of McDowell's position being susceptible to criticism which could be directed at shortcomings in the philosophy of those whose ideas he claims to have influenced him. A brief analysis of the secondary sources which McDowell acknowledges, together with a brief review of some commentaries on the main topics involved in this discussion will, in my view,

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[42] Sally Sedgwick, 'Pippin on Hegel's Critique of Kant,' pp. 273 – 83, *International Philosophical Quarterly,* Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, Issue 131, September 1993, p. 283.

[43] *Ibid.,* p. 283.

[44] Andrew Bowie, 'John McDowell's *Mind and World* and Early Romantic Epistemology,' pp. 515 – 54, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie,* Volume 50, No. 197, 3/1996, p. 516.

enable us to obtain a better understanding of the importance of historical influences for McDowell's picture.

Although McDowell does not directly acknowledge any influence from early Romantic philosophers, Bowie maintains that Hegelian ideas do not flow directly from Kantian ones but are a consequence of the issues raised by early Romantic philosophers. Bowie contends that McDowell's concerns in *Mind and World* "echo aspects of early Romantic epistemology" and that "some Romantic ideas might be used to question certain of McDowell's contentions."[45] The main issue to which attention is directed is McDowell's claim that the conceptual is unbounded. Romantic philosophy throws light on the problems which emerge when this claim is maintained together with other claims which McDowell makes. These include his claims concerning the cooperation of spontaneity and receptivity, the grounding of knowledge in an external reality, and the possibility of our being in direct contact with a reality which is external to ourselves.

As we have seen, McDowell takes on a self-imposed role in *Mind and World* "to correct what is unsatisfactory in Kant's thinking". (MW 83) The fact that the transcendental or "supersensible" is the cause of this dissatisfaction reveals Strawson's influence on McDowell who states: "I have been more strongly influenced than footnotes can indicate by P.F. Strawson .... 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." (MW *viii*)

Strawson's views have been subjected to a great deal of criticism, in particular by Henry E. Allison who defends Kant's transcendental idealism. Allison's main argument involves the claim that human knowledge is subject to particular conditions, including the subjective conditions of human sensibility (space and time), and that this is the distinctive and the revolutionary thesis of Kant's philosophy.

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 515.

Allison's interpretation has influenced Michael Friedman who argues that Kant's conception of the understanding is not subject to the same difficulties as that of McDowell. Friedman interprets Kantian understanding as "rather precisely the faculty responsible for the intelligibility of the realm of law."[46] It is *not* the faculty through which meaning and intentionality are revealed, as McDowell makes it out to be. Meaning and value are, for Kant, "the province of the distinct faculty of reason (the faculty of ends) and judgement (the faculty of purposiveness)."[47]

Friedman notes that McDowell makes use of the Kantian contrast between the realm of freedom and the realm of nature "as a model for his own contrast between the space of reasons and the realm of law."[48] In this regard, he accuses McDowell of "glossing" over the Kantian distinction between understanding and reason. Friedman reveals an interesting issue which McDowell appears to have misinterpreted. He states:

> The Kantian contrast between the realm of freedom and the realm of nature is developed in the *Critique of Judgement* ... where mechanism and teleology are opposed. This last opposition ... involves, in Kant's own terms, the relationship between reason and understanding (between which the faculty of judgement is supposed to mediate) rather than between the understanding and sensibility (between which the faculty of imagination or "schematism" is supposed to mediate).[49]

Friedman's criticism of McDowell is effective in, at the very least, instilling doubts as to the accuracy or otherwise of McDowell's interpretation of Kant. Friedman's main argument is that Kant's conception of the interdependence of understanding and sensibility was developed "*precisely in order fully to accommodate the new idea of nature represented by the scientific revolution.*"[50] It should, however, be conceded that McDowell's aim seems to be very similar to that of Kant. Both philosophers are concerned with reconciling freedom and nature and although McDowell's use of Kant may not be as accurate as Friedman

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46 Michael Friedman, 'Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition: Comments on John McDowell's *Mind and World*,' pp. 427 – 67, *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 104, No. 4, October 1996, p. 447.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 448.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 439n, Friedman refers to *Mind and World*, p. 71n.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 439n.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 435, emphasis added.

may wish it to be, his concern is to demonstrate how close Kant came to resolving this dichotomy.

There is no doubt that McDowell was influenced a great deal by secondary sources in his views on the Hegelian 'completion' of the Kantian project and a number of key issues in this regard have emerged which I shall discuss in the remainder of this section. These include transcendental idealism, the grounding of knowledge in the world, self consciousness and the space of reasons, and the importance of social elements.

Allison defines transcendental idealism as "the doctrine that appearances are to be regarded as being, one and all, representations only, not things in themselves, and that time and space are therefore only sensible forms of our intutition, not determinations given as existing by themselves, nor conditions of objects viewed as things in themselves."[51] He interprets the Kantian distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves as implying that human knowledge is limited to those things that can be known through our ways of knowing, that is, through the categories. Allison however draws attention to Kant's statement that "therefore, the proposition that all sensible representations only yield knowledge of appearances is not at all to be equated with the claim that they contain only the illusion [*Schein*] of objects, as the idealist will have it."[52]

Allison's views contrast with those of Strawson who argues that "The doctrines of transcendental idealism, and the associated picture of the receiving and ordering apparatus of the mind producing Nature as we know it out of the unknowable reality of things as they are in themselves, are undoubtedly the chief obstacles to a sympathetic understanding of the *Critique*."[53] This latter view is one with which McDowell undoubtedly agrees.

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[51] Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) p. 15.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 8. Allison is quoting Kant's *Prolegomena, Ak.*XX, 269, and refers readers to Kant's *Critique*, A45-46/B62-63, and to *Prolegomena*, §13, remark II, *Ak.* IV, 289 – 90.

[53] P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense, An Essay on Kant's* Critique of Pure Reason, p. 22.

McDowell is strongly influenced by Strawson's claim that "Kant fails to satisfy the conditions for a significant application of the contrast between things as they really are and things as they appear."[54] Kant claims that "Our mode of intuition is dependent upon the existence of the object, and is therefore possible only if the subject's faculty of representation is affected by the object."[55] Since space and time are forms of sensibility which are within the experiencing subject, Kant's remark can be interpreted, according to Strawson, as meaning that our sensible capacity is "a capacity or liability of ours to be affected in a certain way by things *not in themselves in space and time.*"[56] This is, according to Strawson, a perversion and an inconsistency on Kant's part which removes the possibility of our unmediated contact with an external world and leaves us in touch only with its "shadow".[57] Strawson therefore attempts to separate Kant's analytic argument from his transcendental idealism which, he argues, is incoherent and can be done away with.

Is it perhaps possible to view Kant's claims about appearances from two standpoints: the "transcendental" and the "empirical"? Pippin claims that "when we speak of knowledge of outer appearances there is no reason at all not to say that we know the *empirical* world as *it* is "in itself"."[58] From a transcendental standpoint, however, he interprets Kant as claiming that "we only know these outer objects *as* appearances, as *conditioned* by the forms of space and time, and thought only by means of the categories."[59] His interpretation of the Kantian transcendental distinction involves maintaining that Kant was both a transcendental idealist as well as an empirical realist, as indeed Kant insisted he was.

This position, however, raises a paradox which has generated a great deal of controversy. The problem is that if we can know all experienceable objects as they are in themselves, subject to our forms of sensibility, from an empirical realist standpoint, why go on to insist, from the standpoint of transcendental

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54 Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, p. 254
55 Kant, *Critique*, B72
56 Strawson, *op. cit.*, p. 253, emphasis added.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
58 Robert Pippin, *Kant's Theory of Form*, p. 198.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

idealism, that we cannot know how things really are in themselves? In this regard, Pippin searches for a positive way to interpret the Kantian distinction between phenomena and noumena which he claims is crucial for Kant's thought. He states that "Kant himself... far from evidencing such tendencies [to eliminate the noumenal dimension], always seemed to regard the distinction as the *pons asinorum* of the critical doctrine – an insistence that has created by far the most extensive critical controversy about Kant's idealism."[60] He finds a hint of a positive role for noumena in the *Critique* where Kant states: "Though we cannot know these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position to think them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearances without anything that appears."[61]

What were Kant's intentions behind the introduction of the thing in itself? Pippin gives three reasons for this. The first is the "exclusively "transcendental" meaning of things in themselves" which is part of Kant's attempt to formulate a position about all objects considered independently of our forms of knowledge. The second is "as regulative ideas necessary for science itself."[62] The third is for practical or moral reasons. Pippin recognises that Kant's distinction between phenomena and noumena is an integral part of his attempt to prove that knowledge is of an objective reality and that Kant's philosophy requires this distinction in order to combat threats of scepticism. Without the concept of things-in-themselves, Kant's philosophy would be liable to the accusation that only appearances exist.

McDowell, however, follows Strawson and the post-Kantian idealists in rejecting the Kantian distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves. He is led to believe that the rejection of this distinction leads to direct realism where our receptivity can link us to a worldly state of affairs. Friedman draws attention to the fact that the German idealist rejection of the Kantian distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves also involves a rejection of other crucial distinctions which McDowell's position cannot afford to do away with – that is,

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60 Pippin, *Kant's Theory of Form*, p. 193.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 204. Pippin quotes Kant, *Critique*, Bxxvi.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 193.

the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions and between understanding and sensibility. Friedman notes that the idea of a noumenon "arises by *abstracting* the concepts of pure understanding from their necessary application to sensibility."[63] This is therefore a "problematic concept" since it involves the idea of an object thought through pure understanding alone. Friedman concludes that "Giving up the opposition between appearances and things in themselves therefore means giving up the notion of a distinct and independent faculty of intuition as well."[64] This could cause problems for McDowell's position as intuition is necessary for grounding thought in the external world by means of passive receptivity. Eliminating intuitions would imply that there would be no receptivity, and spontaneity, or thought, would end up "spinning in the void" without friction from anything external to thought.

McDowell's position on the transcendental distinction appears to have been modified since the publication of *Mind and World*. In a more recent publication he cites Kant's reference to "the *distinction*, which our Critique has shown to be necessary, between things as objects of experience and those same things as things in themselves."[65] This is followed by remarks which modify his previous ideas as he states:

> I am here correcting the two-worlds picture of Kant that I presupposed in *Mind and World*. But note that what Kant insists on in Bxxvii is an *identity* of things as they appear in our knowledge and "those same things as things in themselves"; not "those same things as they are in themselves." ... Considering things as things in themselves is considering the very things that figure in our knowledge, but in abstraction from how they figure in our knowledge.[66]

It seems as though McDowell is attempting to warn against the formulation of statements which may mislead the reader into thinking of objects in the sense of a "two-worlds view", that is, on the one hand, the world of appearances and the world of things-in-themselves. Objects do *not* possess properties that are unknowable to us when we attempt to consider those same objects as things-in-

[63] Friedman, 'Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition,' p. 441.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 442.
[65] McDowell, 'The Woodbridge Lectures 1997,' p. 469, 23n, emphasis added. McDowell quotes Kant, *Critique*, Bxxvii.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 469, 23n, emphasis added.

themselves. The objects are the *same* objects both as appearances and as things-in-themselves and care should be taken so as to avoid confusion that there are two realms, one which is knowable and another which is not.

Hilary Putnam, in line with this analysis, claims that Kant's concept of things in themselves is "quite empty",[67] a view which is similar to that of McDowell. If our description of the world is shaped by our conceptual apparatus, it is pointless, Putnam claims, to ask how the world is "in itself" as "there is no such thing as the world's own language, there are only the languages that we language users invent for our various purposes."[68] He therefore sees the lasting contribution of Kant's *Critique* as being the recognition of the fact that "describing the world is not simply copying it" and that "our description [of the world] is shaped by our own conceptual choices."[69] This view reflects McDowell's ideas on the role of cognition in perception where concepts reach all the way out to the world which is external to thought. Putnam however maintains that Kant's recognition of this fact is flawed not only by his introduction of the thing-in-itself but also by the "notion that our conceptual choices are fixed once and for all by some kind of thick transcendent structure of reason."[70]

On the other hand, Sedgwick, as we have seen in the previous section, argues in favour of Kant's transcendental distinction and maintains that the reasons behind Kant's claim that knowledge must be restricted to appearances results from our receptive perception and our cognitive structure. If this were not so, she states, that is, if perception and cognition did not entail receptivity and structure, "there would be no point in undertaking a transcendental deduction at all, on Kant's view. Nor would it be necessary to introduce a transcendental distinction between appearances and things in themselves, and limit the objects of our synthetic knowledge to the former."[71]

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67 Hilary Putnam, *Pragmatism, An Open Question* (Oxford, U.K.; Cambridge, U.S.A.: Blackwell, 1995) p. 29.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

71 Sally Sedgwick, 'Pippin on Hegel's Critique of Kant' p. 281.

McDowell's dismissal of the Kantian thing-in-itself, together with his views on the cooperation of sensibility and understanding point towards his attempt to dissolve the dualism of reason and nature and to construct a new picture which accommodates his direct realism and which will quell 'anxieties' that the prevailing situation gives rise to.

The major issues in Kant and Hegel which are being discussed and which influence McDowell are all intertwined and the implications which will emerge link a number of these issues. Another major issue which emerges from an analysis of McDowell's use of Kant and Hegel concerns the grounding of knowledge in the world. Kant thought this could be resolved through the thing-in-itself while Hegel saw a possible solution in his Absolute Idealism where thinking incorporates everything there can possibly be.

In contemporary philosophy the concern with grounding can be seen as a "reaction against the proliferation of naturalistic attempts to reduce epistemological questions to questions of cognitive science."[72] McDowell is very concerned with grounding thinking in the world and he criticises coherentism where "exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game." (MW 5) Bowie notes a similar concern in Jacobi's *Jacobi an Fichte* and he criticises Fichte's idealism as he maintains that "Our sciences, merely considered as such, are games which the human spirit thinks up to pass the time."[73] Jacobi claims that Kant's manner of explaining how our knowledge is not only constituted by mind somehow affecting itself is dubious as he argues:

> For even if according to [Kantian philosophy] it can be *admitted* that a transcendental something *may* correspond as *cause* to these merely subjective beings [*Wesen*, by which he means appearances], which are only determinations *of our own being*, it yet remains hidden in the deepest obscurity *where* this cause and what the nature of the relation it has to its effect is."[74]

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72 Andrew Bowie, *op. cit.*, p. 518.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 519. Bowie quotes Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *Jacobi an Fichte,* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1799) p. 21.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 526. Bowie quotes from Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume über den Glauben oder Idealismus und Realismus ein Gespräch* (Breslau: Gottl. Löwe, 1787) p. 224.

Bowie notes that both McDowell and Jacobi question "what *sort* of a ground one can give to conceptual knowledge"[75] and that "Hegel's answer to this problem will … be to try to escape the necessity of a ground at the beginning of philosophy."[76]

Hegel had attempted to remove the problem of the ground of knowledge by means of the dialectic which was concerned with internal contradictions through which "the ground is actually the result which philosophy knows to be its goal" and where "the process of knowledge is itself part of the world's self-articulation *and can be known to be such from within the process.*"[77] This position differs, Bowie notes, from that of the Romantics and McDowell who both maintain the possibility of revising determinate truth claims. A difference, however, is evident in McDowell's claim that we are always already in direct contact with the world and therefore with truth, whereas the Romantics allow for a particular type of scepticism which, rather than refuting reality and knowledge, is concerned with a serious search for truth and certainty. To support this claim Bowie quotes Schlegel who rejects absolute truth and who "makes it clear that there is no final dialectical move, because there is no accessible final reflexive criterion for truth, no way in which the structure of the final self-cancellation of error can be articulated."[78]

Bowie links Schlegel's remarks to McDowell's claim that the layout of reality exerts a *rational* influence on what a subject thinks. He draws attention to the fact that conceptual content which informs our perception cannot always be taken to be benign as it is possible for concepts to contaminate our perceptions as well as to inform them. This is linked to what Bowie regards as McDowell's schematism, or the "as-structure" of understanding through which objects are perceived *as something* rather than as something else. Bowie states:

> The advantage of the ironic scepticism of Schlegel, as opposed to the Hegelian *Aufhebung* of scepticism, is that it both undermines such perverse results of the "as-structure" of understanding and yet preserves an inbuilt normative obligation

75 *Ibid.*, p. 519.
76 *Ibid.*, p. 519.
77 *Ibid.*, p. 551.
78 *Ibid.*, p. 552.

> towards the truth, which is never adequately present in any particular assertion because the subject *has no absolute ground of cognitive certainty.*[79]

McDowell's belief that it took the insights of Hegel to complete and consolidate Kant's conception of the necessary interdependence between understanding and sensibility can be viewed as an acceptance of a position which is very similar, if not identical, to coherentism, together with all its pitfalls – a position which McDowell denigrates but which he seems liable to succumb to. Friedman claims that McDowell's own position is much closer to idealism and Coherentism than he intends. This is, according to Friedman, the result of his misleading interpretation of the Kantian conception of understanding and its relation to post-Kantian German idealism. McDowell, however, claims to be a direct realist and a persuasive account which grounds thinking in an external world is essential for the credibility of his position.

If we follow McDowell and accept the fact that our thinking *is* grounded in a world which is external to thought, and that this follows as a result of a number of 'insights' which he draws from Kant and Hegel, another issue arises concerning self consciousness and the space of reasons. The problem is formulated by Novalis who states: "Can I look for a schema for myself if I am that which schematises?"[80] Bowie formulates this problem in McDowellian terms as he asks: "How does the space of reasons account for itself? How is it that my experiences can be known as *my* experiences, given that there can ... be nothing in the object world that can tell me this?"[81]

Hegelian influence is evident in McDowell's response, namely, that self-consciousness emerges along with objectivity when one is initiated into the space of reasons which includes learning the language of a community. Bowie links this concept to the Heideggerian notion of "being in the world" or of a "self-reflection in the other". This type of self-recognition is also encountered, Bowie notes, in Hegel, and he states:

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79 *Ibid.*, p. 552, emphasis added.

80 *Ibid.*, p. 538. Bowie cites Novalis, *Band 2 Das philosophisch-theoretische Werk*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mähl (Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1978) p. 162.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 539.

> In this model [Heidegger's model of 'self-reflection in the other'] recognition of a world-object occurs when the subject's receptivity encounters the resistance of something in the world which can, via schematism, be seen *as* something and thus can become part of the space of reasons by being linked to concepts of other things in judgements. This encounter also reveals the subject to itself as subject via its reflexive difference from the world, thus via the 'world's making an appearance' to it.[82]

Bowie notes that Kant's transcendental deduction can be crudely regarded as "the attempt of that which schematises to find a schema for itself."[83] According to Bowie, Kant made the mistake of *assuming* the *necessity* of experience in the sense that "there MUST BE *experience*" or, taking Kant's own words which inspired Fichte's discussion on the reflexivity of the self, "*I think* that must *be able* to accompany all my experiences."[84] Bowie formulates the problem in contemporary language: "The self-ascription of experience thus depends upon an immediate aspect of 'mind' which cannot be said to *emerge* along with the awareness of objectivity via insertion into the space of reasons, because it must always already be in place for the insertion to be possible at all."[85]

The question which this discussion raises for McDowell is whether the conceptual can really be 'unbounded' if, following Bowie and the Romantics, at least one of its undeniable conditions of possibility *cannot be articulated in a concept*? Following in the steps of Romantic philosophy, Bowie draws out the problems that accompany a notion of self-consciousness such as that of McDowell. He states: "However much we may learn about ourselves and the world by insertion into the space of reasons, this does not account for the aspect of self-consciousness which cannot come about via reflexive self-knowledge and which is the prior condition of 'objective' synthesised knowledge and self-knowledge."[86]

These remarks lead to the distinction between the knowable which is defined as "something determinate available in receptivity which could be identified via a concept" and that which "really makes knowledge possible".[87] This point draws

82 *Ibid.*, p. 539.
83 *Ibid.*, p. 539.
84 *Ibid.*, p. 539. Bowie quotes Kant, *Critique*, B 132.
85 *Ibid.*, p. 540.
86 *Ibid.*, p. 543.
87 *Ibid.*, p. 554.

attention to a lacuna in the thought of both McDowell and Kant – spontaneity can only be 'felt' because *it is not something knowable.* Therefore, McDowell's contention, following Kant, that spontaneity, which becomes accessible through the subject's interaction with the world, must be the source of the organising concepts of knowledge, cannot be sustained.

Habermas provides a link which can be traced to Hegel from the problem of self consciousness through grounding thoughts in the world and on to social elements. Although Habermas does not specifically tackle the issues which McDowell raises, his comments on Hegel reflect social aspects which are, I believe, among the effects of Hegel's thought which can be traced in McDowell's concerns.

Habermas claims that self awareness emerges from encounters with others and the mentalist concept of a bounded, self-contained subjectivity is superseded by a position which exhibits similarities to McDowell's position. Habermas maintains that Hegel criticised and transcended this mentalist framework which is "the real watershed separating Kant and Fichte from Hegel and those who followed in his footsteps of detranscendentalization."[88] Habermas describes Hegel as conceiving a subject that is "always already linked to the world" and that "finds itself already connected with an environment and functioning as part of it."[89] There is, therefore, *no need to bridge any gap between the thinking subject and the external world*, a claim which McDowell would readily endorse.

Habermas attributes a great deal of importance to the social aspects in Hegel's philosophy, as well as to the fact that, in spite of his acceptance of transcendental elements, Hegel was instrumental in setting the stage for post-Hegelian philosophy which led to the detranscendentalisation of the knowing subject. He states:

> Hegel was the first to put the transcendental subject back into context and to situate reason in social space and historical time. Humboldt, Peirce, Dilthey, Dewey,

88 Jürgen Habermas, 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again – The Move Towards Detranscendentalization,' pp. 129 – 57, *European Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 7, Number 2, August 1999, p. 129.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

> Cassirer, and Heidegger are among those post-Kantian philosophers who were, or, if we think of Wittgenstein, could have been influenced by Hegel in their attempts to treat language, practice and historical forms of life as dimensions of the symbolic embodiment of reason. In his Jena period, Hegel did in fact introduce language, work and symbolic interaction as media through which the human mind is formed and transformed.[90]

Habermas could easily add McDowell to his list of post-Kantian philosophers as the above quotation is redolent with issues closely linked to McDowell's concept of second nature and *Bildung*, which may possibly have been influenced by Hegel and which could be linked to McDowell's claim that the Kantian 'insight' should be viewed "in the context of a naturalism of second nature." (MW 110)

Habermas notes that Hegel's conception of language is crucial in this regard. Hegel makes use of language to *destroy the myth of the given* as it is through language that the conceptual space of possible encounters with anything in the world is articulated.[91] It is through language that human perception is organised, and it is not possible to perceive anything without integrating it into a linguistic (conceptual) network. Once again, Habermas's views on Hegel are applicable to McDowell's views on the manner in which human beings are initiated into language and culture.

Brandom's views on Hegel exhibit a great deal of similarity to those of Habermas. Brandom maintains that "One of Hegel's most basic ideas is that normative statuses such as being committed and being responsible – and so knowledge and agency – must be understood as *social* achievements."[92] The importance of commitments and of normativity is related, according to Brandom, to Hegel's concept of a self which is taken over from Kant. To treat something as a self is to treat it "as the subject of *commitments*, as something that can be *responsible* – hence as a potential knower and agent."[93] Brandom links this to Hegel's claim that "all transcendental constitution is social institution" which is opposed to the

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[90] Habermas, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

[91] *Ibid.*, p. 139.

[92] Robert B. Brandom, 'Some Pragmatist Themes in Hegel's Idealism: Negotiation and Administration in Hegel's Account of the Structure and Content of Conceptual Norms,' pp. 164 – 89, *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, Number 2, August 1999, p. 169.

[93] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

Kantian view which appeals to "something beyond or behind our empirical activity."[94]

The view which emerges is similar to the one which Habermas attributed to Hegel. Brandom states: "Having a normative status in this sense is an essentially social achievement, in which both the individual self and the community must participate. And both the self and the community achieve their status as such only as the result of successful reciprocal recognition."[95]

The Hegelian concept of *Geist* is linked to these aspects and Brandom remarks that Hegelian Spirit should be understood as a self. It is not, however, the individual particular human self which is to be associated with *Geist*, but rather, the *self-conscious* self with *social and communitarian commitments.* Brandom reverts to the concept of common law as an analogy with the institution, administration and enforcement of norms. He states: "What the norm *really* is ... is the product of recognitive *negotiation* between these two poles of reciprocal authority (what the content is *for* the past judges and what it is *for* the present one)."[96]

The Implications of Historical Influence on McDowell

At this stage one is tempted to question whether one should attribute Kantian and Hegelian influence to McDowell or whether the influence of secondary sources such as Strawson, Pippin or Brandom are more powerful than the original texts. Commentaries by Pippin, Sedgwick, Bowie, Friedman and Habermas have thrown more light on these issues and conflicting opinions have emerged. There is no doubt that McDowell is making use of historical sources in an attempt to diagnose and uncover the root of the anxieties which arise as a result of our present position concerning thinking and the world. He makes use of quietism to propose his own alternative "picture" in order to "exorcise" the residual influence of philosophical

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94 *Ibid.*, p. 169.
95 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
96 *Ibid.*, p. 181.

positions from the past and replace them with an alternative "picture" which is not (or should not be) susceptible to the pitfalls of the previously held positions.

McDowell is well aware of a number of implications which emerge as a result of his use of historical influences such as Kant and Hegel. One implication concerns the Hegelian reconciliation of the Kantian dichotomy of intuitions and concepts. If all our knowledge is determined by the subjectivity of our concepts, then the distinction between normativity and nature is overcome. Subjectivity implies emphasis on the normativity of experience and knowledge, as well as emphasis on rationality. Intuitions, according to this view, provide no independent linkage to an external world, but are subsumed under the realm of the conceptual. McDowell is aware of this and, following Sellars, states that "a normative context is necessary for the idea of being in touch with the world at all, whether knowledgeably or not." (MW *xiv*) Echoing the Hegelian emphasis on subjectivity he further maintains that conceptual capacities, which belong to the *sui generis* logical space of reasons, operate not only in judgements, but also "in the transactions in nature that are constituted by the world's impacts on the receptive capacities of a suitable subject; that is, one who possesses the relevant concepts." (MW *xx*)

This reflects the influence of the Hegelian conception of knowledge as subjective. McDowell extends the conceptual sphere to incorporate not only the "logical space of reasons" but also the external world which, in his view, plays an important role as it is endowed with power to impact on a subject's receptive capacities. McDowell thus follows the Hegelian completion of the Kantian project while still recognising the valuable contribution of sensibility where perceptual experience is concerned, without which he would not be in a position to retain his views on direct realism. This is in line with his recognition of Kant's insistence "that intuitions are indispensable if thought is to be contentful at all."[97] Kant's own ideas are clear in this regard as he states:

> Our knowledge springs from two fundamental sources of the mind; the first is the capacity of receiving representations (receptivity for impressions), the second is the

[97] McDowell, 'The Woodbridge Lectures 1997,' p. 463.

> power of knowing an object through these representations (spontaneity ... of concepts). Through the first an object is *given* to us; through the second the object is *thought* .... Intuition and concepts constitute, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts, can yield knowledge.[98]

McDowell appears to agree with Kant in this regard, although he prefers to extend Kant to suit his own purposes. Thus, if one adds to this picture the Hegelian conception of knowledge as subjective together with a view of understanding and sensibility functioning in cooperation, one is lead towards McDowell's view of the unboundedness of the conceptual together with his view that we have unmediated contact with the world.

It is questionable, however, whether these views can be consistently maintained, that is, whether McDowell's view of the unboundedness of the conceptual can be reconciled with his view that we have unmediated contact with the world. He appears to be aware of this difficulty and attempts to rebut accusations of idealism as he states:

> Objects come into view for us in actualizations of conceptual capacities in *sensory* consciousness, and Kant perfectly naturally connects sensibility with receptivity. If we hold firm to that, we can see that the presence of conceptual capacities in the picture does not imply "idealism" .... If we conceive subjects as receptive with respect to objects, then, whatever else we suppose to be true of such subjects, it cannot undermine our entitlement to the thought that the objects stand over against them, independently there for them.[99]

This statement is a clear expression of McDowell's direct realism which, in turn, is dependent on the role which sensibility plays in perception and which rejects the Kantian transcendental distinction between things-in-themselves and appearances. It is interesting to note both a contrast and similarities in the views of Kant, Hegel and McDowell. All three philosophers would like to bring peace to philosophy and satisfy the demand for a picture which grounds thinking with an external reality. The disparity between the different routes each philosopher chooses to take in order to achieve a common end is striking, these being, respectively, the transcendental distinction, absolute idealism and direct realism via quietism.

[98] Kant, *Critique*, A50/B74.

[99] McDowell, *op. cit.*, p. 470.

On his part, McDowell has analysed the historical influences which, in his view, provide 'insights' into the manner the issues could be 'dissolved'. He then moves on to develop a situation where he can justify his conclusions in this regard. His claim that the Kantian notion of things-in-themselves is meaningless results in the dissolving of the dualism between appearances and things-in-themselves. Once this step has been accomplished, McDowell stresses the important role which receptivity plays in perception in order to justify his view that we directly experience the external world.

It is interesting to note the influence of the views of Sellars regarding Kant on McDowell, although this is acknowledged in a later publication where McDowell states:

> I do not think it is far-fetched to attribute to Sellars a belief on the following lines: no one has come closer than Kant to showing us how to find intentionality unproblematic, and there is no better way for us to find intentionality unproblematic than by seeing what Kant was driving at. This means rethinking his thought for ourselves and, if necessary, correcting him at points where we think we see more clearly than he did what he should have been doing.[100]

The issue which McDowell is referring to is central to an analysis of his use of both Kant and Sellars. He is moving towards the idea that the space of reasons is *not* alien to nature, as McDowell explicitly states that "I invoked second nature as a corrective to the tendency to suppose that the very idea of responsiveness to reasons must belong outside the realm of what is natural, if we accept what figures in Sellars as the irreducibility of the logical space of reasons to the logical space in which the natural sciences function."[101] This implies that the Kantian picture of spontaneity and receptivity cooperating in experience lead McDowell to the view that "the idea of sensory experience can be at one and the same time both the idea of something that can stand in justificatory relations to world views, and an idea that, as it stands, belongs in the logical space in which nomothetic science moves."[102] This is the consequence of the insight which McDowell claims to have

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100 McDowell, 'The Woodbridge Lectures 1997,' p. 431.

101 John McDowell, 'Comment on Hans-Peter Krüger's Paper', pp. 120 – 25, *Philosophical Explorations*, Vol. 1 (2), May 1998, p. 124.

102 *Ibid*., p. 121.

discovered in Kant which plays a key role in his reconciliation of the dichotomy of reason and nature.

McDowell gives a great deal of importance to the historical tradition which provides the insights which give rise to his alternative picture. If it were not for such insights, we would be left in a state of philosophical anxiety – but McDowell diagnoses the issues which are at stake and attempts to exorcise them in a quietist manner. The accuracy of his interpretation of various primary and secondary sources is, however, debateable, as it is at times framed in terms which suit his own particular purposes. His ultimate aim, which is to overcome particular residual dualisms, is commendable as is his explicit indebtedness to and admiration of philosophers such as Kant and Hegel.

This chapter has analysed the implications of McDowell's use of historical influences that are related either directly or indirectly to McDowell's re-interpretation of a Hegelian completion of Kant. The purpose of this chapter has been to analyse and to assess the implications of McDowell's interpretation of a Hegelian completion of Kant and to consider the difference it would make if McDowell's interpretation proves to be flawed.

It can now be seen that McDowell takes a number of liberties in his interpretation of a Hegelian completion of Kant which expose him to criticism of the very kind that he directs at viewpoints which he explicitly opposes such as coherentism and idealism. If unrestrained credibility is, therefore, attributed to McDowell's historical sources, his viewpoint can be seen to be flawed. On the other hand, one could adopt a similar approach to that which McDowell and Strawson adopt in their interpretation of Kant and discuss McDowell's views on their own merits, while ignoring his analysis, indebtedness and acknowledgement of historical sources. Whether this tactic will resolve the elements of dissonance which have arisen in McDowell's narrative is, however, debateable.

It is important at this stage to spell out the main implications which emerge from the above analysis for McDowell's position. First of all, McDowell's quietism permits him to remain silent when particular questions are asked, therefore he

shrugs his shoulders at questions such as "What is the realm of reasons?" This creates a number of difficulties where his use of Kant and Hegel is concerned as although he acknowledges their influence, he gives very sparse details as to exactly how this influence affects his position, in particular where Hegel is concerned.

McDowell's insistence on the cooperation of sensibility and understanding has an important implication for his position as a minimal realist. If he were to reject the distinct (yet cooperative) contribution of sensibility where experience is concerned, it would follow that he would not be in a position to claim that he is a minimal empiricist. Moreover, McDowell's use of the notion of cooperation between sensibility and understanding leads to one of his 'insights' – receptivity (or sensibility) already has conceptual content as its contribution in perception is *not separable* from that of spontaneity (or understanding).

One of the most serious implications of McDowell's use of historical sources concerns his analysis of Kant's intentions for the distinction between phenomena and noumena. McDowell insists that Kant's reasons for this move concern morality and religion. It is rather surprising that he does not appear to consider what were possibly Kant's *real* motives. If our cognition is to be constrained by the forms of sensibility, it then follows that the objects we perceive exhibit these forms of sensibility (space and time). This raises a number of issues, the main one being that although McDowell thinks of cognition as having a conceptual structure, in that seeing is "seeing-as", yet he maintains that *everything* is conceptual. Therefore, objects which exist independently of thought already appear to be somehow imbued with conceptual elements, even though he does not elaborate how this is possible. In my view, McDowell looks upon Kant's forms of sensibility in an analogous manner to the way in which he sees the conceptual as being unbounded in his own picture. In other words, once the conceptual is unbounded, it follows that our cognition is restrained by the conceptual which structures our perceptual experience. However, if objects are imbued with conceptual properties, then cognition is *not* of things existing independently of our thought. The consequence is that McDowell's position is liable to accusations of idealism.

However, the key implication to be drawn from the foregoing analysis is the insight which McDowell claims to have discovered through Kant which he attempts to uncover in order to draw our attention to the unsatisfactory manner in which we view the dichotomy of reason and nature. On the one hand, McDowell agrees with Sellars' division of logical spaces as he states: "I think Sellars is right to separate the logical space of reasons from the logical space in which things are made intelligible (explained) by showing how they can be subsumed under natural laws."[103] This implies the retention of a *sui generis* status for the logical space of reasons. It is important to note that McDowell does not want to fall prey to the naturalistic fallacy. This is achieved by his disagreeing with Sellars regarding the nomenclature for the opposite of the logical space of reasons, that is, the logical space of nature. The fine distinction which McDowell makes is between the logical space of nature and the sphere of natural law. He explicitly states that "The logical space of subsumption under natural law (and whatever other modes of explanation, as opposed to understanding, belong with that) is not to be equated with the logical space of nature."[104] It therefore follows that the cooperation of sensibility and understanding allow for understanding to be conceived as natural, but not as falling under the ambit of the law of nature, therefore retaining justificatory relations to a world which is external to thought while at the same time retaining its special *sui generis* status. The Kantian insight therefore leads McDowell to a putative resolution of the dichotomy between reason and nature.

McDowell is concerned with dissolving a number of dualisms and this could possibly be interpreted as achieving some form of Hegelian synthesis as a result of a dialectical move. Most of the dualisms he discusses, including that of sensibility and understanding, involve a move from a thesis, to an anti-thesis, through to a synthesis. If this interpretation were to be taken further, one would see that the thesis could involve positions such as the Given, sensibility and nature, whereas the anti-thesis could be coherentism, understanding and reason. The last move in McDowell's dialectic involves his postulation of second nature which putatively

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[103] John McDowell, 'Comment on Hans-Peter Krüger's Paper', p. 121.
[104] *Ibid.*, p. 122, 2n.

dissolves *all* the previous dualisms and, in his view, presents us with a picture which provides a 'cure' or 'therapy' for our 'anxieties'.

The discussions in this chapter have brought to light a number of problems that recur in any discussion of the relationship between thinking and the world. These include McDowell's views on the unboundedness of the conceptual, which is intended to 'dissolve' the dualism of conceptual and non-conceptual content. This dichotomy is the subject of the next chapter, which will also include an analysis of the issues which the dichotomy raises.

CHAPTER THREE

Can we do without Non-Conceptual Content?

The Conceptual Content of Perceptual Experience

> There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. For how should our faculty of knowledge be awakened into action did not objects affecting our senses ... work up the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience? ....
>
> But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge ... supplies from itself
>
> Kant[1]

A close reading of the two lectures[2] which McDowell dedicates to conceptual content in *Mind and World* demonstrates the manner in which his views on this subject are intricately linked to all the other topics he deals with. These include the Kantian dichotomy of understanding and sensibility, the grounding of thought in an external reality and the susceptibility of philosophical positions to adhere to either coherentism or the Myth of the Given.

The manner in which McDowell conceives of experience plays an important role in this regard, in particular since experience is conceived as conceptual and as pertaining to the realm of spontaneity. Non-conceptual content is completely

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1 Kant, *Critique*, B1.

2 As I mentioned previously, *Mind and World* is presented in lecture format. Lecture II is entitled 'The Unboundedness of the Conceptual' and Lecture III is entitled 'Non-conceptual content.' McDowell also dedicates Part II the 'Afterword', which he entitles 'Postscript to Lecture III,' to a discussion on conceptual and nonconceptual content.

eliminated from McDowell's picture and the main reason behind this move appears to be linked to his adamant rejection of anything which may be remotely connected to acceptance of elements of the Given. The position he retains, where the content of perceptual experience[3] is conceptual, and where the conceptual is unbounded, initially appears to lean towards coherentism. McDowell is well aware of this danger and his account of the content of perceptual experience maintains *both* that the conceptual is unbounded *and* that thought is rationally grounded in a reality which is distinct from itself.

Experiences are, for McDowell, "impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content." (MW 47) This is linked to McDowell's direct realism as although he states that "in experience the world exerts a rational influence on our thinking" (MW 34), yet "it is only because experience involves capacities belonging to spontaneity that we can understand experience as awareness, or apparent awareness, of aspects of the world at all." (MW 48)

This chapter will first discuss McDowell's particular conception of perceptual experience, the content of which is portrayed as conceptual. This will be followed by an analysis of the debate concerning conceptual and non-conceptual content. McDowell places a great deal of emphasis on his picture of the conceptual as unbounded, as opposed to philosophers such as Evans who do not conceive of experience as conceptual, with the consequence that their view of non-human animals is rather different to that which McDowell portrays in *Mind and World*. These views will be discussed, and a confirmation of McDowell's position concerning the unboundedness of the conceptual will conclude this chapter.

McDowell's claims concerning the conceptual content of perceptual experience are intimately linked to his interpretation of the Kantian dictum, "Thoughts

[3] McDowell has been criticised by Richard Rorty for dealing with perceptual experience as though it were a paradigm for experience in general. However, his views on perceptual experience cannot always be generalised to all cases of experience. In this regard, his use of the word 'experience' should generally be taken to mean 'perceptual experience'. See, for example, Richard Rorty, 'The Very Idea of Human Answerability to the World: John McDowell's Version of Empiricism,' pp. 138 – 152, in Rorty's *Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers, Volume 3*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[4] As we have seen in the previous chapter, McDowell considers Kant's transcendental framework unsatisfactory as it presents a picture of things in themselves which our perceptual capacities are incapable of accessing. McDowell's main objection in this regard is that, from a transcendental viewpoint, the world which is external to thought is unknowable. Things are, however, different from an empirical viewpoint, and McDowell suggests that the way out of the oscillation between coherentism and the Myth of the Given is "to conceive empirical knowledge as a co-operation of sensibility and understanding, as Kant does." (MW 47) McDowell further states that we must conceive this co-operation in a quite particular way: we must insist that the understanding is already inextricably implicated in deliverances of sensibility themselves." (MW 47) This leads to a conception of experience as conceptual and to the claim that "we need to appeal to conceptual capacities in order to make it intelligible that experience is not blind," (MW 60) which McDowell takes to be a consequence of the Kantian "insight". Experience is, in his view, intricately linked to the Kantian conception of understanding, or the Sellarsian 'realm of reasons', which McDowell takes to be the realm of the conceptual.

McDowell therefore takes the fact that experience is already conceptual to be an upshot of Kantian thought, and he argues that the space of reasons extends all the way out to experience itself. This does not, however, necessarily follow, as the Kantian thought can be interpreted as meaning that since experience is irreducibly conceptual, it cannot provide direct contact with the world. As a self-proclaimed direct realist, McDowell wants to maintain both that experience is conceptual *and* that experience provides us with direct contact with a world that is external to thought. His arguments in this regard are based on his view, following Sellars, that "if we conceive experience as made up of impressions, on these principles it cannot serve as a tribunal, something to which empirical thinking is answerable." (MW xv) This is because an impression is conceived as "the idea of a transaction in nature." (MW xv) McDowell is concerned with retaining the idea of experience as the idea of something natural, and yet maintaining that experience

[4] Kant, *Critique*, A51/B75.

belongs to the logical space of reasons. This is brought about as a result of his redefinition of the dichotomy of logical spaces whereby he extends the 'natural' beyond that which it is normally conceived to be, that is, the realm in which "the natural-scientific kind of intelligibility is brought to light." (MW xix)

Experience is a concept which is central to any discussion of mind and world, and McDowell's particular conception of perceptual experience plays a key role in *Mind and World*. There is, however, a great deal of debate on whether the content of experience is composed of both nonconceptual and conceptual content or whether it is composed only of the latter, as McDowell claims it to be. The link which experience forges between sensibility and understanding plays an important role in this regard, as well as the mediating role which experience plays in McDowell's conception of mind and world.

As is usual in philosophy, however, things are never as simple as they initially appear to be. The concept of experience has been discussed by a number of philosophers and a number of difficulties arise as soon as one attempts to examine the subject of experience from a philosophical perspective. The questions which a philosophical investigation of experience gives rise to include: What is experience? What role does experience play in our contact with the world? Is experience epistemologically significant? Do experiences carry normative force? Does experience belong to the realm of law or to the space of reasons? Is the content of experience conceptual? If experience has normative force and conceptual content, as McDowell makes it out to be, how does it connect with the world which is governed by causal order?

These questions are treated in different ways by a number of philosophers. The discussions on the subject range from one end of the scale to the other opposite end, that is, from views such as that of McDowell which treat experience as rational and imbued with conceptual content, to others which treat experience as being reducible to brain processes. On his part, McDowell does not tackle the issue of how experience could be conceived *both* as a product of internal brain function *and* how it can reach out to the world.

McDowell's position on perceptual experience is developed in conjunction with his ideas concerning sensibility and understanding, or "the sensory and the conceptual", which "combine so as to provide for the intentionality of perceptual experience, and ... to provide for how perceptual experience figures in the acquisition of a knowledgeable view of the world."[5]

McDowell feels it is extremely important to link conceptual activity, or the understanding, with "sensory consciousness", as he states:

> We can trace some characteristic concerns of modern philosophy to a thought on these lines: if we cannot see conceptual activity as part of a package that includes sensory consciousness of the objective, then the very idea of conceptual activity – which must have objective purport in order to be recognizable as conceptual activity at all – becomes mysterious.[6]

This is a consequence of his interpretation of the Kantian dictum where understanding and sensibility are intricately intertwined, and it is also linked to his views on experience as he states: "My point about perceptual experiences is that they must *provide* rational credentials, not that they must have them. Perceptual experiences do not purport to report facts." [7] In other words, "experience is simply the way in which observational thinking is directly rationally responsive to facts." [8] Crediting experiences with rational relations to judgement and belief only comes about, according to McDowell, "if we take it that spontaneity is already implicated in receptivity; that is, only if we take it that experiences have conceptual content." (MW 162)

Experience does not only provide rational credentials which link spontaneity and receptivity and its function is not merely to rationally respond to facts. Its intimate connection to spontaneity enables it to provide constraint for thinking in a world that is external to thought *and* it enables creatures with the capacity of spontaneity to exercise the freedom and autonomy that pertain to our rationality.

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5 John McDowell, 'The Woodbridge Lectures 1997,' p. 437.

6 John McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' pp. 403 – 32, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, June 1998, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, p. 407.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 406.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 406.

