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4

Empiricism and Normative Constraint

Hannah Ginsborg

I

In *Mind and World*, McDowell proposes a distinctive view of perceptual experience as both passive—a matter of the world's impact on our senses—and informed by concepts. McDowell motivates this view of perceptual experience in the context of the idea that the world must exercise a normative constraint on our thinking, in particular, thinking which aims at belief or judgement.

To make sense of the idea of a mental state's or episode's being directed towards the world, in the way in which say, a belief or judgement is, we need to put the state or episode in a normative context. A belief or judgement to the effect that things are thus and so... must be a posture or stance that is *correctly or incorrectly* adopted according to whether or not things are indeed thus and so... This relation between mind and world is normative, then, in this sense: thinking that aims at judgement, or at the fixation of belief, is answerable to the world... for whether or not it is correctly executed. (1996, xi–xii)

Without the idea of a normative relation between mind and world, we would not be able to make sense of our putative beliefs and judgements as having intentional content, or as being about their putative subject-matter, and we would be unable to make sense of our mental goings-on as genuine thinking at all.

McDowell goes on to elaborate this basic idea of a normative relation between mind and world, or of thinking's answerability to the world, in two steps. The first step is to qualify thought's answerability to the world as a matter, at least in the first instance, of the answerability of thought to the empirical world. (While McDowell is not explicit on this point, this is presumably to exclude the proposal that we try to make sense of intentional content generally by appeal to the model of mathematical thought and belief.¹) Since, for McDowell, our "cognitive predicament is that we confront the world by way of sensible intuition... our reflection on the very idea of thought's directedness

¹ MacFarlane (2004) sees Brandom's inferentialism as realizing a proposal along these lines.

at how things are must begin with answerability to the empirical world" (1996, xii). This first step allows us to focus the general question of how thought can be answerable to the world, or to have intentional content, as a more specific question about the possibility of empirical content. The second step is to argue that the answerability of our thinking to the empirical world must amount to its answerability, more specifically, to experience, where experience is construed as the immediate impact of the world on our senses.

How could a verdict from the empirical world—to which empirical thinking must be answerable if it is to be thinking at all—be delivered, if not by way of a verdict from (as W. V. Quine puts it) "the tribunal of experience"? (1996, xii)

This second step in the elaboration of the normative relation between mind and world yields the view which McDowell calls "minimal empiricism," a view which "makes out that the very idea of thought's directedness at the empirical world is intelligible only in terms of answerability to the tribunal of experience, conceived in terms of the world impressing itself on perceiving subjects" (1996, xvi).

What does the notion of "answerability," in the context of this second step, amount to? McDowell makes clear that it amounts, specifically, to the answerability associated with reasons, that is, rational answerability.

The idea of a tribunal belongs, together with the idea of what the tribunal passes its verdicts on, in what Sellars calls "the logical space of reasons"—a logical space whose structure consists in some of its occupants being, for instance, warranted or correct in the light of others. (1996, xvi)

If thought is answerable to perceptual experience, then perceptual experiences must be capable of standing in a rational relation to our exercises of thought in judgement and belief: having an experience, that is, must be the kind of episode that can rationally warrant us, or justify us, in having a belief. Minimal empiricism, then, commits us to a view on which sense-impressions are capable of rationally justifying or entitling us to our judgements and beliefs, without themselves being judgements or beliefs.

McDowell fleshes out such a view by construing sense-impressions, in normal adult human beings, as conceptually structured, and hence as presupposing the possession of conceptual capacities. In having a perceptual experience of an object, that is, a sense-impression of it, we draw on the same conceptual capacities which we would exercise in making a judgement about the same object, and in a way which involves the same unity between the concepts that there would be in the corresponding judgement. Thus a person's normal visual experience of a green cube can be characterized as something with propositional content, as a case of her seeing that there is a green cube in front of her, or as seeing that the cube (the one in front of her, which she might pick out as *this* cube) is green.² However, in contrast to the judgement that a cube is green, the

² I am here describing McDowell's view in writings prior to the two revisions he makes to it in "Avoiding the Myth of the Given" (2008). On the revised view, the experience would be a matter not of having the fact of the cube's being green presented to one, but rather of having the cube and its greenness presented to one

experience that a cube is green is "passive," a case of "receptivity in operation," in which we are "saddled with content" (1996, 10). Our seeing that the cube is green is not something for which we can hold ourselves accountable, but something which just happens, in normal circumstances, when a green cube is so placed as to affect our visual receptors. It is the cube's simply presenting itself as green, or the fact of the cube's greenness being in view. Because the content of an experience, on this view, is conceptual, experience is the kind of thing, according to McDowell, which can stand in a reason-giving or rational relation to belief, and hence to which belief can be answerable. Someone who sees that the cube in front of her is green is rationally entitled to form the belief that the cube is green. But because the experience is passive, a matter of the green cube's being presented to us as opposed to our making a judgement about it, the belief's answerability to the experience is also its answerability to the world. Experience, while conceptual, is not a kind of thinking, but rather the means through which the world itself serves as normative constraint on our thinking.