McDowell claims that "experiences can intelligibly stand in rational relations to our exercises of the freedom that is implicit in the idea of spontaneity. (MW 24)

McDowell's account of human experience consists of a serious attempt to exorcise the anxieties of traditional epistemology by showing how it is intellectually respectable to ignore sceptical questions rather than answer them. A particular question which, he specifically states, he does *not* allow to be asked concerning the conceptual content of perceptual experience is: What are conceptual capacities exercised on? His reply involves the claim that "in judgements of experience, conceptual capacities are not exercised on non-conceptual deliverances of sensibility" (MW 39) because these capacities are "already operative in the deliverances of sensibility itself." (MW 39) The question which he does allow to be asked concerns what the conceptual contents that are passively received in experience bear on. McDowell's reply to this question claims to overcome accusations of idealism. He states:

> But in disallowing the question what those conceptual capacities are exercised on, I do not disallow the question what the conceptual contents that are passively received in experience bear on, or are about. And the obvious answer, if the question is asked in that general form, is: they are about the world, as it appears or makes itself manifest to the experiencing subject, or at least seems to do so. That ought not to activate a phobia of idealism. (MW 39)

According to McDowell's direct-realist view, experience is a source of knowledge as it is anchored, through second nature, to a reality which is external to thought. Experience links the Kantian concepts of understanding and sensibility as McDowell states: "we *need* to recognize that experiences themselves are states or occurrences that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity. We *must* not suppose that spontaneity first figures only in judgements." (MW 24) There is, he maintains, no doubt that we experience the real world through our experience, since "In experience one takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge." (MW 9) That which we receive in experience already contains conceptual content, as opposed to non-conceptual impressions. We can take this experience to be constitutive of the way things really are, that is, as an aspect of the layout of reality.

Experience is, according to McDowell, passive, and our control over experience is rather limited. Although we can situate ourselves in a particular location, we can focus our attention in a particular direction and we can choose to use one or more of our senses, such as sight, touch and taste, yet, that which is actually experienced is totally beyond our control. This implies, for example, that I can choose to go for a walk along the river bank, but there are limits on my control over what sort of experience I will have. I may anticipate a pleasant experience, and I may decide to direct my attention in a particular direction rather than another, but my actual experience would be beyond my control due to the passivity of experience. I may be peacefully enjoying the solitude and peace and quiet of a riverside walk, and suddenly come across children playing hide and seek or a dog barking loudly while being exercised. I may be on the look out for squirrels and notice a sudden movement, expect it to be a squirrel and, on directing my attention, discover it to be a fox.

This passivity presents us with content which is not always what it appears to be (such as, for example, the Müller-Lyer illusion, or the stick which appears bent when immersed in water). It is up to each individual to judge whether or not we should accept the content which is presented through experience.

Although both active and passive elements are present in any conception of experience, different authors tend to emphasise one element more than the other. While, for example, McDowell emphasises the important role which passivity and receptivity play in experience, J. M. Hinton's classic study of experience draws attention to the fact that passivity is merely associated with experience but is not a requirement for experience as, "we speak of the gratifying experience of clearing six foot two in the high jump, and of humdrum, everyday experiences too."[9]

Experiences contain conceptual content, and McDowell stretches the realm of the conceptual (which for him is 'unbounded') right out to the world. This has particular implications as, he states:

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[9] J. M. Hinton, *Experiences*, Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1973, p. 8. McDowell does not discuss such types of experience in *Mind and World.*

> Quite generally, the capacities that are drawn on in experience are recognisable as conceptual only against the background of the fact that someone who has them is responsive to rational relations, which link the contents of judgements of experience with other judgeable contents. These linkages give the concepts their place as elements in possible views of the world. (MW 11-12)

The fact that McDowell equips experiences with conceptual content allows them to play a role in justification as well as in judgement. But experience also entails openness to the layout of reality due to the fact that it involves passivity. It is through experience that "how things anyway are becomes available to exert the required rational control, originating outside one's thinking, on one's exercises of spontaneity." (MW 25-6) Human beings experience, visually, for example, the way things are in the world. This is what McDowell calls "receptivity in operation" (MW 25) which, he claims, includes the conceptual content of an experience. McDowell therefore maintains that experience provides the friction which is required to stop the 'oscillation' between coherentism and the Myth of the Given. The link between thinking and reality is forged, in his view, through 'experience' which "enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks." (MW 26)

The emphasis which McDowell places on the rational elements of experience could, however, expose him to criticism that his view is too intellectual and that he places excessive emphasis on rationality. A crucial part of experience is its conceptual content by means of which it belongs to the space of reasons and, in this regard, McDowell states:

> we could not recognize capacities operative in experience as conceptual at all were it not for the way they are integrated into a rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one's thinking to the deliverances of experience. That is what a repertoire of empirical concepts is. The integration serves to place even the most immediate judgements of experience as possible elements in a world-view. (MW 29)

McDowell expands on this point as he states:

> It is essential to the picture I am recommending that experience has its content by virtue of the drawing into operation, in sensibility, of capacities that are genuinely elements in a faculty of spontaneity. The very same capacities must also be able to be exercised in judgements, and that requires them to be rationally linked into

> a whole system of concepts and conceptions within which their possessor engages in a continuing activity of adjusting her thinking to experience. (MW 47-48)

This position provides an interesting contrast to Heidegger's practical view of experience which is opposed to intellectual or rational elements and which is an essential component of Heidegger's conception of our "being-in-the-world". In Heidegger's position, experience is a vehicle by means of which we are engaged with things in the world in a practical manner. In my view, if McDowell were to borrow some elements from Heidegger and incorporate them into the picture he presents, his final position could be greatly improved. This also applies to McDowell's direct realism which, in my view, could also benefit from the incorporation of Heideggerian elements as I shall argue in Chapter Six. Very few philosophers take on this Heideggerian attitude with regard to the link between experience and the objects of experience and some actually question the relevance of incorporating objects in the world into a philosophical account of experience, except for reference to the activity in the brain which occurs when we experience something. In this regard, it is maintained that experience could come about solely from activity in the brain, in which case objects in the world would be considered as being potentially redundant for experience. McDowell's view does not, however, tackle these problematic aspects but concerns itself mainly with exploring how and why we should consider experience to be conceptual and with providing a picture in which the conceptual content of experience is grounded in a world which is external to thought.

Experience, in McDowell's view, involves the passive receptivity of conceptual content which is "seamlessly integrated into a conceptual repertoire." It is this so-called "seamless integration" that "makes it possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, or at least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience." (MW 31) In a nutshell, "Experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content." (MW 46)

McDowell's view of experience as conceptual which, in turn, is "unbounded", has generated a great deal of controversy. To some extent, it appears to be a reaction

to rectify the putative 'shortcomings' of Gareth Evans who conceives experience as containing non-conceptual elements and as being directly linked to "informational states" which are acquired through perception. Evans claims that "we may regard a perceptual experience as an informational state of the subject: it has a certain *content* – the world is represented in a certain way."[10] It is only when a subject moves from a perceptual experience to a judgement of the world that basic conceptual skills are exercised.[11]

Although McDowell's admiration for Evans is evident in *Mind and World*, the fact that the latter's conception of experience contains non-conceptual content commits him to some form of advocation of the Given, which creates an unnecessary interface between mind and world. It is experience, in which conceptual capacities are already in play, that is, experience that things are thus and so, that provides, in McDowell's view, a genuinely rational constraint on empirical thinking. This conception of experience, moreover, provides the friction by means of which we can stop "oscillating" between coherentism and the Myth of the Given.

McDowell's main concern is the gap which philosophy has created between mind and world, and his conception of experience as both conceptual and passive is an attempt to bridge this gap. His view of experience as passive, yet containing conceptual content, reflects his concern with providing grounding for thoughts in the external world and with demonstrating the intimate link between understanding and sensibility.

What exactly is the problem that emerges from McDowell's view of perceptual experience as being composed solely of conceptual content? Before discussing McDowell's views in more detail, I shall digress briefly in order to discuss the views of Peacocke and Evans who have exerted some influence on McDowell and whose ideas he attempts to deal with in *Mind and World.* I shall also include the views of Tim Crane in his essay, 'The nonconceptual content of experience' in the

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10 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, edited by John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 226.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 227.

next section in order to analyse problems which arise concerning the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content and its relation to perceptual experience.

The Problem of Conceptual and Non-conceptual Content

The content of a great deal of our experience consists of a rich variety of colours, sounds, smells, movements and other such detail. I can look out of my window and see leaves in various autumnal colours being blown off trees, twirling and dancing in the breeze and forming patterns on the ground. I can walk along the high street on a Saturday morning and watch the market vendors with their colourful fruit, vegetables and other items for sale and the crowds of people in their bright colourful clothes, I can hear the buzz of conversations with the occasional loud shriek of the vendors peddling their wares, I can smell a variety of odours ranging from women's perfume to sizzling burgers. I can direct my attention when and if I decide to do so by, for example, focussing on the particular object, noise or odour which surrounds me, or I can decide to be passive and let myself be affected with anything that may be unusual, striking or outstanding.

Describing the content of experience, as I have just done, involves making use of concepts such as trees, leaves, fruit, vegetables, people, clothes, perfume and burgers. Can concepts, however, adequately capture the fine-grained detail of my actual experience including all the complexity of shapes, colours, movements, sounds and smells?

Philosophical discussions on the subject of experience often focus on the conceptual content of thought. These discussions reveal a contrast between views of the conceptual which are dualistic, and those which are not. Dualistic conceptions, such as those proposed by Evans, Peacocke and Crane, claim that the content of experience is itself composed of two elements, the conceptual and the nonconceptual. On the other hand, McDowell, Sellars and Brandom explicitly deny the existence of nonconceptual elements.

The philosophical problem which arises is whether the content of our experience is dualistic in nature, consisting of conceptual content, which can be adequately described, memorised and, if necessary, recognised at a later date in time, or whether it also consists of nonconceptual elements, incorporating the richness and fine-grained detail of that which we actually experience before it is put into language. Tim Crane formulates the problem as follows:

> Consider, for example, the experience of colours. As I look outside my window, I see an old brick wall and a shabby brown fence. Their surfaces have many different colours - shades of brown, grey and red. I can, at this moment, distinguish all these colours that my experience offers me, and they are *presented* or *represented* to me as different. But is it right to say that I must have *concepts* of them in order for my experience to be like this? It is not obvious that I am able to classify all these colours - for instance, I am not confident that my experience gives me anything that will enable me to identify them if I saw them again. Whatever 'concept' means, it just seems too much to ask that I have concepts of all these shades of colour in order to perceive them.[12]

A possible reply to Crane's problem could be Sedivy's proposal that it is only from a theoretical perspective that "we can posit that there are nonconceptual contents that perform an explanatory role".[13] Standard views, including those of Peacocke, claim that nonconceptual contents "are posited to meet a variety of *theoretical and explanatory* needs concerning concepts and conceptual mental contents which *are* individuated in terms of having to do with the mind," even though the very idea of nonconceptual content implies that there are "mental contents at the level of the experiencing person that are individuated independently of 'anything to do with the mind'."[14] Dangers which are similar to those posed by accounts that revert to the Myth of the Given, however, may arise when nonconceptual content is acknowledged as part of perceptual experience, as, according to Brandom, concepts could then be regarded as "*epistemological intermediaries.*"[15]

[12] Tim Crane, 'Introduction,' *The Contents of Experience: Essays on Perception*, Ed. Tim Crane, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 9.

[13] Sonia Sedivy, 'Must Conceptually Informed Perceptual Experience Involve Non-Conceptual Content?' pp. 413 – 31, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy,* Vol. 26, No. 3, September 1996, p. 428.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 413.

[15] Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, p. 615.

Sedivy claims that nonconceptual contents should only be postulated for theoretical purposes at a subpersonal rather than at the personal experiential level. Possession of a concept, such as the colour red, can, according to Sedivy, be explained by making use of dispositions, standard conditions, and the relationship between the way things look and the way they are. Sedivy claims that her account of perceptual experience is limited to the conceptual sphere as, she claims, "In giving such an account I do not step outside the domain of concepts and I do not utilize that which I as a thinker do not possess, because what I as a thinker possess is firmly in the space of concepts."[16]

Sedivy's claim that one does not step outside the domain of concepts exhibits similarities to the view of Brandom who claims that the origin of the dualism between conceptual and nonconceptual content can be traced back to Kant. This influence is so evident, he claims, that "[e]ssential elements of Kant's dualistic conception of concepts are still with us today."[17] Brandom interprets Kant's remark, thoughts without content are empty and intuitions without concepts are blind, as "Concepts without intuitions are empty, and intuitions without concepts are blind."[18] The normative character of human thought and behaviour is one of Brandom's main concerns, and he attempts to support his claim that "[w]hat a judgement expresses or makes explicit, its content, is conceptual all the way down."[19]

McDowell's picture of experience as an actualisation of conceptual capacities plays a key role in *Mind and World*, as does his absolute rejection of nonconceptual content as a consequence of his claim that the conceptual is unbounded. It is, therefore, interesting to analyse the main motivation which normally lies behind postulations of nonconceptual content.

Discussions on the subject of nonconceptual content generally agree that the three principal considerations for positing such content are:

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16 Sedivy, *op. cit.*, p. 429.
17 Brandom, *op. cit.*, p. 615.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 615.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 616.

(i) epistemological, in order to show that our experience contains the justificatory base for empirical thought;
(ii) phenomenological, in order to account for the finely-grained phenomenological character of perceptual experience;
(iii) explanatory-psychological, in order to account for states of the information-processing cognitive system, such as the visual system, postulated by some psychological theories, which explains experience in terms of the sub-personal representational content.[20]

With regard to the third requirement for nonconceptual content which states that nonconceptual content is posited to provide an explanation of content in terms of subpersonal functioning, such as vision, Sedivy, correctly in my view, claims that this "does not require us to posit nonconceptual contents at the experiential level".[21] In other words, postulation of nonconceptual content concerning the information-processing cognitive system is not necessary as this does not take place at the level of perceptual experience but, rather, at a "subpersonal" level. This is, therefore, a paradigm case of nonconceptual content being postulated for theoretical and not for experiential purposes.

The other two considerations raise questions for McDowell's account on the unboundedness of the conceptual, due to the fact that McDowell maintains that his position as a minimal empiricist could, at face value, appear to imply that justification for the grounding of experience could only be obtained from nonconceptual content or from some sort of epistemological intermediary. Moreover, McDowell's advocation of the use of demonstratives in order to account for the fine-grained detail of perceptual experience has, as we shall see in the next section, been criticised as it does not appear to adequately capture the phenomenological character of some perceptual experiences.

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20 These putative reasons for the postulation of nonconceptual content are listed by both Sedivy and Crane. Crane also mentions these considerations in his contribution to the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Gen.Ed. Edward Craig, Routledge, 1998) on the subject of 'Content, non-conceptual'.

21 Sedivy, *op. cit.*, p.430n.

In order to better understand these problems, the remainder of this section will discuss the views of three philosophers on the subject of conceptual and nonconceptual content in an attempt to uncover underlying tensions in McDowell's position and to point towards a potential solution which may resolve these tensions. Christopher Peacocke has written extensively in favour of the dualistic conception of experiential content, while Gareth Evans and Tim Crane both admit to the existence of both conceptual and nonconceptual content. Both sides of the dualism will be investigated in an attempt to assess whether a philosophical account of conceptual content such as McDowell's can be coherent if all talk of nonconceptual content is eliminated.

One of Peacocke's main concerns which recurs in his published work involves the idea that a concept is individuated by a correct account of its possession, the "master key" to the theory of concepts. Apart from dividing content into conceptual and nonconceptual elements, Peacocke further divides perceptual experience into two levels of nonconceptual content. These are positioned scenario content and protopropositional content.

The content of a perception can, according to Peacocke, be given by specifying a scenario, which is a set of ways of filling out the space around a perceiver with properties, such as colours, shapes, temperatures, and so on, relative to an origin (such as the centre of the chest of the human body) and a family of axes (such as up/down, left/right, forward/back). Scenario content incorporates all the fine-grained content of experience which is *not* subsumed under concepts. Peacocke demonstrates this point with an example:

> If you are looking at a range of mountains, it may be correct to say that you see some as rounded, some as jagged. But the content of your visual experience in respect of the shape of the mountains is far more specific than that description indicates. The description involving the concepts *round* and *jagged* would cover many [more] different fine-grained contents than your experience could have, contents that are discriminably different from one another.[22]

[22] Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992) pp. 67 – 8.

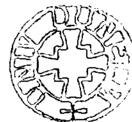
Protopropositional content, on the other hand, relates to the individuals that fill the space around a perceiver together with the properties and relations which figure in that content. Peacocke contrasts the possession conditions that individuate the concepts square and diamond to show that the possession conditions for our perceptual concepts could not be adequately specified without the postulation of protopropositional content. When a square is perceived as different from a diamond, a perceiver need not possess concepts of the relevant geometrical relations. The recognition of difference comes about, according to Peacocke, by means of protopropositional content which presents a perceiver with (nonconceptual) properties and relations which individuate, for example, shapes such as squares and diamonds.

Peacocke's views are discussed in some detail in *Mind and World*[23] where McDowell's main concern is to show that Peacocke does not establish that nonconceptual content can constitute reasons for a subject's believing something, as opposed to showing that there are rational linkages between experience and belief which, in McDowell's view, is not sufficient for justification. McDowell notes that rational relations can only be understood in conceptual terms and it therefore follows that Peacocke's view "leaves it unintelligible how an item with the non-conceptual content that P can be someone's reason for judging that Q." (MW 166)

McDowell notes that Peacocke stipulates a requirement of non-circularity on accounts of concept possession, and this leads to his (mistaken) conviction that links should be established between the conceptual realm and something outside it in order to rationally ground belief and judgement in experience. On his part, however, McDowell does not see any reason to suppose "that it is always possible to give accounts of concepts in conformity with the non-circularity requirement." (MW 169) He states:

> Avoidance of circularity requires the accounts to come at what the thinkers think only from the outside, identifying it as something that one thinks when ..., where what follows "when" is a condition external to possession of the concept. The accounts embody the claim that there is an inside view, but they are not given

[23] See, for example, 'Afterword,' Part II, in particular, pp. 162 – 70.



> from it. Peacocke is responsive to the suspicion that this externality threatens the project of capturing content. He thinks he can meet the threat by linking the external condition to the thinking not just with "when" but also with "for the reason that". However, I have urged ... that the required externality undermines the very intelligibility, here, of "for the reason that". (MW 168)

McDowell further states that non-circular accounts might be available but that these would have to be given from within the conceptual realm rather than from outside it. A non-circular account of concept possession is possible, according to McDowell, "where what follows "when and for the reason that ..." can be a mention of conceptual states whose content involves concepts other than the one of which an account is being given; that is, cases in which a concept can be captured in terms of how employments of it are rationally grounded in employments of other concepts." (MW 169)

Although an initial glance at Peacocke's ideas may give one the impression that his views on nonconceptual content are diametrically opposed to those of McDowell, a closer look at the philosophical discussion in which they have later engaged demonstrates that the distance between their views is not as great as one may initially make it out to be. Peacocke, for example, claims that "the most fundamental insights in *Mind and World* do not require the exclusion of nonconceptual content" and that "it would be possible to combine *A Study of Concepts*' treatment of nonconceptual content with a McDowell-style view: that when genuine perception occurs, the relevant states of affairs in the scene around the perceiving subject are constituents of the way, at the nonconceptual level, the experience represents the world as being."[24] This proposal could, in my view, be expanded to discriminate between perceptual content which is conceptual and which can be utilised inferentially, and the acceptance of fine-grained nonconceptual elements which are *not* utilised inferentially as they form part of a more inarticulate background which, under appropriate circumstances, could be brought to the forground. This concession would not imply acceptance of elements such as the Given which McDowell vehemently opposes.

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[24] Christopher Peacocke, 'Nonconceptual Content Defended,' pp. 381 – 88, *Philosophy and PhenomenologicalResearch*, June 1998, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, p. 388. In this paper Peackcocke raises a number of arguments against McDowell's view concerning conceptual and non-conceptual content. However, I restrict this discussion to the most relevant points which Peacocke (and McDowell in his reply) raise.

McDowell is adamant in his defence of his position which totally excludes nonconceptual content. He claims that acceptance of nonconceptual content, together with conceptual content, as Peacocke's position proposes, would result in difficulty in accommodating the Kantian insight that experience is not blind. He states:

> Experience is not blind precisely (in part) in disclosing the fine-grained ways things are, say, seen to be that are supposed to elude capture by conceptual capacities plausibly possessed by ordinary subjects of experience. How can a non-blindness secured by experience's having a content that is conceptual in part be somehow spread to parts of its content that are nonconceptual?[25]

In this regard, McDowell defends Evans' position as although the latter favours nonconceptual content which is featured as 'informational states', this content is viewed as input to reasoning, in an attempt to elude criticism that experience is blind.

Evans conceives of perceptual experience as an informational state of the subject which has a certain content through which the world is represented. The main difference between McDowell's and Evans' views concerns the latter's statement that "The informational states which a subject acquires through perception are *non-conceptual, or non-conceptualized.* ... in moving from a perceptual experience to a judgement about the world ... one will be exercising basic conceptual skills."[26]

Informational states with particular specific content are belief-independent, according to Evans, who considers such states as a "primitive notion for philosophy."[27] In this regard, he concedes that appearance may be deceptive, as in the Müller-Lyer illusion which separates appearance from belief with the result that "the subject's *being* in an informational state is independent of whether or not he believes that the state is veridical."[28] Belief is therefore distinct from "the operations of the informational system [which] are more primitive" as belief is

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25 *Ibid.*, pp. 418 – 19.
26 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p. 227.
27 *Ibid.*, p. 123.
28 *Ibid.*, p. 123.

considered to be "a far more sophisticated cognitive state: one that is connected with (and, in my opinion, defined in terms of) the notion of *judgement*, and so, also, connected with the notion of *reasons*."[29]

McDowell criticises Evans for claiming that states of the informational system are "belief independent." (MW 60)[30] Belief, according to Evans, should be reserved for cognitive states such as judgements and connected to the notion of reasons, which, in McDowell's terminology, implies spontaneity. This betrays, according to McDowell, a "blind spot" as Evans "uses the point as an argument that the content of experience cannot be conceptual." (MW 61) In this regard, McDowell states:

> The point does not tell against the conception of experience I have been recommending: a conception according to which capacities that belong to spontaneity are already operative in receptivity, rather than working on something independently supplied to them by receptivity. Evans does not argue against that conception; it simply does not figure among the possibilities he contemplates. (MW 61)

It is by means of conceptualisation or judgement, Evans claims, that we succeed in moving from one informational state, consisting of nonconceptual content, to a cognitive state which can be verified by means of the deliberate reproduction of an informational state. Evans emphasises the fact that the veracity of judgements is *not* obtained by any form of inward-looking at our own internal informational states. Judgements are based upon the unconceptualised information of our experience, but they are not *about* the informational state. He maintains that, "in a state of information on the basis of which a subject may ascribe to himself an experience as of seeing, say, a tree, what *he* observes (if anything) is only the tree, not his own informational state."[31]

Evans views the ascription of conceptual content to be possible by means of links between (nonconceptual) perceptual states and the thinking, concept-applying system. All that conscious experience requires, he claims, is that "the subject exercise some concepts - have some thoughts - and that the content of those

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29 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
30 McDowell refers to *The Varieties of Reference*, p.123.
31 Evans, *op. cit.*, p. 230.

thoughts should depend systematically upon the informational properties of the [nonconceptual] input."[32]

Evans is aware of the problems which arise when one considers the difficulty of subsuming fine-grained experience under concepts. He is, moreover, wary of accounts which claim to explain informational states in terms of dispositions to make certain judgements. In his view,

> no account of what it is to be in a non-conceptual informational state can be given in terms of dispositions to exercise concepts unless those concepts are assumed to be endlessly fine-grained; and does this make sense? Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate?[33]

Although McDowell is generally sympathetic to Evans' views, the position he has argued for concerning the unboundedness of the conceptual does not allow him to admit nonconceptual elements, not even when he considers problems that arise concerning the fineness of grain of perceptual experience, where he resorts to the use of demonstratives and to the postulation of concepts which are short-lived.

McDowell criticises Evans for separating concepts and intuitions as he notes that "Evans thinks intuition and concept, dualistically conceived, need to be shared out between experience and judgement." (MW 59) He further states:

> Evans is trying to enforce a distance between the conceptual, on the one hand, and the world's impacts on the senses, on the other. If it is assumed in advance that the role of intuition in their constitution prevents us from counting these capacities as (purely) conceptual, the distance is being presupposed, not argued for. And obviously this ground for refusing to accept that these capacities are conceptual is equally illicit for those who use the fine-grained character of experience to recommend a mixed position, in which the content of experience is partly conceptual and partly non-conceptual. (MW 59)

The view of perceptual experience that Evans proposes is evidently dualistic, consisting of both conceptual and nonconceptual elements. Although McDowell admits to having been greatly influenced by Evans, his views on conceptual and nonconceptual content exhibit some fundamental differences.

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32 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Crane's views on perceptual experience incorporate the possibility of nonconceptual content and are mainly based on a link he forges between concepts and beliefs, together with a distinction he draws between beliefs and perceptions. Crane claims that concepts form part of a holistic network of beliefs and other intentional states and that beliefs, as opposed to perceptions, are revisable on the basis of other evidence.

Crane's basic contention is that perceptions are to be clearly distinguished from beliefs as the former are composed of nonconceptual content while conceptual content is attributed to the latter. This follows as a consequence of his claim that whereas beliefs are structured, perceptions are not, and inference is only possible where beliefs are concerned. While one can conceive of perceptions which are explicitly contradictory, such as visual illusions including the 'Waterfall Illusion' or the Müller-Lyer illusion, it is not possible for one to have explicitly contradictory conscious beliefs, as beliefs form a holistic network which is coherent where truth is concerned.

The holism of beliefs implies that one cannot, for example, have the concept of cheese unless one has beliefs in which the concept is involved. However, "I can't have the concept if I only have one belief about cheese. For I can't have only one belief about cheese. Since intentional states come not in single spies but in whole battalions, then since possession of concepts needs intentional states, it needs a multiplicity of them."[34]

On the other hand, perception is not subject, in Crane's view, to the Davidsonian 'constitutive ideal of rationality'. Neither is perception subject to normativity, as Crane maintains that

> to perceive that *p*, there are no other *perceptions* that you *ought* to have. There is no 'ought' about it. You simply perceive what the world and your perceptual system let you perceive. If these systems go wrong, then they can produce states with contents - e.g. contradictions - that the belief system would not tolerate. But

[34] Tim Crane, 'The Nonconceptual Content of Experience', Chapter 6, pp. 136 – 57, *The Contents of Experience: Essays on Perception*, ed. T. Crane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 145.

> unlike the case of beliefs, failing in this way does not stop the perceptions from *having* those contents.[35]

This claim, however, raises the question of how the transition from perceptions to beliefs occurs. According to Crane, belief *conceptualises* the content of perception. He treats the transition from perception to belief in terms of "whole contents" which he claims are "of the same type". Perceptions contain nonconceptual content, according to Crane, which is causally related to belief, thus effecting a conceptualisation of the contents which are thus conveyed.[36] This explains Crane's claim that some conceptual and nonconceptual states share contents. Crane draws attention to the three examples of states that philosophers have claimed to contain nonconceptual contents. These are:

1. Perceptual experiences, such as perceiving that it is raining, or that the cat is on the mat;
2. States of the so-called 'subpersonal' computational system such as the visual system;
3. States that we may describe as carrying 'information', such as if a tree has 70 rings, then it is 70 years old.[37]

The second and third examples are easily dismissed as Crane maintains that "the holistic constraints of rationality are the only motivation for postulating concepts."[38] The visual system does not meet these constraints and, therefore, possesses no concepts. Moreover, beliefs cannot be ascribed to a tree, therefore neither can concepts which can only be possessed by a believer.[39] McDowell would, however, respond to (1) by claiming that experience is passive in its receptivity and that we are open to experience which is conceptual. He would further maintain that perceptual experience, which cannot be other than conceptual, does not involve the postulation of any epistemological intermediaries.

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35 *Ibid.*, p. 154.
36 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
38 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
39 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

McDowell's view of the Conceptual as Unbounded

McDowell's views on the content of perceptual experience centre around his claim that experience comes about as the world makes impressions on our senses, and although these impressions are products of receptivity, they already contain conceptual content. He claims that "experience has its content by virtue of the drawing into operation, in sensibility, of capacities that are genuinely elements in a faculty of spontaneity." (MW 46-47) This view is similar to that of Alva Noë who agrees with McDowell that experience is *both* concept dependent and judgement dependent as she states:

> Experience, then, is *judgement*-dependent in this sense: the ability to grasp the judgement or thought that, for example, there are deer grazing in the meadow, is a precondition of one's ability to have the corresponding experience. And because experience is in this way judgement-dependent, it is also *concept*-dependent. That is, to have an experience as of deer in the meadow, one must, among other things, know what deer are and what a meadow is.[40]

This view may initially sound rather exaggerated, but examples which justify it easily come to mind. One could imagine, for example, that it would be rather difficult, if not impossible, for an Arab bedouin, who has spent an entire life in a stark desert environment, to envisage a deer in a meadow, or to even know what a deer and a meadow are. Even though these concepts could be explained to the arab bedouin, the deer as a beige-coloured four-legged creature of a particular size, and the meadow as a large expanse of green grass, a 'deer' and a 'meadow' may remain concepts which the bedouin would have difficulty in comprehending and, therefore, conceptualising.

McDowell is explicit in his insistence that he is not "merely affixing the label "conceptual" to the content of experience." (MW 46) It is ironic, however, that he adds a particular qualification to this as he states: "I regard the content of experience in the very way that my opponents express by saying that it is non-conceptual, at least not through and through." (MW 46) Could this be taken to mean that both McDowell and his "opponents" view the content of experience in a

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40 Alva Noë, 'Thought and Experience', pp. 257 – 65, *American Philosophical* Quarterly, Volume 36, No. 3, July 1999, p. 258.

similar manner, the difference being that McDowell insists that it is conceptual *(on most occasions)*, while others, such as Evans, insist that it is not? Or could it mean that cognitive psychology proves to be an exception as McDowell admits a few pages later that "it is hard to see how cognitive psychology could get along without attributing content to internal states and occurrences in a way that is not constrained by the conceptual capacities, if any, of the creatures whose lives it tries to make intelligible." (MW 55) McDowell goes on to draw a distinction between what he calls "the respectable theoretical role that non-conceptual content has in cognitive psychology, on the one hand, and, on the other, the notion of content that belongs with the capacities exercised in active self-conscious thinking." (MW 55) This statement is extremely relevant to this discussion and I shall refer to it again in the concluding section of this chapter. It appears to concede McDowell's (partial) acceptance of nonconceptual content where cognitive science is concerned, as long as this is postulated for merely *theoretical* purposes which are distinct from the role which nonconceptual content is putatively said to play in perceptual experience and rational justification.[41]

At this point it is relevant to ask precisely what McDowell means when he uses the word "conceptual"? His definition of this term is linked to the Kantian notion of spontaneity as he states: "The way I am exploiting the Kantian idea of spontaneity commits me to a demanding interpretation for words like "concept" and "conceptual". It is essential to conceptual capacities, in the demanding sense, that they can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials." (MW 48) "Kantian spontaneity" is in turn defined as "the freedom that consists in potentially reflective responsiveness to putative norms of reason." (MW 182)

An argument which has been directed against claims such as those of McDowell on the unboundedness of the conceptual is that it is not always possible to capture certain fine-grained details in experience. In a discussion on the use of demonstratives to capture the intricate detail of perceptual experience, McDowell states that "One consideration that impresses Evans is the determinacy of detail

[41] I return to this point in the conclusion to this chapter.

that the content of experience can have. He claims that this detail cannot all be captured by concepts at the subject's disposal." (MW 56) This is an argument with which McDowell disagrees and, in his view, this difficulty can be overcome by making use of demonstratives such as "that shade". The main distinguishing feature of a concept, according to McDowell, is

> that the associated capacity can persist into the future, if only for a short time, and that, having persisted, it can be used also in thoughts about what is by then the past, if only the recent past. What is in play here is a recognitional capacity, possibly quite short-lived, that sets in with the experience. (MW 57)

Moreover, although we do not possess the vast amount of concepts which may be required to capture each and every colour experience possible, yet, according to McDowell, "if we have the concept of a shade, our conceptual powers are fully adequate to capture our colour experience in all its determinate detail." (MW 58)

This claim has, however, been contested, as it raises the question whether our conceptual powers really are fully adequate to capture *all* the fine grained detail of our colour experience including indeterminate detail. It further raises a question concerning the difference it would make to McDowell's picture if he were to concede the existence of nonconceptual elements which are intricately fine-grained.

Gregory McCulloch criticises McDowell for considering only colour shades and draws attention to the fact that it would be difficult to generalise this claim to other varieties of perceptual experience with conviction. McCulloch presents a persuasive case by means of an example of a perceptual experience which involves indeterminate detail as he argues:

> Watching a tree in full leaf in blustery weather involves an enormous complexity of experience of such matters as constantly changing shape, colour and movement. It cannot be denied that this flux is present in the experience, but it seems a non-starter to suppose that the subject undergoes a parallel wax and wane of a vast number of conceptual capacities, no sooner acquired than lost. This just seems to empty the idea of conceptual capacity of material content, and while McDowell may feel forced to bite the bullet for fear of endorsing the Myth of the Given, it would be better if a less draconian solution could be found.[42]

[42] Gregory McCulloch, 'Dismounting from the seesaw', pp. 309 – 27, Critical notice of

McCulloch puts forward a proposal for a partial interpenetration between mind and world, in order that "there is not so much as an *impermeable shroud* as a *fishnet stocking* around the understanding."[43] He claims that McDowell's position would not be threatened if some non-rational constraint to spontaneity were to be conceded. Acceptance of non-rational elements would be justifiable, he feels, because it would not necessarily lead to the claim that spontaneity lacks rational structure altogether. Rather, it would imply that we would not be able to provide justification in such cases, which is, however, something that happens anyway.

Another possible proposal for the allowance of nonconceptual elements in perceptual experience involves aesthetic experience. A consideration of aesthetic experience could reveal that there are limitations to McDowell's claim regarding the unboundedness of the conceptual. In this regard, Bowie notes that aesthetic experience "disrupts existing forms of intelligibility by revealing that what is conceptually inarticulable can still be intelligible, and may later become part of conceptual intelligibility."[44]

The question however arises as to whether acceptance of these suggestions would still involve susceptibility to the threat of the Myth of the Given. Due to the fact that McDowell is concerned with reconciling the Kantian concepts of understanding and sensibility, a reconciliation which involves subsuming sensibility under the realm of reason, acceptance of the suggestions would entail acceptance of nonconceptual elements which could create problems for McDowell regarding the possibility of interaction occurring between the conceptual and the non-conceptual realms. It is, moreover, to be noted that it is generally possible for a perceiver to consciously focus upon and experience such putative nonconceptual elements and, by directing attention to features of the environment which may be in flux or which may appear to be composed of nonconceptual content, bring them to the forefront of experience thus deliberately drawing them into the realm of the conceptual.

John McDowell's *Mind and World*, p.314.

43 *Ibid.*, p.314.

44 Bowie, 'John McDowell's *Mind and World*,' p. 553.

In this regard, McCullough's views on the non-conceptual content of experience should be related, in my view, to the views of philosophers on the subject of background. David Cooper, for example, follows Heidegger and Husserl in taking a holistic view of background. Cooper states that "Holism of a background does not, then, entail its inexpressibility."[45] He further maintains that it is possible to bring to the front elements which were previously part of the background. In this manner, he claims that the background is 'expressible' as he presents the following analogy:

> To suppose that the background is inexpressible because not all of it can, at a stroke, be made present for inspection would be like arguing that the surface of my body is invisible because I cannot take all of it in at a single glance. Indeed, once it is conceded that no particular element is forever condemned to the background, it would seem natural to conclude that the background – each element in it – is, after all, expressible.[46]

The influence of existentialist philosophy on Cooper's thought is evident as he criticises accounts which involve 'the metaphysical subject' or "the pure (or transcendental ego) which has no background as it views the world 'from outside'."[47] Cooper's view emphasises communal and practical elements as he states, following Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty:

> It is precisely through verbal engagement in the communal business of life that the capacities to mean and understand are identified. Once this is seen, it is easier to accept ... that understanding of words is not, in the first instance, a matter of holding them before us and attaching senses to them, but of carrying on the practical business of life with them.[48]

Cooper's views on background could easily be applied to the debate on conceptual and non-conceptual content. His discussion on this subject and on the possibility of bringing background to the forefront lends itself easily to the present discussion where elements of background are conceived, by McCulloch, for example, as

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45 David Cooper, 'Ineffability', pp. 1 – 16, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 6, 1991, p. 8.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 6 – 7.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

possessing non-conceptual content. Cooper claims that "any particular element of that [background] can be brought to light and speech."[49]

Another statement which Cooper makes regarding Wittgenstein's views on saying and showing is also revealing. He states: "The dictum that what can be shown, cannot be said owed its plausibility to the fact that what showed itself might on *further* grounds be regarded as unsayable."[50] In other words, it is not necessarily the case that what can be shown cannot be said. If this line of reasoning were to be applied to the debate on conceptual and nonconceptual content, it would follow that perception of nonconceptual content, such as that which occurs during aesthetic experience, could be brought under the ambit of the conceptual.

Cooper's views on this subject contrast with those of Diana Raffman who, in an article on musical ineffability, identifies features in music which, she claims, "are likely to be recovered at such shallow processing levels (i.e., so "near" to the peripheral sense organs) that they fail to be mentally categorized in the manner thought necessary for the learning of verbal labels."[51] Raffman calls this "perceptual ineffability", which she describes as "a kind of *knowledge* – conscious knowledge which cannot be expressed in language."[52] She defines "ineffable musical *knowledge*" as "something we consciously know but cannot report."[53] This implies that Raffman's conception of musical ineffability may be interpreted as a form of experience which contains elements of non-conceptual content.

Raffman follows Stanley Cavell[54] in her assertion that "the ineffable turns out to be knowledge communicable only by ostention."[55] She further states: "Only reference by ostention can satisfy my communicative intentions here. The knowledge I wish to convey cannot be conveyed by language, by telling, alone;

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49 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
50 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
51 Diana Raffman, 'Toward a Cognitive Theory of Musical Ineffability', pp. 685 – 706, *Review of Metaphysics*, 41, June 1988, p. 688.
52 *Ibid.*, p. 689.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 695.
54 Stanley Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).
55 Raffman, *op. cit.*, p. 701.

instead, I must show you, I must acquaint you, with what I hear. "But for that to communicate, you have to [hear] it too"."[56]

Raffman extends her views to artworks and claims that it is necessary to be perceptually acquainted with a visual work in order to know it. Seeing an artwork, she maintains, involves acquiring knowledge that could not have been acquired otherwise. This is due to the fact that "my knowledge by seeing is considerably more specific than my knowledge by description, presumably because the percept contains information too fine-grained to secure lodging in long-term memory."[57]

Raffman claims that there are a number of features of our world which are "perceptually ineffable", that is, "known only by sensing". These include "The precise shade of the apples on my kitchen counter, the precise volume of my doorbell, the precise taste of last night's chicken curry."[58] It is evident that Raffman believes that certain perceptual experiences contain non-conceptual content and her views in this regard contrast with those of McDowell who denies such cases of non-conceptual content which, he would maintain, could easily be captured by the use of demonstratives. Raffman makes a number of statements which reinforce her view as she states:

> The point is that our mental schemas for pitch and colour (among other things) are evidently much less fine-grained than the pitch and colour differences we can perceive. As a result, since our ability to *name* the pitches and colours we perceive is limited by our ability to identify them ... our ability to say what we hear or see in a work of art will be correspondingly limited.[59]

She acknowledges following Jerry Fodor regarding her views on "'shallow' perceptual representations" such as colour, pitch, timbre of objects, and the "logico-syntactic forms of linguistic utterances" being "impermeable to the

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 701.
[57] *Ibid.*, p. 702.
[58] *Ibid.*, p. 704.
[59] Diana Raffman, 'perception' pp. 317 – 20, *A Companion to Aesthetics*, Ed. David Cooper, (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell) p. 320.

influence of cognitive systems like belief, memory, and decision-making."[60] Her main claim is that it seems as though we know more than we can say.

The problems posed by aesthetic experience to discussions on conceptual and non-conceptual content have generated a great deal of debate and Raffman quotes John Dewey who argues in favour of the special qualities which pertain to works of art as he states:

> If all meanings could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist. There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and audible qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence.[61]

One aspect, however, that Raffman omits from her discussions on perception and on musical ineffability is the possibility of such experience to be brought under the auspices of the conceptual by means of demonstratives or by bringing background elements to the foreground by means of directing or focussing attention.

In a manner of reasoning which expresses similarity to McDowell's views and which contrasts with that of Raffman, Sonia Sedivy posits demonstrative concepts to account for the fine-grained content of perceptual experience. Sedivy confronts the problem of accounting for the rich fine-grained character of experience by claiming that demonstrative concepts are capable of capturing "the exact determinate nature of the represented individuals or attributes" as they can be used to pick out properties such as "*that shade*" or "*that shape*" or individuals such as "*that person*" or "*that mountain*". Demonstrative concepts can therefore, in Sedivy's view, capture the character of perceptual experience in a way that descriptive contents or descriptive concepts cannot.[62]

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60 Raffman, p. 318, refers to J.A. Fodor, *The Modularity of Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983).

61 Raffman, 'Towards a Cognitive Theory of Musical Ineffability', p. 685. Raffman quotes John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, Minton, New York, 1934, p. 74.

62 Sedivy, 'Must Conceptually Informed Perceptual Experience Involve Non-Conceptual Content?' p. 430n.

This view contrasts with that of Peacocke who opposes McDowell's use of demonstratives to capture the fine-grained elements of experience. In his view, demonstrative concepts slice too finely to capture the way that, for example, a colour or a shape are given in experience. He agrees with McDowell that Evans overlooked demonstrative concepts, but still feels that if one were to consider different conceptual contents such as "that shade", "that red" or "that scarlet", it would seem "quite implausible that just one of these, and not the others, features in the representational content of the experience of a shade of red."[63] The same applies to examples concerning shapes. This could result in the implication that, if one were to accept McDowell's ideas concerning demonstratives, two people who may have the same experience of, for example, the colour red, may represent the experience by making use of concepts at their disposal which would differ at the finest-grade level, such as "that red" and "that scarlet". Peacocke feels this is incorrect and maintains that both perceivers would experience a single shade (or shape) in the same way. The shade (or shape) which they would both experience would, in turn, make available "various different demonstrative concepts to the two subjects, depending on the richness of their repertoire of general concepts."[64] Peacocke considers whether McDowell could respond to this objection by omitting all general demonstrative concepts and instead making use of the demonstrative "that". However, he notes that the result would be "much too indeterminate to fix a reference."[65]

McDowell responds to Peacocke by drawing a distinction between "concepts of ways ordinary visible things can be and be seen as being" and "concepts of the associated objects."[66] He admits that this distinction does not feature in *Mind and World* and therefore explains that, with regard to his use of demonstratives to capture the fine-grained detail of experience, "the point I needed to make relates rather to the concepts of ways ordinary visible objects can be and be seen as being, on the basis of which concepts of the associated objects can be introduced.

63 Christopher Peacocke, 'Nonconceptual Content Defended,' p. 382.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 382.
65 *Ibid.*, p. 382.
66 John McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, p. 415.

It relates to concepts of the associated objects at most derivatively."[67] Demonstrative expressions such as "is coloured thus" are used, McDowell claims, to express a conceptual capacity which captures the fineness of grain in experience. Rather than escaping from the conceptual net, he claims, this fineness of grain in experience is partly constitutive of it. In this regard, McDowell sees the issue which both Peacocke and Evans raise as being whether "ordinary perceptual experience outrun[s] the conceptual resources plausibly attributable to ordinary subjects."[68] His answer to this is clearly "No".

McDowell's main point is that "Having things appear to one a certain way is already itself a mode of actual operation of conceptual capacities." (MW 62) In other words, seeing is *"seeing-as,"* which, in turn, implies conceptual content. Moreover, "it takes work to ensure that the capacities are recognizable as genuinely conceptual capacities - that the invocation of the conceptual is not mere word-play." (MW 62) McDowell is, without doubt, strongly influenced by both Sellars and Brandom in his views on nonconceptual content and the link this forges with experience, justification and belief. Sellars had drawn attention to the fact that human beings are concept-users, and that propositionally contentful utterances and genuine beliefs are essentially the sort of things that can function as reasons and for which reasons can be given. Brandom, on the other hand, makes use of the expression 'inferentially articulated' in a discussion on concepts and normativity. He distinguishes between an utterance made by a human and an utterance made by a parrot, where the former, which is inferentially articulated (as opposed to the latter), involves understanding and therefore pertains to the conceptual, that is, to the Sellarsian realm of reasons.

McDowell's advocation of conceptual content and his total rejection of nonconceptual content however raises certain questions: How convincing is McDowell? Can our perception be anything other than conceptual, and if so, how can non-conceptual perception be described or understood? Can McDowell's view allow for fine-grained nonconceptual elements of experience and, if it were to do so, what difference would this make to his general position?

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67 *Ibid.*, p. 415.
68 *Ibid.*, p. 417.

McDowell proposes an interesting and revealing account of the manner in which the conceptual is present both in experience and in the realm of spontaneity, explicitly claiming that both pertain to the realm of the rational. This position could collapse if McCullough's suggestions discussed earlier in this section were to be adopted. McDowell's position is clear as he states:

> And what secures this identification, between capacities that are operative in appearances and capacities that are operative in judgements, is the way appearances are rationally linked into spontaneity at large: the way appearances can constitute reasons for judgements about objective reality - indeed, do constitute reasons for judgements in suitable circumstances ("other things being equal"). (MW 62)

It is interesting to note McDowell's qualification in the above quotation, that is, that appearances can and do "constitute reasons for judgements *in suitable circumstances*" (italics added). This implies that there may be cases where circumstances may not be appropriate for appearances to constitute reasons for judgements, such as illusions or hallucinations. He further claims that we should not take our fallibility in the case of illusions or hallucinations to mean that we never really know whether our perceptions are veridical or not. Such an assumption would have, he claims, "epistemologically disastrous" consequences.[69]

Conceptual Content and Non-Human Creatures

McDowell's conception of perceptual experience as belonging to the realm of spontaneity and his views on the conceptual as unbounded lead him to a controversial view of non-human animals. In this regard, he denies "outer experience" to creatures who are not capable of "active thinking", even though he admits that "it would be outrageous to deny that they are perceptually sensitive to those features." (MW 50) McDowell credits Evans with similar ideas on the subject. Both maintain that "we share perception (like memory) with "animals" (p.124) [*The Varieties of Reference*]; that is, with creatures that cannot be credited

69 John McDowell, 'Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space,' pp. 228 – 59, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998) p. 232.

with conceptual capacities." (MW 63) Reasoning on these lines leads, McDowell claims, to

> a temptation to think it must be possible to isolate what we have in common with them [animals] by stripping off what is special about us, so as to arrive at a residue that we can recognize as what figures in the perceptual lives of mere animals. That is the role that is played in Evans's picture by informational states, with their non-conceptual content. (MW 64)

But factorising in this manner does not lead anywhere fruitful. McDowell's solution is to say that "we have what mere animals have, perceptual sensitivity to features of our environment, but we have it in a special form. Our perceptual sensitivity to our environment is taken up into the ambit of the faculty of spontaneity, which is what distinguishes us from them." (MW 64) This view is shared by Alva Noë who claims that "[w]e cannot factor experience into a conceptual part and a raw experiential part in such a way as to allow us to make sense of the intactness of that experiential part in the absence of its conceptual framework."[70] Noë further claims that "Capacities for experience and thought go hand in hand and are in a sense one. Creatures acquire capacities for experience as they actively explore and begin to think [in conceptual terms] about the world."[71] In a similar manner to McDowell, Noë claims that "perceptual experience is concept-dependent in the sense that when we have perceptual experience, we exercise our grasp of concepts."[72]

Attempts by philosophers to seemingly diminish the capabilities of non-human animals have often been greeted by controversy and debate. Descartes, who had reduced non-human animals to automata, was critised a great deal, as is evident from a letter which Henry More wrote to Descartes: "But there is nothing in your opinions that so much disgusts me, so far as I have any kindness or gentleness, as the internecine and murderous view which you bring forward in the *Method*, which snatches away life and sensibility from all the animals."[73]

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70 Alva Nöe, 'Thought and Experience,' p. 264.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 264.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 258.

73 Quoted in Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Inquiry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978) p. 282.

McDowell considers animals to be creatures that lack spontaneity. In this regard, he notes that if one were to accept the claim that human beings share perception with animals, this may be taken as a good reason to credit perceptual experience with nonconceptual content. However, although he admits that both human beings and animals possess perceptual sensitivity to features of their environment, the perceptual sensitivity of human beings pertains to spontaneity and is therefore distinct from that of animals. The point which McDowell is interested in emphasising is that "dumb animals do not have Kantian freedom." (MW 182) It is by means of the possession of spontaneity, which is exercised in perceptual experience, that human beings are distinct from animals. McDowell further states:

> No one without a philosophical axe to grind can watch, say, a dog or a cat at play and seriously consider bringing its activities under the head of something like automatism. But we can deny Kantian spontaneity while leaving plenty of room for the self-movingness that is plain to the unprejudiced eye in such a scene. (MW 182)

Although McDowell's views on non-human animals are not as drastic as those of Descartes, yet it is interesting to compare them to the results of more recent research on the extraordinary capabilities of animals. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh describes her attempts to cultivate linguistic and cognitive skills in primates. It is claimed that as a result of her work with Kanzi, a bonobo, Kanzi acquired "linguistic and cognitive skills far beyond those achieved by any other nonhuman animal in previous research." Moreover, "Kanzi has proven himself capable of comprehending spoken English utterances of a grammatical and semantic complexity equal to (and in some cases surpassing) that mastered by a normal two-and-a-half-year-old human child."[74]

However, James Trefil explores different reports of animal intelligence including Kanzi whose sentences, he notes, never developed beyond a couple of words, as opposed to language acquisition in human children, which is extremely rapid, as most children speak in complete grammatical sentences in their native language by age six. Trefil maintains that "a clear separation can be made between human

[74] Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, Stuart G. Shanker, Talbot J. Taylor, *Apes, Language and the Human Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. v.

beings and the rest of the animal kingdom, based on our ability to perform specific mental functions."[75]

McDowell has been taken to task for his rejection of the possibility of experience in non-human animals. Arthur W. Collins understands McDowell's caution in this regard and remarks that if McDowell were to have claimed that the perceptual experience of human beings was shared with that of animals, then experience would have to be placed outside the conceptual realm and this would open his views to criticism for having embraced the Myth of the Given.[76] Collins recognises McDowell's concept of human perception as problematic, and although McDowell makes use of language and *Bildung,* which includes culture and tradition, to account for the difference between human beings and non-human animals, yet, Collins remarks, "it is hard to bring into focus exactly what we are imagining to be the essential contrast between the vision (for example) of S [a normal human subject] and B [a non-speaking brute] apart from the fact that S can describe things S and B can both see."[77] Collins therefore concludes that

> Human perception is the same as brute perception: the very thing that is not conceptual in brutes is conceptual in the lives of creatures with the kind of *Bildung* to which McDowell calls attention so effectively. ... The key will lie in the fact that a description that fits something that both S and B perceive *can be given* by S. In itself, this is not a difference in perception.[78]

In his reply to Collins, McDowell rejects Collins' implication that he (McDowell) rejects "the idea that we share perception with brutes." This is "definitely wrong," McDowell claims, as he "trivially" allows for "at least one level at which perception is the same thing for us and for them", this being "*perception.*"[79] McDowell further admits that both adult human beings and brutes enjoy perceptual sensitivity to features of their environment. There is, however, an important difference between perception that is "an actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness and perception that is not" and this follows

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75 James Trefil, *Are We Unique?* (John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1997) p. 225.

76 Arthur W. Collins, 'Beastly Experience', pp. 375 – 80, *Philosophy and henomenological Research,* June 1998, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, p. 376.

77 *Ibid.,* p. 377.

78 *Ibid.,* p. 380.

79 John McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,* p. 409.

from the fact that "learning to talk is not just acquiring a new range of expressive behavior, with the kind of thing a creature has to express left unaltered, but acquiring conceptual capacities, which includes acquiring the propensity for such capacities to be actualized in sensory consciousness."[80] This implies that only "creatures who are capable of actively building a world view" (and not brutes) are in a position to have "bits of the world perceptually manifest to them as materials for a world view."[81]

McDowell's response to Collins on the subject of the perceptual experience of human and non-human animals defends his point of view which involves the perceiver taking in *facts* – a position which, McDowell concedes, could have been taken as competing with the having of *objects* in view. In this regard, McDowell follows Kant on the unity of judgements and intuitions,[82] and his interpretation brings together both *facts* and *objects*, as he states:

> I think that his [Kant's] point is that enjoying intuitions – having objects in view – is to be understood in terms of the same logical togetherness in actualizations of conceptual capacities that makes sense of the unity of a judgeable content. I wish I had exploited this thought in *Mind and World*. It would have enabled me to acknowledge that the idea of having objects in view, as opposed to taking in facts, is transcendentally important.[83]

Having objects in view implies, according to McDowell, that the content of perceptual experience is conceptual. Is it possible, however, to attribute conceptual content to non-language users? Peacocke criticises McDowell in this regard, namely, for restricting perceptual representational content, which can give a reason for a belief, to language users. He claims that "some representational contents of perception are common to the states of language-users and to nonlinguistic creatures" and, furthermore, "Perceptual states with relatively primitive spatial representational contents can be enjoyed by nonlinguistic creatures. The idea that a nonlinguistic creature sees a shape as a diamond rather

80 *Ibid.*, p. 412.

81 *Ibid.*, p. 413.

82 "The same function which gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in a judgement* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations *in an intuition*." Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A79/B104-5, quoted in McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' *Philosophy and PhenomenologicalResearch*, p. 414.

83 McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' p. 414.

than as square does not seem to me to be philosophically objectionable."[84] McDowell does not find any objection to crediting representational content to creatures that do not possess conceptual capacities as he maintains that Peacocke's claim that, for McDowell, representational content is conceptual content, is not correct. Attributing representational content to non-linguistic creatures, however, does not suffice to "make it intelligible that the creature's being in that state is its possessing a reason for a belief or an action." Rather, he urges that "what makes it intelligible that a subject has a reason is ... [that] the subject's being in such a state must be an actualization of conceptual capacities it possesses."[85]

McDowell's views on the difference between human beings and non-human animals, in particular where perceptual experience is concerned, are intricately linked to his views on rationality, understanding and freedom. Reason is, in his view, linked to "the power of speech, the power of giving expression to conceptual capacities that are rationally interlinked in ways reflected by what it makes sense to give as a reason for what."[86] This statement forms part of a discussion on naturalism where McDowell presents readers with a hypothetical situation where wolves acquire reason. McDowell further links the acquisition of reason to the capability of contemplating alternatives and, it follows, to freedom to act in whichever way one wants. He states: "The point is that something whose physical make-up left no free play in how it manifested itself in interactions with the rest of reality, or something whose physical make-up, although it left such free play, somehow precluded the development of the imagination required to contemplate alternatives, could not acquire reason."[87] The capacity for active thought is important in this regard as McDowell states: "An ability to conceptualize the world must include the ability to conceptualize the thinker's own place in the world; and to find the latter ability intelligible, we need to make room not only for conceptual states that aim to represent how the world anyway is, but also for conceptual states that issue in interventions directed towards

84 Christopher Peacocke, 'Nonconceptual Content Defended,' p. 384.
85 McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' p. 417.
86 John McDowell, 'Two Sorts of Naturalism,' pp. 167 – 97, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 169.
87 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

making the world conform to their content."[88] Reason, in this regard, implies not only knowledge, but also active agency which includes freedom to select one course of action rather than another.

Once McDowell has linked conceptual content with not only reason, but also with knowledge and autonomy, it seems as though he has reached a position where it is impossible for him to attribute perceptual experience and the subsequent implications which such an attribution would entail, such as spontaneity and understanding, to non-human animals.

Conceptual Content Confirmed

Before attempting to arrive at some conclusions, a brief summary of the foregoing would not be amiss. Nonconceptual content appears to have been postulated in order to account for the grounding of experience. Views which deny the existence of nonconceptual content, such as those of McDowell, Brandom and Sedivy, consider the conceptual to be constitutive of all that is the case. On the other hand, Peacocke, Evans and Crane maintain that if one were to deny the existence of nonconceptual content, one would be unable to account for the rich detail contained in perceptual experience, as well as for the link which bridges the realm of reasons with the "external world". Does a serious consideration of the views discussed imply that we need to retain a view of perceptual experience as dualistic, that is, containing both conceptual and nonconceptual elements, or is it possible to reject this dichotomy? Would McDowell's position be compromised if he were to admit to elements of nonconceptual content in perceptual experience?

In my view, McDowell is on the right track when he maintains that the conceptual is unbounded. Whenever we, as rational human beings, think, we are constrained by our cognitive faculties which form part of the space of reasons. Rational human beings are unable to step outside the realm of the conceptual. I believe that Sedivy is correct in her claim that nonconceptual content should only be

[88] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

postulated at a theoretical as opposed to a nonexperiential or subpersonal level.[89] This postulation could be utilised to expand on McDowell's concession that nonconceptual content has a theoretical role to play in contexts such as cognitive psychology.

Crane is, in my view, also on the right track when he distinguishes beliefs from perceptions and discusses the disparate elements which are constitutive of each. I think that he could improve his position if he were to distinguish between perceptual experience and perceptual mechanisms, and consider perceptions (as opposed to beliefs) to form part of the latter and not the former. Peacocke, in turn, proposes an interesting and convincing view of scenario content and protopropositional content in an attempt to support his claim in favour of nonconceptual content. I believe, however, that Peacocke should attribute these elements to the perceptual *apparatus* of human beings rather than to nonconceptual elements of perceptual experience. They could, moreover, be viewed as elements in a background which, by means of a shift in attention, could be brought to the foreground and therefore fall under the ambit of the conceptual.

Sedivy and Crane both draw attention to the fact that nonconceptual content is required to explain, amongst other things, psychological or explanatory states of the subpersonal, computational system such as the visual system. Perceptual mechanisms could be one area where the idea of nonconceptual content could be found to be useful, but this would not prove to be philosophically interesting.

As we have seen, a number of philosophers argue in favour of nonconceptual content. However, I would like to suggest that a distinction should be drawn between perceptual content which figures in inferences, which can be considered to be conceptual, and perceptual sensations which do *not* figure in inference, which are then considered to be nonconceptual. The latter could include both aesthetic experience and the fine-grained elements of experience which elude conceptualisation. Luntley, who admits to McDowell's influence on this subject, draws attention to this distinction and states:

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89 Sedivy, 'Must Conceptually Informed Perceptual Experience Involve Non-Conceptual Content?' p. 428.

> It is, however, the idea of content that figures in inference that is the hallmark of the notion of conceptual content .... I follow him [McDowell in *Mind and World*] in taking conceptual content as that which figures in inference. This leaves the issue of perceptual experience having a content more fine-grained than that for which the subject has names or descriptions *irrelevant* in constructing a notion of non-conceptual content.[90]

The fact that conceptual content involves the possession of intentional states which are inferentially related is crucial in this regard and, I believe, it is a claim which is implicit in McDowell's emphasis on rationality and normativity. Crane makes a similar point when giving a definition of nonconceptual content and concept possession where the distinction between intentional states with content which is inferentially related and those which is not plays an important role. He states:

> *X* is in a state with nonconceptual content *iff X* does not have to possess the concepts that characterise its content in order to be in that state. Since *possessing a concept is being in intentional states whose contents are appropriately inferentially related*, then a state with nonconceptual content is one whose contents are not so related. So in order to be in such a state, one does not have to be in other inferentially related states of the kind that give the contents of beliefs their conceptual structure.[91]

I believe that the inclusion of nonconceptual elements in this regard would not cause any damage to McDowell's overall picture, neither would it constrain him to accept elements such as the Given. It would, rather, improve his present position as it would allow him to amend his excessive dependence on demonstratives and to allow for innocuous elements which may involve either richness of perceptual detail, aesthetic experience or the evocation of strong (unconceptualisable) emotions. On his part, McDowell should not have any problem with accepting this suggestion, as it could be viewed as an extension of his view which allows for nonconceptual content in cognitive psychology where such content is postulated for merely theoretical considerations.

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90 Michael Luntley, *Contemporary Philosophy of Thought, Truth, World, Content,* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1999) pp. 358 – 59, 4n, emphasis added.

91 Crane, 'The Nonconceptual Content of Experience,' p. 149, emphasis added.

Closely related to the discussion concerning conceptual and nonconceptual content which has been the topic of this chapter is another dualism which McDowell feels should be dissolved. This is the dualism of scheme and content which Donald Davidson, following Quine, recognised as the so-called third dogma of empiricism. The demolition of the dualism of scheme and content is crucial to McDowell's philosophy, in spite of his adherence to minimal empiricism, and this will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Third Dogma of Empiricism

The Dualism of Scheme and Content

> 'Objects' do not exist independently of conceptual schemes. *We* cut up the world into objects when we introduce one or another scheme of description. Since the objects *and* the signs are alike *internal* to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what.
>
> Hilary Putnam[1]

The main topics which McDowell discusses in *Mind and World* which I have chosen to discuss in this dissertation are intricately linked and intertwined. McDowell's views on the unboundedness of the conceptual, for example, are closely linked both to his use of Kant and to his interpretation of the Kantian duality of sensibility and understanding, as we have seen in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. They are also linked to Davidson's rejection of the dichotomy of scheme and content. This chapter will investigate the relevance of the scheme-content dichotomy and the implications which its rejection has on McDowell's position as a minimal empiricist. McDowell is concerned with retaining constraint for thinking from a world which is external to thought. Does a rejection of the scheme-content dualism necessarily imply a rejection of such a constraint with the consequent loss of justification for thought? An investigation of Davidson's position concerning the dualism will be conducted, together with an analysis of some opposing views which retain the dichotomy. The main aim of this chapter is to provide support for McDowell's rejection of the dualism and for

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[1] Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 52.

his retention of minimal empiricism. At times the discussion on the dualism of scheme and content in this chapter may appear to veer away from McDowell's main concerns. However, I believe that a thorough understanding (and therefore a thorough analysis) of the implications of the dualism is important as it is intricately intertwined with a number of issues which McDowell draws on in *Mind and World.*

The idea of the possibility of different conceptual schemes comes about when one considers different ways in which the organisation of the unstructured 'Given' could be possible. It is not only people from different cultures or different intellectual traditions who may organise the 'Given' in a different way, but aliens or Martians may operate with a conceptual scheme which is totally different from that used by human beings. If one considers the possibility of having immediate contact with non-conceptual intuitions which are subject to conceptual organisation by the application of a conceptual scheme upon them, as Hilary Putnam claims in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, then one can imagine the possibility of different ways in which the intuitions can be organised which, in turn, implies the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes.

What is the relevance of accepting or rejecting the scheme-content dichotomy? Davidson claims that rejection of the scheme-content dichotomy does not imply rejection of objective truth. He states:

> In giving up dependence on the concept of an uninterpreted reality, something outside all schemes and science, we do not relinquish the notion of objective truth – quite the contrary. Given the dogma of a dualism of scheme and reality, we get conceptual relativity, and truth relative to a scheme. Without the dogma, this kind of relativity goes by the board. Of course truth of sentences remains relative to language, but that is as objective as can be. In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false.[2]

On his part, McDowell claims to be a minimal empiricist, and such a position is generally considered to be in line with a philosophical stance that upholds the

[2] Donald Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' pp. 183 – 98, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984) p. 198.

dualism. However, McDowell clearly reacts against such dichotomies. He acknowledges that "the point of the dualism [of scheme and content] is that it allows us to acknowledge an external constraint on our freedom to deploy our empirical concepts." (MW 6) This raises the question as to how McDowell can reject the dualism and succeed in maintaining external constraint on our thinking. Acceptance of arguments which claim to demolish the dualism, such as those of Davidson, leads towards coherentism, which is a position McDowell considers unacceptable. On the other hand, acceptance of the scheme-content dualism generally leads to adherence to the Given which McDowell adamantly refuses to accept. His solution to the seemingly irresolvable paradox that arises is to view the conceptual as unbounded so as to be able to incorporate impressions into the realm of the conceptual, and, therefore, into the rational sphere. He states: "What I have been urging ... is that we must find a place for impressions, the deliverances of receptivity .... [which] must figure in the order of justification." (MW 146)

The picture that emerges does not, according to McDowell, give rise to "unconstrained coherentism" where "there are no external rational constraints on exercises of spontaneity." (MW 143) That is the trap which Davidson falls into as a consequence of his claim that "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief," this being a "formulation" which McDowell considers "an excess of simplicity." (MW 143) McDowell's suggested amendment claims that "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except something else that is also in the space of concepts." (MW 143) This constitutes McDowell's extension of the conceptual sphere where "exercises of spontaneity can be rationally constrained by facts, when the facts make themselves manifest in experience; that is a constraint from outside exercises of spontaneity – from outside the activity of thinking ... though not from outside what is thinkable, so not from outside the space of concepts." (MW 143-44)

McDowell agrees with Davidson that the dualism of scheme and content is no longer tenable. However he criticises Davidson for arriving at a position after his rejection of the dualism, when he can no longer link belief (or thought) to a reality to which it is external. McDowell is determined to maintain that thought is

grounded in an external reality and this leads him to retain his stance as a minimal realist. The minimal realism which he espouses does not rely on any ultimate foundations which are outside the sphere of the conceptual, neither is it dependent on epistemological intermediaries, such as the Given. When we reject the Given, he states:

> It can seem that we are retaining a role for spontaneity but refusing to acknowledge any role for receptivity, and that is intolerable. If our activity in empirical thought and judgement is to be recognizable as bearing on reality at all, there must be external constraint. There must be a role for receptivity as well as spontaneity, for sensibility as well as understanding. (MW 8-9)

This implies that McDowell's minimal empiricism is a consequence of his striving for external constraint as a result of his analysis of a number of shortcomings in the views of Davidson, Sellars and Quine. He states:

> There really is a prospect of finding empirical content, as possessed by exercises of spontaneity, unmysterious if we can think of it on the lines that Davidson and Sellars disallow, and that Quine is officially committed to disallowing. We ought to have no problem about how an exercise of "conceptual sovereignty" can bear on the empirical world – can constitute taking a stand on how things are, a posture correctly or incorrectly adopted according to the way the world is arranged – if "conceptual sovereignty" is rationally answerable to how the world impresses itself on the subject in experience. (MW 141-2)

McDowell is evidently in favour of direct realism where facts in the world act as a constraint on our thought. A number of his claims are, however, based on a criticism of Davidson's rejection of the dualism of scheme and content – although McDowell agrees that the dualism of scheme and content should be rejected, his resulting picture contrasts with that of Davidson.

McDowell's claims in this regard contain a number of implications, both for acceptance of the scheme-content dichotomy, as also for its rejection. In my view, it is therefore necessary to analyse the implications which arise from different views on the dualism of scheme and content in order to better understand the position which McDowell points towards which attempts to circumvent certain problems which emerge from Davidson's account.

How did Davidson's demolition of the scheme and content dualism come about? Following Quine's attack on the so-called 'two dogmas of empiricism', that is, the analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism, Donald Davidson identified yet a third dogma, that of a dualism of conceptual scheme and content. Davidson claims that Quine's dualism of "organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible."[3] Once this dogma is given up, "it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism."[4]

Davidson's claims about the dualism of scheme and content have generated a great deal of debate, and a number of philosophers have linked the third dogma to Kant's dualism of sensibility and understanding and to his remark, "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."[5] McDowell acknowledges the importance of both Kant's dictum and Davidson's rejection of the scheme-content dualism. He begins *Mind and World* with the explicit statement that his discussion will be focussed in terms of Davidson's dualism of scheme and content and on "the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world." (MW 3)

A number of authors have linked the third dogma to Quine's first dogma of empiricism, that is, the analytic-synthetic distinction. Whenever this link is demonstrated, arguments against the first dogma are re-directed against the third dogma. In this regard, Marie McGinn states:

> The third dogma expresses the idea that there are two distinct elements in our scientific picture of the world. On the one hand, there is the given - traditionally, *experience* or *reality* - which is ... entirely independent of the mind's cognitive ability. On the other hand, there is the mind's interpretation of the given - the conceptual scheme - by means of which the mind puts a particular construction on what is given. If we combine this doctrine with the first dogma of empiricism, then we can claim that the second element - *our* contribution to the scientific picture - is identifiable with the set of propositions that are analytically true. These analytic truths are held to define our concepts; .... Synthetic truth ... arise[s] when these principles are applied to particular sequences of experience or particular tracts of reality.[6]

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3 Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' p. 189.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

5 Kant, *Critique*, A51/B75.

6 Marie McGinn, 'The Third Dogma of Empiricism,' pp. 89 – 102, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. LXXXII, The Aristotelian Society, 1982, pp. 89 – 90.

The whole notion of the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content can be traced back to its Kantian roots as the problematic of something that is available as potential knowledge and the various ways in which it can be known. In other words, acceptance of the dualism would imply on the one hand, the postulation of an unconceptualised 'Given' that is the foundation of all phenomenal knowledge, and, on the other hand, something which is capable of "organising" (or "fitting") this unsynthesised material in terms of concepts and categories of understanding. The distinction is, therefore, one between what is given in experience (content) and the conceptual scheme that organises that Given.

The connection between the rejection of the Given and the demolition of the dualism of scheme and content has been widely discussed and Marie McGinn links this to her own anti-foundationalist and anti-relativist stance. In her view, objections to the third dogma involve strong claims against the possibility of something neutral, waiting to be interpreted, such as the Given. She states that "this notion of something neutral is futile or vacuous."[7] It follows that a rejection of the third dogma together with a rejection of the notion of the Given can be taken as an attack on foundationalism.[8]

McGinn looks into the reasons normally stated for postulating the Given and acknowledges that "Empiricist faith in the dogma of the given has generally rested on the thought that if science is not to be an arbitrary, human fabrication, then there must be some foundational level to our knowledge, at which it simply makes no sense to wonder whether we might be in error."[9] This foundational level is often taken as an independent constraint on what counts as truth and McGinn quotes C. I. Lewis who states: "If there be no datum given to the mind, then knowledge must be contentless and arbitrary; there would be nothing which it must be true to."[10]

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7 *Ibid.*, p. 100.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 94.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 94. McGinn quotes C.I. Lewis in *Mind and the World Order*, p. 39.

Once the third dogma has been rejected, the notion of the Given as a foundation for truth and objective knowledge also has to be rejected. The question which McGinn asks is whether the "role of the given can be dispensed with without depriving the process of justification of any genuine stopping point, that is, without making knowledge impossible."[11] This question could easily be applied to McDowell's position on the Given. With a rejection of the Given and with nothing to replace it, where does the process of justification come to an end?

McGinn's suggestion in this regard is a commitment to a holistic conception of beliefs which she links to the rejection of the first dogma of empiricism. Once the analytic-synthetic distinction has been abandoned, we can no longer distinguish between language as meaning and knowledge of the world. Her view of justification is similar to that of Davidson as she claims that "it is commitment to a background of unquestioned beliefs that gives the beliefs we do question their sense, that makes it possible for those beliefs to be challenged, justified, undermined, and so on."[12] McGinn concludes that justification does not require the idea of something Given which is supposedly beyond the possibility of error. It follows, she claims, that the dualism of scheme and content is not necessary for the possibility of knowledge, nor is it necessary for the possibility of objective truth.

Although McDowell would probably agree with McGinn's arguments against the Given and with her claim that the dualism of scheme and content is not necessary for objectivity, he would dispute her arguments where justification is concerned. This is mainly because, in a similar manner to Davidson, she does not provide what he would consider to be the necessary friction to link thinking to an external reality. Grounding can only come about, in McDowell's view, from an understanding of Kant's most important insight which involves the claim that intuitions play an important role in our perceptual experience and that understanding and sensibility must always be integrated together. There is, McDowell maintains, no sense to be made of the notion of unconceptualised sensory input which does not stand in a rational relation to conceptual thought, or

11 Marie McGinn, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

to purely intellectual thought operating independently of any constraint from sensibility. It is only through understanding this Kantian insight that we can escape from the "oscillation" between coherentism and the Myth of the Given. In order to "dismount from the see-saw" where "oscillation" between coherentism and the given occurs, McDowell proposes that experience should be conceived as infused with conceptual content, and that the conceptual should be considered as 'unbounded', in order for it to reach out to the world which is external to thought. This is, in a nutshell, McDowell's minimal empiricism – a type of empiricism which he feels is necessary in order to explain how exercises of concepts can constitute warranted judgements about the world. McDowell's minimal empiricism attempts to do away with the dualism of scheme and content which has, at times, been postulated as a response to the very same problem of empirical justification.

Philosophers who endorse empiricism generally find it implies adherence to the scheme and content dualism together with the necessity of postulating entities such as the Given or other sorts of epistemological intermediaries in order to point to something received in experience from outside the conceptual realm. McDowell's position is diametrically opposed to this view: he insists on doing away with both epistemological intermediaries, including the Given, and with the dualism of scheme and content, although he is concerned with providing empirical justification which reaches out to the world. His resolution of this problem is linked to his view of experience as passive, yet drawing on capacities that genuinely belong to spontaneity, together with his ideas on the unboundedness of the conceptual. McDowell states: "I have urged that in order to escape the oscillation, we need a conception of experiences as states or occurrences that are passive but reflect conceptual capacities, capacities that belong to spontaneity, in operation." (MW 23) It is for this reason, he maintains, "that the conception of experience I am recommending can satisfy the craving for a limit to freedom that underlies the Myth of the Given." (MW 10) This statement, however, raises the question whether McDowell's solution (which does away with the Given and with the dualism of scheme and content) succeeds in endorsing the minimal empiricism he proposes and whether it satisfies the "craving" for empirical justification without resorting to the Myth of the Given.

It is important to note that if McDowell were to retain the dualism of scheme and content, his whole project would collapse. If the dualism were to be retained, it would then be found necessary to postulate some sort of interface or 'epistemological intermediary' between thinking and the world. This would be in direct opposition to his conviction that dualisms should be 'dissolved' and where epistemological intermediaries constitute unnecessary fictions. If McDowell is really committed to renouncing all elements relating to the Given, it is only through the renunciation of the dualism of scheme and content that he can do so. Retaining the dualism would imply retaining undesirable elements of the Given. On the other hand, a rejection of the dualism of scheme and content implies a total rejection of the Given together with a rejection of an independent role for sensibility (which, according to McDowell, can only operate *in conjunction with* understanding). This leads to the picture which McDowell wishes to recommend, where grounding, friction, constraint of our belief-system, together with warranted judgements about the world play an important role.

As we have seen, McDowell's views in this regard have been strongly influenced by Davidson's rejection of the third dogma of empiricism. Davidson, however, contrary to McDowell, links the rejection of the dualism of scheme and content to a *rejection* of empiricism. In order to understand the position of both philosophers and the implications which arise from their views, I believe it is important to analyse Davidson's views concerning the rejection of the scheme-content dualism, as well as an opposing view which argues for the retention of the dualism. McDowell's views in this regard are very similar to those which he uses to reject the Given, therefore, analysing them once again would only prove to be a repetition of previous arguments regarding the Given which have been rehearsed in Chapter One. The discussion will therefore focus on Davidson's views on the subject and will underline the implications for McDowell's recommended picture where the dualism of scheme and content is dissolved and where minimal empiricism is retained. However, before moving on to Davidson's views, McDowell's views on minimal empiricism will be discussed since they provide a window onto the major bone of contention between the two philosophers and

involve McDowell's claim that Davidson shows a 'blind spot' where McDowell's recommendations are concerned.

McDowell's Minimal Empiricism as an alternative to Coherentism

McDowell's minimal empiricism[13] allows for "impressions" which are not conceived as *tertia*, rather they are "innocuous" and "can come into their own as precisely a mode of openness to the world." (MW 155) He notes that Davidson "shows a blind spot" where his alternatives are concerned and that although Davidson does not argue against these views, yet the solution which McDowell proposes "simply does not figure among the possibilities that he contemplates." (MW 14)

McDowell further notes that Davidson links the fate of empiricism with that of scheme-content dualism which he (Davidson) attacks in a way that parallels Sellars's attack on the Myth of the Given. McDowell explicitly states that he considers Sellars and Davidson to be interchangeable in this regard as "Sellars's attack on the Given corresponds ... to Davidson's attack on what he calls "the third dogma of empiricism" – the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical "content"." (MW xvi)

McDowell claims that the dualism, which he prefers to call the "dualism of scheme and Given," is attractive for some philosophers because it appears to provide a constraint on thinking from something which is external to thought itself. He states: "The putatively reassuring idea is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingements on the conceptual realm from outside." (MW 6) Moreover,

> Davidson's ground for giving up empiricism is ... the claim that we cannot take experience to be epistemologically significant except by falling into the Myth of the Given, in which experience, conceived in such a way that it could not be a tribunal, is nevertheless supposed to stand in judgement over our empirical thinking. That certainly has the right shape for an argument that we *must* renounce

13 In his reply to Huw Price's review of *Mind and World* McDowell states, "it [rejecting the Given] does not cost us even the minimal empiricism that Davidson thinks we have to renounce." (*Philosophical Books*, Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1997, p. 178).

> empiricism. The trouble is that it does not show how we *can*. It does nothing to explain away the plausibility of the empiricist picture, according to which we can make sense of the world-directedness of empirical thinking only by conceiving it as answerable to the empirical world for its correctness. (MW xvii)

Why do Sellars and Davidson renounce empiricism? McDowell's analysis of this topic suggests it is both because of the threat of the Given and because they both view the logical space of reasons as being *sui generis*, a view which creates a dichotomy of logical spaces between the logical space of reasons and the logical space of nature. In this regard, McDowell partially retains the position of Sellars and Davidson as he accepts that the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*. At the same time, he rejects the view of the dichotomy of logical spaces as being between the normative and the natural. By drawing on the concept of "second nature",[14] together with his views on the unboundedness of the conceptual and the role which experience plays in human perception, McDowell proposes a version of minimal empiricism that aims to eliminate the tension between the normative and the natural. The resulting picture views empirical content as being possible only as a result of an acknowledgement "that thoughts and intuitions are rationally connected," (MW 17-18) this being a position that Davidson rejects. The result is that, according to McDowell, Davidson "undermines his right to the idea that his purportedly reassuring argument starts from the idea of a body of beliefs." (MW 18) This is, in McDowell's view, the manner in which to expose Davidson's position as coherentist with no rational constraint on thought from outside it.[15]

McDowell's espousal of minimal empiricism leads him to accuse Davidson of rejecting what appears to be a necessary condition for empirical content, that is, the role of experience in grounding judgements and beliefs. He states:

> My objection to Davidson is this: so far from helping us out of the bind [being tempted by the thought of experience as a tribunal, and being unable to see how this was possible] ... by identifying something that goes wrong when we find empiricism plausible, he merely pronounces empiricism untenable ... After we

14 The concept of "second nature" is discussed in Chapter Five.

15 McDowell's remarks regarding Davidson do not appear to take into consideration Davidson's own rejection of the label 'coherentist.' McDowell also does not appear to consider Davidson's views on anomalous monism and on triangulation which point towards a realist position. It is important to keep in mind that McDowell makes use of Davidson's ideas on beliefs as a typical example of the type of thinking he wishes to avoid under the label 'coherentism.'

> have read Davidson, that line of thought still makes it look as if the very idea of empirical content requires experience to play the role Davidson says it cannot play, that of grounding judgements or beliefs.[16]

It appears, however, that it was Davidson's ideas which led McDowell to his present position, and he acknowledges that "Davidson has the essential point" but "the result is precisely to leave us with the philosophical problems he wants to eliminate." (MW 138) He admits to seeing Davidson's views as something "that ought to be a model" for him "up to a point." (MW 138) McDowell is here referring to Davidson's statement that giving up the dualism of scheme and world does not imply giving up the world, rather by giving up the dualism we "re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."[17] The position which McDowell is aiming to reach is precisely one where we have "unmediated touch" with the world. Davidson's position, however, leaves a great deal to be desired in this respect, in spite of some of his claims to the contrary.

McDowell links Davidson's attack on the dualism of scheme and content to Quine's attack on the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements. He however allows for the retention of the concept of analyticity of meaning and maintains that "The suspect notion of the analytic is the notion of truths that are such by virtue of being constitutive of conceptual schemes in the suspect sense, the sense in which schemes are conceived as dualistically set over against the world." (MW 157) He therefore rejects the concept of meaning as forming part of a scheme conceived as part of the dualism of scheme and world. Rather, in an attempt to "rehabilitate the idea of statements that are true by virtue of their meaning," (MW 157) McDowell attempts to retain the structure inherent in our "mindedness" as he states: "The idea of a structure that must be found in any intelligible conceptual scheme need not involve picturing the scheme as one side of a scheme-world dualism. And analytic truths (in an interesting sense, not just definitionally guaranteed truisms such as "A vixen is a female fox") might be just those that delineate such a necessary structure." (MW 158) Unfortunately, he

[16] McDowell's reply to Huw Price's review of *Mind and World, Philosophical Books*, Vol. 38, No. 3, July 1997, p. 178.

[17] McDowell (MW 138) is quoting Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme.'

does not provide any positive examples, apart from remarks such as "there are limits to what makes sense," "our mindedness ... has a necessary structure," (MW 158) and a brief mention that perhaps some of Wittgenstein's "hinge propositions" in *On Certainty* belong to this category. (MW 158n)

McDowell's claims, which depart substantially and in important ways from those proposed by Davidson, raise a number of questions. Is McDowell justified in his criticism of Davidson? Does the alternative view which McDowell proposes compensate for the shortcomings he identifies in Davidson's account? McDowell's position allows for the existence of conceptual schemes, as long as they are not conceived as dualistically set against the world (MW 157) and as long as they are viewed "innocently" as embodying a language or cultural tradition. (MW 155) Is it possible to retain the notion of a conceptual scheme, as long as it is "innocently" conceived as embodying a language or a cultural tradition and not as part of a dichotomy? Can Davidson's view be seen to embrace minimal empiricism in the same manner as McDowell's view does, when considered in the light of his more recent discussions on the dualism of scheme and content?

I do not claim to have an answer to all these questions. Their investigation involves a discussion of different viewpoints on the dualism of conceptual schemes and empirical content (or "Given") and an in-depth analysis of this dualism. The next section will analyse Davidson's views on the subject and it will be followed by a discussion of his ideas in recent publications.

Davidson on the Dualism of Scheme and Content

Davidson claims that the dualism of scheme and content emerges as a consequence of Quine's attack on the two dogmas of empiricism. Giving up the analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism still leaves us with the idea of empirical content as well as the idea of language as embodying a conceptual scheme. This results in a dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content. "The new dualism", Davidson states, "is the foundation of an empiricism shorn of the untenable dogmas of the analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism –

shorn, that is, of the unworkable idea that we can uniquely allocate empirical content sentence by sentence."[18]

The dichotomy of conceptual scheme and empirical content implies a commitment to the possible existence of alternative conceptual schemes. Davidson draws attention to the fact that even seemingly innocent mention of 'our conceptual scheme' contains an assumption that there might be "rival systems".[19] Even those who only admit to the existence of one scheme are, in Davidson's view, "in the sway of the scheme concept; even monotheists have religion."[20]

Davidson's basic argument is that the whole notion of alternative conceptual schemes does not make sense, mainly because it is not possible to conceptualise the possibility of alternative schemes which can be contrasted with ours. He states: "I want to urge that this second dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma."[21]

His argument against the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes follows this line of thought:

1. Having a conceptual scheme is associated with having a language.
2. A criterion of languagehood is linguistic intertranslatability.
3. One is entitled to call something a language only if one is prepared to claim that one can translate its assertions into one's own language. Davidson states, "whatever plurality we take experience to consist in ... we will have to individuate according to familiar principles." Davidson concludes that "A language that organizes *such* entities must be a language very like our own."[22]
4. There are, therefore, no genuinely alternative conceptual schemes.

Davidson states that "if translation succeeds, we have shown there is no need to speak of two conceptual schemes, while if translation fails, there is no ground for

[18] Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' p. 189.
[19] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[20] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 189.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

speaking of two ... [so] there never can be a situation in which we can intelligibly compare or contrast divergent schemes, and in that case we do better not to say that there is one scheme, as if we understood what it would be like for there to be more."[23] This argument is condensed by Arto Siitonen who says:

> Let us assume that there is a system of concepts altogether alien to us. When aliens speak their language associated with that system, we terrestials cannot understand a bit. However, how can we even claim to know that aliens *speak* their *language*? In attributing speech behaviour, beliefs and intentions to them, we cross the allegedly absolute boundary between the schemes.[24]

Siitonen further draws attention to the fact that, were we to concede that some expression in the alien language were true, the notion "true in the alien language" would not be independent of the notion "translatable".[25]

Davidson's arguments against the dualism of scheme and content incorporate an attack on conceptual relativism. Conceptual relativism implies that different conceptual schemes could express themselves in incommensurable ways as a result of which there would be no possible way to decide which interpretation is right or wrong. If such a case were demonstrated to exist, it would unsettle any possible arguments in favour of realism. Davidson states that "The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common co-ordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability."[26]

Siitonen makes a similar point when he draws attention to the fact that "If this (super-) scheme [which is presupposed when speaking about the plurality of different schemes] is radically different from the schemes which it concerns, it

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[23] Donald Davidson, 'Reply to Solomon,' pp. 243 – 44, *Essays on Actions and Events*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) p. 243.

[24] Arto Siitonen 'Understanding our Actual Scheme,' pp. 149 – 56, *The Mind of Donald Davidson*, Edited by Johannes Brandl and Wolfgang L. Gombocz (Amsterdam: Grazer Philosophische Studien, Editions Rodopi B.V., 1989) Volume 36, p. 152.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

[26] Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' p. 184.

cannot say anything about them; but if it is compatible with them, the view that there are radically different schemes cannot be expressed."[27]

Davidson's views on the third dogma of empiricism have been subject to a great deal of criticism and have generated a great deal of discussion. Some critics identify two arguments in Davidson's work: the empirical argument from interpretation and the conceptual argument against the scheme-content distinction,[28] although when these are analysed a number of similarities are evident.

The argument from interpretation involves a number of claims which Davidson makes which are related to his rejection of the scheme-content distinction. These include the holism of meaning, which involves the claim that meaning can only be determined against a background of assumptions about the world of the speaker. Davidson's theory of radical interpretation is linked to his principle of charity (or, following Richard Grandy, the principle of humanity) and involves the assumption that the beliefs of the speaker of the language which we are attempting to interpret are, in broad outline, similar to ours and generally correct or rational, or that their interests are similar to ours. In this regard, Davidson states:

> A theory of interpretation cannot be correct that makes a man assent to very many false sentences: it must generally be the case that a sentence is true when a speaker holds it to be. So far as it goes, it is in favour of a method of interpretation that it counts a sentence true just when the speaker holds it to be true. But of course the speaker may be wrong; and so may the interpreter. So in the end what must be counted in favour of a method of interpretation is that it puts the interpreter in general agreement with the speaker.[29]

Davidson admits to being influenced by Quine with regards to the principle of charity, although he admits to some variations. He states, "We have no choice, Quine has urged, but to read our own logic into the thoughts of a speaker."[30]

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27 Siitonen, 'Understanding our Actual Scheme,' p.151.

28 See, for example, Michael Luntley in *Contemporary Philosophy of Thought, Truth, World, Content* (Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999) Chapter 5, pp. 118 – 42.

29 Donald Davidson, 'Thought and Talk,' pp. 155 – 70, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, p. 169.

30 Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' pp. 307 – 19, *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Ed. Ernest LePore (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1986) p. 316.

Davidson further states:

> the principle [of charity] directs the interpreter to translate or interpret so as to read some of his own standards of truth into the pattern of sentences held true by the speaker. The point of the principle is to make the speaker intelligible, since too great deviations from consistency and correctness leave no common ground on which to judge either conformity or difference.[31]

Acceptance of the principle of charity is, according to Davidson, "not an option but a condition of having a workable theory" since, he adds, "it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it. ... 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."[32]

Davidson's dependence on the principle of charity has been subjected to a great deal of criticism. One suggestion is that there are imperialistic and patronising motives lurking behind Davidson's position and behind "the rather sinister double-talk which is consequently involved in Davidson's superficially benign-sounding insistence on his 'principle of charity' (and Grandy's on his similar 'principle of humanity')."[33] Davidson has been accused (together with other philosophers including Aristotle) of taking a position which requires "the interpretation of cultural others as at best intellectually inferior versions of themselves and that they [Aristotle and Davidson] also happen to be intellectual representatives of two of the more dynamic and successful imperial powers that history has known (namely, Alexander the Great's Greece and the contemporary United States of America)."[34] Michael N. Forster puts forward this position and quotes Hacking to reinforce his view as he states:

> The very names given to these principles, and the fact that some writers invoke them as principles to enable us to translate the speech of 'natives', may raise a wry smile. 'Charity' and 'humanity' have long been in the missionary vanguard of colonizing Commerce. Our 'native' may be wondering whether philosophical B52s and strategic hamlets are in the offing if he won't sit up and speak like the English. Linguistic imperialism is better armed than the military for perhaps it can be proved, by a transcendental argument, that if the native does not share most of

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31 *Ibid.*, p. 316.

32 Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' p. 197.

33 Michael N. Forster, 'On the Very Idea of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes,' pp. 133 – 86, *Inquiry*, Vol. 41, No. 2, June 1998, p. 167.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 166.

> our beliefs and wants, he is just not engaged in human discourse, and is at best subhuman. (The native has heard that one before too.)[35]

Similar criticism has been directed against Davidson by Colin McGinn who maintains that it is a *condition of interpretability* rather than a *principle of charity* whereby we can claim that a subject by and large believes what he perceives. There are cases where it is impossible to interpret a person, such as when "a person systematically and globally refuses to let his beliefs be shaped by his experience."[36] McGinn concludes that a person who does not form beliefs on the basis of experience in the usual way is not interpretable, but he this would include only "eccentric souls" or "madmen" and that "distrusting one's senses in this radical way is a sure way to perish."[37] Experience is therefore important in interpretation as, McGinn states, "if you want to find out what a complete stranger believes you first notice how the world appears to him – how he experiences it – and then you take it that he believes by and large what he has perceived."[38]

McGinn's remarks are made in the context of a critique of Davidson's principle of charity which, he states, "goes by the board as a universally applicable precept."[39] McGinn accuses Davidson of neglecting the role of experience in the formation of beliefs which, when given due importance, makes the principle of charity redundant. McGinn claims to endorse a 'principle of humanity' which replaces Davidson's 'principle of charity' as he allows for charity about rationality as a requirement for interpretation and, moreover, agrees with Davidson on the limits to the amount of inconsistency which can intelligibly be permitted when interpreting other people's beliefs.