McDowell distinguishes his view from two other conceptions of the relation between mind and world, neither of which he thinks satisfies the demand that thinking be normatively constrained by reality. One is the "coherentist" conception associated with Davidson, on which sense-impressions play a merely causal role in accounting for our beliefs. For Davidson, relations of rational justification hold only among beliefs or other doxastic states involving the active exercise of our conceptual capacities. The sense-impression caused in us by a green cube can cause us in turn to form the perceptual belief that the cube is green, and this perceptual belief (which, if it is veridical and appropriately caused, we might describe as a case of seeing that the cube is green) can rationally ground further beliefs about the cube. But there is no rational relation between the green cube, or the impression it causes in us, and our beliefs about it. For McDowell this robs our beliefs of the normative bearing on reality that allows us to think of them as having empirical content, and, since he thinks that we need to be able to make sense of empirical content in order to make sense of content *überhaupt*, it follows that we cannot think of them as beliefs at all.

The other is the position criticized by Sellars under the name of the "Myth of the Given," on which the impact of a green cube on our senses is non-conceptual but still something to which our judgement that the cube is green can be rationally answerable. On this view, unlike Davidson's, the world, via sense-impressions, is supposed to provide a normative and not merely causal constraint on belief and thus to make intelligible the idea that our thinking about the world has empirical content. But, as Sellars

with the same kind of objective unity that the concepts *cube* and *green* would have in the judgement "the cube is green." (That reflects just one of the revisions; the second bears on which properties can be presented to a subject in experience; since I am using an example in which this revision does not make a difference, I will not be taking it into account in this paper.) Because I believe that the revisions are, by McDowell's own lights, a step in the wrong direction, I will mostly be referring to the original view, although I will mention the revised view where it is relevant. "McDowell's view" without qualification should thus be taken as referring to the original view.

pointed out, the appeal to “given” sense-impressions—“given” in the sense that our having them does not presuppose our having acquired conceptual capacities—fails because we cannot make sense of a belief’s being rationally answerable to something which is non-conceptual. The illusion that we can derives from what Sellars calls the “mongrel” conflation of a particular sensation (say of the kind associated with seeing green things), with the representation of something as having a general feature (say, the feature of being green) (Sellars 1963, §7). Once this illusion is exposed, according to McDowell, we see that the world cannot normatively constrain our thinking by way of sense-impressions non-conceptually construed. The only way to understand the relation between sense-impressions and thinking as rational—which is in turn, for McDowell, the only way to understand the world’s constraint on our thinking as normative—is to understand the sense-impression caused by the green cube as a case of seeing that the cube is green, something which presupposes our capacity to judge that a cube is green without involving the exercise of that capacity.

In this paper I shall call into question the move which McDowell makes from the general notion of a normative relation between the world and our mental states and episodes—a relation without which these states and episodes would not count as the exercise of thought, or as having intentional content—to the more specific idea of “minimal empiricism” according to which experiences, construed as passive, constitute reasons for belief. I accept McDowell’s first step, from the idea that thinking must be answerable to the world to the idea that it must be answerable, more specifically, to the empirical world. What we have to make sense of, in the first instance, is distinctively empirical thinking, which means making sense of how our psychological responses to the empirical world can amount to having beliefs or making judgements about it. To make sense of intentional content, in other words, we have to make sense of empirical content. But I do not see as inevitable McDowell’s second step, of identifying thinking’s answerability to the empirical world, that is, its having empirical content, with the rational answerability of beliefs and judgements to experiences. I shall suggest that what we might think of as the broad empiricist requirement of a normative constraint on our thinking by the empirical world—a requirement which is empiricist in spirit, but more minimal than McDowell’s “minimal” empiricism in that it does not require that the constraint be rational—can be satisfied in a different way, which avoids coherentism and the Myth of the Given without involving commitment to McDowell’s view of experience as both passive and affording reasons for belief.³