One line of criticism which has been directed against Davidson's arguments concerns the assumption he makes concerning the requirement of linguistic intertranslatability (or interpretation) for something to be considered a language at

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35 *Ibid.*, p. 167. Forster quotes I. Hacking in *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975) p. 149.

36 Colin McGinn, 'Radical Interpretation and Epistemology,' pp. 356 – 68, *Truth and Interpretation, Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson,* Ed., Ernest LePore, p. 367.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 367.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 368.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 368.

all. If one were to use the case of the possibility of aliens speaking a language in this regard, what if no sense could be made of such a language? Those in favour of the existence of different conceptual schemes could easily claim that what it is for aliens to have a different conceptual scheme would be that it would be impossible to make sense of their utterances. Moreover, Davidson's claim that there are no genuinely alternative conceptual schemes does not necessarily follow from the assumption that an alien who speaks a language, for example, would have a pattern of belief which is similar to ours. Rather than denying the *dualism* of scheme and content, this merely leads to the possible claim that *there is only one conceptual scheme* (but not necessarily to the fact that other conceptual schemes may eventually be uncovered). A conceptual relativist or a proponent of different conceptual schemes could argue that aliens have completely different mind-sets, which results in the incongruence or incompatibility of our beliefs and theirs.

Davidson's arguments reinforce the view that the only way to conceive the world is the way we do, but do they succeed in demolishing the scheme-content dualism? The only conclusion which Davidson could reach at this point is that *all rational creatures make use of the same conceptual scheme to organise their intuitions.* The proponent of different conceptual schemes could still, however, challenge Davidson's assumption that interpretation is possible and that interpretation (or translation) is a criterion for something to be called a language. It is interesting to note that it is possible to discover ways of thinking about the world which are different from the ones we are accustomed to, when we are engaged in the interpretation of foreign languages, such as Eskimos who use different words for different types of snow or Maltese who use a number of different words for different types of wind. This does not, however, imply the use of different conceptual schemes and it is important to emphasise the fact that our speech always involves language which concerns a world of material objects which is populated by people of varying degrees of emotional, psychological and linguistic complexity.

In 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics' Davidson makes use of a different tactic to that used in 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' against the possibility

of different conceptual schemes. His basic claim is that "much community of belief is needed to provide a basis for communication or understanding."[40] In this regard, he postulates the existence of an omniscient interpreter and, following his assumption that the possibility of massive error is impossible,[41] he constructs an argument against the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes. His claim is that it would not be possible for massive error to occur due to the claim that error is only possible against a background of largely true beliefs. (If massive error were to occur, it would be indicative of the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes.)

Two arguments could be directed against this claim. The first is that a conceptual relativist would claim that beliefs are considered to be correct or not only when viewed relative to a conceptual scheme and, therefore, the notion of an omniscient interpreter begs the question against the conceptual relativist. However, there is one way in which the notion of the omniscient interpreter could be conceived in order to accommodate the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes – that is, by assuming that the omniscient interpreter views *all* (even incompatible) conceptual schemes in a separate yet conjunctive manner. In order to do so, the omniscient interpreter would have to take on an *additive* point of view whereby access to all sorts of schemes and beliefs is available *conjunctively* and in such a way that alien beliefs do not contradict other (incompatible) beliefs but are viewed *in conjunction with and, therefore, alongside each other.* This would preclude the possibility of massive error.

Luntley, who puts forward this view and who admits that his reading of Davidson has been influenced by McDowell,[42] argues that the denial of the scheme-content dualism comes about as a result of a transcendental argument about our confrontation with the world rather than from the empirical argument from interpretation. Luntley's main claim is that our confrontation with the world is direct and this leads, in his view, to a denial of the scheme-content dualism.

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40 Donald Davidson, 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics,' 1977, pp. 244 – 54, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Studies in the Philosophy of Language*. Reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, pp. 215 – 26, p. 200.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 200. Davidson states: "objective error can occur only in a setting of largely true beliefs."

42 Luntley, *Contemporary Philosophy of Thought*, p. 360, 32n.

It therefore follows that, since the world is independent of will and since it has a direct impact on our thinking, there is constraint on thinking from outside thought itself, with the result that the very idea of a dualism of scheme and content is dissolved. It seems as though Luntley is following McDowell to some extent in this regard, and this is evident in his claim that "What is denied by the thesis of direct presence is the idea that the structure encountered is an organization that arises from the application of a conceptual scheme upon a level of confrontation that is non-conceptual."[43] This view is consonant with both Davidson's and McDowell's claims that the world is present in thought, that is, within the realm of rationality or of the conceptual, and is not presented to us via some intermediary such as the Given.

From the foregoing discussion, one can identify four main themes in the dualism of scheme and content. These emerge from criticisms of the dualism such as Davidson's, but they could just as easily emerge from McDowell's criticism of the dualism. An anti-dualist would:

1. oppose the idea that our beliefs and theories result from the organisation of a neutral or uninterpreted content;
2. oppose the idea that the world has an intrinsic structure which is independent of all concepts and theories;
3. oppose the idea that our beliefs and meanings are based on evidence which is obtained from experiences which are independent from the world;
4. maintain that there could be no such possibility of a view of the world achieved from outside all concepts.[44]

If one were to accept these criteria, both McDowell and Davidson are confirmed anti-dualists. Their espousal of particular viewpoints such as the rejection of the Given and the importance of providing a solid grounding in the world for our thoughts and knowledge (openness and passivity of experience for McDowell, triangulation for Davidson) play an important role in this respect. The attack of

43 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

44 William Child, 'On the Dualism of Scheme and Content,' pp. 53 – 71, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. XCIV, The Aristotelian Society, 1994, p. 55.

both philosophers on the dualism of scheme and content can be viewed as an attack on the Given which had previously appealed to a number of philosophers but which both McDowell and Davidson have done their utmost to discredit.

Davidson's Position Updated

Davidson's views concerning the rejection of the scheme-content dualism appear to have developed since his paper, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme' was first published in 1974.[45] 'Content' was initially described in two ways, "either it is reality (the universe, the world, nature), or it is experience (the passing show, surface irritations, sensory promptings, sense-data, the given)."[46] Davidson added that "Empirical content is ... explained by reference to facts, the world, experience, sensation, the totality of sensory stimuli, or something similar."[47] These ideas were further developed in 'The Myth of the Subjective' first published in 1986 where Davidson describes the contents of a scheme as "objects of a special sort, such as sense-data, percepts, impressions, sensations, or appearances; or the objects may dissolve into adverbial modifications of experience."[48] This expresses similarities to McDowell's view on content (as opposed to scheme) which he often refers to as Given (as in the dualism of scheme and Given) in order to distinguish content in this dualism from representational content.

In 'Seeing through Language,' published in 1997, Davidson's views on the dualism of scheme and content seem to take into consideration some of the criticism which McDowell directed towards his original discussion.[49] Rather than rejecting alternative conceptual schemes conceived as different ways of describing the world we live in, Davidson now concedes that "some people have conceptual resources not available to everyone" such as "Biologists, aeronautical engineers, solid state physicists, musicologists, cartographers, molecular biologists,

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45 The paper was first published in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 1973-74.

46 Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' p. 192.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

48 Donald Davidson, 'The Myth of the Subjective,' pp. 159 – 72, *Relativism: Confrontation and Interpretation*, Ed. M. Krausz, (South Bend, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989) p. 161n.

49 The paper refers to McDowell's criticism of Davidson in *Mind and World*.

selenographers and psychoanalysts [who] all command vocabularies and theories many of us do not."[50] Davidson calls these "differences or provincialisms in our conceptual schemes" which are explicable, *but which do not consitute different conceptual schemes.*[51]

Davidson's claim that "We perceive the world through language, that is, through having language"[52] reflects the claim that there is no way in which we can get outside our concepts together with the claim that thinking necessarily involves the use of concepts. Davidson, however, clearly states that "language does not distort," and that "we should resist the claim that it is truth that is bent or distorted by language," even though "language reflects our native interests and our historically accumulated needs and values, our built-in and learned inductive dispositions."[53]

Davidson's primary concern still remains the fact that "the criteria for what would constitute a scheme incommensurable with ours are simply unclear" and serious problems would only exist in cases where "no translation is possible" as in the case of "genuinely incommensurable languages."[54] It is not clear, however, whether his use of the word 'decode' instead of 'translate'[55] is a concession to critics who suggest that translation is too strong a criterion for languagehood and that this could easily be substitued by the notion of 'interpretation'.

Davidson's attitude towards the Given, however, does not alter, and he states that we would have a distorted view of reality or have to accept that it is impossible, *pace* Kant, to perceive how the world really is only if "it were possible, in principle at least, to isolate some unconceptualised given which could be shaped by the mind, for then it might make sense to imagine a multitude of structures

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[50] Donald Davidson, 'Seeing through Language,' pp. 15 – 28, *Thought and Language*, Royal Institute of Philosophy supplement 42, Ed. John Preston (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997) p. 15.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[53] Davidson, 'Seeing through Language,' p. 17.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[55] *Ibid.*, p. 15. Davidson actually says: "If a scheme could be decoded by us, then it would not, by this very token, be all that different from ours."

within which the given could be shaped."[56] Since, however, "few of us now are taken by the idea of an unprocessed given," it is difficult to make out exactly what it is that awaits shaping.[57]

It is interesting to note Davidson's move in this paper towards direct realism as well as his attack on a view of language as an interface between thought and world. He states: "Language is not a medium through which we see; it does not mediate between us and the world," it "does not mirror or represent reality, any more than our senses present us with no more than appearances," and "scepticism about the power of language to capture what is real is old-fashioned scepticism of the senses given a linguistic twist."[58] Davidson remarks that "There is a valid analogy between having eyes and ears, and having language: all three are organs with which we come into direct contact with our environment. They are not intermediaries, screens, media, or windows."[59]

The learning of language plays an important role in this regard, and Davidson considers language, once learned, as a "mode of perception" and as "the organ of propositional perception." His direct realism is reinforced in a manner which reflects McDowell's ideas on the subject as he talks of perception as being "direct and unmediated in the sense that there are no epistemic intermediaries on which perceptual beliefs are based, nothing that underpins our knowledge of the world."[60]

Referring directly to McDowell's criticism of his view that nothing can supply a reason for a belief except another belief, (a view which Davidson re-confirms), he states that "Much of modern philosophy has been devoted to trying to arbitrate between the unconceptualised given and what is needed to support belief, but we now see that there is no chance of success."[61] He is, however, concerned with the problem of epistemological justification as he states: "What makes these

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56 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 22. Davidson refers in a footnote to his paper, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' published in 1983.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

problems pressing is the question how beliefs, if epistemically supported by nothing more than other beliefs, can independently, or as a collection, be connected with the world."[62]

Davidson draws on his views of triangulation in an attempt to come to grips with the problem of epistemic justification. Triangulation involves a consideration of the necessary conditions for the development of thought and language, a view which Davidson has presented in previous papers. He summarises his views on the subject as he states: "Learning requires three generalisations: the learned association of fire and hurt requires two, and the learning is displayed in the similarity of the responses: we avoid hurt by avoiding fire. Before there can be learning there must be unlearned modes of generalisation. Before there can be language there must be shared modes of generalisation."[63]

Davidson, however, draws attention to the fact that his ideas concerning triangulation do not require thought or language but occur with great frequency among animals that neither think or talk. Two further criteria are therefore required to account for objectivity. The first is the "concept of error, [that is] the appreciation of the distinction between belief and truth"[64] which comes about when there is disagreement in the attempt of two parties to communicate as part of the triangulation process. This is a holistic conception of error, as Davidson states: "the problem of error cannot be met sentence by sentence, even at the simplest level. The best we can do is cope with error holistically, that is, we interpret so as to make an agent as intelligible as possible, given his actions, his utterances and his place in the world."[65]

The second criterion consists of the expression of truth by means of the communication of the propositional contents of the shared experience by means of language. Davidson states: "Communication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by

62 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
65 Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' p. 318.

the same events and objects."[66] Davidson's notion of objective truth therefore conjoins belief and truth as he states: "In order to doubt or wonder about the provenance of his beliefs an agent must know what belief is. This brings with it the concept of objective truth, for the notion of a belief is the notion of a state that may or may not jibe with reality."[67] When this position is conjoined with Davidson's claim that beliefs are by nature generally true, one can better comprehend the logic behind his conclusion that "The primitive triangle, constituted by two (and typically more than two) creatures reacting in concert to features of the world and to each other's reactions, thus provides the framework in which thought and language can evolve."[68] This is, in my view, a clear statement of Davidson's adherence to realism and to objective truth, which could be seen to rebut McDowell's criticism in this regard.

Although Davidson's views do not consist of an explicit reaction to the criticism which McDowell directs at him in *Mind and World*, one notes that some changes in Davidson's thought appear to have developed, at least in part, as a (direct or indirect) reaction to that particular criticism. It is clear that Davidson was aware of McDowell's criticism at the point of writing 'Seeing through Language' as *Mind and World* is cited as a reference[69] and McDowell's criticism of Davidson's coherentist position is acknowledged.[70] It seems likely that *Mind and World* has had a positive influence on Davidson and that it encouraged him to reconsider his position on a number of issues, in particular, on the connection of our beliefs to the world and on what appears to be acceptance of direct realism.

Is Davidson's revised position subject to criticism which has been directed against his views on the dualism of scheme and content? Nicholas Rescher maintains, in a pragmatic vein, that Davidson's anti-dualist arguments are not convincing and that the dualism of scheme and content is still useful and valid, while Michael N. Forster proposes some interesting examples of alternative conceptual schemes. What are the implications of these arguments for McDowell's position?

66 *Ibid.*, p. 318.
67 *Ibid.*, p. 318.
68 Davidson, 'Seeing Through Language,' p. 27.
69 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
70 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Adherence to the Scheme-Content Distinction

Nicholas Rescher argues in favour of retaining the scheme-content distinction and, to support this claim, makes use of pragmatic arguments which take into consideration the "practical issue of how effectively they [conceptual schemes] enable us to find our way amid the shoals and narrows of a difficult world."[71] The main thrust of Rescher's pro-dualism discussion is that Davidson's focus on *translation* is misguided and that we should shift to the broader notion of *interpretation* as a criterion for an alternative conceptual scheme. Interpretation would imply making sense of that which others say in a rough and ready way which would include paraphrase and explanation and thereby render other conceptual schemes intelligible.

Rescher claims that the shift from *translatability* to *interpretability* would not be incompatible with scheme-differentiation.[72] Examples to support his claims are abundant in Rescher's paper, and he draws attention to the fact that cuneiform inscriptions demonstrated that language was being used, but these inscriptions were untranslatable, thus providing an instance of the possibility of an alternative conceptual scheme which could not be translated. Amongst the numerous examples he puts forward are translating a modern chemistry text into Ionic or translating a thesis on quantum electrodynamics into Latin. A relatively more recent example is provided when he quotes a Melanisian utterance translated literally into English taken from a publication by the anthropologist Malinowski which would require a large number of assumptions, explanations and paraphrasing to make any sense.[73]

There are two claims a Davidsonian might make in response to Rescher's remarks, a strong claim and a weak one. The strong claim would be that for anything to be a language it has to be such that it is *actually* translatable; the weak

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71 Nicholas Rescher, 'Conceptual Schemes,' pp. 323 – 46, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume V, Studies in Epistemology*, Eds., Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling Jr., Howard K. Wettstein, Associate Editor, Robert Feleppa (Minneaspolis, U.S.A.: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) p. 343.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 328.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 327, 344n.

claim would be that for anything to be a language, it ought to be *theoretically* translatable (even though one does not know how to translate it yet). In my view, Davidson is committed to the weak claim, but it is arguable that he is also committed to the stronger one, although one cannot deduce this from his writings.

Rescher's views on translatability have been criticised by Robert Kraut who accuses him of ignoring the fact that translatability is *not* an *a priori* constraint on languagehood, but emerges as the conclusion of an argument. Kraut claims that we cannot understand truth independently of translation and we cannot understand the imputation of a theory to someone without accepting that most of the sentences which constitute the theory are true.[74]

Rescher replaces Davidson's postulation of 'translatability' as the determinant of language use with 'functional equivalency' which, he claims, "affords the needed principle of unification and renders diverse linguistic schemes as distinct instances of a common species."[75] He describes 'functional equivalency' by making use of the concept of 'counting as money' as analogous to 'counting as a language'. The money we use is a fixed basis of reference when we consider other monetary systems. The problem arises, he notes, when one considers money which is no longer in use, such as the Roman denarius, and which is incommensurable with present-day money where exchange rates are concerned. Roman coins are, however, considered to be money because of the way they were used, that is, because of their functional role. Rescher claims that the same applies for language and what makes talk or writing recognisable as a language would be its function in communicating and transmitting information.[76]

Rescher disagrees with Davidson's views on scheme innovation where "We get a new out of an old scheme when the speakers of a language come to accept as true an important range of sentences they previously took to be false (and, of course,

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[74] Robert Kraut, 'The Third Dogma,' pp. 398 – 416, *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Ed. Ernest LePore (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 1986, 1993) p. 403.

[75] Rescher, 'Conceptual Schemes,' p. 329.

[76] *Ibid.*, p. 328.

vice versa)."[77] Rescher's view on conceptual innovation is that moving from "one conceptual scheme to another is in some way to change the subject. It is not a quarrel about the same old issues."[78] Whereas Davidson claims that new schemes would involve a redistribution of truth values, Rescher's conception of the differentiation of conceptual schemes turns on the fact that some truth-determinations from the angle of one scheme are simply *indeterminate* from that of the other. In other words, "The difference between schemes does not lie in disagreement and conflict; it turns not on what they *do* say but on what they do not and cannot say at all, on matters that simply *defy* any attempt at actual *translation* from the one scheme into the other and that call for the evasive tactics of paraphrase, circumlocution, and "explanation"."[79]

Kraut criticises Rescher's claim that what can be said by one conceptual scheme is simply outside the range of the other and is not a matter of distributing truth values differently. One example which Rescher gives which Kraut criticises is that of Caesar's conceptual scheme not including concepts such as 'electricity'. Kraut questions what is added to the "bare behaviouristic claim" that Caesar fails to hold true (or false) particular sentences by saying that his conceptual scheme differs from ours. This merely implies that there is a range of sentences which Caesar would neither accept nor reject. It does not, however, turn any explanatory wheels, neither does it retain the excitement in the scheme idea. In other words, one may concede that Caesar's conceptual scheme is lacking certain concepts, but this does not pose any challenges for opponents of the dualism, nor does it provide any interesting philosophical implications. All it implies is that Caesar lacks the relevant sentential skills and therefore lacks the appropriate concept.[80]

Although Rescher is committed to the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes, he does not subscribe to the notion of scheme-neutral experience, sensation, or any other such 'given'. He argues in favour of abandoning the 'myth' of unstructured input, without however giving up the idea of the possibility

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77 *Ibid.*, p.331. Rescher quotes from Davidson's 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme.'

78 *Ibid.*, p. 331.

79 *Ibid.*, p. 331.

80 Kraut, 'The Third Dogma,' p. 404.

of different conceptual schemes. In a manner which reflects both McDowell's views concerning the unboundedness of the conceptual and Davidson's views in 'Seeing through Language', but which, however, reflects idealist leanings, he states: "any reality we can conceive of … is *already* linguistically and conceptually mediated. The idea of a "thought-independent reality" that is *prior* to the mechanisms of conceptualizing thought … is thus a misleading myth." The real is simply "what we can really and truly say or think to be the case."[81]

His argument is based on the fact that it is not possible to say what the Given is, nor is it possible to apply the distinction between that which is Given, and that which is not. Therefore, "Even if one were to grant *in abstracto* the existence of a preschematically *given* over and above the schematically graspable, there is nothing one can *do* with this conception."[82] To support his claims Rescher quotes Rorty who states that "the suggestion that our concepts shape neutral material no longer makes sense once there is nothing to serve as this material."[83] Rescher thus demonstrates that it is not necessary for a supporter of different conceptual schemes to embrace the assumption that a scheme-neutral input exists. Rather, the supporter of different conceptual schemes supports the fact that different languages afford us different ways of talking and that conceptual schemes are built upon *Weltanschauuntgen*. Rescher's claim is that "given a proper conception of what conceptual schemes are and how they actually work, one can abandon entirely the myth of a uniform, shared, preschematic input without giving up the idea of different conceptual schemes,"[84] this being a view which is similar to that of McDowell.

An important final question which Rescher addresses is the appraisal of alternative conceptual schemes. If conceptual schemes do not process the same material differently, why should we not simply conjoin them? He admits that we do so sometimes such as when a scholar moves between different thought-worlds of different cultures or when we combine a specialist conceptual scheme such as that of science with the scheme of our everyday life. This is however very

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81 Rescher, 'Conceptual Schemes', p. 336.

82 *Ibid.*, p. 336.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 337. Rescher quotes from Richard Rorty, 'The World Well Lost,' p. 650.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 338.

difficult and restricted as adopting another conceptual scheme may require some sort of "conversion experience". Although "Different schemes talk about things differently ... [different schemes] are - or may be - simply out of touch with one another and stand in a condition of Feyerabendian incommensurability,"[85] comparison can be effected by means of "pragmatic efficacy". In order to arbitrate between competing schemes he suggests that one should pragmatically ask, "Which scheme underwrites more efficient and effective intervention in the course of events so as to produce those desired results in the area of cognition and communication for whose sake languages and their conceptual schemes are instituted as human resources."[86]

In this regard, Rescher is influenced by C. I. Lewis whose espousal of the scheme-content dualism is closely connected to his pragmatist beliefs. In order to support his view, Rescher quotes Lewis who states, "There may be alternative conceptual systems, giving rise to alternative descriptions of experience, which are equally objective and equally valid .... When this is so, choice will be determined, consciously or unconsciously, on pragmatic grounds."[87] A major difference between Lewis's ideas and those of Rescher is that the former, as we have seen in Chapter One, espouses the Given, while the latter does not.

Numerous examples of language where putative alternative conceptual schemes emerge are abundant in the literature on the subject. Forster, for example, draws attention to the fact that the term used for white in epic Greek, *leukos*, was applied to things which are bright and transparent such as a cloudless, radiant sky or clear water, besides that which would normally be classified as white. The word *melas* which, he claims, is the closest equivalent to our term 'black', was applied to dark things such as an oak tree, wine and the sea. The epic Greek word *chlòros* implies, according to Forster, a colour (green-yellow-pale) and the idea of moistness, while *porphureos* connotes purple but also implies qualities of motion

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85 *Ibid.*, pp. 341 – 42.

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 342 – 43.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 342. Rescher quotes C. I. Lewis's *Mind and the World Order*, pp. 271 – 72.

such as surging or swelling. Forster further claims that epic Greek lacks terms for blue or brown and lacks distinct terms for green and yellow.[88]

Forster reacts to Davidson's demolition of the scheme-content dualism as he accuses Davidson of "conflating" a number of distinct questions which he identifies as follows:

1. Are we justified in believing that there are systems of concepts and beliefs which differ from our own in ways that are quantitatively and qualitatively radical?
2. Are we justified in believing that there are systems of concepts and beliefs which could not in any way be interpreted or translated by us into our language?
3. Are we justified in believing that "there are systems of concepts and beliefs which are unintelligible by us"?
4. Are we justified in believing that "there are systems of concepts and beliefs which relate to experience or reality in a sharply dualistic manner of scheme to content"?[89]

Forster is in favour of retaining the dualism of scheme and content. However, in his paper, 'On the Very Idea of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes' he does not offer any positive suggestions as to why the dualism should be retained, apart from a number of examples including those cited earlier in this section.

What are the implications which emerge from Rescher's and Forster's arguments for McDowell's position where the scheme and content dualism is rejected and where adherence to minimal empiricism is adopted? In my view, if one were to retain the dualism as Rescher and Forster advocate, it would not give rise to any philosophically interesting issues as the distinction can be shown to be cultural or historical. Moreover, Rescher's and Forster's retention of the dualism does *not*

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88 Forster, 'On the Very Idea of Denying the Existence of Radically Different Conceptual Schemes,' pp. 162 – 63.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 173, 39n.

incorporate acceptance of the Given, which renders it less threatening when compared to Davidson's and McDowell's positions.

Rescher's main arguments in favour of retaining the distinction seem to centre mainly on his claim that conceptual schemes are built upon world-views or *Weltanschauungen*, and these arguments also apply to Forster. In this regard, it does not seem as though any serious implications emerge from the foregoing arguments in favour of the scheme-content dualism for philosophers such as Davidson and McDowell who reject it. Although both Rescher and Forster present a number of interesting examples in an attempt to defend their position, yet both Davidson and McDowell could argue that these are merely different cultural or historical expressions used in language which could generally be interpreted. This would demonstrate that both Rescher's and Forster's examples do *not* belong to a *radically* different conceptual scheme, at least, not under the conditions which Davidson imposes for something to be considered as such.

What conclusions can be drawn from the foregoing discussion? Are the arguments against the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content persuasive, or is there some notion of the dualism which should be retained? Rescher's and Forster's arguments have demonstrated that it is possible to conceive of different conceptual schemes which are dissociated from the *dualism* of scheme and content. This is a view which contrasts with that of Davidson whose main argument against the scheme-content dualism is that it is not possible to conceive of alternative conceptual schemes, and that therefore the dualism collapses. Should the dualism be retained if the existence of alternative conceptual schemes is conceded or does Davidson's argument collapse? McDowell, like Davidson, rejects the scheme-content dualism. Can his arguments withstand the danger of collapse that Davidson's argument now faces?

From Translation to Interpretation:
Retaining Conceptual Schemes and Discarding the Dualism

In a discussion on the third dogma of empiricism, Jeff Malpas notes that although Quine's two dogmas appear to have been largely rejected by analytic

philosophers, debate still persists on the viability or otherwise of the scheme-content distinction and the notion remains in a variety of forms.[90] Malpas claims that the three dogmas all depend on "the one basic distinction expressed in various ways as a distinction between the conceptual and the empirical, the linguistic and the extralinguistic, the subjective and the objective."[91] It is interesting to note that McDowell maintains a position which attempts to retain two elements which, according to Malpas, constitute a dichotomy, that is, both the conceptual *and* the empirical. It makes no sense, Malpas claims, to treat one part of the dichotomy in isolation from the other, and therefore the notion of a conceptual scheme can only be employed in connection with talk about something which concerns the world or experience. Malpas is sympathetic towards Rescher's view of conceptual schemes as representing particular theoretical standpoints. In this regard, schemes are identified with theories but this relegates schemes to purely local structures. Referring to Rescher's views on the subject, Malpas draws attention to the "everyday and seemingly unproblematic usage in a number of contexts in which some such notion [as a conceptual scheme] seems to be called for."[92]

In my view, it is possible to admit to the existence of different conceptual schemes and yet to reject the dualism of scheme and content. Davidson appears to be happy to concede that "some people have conceptual resources not available to everyone" such as musicologists, aeronautical engineers and selenographers.[93] Even McDowell allows for different conceptual schemes as long as they serve merely to embody a language or a cultural tradition. (MW 155) Yet (in my view, misplaced) criticism is often directed at Davidson where he is accused of implying that in order to believe in the possibility of different conceptual schemes one must believe in the dualism of scheme and content.

Forster criticises Davidson in this regard and accuses him for being either "trivially true but irrelevant or relevant but quite implausible."[94] Forster claims that Davidson does not address the possibility of there being radically different

[90] J. E. Malpas, *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning: Holism, Truth, Interpretation* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992) p. 194.
[91] *Ibid.*, p. 193.
[92] *Ibid.*, pp. 198 – 99.
[93] Davidson, 'Seeing Through Language,' p. 15.
[94] Forster, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

conceptual schemes without a commitment on the part of such adherents to the scheme-content dualism. However, one should consider the fact that Davidson's 'Seeing Through Language' was published in 1997, while Forster's paper was published in 1998 and it could therefore be the case that Forster was not aware of Davidson's updated views. This would imply that Forster is not, as he mistakenly seems to think, explicitly criticising Davidson when he notes that both Hegel and Herder were "each committed to the existence of a multiplicity of radically different conceptual schemes, but at the same time equally committed to *rejecting* any sharp form of scheme-content dualism."[95] However, Forster's use of the word "radically" in this context appears to be, in my view, misconceived, as it could give rise to an objection which would claim, *pace* Davidson, that "radical" differences in conceptual schemes are *incompatible* with a rejection of the dualism.

Malpas criticises Davidson for assuming that incommensurability and untranslatability amount to the same thing.[96] He further agrees with Marie McGinn that the Davidsonian approach does not imply an end for epistemology. However, "the sense in which it remains is a sense in which the theory of knowledge is transformed into, or seen as part of, the theory of interpretation, and is thereby understood against the holistic background of the psychological."[97]

On the other hand, in a paper which appears to be an attempt to clarify a number of issues, Quine explicitly states that he is in agreement with Davidson in conceiving of the dualism as one between language and the world. He states, "Where I have spoken of a conceptual scheme I would have been content, Davidson will be glad to know, to speak of a language awkward or baffling to translate."[98] It is interesting to note that Quine uses the terms "awkward" and "baffling to translate" as opposed to Davidson's stronger "intranslatability". In fact, Quine suggests that Davidson's arguments may be connected to a misinterpretation of his own use of the term "conceptual scheme". Quine

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95 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

96 Malpas, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 213.

98 W.V. Quine, 'On the Very Idea of a Third Dogma,' Chapter 4, pp. 38 – 42, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981) p. 41.

criticises Davidson's use of the notion of translatability as a criterion for languagehood and he states:

> If there is a question in my mind whether a language might be so remote as to be largely untranslatable, ... that question arises from the vagueness of the very notion of translation. We are already accustomed, after all, to cutting corners and tolerating rough approximations even in neighbourly translation. Translatability is a flimsy notion, unfit to bear the weight of the theories of cultural incommensurability that Davidson effectively and justly criticizes.[99]

This statement is in line with Quine's remarks on the indeterminacy of translation where he maintains that there are no facts of the matter regarding what speakers of alien languages mean and, moreover, that there is no objective fact of the matter about what anyone is actually talking about. He expands on this viewpoint as he states: "when I say there is no fact of the matter as regards, say, two rival manuals of translation, what I mean is that both manuals are compatible with all the same distribution of states and relations over elementary particles. In a word, they are physically equivalent."[100] Choice in such matters should be made, Quine states, by means of pragmatic principles which do not reduce the lack of fact about meaning but, rather, provide a means of making pragmatic choices.

Quine criticises Davidson for conflating truth and belief as he claims that Davidson refers to "the totality of experience" and "surface irritations" on a par with "the facts" and "the world". This criticism arises from Davidson's statement that "the notion of fitting the totality of experience, like the notion of fitting the facts, or being true to the facts, adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true ... Nothing, ... no *thing*, makes sentences and theories true: not experience, not surface irritations, not the world."[101] Quine draws attention to the fact that empiricism is *not* a theory of truth but a theory of evidence where "The proper role of experience or surface irritation is as a basis not for truth but for warranted belief."[102]

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99 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
100 Quine, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
101 *Ibid.*, p. 39. Quine quotes Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,' p. 16.
102 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

An interesting version of the scheme-content dichotomy is discussed by Kraut who attempts to "improve on the intelligibility of the scheme idea" without violating Davidson's views on interpretation, truth and reference.[103] He claims that "one can do something that looks suspiciously like scheming, while remaining opposed to a scheme-transcendent *urstoff* into which all languages *must* be translated."[104] It is interesting to note Kraut's shift in emphasis from epistemology to ontology, as he maintains that "the scheme-content distinction need not be thought of as the implementation of an outmoded and misguided epistemological theory" due to the fact that "scheming is the natural manifestation of a willingness to acknowledge alternative ontologies, as spawned by alternative expressive resources."[105] His alternative to the views which have been discussed involves the suggestion that 'content' corresponds to the favoured ontology embraced by the interpreter of a conceptual scheme and that disparities between conceptual schemes "need not entail global translational breakdowns; but they nonetheless have fairly interesting ontological consequences, consequences of the sort that schemers everywhere are trying to capture with their metaphors."[106] This statement could easily apply to the examples provided by Rescher and Forster cited in the previous section of this chapter.

In my view, the foregoing arguments clearly demonstrate that the notion of an alternative conceptual scheme can be considered as valid *only* when it is used to refer to a particular theoretical, cultural or historical system or to a specialised language. A scheme could be considered to represent a particular theoretical standpoint or a particular way of understanding particular phenomena. Schemes could therefore be viewed as dissociated from the *dualism* of scheme and content. Although this admission may imply some interesting ontological consequences, as Kraut remarked, yet it is a conception of scheme which is trivial as it is deprived of the organising role which it played when it previously formed part of a dualism. Moreover, it cannot be seen to turn any explanatory wheels. Davidson himself admits (as we have seen) to the existence of differences or provincialisms in our conceptual schemes. These provincialisms can always, however, be interpreted,

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103 Kraut, 'The Third Dogma,' p. 415.
104 *Ibid.*, p. 407.
105 *Ibid.*, p. 409.
106 *Ibid.*, p. 415.

even if this is only possible in a rough and ready manner. There is no doubt that provincialisms and rough and ready interpretations are accepted elements in any language.

Most of Davidson's argument centers around his claim that translation is a criterion for languagehood. The concept of 'translation' in this regard could be broadened to include concepts such as 'understanding', 'interpretation' and 'paraphrase'. In other words, elements of comprehension and communication (whether present, past or potentially future) are necessary for anyone to claim that particular marks or sounds constitute a language. This leads to the conclusion that it is not possible to conceive of a language (or another conceptual scheme) that is totally beyond interpretation. Although Rescher's example of cuneiform inscriptions may be considered beyond interpretation, this does not imply that they may not, in time, be deciphered, just as Egyptian hieroglyphics or Linear B have been deciphered. Forster, whose position is apparently (but not explicitly) in favour of retaining the scheme-content dualism, admits, in a discussion on the translation of epic Greek into English, that:

> A good translator, working in the spirit of Schleiermacher, will recognise that existing English does not afford an exact expression of this concept [the epic Greek word *chlòros*], and that the best way to convey it in English is therefore to modify existing English usage in a systematic way for the course of the translation in order thereby both to mimic Greek usage and hence meaning and to alert the reader of the translation by means of the odd usage to the fact that he is dealing with something conceptually unfamiliar.[107]

Forster identifies three types of translation: "literal translations into a home language as it is already constituted; nonliteral translations; and ... translations which achieve whatever degree of success they achieve by modifying the existing usages and hence the existing meanings of words in the home language."[108] He further notes that there is an important distinction which should be made between *translation* and *interpretation*. It is possible, he claims, to interpret a word from, for example, an alien language, into English by means of a description or use which succeeds in conveying the sense of the original word without there being any means of actual translation. This is, he claims, evident also when one

107 Forster, *op. cit.*, p. 178, 83n.
108 *Ibid.*, p. 138.

considers nonverbal means of interpretation, such as ostension, which could also successfully convey the sense of a word without translating it.[109]

Forster's main objective in this regard is to demolish Davidson's claim that one is entitled to call something a language only if one is prepared to claim that it is possible to translate or interpret its assertions into one's own language, in which case, according to Davidson, it would result that both languages would not belong to different conceptual schemes. Forster's arguments attempt to demonstrate that it is possible to conceive of different conceptual schemes, such as epic Greek and present-day English, where content can be interpreted successfully, after broadening the concept of interpretation and considering "fairly basic empirical facts and conceptual distinctions."[110] In order to reinforce his point, Forster notes that "The great translator of Plato, Schleiermacher, and the great translator of Aeschylus, Fränkel, both argue for the inevitability of such distortions at least when translating ancient texts into a modern language."[111] He quotes Schleiermacher as stating that the translator "must bend the language of the translation as far as possible toward that of the original in order to communicate as far as possible an impression of the system of concepts developed in it."[112]

It is interesting to note that a position which admits to the existence of different conceptual schemes while at the same time doing away with the dualism of scheme and content makes it "far from obvious", as Forster maintains, "that some form of skepticism or relativism is the wrong position to adopt."[113] He further claims that "it is not at all clear that acknowledging the existence of radical differences in concepts and beliefs must lead to skepticism or relativism – [or] that denying their existence is the only way of avoiding skepticism and relativism (or even the best way)."[114]

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109 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
110 *Ibid.*, p. 139.
111 *Ibid.*, p. 172, 29n.
112 *Ibid.*, p. 172, 30n. Forster quotes Schleiermacher, 'On the Different Methods of Translation,' in *German Romantic Criticism*, Ed., A.L. Wilson (New York: Continuum, 1982) p. 25.
113 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
114 *Ibid.*, p. 165.

It has often been suggested by a number of philosophers that acceptance of the existence of multiple conceptual schemes leads to conceptual relativism and that this, in turn, leads to scepticism and a denial, or failure to definitively assert, the objectivity of our thoughts, beliefs and knowledge. In my view, however, instead of viewing the threat as being *conceptual relativism*, one should consider it to be *cultural relativism* which, in turn, is not conceived dualistically but, rather, innocently as the possibility of different forms of expression by different cultures in different epochs. Jane Heal proposes an interesting description of 'cultural relativists' who, she notes, draw attention to the existence of widely differing conceptual schemes which are often said to be 'incommensurable'. This can be quite unsettling for a realist. However, she states that "it is said" that "we should ... recognize that the making of these utterances [which seem to belong to different and incommensurable conceptual schemes] is not to be construed as the description of how things are independent of people; rather they are moves in complex social rituals, constitutive of various distinctive ways of life."[115]

Heal is a quietist where conceptual schemes are concerned and this is evident in her claim: "In order to avoid affirming that there are two conceptual schemes we do not have to insist baldly that there is only one, nor yet do we have to underpin the concepts exercised in the judgements we wish to interpret realistically by appealing to a classification scheme built into Nature."[116] This could be interpreted as implying that we can be relaxed with our existing world view and not allow it to give rise to any anxiety because it is not possible for an alternative conceptual scheme to be made available as a viable option for us.

Heal, like McDowell, espouses minimal realism and follows Wittgenstein in taking the view that alternative ways of looking at things "never acquire in our thought more than the shadowy and notional status which they have at the beginning of the process of reflection." She explicitly states that "We never answer the question 'Are there other conceptual schemes?' affirmatively in a way

115 Jane Heal, *Fact and Meaning: Quine and Wittgenstein on Philosophy of Language* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1989) p. 30.

116 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

which would precipitate us into relativism."[117] This view is consonant with the conclusion arrived at in this chapter where the acceptance of the existence of alternative conceptual schemes does not lead to acceptance of epistemological intermediaries such as the Given. Neither does it lead to either relativism or scepticism, or imply any form of dualism whatsoever. In fact, McDowell's main motivation for rejecting the dualism is his rejection of the Given which is evident in his referring to the dualism as that of scheme and *Given*.

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that McDowell's rejection of the dualism and his position as a minimal empiricist are legitimate and compatible as the issue of the dualism of scheme and content can now be dissociated from the existence of alternative conceptual schemes which are not philosophically threatening. The demolition of the dualism of scheme and content by both McDowell and Davidson can be linked more clearly to McDowell's views discussed in Chapter Two on the Kantian dualism of understanding and sensibility. If the latter concepts are to be conceived as interdependent and intertwined, and not as a dualism, the same should apply to scheme and content. In this regard, Davidson links the dualism to the dualism of subjective and objective: "Instead of saying it is the scheme-content dichotomy that has dominated and defined the problems of modern philosophy ... one could as well say it is how the dualism of subjective and objective has been conceived. For these dualisms have a common origin: a concept of the mind with its private states and affairs."[118]

The rejection of the dualism of scheme and content therefore involves a rejection of traditional views of experience such as those of Descartes, Hume, Berkeley and C. I. Lewis. It is also part of a serious attempt to reconcile the subjective and the objective which McDowell proceeds to do through the dissolution of the dualism of reason and nature, as we shall see in Chapter Five. McDowell notes that "Davidson's aim ... is to exorcise a style of thinking whose effect ... is to make a mystery out of thought's bearing on the empirical world." (MW 138) This statement expresses the manner in which the dualisms I am discussing in this

117 *Ibid.*, p. 210.
118 Davidson, 'The Myth of the Subjective,' p. 163.

thesis are interlinked and how they all point towards McDowell's adherence to minimal realism.

In my view, a more holistic conception of the implications which emerge when the dualism of scheme and content is dissolved emerges when one considers the Heideggerian concept of human beings as living in a world where they are engaged in everyday relationships with others and with things in the world. Similar views to those of Heidegger are reflected by Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* as he states: "Children do not learn that books exist, that armchairs exist, etc., etc., - they learn to fetch books, sit in armchairs, etc., etc."[119] This statement raises questions regarding the validity of the subject-object distinction and the relevance of asking questions concerning realism and anti-realism, as we shall see in Chapter Six. At this stage, however, it is important to note that McDowell's extension of the conceptual realm to incorporate everything that exists, by considering the conceptual as unbounded, is a key issue. It is only by means of this postulation that McDowell can succeed in dissolving the dichotomy of scheme and content and still maintain minimal empiricism, whilst rejecting adherence to the Given. Added to this is McDowell's reconciliation of reason and nature which will be discussed in Chapter Five, by means of which, in a quietist manner, we will arrive at "a frame of mind in which we would no longer seem to be faced with problems that call on philosophy to bring subject and object back together." (MW 86)

Criticism which claims that by giving up the scheme-content dualism we risk losing our grip on the world, that is, we risk losing any possibilities we had for justification, can now be rebutted. In my view, if one were to combine McDowell's view of the unboundedness of the conceptual and the openness and passivity of experience together with Davidson's principle of charity (or humanity) and ideas on triangulation one would succeed in arriving at a plausible explanation of how knowledge can be justified. To this one could also add the Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

[119] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §476.

McDowell is evidently committed to dissolving dualisms such as the scheme-content dualism, in spite of his espousal of minimal empiricism which, in my view, precludes him from falling into the trap of coherentism. If he were to retain the scheme-content dualism, conceived in a manner which is philosophically interesting, in order to support his minimal empiricism, he would be allowing for the existence of unconceptualised thought, or Given, operating independently of any constraint from sensibility. This is a position which he vehemently opposes, mainly as it does not provide what he considers to be rational justification or constraint from an external world. If McDowell were to retain the dualism of scheme and content, his whole project would collapse. In this regard, his dissolving the dualism of scheme and content is in line with his opposition to coherentism and the Given and, as we shall see in the following chapter, to his reconciling the dualism of reason and nature.

It is to be admitted that McDowell walks on a fine line as his position involves the rejection of the scheme-content distinction, together with emphasis on the important role which the conceptual plays in experience and adherence to minimal empiricism and direct realism. As we have seen, these views are often considered to be incompatible, and this could possibly be one reason why McDowell has often been accused of being an idealist, in spite of his protests to the contrary. His attempt to provide constraint for our thinking from an external world is however controversial and involves, as we shall see, the claim that exercises of concepts constitute warranted judgements about the world. Added to this is the claim that the space of reasons is *sui generis,* and that the Sellarsian contrast between placing something in the realm of reasons and giving an empirical description of it is not sustainable once the notion of the unboundedness of the conceptual and that of second nature are introduced. Moreover, his position does away with any form of foundation for empirical knowledge, once again as a result of his reconciliation of reason and nature.

The following chapter will discuss McDowell's views on the dualism of reason and nature which will point towards his adherence to direct realism in Chapter Six. His attempted reconcilation of the dualism of reason and nature enables him

to maintain a position which is generally considered to be extremely difficult to achieve as it will involve claims such as "a normative context is necessary for the idea of being in touch with the world at all, whether knowledgeably or not." (MW xiv) As we shall see, this is brought about by means of manoeuvres which emanate from his quietism.

CHAPTER FIVE

Reason and Nature

The Dualism of Reason and Nature

> I had thought that once one follows Sellars in distinguishing between the causal antecedents of a belief and its place in the logical space of reasons, McDowell's questions about the relation between Reason and Nature no longer need asking.
> Richard Rorty[1]

The dualism which, according to McDowell, obstructs our understanding of how thought can reach out to the world is that of reason and nature. Reason is generally considered to belong to the *sui generis* realm of reasons, while nature is generally taken to belong to the realm of law. The dualism of reason and nature, which initially appears impossible to resolve, comes about when we think of our sense organs, on the one hand, as belonging to nature, and our thoughts, on the other hand, as belonging to the realm of spontaneity, or, following Sellars, the logical space of reasons. Our spontaneity is normally considered to operate in a realm which is diametrically opposed to the realm of nature, and is therefore conceived as non-natural. McDowell states: "I have tried to make it plausible that the anxieties I aim to exorcise issue from the thought – often no doubt only inchoate – that the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*, as compared with the logical framework in which natural-scientific understanding is achieved." (MW xxii) The sharp distinction between justificatory relations which pertain to reason and causal relations which pertain to nature therefore emerges as

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[1] Richard Rorty, 'McDowell, Davidson and Spontaneity,' pp. 389 – 94, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, June 1998, p. 389.

part of the dualism of reason and nature with a sharp distinction being drawn between justification and causality.

Rorty's statement quoted above attempts to cast doubts on the necessity which McDowell feels to dissolve this dualism. Rorty claims to be a 'bald naturalist' and this is a position which, as we shall see, McDowell vehemently opposes. McDowell expends a great deal of effort in *Mind and World* on attempting to dissolve the dualism of reason and nature. Is Rorty justified in his criticism that the views of Sellars suffice to settle the matter once and for all? What are Sellars' views on the subject and what are the effects of these views on McDowell's thought?

This chapter will analyse the dualism of reason and nature which McDowell attempts to 'dissolve'. It will investigate the credibility of the alternative picture which McDowell presents in *Mind and World* where he draws on Aristotelian ethics in an attempt to broaden the generally accepted conception of nature to incorporate normativity and rationality by postulating 'second nature' and *Bildung*, both of which are key concepts in his putative dissolution of the dualism of reason and nature.

There is no doubt that McDowell is greatly influenced by Sellars on whose thought he draws on a number of occasions. Sellars' ideas on the Given and on the distinction between normativity and causality play a key role in McDowell's discussion on reason and nature. Sellars had drawn attention to the fact that failure to observe the sharp distinction between norms and causes leads to the myth of the Given, where epistemological intermediaries are postulated and where an erroneous link is forged between objects, or causal events, and the realm of reason which incorporates normativity.

McDowell explicitly claims that, for the purposes of his argument, Sellars and Davidson are interchangeable and he interprets Sellars (and Davidson, as we have seen in the previous chapter) as having rejected empiricism, "partly", he states, "because they think the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*, as compared with the logical space in which Sellars sees "empirical description" as functioning,

which I have identified on Sellars's behalf with the logical space of nature." (MW xviii) The similarity of Sellars's views to those of Davidson concerning holism of belief and rationality is evident in the following statement: "empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation*, but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy though not *all* at once."[2]

Michael Williams calls this position "contextualism" and notes that it implies a view where "all justification takes place in an informational and dialectical context."[3] Williams draws attention to the fact that this view differs from the coherentist idea of total justification which plays no role in Sellars's thinking. Williams is mainly concerned with contrasting this view with foundationalism where empirical knowledge has a basis in an external world and which is the target of Sellars's attack on the Given.

Foundationalism has often been reverted to by empiricists in their attempts to ground thinking in a world that is external to thought. On the whole, however, most adherents of foundationalism end up postulating something that seems to be suspiciously like the Given. After Sellars's attack on the Given, however, the plausibility of this line of thought was considered by most epistemologists to be futile as it postulated extraneous and unnecessary intermediaries between thinking and the world. Philosophers who have followed Sellars in rejecting the Given include Davidson who proposed a holistic epistemology where only beliefs could be taken as justification for other beliefs. This is, however, a position which McDowell refuses to accept. In his view, it is a position that leads to coherentism where, as we have seen, there is no constraint on thought from an external world. McDowell retains minimal empiricism, while at the same time rejecting both

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2 Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with an Introduction by Richard Rorty and Study Guide by Robert Brandom (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997) p. 78. First published in Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1956). Reprinted in Sellars, 1963.

3 Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge, A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 179.

coherentism and the Given, and his views are strongly influenced by Sellars and Davidson.[4]

McDowell's advocation of both minimal empiricism and direct realism involves a stark contrast with the views of Davidson who, as we have seen in Chapter Four, was instrumental in demolishing the dualism of scheme and content. On the one hand, Davidson is a realist due to his views on triangulation and he states, "We can be realists in all departments. We can accept objective truth-conditions as the key to meaning, and we can insist that knowledge is of an objective world independent of our thought and language."[5] Davidson further states: "The ultimate source of both objectivity and communication is the triangle that, by relating speaker, interpreter and the world, determines the contents of thought and speech. Given this source there is no room for a relativized concept of truth."[6] This expresses Davidson's realism and his conviction that language and belief are essentially linked to both a human community and to a reality which is distinct from human thought. However, as we have seen, Davidson also claims that once the dualism of scheme and content has been demolished, there may not be anything left to call empiricism.

McDowell is opposed to Davidson's claim that causal links suffice to provide friction from an external reality. This is unacceptable, he maintains, and, following Kant, he states: "Thoughts without intuitions would be empty, as Kant almost says: and if we are to avert the threat of emptiness, we need to see intuitions as standing in rational relations to what we should think, not just in causal relations to what we do think. Otherwise the very idea of what we think goes missing." (MW 68)

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4 It is also important to note Robert Brandom's influence in this regard. McDowell acknowledges Brandom's influence, but Brandom's role in *Mind and World* is, in my view, indirect. Brandom follows Sellars whose ideas on justification he develops. Brandom takes justification to be inferential and views normativity in the context of a set of social practices where authority, responsibility and normative significance play a key role in justification and rationality.

5 Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' p. 307.

6 Donald Davidson, 'The Structure and Content of Truth,' pp. 279 – 328, *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 87, 1990, p. 325.

How can McDowell advocate minimal empiricism after having rejected the dualism of scheme and content when Davidson claimed that a rejection of the dualism implies a rejection of empiricism? McDowell's arguments are linked to his reconciliation of reason and nature which is achieved through "a firm hold on a naturalism of second nature." (MW 86) By rejecting the dichotomy of reason and nature, which is "the framework that is the real source of the problems of traditional empiricism," (MW 155) McDowell maintains that "impressions can come into their own as precisely a mode of openness to the world." (MW 155) The opposing view states that "empiricism conceives [of] impressions in such a way that they could only close us off from the world, disrupting our "unmediated touch" with ordinary objects." (MW 155) On the other hand, impressions can be "innocuous" and it therefore follows that "spontaneity is rationally vulnerable to receptivity without the unwelcome effect that receptivity seems to get in the way between us and the world." (MW 155) McDowell wants to place everything that is thinkable in the logical space of reasons, and yet maintain his minimal empiricism. He states that he is "concerned to cast doubt on Sellars's idea that placing something in the logical space of reasons is, as such, to be contrasted with giving an empirical description of it." (MW 5n) Can he do so successfully?

McDowell recognises that both Sellars and Davidson reject empiricism, mainly because they consider the logical space of reasons to be *sui generis* and therefore to be contrasted with the logical space of nature. In his efforts to bridge the gulf between reason and nature he admits that

> it can seem impossible to reconcile the fact that sentience belongs to nature with the thought that spontaneity might permeate our perceptual experience itself, the workings of our sensibility. How could the operations of a bit of mere nature be structured by spontaneity, the freedom that empowers us to take charge of our active thinking? (MW 70)

McDowell's solution involves making a distinction between the intelligibility of the space of reasons and natural-scientific intelligibility, that is, between reason and nature. In his view, the dichotomy of logical spaces should not be viewed as one between the *natural* and the *normative*. McDowell follows Sellars and Davidson in identifying a particular logical space where natural-scientific

investigation takes place, which is fundamentally distinct from the logical space of reasons. He however continues this train of thought with the explicit claim that the logical space which contrasts with the logical space of reasons is *not* to be equated with the logical space of *nature*. This makes it seem impossible, McDowell claims, "to combine empiricism with the idea that the world's making an impression on a perceiving subject would have to be a natural happening." (MW xx)

At this point, McDowell inserts a "reminder" which he calls "second nature", and which, as we shall see, enables him to expand on his claim that the conceptual is unbounded while at the same time incorporating rationality and normativity into "second nature." In this manner, he argues, conceptual capacities can be seen to operate both in judgements and "in the transactions in nature that are constituted by the world's impacts on the receptive capacities of a suitable subject." (MW xx) He further states: "Empirical content looks problematic ... when one becomes inexplicitly aware of an apparent tension between empiricism and the fact that the idea of an impression is the idea of an occurrence in nature." (MW xxi) By postulating "second nature" it becomes possible to "accommodate impressions in nature without imposing a threat to empiricism." (MW xx) In this manner McDowell can claim that "it is not philosophically threatening to suppose there is insight in the thought that reason is not natural" when an interpretation of "natural" is taken as "the logical space of natural-scientific understanding." (MW xxiii) In other words, McDowell's minimal empiricism maintains "that the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*, as compared with the structure of the logical space within which natural-scientific description situates things." Moreover, McDowell's alternative "makes room for us to suppose, as according to Sellars and Davidson we cannot, both that the very idea of experience is the idea of something natural and that empirical thinking is answerable to experience." (MW xix)

To overcome the dualism of reason and nature, McDowell draws on historical events which give rise to shifts in our conception of nature and human rationality. He notes that the modern conception of nature is based on a particular view of the achievements of modern science and that "modern science understands its subject

matter in a way that threatens, at least, to leave it disenchanted." (MW 70) The ensuing result is "a contrast between two types of intelligibility: the kind that is sought by ... natural science, and the kind we find in something when we place it in relation to other occupants of 'the logical space of reasons'" (MW 70) McDowell claims that we need to "rethink our conception of nature so as to make room for spontaneity, even though we deny that spontaneity is capturable by the resources of bald naturalism, we shall by the same token be rethinking our conception of what it takes for a position to deserve to be called "naturalism"." (MW 77)

He discusses three possible styles of response with regard to the status of spontaneity. The first response is "bald naturalism", a reductive approach, which "aims to domesticate conceptual capacities within nature conceived as the realm of law." (MW 73) Opponents of "bald naturalism" maintain that "the space of reasons stubbornly resists being appropriated within a naturalism that conceives nature as the realm of law." (MW 73) The second response, which is the view that McDowell recommends, concedes that the logical space of spontaneity "cannot be aligned with the logical space that is the home of ideas of what is natural in the relevant sense, [yet] conceptual powers are nevertheless operative in the workings of our sensibility, in actualizations of our animal nature as such." (MW 74) McDowell acknowledges that "this can seem to express a nostalgia for a pre-scientific world view, a call for a re-enchantment of nature." (MW 74)

The third response follows Davidson's ontological claim that "every event, even those that fall under the concepts that subserve "space of reasons" intelligibility, can in principle be made intelligible in terms of the operations of natural law." (MW 75) This position, however, differs from bald naturalism as it still maintains that there is a distinction between "spontaneity-related concepts" which are *sui generis* and "concepts whose fundamental point is to place things in the realm of law." (MW 74) The whole point of this ontological approach is that *sui generis* concepts that belong to spontaneity are "already in principle available to an investigation whose concern is the realm of law. The constitutive focus on the two kinds of intelligibility separates two batches of conceptual equipment, but it does not separate their subject matter." (MW 75) Therefore *sui generis* concepts

can be causally linked *only* if they are also occupants of the realm of law, by virtue of which these concepts are (viewed ontologically) also items in nature.

It should, however, be noted that efforts by philosophers to get to grips with the dualism of reason and nature have not achieved general consensus except for those who incorporate one side of the dualism into the other, such as 'bald naturalists' and reductionists who explain reason in natural (mechanistic) terms. In this regard, McDowell has proposed an alternative which somehow 'naturalises' reason while retaining its *sui generis* character.

Friedman criticizes McDowell's treatment of these three responses and maintains that McDowell is mistaken in taking "bald naturalism" (which is committed to modern mathematical-physical sciences) as a threat or blockage to a proper appreciation of the philosophical autonomy he wishes to defend. Friedman disputes McDowell's claim that the 'disenchantment of nature' effected by the scientific revolution was the key obstacle which stood in the way of a proper appreciation of the Kantian 'insight'. In his view, both Strawson and McDowell wish to introduce Kantian themes into contemporary philosophy and both recognise the fundamental tension between Kant's ideas and the world-view of modern mathematical-physical science. Friedman claims that there is no such tension in Kant and he further maintains that "the problem in question arises directly out of the recent naturalistic attacks on the autonomy of philosophy due, above all, to the work of Quine."[7]

Friedman draws attention to the fact that the contrast which McDowell describes between his own relaxed naturalism of second nature and "bald naturalism" is a recent development which arises in the context of contemporary post-Quinean philosophy. Therefore, Friedman claims, "The project of thus reconstructing reason from within the realm of law – on pain of rampant platonism – was not felt as philosophically urgent before these particular post-Quinean developments."[8]

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7 Michael Friedman, 'Kantian Themes in Contemporary Philosophy,' pp. 111 – 30, *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume LXXII*, (The Aristotelian Society, 1998) p. 121.

8 Michael Friedman, 'Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition: Comments on John McDowell's *Mind and World*,' p. 435.

Friedman demonstrates that "the route from the scientific revolution, through Kant, to the kind of problematic for which bald naturalism and rampant platonism are possible (if ultimately unsatisfactory) responses is considerably more complex than McDowell's account suggests."[9]

What are the implications of Friedman's criticism for McDowell's picture? If one were to accept Friedman's allegations, it would follow that McDowell is mistaken in claiming that we could revert to Kantian philosophy in order to realise (or, in his terms, to be 'reminded') that spontaneity and receptivity cannot be viewed in isolation from each other, but that we should "show" that Quine was mistaken in his "scientific" view of mankind and subsequent "naturalised epistemology." McDowell's quietist approach, which aims to quell the anxieties which arise from the dualism of reason and nature, would prove to be incorrect in this regard, as it would be pointing towards the wrong direction, that is, to Kant instead of (as Friedman suggests) to Quine. This implies that McDowell's attempt to show where the relevant 'insight' was blocked would lead us along the wrong track, with the possible negative consequence of finding the persuasiveness of his alternative picture unconvincing. McDowell's credibility with regard to his use of historical sources would, moreover, be put into question.

However, McDowell's attempt to dissolve the dualism of reason and nature is not wholly dependent on the historical issues which give rise to this dualism, except that his not being successful in this regard has the effect of rendering his quietism incomplete. This would ensue because one of the requirements of quietism involves a 'diagnosis' of the problem before 'therapy' or a 'cure' can be recommended. Friedman, in my view, has successfully cast doubt on McDowell's 'diagnosis' but not on his final picture.

What is the 'therapy' which McDowell recommends whereby the space of reasons is conceived as autonomous and *sui generis*, and yet where it is 'aligned' with nature conceived as the 'realm of law'? McDowell admits that "what is specifically human is surely natural (the idea of the human is the idea of what

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[9] Friedman, 'Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition,' p. 435.

pertains to a certain species of animals)." (MW 77) However, we refuse "to naturalize the requirements of reason. But human minds must somehow be able to latch on to this putatively "inhuman" structure. So it looks as if we are picturing human beings as partly in nature and partly outside it." (MW 77)

McDowell therefore proposes his alternative view of nature which is expanded so as to incorporate spontaneity in order to dissolve the dichotomy of reason and nature. He states: "If we rethink our conception of nature so as to make room for spontaneity, even though we deny that spontaneity is capturable by the resources of bald naturalism, we shall by the same token be rethinking our conception of what it takes for a position to deserve to be called "naturalism"." (MW 77) McDowell's solution allows for a conception of spontaneity as *sui generis* and makes use of Aristotelian ethics with the intention of broadening our habitual conception of nature. This solution keeps in mind the fact that:

> Exercises of spontaneity belong to our mode of living. And our mode of living is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. So ... exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. This removes any need to try to see ourselves as peculiarly bifurcated, with a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections. (MW 78)

McDowell's solution involves a reflection on Aristotle's ethics where the acquisition of "practical wisdom" opens our eyes to the requirements of reason. From a historical perspective, McDowell notes that it was only around the seventeenth century that knowledge was considered to have a normative status and to belong to an autonomous "space of reasons." Aristotle's naturalism, McDowell claims, would not have felt the tension we feel today between the normative and the natural. McDowell uses "practical wisdom" as a "model for the understanding, the faculty that enables us to recognize and create the kind of intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons." (MW 79) In this regard, McDowell introduces the concept of "second nature" which is "all but explicit in Aristotle's account of how ethical character is formed," and where practical wisdom is considered to be "second nature to its possessors." (MW 84)

How does second nature come about? McDowell claims that "human beings are intelligibly initiated into this stretch of the space of reasons by ethical upbringing, which instils the appropriate shape into their lives. The resulting habits of thought and action are second nature." (MW 84) Second nature opens ones eyes to reasons at large and includes initiation into "conceptual capacities which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics." (MW 84) "*Bildung*" is the term McDowell uses to refer to this type of initiation and upbringing.

Bildung and Second Nature

How does *Bildung* come about? McDowell's remarks in this regard leave a great deal to be desired, as he does not explain very much about *Bildung*, nor does he comment on how or when the process of *Bildung* begins in a human being's life. What he says is that the ethical domain consists of rational requirements which are there, whether we respond to them or not. It is through acquiring the appropriate conceptual capacities that we are alerted to the demands of rationality. This comes about, he states, because

> When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking. We can so much as understand, let alone seek to justify, the thought that reason makes these demands on us only at a standpoint within a system of concepts and conceptions that enables us to think about such demands, that is, only at a standpoint from which demands of this kind seem to be in view. (MW 82)

McDowell's notion of *Bildung* has been subject to a great deal of criticism. Weinberg accuses McDowell that his arguments on the subject of second nature appear to fall short of their mark. Weinberg himself confesses to not quite getting this part of McDowell's argument[10] and, in my view, it is difficult to find McDowell's claim to anchor spontaneity (or second nature) in the external world (in 'first' nature) persuasive. One gets the impression that McDowell is in a position to clarify this position but it does not appear as though he has done so – at least not in any particularly persuasive manner – either in *Mind and World* or in

[10] Jonathan M. Weinberg, 'John McDowell, *Mind and World,*' p. 255.

subsequent publications. This leads to McDowell's picture threatening to create new problems of its own, which goes against one of the tenets of quietism, namely, to present a picture which is obviously preferable to the previous one, which is persuasive, and which does not raise new problems.

Another aspect where McDowell falls short is due to his failure to provide sufficient grounds against one of the rival positions to "naturalised platonism" – that is "bald naturalism". McDowell is aware of this alternative as well as of the fact that bald naturalism "can be attractive." (MW 76) Yet, as Weinberg argues, McDowell does not show that the persuasiveness of bald naturalism is illusory, which, as a quietist, it is his task to do, as bald naturalism is part of the picture which he starts with and which he should aim to persuasively discredit. As Weinberg remarks, McDowell "not so much fails in his arguments against bald naturalism, but, more accurately, simply does not care to argue against it. ... McDowell seems to consider the position almost beneath contempt."[11]

A close reading of the Introduction to *Mind and World* demonstrates, however, that Weinberg's criticism is not entirely justified. McDowell is concerned with maintaining the that the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*. (MW xxii) One of the aims of bald naturalism is to demonstrate that the space of reasons can be *reduced* to "the space of natural-scientific understanding" (MW xxii) and this is something which McDowell's picture does not permit. In his effort to "unmask the supposed obligations [which arise as a result of the manner in which we view particular philosophical problems] as illusory" McDowell claims to "acknowledge as an insight the basic conviction that generates the anxieties" (MW xxii) – something which bald naturalism refuses to do. Although McDowell explicitly states that he is *not* concerned with refuting bald naturalism, (MW xxiii) he claims that his alternative is an improvement on bald naturalism as it allows for a conception of reason which is both special (that is, *sui generis)* and "natural," albeit in a different manner to that which bald naturalists generally conceive of "natural." The key point here is that McDowell's conception of "natural" is much

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11 *Ibid.*, p. 262.

broader than that of bald naturalists who conceive of the natural as "the logical framework in which natural-scientific understanding is achieved." (MW xxii)

Weinberg does not, however, appear to be convinced by McDowell's arguments. He declares that he "simply cannot get a precise enough hold on his [McDowell's] picture of 'naturalized platonism' to see it as a position for which I can abandon my own scientific naturalism."[12] The difficulties include McDowell's use of metaphors such as "openness to facts" or "resonating to the space of reasons" which, Weinberg claims, never get beyond metaphors. Metaphors, according to Weinberg, are essential components when one is dealing with a quietist picture, yet McDowell's "new picture remains so very elusive [that it] can make reading *Mind and World* a rather frustrating experience."[13] Weinberg considers this to be the chief failure of McDowell's work as although he seems to be convinced of his alternative picture, yet he does not succeed in showing others how to get there as well.

Since McDowell's notion of *Bildung* is not explained in detail, are there other sources which can be utilised in order to better understand this notion? One possible source is Hans-Georg Gadamer who, in *Truth and Method,* uses the concept of *Bildung* which he calls a "leading humanistic concept."[14] The translation of *Bildung* in Gadamer's text is "self-formation or cultivation" and he traces the use of the word back to Hegel who "already speaks of Sichbilden ('educating or cultivating oneself') and Bildung, when he takes up the ... Kantian idea of duties towards oneself."[15] Hegel saw, according to Gadamer, "that philosophy ... has, in Bildung, the condition of its existence." This is intimately connected to Hegel's Absolute Spirit or *Geist* which, according to Gadamer, "has an essential connection with the idea of Bildung."[16]

Culture and *Bildung* are, however, separate and should be distinguished, and Gadamer quotes Wilhelm von Humbolt who states, "but if in our language we say

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12 Weinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 258.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 259.
14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975) p. 10.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 11.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Bildung, we mean something both higher and more inward, namely the attitude of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavour, flows harmoniously into sensibility and character."[17]

Gadamer traces the etymology of the word *Bildung* to its Latin *formatio* and notes that there is a mystical quality incorporated into *Bildung* as opposed to other German translations of *formatio* such as *Formierung* and *Formation.* This is due to the fact that *Bildung* incorporates the word *Bild* whereas the idea of 'form' lacks the mysterious ambiguity of *Bild*, which can mean both *Nachbild* ('image', 'copy') and *Vorbild* ('model'). Gadamer claims that *Bildung* evokes religious sentiments as he states: "The rise of the word Bildung calls rather on the ancient mystical tradition, according to which man carries in his soul the image of God after whom he is fashioned and must cultivate it in himself."[18]

Gadamer's notion of *Bildung* incorporates a projection beyond individual self-interest towards a concept of an intellectual human being. In a statement which is evocative of McDowell's views on the subject, Gadamer claims that *Bildung* comes about because

> Every single individual that raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own. Thus every individual is always engaged in the process of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom.[19]

Gadamer's description of *Bildung* therefore exhibits a number of similarities to that of McDowell, and a brief description of the details from Gadamer's *Truth and Method* provide a more detailed explanation of McDowell's possible intentions where *Bildung* is concerned.

It could possibly also be the case that McDowell was influenced by Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* where *Bildung* is concerned.[20] Rorty cites

17 *Ibid.*, p. 11. Gadamer quotes Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Gesammelte Schriften*, p. 30.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
19 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
20 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton University Press,

Gadamer as claiming that the most important thing we can do is to "redescribe" ourselves and this is brought about "by substituting the notion of *Bildung* (education, self-formation) for that of "knowledge" as the goal of thinking."[21] Rorty makes use of the word 'edification' instead of *Bildung* which he claims sounds too foreign, and instead of education which, in his view, sounds too flat. In a manner which is seen to be reflected in McDowell's ideas regarding *Bildung*, Rorty claims that education needs to begin with acculturation and "the search for objectivity and the self-conscious awareness of the social practices in which objectivity consists are necessary first steps in becoming *gebildet*."[22] Elements of normativity appear to be included into Rorty's notion of *Bildung*, which also incorporates the humanist tradition. Rorty contrasts the latter with the natural sciences which, he claims, do not suffice for one to be considered educated. This is also applied to Gadamer's views on *Bildung* and Rorty states that "Gadamer begins *Truth and Method* with a discussion of the role of the humanist tradition in giving sense to the notion of *Bildung* as something having "no goals outside itself" [*Truth and Method* p. 12]."[23]

The notions of *Bildung* and second nature are very closely linked in McDowell's *Mind and World*, and an investigation of the origins of the concept of second nature takes us back to Cicero whose description of this aspect resembles that of McDowell. Cicero believed that following one's own nature implied following reason which, for him, also meant virtue. In *The Nature of the Gods* Cicero exults humankind (which he believes to have been bestowed on us by "divine providence" which he also calls "the wise and careful providence of nature")[24] for possessing senses which by far surpass those of animals. One of the benefits of possessing such superior senses is that of distinguishing between good and bad. It is as a consequence of the providence of nature that human beings can control the

Princeton, 1979. McDowell acknoweldges Rorty's influence as he claims that his first sketches of *Mind and World* were a result of "an attempt to get under control my usual excited reaction to a reading – my third or fourth – of Richard Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*." (MW ix) He further claims that "Rorty's work is in any case central for the way I define my stance here [in *Mind and World*]." (MW x)

21 Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 359.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 365.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 362.

24 Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods*, translated by Horace C.P. McGregor with an Introduction by J.M. Ross, London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972, p. 180.

environment in which they live in a number of ways which suit them, according to Cicero, and he further states that "One may say that we seek with our human hands to create a second nature in the natural world."[25]

Although McDowell does not give any indication that he believes in anything which may remotely resemble Cicero's divine providence, both philosophers express very similar views on the distinction between second nature and the natural world. They both maintain that it is through second nature that we learn to discriminate between good and bad and that second nature pertains to humans and both distinguishes them and helps them to 'domesticate' the natural world.

It therefore seems as though second nature is an integral element in a particular philosophical viewpoint which is generally called 'humanism,' where the world is conceived as a product of human interests. Cooper views humanism as an anti-naturalist viewpoint and, in a discussion of 'existential humanism,' provides the following definition for that which he calls 'the human world' thesis:

> the concepts we apply to the world necessarily reflect human values and interests; concepts cannot be extricated from the traditions and ways of life in which they are embedded; the things concepts apply to are intelligible only in relation to our purposive practices; the holistic character of possible descriptions of the world is due, not to the world, but to the human life they register; no sense can be made of what it is for something to exist except as concerning us.[26]

Cooper sees humanists as rejecting 'bald naturalism' and labels McDowell a 'postmodern humanist.'[27] He further remarks that most humanists focus on aspects which belong to 'second nature,' which is the product of culture and not biology. Cooper however notes that some humanists call themselves naturalists, and quotes Marx as stating that "completed naturalism is humanism" and vice-versa.[28] According to Cooper, Marx contrasted "his 'naturalism' as much with

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25 *Ibid.*, p. 185, Sect. 151 – 54.

26 David E. Cooper, Chapter 5, 'Existential Humanism,' p.1 (typescript version) *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, forthcoming, 2002)

27 Cooper cites John Haldane's paper, 'Rational and Other Animals,' pp. 17 – 28, A. O'Hear, Ed., *Verstehen and Human Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

28 Cooper, 'Humanism and Humility,' p. 2, (typescript version) *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery*. Cooper quotes from Marx's *Economic and*

(Feuerbachian) 'materialism' as with 'idealism', and distinguishes our 'species essence' from the fixed biological nature postulated by 'naturalists' in his occasionally pejorative sense."[29]

The similarity of Marx's views to those of McDowell where humanism is concerned is interesting and McDowell notes the striking resemblance between Gadamer's account of the difference between a merely animal life, lived in an environment, and a human life, lived in a world, and Marx's remarks in his 1844 manuscripts. McDowell states: "For Marx, of course, a properly human life is nothing if not active: it involves the productive making over of "nature, the sensuous exterior world"." (MW 135). If productive activity is properly human, it can in principle range freely over the world. This contrasts with "merely animal life ... [which] is a matter of dealing with a series of problems and opportunities that the environment throws up, constituted as such by biologically given needs and drives." (MW 117-18) Wage slavery, according to Marx, dehumanizes human beings and reduces their existence to the condition of merely animal life where their freedom is restricted and where the only liberty available concerns animal functions such as eating, drinking and procreating. Once these remarks are combined with those of McDowell on *Bildung* and second nature, the importance of enculturation through education in order to achieve rationality and autonomy is evident.

Marx's philosophy therefore contains elements which exhibit striking similarities to McDowell's second nature. In a discussion on Marx and on nature conceived as a product of man, Leszek Kolakowski[30] takes as a point of departure the idea of humanised nature. Kolakowski claims that man assimilates the external world, which is first biological, then social and later human, and that this occurs "as an organization of the raw material of nature in an effort to satisfy needs; cognition, which is a factor in the assimilation, cannot evade this universal determination."[31] There is no point, Kolakowski argues, to ask about a world conceived as pure

Philosophical Manuscripts, in *Karl Marx: Early Texts*, Ed. D. McClellan, Oxford, Blackwell, 1979, p. 149.

29 *Ibid.*, pp. 2 – 3.

30 Leszek Kolakowski, *Toward a Marxist Humanism, Essays on the Left Today*, translated from Polish by Jane Zielonko Peel (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1969).

31 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

thought, due to the fact that "all consciousness is actually born of practical needs, and the act of cognition itself is a tool designed to satisfy these needs."[32] It is only through practical contact with nature that man can be defined as this contact gives rise to and defines man's ability to understand.

The picture which Kolakowski draws is both humanist and realist, as he states: "the qualities of things arise as human products, yet not in the idealist sense" because if one were to conceive of objects as being wholly dependent on consciousness, then it would be very difficult to justify the existence of the world. Moreover, Kolakowski notes, "man has far fewer rational motives for creating a world *ex nihilo* than God has."[33]

In Kolakowski's view, questions concerning the existence of an absolutely independent reality are incorrectly formulated. This brings to mind McDowell's opinion on such questions, and Kolakowski's reasons for this position include the view that the significance of qualities of things and their attributes only emerges in conjunction with a "socially subjective" view of objects which "bear the imprint of the organizational power of man, who sees the world in such terms and from such points of view as are necessary for him to adapt to it and to transform it usefully."[34] This statement resonates with both Heidegger's views concerning being-in-the-world (which is discussed in the next chapter) and with McDowell's views on the manner in which the conceptual permeates everything that exists.

Language plays an important role in Kolakowski's picture of humans attributing significance to the world which exists separately from their thinking but which is only understandable through human cognition and therefore through human language. Language and cognition are components of the world, and language is "a set of tools we use to adapt ourselves to reality and to adapt it to our needs – active tools, tools of construction, not of exploration."[35] The existence of things, according to Kolakowski, "comes into being simultaneously with their appearance as a picture in the human mind" and our concepts are concerned with "things for

32 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
33 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
34 *Ibid.*, p. 47.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

us" as opposed to "things as they are in themselves", which it is futile to attempt to understand because it is not possible to form a concept of such things in themselves.[36]

Kolakowski's conclusion is that although this view retains the Kantian thought that the object cannot be conceived in isolation of the subject that conceives it, yet the "subject" can only be conceived as a social subject, for whom "objects" are no longer seen as forming part of a metaphysical world which we cannot know. The imprint of human beings on the world is picturesquely described by Kolakowski in his concluding remark that "in all the world man cannot find a well so deep that, leaning over it, he does not discover at the bottom his own face."[37]

The concept of the external world being available only in its humanized form appears to be a recurrent issue in most accounts of *Bildung* and second nature. Does McDowell's account of *Bildung* and second nature also take a humanist view of the external world? McDowell's view is, without doubt, very similar to the views discussed. He attempts to bridge the divide between a humanist view of the world and a contrasting position by means of his views on the unboundedness of the conceptual on the one hand, and the passivity of experience on the other, both of which play an important role in his attempt to dissolve dualisms.

In McDowell's narrative, it is by means of *Bildung* that human beings are initiated into second nature and into the sphere of reasons. Second nature is, in McDowell's view, the key to reconciling the dualism of reason and nature. McDowell insists that it is important for us to recapture the idea of second nature in order to keep the concept of nature as "partially enchanted". (MW 85) We should, he claims, "recapture the Aristotelian idea that a normal mature human being is a rational animal, but without losing the Kantian idea that rationality operates freely in its own sphere." (MW 85) McDowell further states: "We tend to be forgetful of the very idea of second nature. I am suggesting that if we can recapture that idea, we can keep nature as it were partially enchanted, but without lapsing into pre-scientific superstition .... This makes room for a conception of

36 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
37 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

experience that is immune to the philosophical pitfalls I have described." (MW 85) This view encapsulates McDowell's response to a number of recurring issues in philosophy which include how thought (and spontaneity) can be reconciled with a "naturalistic" or "scientific" view of the world.

McDowell's conception of "second nature" is a brave effort to broaden the normal meaning of "naturalism" in order to accommodate spontaneity and thought – that is, the space of reasons. However, as Jerry Fodor points out, McDowell fails to explain how we manage to achieve rationality once this is situated outside the realm of law. Fodor's main question is: "How can what is not in the realm of law make anything happen?"[38]

In Fodor's view, McDowell's answer to these problems is unsatisfactory. McDowell's use of the concept of "second nature" and of "ordinary upbringing" do not resolve the problem of reconciling rationality with the realm of law, in spite of McDowell's quietism and insistence that second nature can be taken as simply a "reminder" rather than as the proposal of a new theory. Fodor, however, makes a valid point in a critique of McDowell's notion of *Bildung* as he states:

> Second nature is what we get [according to McDowell] when 'our *Bildung* actualises some of the potentialities we are born with; we do not have to suppose it introduces a non-animal ingredient into our constitution'. But the question arises how second nature, so conceived, could itself be Natural. It's not enough for McDowell to say that it is and that you can get some down at the *Bildung* store; he has to say how it could be short of spooks.[39]

A question which can be seen to follow from Fodor's remarks which Haldane raises is: "How has it come about that there are animals that possess the spontaneity of understanding? ... There was a time when there were no rational animals." (MW 123) Haldane accuses McDowell of not giving a direct reply to this question and of remarking instead that we are to regard "the culture a human being is initiated into as a going concern ... and nothing occult happens to a human being in ordinary upbringing (*Bildung*)." (MW 123)

[38] Jerry Fodor, 'Encounters with Trees,' pp. 10 – 11, *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 17, No. 8, 20 April 1995.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Haldane claims that McDowell's response is "flawed". Besides the fact that "the original question remains unanswered," a question which arises as a result of "McDowell's own division between the natural and the personal realms," Haldane notes that "to trace the emergence of understanding to the educational influence of the surrounding human culture is evidently regressive. From whence comes its *Bildung*, and so on?"[40] Haldane, whose own position is diametrically opposed to bald naturalism, notes that McDowell's response, which claims that human infants are mere animals distinctive only in their potential, fails to address the point of how it can be that such a potential is possessed.

Both Fodor and Haldane however seem to have overlooked McDowell's response in *Mind and World* to accusations such as theirs. McDowell grants that it would be reasonable to look for an "evolutionary story" where *Bildung* and second nature are concerned, although this should not seem "very pressing" and reflection should suffice since, in his view, "there is no particular reason why we should need to uncover or speculate about its history, let alone the origins of culture as such." (MW 123) He further remarks that there is no reason to argue that initiation into second nature actualises "an extra-natural potential in human beings" as this does not follow from our ignorance about how "human culture might have come on the scene in the first place." (MW 124)

McDowell gives an account of the manner in which human beings are born mere animals,[41] yet "mature into being at home in the space of reasons or, what comes to the same thing, living their lives in the world" (MW 125) by means of initiation into language and culture through which our potential for acquiring mind is actualized. This, however, contrasts starkly with his description of "mere animals" who live in an environment and who are not capable of such "emancipation." McDowell's humanist position emerges clearly in this contrast between human beings who are depicted as rational and autonomous agents as opposed to non-human animals who are enslaved "to immediate biological

[40] John Haldane, 'Rational and Other Animals', pp. 17 – 28, _Verstehen_ *and Humane Understanding*, ed. Anthony O'Hear, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 26.

[41] Animal experience is discussed in Chapter Three.

imperatives" (MW 117) and who merely act and react in accordance with problems and opportunities that arise in their environment.

McDowell introduces the notion of "proto-subjectivity" (MW 117) into his picture of animal life in an attempt to combat criticism that his depiction of animals is similar to Cartesian automata. However, in my view, his relegation of animals to inferior dumb creatures who share perception with humans but whose lives are merely a series of immediate biological imperatives is excessively demeaning. Moreover, the "distinctive potential" through which human beings are drawn out of the animal life into which they are born and through which they aquire spontaneity and understanding still remains as mysterious as ever. McDowell's intentions in this regard appear to be connected to the introduction of *Bildung* and second nature into human lives, following Gadamer, together with the importance he attributes to rationality and autonomy, following Kant and Hegel. The question however arises as to whether it is necessary for him to attribute such an inferior status to animals and whether his distinct leaning towards humanism will allow him to retain his position in favour of direct realism, as we shall see in the next chapter.

On his part, McDowell describes *Bildung* in a positive and benign manner as forming part of human rationality. Bowie, however, draws attention to the possibility that *Bildung* may become contaminated by negative or malign forces that may lead towards the cultivation of irrational attitudes rather than rational ones. Bowie notes that although tradition is "the repository of a whole range of background schematisations which are present in established language-games,"[42] yet the danger of our concepts or tradition being contaminated is still present. What is lacking, according to Bowie, is an account of that which can put into question the "topography of intelligibility" on which we rely when we are socialised into a tradition. In this regard, McDowell seems to allow space for the introduction of innovation and originality into the space of reasons, even though "a thought that transforms a tradition must be rooted in the tradition that it transforms." (MW 187) McDowell does not consider possibilities of

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[42] Bowie, 'John McDowell's *Mind and World* and Early Romantic Epistemology,' p. 553.

contamination, although he allows for innovative reform, as he repeats once again that "being at home in the space of reasons includes a standing obligation to be ready to rethink the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that constitute the space of reasons as one conceives it at any time." (MW 186)

Further criticism directed at McDowell concerning *Bildung* includes his claim that "human beings are mere animals, distinctive only in their potential," (MW 123) which makes it seem as though spontaneity and rationality have been translated into "distinctive potential" which still remains mysterious, in spite of McDowell's claim that "there is no problem" about how human beings are emancipated into "fully-fledged subjects" through *Bildung*. (MW 125)

McDowell appears to be totally confident with regards to his suggestions regarding *Bildung* through which human beings are initiated into second nature. In a Wittgensteinian vein, he concludes with the strong claim that "If we could achieve a firm hold on a naturalism of second nature .... it would be to have achieved "the discovery that gives philosophy peace"." (MW p.86) McDowell's *proposals* in this respect, however, should not be considered as *solutions*. His proposed task for philosophy, to reconcile reason and nature, would counter the idea of "a naturalism that constricts the idea of nature". (MW 85) It would, in McDowell's view, lead to "a frame of mind in which we would no longer seem to be faced with problems that call on philosophy to bring subject and object back together." (MW 86).

McDowell's views on "second nature" and "*Bildung*" leave a number of unanswered questions which include: Is McDowell's concept of "second nature" sufficient to explain the position of human beings within nature, yet not completely governed by the realm of law due to our nature being *largely* second nature? Is McDowell's postulation of "second nature" merely the creation of a newly-worded dualism, that between nature and second nature? Is McDowell merely making a change in the language we use to refer to the space of reasons by re-naming it and calling it "second nature"? If we take on McDowell's ideas concerning "second nature", do we still require the concept of (first) nature or

does it become superflous since human beings are rational animals and the realm of the conceptual is "unbounded"?

Most of these questions remain unanswered, and this creates the feeling that McDowell's ideas in *Mind and World* are still being developed, although this sense of incompleteness also comes about as a consequence of his quietism. In order for his proposals to be more widely accepted, however, it would be necessary for him to provide a fuller explanation of both "second nature" and "*Bildung,*" in spite of his quietism. It is interesting to note that McDowell seems to be thoroughly convinced of the recommended picture which he proposes, which, he claims, will achieve peace for philosophy, but whether he succeeds in convincing others is another matter. This makes it extremely difficult to accept his 'picture' of second nature and *Bildung* as 'peace giving' mainly due to the fact that it does not appear to have achieved peace for philosophy and there does not seem to be general consensus or acceptance of McDowell's 'picture' as 'peace giving.' There is no doubt that his position arouses sympathy and interest, as the pictures he proposes are intriguing. However, it is difficult for others to find them completely persuasive or convincing.

McDowell's "*Bildung*" in a Social World

"*Bildung*" is the only social element which emerges from McDowell's views on the relationship between thinking and the world. This concept has however been criticised for being too 'individualistic'. Brandom claims that McDowell places too much emphasis on individualistic aspects and therefore neglects social elements which are important in any consideration of experience and of conceptual activity.

Brandom suggests that McDowell "systematically underplays the significance of the *social* dimension of the practice of giving and asking for reasons ... that is the concrete embodiment of the aspect of our activity he talks about abstractly under the rubric of 'spontaneity'."[43] He criticises McDowell for following C.I. Lewis

[43] Robert Brandom, 'Perception and Rational Constraint,' p. 373.

(in *Mind and the World Order*) who emphasises the singular and individualistic aspects of rational constraint as he states that "Assessments of truth and reliability are *not* outside the practice of giving and asking for reasons, scrutinizing and criticizing the rational warrant for our commitments but of its very essence."[44]

McDowell's response to Brandom involves the assertion that he explicitly opposes individualism, and proof of this is the connection he proposes between the possession of conceptual capacities and the initiation into a tradition which is embodied in a shared language. McDowell reaffirms his social commitment as he accuses Brandom of betraying "an inability to see how radically initiation into a communal practice can transform the capacities of an individual considered just as such."[45]

His views in this regard are similar to those of Strawson who, however, draws attention to the common practice of philosophers who "work through epistemological and ontological questions in abstraction from the great fact of the concept-user's role as a social being."[46] Strawson maintains that an individual does not first "acquire his concepts, develop his techniques and habits of action in isolation; and then, as it were, at a certain point, enters into relation with other human beings and confronts a new set of questions and problems." In language which reflects that of McDowell, Strawson claims that, "On the contrary. All this cognitive, conceptual and behavioural development takes place in a social context; and, in particular, the acquisition of language, without which developed thinking is inconceivable, depends on interpersonal contact and communication."[47] Each human being, in his view, "must see himself in some social relations to others whose purposes interact with his. If our subject is man in his world, it seems necessary to admit that his world is essentially a social world."[48]

It is unfortunate that McDowell does not delve deeper into the social implications of his conception of human beings initiated into a world by means of *Bildung*.

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44 *Ibid.*, p. 373.
45 McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators, p. 409.
46 P.F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, p. 80.
47 *Ibid.*, p. 81.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

Nor does he explain how or when *Bildung* comes about. Some remarks by Strawson may shed light on the possible conditions for the emergence of *Bildung* in the life of a human being. Strawson claims that a human being develops a world-view as a result of "the causal outcome of his exposure to, and interaction with, the world, including the instruction he receives from other members of the community."[49] This statement draws attention to the fact that McDowell's views on the normative elements inherent in *Bildung* could just as well be explained by causal means if one follows the implications which arise. Strawson further claims that it would be better to consider the human being as first building up a body of beliefs before developing the power of critical and self-conscious reflection. Strawson quotes Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* who states: "When we first begin to *believe* anything, what we believe is not a single proposition, it is a whole system of propositions. (Light dawns gradually over the whole)."[50]

The importance of the fact that human beings are engaged in practical and communal activities in the world, and that this should be considered as an integral part of McDowell's *Bildung* cannot be denied. In a discussion on 'Ineffability', David Cooper links experience with social aspects and he defines experience as being, "from the outset, of items in a 'lifeworld', replete with 'cultural' features."[51] Cooper maintains that it is important to take into consideration the engagement of human beings in the practical communal business of life. He criticises accounts which emphasise metaphysical aspects of the detached spectator in isolation from cultural and practical concerns. Discussions on the relationship between human beings and their world should take into consideration the fact that "They [human beings] do not first encounter raw data or 'mere physical things' (Husserl), which they subsequently interpret and categorize, and to which they finally attach 'cultural' features so as to give them a place in life."[52] Rather, following Heidegger, and taking the world as a 'background' for human activities, he states that "Meaning ... is in the world we encounter right from the

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49 *Ibid.*, p. 95.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 95. Strawson quotes Wittgenstein in *On Certainty.*

51 David Cooper, 'Ineffability', pp. 1 – 16, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 65, 1991, p. 3.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

start."[53] He quotes Heidegger as stating that we do not hear, for example, "noises or complexes of sounds, but the creaking waggon, the motor-cycle."[54]

Although *Bildung* is not Cooper's concern in this paper, his views could easily be applied to those of McDowell. As we have seen, McDowell accepts social elements in *Bildung*, as well as admitting that experience is of objects, due to the fact that seeing, for example, is "seeing-as". His position could, however, be improved if more emphasis were to be placed on the important role of *Bildung* in connection with human beings engaged in the practical and communal activities in the world.

By means of a conception of human beings engaged in the world, the social aspects of enculturation have been linked to both the community and to the notion of our being in direct contact with an external reality. Habermas, in a commentary on Hegel's early philosophy, places a great deal of emphasis on social elements and observes that language "can assume communicative functions and carry on traditions only within a community of speakers."[55] The social aspects of language therefore integrate the collective spirit embodied in a community into the objective spirit due to the participation of members of a community in traditions and practices. There is no doubt that subtle echoes of this position are evident in McDowell's *Bildung* which is also a repository of tradition and through which we are initiated through language and through living in a community. Habermas links the social to his position on realism and, in an explicit advocation of direct realism, he describes the importance of intersubjectivity and its necessary link to a world which is independent of mind and which is shared by all. He states:

> For a language to be shared and a social practice to be joined, one condition must be met. Participants who find themselves related to one [an]other in an intersubjectively shared life-world must at the same time presuppose – and assume that everybody else presupposes – an independent world of objects that is the same for all of them. A view cannot be shared if it is not a view of or about something obtaining in 'the' world, and a practice cannot be performed in common if it is not

[53] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 3. Cooper quotes Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Blackwell, 1980) p. 207.
[55] Jürgen Habermas, 'From Kant to Hegel and Back Again – The Move Towards Detranscendentalization,' pp. 120 – 57, *European Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 2, August 1999, p. 140.

> situated in what obtains in 'the' world, meaning that it is one and the same world for everybody.[56]

Realism, according to this view, is presupposed by intersubjective social aspects which include language and which cannot be assumed to be possible unless consensus is achieved. Although this statement reflects a number of issues which recur in Habermas's publications, it can be seen to be relevant with regards to McDowell's ideas in *Mind and World* as it expresses the link between intersubjective and social aspects related to constraint from an external world.

McDowell's views on second nature have also been linked to Daniel Dennett's views on memes from which some interesting aspects concerning *Bildung* can be gleaned. Memes are "the sort of complex ideas that form themselves into distinct memorable units."[57] These ideas can be communicated and transmitted and are closely linked to language which is "an excellent medium through which detailed strategies of action and detailed information relating to the context of action can be enunciated and shared."[58]

Grant Gillett links this notion of memes to McDowell's second nature and claims that "there is a massive shaping process imposed on the cognitive architecture of the brain by the cultural and linguistic milieu in which it develops."[59] He further links the human 'memosphere', which is where some of the complexes of memes become stabilised and successful, to McDowell's 'space of reasons.' Processes such as training and education, which give rise to second nature are, Gillett notes, an ineliminable part of human nature which, he states, "is ... unsurprising given that the primary evolutionary trick of the human species is to make its offspring totally dependent on nurture and relationship for survival, and therefore to prime them for acculturation even above the individualistic pursuit of what we might regard as more phylogenetically basic drives."[60]

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56 *Ibid.*, p. 142.

57 Grant Gillett, 'Dennett, Foucault, and the Selection of Memes,' pp. 3 – 24, *Inquiry*, Vol. 42, No. 1, March 1999, p. 6. Gillett quotes Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 201.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 4 – 5.

Social aspects are as relevant in the memosphere as they are in McDowell's second nature, as Gillett claims that a conative structure is set up as a result of "a fundamental and hard-wired commitment to becoming like one's conspecifics" and which is a structure which "optimizes the tendency to pick up the worthwhile tricks in the memosphere by attaching ourselves to other human beings and conforming one's perceptual activity and behaviour to theirs."[61] The resulting picture is of a set of dispositions which are not mechanistic causes but which provide reasons for individuals to follow them. It is interesting to note Gillett's comment that "the teaching that sticks needs normative support from other memes or meanings to which the individual subscribes. This support is almost always traceable to a social context which supports the new idea."[62] These remarks could easily apply to McDowell's notion of *Bildung* and used to substantiate arguments concerning how ethical behaviour, which is inculcated in human beings by means of the 'dictates' of second nature, is linked to human relationships and how an underlying tendency towards normativity can be achieved through training and education.

The normativity of meaning, according to Gillett, consists of rules which are, he states, "mastered by the meme user not through any ratiocinative process but just by catching on to the skills of usage evinced by others in the process of shaping of personality, reward and punishment, evaluative communications, and all the things that go into McDowell's second nature."[63] It follows, according to Gillett, that human beings are inducted into the realm of reasons, which includes evaluations and norms, as it functions by means of corrections and instructions which impose certain constraints on agents.

Both Gillett and McDowell are adamantly opposed to reductive explanations where normativity and human agency are concerned. Gillett takes the realm of reasons to be holistic and criticises reductive accounts for neglecting the individual human being as a moral and psychological agent in a social context, whose meaningful activity can only be understood through subjectivity. His

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61 *Ibid.*, p. 10.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
63 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

criticism of reductionism includes a critique of science towards which a number of reductive accounts direct their explanations. He states that although scientistic presumptions may be appealing because they seem to deliver a characterisation of how the world really is, however, "it is always salutary to recall that at the really fundamental levels of science there is imagery, metaphor, and mysticism."[64] This is because "we have to remain quite agnostic about whether, when we get down to basics about the actual world, we are talking of particles and forces, energy condensations, mathematical constructs or even 'configurations of spirit'."[65]

The importance of both normativity and community in rule-following is acknowledged by Gillett who claims that rules cannot be mechanistic. Although they place demands of behaviour on us, yet they do not "efficiently cause any response."[66] Human thought plays an important role in rule-following which cannot be reduced to a mechanistic explanation.

Rule-following is a subject on which McDowell has been engaged in a number of debates. A link appears to have emerged between social elements, rule-following and McDowell's *Bildung* and a brief analysis of McDowell's contribution to the debate on rule-following should shed further light on these elements and on McDowell's views on community.

McDowell and the Rule-Following Debate

Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following in the *Philosophical Investigations* have generated a great deal of debate, and McDowell is one of the key players in this regard. Although there are conflicting opinions about Wittgenstein's remarks, these are generally taken to imply that although we cannot explicitly specify which rules we follow or where the rules originate when using particular expressions, yet normativity, considered as a standard of correctness or incorrectness concerning meaning, is still maintained and this comes about through participation in a custom or practice. There is, however, no general

64 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
65 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
66 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

consensus about Wittgenstein's remarks and some commentators take him to offer constructive philosophy, while others interpret him as taking on a quietist approach. However, the rule-following debate has taken on a life of its own apart from Wittgenstein's possible intentions, and it now appears to centre around arguments concerning the objectivity of meaning and community consensus which is often linked to standards of correctness.

In the debate on rule-following, McDowell takes a quietist approach and acknowledges Wittgenstein's use of this method. He states:

> If one reads Wittgenstein as offering a constructive philosophical account of how meaning and understanding are possible, appealing to human interactions conceived as describable in terms that do not presuppose meaning and understanding, one flies in the face of his explicit view that philosophy embodies no doctrine, no substantive claims.[67]

These remarks are directed towards Crispin Wright's interpretation of Wittgenstein on rule-following as offering constructive philosophy. McDowell further states: "But what we might ask [Wittgenstein] for more of is not a constructive account of how human interactions make meaning and understanding possible, but rather a diagnostic deconstruction of the peculiar way of thinking that makes such a thing seem necessary."[68] On his part, McDowell insists that we simply have to remind ourselves of the meaning we know our words to have and that no justification can be given because at this level we arrive at what he calls 'bedrock.' This is the level we reach when looking for justification at which we find that no further explanation can be given by reference to what goes on at the level below.

McDowell takes Wittgenstein's remarks[69] to suggest that meaning is grasped directly, and not through any intermediary such as interpretation. In following a rule, therefore, an individual simply acts without the necessity of reverting to supporting reasons. In other words there is, McDowell states, "a way of grasping a rule that is not an interpretation" and that "interpretation" is a "prejudice" which

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67 John McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy,' pp. 263 – 78, *Mind, Value, and Reality,* p. 277.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 278.

69 McDowell refers to the second part of §201, *Philosophical Investigations.*

"insidiously tempts us to put a fantastic mythological construction on these conceptions" which we should attempt to "exorcise" in a quietist manner and "so return them to sobriety."[70]

McDowell follows Wittgenstein[71] in taking sign-posts to be an analogy for rule-following as he states: "When I follow a sign-post, the connection between it and my action is not mediated by an interpretation of sign-posts that I acquired when I was trained in their use. I simply act as I have been trained to."[72]

Training in this regard brings to mind the importance which McDowell attributes to education and upbringing when dealing with second nature and *Bildung* in *Mind and World.* In the discussion on rule-following, however, McDowell further states: "the training in question is initiation into a custom. If it were not that, then the account of the connection between the sign-post and action would indeed look like an account of nothing more than brute movement and its causal explanation; our picture would not contain the materials to entitle us to speak of following (going by) a sign-post."[73]

Normativity, which implies standards of correctness or incorrectness, is included in McDowell's picture which takes into consideration Wittgenstein's remark that "To use an expression without justification is not to use it without right."[74] McDowell concludes that following a rule is a matter of participating in a communal practice. The notion of rule-following therefore retains normativity while rule-following is conceived as a matter of obeying a practice or going against it.

What if the community's beliefs are misguided or incorrect? Conformity with others can lead to communal incorrectness or misjudgement due to the fact that community consensus implies general agreement amongst a group of people who

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[70] John McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,' pp. 221 – 62, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, p. 258.

[71] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §201.

[72] John McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule,' p. 239.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 239. Similar claims by McDowell are also to be found in 'Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy,' see p. 276.

[74] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §289.

may all be wrong about their beliefs and practices without realising it. McDowell attempts to restore normativity into this picture by means of his notion of 'bedrock' which is the basic level for justification where no further explanation can be given by reference to a lower level.

McDowell says that bedrock for our linguistic practices is the level of activity at which our norms are still in place and where we must describe one another's linguistic behaviour in the meaningful terms available to us as speakers of the language in question. This description will not be intelligible to those outside the practice.[75] McDowell states, "At the level of 'bedrock' ... there is nothing but verbal behaviour and (no doubt) feelings of constraint."[76] This line of reasoning appears to follow similar lines to that in *Mind and World* concerning second nature. McDowell conceives of second nature (as we have seen) as imbued with normativity and as being 'natural' at bedrock, which one can take to be the level of receptivity, where we are open to experience which, in turn, is conceptual. Similar concepts emerge in remarks which McDowell makes on Wittgenstein and 'forms of life' where he states: "His [Wittgenstein's] point is to remind us that the natural phenomenon that is normal human life is itself already shaped by meaning and understanding."[77]

It is important to mention that McDowell does not make any connection between rule-following and second nature in *Mind and World*, nor does he do so in subsequent publications. If he did, he could perhaps have followed a train of thought which could lead him to postulate similar ideas for second nature as he does for the normativity of rule-following, including bedrock and participating in communal practices in a world that cannot be conceived in any other way but as social and objective.

McDowell links his remarks on rule-following to objectivity, although he has been criticised in this regard for taking objectivity to require the contractual conception

[75] McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on following a rule,' p. 241.
[76] *Ibid.*, p. 241.
[77] McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy,' p. 277.

of meaning.[78] He states, "The idea at risk is the idea of things being thus and so anyway, whether or not we choose to investigate the matter, and whatever the outcome of any such investigation. The idea requires the conception of how things could correctly be said to be anyway – whatever, if anything, *we* in fact go on to say about the matter."[79]

Although McDowell appears to be comfortable with this move, the slide from community to objectivity requires further clarification. Perhaps some of McDowell's remarks on community may help to shed light on this issue. McDowell states that "shared membership of a linguistic community is not just a matter of matching in aspects of an exterior that we present to anyone whatever, but equips us to make our minds available to one another, by confronting one another with a different exterior from that which we present to outsiders."[80] Moreover, he states:

> This non-anti-realist conception of a linguistic community gives us a genuine right to the following answer: shared command of a language equips us to know one another's meaning without needing to arrive at that knowledge by interpretation, because it equips us to hear someone else's meaning in his words. Anti-realists would claim this right too, but the claim is rendered void by the merely additive upshot of their picture of what it is to share a language. In the different picture I have described, the response to Wittgenstein's problem works because a linguistic community is conceived as bound together, not by a match in mere externals (fact accessible to just anyone), but by a capacity for a meeting of minds.[81]

This is an explicit advocation of McDowell's realism which he connects to normativity and to the fact that human beings share membership of a linguistic community, both of which are evocative of his views on *Bildung*.

The foregoing discussion has explored McDowell's views on social and communitarian aspects. These can be linked to a possible development of the concept of Bildung which, as we have seen, is composed of a number of social aspects and involves our interaction with other human beings and with objects in

[78] Bob Hale, 'Rule-following, objectivity and meaning,' pp. 369 – 96, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, Eds. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997, 1999) p. 390.

[79] McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on following a rule,' p. 222 (emphasis added).

[80] *Ibid.*, p. 253.

[81] *Ibid.*, p.253.

the world. It is by means of *Bildung* that human beings comport themselves in certain ways rather than others towards other human beings and towards objects in the world. This implies that we interpret the world through our conceptual scheme and that concepts are deployed when objects are presented to our receptive sensibility. In other words, I experience a laptop *as* a laptop and not in any other way. Therefore my deployment of the concept 'laptop' is manifest in my engagement with the laptop at the present moment in time, with my response to the laptop and with my use of it for particular practical purposes. Concepts, which are taken to possess shared meaning, therefore play an important role in the interaction of human beings with the world and in their engagement with objects in the world.[82] One can view the role of concepts in intelligent comportment as providing the main reason for the Kantian insistence that "intuitions without concepts are blind". Does McDowell incorporate these elements of *Bildung* into his own position?

McDowell's interpretation of the Kantian dictum takes another track, due to his view of the conceptual as unbounded and due to the important role concepts play in the space of reasons. His reasons for this are closely connected to his views on experience which, as we have seen, is incorporated into the space of reasons. However, it appears as though McDowell's neglect of the social aspects of human comportment blind him to the fact that the conceptual is unbounded *prior* to it being required to incorporate experience into the realm of reason. It further appears to blind him to a separate issue, where *Bildung* is conceived as a pre-requisite for human beings to interact and, therefore, engage in their world. This notion gives rise to the question whether there is a more primitive or *a priori* role for *Bildung* than the role which McDowell describes it as having in the space of reasons and, if so, whether acceptance of such a more primitive role would incorporate mysterious or perhaps Platonic elements into *Bildung*. The extremely positive manner in which McDowell conceives *Bildung* somehow detracts attention from possibilities of human error or misplaced judgement as it

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[82] Cooper calls McDowell a 'concept-bound realist' because of McDowell's claim that, except when we are misled, our concept-bound experience takes in how things anyway are. See David E Cooper, Chapter 5, 'Existential Humanism,' p. 9 (typescript version) *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery.* McDowell's realism is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

optimistically conceives human rationality and human perception as being generally correct. It is important to remember, however, that although human beings are generally rational creatures, our rationality does not prevent us from sometimes being liable to error or misplaced judgement.

Accusations of Idealism

McDowell is well aware of the fact that his position is susceptible to accusations of idealism because one consequence of his dissolution of reason and nature is the location of perceptible reality within the conceptual realm. He is determined to counteract such accusations with a repeated insistence on the importance of acknowledging a reality which is independent of thinking. It is therefore relevant at this stage to discuss McDowell's reaction to accusations of idealism. This is closely related to his position as a direct realist which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.[83]

Idealism is not subject to any constraint from outside thinking. McDowell's views are explicit as he states: "But the point of ... the option I am urging, is precisely that it enables us to acknowledge that independent reality exerts a rational control over our thinking, but without falling into the confusion between justification and exculpation that characterizes the appeal to the Given." (MW 27) After having introduced the concept of "second nature" he states: "If we refuse to naturalize spontaneity within the realm of law, it can seem that we are trapped in the philosophical impasse I began with, the *forced choice between coherentism and the Myth of the Given*." (MW 88, emphasis added)

Idealism is, without doubt, a position McDowell has no sympathy for. This may be a consequence of his determination to demonstrate thought's bearing on the world, which, in turn, yields justification for our knowledge. His description of idealism is thoroughly depreciative as he states: "When we put the point in high-

[83] Although it may seem that this section would be better placed in Chapter Six where the issue of realism and anti-realism is discussed in detail, its purpose, located as it is at the end of Chapter Five, is to act as a bridge between Chapter Five and Chapter Six due to the evident intimate relationship between the subjects of these two chapters, that is, reason and nature and realism and anti-realism.

flown terms, by saying the world is made up of the sort of thing one can think, a *phobia* of idealism can make people *suspect* we are renouncing the independence of reality – as if we were representing the world as a *shadow* of our thinking, or even as made of some *mental stuff*." (MW 28, emphasis added) These views are reinforced in a critique of "rampant platonism" where he ironically states: "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*." (MW 88, emphasis added)

We should, according to McDowell, regard experience as revealing an objective reality because "experience is passive, a matter of receptivity in operation" and this "should assure us that we have all the external constraint we can reasonably want." (MW 28) In addition McDowell claims that experience is conceptualized as it is "seamlessly integrated into a conceptual repertoire," (MW 31) and thus "rationally linked into the activity of adjusting a world view." (MW 33)

Do these statements imply that McDowell is an idealist? How can McDowell escape accusations of idealism? Fichte, for example, claimed to be an idealist and his views express similarities to those of McDowell. Fichte understood the world as a projection of our thinking and claimed that experience of objects could be explained in terms of the necessary operations of the intellect itself, without any appeal to things in themselves. This sounds similar to McDowell's placing experience within the realm of the conceptual, with the difference that McDowell claims that we are passive in our experience and that is how the world impacts on our (conceptual) experience. Fichte's philosophical system also includes a point where justification ends, which remains within the sphere of spontaneity, and which is a position which one cannot transcend. This sounds similar to McDowell's 'bedrock' which is where justification comes to an end, as we have seen in McDowell's contribution to the discussion on rule-following in the previous section. Absolute spontaneity plays an important role in Fichte's philosophy due to the importance he attributes to autonomy and freedom. McDowell also attributes a great deal of importance to autonomy and freedom, but his notion of the conceptual as unbounded sounds uncannily similar to Fichte's absolute spontaneity.

McDowell rebuts accusations of idealism and insists that he does *not* equate "facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities – acts of thinking" or "perceptible facts in particular with states or occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation". (MW p. 28) If he did, he would have to admit to accusations of idealism. Rather, his claim is that "perceptible facts are essentially capable of impressing themselves on perceivers in states or occurrences of the latter sort [experiences]; and that facts in general are essentially capable of being embraced in thought in exercises of spontaneity, occurrences of the former sort [acts of thinking]." (MW p.28) What is important in this respect is the distinction McDowell draws between "thinking" and "the thinkable", together with the notion of constraint from an independent reality. "The constraint comes from outside *thinking*," McDowell states, "but not from outside what is *thinkable*." (MW 28)

McDowell reiterates this point in response to criticism from Brandom who objects to the slide in McDowell's reasoning from taking the *world* to taking *experience* to exercise a rational, and not merely causal, constraint on our thinking. In responding to Brandom's criticism concerning the rational constraint which thinking requires, McDowell states that perceptual experiences "must *provide* rational credentials, not ... have them. Perceptual experiences do not purport to report facts. In enjoying experiences one seems to, and in some cases does, take in facts; this makes the facts available to serve as rational credentials for judgements or beliefs based on the experiences."[84] He rejects insinuations which Brandom's criticism may have implied, that experiences may appear to be intermediaries between facts and judgements or that they may look like "pointless duplication" and states: "in my picture experience does not introduce an indirectness in the rational responsiveness of observational thinking to facts. Rather, experience is simply the way in which observational thinking is directly rationally responsive to facts."[85] It is for this reason that McDowell claims that we should be patient and humble. We have, he claims, a perpetual obligation to reflect "on the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that, at any time, one

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[84] McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' p. 406.
[85] *Ibid.*, p. 406.

takes to govern the active business of adjusting one's world-view in response to experience." (MW 40)

The dangers of an idealistic position are evident for McDowell who, in a dialogic manner similar to that of Wittgenstein in the *Philosophical Investigations*, imagines an objector to his direct realist position who accuses him of exploiting "the claim that it is no more than a truism that when one's thought is true, what one thinks *is* what is the case." (MW 179) The objector's view is similar to that of Brandom which was discussed earlier in this chapter as he states:

> But as soon as we try to accommodate the sense in which the world is populated by *things*, by objects (and there had better be such a sense), it will emerge that your image of erasing an outer boundary around the realm of thought must be idealistic in tenor, perhaps in an extended sense. Even if the image allows for a kind of direct contact between minds and facts, it obliterates a certain possibility that we should not be willing to renounce, a possibility of direct contact between minds and *objects*, which must surely be external to the realm of thought. (MW 179)

In his reply to this objection, McDowell refers to Frege's notion of sense and states:

> If the relevant senses are rightly understood, the role of sense, in a picture that leaves the relation of thought to the world of facts unproblematic, already ensures that there is no mystery about how it can be that the relevant thoughts bear on the relevant particulars, inhabitants of the realm of reference, in the non-specificatory ways that proponents of the recoil [from the generalized Theory of Descriptions] rightly insist on. (MW 180)

The point being made here is, briefly, that on Frege's account of sense, unlike the Russelian, elucidation of a term's sense directs us towards the actual or possible referent of the term. In Frege's own metaphor, the sense is a 'route' to a referent. In the above quotation, McDowell's immediate concern is less with Frege's own account than with Evans's views on Frege[86] as he states: "Evans's master thought is that Frege's notion of sense, which Frege introduces in terms of modes of presentation, can accommodate the sorts of connection between thinkers and particular objects that have been recognized to make trouble for the generalized

[86] See Gareth Evans, Chapter One, 'Frege,' pp. 7 – 41, *The Varieties of Reference*.

Theory of Descriptions." (MW 106) Evans connects Frege's notion of sense to objectivity as he suggests that

> we take Frege's ascription of a sense to a Proper Name to mean that not only must one think of an object – the referent of the term – in order to understand a sentence containing it, but also anyone who is to understand the sentence must think of the referent *in the same particular way*. It is therefore, for Frege, as much a public and objective property of a term that it imposes this requirement, as that is has such and such an object as its referent.[87]

This notion of understanding and objectivity which links sense and reference is evocative of Davidson's views on triangulation as it links speakers and hearers in such a manner that it becomes possible to individuate thoughts (or senses) due to communality of reference as Evans states:

> I suggest that the desired notion [of two men thinking of something in the same way] can be explained in terms of the notion of an account of what makes it the case that the subject's thought is a thought about the object in question. Imagine such an account written out. '*S* is thinking about the object *a* in virtue of the fact that ... *S* ...': what follows 'that' is an account in which references to the subject and the object thought about appear, possibly at several places. Now I suggest that another subject, *S'*, can be said to be thinking about the object *a* in the same way if and only if we get a true statement when we replace reference to *S* with reference to *S'* throughout the account provided for *S*, deriving '*S'* is thinking about *a* in virtue of the fact that ... *S'* ...'.[88]

This is related to McDowell's claim that "thought and reality meet in the realm of sense" (MW 180) and that "Frege's notion of sense operates in the space of reasons." (MW 180) Although McDowell does not go into very much detail on this subject, it appears as though he is identifying Frege's notion of sense with the Sellarsian space of reasons and with his views on the cooperation of understanding and sensibility.

McDowell's views, however, raise the question whether it is possible to avoid the pitfalls of idealism in a conception of thought and world as sharing a common feature or structure. Colin McGinn draws attention to this problem in a review of another of McDowell's papers as he states: "McDowell is pushing for the idea ... that thought and nature share a common feature or structure, but it is notoriously

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87 Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, p. 17.
88 *Ibid.*, pp. 20 – 21.

hard to make sense of this without implying idealism."[89] The picture which McDowell presents in *Mind and World* appears to be a balancing act (or tightrope performance) between idealism and realism.

McDowell's certainty regarding our unmediated contact with the world is not always evident. On one occasion he states: "The concept of red gets a grip, in characterizing an "inner experience" of "seeing red", because the experience is in the relevant respect subjectively like the experience of seeing that something – some "outer" thing – is red, *or at least seeming to.*" (MW 30, emphasis added) A couple of paragraphs later he states: "It is this integration [of capacities seamlessly integrated into a conceptual repertoire] that makes it possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, *or at least seeming awareness*, of a reality independent of experience." (MW 31, emphasis added)

It remains unexplained why McDowell qualifies his direct realism with "seeming", in particular, when it is quite unnecessary to do so, considering the position he takes. The unmediated reality he was aiming for is somehow blurred and loses its directness due to this qualification.[90] It may be the case, however, that the qualifications are intended to cater for ordinary, unproblematic cases of erroneous perception, although this can only be surmised as McDowell does not comment in this regard. In order to clarify matters, McDowell should specifically state what his precise intentions are, otherwise both positive and negative speculation will be rife as to what his intentions could be, due to the fact that some philosophers define objectivity as involving the distinction between that which *is* the case and that which *merely seems to be so.* Leich and Holtzman, for example, state: "Objectivity, on one well-established use of the term, is located in the distinction between appearance and reality; to maintain that it is an objective

[89] Colin McGinn, 'Good Things', pp. 22 – 23, *The London Review of Books*, Vol. 18, No. 17, 5 September 1996, p. 22. This is a review of *Virtues and Reasons: Philippa Foot and Moral Theory*, Ed. Rosaline Hursthouse, Gavin Lawrence and Warren Quinn, in which a paper by McDowell is published which "offers to defend a new kind of moral naturalism that reaches back to Aristotle", and which "argues for a view of nature that has 'intelligible order' built into it."

[90] McDowell uses "seeming" in this manner on a number of occasions. See, for example, MW 34 and MW 39. He also makes use of "*apparent* awareness" when, for example, he states: "we can understand experience as *awareness, or apparent awareness*, of aspects of the world." (MW 47, emphasis added).

matter whether or not a certain speaker's claim is true is, on this use, to maintain that there is a clear difference between the claim's merely *seeming to be true* to the speaker, and its *actually being true*."[91]

McDowell mistakenly seems to think that one consequence of his rejection of the Kantian notion of things-in-themselves, which are unknowable to us, is that his direct realist position no longer remains susceptible to accusations of idealism. This view is closely related to his interpretation of Kant which was discussed in Chapter Two. McDowell takes Kant to be an idealist because of the distinction he makes between the empirical and the noumenal world. Kant's argument, however, does not centre around this distinction but involves the notion of *a priori* conditions of sensibility. Human beings, according to Kant, themselves supply the *a priori* conditions for the world because our conception of the world cannot be otherwise than that which is ordered by our forms of sensibility. It is these particularly human 'constraints' which lead Kant to conclude that we cannot experience things as they are in themselves. McDowell's interpretation of Kant appears to lead him to give up anything vaguely connected to Kantian things-in-themselves with the hope of avoiding attacks of idealism. A sceptic could still, however, agree with McDowell that the world is directly present to us in experience, but insist that this is present to us not as it really is but in some form distorted by our conceptual scheme or forms of sensibility, this being, in effect, Kant's view.

Another issue with a Kantian reference that can be directed against McDowell is that Kant believed that the rational self is 'constitutive' of the empirical world and must therefore be, in a sense 'outside' it. This implies that anything that constitutes something cannot form part of that which it constitutes. McDowell's putative dissolution of the dualism of reason and nature therefore requires more than a mere postulation of *Bildung* which, in his view, incorporates rationality and explains how education, tradition, culture, etc., transform us from mechanical parts of nature into reflective and rational human beings. Postulating *Bildung* is

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[91] Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich, 'Introductory Essay: Communal Agreement and Objectivity,' pp. 1 – 30, *Wittgenstein: to Follow a Rule*, Eds. Steven H. Holtzman and Christopher M. Leich, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981) p. 2, (emphasis added).

not sufficient to explain how the natural world exists in its own right, apart from human thought and rationality. Such a conception would require a notion of a self or of a mind that is separate and distinct from the empirical world, and not just a picture of human beings who, thanks to McDowell's *Bildung*, are presented as a sophisticated product of that world. If it is claimed that it is through *Bildung* and second nature that we are enabled to recognise and create the rationality and intelligibility that we find in the world, then doubts arise as to whether that which we recognise and create is *really* part of a world which is external to thought.

On his part, McDowell believes that he has succeeded in demolishing misleading pictures such as those which adherents of either coherentism or the Given construct. He further appears to believe that his quietism permits him to recommend a particular picture of our openness to the world which he thinks is persuasive and which he hopes will replace our previous (and, in his opinion, mistaken) views. It is questionable, however, whether this tactic is successful or whether all we can deduce from McDowell's picture are attractive metaphors built on interesting but largely unargued assumptions, without sufficient arguments to substantiate them.

McDowell's only argument for claiming that our experience of the world is veridical is that in experience we are open to the world and that our experience is passive. Is this sufficient for him to counter attacks of idealism? Passivity is not necessarily felt only through veridical experiences. Idealists could, for example, argue that we generally feel ourselves to be passive when we experience things. It could be the case that human beings are brought up in such a way so as to feel that they experience a real world with which they are engaged and that their experience of this world is felt to be passive. For example, Fichte, who regarded himself as an idealist, argued that although the world – the 'not-I' – is a 'posit' of the I, we nevertheless feel ourselves passive in our experience of it. Indeed, much of Fichte's philosophical effort is devoted to explaining how what is so passively encountered is nonetheless something 'posited' by subjectivity. This implies that McDowell's arguments regarding the passivity of experience are not sufficient to counteract claims from idealists that they too can be passive in their experience. The foregoing discussion on accusations directed towards McDowell concerning

idealism is, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, closely related to his position on direct realism. At this stage one can acknowledge that a realist account of human beings engaged in a world which is independent of thought requires an explanation which is more substantial than McDowell's passivity, as we shall see in the following chapter which discusses the issue of realism and anti-realism.

CHAPTER SIX

Realism and Anti-Realism

McDowell's Direct Realism

In *Mind and World* McDowell proposes a particular type of direct realism which brings together all the other strands of thought which have been discussed in this essay, that is, the Kantian dualism of sensibility and understanding, the issue of conceptual versus nonconceptual content, the dualism of scheme and Given and the dualism of reason and nature. This chapter will first discuss the issue of realism and anti-realism together with McDowell's views on direct realism. A discussion on issues concerning the notion of world will follow, and the chapter will conclude with a synthesis of McDowell and Heidegger's thought on the concept of "being-in-the world".

The problem of the relationship between thinking and the world has occupied philosophers for centuries and, as Crispin Wright states, "If anything is distinctive of philosophical enquiry, it is the attempt to understand the relation between human thought and the world."[1] This form of philosophical enquiry has developed into a dispute between realists and anti-realists whose arguments are centered around the very idea of what the relation really is between thinking and the world.

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[1] Crispin Wright, *Realism, Meaning and Truth*, 2nd edition, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987, 1995) p. 1.

Wright describes realism as

> a mixture of modesty and presumption. It modestly allows that humankind confronts an objective world, something almost entirely not of our making, possessing a host of occasional features which may pass altogether unnoticed by human consciousness and whose innermost nomological secrets may remain forever hidden from us. However it presumes that we are, by and large and in favorable circumstances, capable of acquiring knowledge of the world and of understanding it.[2]

The philosophical literature on realism and anti-realism presents its subject as involving a number of issues and a number of ongoing disputes. These include realism in the philosophy of science, mathematical realism, moral realism and realism in the philosophy of language. One overarching statement which has been applied to all brands of realism is that sentences have objective truth conditions which are potentially verification-transcendent. This implies that we may not be capable of ever determining whether or not these truth conditions obtain.

Michael Dummett is the main proponent of the view that realism entails a notion of verification-transcendent truth. His discussion of the issue is related to his views on truth and meaning and his definition of realism argues for evidentially unconstrained truth conditions as he states, "Realism I characterize as the belief that statements of the disputed class possess an objective truth-value, independently of our means of knowing it: they are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us."[3]

Wright is critical of Dummett's conception of verification-transcendent truth, as he claims that "it is far from obvious that such is the only way, that only by allowing that truth can transcend evidence can substance be given to the idea that truth is not in general of our creation but is constituted by correspondence with autonomous states of affairs." If the notion of verification transcendent truth conditions were to be

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2 Wright, *op. cit.,* p. 1.

3 Michael Dummett, 'Realism,' 1963, reprinted in Michael Dummett, *Truth and Other Enigmas,* (London: Duckworth, 1978) pp. 145 – 65, p. 146.

accepted, it would result in realism having no content "when restricted to the domain of states of affairs over which human cognitive powers *are* sovereign."[4]

The stringency of Dummett's considerations provide severe restrictions for any proponent of realism and puts realists into a tight corner. Taking the consideration to its extreme may prove to have serious implications for realism and may lead to the inevitable abdication of any arguments which realists may propose. Otherwise it may lead to scepticism where:

> The sceptic agrees with the realist that our investigative efforts confront an autonomous world, that there are truths not of our making. But he disputes that there is ultimately any adequate warrant for regarding our routine investigative practices as apt to issue in knowledge of, or reasonable belief about the world. In more radical moments, indeed, the sceptic disputes that we have any reasonable basis for our confidence that we can so much as conceptualize the world as it really is.[5]

This would imply acceptance of the possibility that we are living in a world (if we could even go as far as admitting that much) where we had no justification for either knowledge or true belief about the world and where we could never be certain as to whether we were correct or mistaken in our statements about the world. However, if the sceptic is right, we don't have to *imagine* this position, it may be the case that, for all we know, we are actually *in* it.

McDowell's version of direct realism plays an important role in *Mind and World* and one of his main claims is that there can be no general barrier or interface between thought and world. This is explicit in this statement: "Thinking does not stop short of facts. The world is embraceable in thought." (MW 33) McDowell's alternative to the two generally held positions, coherentism and adherence to the Given, allows for rational constraint from outside thinking while denying that our thinking takes us outside the realm of the conceptual. He considers experience to be passive, that is, receptivity in operation, while at the same time maintaining that experiential content is already conceptual. Experience is therefore unmediated contact with an

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4 Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

independent reality and what is given in experience is *not* non-conceptual impressions *but* facts which inform us that *things are thus and so*.

Impressions are, in McDowell's view, "impingements by the world on our sensibility," themselves imbued with concepts. (MW 9-10) McDowell's basic claim in this regard is that "receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation [between receptivity and spontaneity]" as "the relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity". External constraint is essential for "our activity in empirical thought and judgement ... to be recognizable as bearing on reality at all," (MW 9) otherwise we run the risk of "falling into an interminable oscillation" between coherentism and the Myth of the Given. (MW 9) If there were to be no constraint external to our thinking, spontaneity would merely be "a frictionless spinning in a void." (MW 11)

There is no ontological gap for McDowell between our thinking and the world as "How things are is independent of one's thinking," (MW 25) and "When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case." This implies that "one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case." (MW 27)

McDowell's adherence to direct realism raises a number of questions. If his quietism involves a serious effort to attain peace for philosophy, why should he claim to be a direct realist when this implies that an opposing and contrasting position is available, that is, anti-realism, with the result that peace will be more difficult for philosophy to attain? If one of his aims is dissolving dichotomies, why should he settle for a position which takes sides in a conflicting issue and not attempt to dissolve this dispute together with the others? Surely there are ways and means of resolving this issue which avoid the necessity of taking either one side or another (as this chapter will attempt to demonstrate). Should we not conclude, as a consequence of McDowell's quietism, that it no longer makes sense to claim to be either a realist or an anti-realist, once the dualism of reason and nature has been putatively dissolved?

Would it not be more fruitful to consider how thinking *is* part of the world, *pace* McDowell, by means of second nature, rather than investigate how and why thinking has unmediated contact with a reality that is *external* to it?

Arguing in favour of thinking having unmediated contact with the world may be persuasive for some, but it also implies that a contrasting "mediated" stance, that is, anti-realism, is also a possibility. On the other hand, if McDowell were to succeed in finally resolving the dispute between realists and anti-realists, he would surely, in a quietist manner, not give preference to one camp over the other, and would do so in such a manner so as to leave no other possibilities in the picture in order to give philosophy the peace it deserves. One would expect McDowell as a quietist to say that it is only on particular occasions that we can sensibly ask whether a perception is 'direct' or 'mediated' – and that, on such occasions, ordinary empirical enquiry supplies the answer. I shall argue that McDowell's position presents potentialities for resolving the conflict, but something seems to be blocking him from arriving at this 'insight'.

McDowell does not demonstrate how we are in a position to know that "seeing that" something is the case, which he claims is an intuition which is imbued with conceptual content, is actually a veridical experience of "seeing that" an object, external to thought, is being perceived, rather than merely something which pertains to the realm of the subjective. Are we simply to take McDowell's word that we are, in perception, in direct unmediated touch with a reality that is external to our thought, that is, with objects themselves, and that spontaneity is restrained by "rational constraint from the world." (MW 8n)

McDowell takes the fact that experience is already conceptual to be an upshot of Kantian thought, and he argues that the space of reasons extends all the way out to experience itself. This does not, however, necessarily follow, as the Kantian thought can be interpreted as meaning that since experience is irremediably conceptual, it *cannot* provide direct contact with the world.

McDowell rebuts criticism that his "refusal to locate perceptible reality outside the conceptual sphere must be a sort of idealism," (MW 26) and he accuses such critics of falling into the "oscillation" between coherentism and the myth of the Given. Moreover, he claims that his option "enables us to acknowledge that independent reality exerts a rational control over our thinking." (MW 27) McDowell states:

> When we trace justifications back, the last thing we come to is still a thinkable content; not something more ultimate than that, a bare pointing to a bit of the Given. But these final thinkable contents are put into place in operations of receptivity, and that means that when we appeal to them we register the required constraint on thinking from a reality external to it. The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experiences, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility." (MW 28-29)

This implies that McDowell's option does not, in his view, fall into the same pitfalls as the Myth of the Given, neither does it result in a frictionless spinning in the void, or "oscillate" between these two positions. His manner of tracking justification back seems to reach 'bedrock,' that is, a basic level of justification[6] which still remains within the sphere of the conceptual and yet is susceptible to impacts from an external world through receptivity. His claim is that "the impressions on our senses that keep the dynamic system in motion are *already equipped* with conceptual content." (MW 34, emphasis added)

The only argument which McDowell endorses in favour of direct realism is that "experience can be conceived as openness to the world" (MW 111) and that we are 'passive' in our experiences. The passivity of experience gives us, he states, "all the external constraint we can reasonably want ... from outside thinking." (MW 28) The passivity of experience could, however, easily be accommodated by an idealist who could claim that the world is our projection *and* that we nevertheless feel ourselves passive in experiencing it. Confusion then arises as to whether we experience an

6 'Bedrock' was discussed in Chapter Five in connection with McDowell's views on Wittgenstein and rule-following.

independent external world thanks to our passivity or whether our second nature, through which we are initiated into language and culture, together with our forms of sensibility, project significance onto our experience. In a discussion on the problems which arise concerning the passivity of experience, Cooper states:

> The main motive for speaking of the world as directly present to us was to deny that we experience it indirectly, *via* inferences from sense-data .... To say we are passive recipients is fair enough if the point is to insist upon the generally automatic, unhesitating way we identify objects of perception – to deny that we are generally 'imposing' or 'projecting' significance upon them .... But 'passively recipient' seems a poor way of characterizing our relation to the world when it is being stressed ... how our experience is being shaped by interpretations rooted in our active, purposeful dealings with things.[7]

In order to convince others regarding his direct realism McDowell needs to elaborate further on his claim that we can be sure of our capacity to comprehend the world because of our standing obligation to reflect and reform our concepts. (MW 40) This does not fit in well with his further claims concerning the possibility of cognitive closure and his denial of an end to enquiry, although he states that "the idea of an end to inquiry is no part of the position I am recommending." (MW 40) If, on the one hand, McDowell claims that regular updating will lead towards increased veridicality, he must either have in mind the possibility of an end to enquiry, following Peirce, otherwise he is begging the question about our conceptual fitness. It is a shortcoming in McDowell's position that his claims regarding our capacity to comprehend the world cannot be reconciled with his claims regarding the possibility of cognitive closure. In McDowell's view, "the faculty of spontaneity carries with it a standing obligation to reflect on the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that, at any time, one takes to govern the active business of adjusting one's world-view in response to experience." (MW 40) To claim that the world is completely within our powers of thinking may lead to accusations of idealism. However, his claim that our understanding can be an accurate guide to a world which has its own mind-independent nature requires a fuller explanation than the one which he actually provides. McDowell appears to be concerned to imply that even though we may at

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7 David E. Cooper, 'Losing our minds: Olafson on human being,' pp. 479 – 95, *Inquiry*, 39, nos. 3 – 4, December 1996, p. 492.

some time *fully* comprehend the world, we still would not be entitled to think we had done so, and we would have no way of ever knowing we had actually *fully* comprehended the world, even if this were to be the case.

A number of accusations have been directed towards McDowell's direct realism. Roger F. Gibson, for example, questions whether McDowell's solution, where receptivity is imbued with conceptual content, is not a form of idealism. McDowell's tactic, as Gibson notes in this regard, is to distinguish *thinkables* which exist independently of thought and with which the world is identified, with *acts* of thinking. Gibson asks how thinkables are to be individuated in order that it makes sense to talk of the world as a totality of thinkables. He further states: "McDowell's thinkables leave me wondering: thinkable for whom? I believe that any attempt to answer this question will reveal the vacuity of the notion of the world as the totality of thinkables."[8]

Criticism has also been directed against McDowell by Cooper who classifies him as a 'concept-bound realist' or 'commonsense realist.' This is a type of realism which, in Cooper's view, unsuccessfully attempts to combine the fact that our exercising our concepts is a precondition for encountering the world with the view that, except when we are 'misled,' our concept-bound experience takes in "how things anyway are" and is our mode of "openness to the layout of reality."[9] Cooper notes that concept-bound or commonsense realism stipulates that the world has its own nature, regardless of whether this nature is known or not.

Cooper analyses the position of concept-bound realists in a discussion of a position which he calls existential humanism. This position emphasises the ineliminable role that human interests play in perception and cognition and how these are intimately entwined with the manner in which we are engaged in the world in a purposeful and

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8 Roger F. Gibson, 'McDowell on Quine, Davidson and epistemology,' pp. 123 – 34, *Donald Davidson: Truth, meaning and* knowledge, Ed. Urszula M. Żeglén (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 134.

9 Cooper, 'Existential Humanism,' Chapter 5, p. 9 (typescript version) *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery.* Cooper quotes McDowell in *Mind and World* pp. 25 – 26.

practical manner. In this regard, Cooper states: "things are meaningful or significant ...[because] they are encountered or experienced, within our practices, as items which refer, point or direct us towards further things, situations, people, or whatever."[10] This is analogous, he notes, to the relationship that can be traced between words and language where words can be used "only in virtue of practices in which language is engaged."[11]

Cooper criticises concept-bound realists for insisting on the necessity of constraint from an external world when they simultaneously claim that cognition and perception are mediated by practical concerns. Conceptual schemes reflect practical purposes and interests and Cooper asks whether we can have access to a world "other than through our interest-related conceptual 'nets.'" In this regard, Cooper makes use of a fishing-net analogy which he borrows from David Wiggins and states:

> If, as the fishing-net analogy suggests, we can [have access to the order of things independently of our conceptual scheme], then the concession to humanism[12] turns out to have been bogus: for it is being allowed that we may, after all, transcend our interests .... If we cannot, then this is either because one has conceded 'the human world' thesis (no sense can be made of an independent order of things) or because one thinks there is a conceptually inaccessible, undiscursable order of things. Accepting the first disjunct is to give up the realist objection to humanism: accepting the second is to renounce concept-bound realism in favour of some other variety – 'noumenal' realism, or whatever.[13]

Cooper notes that one of the motives of philosophers such as McDowell for claiming to be realists is their claim that, except when we are 'misled,' our thought and talk cannot be said to act as an intermediary between ourselves and the world or to 'distort' how things really are. Although it is incumbent on the humanist, Cooper claims, to preserve the distinction between truth and falsity at the level of particular statements, yet this is done *without* invoking a world which is external to human interests. Cooper states: "Our thought and talk in general neither distort the way the

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10 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

12 Cooper uses the term 'humanism' in a rather technical sense to mean that there is no discursable or conceptualisable way the world is independently of human perspectives.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 9 – 10.

world anyway is not get it right, for there is no way the world anyway is."[14] He however stresses that this does not imply that the 'articulated world' is produced by means of reflective thought and talk, but, in a Heideggerian spirit, that the human world is one where "objects only 'show up' in, and are dependent upon, our practices ....[which] has a conceptual articulation which reflective thought can 'grasp' ... [and which is] 'grounded in' our being-in-the-world ... whose vehicle is ... 'concerned', active engagement."[15]

Cooper criticises concept-bound realists such as McDowell who claim that the application of concepts is determined by the way things in the world are, in spite of their 'genesis' or origin in human interests, practices and forms of life. Placing the burden for determining the acceptable use of a concept on the world is a 'will o' the wisp,' or the fantasy of a 'mirroring realism' and Cooper further notes that the sharp distinction between possession and use of concepts is "artificial." Possession of a concept is, in his view, "a capacity to make moves in a sort of life" which "cannot be determined independently of our interests and practices."[16] Cooper concludes that "the burden of determining the acceptable application of concepts is seen ... not to fall entirely on the world."[17] He concludes that the persistence of concept-bound realists such as McDowell in favour of realism is not warranted due to their adherence to the thesis of 'the human world.'[18]

Cooper's criticism makes McDowell's views in favour of direct realism liable to attack from critics who claim that we can never experience things as they really are,

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[14] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 10.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 11. Cooper refers to Jane Heal (*Fact and Meaning, Quine and Wittgenstein on Philosophy of Language*) who offers a '*quietist* response' (p.4) to the issue of realism and anti-realism. Heal advocates 'minimal realism' and she follows Wittgenstein with her claim that "our concepts do not come isolated. To understand a concept is to see it at work in its setting." (p. 225) She further states:

> The hope of finding a set of concepts free of any such entanglement with things which present themselves, when we become aware of them, as contingencies, concepts the use of which carries only the risk of falsehood and not the risk of having the concepts themselves turn out misguided, is a will o' the wisp. It is the illusory ambition of discovering the real joints at which the world is to be sliced. (p. 227)

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

but only as they appear to beings physiologically and mentally constituted as we are. It might be said, however, that in order to experience things as they really are we would have to be in a position to experience entities such as atoms and molecules and other such physical entities. Although McDowell does not consider this type of experience in *Mind and World*, one response which he may tend to agree with is put forward by Strawson in *Analysis and Metaphysics*. Strawson claims that one can both agree with the critic and further claim what, at first glance, sounds like a contradiction: We also perceive things as they are in themselves. Strawson draws attention to the fact that "things as they really are" should be treated in different ways depending on the sense or criteria of application. In the first case, Strawson states, "the standard of reality is physical theory" while in the second case it is "normal conditions of observation that are taken as the standard by which others are corrected."[19] Both standpoints therefore speak of the same things and refer to the same things and this can be ascertained by ascribing characteristics such as position, size and shape to the entities which are referred to. We ascribe, according to Strawson, sensible qualities to objects, and since "the standard of correctness of such ascription ... [is] intersubjective agreement, [this] is something quite securely rooted in our conceptual scheme."[20]

McDowell's direct realism is an explicit attempt to avoid particular philosophical pitfalls, in particular, those that have beset the philosophers he admires, including Sellars, Evans and Davidson. He correctly recognises that other positions are threatened either by coherentism, which, in his view, cannot provide justification from an external world, or by the idea of the Gven which is taken by its adherents to supply empirical content but which offers "exculpations" rather than "justifications". His attempt to halt the "oscillation" between coherentism and the Given involves a denial of the putative division between empirical understanding and its subject matter. Thought, in his view, is directly connected to the external world, and concepts play an important role in structuring our perceptual experience. According to McDowell,

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19 P.F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, p. 66.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

human beings have a distinctive mode of sensitivity to a reality outside thought, and this provides a genuinely rational constraint on empirical thinking. This is similar to Strawson's view that human experience is composed of a sensitivity which "takes the form of conscious awareness of its environment."[21]

McDowell's account of empirical content insists that what we 'take in' in perception is generally veridical. This however raises questions as to why it should be so. What reasons do we have for claiming that our perception, which is receptive, is veridical? If receptivity is placed within the space of concepts and if what one takes in in receptivity has conceptual content, then McDowell should explain why we should trust receptivity.

Veridical and Non-Veridical Perceptual Experiences

McDowell admits to the possibility of experience misleading us as and says that "certainly one can be misled, at least in the case of "outer experience"." (MW 26) This is regularly repeated in the form of a proviso as he states, "But *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are." (MW 26) Moreover, "*That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world." (MW 26)

The possibility of our being misled is raised by McDowell on a number of occasions (MW 111, for example). Acknowledging that we can be mislead leads to a tendency towards scepticism, that is, towards the thought that even when we are not misled we cannot genuinely experience a reality which is external to our thinking. If we cannot distinguish between misleading experiences and non-misleading ones, how can we know that we are experiencing the external world? McDowell's reply in *Mind and World* leaves a number of unanswered questions. He thinks that such questions are

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

not pressing and can be dismissed as long as they do not show that "the very idea of openness to facts is unintelligible" (MW 113) or that empirical content absolutely cannot be veridical. McDowell specifically states: "The aim here is not to answer sceptical questions, but to begin to see how it might be intellectually respectable to ignore them, to treat them as unreal, in the way that common sense has always wanted to." (MW 113) This is in line with his quietism – his talk of openness is a rejection of the traditional predicament, not an attempt to respond to it. It is important to note, however, that openness does not necessarily imply veridical perception, as we may be open to experience and still be misled.

Due to this lack of persuasive answers on the distinction between misleading and non-misleading experiences, it may be more fruitful to search for McDowell's ideas on this subject elsewhere. In a discussion on the "Argument from Illusion," where "appearances do not give me the resources to ensure that I take things to be thus and so, on the basis of appearances,"[22] McDowell recommends that "we should jettison the whole approach to knowledge that structures epistemology around the Argument from Illusion."[23] He states that "Seeing (or more generally perceiving) that things are a certain way is just one of the "factive" (or … "guaranteeing") states that is restored to its proper status when the generalized Argument from Illusion is undermined; others include remembering how things were and learning from someone else how things are."

McDowell's consistency in making a serious effort to get rid of superflous intermediaries is admirable. In this case he simply argues that, for example, remembering past events is *simply directly remembering them* and does not necessitate intermediaries which are unnecessary and which incorrectly postulate our being "in direct *perceptual* touch" with past events.[24] McDowell's argument with regards to perception involves the notion that, if it is conceded that one may

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22 McDowell, 'Knowledge and the Internal', pp. 395 – 413, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*, p. 396.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 399.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 407, 17n.

sometimes be wrong, this does not imply that human beings should *always* doubt whether their perception is veridical or not. Doubt concerning the veridicality or otherwise of perception should only arise when there is a concrete reason for doubting, and not in each and every case of perceptual experience. In normal cases of perceptual experience, we have no reason to doubt that our seeing that things are thus-and-so is one way of obtaining knowledge. If doubt were to occur, we would not be in a position to claim that such perceptual experience results in knowledge. In a discussion on the possibility of being misled by an illusion when, in fact, there was no object with which one could be acquainted, he states: "But it is not acceptable – indeed, it is epistemologically disastrous – to suppose that fallibility in a capacity or procedure impugns the epistemic status of any of its deliverances."[25] McDowell further states that "there is nothing ontologically or epistemologically dramatic about the authority that it is natural to accord to a person about how things seem to him."[26] It is to be noted that these remarks apply equally well to McDowell's position in *Mind and World* where, however, his treatment of the matter is rather cryptic.

It may be the case that McDowell's position in this regard is influenced by Strawson who states: "We can, and do, misperceive, make mistakes. But it is certainly a feature of our ordinary scheme of thought that sense perception is taken to yield judgements which are generally or usually true."[27] Strawson, however, advocates a causal theory of sense perception, as opposed to McDowell's emphasis on the conceptual character of perceptual experience. Strawson states that the notion of the causal dependence of the experience enjoyed in sense-perception on features of the objective spatio-temporal world is "conceptually inherent in a gross and obvious way in the very notion of sense perception as yielding true judgements about an objective spatio-temporal world."[28] Strawson maintains that we cannot be expected to check each and every piece of information which we receive in order to check its correctness or otherwise, as

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25 McDowell, 'Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space,' pp. 228 – 59, *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, p. 232.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 245.

27 P.F. Strawson, *Analysis and Metaphysics*, p. 60.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 61.

> A radical and all-pervasive (i.e. philosophical) scepticism is at worst senseless, at best idle; but one of the things we learn from experience is that a practical and selective scepticism is wise, particularly when what is in question are the assertions of interested parties or of people with strong partisan or ideological views, however personally disinterested they may be.[29]

McDowell's views on openness to experience do not distinguish between different perceptual experiences such as veridical and non-veridical perception, and criticism has been directed towards his position in this regard. His claim that our experience is of objects which exist in an external world mainly revolves around his claims that experience is passive and that we are open to experience of an external world. His views regarding openness to experience have been criticised by Roger F. Gibson who raises a number of 'perplexing questions' which this picture raises. Gibson takes the Müller-Lyer illusion as an example of the fact that what one takes in in perception in such a case, that the two lines do not seem to be of equal length, is *not* an aspect of the perceptible world. His question concerns what we take in when we are misled, following McDowell's claim that we take in aspects of the perceptible world when we are not misled. Gibson suggests that "one could maintain that non-misleading appearances comport with aspects of the world, but misleading appearances do not,"[30] where he takes the word 'comport' to be neutral between correspondence and coherence. It does not seem to make sense on McDowell's part to claim that the content of a non-misleading appearance is literally an aspect of the world, while the content of a misleading experience is merely an appearance. This leaves one puzzling, Gibson notes, over McDowell's "*they-aren't-somethings-but-they-aren't-nothings-either* attitude toward whatever it is that gets 'taken in' when one is misled."[31]

Simon Glendinning and Max de Gaynesford also criticise McDowell in this regard. They claim that he includes features that are both inconsistent and unnecessary and that his account of openness to experience falls short of its objects and is therefore

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29 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
30 Gibson, 'McDowell on Quine, Davidson and epistemology,' p. 133.
31 *Ibid.*, p. 133.

vulnerable to scepticism. Glendinning and de Gaynesford define openness as the view that "facts in the world, and no substitute, just are what is disclosed in non-deceptive perceptual experience."[32] They quote McDowell as claiming that "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."[33] Glendinning and de Gaynesford explain that the disjunctive conception involves drawing a distinction between cases where, when things appear to be thus and so to a subject, appearances are mere appearances and cases where what the subject perceives *is* the case. They acknowledge McDowell's intention to provide an alternative to the traditional picture of experience which is described "in terms of exclusively subjective episodes that lie on the "near side" of an "interface" between two discrete regions of reality, the inner and the outer."[34]

Although elements of subjectivity are not immediately evident on a first reading of *Mind and World* or of McDowell's other texts, Glendinning and de Gaynesford draw attention to the fact that McDowell is committed to a conception of the subjective character of experience. They maintain that although he does not consider experience to be exclusively subjective, he does not deny the subjective *character* of experience which involves a claim that there is "something it is like" to enjoy experiential access to the world.[35] They quote McDowell as claiming that "nothing could be recognizable as a characterization of this domain of subjectivity if it did not accord a special status to the perspective of the subject,"[36] and note that he insists that "the characterization of inner facts in terms of first person seemings is 'the most conspicuous phenomenological fact there is'."[37] Their main claim is that McDowell

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32 Simon Glendinning and Max de Gaynesford, 'John McDowell on Experience: Open to the Sceptic?' personal communication, November 2000, sect. 1, p. 3.

33 John McDowell, 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge', pp. 455 – 79, *Proceedings of the British Academy* lxviii, p. 478.

34 Glendinning and de Gaynesford, *op. cit.*, sect. 1, p. 3

35 Glendinning and de Gaynesford refer the reader to see, for example, John McDowell's 'Singular Thought and the extent of Inner Space,' pp. 137 – 68, *Subject, Thought and Context*, ed. Philip Pettit and John McDowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 149. (Reprinted in John McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality,* pp. 228 – 259, p. 240.

36 Glendinning and de Gaynesford refer to McDowell (1986), p. 160. (See *Meaning, Knowledge, and, Reality,* p. 251).

37 Glendinning and de Gaynesford refer to McDowell (1986), p. 152. (See *Meaning,*

cannot sustain his view on the openness of experience while at the same time maintaining commitment to a conception of the subjective character of experience. Glendinning and de Gaynesford further state:

> Like the anti-realist conception, the central feature of this [McDowell's] account of experience is that it clings to the assumption that "enjoying an experience" has a distinctively first-personal character. That is, it is committed to the idea that there is "something that it is like" to enjoy an experience and that 'what it is like to enjoy access or apparent access' is the same.[38]

Glendinning and de Gaynesford claim that since McDowell views experience as an 'upshot' of confrontation with a fact, then, "*in some sense* it must be detachable from the fact of which it is the upshot."[39] It follows that McDowell's position on experience is subject to accusations of involving a version of the interface model – a view which undoubtedly goes against his explicit intentions. This follows, they claim, from McDowell's willingness to allow that "what is given to experience in the two sorts of case [viz., deceptive and non-deceptive perceptions] to be the same *in so far* as it is an appearance that things are thus and so."[40]

According to Glendinning and de Gaynesford, this view leads McDowell to a sceptical position – something that McDowell does his utmost to avoid. McDowell's response to the sceptical question which asks which of the perceptions, deceptive or non-deceptive, is veridical, involves the statement that "when someone has a fact made manifest to him, the obtaining of the fact contributes to his epistemic standing on the question."[41] This response, however, again leads to the disjunctive conception of appearances as it implies that a subject would still have to ask whether a particular

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Knowledge, and Reality, p. 243).

38 Glendinning and de Gaynesford, 'John McDowell on Experience,' Sect IV p. 10. Glendinning and de Gaynesford refer to McDowell (1986) p. 149. (See *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality,* p. 240).

39 *Ibid.*, Sect IV p. 10.

40 *Ibid.*, Sect IV p.10. Glendinning and de Gaynesford refer to McDowell's 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge,' pp. 455 – 78, *Proceedings of the British Academy,* (1983) lxviii, p. 475. (Reprinted in McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality,* pp. 369 – 394, p. 389).

41 *Ibid.*, Sect V p. 14. Glendinning and de Gaynesford refer to McDowell (1983) p. 476. (see *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality,* p. 388).

experience is either a case of a perceptually manifest fact or a case of a mere appearance. This is not something a sceptic would deny, rather, a sceptic would suspend judgement as to the veracity or falsity of the experience in each case. Glendinning and de Gaynesford conclude that this results from McDowell's adherence to the traditional conception of human subjectivity which denies the possibility for a subject to provide adequate grounds for insisting that an experience is either a mere appearance or a fact making itself perceptually manifest merely on the basis of what is given in experience.

The alternative which Glenndinning and de Gaynesford propose involves "an account which takes its point of departure not from a subject's personal experience but from a living human being's practical activity; the distinctive ways in which it relates itself actively in an environment."[42] This alternative views the world as playing an important role in the attribution of content to experience. This comes about by means of "*practices of verification*" and "what we see something *as* is now conceived as internally connected to our patterns of behaviour 'outside alongside' entities in the world". It therefore follows that "Typically, what we see something as just is what that something is."[43] This is not a position which McDowell can claim to hold due to his adherence to subjective conditions of experience and to his refusal to distinguish between deceptive and non-deceptive cases of perceptual experience.

Glendinning's and de Gaynesford's alternative appears to be an improvement on that of McDowell and it retains a number of elements which are crucial for McDowell such as the claim that the content of experience is conceptual. They believe that "by acting in an environment the human animal is *itself* the instrument of access to the facts. ... it is natural to suppose that what is first perceptually manifest is *already* significant or conceptually informed in some way; and in this sense what is immediately manifest is not a blankly external fact."[44] They claim to avoid threats of

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42 Glendinning and de Gaynesford, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
43 *Ibid.*, Sect V, p. 15.
44 *Ibid.*, Sect. VI, p. 17.

scepticism by eliminating references to subjective elements and, in a manner which is evocative of the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world, state:

> the modes of existence or forms of life that characterize a human existence just are its access to the world. Such an approach not only makes sense of the idea that perceptual content is, from the start, conceptually informed, but also, since we are beginning with the modes of existence of a living human being and not the presence to itself of a subject, the threat of scepticism cannot arise.[45]

This statement could certainly be applied to McDowell's views on the subject if he were to incorporate the suggestions that Glendinning and de Gaynsford propose. As we have seen, McDowell's conception of experience as openness to the layout of reality plays a key role in his conception of experience as veridical.

Unfortunately, McDowell does not discuss the distinction between illusions and hallucinations and Glendinning attempts to rectify this deficiency. Glendinning distinguishes between an illusion, such as seeing a spot of sunlight on the path through a forest as a stone, which involves the fact that there is *something* in the world which seems to be some way, from hallucinations which do not involve any sort of openness to the world. Victims of hallucination are generally convinced that they are perceiving a fact but can generally be brought to acknowledge that this is not a result of facts in the world being perceptually manifest. Rather the hallucination does *not* reflect the way things in the world actually are. Perceptual illusions involve the fact that there is something in the world which seems to be some way. On the other hand, according to Glendinning, "in the case of hallucinations there is no state of the world which is an (occurrent) component of a (current) perceptual experience, and so it cannot be classified as a case of perceptual openness."[46]

Glendinning's primary conclusion in this discussion is aimed at both traditional and McDowellian views that "there are no perceptual 'mere appearances'."[47] Following

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45 Glendinning and de Gaynesford, *op. cit.*, Sect VI, p. 18.

46 Simon Glendinning, 'Perception and Hallucination: A New Approach to the Disjunctive Conception of Expereince,' personal communication, November 2000, p. 2.

47 Simon Glendinning, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Merleau-Ponty, he recognises that those who suffer from hallucinations are *closed* to the world, where a hallucinator carves out a private 'fictional' space, as opposed to normal persons who are *open* to the world. He states: "The victim is, of course, *still there* in the world with others, but, is so in a mode which can be *completely impervious* to perceptual experiences and the reason and testimony of others."[48]

Glendinning draws a distinction between manifest phenomena and seemings in order to discredit McDowell's claim that in deceptive cases of perception, such as illusion and hallucination, the object of experience is a mere appearance. He presents three examples of S seeing an *X* where, in the first case, an *X* is manifest, and, therefore, this is a case of veridical perception. In the second case, S has an illusion of seeing *X*, therefore something seems *X*, in which case, however, since S is looking at an *F* disguised as an *X*, the actual object of experience is the *F* (which seems to be *X*) and not the *X*. In the third case, S has a hallucination as of seeing an *X*, but in actual fact, nothing whatsoever is perceived. This analysis therefore discredits McDowell's claim that his view "*can allow* what is given to experience in the two sorts of case [deceptive and non-deceptive appearances] to be the same in so far as it is an appearance that things are thus and so."[49]

Philosophical Conceptions of World

The discussion on the veridicality or otherwise of perceptual experience raises a number of questions concerning what role, if any, the world plays in our thinking, and whether that role is direct or mediated through language or concepts. This is relevant when discussing realism and anti-realism where the existence or otherwise of a world which is external to thought is the essential issue. "World" has a central role to play in McDowell's *Mind and World*, namely, concerning his ideas on the dualism of thinking and the world, which, he believes, can be "dissolved".

48 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

49 Glendinning refers to McDowell, 'Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge,' (1983) p. 475. (See also *Meaning Knowledge, and Reality*, p. 389).

A metaphysical question which often arises in connection with the word "world" is "What is the real nature of the world?" Can we ever succeed in achieving a faithful portrayal of the way the world is? Is there a particular structure which belongs to the world which our thoughts conform or fail to conform to? Is there a 'ready-made' world to which we can ascribe one true description or could there be a multiplicity of true descriptions of aspects of the world? We are human beings who live *in* a world and who are *engaged* with things in the world. Can we ever really know what 'world' is due to the fact that our descriptions and explanations are clouded by our concepts, our interests, our involvement, and linguistic conventions?

The concept of "World" is not generally given very much attention in the philosophical literature and McDowell does not pay much attention to this concept in spite of the important role it plays in *Mind and World.* His use of the word "world" consists of remarks which sometimes refer to the world as it anyway is, and at other times to "the world as it appears to the experiencing subject." (MW 39) This section will first analyse McDowell's use of the word "world," followed by the views of other philosophers who make use of the word "world" with the aim of arriving at a better understanding of this concept.

The nature of world-directed thought and the role of concepts in structuring perceptual experience are central issues in *Mind and World.* McDowell's attempt to "dissolve" the dualism of thinking and the world involves a central claim that there is no intermediary, barrier or interface between thought and the world and that what we think and what is the case must be one reality. As we have seen, his view is that "thinking does not stop short of facts. The world is embraceable in thought." (MW 33) Moreover, the influence which the world exerts on thought is already in the order of reason rather than material causes.

The world, in McDowell's view, exists independently of our thinking since although "in experience one can take in how things are... how things are is independent of one's thinking." (MW 25) Moreover, "In a particular experience in which one is not

misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so* .... *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world. It is how things are." (MW 26) There is "no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case .... [so] there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world." (MW 27) Experience is a region of direct contact with the world, according to McDowell, rather than an intermediary between the world and the rational mind.

McDowell's rationality reaches all the way out to the world itself, rather than ceasing "at some outermost point of the space of reasons," as it is crucial, in his view, that "the world itself must exert a rational constraint on our thinking." (MW 42) If, however, our experience of the world is necessarily structured by and imbued with concepts, can one nevertheless speak of experience as a direct encounter with the *world*?

Ambiguity is evident in McDowell's conception of "openness to the world" which, in his view, is one way in which intermediaries between the perceiving subject and the world can be eliminated. "Openness to the world", however, does not necessarily eliminate perceptual distortion of the world by such forms as our conceptual scheme, our particular upbringing and culture, our interests, or our linguistic conventions. We should not forget that the deliverances of experience are not only a product of the world, but also, following Kant, of features of our own constitution. How can the empirical world be independent if we are partly responsible for its fundamental structure?

McDowell's reply to these remarks points towards the distinction we sometimes make when we separate the self (or organism that experiences) from the "internal constitution of the perceiving organism" (or brain). He states:

> obviously what happens in our brains when we perceive is partly due to facts about the constitution of our nervous system, so it can be at most partly due to relevant features of the layout of our environment. But it does not begin to follow that we

> cannot conceive *our* perceptual *experience* as openness to the world. It is we who do our experiencing, not our brains.[50]

Talk about "world" carries with it a number of implications, as philosophers do not always specify exactly what they mean when they use this word and, as I have mentioned, discussions on "world" are sparse in the philosophical literature. It is therefore relevant to investigate some philosophical views on "world" with the aim of better understanding McDowell's use of the term "openness to the world".

The Presocratics were concerned with questions about the world, both from a scientific as well as from a philosophical standpoint and a number of presocratic concepts concerning 'World' have continued to dominate Western philosophy to the present day. The most relevant for present purposes is Protagoras of Abdera who, as a reaction to developments which had increasingly implied that the real world is quite different from the phenomenal world, pronounced that "Man is the measure of all things, of those that are that they are and of those which are not that they are not." This statement appears to contain faint echoes of the Kantian transcendental distinction where what we can know of the world depends on the manner in which we, as human beings, are constituted.

In contemporary philosophy, Nelson Goodman analyses presocratic views of world in an attempt to list different ways of worldmaking which he lists as follows: "*ordering*, in the derivation of all four elements from one;[51] *supplementation*, in the introduction of the Boundless; *deletion*, in the elimination of everything else; and *division*, in the shattering of the One into atoms."[52] To these one can add "*composition*, as when events are combined into an enduring object; *deformation*, as when rough curves are smoothed out; and *weighing* or emphasis."[53] Goodman admits of multiple alternative versions of "World" and his reply to the question "What is the way the world is?" is

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50 John McDowell, 'Reply to Huw Price,' p. 180.

51 Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978) p. 101. Goodman refers to Thales who reduced all four elements into water (see Goodman, p. 98).

52 Nelson Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 101.

"not a shush but a chatter."[54] This is a reflection of his belief in a multiplicity of descriptions of the world. He denies that there is such a thing as the structure of the world for anything to conform or fail to conform to, but admits that there are many different equally true descriptions of the world. Goodman concludes with the warning that a multiplicity of world views gives rise to considerations which are at variance with those that are at present in use.

Justus Buchler's views on "World" take a different approach to those of Goodman. Buchler notes that although the two terms, "world" and "universe", are extensively used, not only in philosophy but also in common speech, religion, literary art and theoretical physics, yet they have not received adequate philosophical attention, a lack which he attempts to remedy. A rudimentary sense of the terms suggests "everything", "all there is", or "an all embracing totality" or unity which embraces all there is. The concept of "world" is indispensable to most metaphysical approaches, according to Buchler, as it "makes possible a primitive but sobering type of contract, between what is dealt with by man as specific and chartable and what is always to be acknowledged as indefinitely greater in scope. The World provides conceptually what is greater in scope, incomparably greater, than anything "in" it or "of" it."[55]

The coherence of questions such as "What if there were no World?" or "Why is there a World instead of nothing at all?" is doubtful, according to Buchler. Phrases which negate the World do not identify a subject matter and refer to the World as though it were a complex. Buchler concludes with a discussion of the confusion which arises when the word "real" is used in the question: "What is the real nature of the World?" He claims that "The notion of "reality" has never been helpful to theoretical understanding and has often impaired it."[56] In his view, it follows that when one questions the *real* nature of the World one is implying the existence of a World which is "not real", from which it follows that the question is meaningless. Buchler's

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54 *Ibid.*, p. 31.

55 Justus Buchler, 'On the Concept of the World', pp. 555 – 79, *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. XXXI, No. 4, Issue 124, June 1978, p. 556.

56 *Ibid.*, p. 579.

investigation of the concept "World" therefore dissolves questions which only serve to cause confusion and to make matters more problematic.

Buchler's views exhibit similarities to those of Heidegger who, as a reaction to Husserl's emphasis on the subjectivity of intentionality (and *epoche*, or 'bracketing' the existence of the real world in order to focus on intentionality and subjectivity), claims that we cannot make sense of questions which ask for 'proof' of the external world. As we shall see, Heidegger believes that *Dasein* or Human Being can be seen to exist only in terms of actual *engagement* with the world. Therefore, for Heidegger, "the scandal of philosophy" is that "such proofs [of the existence of the external world] are expected."[57]

It is through theorising, according to Heidegger, that we come to think of the world as a collection of objects, detached from our own involvement as beings-in-the-world. Our obsession with theory dangerously alienates us from our own humanity as it ignores the richness of pre-theoretical experience which makes the world meaningful for us. By 'theoretical' Heidegger means disengagement from practical concerns instead of which a disinterested observation or 'spectating' takes over. Heidegger warns against regarding the world as a disengaged spectator removed from all practical interests as he states: "By looking at the world theoretically we have already dimmed it down to the uniformity of what is purely present-at-hand."[58] This leads to a consideration of the world as a mere 'thing of nature' to be observed in a wholly detached manner, which, in turn, leads to the danger of Cartesianism where the world is viewed as a collection of extended substances apart from ourselves conceived as 'thinking things'. A 'world', for Heidegger, in his 'primary' sense of the term, is a significant whole in which we as human beings dwell. In his terminology, "*World*" in quotation marks refers to the totality of those entities which can be present-at-hand. Theorising therefore involves thinking in terms of the "*world*" where we view reality

57 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, Tr. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) p. 37.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

as a collection of objects and where we disregard the *world* with which we are engaged as beings-in-the-world.

Our relationship with objects in the world is intimate and constituted by our ordinary everyday activity in a world where we interact with others and where we make use of various types of objects and equipment. Therefore, according to Heidegger, our ordinary everyday existence depends mainly on our relationships with other people and with things which we deal with.

It is important to note that Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world implies engagement not location and a consideration of being-in-the-world involves resisting the Cartesian temptation to consider ourselves and the world as separate and independent entities. As we shall see later in this chapter, this Heideggerian notion of being-in-the world reflects, to some extent, McDowell's conception of the interdependence of spontaneity and receptivity and his view of the conceptual as unbounded. Heidegger believes that our subjectivity is intricately intertwined with our humanity. As beings living in a world it would make no sense to imagine away the existence of the world as that would imply imagining away our very own existence.

Heidegger makes use of the word Dasein ('being' or 'existence') to refer both to "the manner of Being which ... man ... possesses" and to the creatures which possess it.[59] Dasein, for Heidegger, *is* its possibilities in that no sense can be made of a person's existence except in terms of the projects upon which he is engaged. Dasein needs the world, as much as the world needs it. Neither can be conceived in the other's absence. Heidegger states, "Self and the world belong together ... [They] are not two beings, like subject and object," but "the unity of Being-in-the-world."[60] Cooper elaborates on this point as he states, "To be anything, an object must be 'lit up' for us

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59 Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 32. See David E. Cooper, *Existentialism* (London: The Claridge Press, 1996). Cooper states that "Heidegger is reluctant to call us by such familiar epithets as 'people'" and that "it is not excluded that non-human creatures should have *Dasein*, Martians perhaps or, though Heidegger doubts it, some higher animals." (p. 28).

60 Heidegger, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

in a structure of significance: and to be anything, we must be engaged in the world as creatures who light it up."[61]

Heidegger's views on 'world' contrast with those of realists who maintain that the world is completely independent of that which anyone can think or say about it, and that even if all human beings, or all thinkers, were to be wiped out of existence, the world would still continue to exist. This view leads Richard Rorty to question whether there is any point in speaking about the world at all. He makes a rather extraordinary claim, that "'the world' is either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone."[62] As a pragmatist, Rorty recommends that we should follow Dewey by dissolving dualisms such as spontaneity and receptivity and necessity and contingency and view the world in terms of problem solving and modifying "our beliefs and desires and activities in ways that will bring us greater happiness than we have now."[63] "This shift in perspective," Rorty claims, "is the natural consequence of dropping the receptivity/spontaneity and intuition/concept distinctions, and more generally of dropping the notion of "representation" and the view of man that Dewey has called "the spectator theory" and Heidegger, the "separation of *physis* and *idea*"."[64] Rorty concludes with the sweeping statement that the coherence and correspondence theories of truth are "noncompeting trivialities" and urges us to move beyond realism and idealism in order to arrive at a point at which we are capable of stopping doing philosophy when we want to.

McDowell refuses to concede loss of the world to Rorty and directly confronts his criticism of Davidson where Rorty claims that progress in our language-game has nothing to do with the way the world is. McDowell finds this "extraordinary" and states that "It is the whole point of the idea of norms of inquiry that following them ought to improve our chances of being right about "the way the rest of the world is".

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61 Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 30

62 Richard Rorty, 'The World Well-Lost', pp. 649 – 65, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume LXIX, No. 19, October 26, 1972, p. 663.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 665.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 665.

If following what pass for norms of inquiry turns out not to improve our chances of being right about the world, that just shows we need to modify our conception of the norms of inquiry." (MW 151)

McDowell equates 'world' with things that exist and the world which he claims we are in direct contact with is "the perfectly ordinary world in which there are rocks, snow is white, and so forth: the world that is populated by "the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false", as Davidson puts it. It is that ordinary world on which our thinking bears." (MW 151) In other words, the claim that "The world contains rocks" is equivalent in meaning to "Rocks exist" or "There are rocks," both of which express existence claims.

McDowell's view is, however, open to attack from anti-realists who can claim that they too admit the existence of things such as rocks and trees. The disagreement in the dispute between realists and anti-realists is, rather, about how we are related to that which exists. The main bone of contention is the realist claim that what exists does so independently of knowledge or experience, in contrast to anti-realists who claim that what exists is in some way internally related to our knowledge of things.

This is a very problematic position when one considers that we are, as human beings, situated *in* the world. On this conception, we are part of the world and its history, just as rocks and snow and other familiar objects are, and our experiences are genuine experiences *of* the world which we take to be the source of our objective knowledge. Do we still need to ask questions about how we as human beings are epistemically related to that which exists apart from our human existence? Is it possible to reconcile our position as beings-in-the-world with our claims regarding objective knowledge?

Heidegger's Being-in-the-World – Resolving the Conflict

Is it possible to dissolve the dispute between realists and anti-realists by reverting to Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world? I would like to suggest that the version of

"world" which Heidegger proposes in *Being and Time* bridges the gap between traditional philosophical conceptions of "world" which give rise to problems, and McDowell's conception of experience as "openness to the world". Experience, in Heidegger's view, is not an intermediary between ourselves and the world, but it discloses the world to us in a direct way which eliminates the necessity to postulate mental intermediaries, as Kant and Husserl had previously done. Heidegger's philosophy dissolves the subject-object distinction and therefore 're-instates' human beings within the world in which they live, without the need for any intermediary or gap between ourselves as thinkers and the world, or any need for epistemological questions to be asked about how we are related to everything else that exists in the world.

Dasein is a central element in Heidegger's philosophy and most of his ideas on the subject of "world" revolve around this concept. Although Dasein's mode of existing is "being-in-the-world", yet this is not understood as some form of spatial or physical inclusion. Rather, the Heideggerian sense of "in" is existential and expresses involvement. This view eliminates the dichotomy of self and world and of subjectivity and objectivity as Heidegger states: "There is no such thing as the 'side-by-sideness' of an entity called 'Dasein' with another entity called 'world'."[65] Heidegger draws on the primordial sense of "in" as "to reside" or "to dwell".[66] In Heidegger's view, Dasein inhabits the world which is itself part of our being and where we feel at home, rather than estranged. The result is that the relation between human beings and that which they inhabit cannot be understood on the model of the relation between subject and object. The world, therefore, pervades the relation of human beings to other objects in the world.

How does Heidegger depict our basic relation to the world? Heidegger's notion of Being-in-the-world constitutes a unitary phenomenon which is conceived in such a manner so as to resist the Cartesian temptation to think that we are dealing with

65 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 81.
66 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

separate entities, ourselves and the world. 'Being-in' involves engagement with the world as opposed to location. According to Heidegger, our everyday relationships, both with other people and with things in the world, are *not* the product of mental activity but are constituted by our practices, that is, by our everyday activity in the world which includes our interaction with others and our ways of using things. People and things have meaning for us because of our dealings with them which develop into long-standing relationships and which form part of our practical engagement as being-in-the-world.

In Heidegger's view, in everyday life we experience things as 'ready-to-hand' (*zuhanden*), that is, as functional, practical items which figure in a field of 'concern'. We do this not through disengaged observation, as detached spectators, but, rather, through our practical dealings with them. Heidegger calls the entities which we encounter in concern "equipment" (*Zeuge*). We encounter things such as hammers and pens and other artefacts which, according to Heidegger, are 'ready-to-hand' by means of intelligent comportment where it is our use of things which reveals them as what they are. Things are therefore 'lit up' in virtue of the roles they play within our practical concerns.

In a manner which reflects McDowell's views on the unboundedness of the conceptual, Heidegger conceives of Dasein's dealings with things as intelligent and as involving understanding, and whatever is "disclosed in understanding ... is accessible in such a way that its "as which" structure can be made to stand out."[67]

Heidegger rejects Husserlian intentionality as an attempt to explain the directedness of the mind, because he claims that it gives rise to more problems than it solves. Intentionality separates the supposedly 'mental' from the world and creates a dichotomy between mind and world, rather than bridging the gap between subject and object. Heidegger claims that Husserlian intentionality involves a misinterpretation

[67] *Ibid.*, p. 189.

which "lies in *an erroneous subjectivizing* of intentionality."[68] This involves the postulation of an ego or a subject to whom, in turn, intentional experiences are attributed. Heidegger states: "The idea of a subject which has intentional experiences merely inside its own sphere and is ... encapsulated within itself is an absurdity which misconstrues the basic ontological structure of the being that we ourselves are."[69] Heidegger prefers to call our directed activity "comportment" as this term does not have any mental implications and it is characteristic of human activity in general.

Heidegger rejects the Kantian notion of perception as synthesis of a manifold of things. He states: "My encounter with the room is not such that I first take in one thing after another and put together a manifold of things in order then to see a room. Rather, I primarily see a referential whole ... from which the individual piece of furniture and what is in the room stand out."[70]

Heidegger calls our skill for dealing with everyday things the "sight of practical circumspection ..., our practical everyday orientation."[71] It is a skill which is so pervasive and constant that he simply calls it *being-in-the-world.* This involves the ever-presence of the world, as Heidegger explains: "Why can I let a pure thing of the world show up at all in bodily presence? Only because the world is already there in thus letting it show up, *because letting-it-show-up is but a particular mode of my being-in-the-world* and because world means nothing other than what is always already present for the entity in it."[72]

Questions concerning realism and anti-realism are meaningless for Heidegger as it is Dasein, understood as being-in-the-world, that leads to an understanding of the manner in which there is nothing to be bridged between self and world. This is

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68 Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 63 – 64.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 63 – 64.

70 Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 187.

71 Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology,* p. 163.

72 Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time,* p. 196, emphasis added.

derived from Heidegger's view of the practical manner in which human beings relate to the world in their everyday purposeful activity, which includes both skilful and intellectual coping. In a commentary on Heidegger, Dreyfus states that "in a wide variety of situations human beings relate to the world in an organized purposive manner without the constant accompaniment of representational states that specify what the action is aimed at accomplishing." This is evident in skilled activity such as a move in chess which, Dreyfus remarks, "is an example of "apparently complex problem solving which seem[s] to implement a long-range strategy" as long years of experience result in a chess grandmaster playing "master level chess while his deliberate, analytic mind is absorbed in something else."[73]

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that the existence of human beings is intimately connected to the existence of a world. Heidegger states: "Dasein itself, ultimately the beings which we call men, are possible in their being only because there is a world .... Dasein exhibits itself as a being *which is in its world but at the same time is by virtue of the world in which it is.*"[74]

The Cartesian *cogito sum* is therefore turned on its head as Heidegger states: "The "*sum*" is then asserted first, and indeed in the sense that "I am in a world"."[75] The problem raised by questions which ask whether there is an external world at all is further dissolved, as Heidegger states: "The question of whether there is a world at all and whether its being can be proved, makes no sense if it is raised by *Dasein* as being-in-the-world; and who else would raise it?"[76] In other words, once intermediaries such as intentional contents or representations are rendered unnecessary, it no longer makes sense to ask whether intentional states correspond to reality, or whether conditions of satisfaction can be met. The dichotomy of subject and object is rendered meaningless as the two concepts collapse into Dasein experienced as being-in-the-world. Attempts to *prove* the existence of the world or

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73 Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's* Being and Time, *Division I,* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1997) p. 93.
74 Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time,* p. 202.
75 Heidedgger, *Being and Time,* p. 254.
76 Heidegger, *Being and Time,* p. 246 – 247.

attempts which question whether the world is *real* or not "presuppose a subject which is proximally world*less* or unsure of its world, and which must, at bottom, first assure itself of a world."[77]

The possibility of dissolving the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective and, therefore, between thinking and the world plays an important role in Heidegger's philosophy and, in this regard, Richard Polt suggests that we jettison the crude dichotomy of the inner and the outer. This should come about as a result of the process of human existence which, he claims, "occurs when the human body interacts with the beings around it in such a way that those beings reveal themselves in their depths of meaning. If our connections to other beings were cut, we would not end up inside our mind – we would end up *without a mind at all*."[78]

It is now evident that Heidegger's description of "world" differs from that of Buchler and Goodman and proves to be illuminating when applied to the issues which emerge from an analysis of McDowell's views on world. In this regard, I believe it can be utilised to point towards a possible dissolution of the dichotomy between subject and object, and between mind and world, which can be linked to McDowell's concept of "openness to the world". In my view, McDowell's position is compatible with and can be extended to incorporate Heidegger's notion of being-in-the-world.

Do Heidegger's and McDowell's views on the union between subject and object succeed in proposing a credible picture of how we are in direct contact with a world which is there anyway. In my opinion, misunderstandings often arise when human beings are viewed as separable from their world which, in turn, leads to a conception of two types of world, the subjective and the objective. McDowell, however, draws attention to the fact that thought is not separable from conceptual activity. Our conceptual repertoire is part of the world, and cannot therefore be conceived as being separate and distinct from it. There is no outer boundary around the conceptual,

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77 *Ibid.*, p. 250.

78 Richard Polt, *Heidegger, An Introduction* (London: UCL Press Ltd., 1999) p. 57.

McDowell argues, and our thinking, together with our experience goes all the way out to the world, thus resulting in our being open to the world and to our directly experiencing the world and its contents. I believe that McDowell is correct in claiming that there is no gap or intermediary between thinking and the world and that in experience we are open to the world as it is. Any other conception of mind and world would be meaningless and I believe we should follow Heidegger and claim that there are no longer two distinct worlds to describe. Mind and world are united by means of a combination of Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* as being-in-the-world and McDowell's openness to the world, both of which do away with unnecessary intentional content. This conception also eliminates Kantian noumena or things-in-themselves which are rendered meaningless as a consequence of the dissolution of the dualism of thinking and the world.

Criticism could easily be directed against the above point of view with the accusation that there are striking differences between Heidegger and McDowell. These include Heidegger's dissolution of *Dasein* versus world, which relies on practical engagement as our 'primordial' way of encountering world, as opposed to McDowell's emphasis on perceptual experience. In my view, however, a deeper understanding of the views of Heidegger and McDowell exhibit affinities which are not apparent at first glance. Bowie,[79] for example, notes that McDowell makes use of "proto-Heideggerian locutions" such as "the world's making itself manifest to us" (MW 143), "our unproblematic openness to the world" (MW 155) and his citing of Evans' "idea of the subject as being *in* the world." (MW 54) Another claim which Bowie makes is that the key ideas which McDowell draws from Gadamer originate in Heidegger's work of the late 1920's and early 1930's.[80] Bowie draws attention to the manner in which Heidegger's and McDowell's views on Kant converge in Heidegger's claim that the 'Schematism Chapter' leads to the "core of the whole problematic of the Critique of Pure Reason," and, therefore, of Kant's whole project.[81] This involves the problematic status of Kant's imagination as Bowie quotes Heidegger who states, "But

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[79] Bowie, 'John McDowell's *Mind and World* and Early Romantic Epistemology,' p. 536.
[80] *Ibid.*, p. 536, 21n.
[81] *Ibid.*, pp. 536 – 7.

if receptivity means the same as sensuosness and spontaneity the same as understanding, then the imagination falls in a peculiar way between the two" because, according to Bowie, the imagination must play the role of structuring receptivity by spontaneity demanded by McDowell.[82] In my view, just as Kant's 'imagination' falls between spontaneity and receptivity, McDowell's 'experience', which is imbued with conceptual content, takes the place of Kantian imagination as the intermediary between spontaneity and receptivity, which both fall within the sphere of the conceptual.

Mulhall also draws attention to Kant's failure to recognise that the concepts of externality or world should be seen "as internal to the categories of the understanding, as part of our concept of an object in general" and his postulation of the thing-in-itself leads to the sceptical conclusion where he posits the existence of things which we cannot know.[83] Mulhall notes the contrast in Heidegger's thought as opposed to Kant where the former "aims to overcome scepticism by providing something like a transcendental deduction of the concept of a world; and in doing so, he reveals that there are more ways of making a habitable world – more layers or aspects to it – than Kant's twelve categories allow."[84] Although it cannot be said of McDowell that he attempts to provide a transcendental deduction of the concept of the world, there is, in my view, no doubt that he conceives of externality and world as being internal to the concept of objects through his notion of the unboundedness of the conceptual in a manner which bears at least a minimal resemblance to Heidegger's notion of the dissolution of *Dasein* and world.

Another point of convergence between McDowell and Heidegger which deserves mention is the manner in which we *directly experience objects in a practical sense*. Although McDowell's means of arriving at this direct realist conclusion differ from those of Heidegger, who makes use of notions such as concern, care and engagement

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82 *Ibid.*, p. 537.

83 Stephen Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kirkegaard* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001) p. 255.

84 *Ibid.*, p. 255

in the practical business of life to 'dissolve' the dichotomy of subject and object, yet the final position which both philosophers arrive at expresses similarities. This is mainly due to McDowell's views on the unboundedness of the conceptual, as a result of which anything that could have been considered as external is brought into the realm of reason, which plays a role similar to that of Heidegger's *Dasein* or being-in-the-world.

Heidegger's views on the consequent problems for philosophy raised by the dominance of the *theoretical*, as we have seen, could also be compared to McDowell's views on the mistaken emphasis which is often attributed to a scientific world view. On the part of the former, as we have seen, the dominance of the theoretical leads to the bifurcation of self and world. According to McDowell, undue emphasis on a scientific world view leads to 'bald naturalism' which eliminates meaning and hence normativity from our view of the world and, moreover, removes reason (or rationality) from its *sui generis* status and draws it into the logical realm of law, which is, in his view, not acceptable.

Re-Habilitating Realism

Can realism be rehabilitated in view of the foregoing discussion? If an attempt to do so is to be made, it is important to review exactly what realism stands for, and Platts gives an interesting description. Realism, he says,

> embodies a picture of our language as reaching out to, connecting with, the external world in ways that are (at least) beyond our present practical comprehension. It embodies a picture of an independently existing, somewhat recalcitrant world describable by our language in ways that transcend (at least) our present capacities to determine whether those descriptions are true or not. It embodies a picture of our language, and our understanding, grappling with a stubbornly elusive reality. Perhaps, with effort, we can improve our capacities to understand that world, to know that our characterisations of it are true. If we succeed in so doing, we do not bring that world into being, we merely *discover* what was there all along. But that reality will always exceed our capacities: we can struggle to achieve *approximately true* beliefs about that reality, approximately true beliefs about the entities and their characteristics which, independently of us, make up that reality. But we have to rest

> with the approximate belief, and ultimately to resign ourselves to (non-complacent) ignorance: for the world, austerely characterised by our language, will always outrun our recognitional capacities.
>
> I find this conception of the world profound, sympathetic, and (healthily) depressing.[85]

Is this the view which realists such as McDowell should defend? Can we only hope to attain approximately true beliefs of an independent and seemingly forever elusive world? Realism is something which we generally come to accept as part of our commonsensical view of the world. We believe that we interact with other people and with objects on a day-to-day basis, and that our statements are meaningful and refer to things which exist independently of our thoughts. Grayling, for example, states that "ordinary discourse is, without question, realist in character."[86] Why is it that arguments proposed by anti-realists tend to make realism look so problematic?

The main issue in the debate on realism, according to Grayling, is "the epistemological thesis that what exists does or can do so *independently of any thought, talk, knowledge or experience of it.*"[87] It is the task of realists to demonstrate that this claim is intelligible, and the task of anti-realists to argue against such claims.

An interesting observation that Grayling makes is that since we assume the entities to which we refer exist independently of our thought, it would therefore "render explanation of our first order linguistic practice incoherent if we did not or could not attribute to speakers beliefs about the existence, independently of them, of the entities constituting the domain over which their discourse ranges."[88] Grayling notes that these are realist *commitments* that are "fundamental to first order practice"[89] and he distinguishes between realism, conceived in this regard, and 'transcendentalism'. The latter reflects the notion of verification-transcendent truth conditions and takes realism to be literally true. An anti-transcendentalist, on the other hand, concedes that

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85 M. Platts, *Ways of Meaning* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) pp. 237 – 38.

86 A.C. Grayling, *An Introduction to Philosophical Logic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., Third Edition, 1998) p. 307.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 307.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 307.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 307.

it is not possible to establish the truth or falsity of verification-transcendent truth and replaces this notion with a conception of realism as a "fundamental assumption of our practice at the first order. It is therefore not true but assumed to be true."[90] The epistemological implications of this view involve the notion that "coming to know things about the world is a process of discovery, one which lies under the austere constraint of our inherent epistemic limitations."[91]

Grayling's views concerning the epistemological implications of the realism/anti-realism debate are, in my view, relevant. His position, however, follows traditional views which accept that there are two possible stances to take in this debate, that of a realist or that of an anti-realist, and which does not question the fundamental assumptions of the debate itself. In this regard, and in view of the discussion on Heidegger and being-in-the-world earlier in this chapter, I believe it is relevant to question whether the distinction between realism and anti-realism is really necessary. The statements that are made by realists and anti-realists both make use of the same entities and states of affairs. There is no difference in the actual discourse of each of the two parties to the realism and anti-realism debate. This may be due to the fact that, as human beings, it is impossible to escape from the conceptual, cultural and contextual practices which make us the very human beings which we are. It is also impossible for us to escape from our surroundings, that is, from the very world which incorporates other beings and objects which surround us. If human beings could be conceived in isolation from the world, I believe it would then be meaningless to speak of thinking, existence or of a world at all.

Feyerabend finds evidence of a conception of human beings as integral components of the world they inhabit in Homeric epics where the individual is "embodied *into its surroundings.*"[92] The context of Feyerabend's discussion is an analysis of creativity and the problems which arise when attempts are made to reconcile it with objectivity. "It needs a miracle," Feyerabend states, "to bridge the abyss between subject and

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90 *Ibid.*, p. 308.
91 *Ibid.*, p. 308.
92 Paul Feyerabend, *Farewell to Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 1987) p. 139.

object" and creativity is supposed to be that miracle.[93] There is, however, no need for miracles, as Feyerabend suggests that we view humans "as inseparable parts of nature and society, not as independent architects."[94]

In my view, the realism/anti-realism debate can be tentatively dissolved through recognition of the fact that both realists and anti-realists share the same concepts, culture and contextual practices. Adherents of both realism and anti-realism are engaged in a social world in which they are directly involved with other people and with objects which have meaning for them and which aid or obstruct them in their everyday dealings and practices. Could the realism and anti-realism debate be dissolved by means of an analysis of the social and practical aspects which concern human beings and which relate to the issues which are under discussion? I would like to claim that it can, and that the foregoing discussion points towards a possible direction which such a discussion could explore.

It is, in fact, rather puzzling to note that McDowell, whose quietist position on most issues leads him towards a putative dissolution of dichotomies, is an advocate of direct realism, itself one side of a debate, and that he does not attempt to resolve this matter. If McDowell's picture were to have taken into consideration Heideggerian aspects concerning human beings living in a world where they are engaged in a purposive and practical manner, he may have succeeded in resolving this affair. As we have seen, his position includes the right ingredients which include openness and passivity of experience, together with an acceptance of two crucial facts: the role which human interests and perspectives play in our perceptual experience and the fact that we do not 'create' an external world through thought and language. Reconciling these facts requires, however, more than McDowell seems prepared to concede.

Introducing Heideggerian notions concerning world into McDowell's picture could, I believe, fit into his quietistic philosophy and work towards achieving philosophical

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93 *Ibid.*, p. 140.
94 *Ibid.*, p. 141.

peace. Such an introduction could further point towards the dissolution of other dualisms including that of subject/object, reason/nature and mind/world. Unfortunately, due to the position he chooses to maintain, McDowell gives hostage to fortune by proclaiming himself a realist. If he had taken the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world on board, he could have dismissed the issue of realism and anti-realism and been in a better position from which to work towards his aim of achieving peace for philosophy. It would then be possible for him to present a picture which is persuasive and as a result of which epistemological questions about the relation of human beings to everything else that exists no longer need to be asked.

What about the notion of verification-transcendent truth conditions? Although this is an issue which will continue to generate debate, such a notion introduces a mysterious type of Platonic form into the realism/anti-realism debate. It is tempting, even though defenders of this notion would dispute this way of putting it, to conceive of verification-transcendent truth conditions as a type of transcendental Kantian thing-in-itself, or noumena, standing regally above every discourse. I do not believe, however, that this is a feasible position to hold, in spite of the interesting philosophical implications which may ensue from such a stance.

I hope to have shown in the foregoing discussion that a different approach which dissolves the realism/anti-realism debate should be pursued. Heidegger has pointed towards a direction, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this chapter, where the traditional distinction which philosophers generally draw between subjectivity and objectivity is no longer valid or necessary and can therefore be considered to be meaningless. Can this position achieve peace for philosophy?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion: McDowell's Quietism

Reworking Dualisms

> it seems to me that the most promising and interesting change that is occurring in philosophy today is that these dualisms are being questioned in new ways or are being radically reworked. There is a good chance that they will be abandoned, at least in their present form .... What we are about to see is the emergence of a radically revised view of the relation of mind and world.
>
> Donald Davidson[1]

In Chapter Six I discussed the possibility of incorporating Heideggerian elements into McDowell's picture in an attempt to question the distinction which philosophers traditionally draw between realism and anti-realism and to uncover possibilities which may emerge when elements from continental philosophy are brought into this issue, which is generally considered to be the preserve of analytic philosophy. Although my attempts in this regard should not be considered as conclusive, I believe that they point towards a direction which should be further explored, in particular when attempts are made to re-work issues which seem to be intractable such as the debate between realists and anti-realists. Questioning the actual validity of traditional distinctions such as that of realism and anti-realism is a step in the right direction, as is an examination of the assumptions which underlie such distinctions.

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1 Davidson, 'The Myth of the Subjective' p. 223, 6n.

A satisfactory resolution of issues such as that of realism and anti-realism and the proposal of new points of view with the aim of achieving philosophical peace is certainly not an easy task. Neither is the persuasive reworking of dualisms with the subsequent emergence of novel philosophical views, in spite of Davidson's optimistic remarks in the quotation at the beginning of this Chapter. It would certainly be presumptuous and extremely difficult for any philosopher to claim that a definitive position had been reached which everyone can agree with and which can achieve the peace which philosophy has been striving for.

McDowell's opening declaration in *Mind and World* is that his "overall topic ... is the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world." (MW 3) As we have seen in the previous chapters, his attempts to rework a number of dualisms including that of reason and nature has resulted in a picture of mind and world where *both* spontaneity *and* rational constraint from the world can peacefully co-exist. McDowell follows Kant in his claim that knowledge is yielded by *both* intuitions *and* concepts acting in cooperation. This leads to his claim that the conceptual is unbounded, a claim which follows as a consequence of his incorporation of experience, which he considers to be already imbued with conceptual content, into the space of reasons.

McDowell follows Davidson, as we have seen in Chapter Four, in his rejection of the scheme/content dualism. However, due to the fact that McDowell's final picture retains empiricism, arguments against the dualism of scheme and content are formulated in such a manner so as to eliminate epistemological intermediaries such as the Given, while at the same time retaining elements of receptivity in order to provide justification for thought and conceiving of perception as "openness to experience."

The key dualism which McDowell tackles in *Mind and World* and which is discussed in Chapter Five is that of reason and nature. This subject has been interminably debated over the centuries and the tendency of a number of philosophers in more recent times is to 'naturalise' reason and to put forward a picture which McDowell

calls 'bald naturalism'. This is, as McDowell acknowledges, one of the 'pictures' which has given rise to a great deal of philosophical anxiety as a result of the fact that bald naturalism denies the possibility of spontaneity operating in a *sui generis* conceptual framework. McDowell's picture attempts to maintain *both* that "conceptual capacities are in one sense non-natural," that is, "we cannot capture what it is to possess and employ the understanding, a faculty of spontaneity, in terms of concepts that place things in the realm of law" (MW 87) *and* that "our capacities of receptivity, our senses, are part of nature." (MW 87) In his view, the difficulty which such a position presents is "illusory" because nature, rather than being identified with the "realm of law," should include second nature which we achieve both as a result of the potentialities we are born with and by means of our upbringing. In his view, "once we allow that natural powers can include powers of second nature, the threat of incoherence disappears." (MW 88)

McDowell's postulation of second nature has attracted a great deal of criticism, as we have seen in Chapter Five, where I question whether "second nature" is merely the creation of a new dualism, that between (first) nature and second nature. As a quietist McDowell presents second nature as a 'reminder' and, in a Wittgensteinian vein, he does not put forward any substantial arguments to uphold his position. It is therefore difficult when doing 'traditional' (as opposed to quietist) philosophy to refrain from asking a number of questions which this 'reminder' raises. Lack of substantial arguments in favour of second nature on the part of McDowell only results in a new picture which is not persuasive and which generates new 'anxieties' rather than quelling existing ones which McDowell identifies and attempts to 'exorcise.'

I argue in Chapter Six that McDowell's position as a direct realist appears to be a move which diverges radically from his habitual way of doing philosophy. If McDowell is really determined to achieve peace for philosophy he should, as a quietist, refrain from preferring one camp, that of realism, over another, that of anti-realism. By introducing the Heideggerian notion of being-in-the-world into McDowell's picture, I argue that McDowell's position could be improved if increased

emphasis is placed on the futility of divorcing the concept of human beings from the concept of the world with which they are engaged in their everyday lives. The discussion on the realism/anti-realism debate in Chapter Six led to the conclusion that new avenues should be pursued in this regard and that traditional distinctions need to be re-examined and questioned.

My general line of thought in this thesis is that although McDowell succeeds to some extent in his attempts to dissolve dualisms and to relieve philosophers of anxiety that comes about as a result of mistaken views which have kept us in their grip over time, yet his account is not as persuasive as he intends it to be. This concerns not only his discussion on second nature but also the issue of realism and anti-realism where he chooses to retain the former position as opposed to the latter. Although it is only fair to admit that realism is the language of our daily practices and dealings with other human beings, yet realism as a philosophical position entails the claim that our perceptual experience gives us a true picture of the world which is not clouded by human interests, concepts and perspectives. It is difficult to reconcile such a view of realism with McDowell's claims concerning the unboundedness of the conceptual and the manner in which perceptual experience is a conjoint product of both spontaneity and receptivity. McDowell is, without doubt, a "concept-bound realist,"[2] and this implies that although his views on realism may be acceptable from a commonsensical point of view, it is difficult if not impossible to justify his direct realism from a philosophical point of view.

It is, however, to be admitted that McDowell's position has its merits, and these include the persuasive manner in which he draws attention to the unsustainability of philosophical positions which veer towards either coherentism or the Myth of the Given, and to how philosophers views have 'oscillated' between these two poles. A number of interesting possibilities for philosophy emerge as a result of McDowell's

[2] This concept was introduced in Chapter Six where I cited David E. Cooper who calls McDowell a 'concept-bound realist' in *The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility and Mystery*.

exegesis, some of which concern future methodological possibilities for philosophical positions which appear to be intractable.

I claim in Chapter One that McDowell adopts a particular methodology in *Mind and World*, which I identify as a version of Wittgenstein's quietism. This methodology plays an important role in *Mind and World* as it advocates the provision of 'therapy' and the 'exorcism' of 'pictures' which, according to McDowell, have held us in their grip and which can be exposed as being mistaken.

In the next section I discuss once again the subject of McDowell's quietism in order to explore the implications of this method for McDowell's picture. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the possibility of McDowell's attempt to attain philosophical peace, following Wittgenstein who states: "The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to."[3]

Quietism Revisited

What is it that gives rise to the anxiety which McDowell is so keen to provide therapy for? His stated aim in this regard is "to see how we need not seem obliged to set about answering the questions that express the anxieties." (MW xv) One example of philosophical anxiety which he acknowledges concerns Kantian spontaneity and the discomfort which arises "when it is viewed from the standpoint of the familiar modern conception of nature as the disenchanted realm of law." (MW 183) McDowell further states: "When we acknowledge the peculiarity of spontaneity, we should be aware of how we thereby risk falling into unprofitable philosophical anxiety. But the risk need not be realized. We can understand and exorcise the philosophical impulse, not just repress it." (MW 183)

Another example of philosophical tension which McDowell attempts to relieve is the notion of empirical content which "looks problematic ... when one becomes

[3] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §133

inexplicitly aware of an apparent tension between empiricism and the fact that the idea of an impression is the idea of an occurrence in nature." (MW xxi) McDowell maintains that particular questions which philosophers ask such as "How is empirical content possible?" should no longer appear to be pressing after the problems which give rise to such questions are exposed as illusory. He states: "If we can achieve a way of seeing things in which there is after all no tension there, the question, taken as a way of expressing that philosophical puzzlement, should lapse; that needs to be distinguished from its seeming to have been answered." (MW xxi) Moreover, "a 'How possible?' question … expresses a distinctive kind of puzzlement, issuing from an inexplicit awareness of a background to one's reflection that, if made explicit, would yield an argument that the topic of the question is not possible at all." (MW xxi) He claims that responding to such a "How possible?" question "would be like responding to Zeno by walking across a room". (MW xxi) McDowell however admits that this is not the only way of doing philosophy as he adds that "That [response to a 'How possible?' question] leaves it open that investigations of the "engineering" sort might be fine for other purposes." (MW xxi) He remains silent as to what these other purposes may be.

It is interesting to note McDowell's comments in response to criticism of his negative attitude towards "constructive philosophy." He states that constructive philosophy attempts "to *answer* philosophical questions of the sort I have here singled out: "How possible?" questions" (MW xxiii) which, if properly thought through, would be revealed as being impossible to answer. In McDowell's view, "there is no prospect of answering the question as it was putatively meant." (MW xxiv) He thinks that such questions should be 'exorcised' rather than 'answered' and that this takes hard work: if you like, constructive philosophy in another sense." (MW xxiii) There are two possible consequences concerning "How possible?" questions, according to McDowell, who states: "If the frame of mind is left in place, one cannot show how whatever it is that one is asking about is possible; if the frame of mind is dislodged, the "How possible?" question no longer has the point it seemed to have." (MW xxiv)

These comments raise a number of questions concerning the feasibility of 'exorcising' such "How possible?" questions and the feasibility of McDowell's quietism. As we have seen in Chapter One, McDowell makes use of a particular version of quietism and attempts to 'dissolve' philosophical problems. Some of McDowell's claims, including those which concern second nature, for example, are in stark contrast with his claim to provide 'therapy' and to 'exorcise' questions in order to achieve peace for philosophy. They appear to contain substantial philosophical claims which elicit a predictable response from critics who ask for arguments to substantiate such claims. It is therefore not always clear that McDowell's own picture accords with the quietistic methodology which he adopts.

How can McDowell escape from this uncomfortable position? Can he maintain his quietism and still put forward substantial philosophical claims? There may possibly be two solutions which McDowell could adopt. If he were to tone down his remarks concerning quietism he could perhaps succeed in putting forward a more 'diluted' version of philosophy. He would then have to take back his claim not to be engaged in constructive philosophy together with his claim to be attempting to give philosophy peace. This position would allow him to put forward philosophical claims which could be considered as constructive philosophy, in a more modest manner than philosophy with a capital 'P' in the grand style generally allows for. The second option would be for McDowell to give up all pretence of doing philosophy at all, instead of which he would merely put forward pictures and descriptions in an attempt to 'exorcise' particular incorrect viewpoints. This would enable him to retain his quietism while at the same time simply assembling reminders or attuning the reader to certain ways of thinking, in a similar manner to the later Heidegger or to some of Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Philosophical Investigations*. Such a manner of writing would not involve arguing, theorising or drawing conclusions, but merely provide descriptions of preferable or recommended pictures. If McDowell follows the second option, then he cannot claim to be doing philosophy at all. An anomaly exists because it is evident that there are claims of a philosophical nature that McDowell

seems to want to make, and these philosophical claims provide elements of dissonance where his quietism is concerned.

How does McDowell provide therapy for philosophical anxiety and how does he attempt to exorcise 'How possible?' questions? McDowell's adoption of a particular version of Wittgensteinian quietism is described by Weinberg as involving three steps:

> First: show how the paradox is unresolvable as long as we remain captives of that picture. This step is necessary to see that the question cannot be addressed as it is phased, and a meta-solution will be required; .... Next, discover what it is in the extant picture that makes the two theses seem paradoxical. Finally: having shown 'ordinary' philosophy to be uninhabitable, the quietist must show a way to another position, another picture, in which the problem which seemed so pressing before can be seen to be ill-formed, or at least trivial.[4]

Weinberg maintains that McDowell's quietism fails as the replacement picture which he proposes creates problems which appear to be insoluble. He criticises second nature as follows: "second naturalism makes unproblematic the *existence* of enchantment in the world, but at the cost of making it inscrutable *how*, for example, the same language faculty that through proper *Bildung* can create the freedom of spontaneity, can also be described in the nomological mode of the scientific linguist."[5] Weinberg admits that this may seem to be a *prima facie* objection, but McDowell still needs to counteract it.

Weinberg however admits that there is much to be admired in McDowell's version of quietism as he states that it

> provides a framework from which to take seriously the feelings of unease that various philosophical positions can create. Though such a feeling is not itself an argument ... quietism shows how such disquiet can stand at the heart of an argument. It also provides ... a powerful tool for avoiding the more irresolvable philosophical disputes. And quietism contains one of the best lessons of modern philosophy, namely, that not all philosophical questions are in fine shape as they are .... The

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4 Weinberg, 'John McDowell, *Mind and World,*' p. 250.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 260.

> quietist looks ... at the motivations of a question, to see what deeper intellectual needs can drive one to make some truly incredible statement.[6]

Weinberg puts forward a sympathetic view of McDowell's quietism as he states that "to be a McDowellian-style quietist about a certain question requires not just observing and arguing that no traditional philosophical answer to that question will ever be forthcoming, but also and more importantly providing the intellectual means to annul the philosophical impulse that lay beneath the question."[7] This involves arriving at a position where there are no theories and where none are required. This is "a place where we can finally be relieved of the philosophical pressure to state one ultimate thesis that will get everything right – but which never seems to arrive."[8] Acknowledging the method which McDowell uses to bring this about is important as Weinberg states: "McDowell's writing is hermeneutically challenging when one knows what he is trying to do; it is nearly impenetrable when one does not."[9]

Not all commentaries on quietism are as sympathetic as that of Weinberg, and Zangwill calls quietists "a small but persistent maverick minority of philosophers who have cast aspersions on the whole [metaphysical] undertaking."[10] He identifies quietists to include Wittgenstein, the positivists, and perhaps Kant. Zangwill laments "the sad fact ... that philosophers with the pessimistic metaphilosophy hardly ever give much argument for their attitude."[11] These statements are made in the context of a discussion on Simon Blackburn's notion of "quasi-realism" where Zangwill explores the possibility of attributing moral facts or states of affairs to projectivism which he contrasts with moral realism. Zangwill's own sympathies are on the part of metaphysics which, in stark contrast to quietism, is viewed as being "full of sound and fury, signifying plenty."[12]

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6 *Ibid.*, p. 263.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 250.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 248.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 247.
10 Nick Zangwill, 'Quietism,' pp. 160 – 76, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XVII, The Wittgenstein Legacy*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) p. 160.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 160.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

Metaphysics may be full of sound and fury, but whether it signifies plenty or not is debateable and such a discussion goes beyond the concerns of this thesis. What I am concerned with is recognising and acknowledging the particular method which McDowell uses, which I believe is crucial for a correct understanding of his views.

Appreciation of a particular methodology has also been acknowledged to be important for a correct understanding of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. In this regard, it is interesting to compare remarks which have been made in connection with the later Wittgenstein's way of doing philosophy, some of which could also be applied to McDowell. Both form and content are important in this regard as Mulhall states:

> if our readings of Wittgenstein make no effort to come to terms with the form as well as the content of his writing, if we do not allow the unique stamp his sentences bear – their appearance of poverty and provisionality, their following out of inclination rather than the dictates of a system, their rootedness in self-examination, their flights of figuration – to stimulate us to thought, then we will utterly miss their point.[13]

He further adds:

> Anyone familiar with Wittgenstein's characterizations of his own philosophical method as not informing us but reminding us of something, as recalling us to what we always already knew, as relying on no expertise, will see that he faces a structurally similar series of questions concerning how he can, and can want to, tell us what we already know, how he can expect us to care about what he tells us, how he can redefine the differences and similarities between himself as writer and us as readers.[14]

Wittgenstein was concerned with certain mistaken pictures which are put forward by metaphysicians which keep us in their grip and his *Philosophical Investigations* is replete with examples of such errors in our thinking.

Wittgenstein is often considered to be a quietist, although consensus on this issue has not been achieved and Wright, for example, claims that Wittgenstein should be understood as having put forward substantial philosophical claims. Jonathan Lear

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13 Mulhall, *Inheritance and Originality, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Kirkegaard,* p. 35 – 36.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

views Wittgenstein's later philosophy as putting forward both revisionary and non-revisionary views. In his view, "The task of philosophy, for Wittgenstein, is to understand the world, not to change it. A dominant theme of Wittgenstein's later philosophy is that philosophy should be non-revisionary. Whatever its value, philosophy should leave our linguistic practices and, in particular, our theory of the world as they are."[15] This implies that, Lear states,

> one might want to say that there are two conflicting strains in Wittgenstein, one revisionary, one non-revisionary; but I do not think that this can be so. The arguments about meaning and about the nature of philosophy are each pursued with such vigor and care that, if they are in conflict, they are in obvious conflict: one would expect Wittgenstein to have noticed and to have made some effort to resolve the tension. There is no evidence of such an effort; indeed, the *Investigations* reads as though he intended both themes to be taken together as forming a coherent whole. One might also be tempted to treat Wittgenstein's remarks about the non-revisionary nature of philosophy as among the less fortunate dark utterances of the master. To dismiss so lightly thoughts which a great philosopher evidently regarded as important is, I think, to exercise bad judgement.[16]

Lear suggests that the *Investigations* should be seen as an act of pointing which is subject to misinterpretation, and that philosophy must be done by pointing "because we cannot step outside our form of life and discuss it like some *objet trouvé*. Any attempt to *say* what our form of life is like will itself be part of the form of life; it can have no more than the meaning it gets within the context of its use."[17] He further claims that the central task of philosophy for Wittgenstein is to make us aware of our mindedness which means that "When we are freed from the need to construct spurious justifications for our practices [i.e. thinking that key practices such as inference in accordance with the excluded middle have any justification] we are at least able to say, "that's simply what we do." For Wittgenstein this is the beginning of self-consciousness about the way we see the world."[18]

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[15] Jonathan Lear, 'Leaving the World Alone,' pp. 382 – 403, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXIX, No. 7, July 1982, p. 382.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 382.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 385.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 401.

Both Wittgenstein and McDowell appear to be concerned with what Lear calls our 'mindedness' and both offer therapy to quell philosophical anxieties. George Pitcher puts forward a view in response to Wittgenstein's statement that "The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness"[19] which reflects McDowell's ideas on how philosophy has been conducted. Pitcher remarks that

> such a cure requires that the real source of the difficulty be located and removed. The trouble with philosophical theories or systems (phenomenalism, for example) is that their propounders have not located the real source of their original puzzlement: they still carry it deep within their ways of thinking. And so the pain – the puzzlement – is bound to reappear. Philosophical theories, in short, break out into puzzles as disturbing and perplexing as those which they were designed to resolve. They all have consequences which are paradoxical, which we know instinctively to be false. Philosophical theories are thus at best only temporary pain killers: they do not cure. They are aspirin; but what is needed is surgery.[20]

On his part, McDowell would probably agree with Pitcher's diagnosis and recommendations where philosophy is concerned, and I shall return to this issue in the concluding section of this chapter where I discuss McDowell's comments on the possibility of achieving peace for philosophy.

Pictures versus theories

As we have seen in the previous sections, quietism involves exposing mistaken assumptions in pictures which have held us captive in their grip and, once we have realised the error of our way of seeing things, it puts forward new pictures. How do such pictures differ from philosophical theories and what is McDowell's position in this regard?

Constructive philosophy, according to McDowell, tends to give rise to certain pictures and if we succeed in getting rid of those pictures then we would not feel the need to raise certain questions which philosophers tend to ask. An interesting view of

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19 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §225.

20 George Pitcher, *The Philosophy of Wittgenstein*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964) pp. 196 – 97.

pictures which philosophers put forward is given by Edwards who discusses Wittgenstein's views in this regard. He states:

> The primary vehicles for this bewitchment ['bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language' §109] are the grammatical pictures inherent in any language. The illness of philosophy is not the presence of these pictures; the sickness is our captivity to them. We do not recognize them as pictures; hence we feel ourselves powerless before them and the confusions they bring when taken literally. This feeling of powerlessness is an important phenomenological feature of the philosopher's captivity to his pictures. In the grip of a grammatical picture we feel things *must* be a certain way; and when that conception leads to absurd consequences, we try bravely to swallow them down. After all, we think, what choice do we have? ... Bewitched by a picture, the individual forgets himself ... and becomes merely an invisible and impotent observer of "the way things are."[21]

One example of such a picture which McDowell puts forward is that of bald naturalism. In this regard, McDowell refuses to argue against bald naturalism but simply states that his alternative, naturalised platonism, is preferable: "I need not pretend to have an argument that the bald naturalist programme ... *cannot* be executed. The point is just that the availability of my alternative and ... more satisfying exorcism undercuts a philosophical motivation ... for supposing the programme *must* be feasible." (MW xxiii) He further states that " 'Naturalized Platonism' is not a label for a bit of constructive philosophy. The phrase serves only as shorthand for a "reminder", an attempt to recall our thinking from running in grooves that make it look as if we need constructive philosophy." (MW 95)

McDowell further considers bald naturalism "a less satisfying way to do that [exorcise (not answer) questions that give expression to a distinctively philosophical kind of puzzlement] than my alternative." (MW xxi) Unfortunately he does not show why bald naturalism is untenable, but he provides an alternative picture, 'Naturalised Platonism,' which, in his view is preferable. As Weinberg states, "McDowell's task, as the quietist, is to provide such a refutation, and in so doing motivate us to abandon

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[21] James C. Edwards, *Ethics without Philosophy, Wittgenstein and the Moral Life,* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985) pp. 151 – 52.

our current picture. But at best he argues here that there would be another option, should we decide to renounce bald naturalism."[22]

In response to criticism from Wright concerning his rejection of bald naturalism due to its feasibility,[23] McDowell replies as a quietist that "I have no need to say anything against bald naturalism except that it does not relieve the philosophical difficulty I consider."[24] Wright expresses shock that McDowell does not feel a definite theoretical obligation in this direction, to which McDowell responds that "if we can neutralize the reason [for which philosophical treatment of a discourse causes concern], there is no need for theory."[25] What McDowell is concerned with is that "If the idea of second nature is so much as intelligible, that shows that the conception of the natural that causes concern over platonistic ways of talking is not compulsory. Of course there is no guarantee that the reminder will have its intended effect on just anyone."[26] McDowell's sympathies clearly lie within the parameters of a methodology that can be seen to work and he explicitly states that he is not interested, and is therefore prepared to ignore, *theories* which have no force when used to persuade someone who is committed to a particular position to change their view.

What distinction should be made between the quietist conception of a picture which generates anxiety, the grip of which we attempt to loosen, and a philosophical theory which argues in favour of a new manner of thinking of a particular problem? This distinction can be traced back to Wittgenstein who drew attention early in the *Investigations* that our being held in the grip of a picture concerning language and meaning led to the generation of other theories of language and meaning which would otherwise not have been put forward. Wittgenstein makes the explicit claim that "A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably."[27] The persuasiveness of pictures,

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22 Weinberg, *op. cit.,* p. 261.
23 See Wright, 'Human Nature,' p. 238.
24 McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' p. 428, 13n.
25 *Ibid.*, p. 429, 14n.
26 *Ibid.*, p. 429, 14n.
27 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §115.

according to Wittgenstein, can change opinions, as he states: "I wanted to put that picture before him and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently; that is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*."[28] It is important to note that the later Wittgenstein is very guarded where theories of language and meaning are concerned and he does not appear to put forward any explicit theories in this regard.

Wittgenstein actually makes use of St. Augustine's picture theory of language at the start of the *Investigations* and Mulhall comments on Wittgenstein's proposed alternative to this picture which is, he states,

> rather designed to render such techniques [philosophical techniques of problem-solving and theory-building] uninteresting or pointless, to establish an orientation in which they will no longer appear to attract or satisfy us. If, then, Wittgenstein's emphasis on use is a paradigm, it is the paradigm to end all theoretical paradigms; it may not spell the end of philosophy, but it aims to break the spell of philosophy as theory.[29]

A number of Wittgenstein's remarks in the *Investigations* which reinforce his anti-theoretical stance include his statement that "we may not advance any kind of theory. There must not be anything hypothetical in our considerations. We must do away with all *explanation*, and description alone must take its place."[30] Other remarks of Wittgenstein include the statement that "Philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything,"[31] "In philosophy we do not draw conclusions,"[32] and "If one tried to advance *theses* in philosophy, it would never be possible to debate them, because everyone would agree to them."[33]

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28 *Ibid.*, §144.
29 Mulhall, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
30 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §109.
31 *Ibid.*, §126.
32 *Ibid.*, §599.
33 *Ibid.*, §128.

Commenting on Wittgenstein's remarks quoted in the previous paragraph, Ackerman states: "As a description of how philosophy is in fact done, these remarks are obviously false. Philosophers are continually explaining things, deducing things, drawing conclusions, advancing and debating theses, and very rarely agreeing on them. But these remarks are intended to tell us not what philosophical practice is, but what it *ought to be*. Do they have any merit?"[34] To reinforce her point Ackerman quotes David Armstrong who states: "it is quite impossible to be in such a theory-free state if you think at all extensively on philosophical topics. Those philosophers who believe they are in such a theory-free state are really being moved by obscure and ill-formulated theories which escape any criticism or corrections because they are never brought out into the open where they can be clearly considered."[35]

Ackerman claims that Wittgenstein's remarks such as "Philosophy only states what everyone admits"[36] and "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it ... It leaves everything as it is"[37] are intended as an account of philosophy as it ought to be and not as it is actually done. However she notes that this is inconsistent with Wittgenstein's own philosophical practice. In her view, "*Philosophical Investigations* does not state only what everyone admits; its views are at odds, and are intended to be at odds, with the views of Descartes, Russell, and Wittgenstein's own earlier self."[38] She therefore presumes that "everyone" in §599 should be taken to mean non-philosophers whose intelligence has not been "[bewitched] ... by means of language"[39] and who have not become "calloused by doing philosophy."[40] However, Ackerman notes that, from anecdotal evidence, Wittgensteinian views do not strike non-philosophers as being correct or

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34 Felicia Ackerman, 'Does Philosophy Only State What Everyone Admits? A Discussion of the Method of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*,' pp. 246 – 54, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Volume XVII, The Wittenstein Legacy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992) p. 246, emphasis added.

35 *Ibid.*, pp. 246 – 47. Ackerman quotes David Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of the Mind* (London 1968) p. 14.

36 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §599.

37 *Ibid.*, §124.

38 Ackerman, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

39 Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, §109.

40 *Ibid.*, §348.

natural.[41] Ackerman's conclusion is that Wittgenstein's views do not reflect his actual practice and are more drastic than those of Moore who defends common sense. She states: "Moore ... has no interest in denying the philosophical discoveries about the many philosophical problems where common sense does not dictate any particular position."[42] It is likely that McDowell too would allow other ways of doing philosophy, such as those he calls "investigations of the 'engineering' sort" as I mentioned earlier in this chapter. Unfortunately, he does not specify exactly what these could be, and his main objection to such ways of doing philosophy is that philosophical anxiety would be generated rather than quelled.

Is it possible for observations which are drawn and which are based merely on intuitions ever to be genuinely theory free? The very concept of doing philosophy seems to entail argumentation and theorising, as Ackerman remarks,

> if something is to count as theoretical if it involves deduction or drawing conclusions rather than just description, it seems impossible to do philosophy without theorizing, for philosophy does seem to involve deductive reasoning and the drawing of conclusions. When we consider theories as non-deductive explanations, hypotheses, or general views about large-scale philosophical problems such as the mind-body problem, however, whether one can do philosophy without "theorizing" seems less clear.[43]

On their part, quietists such as McDowell refuse to theorise and therefore do not provide arguments in favour of or against pictures which they put forward. The result is that these pictures cannot be judged to be valid or invalid, in contrast to philosophical theories which provide arguments for their justification. It is to be admitted, however, that the distinction between pictures and theories is not as clear as one may wish it to be, and it is difficult to label McDowell's second nature as either a theory or a picture. It is probably the case that whether one views a philosophical position as a theory or as a picture depends on one's preference and orientation where methodology and constructive philosophy is concerned. In this regard McDowell differs from Wittgenstein as the picture of the manner in which concepts mediate the

41 Ackerman, *op. cit.*, p. 248.
42 *Ibid.*, pp. 250 – 51.
43 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

relation between mind and world which emerges from *Mind and World* cannot be said to be bereft of theories.

One thing which is certain about pictures which quietists favour is that they are replete with metaphors, and Weinberg notes that "such metaphors [which McDowell uses] as openness to facts, or resonating to the space of reasons, never quite get beyond metaphors. The metaphors ideally, in a quietist approach, provide the basic materials for building the alternative picture. But they remain mere gestures towards such materials."[44] The result is, in Weinberg's view, that reading *Mind and World* can be a rather frustrating experience. This does not however imply that metaphors are to be eliminated from philosophical discourse as Lear states that "metaphors are not bereft of value, even in philosophy."[45]

Philosophical Peace or Eternal Anxiety?

Can McDowell achieve peace for philosophy as a result of the methodology he uses and the pictures which he puts forward?

McDowell is evidently influenced by Wittgenstein who claimed that peace for philosophy was a state where one could choose to stop doing philosophy when one wanted to. Ordinary language philosophers have also discussed achieving peace for philosophy and a typical remark in this regard is that "Philosophy makes itself redundant by exposing the abuses of language which have generated it."[46]

Lear, however, believes that philosophical questions will always continue to be asked as he states, "Yet even if we grant that therapy is a valuable approach to certain philosophical problems, it does not follow that there are no legitimate philosophical questions to be asked; in particular, that there is no legitimate question of how we are

44 Weinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

45 Jonathan Lear, 'The Disappearing 'We',' pp. 219 – 42, *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume LVIII,* (58) (The Aristotelian Society, 1984) p. 242.

46 Mark Addis, 'Does Language Matter to Philosophy? Aristotle and Wittgenstein on the nature of philosophical enquiry,' pp. 211 – 16, *Cogito,* Vol. 7, No. 3, 1993, p. 215.

to understand the therapeutic methods themselves."[47] He further does not appear to consider as viable the possibility of giving up philosophy altogether, as Wittgenstein advocated, as he states that "after studying the later Wittgenstein we should not wander around stupefied, oblivious to the existence of any reflective questions."[48]

McDowell would probably agree with such a conception as he qualifies a remark he had made earlier concerning Wittgenstein's remark on philosophical peace. He states: "In the lecture [Lecture V in *Mind and World*] I credit Wittgenstein with the aspiration of seeing through the apparent need for ordinary philosophy. This needs to be taken with care. I do not mean to suggest that Wittgenstein seriously contemplates a state of affairs in which ordinary philosophy no longer takes place. The intellectual roots of the anxieties that ordinary philosophy addresses are too deep for that." (MW 177) McDowell further notes that "The impulse [to stop doing philosophy] finds peace only occasionally and temporarily." (MW 177)

McDowell's admiration for Wittgenstein and his advocation of a particular methodology which I have claimed is a version of Wittgensteinian quietism is evident. In a Wittgensteinian spirit, he recommends diagnostic moves which should be pursued, mainly because

> our philosophical anxieties are due to the intelligible grip on our thinking of a modern naturalism, and we can work at loosening that grip. It is a way of making this suggestion vivid to picture a frame of mind in which we have definitively shrugged off the influences of our thinking that lead to philosophical anxieties, even if we do not suppose we could ever have such a frame of mind as a permanent and stable possession. Even so, this identification of a source for our apparent difficulties can be one of our resources for overcoming recurrences of the philosophical impulse: recurrences that we know there will be. (MW 177-178)

McDowell explicitly admits that Wittgenstein's aspiration, to see through the apparent need for ordinary philosophy, "is not fantastic." (MW 94) The manner in which he attempts to bring this about is through the postulation of a "naturalism of

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47 Lear, 'The Disappearing 'We',' p. 240.
48 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

second nature ... [which] is precisely a shape for our thinking that would leave even the last dualism not seeming to call for constructive philosophy." (MW 94-95) He is concerned with eliminating "the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason" and this is brought about by means of *Bildung* which "ensures that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman," and as a result of which no genuine questions about norms remain, "apart from those that we address in reflective thinking about specific norms, an activity that is not particularly philosophical." (MW 95) The result is, in his view, the elimination of a need for constructive philosophy, at least where norms of reason are concerned.

In a reply to comments by critics on *Mind and World,* McDowell clarifies his position regarding his attempt to relieve philosophical anxiety. This clarification reveals the precise manner in which McDowell conceives of his own methodology and corrects a number of misunderstandings which critics have generated due, in my view, to an inappropriate understanding of this particular way of doing philosophy.

One example in this regard involves McDowell accusing Brandom of ignoring the dialectical organisation of his book in which, he states, "I recommend a picture in which experience is actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness not as the only theory of perception that meets requirements we can impose on any such theory independently of any particular dialectical context, but as the way to relieve the specific philosophical discomfort that I consider."[49] McDowell further claims to have made use of coherentism and the Myth of the Given *not* as competing *theories* but "as opting out of this area of philosophy."[50] His intention is to relieve the discomfort generated by the "transcendental anxiety" which is generated as a result of a desire to maintain that conceptual capacities belong to the *sui generis* logical space of reasons, and relieving the discomfort involves retaining this thought while somehow eliminating the anxiety which it tends to generate. He notes that a

49 McDowell, 'Reply to Commentators,' p. 403.
50 *Ibid.,* p. 403.

position which embraced bald naturalism would avoid the discomfort, but still generate "transcendental anxiety."

McDowell further maintains that not everyone is capable of feeling such discomfort and, for example, that "Only someone who feels the pull of the thoughts I uncover will be subject to the philosophical discomfort I am to deal with."[51] He further remarks that "Davidson is not immune to the philosophical discomfort I consider; he is not in the business of trying to relieve it."[52] A precise example of transcendental discomfort involves, according to McDowell, Davidson's renunciation of the link between sensory consciousness and objective reality. He states: "when Davidson renounces the very idea that sensory consciousness itself can be of objective reality, that does not neutralize the temptation to believe in the Given, but merely induces transcendental discomfort."[53]

Whether Davidson should be immune or not and whether he should attempt to relieve such discomfort is not a question to which McDowell attempts to respond. By means of a rhetorical question he suggests that "the discomfort that is my concern lies at the basis of the overtly epistemological obsessions that characterize a certain strand in modern philosophy."[54] He is committed to showing how the discomfort can be avoided while at the same time preserving the thought which in itself gave rise to the discomfort, rather than dismissing the thinking that generates the anxiety. In a quietist vein, McDowell thinks that "the transcendental thought is in itself innocent, so the appearance that it lands us in philosophical difficulty merits sympathetic dissolution rather than mere dismissal."[55]

McDowell's method for relieving the discomfort consists in displaying a different context for the transcendental thought that gives rise to the origin of the discomfort,

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51 *Ibid.*, p.404.
52 *Ibid.*, p. 404.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 427.
54 *Ibid.*, p. 404.
55 *Ibid.*, p. 404.

and the result is "to free the transcendental thought from the appearance of posing a philosophical difficulty."[56]

McDowell makes a similar point in a clarification to remarks by Rorty regarding what he means when he writes about "a bald naturalism that would opt out of this area of philosophy altogether." (MW 67) 'Opting out' is here used in a disparaging sense as although it recognises the necessity of asking certain questions, it "grants no force to the distinctive intuition," that is, "the intuition that the conceptual apparatus that centers on the idea of objective purport belongs in a logical space of reasons that is *sui generis*, by comparison with the logical space in which the natural sciences function."[57] His purpose in this regard is to contrast the manner in which bald naturalists 'deconstruct' their problems with his own way of doing philosophy. He further contrasts his own methodology with that of 'traditional philosophy' as he states, "Not opting out can take the form of immersing oneself in traditional philosophy, but I offer a way of preserving the distinctive intuition while not seeming to have *to bridge the apparent gulfs that traditional philosophy worries about.*"[58]

McDowell's therapeutic quietism therefore retains the thought which gives rise to philosophical anxiety while showing how it can be acknowledged in a different manner which does *not* give rise to anxiety. The aim of his 'therapy' is "to display the thought itself as, nevertheless, innocent. According to me [McDowell], the seeming problems arise when the thought is placed in a context that can and should be discarded."[59] Such 'therapy' therefore promises "a potentially satisfying exorcism of philosophical anxiety, because it fully acknowledges the thought that generates the anxiety." (MW 184) McDowell's efforts in this regard resist keeping "apparent problems of the gulf-bridging type on the agenda,"[60] nor does he wish to be saddled with "the gulf-bridging tasks of traditional philosophy."[61] Responding to Rorty's

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56 *Ibid.*, p. 406.
57 *Ibid.*, p. 421.
58 *Ibid.*, p. 421, emphasis added.
59 *Ibid.*, p. 423.
60 *Ibid.*, p. 424.
61 *Ibid.*, p. 424.

reading of McDowell that we "remain in awe of the normative-descriptive distinction," McDowell denies that such a distinction figures in his thinking and the only philosophical interest which such a distinction can generate is "because of the role it can play in diagnosing and dissolving the appearance that we are faced with those intellectual obligations."[62]

McDowell's attempt to exorcise particular philosophical problems and show that they are 'illusory' or innocent is a move in the direction to achieve philosophical peace. However, as I have argued in this chapter, McDowell would admit to the fact that anxiety is destined to remain part of the baggage of philosophers and he further admits that "The impulse [to stop doing philosophy] finds peace only occasionally and temporarily." (MW 177)

As I stated earlier in this chapter, this investigation does not presume to have exhausted all that there is to be discussed on John McDowell's *Mind and World.* Neither does it claim to provide a final answer to the numerous questions which this publication raises. What I have attempted to do is analyse a number of dualisms and examine some of the issues which this important publication raises in an attempt to provide a clearer picture of that which McDowell attempts to achieve. In this regard, I claim that a thorough understanding of McDowell's quietism is crucial for a proper appreciation of this difficult text. Lack of appreciation of his particular methodology has resulted in a number of critics attacking McDowell over issues which cannot be properly understood when viewed solely from the viewpoint of constructive philosophy.

My appreciation of McDowell's methodology should not be taken as implying that this is the only acceptable way for philosophy to be conducted. On the contrary. On the one hand, I am sympathetic to his quietism, I believe that it offers a great deal of potential for dealing with philosophical problems which have previously appeared to be insoluble, and that it exposes the manner in which certain philosophical questions

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62 *Ibid.*, p. 424.

are incorrectly formulated and require closer examination. On the other hand, however, I maintain that other methodologies still remain valid and that a variety of methodological approaches serves to provide material for more interesting and stimulating philosophical debate.

I would like to conclude by quoting from a review of *Mind and World* by Crispin Wright who has been engaged in a number of debates with McDowell and who can generally be seen to hold opposing views to McDowell. Wright sees the two main contentions of *Mind and World* as being McDowell's conception of experience as conceptual and his 'reminder' of second nature which could putatively reconcile the normative and the natural. Although Wright does not think either of these is developed with convincing clarity, yet he sees them as "original suggestions on profound, central problems, and either may yet prove to be a lasting contribution."[63] Wright further states that "If that influence [of the stylistic extravagance of McDowell's book] is largely towards renewed efforts on the agenda – to new work on the hard epistemological questions about the interface between thought and experience, and to a re-examination of the assumptions that generate the dualism of norm and nature that we have anyway somehow to overcome; if so, then, to that extent, its influence will be all to the good."[64] Wright however cautions those who may be encouraged to follow McDowell not "to swim out of their depth in seas of rhetorical metaphysics," as he warns that although "McDowell is a strong swimmer, ... his stroke is not to be imitated."[65]

63 Wright, 'Human Nature,' p. 251.
64 *Ibid.*, p. 252.
65 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

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