³ Brandom (1998) also rejects McDowell’s move from the idea of thinking as normatively constrained by the world to the idea of thinking as rationally constrained by experience. The approach I am suggesting differs from Brandom’s in at least the following two respects. First, I follow McDowell in understanding the normative constraint in an internalist way, that is, as implying that the constraint must be recognized by the thinker herself. This is in contrast to Brandom’s externalist construal of the constraint, which allows it to be satisfied by the possibility of an outsider (an interpreter or scorekeeper) rationally criticizing the subject’s thoughts in the light of how things are believed to be from the outsider’s point of view. Second, I claim that we can understand the constraint as normative without understanding it as rational, whereas Brandom takes for granted that normativity and rationality come to the same thing.

I shall motivate this suggestion by sketching two independent and complementary difficulties about the conception of experience to which McDowell is committed by his construal of what I am calling the broad empiricist requirement.⁴ The first is that the passive character which McDowell has to ascribe to experience precludes it from rationalizing belief in the way that minimal empiricism requires. Experiences can serve as reasons for belief in the sense that we can cite our own experiences, among other facts about the world, as justifying or entitling us to our beliefs. But minimal empiricism requires that experiences serve as reasons for belief in something like the same sense that beliefs serve as reasons for beliefs, and not just in the way that facts in general can serve as reasons for belief. The second difficulty bears on McDowell’s construal of experience as depending on the antecedent possession of conceptual capacities. Even if he can account for experiences, so construed, as rationally justifying beliefs, this leaves open a question about how our concepts in turn have the right kind of bearing on the world, a question which comes into focus when we ask how we come to acquire them. Without a satisfactory account of concept-acquisition, I shall suggest, we are left with the same general worry, about how our thinking can have empirical content, from which minimal empiricism was meant to free us. Consideration of the second of the two difficulties will lead us to my alternative construal of the broad empiricist idea motivating McDowell’s minimal empiricism—the idea that empirical thinking must stand in a normative, not merely causal, relation to its purported subject-matter. I shall suggest that we can make sense of this relation in a way which bypasses minimal empiricism, by understanding it as the world’s normative constraint on the activity which makes empirical concepts—and so empirical thinking—possible.

II

The source of the first difficulty I want to raise for McDowell can be put in terms of Davidson’s famous dictum that “nothing can count as a reason for holding another belief except another belief” (1986, 141).⁵ McDowell rejects the dictum, which he understands as implying, in particular, that “experience cannot count as a reason for holding a belief” (1996, 14). But he suggests that we can preserve its “substantial point” by amending it as follows: “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except something else which is also in the space of concepts” (1996, 140; for a similar formulation, see 2006, 137). It is, McDowell thinks, a “blind spot” on Davidson’s part that he fails to see that experiences can have rational significance for our beliefs (1996, 14; 2006, 138), so nothing of importance is lost if we make the emendation. Now the fact that McDowell takes it to be important to preserve the “substantial point” of

⁴ In what follows I will use “empiricist” *tout court* to describe views satisfying the broad empiricist requirement.

⁵ Stroud (2002) raises a difficulty along these lines, and I develop it further in Ginsborg (2006a). The present discussion abbreviates my earlier discussion in some respects and expands on it in others, taking into account changes in McDowell’s view since 2006. A related difficulty is raised by Glier (2004, 2009).

Davidson's dictum suggests that the sense in which experiences serve as reasons for belief, on the minimal empiricist view, must be the same sense in which, for Davidson, beliefs serve as reasons for other beliefs. It suggests that the subject's belief that the cube now in front of her is green is rationally answerable to her seeing that it is green in the same sense of rational answerability in which, for example, her belief that there is at least one green cube in the room might be rationally answerable to her belief that the cube now in front of her is green. But, as I shall argue in this section, the passive nature of experience—its non-committal or nondoxastic character—precludes it from playing the relevant kind of reason-giving role. As I see it, Davidson's omission of experiences from the scope of reasons for beliefs is well-motivated, since his point bears not just on the conceptual character of belief but also on its commitment-involving character, the character which, according to McDowell, distinguishes belief from experience. So even though Davidson himself, at least in the article from which the dictum is drawn, construes experiences as extra-conceptual impacts on sensibility, his point applies also to experiences construed as conceptual à la McDowell. As long as the experience that *p* does not involve belief that *p*, then it cannot be a reason for belief—or at least (and this qualification will become important in what follows) not in the sense of “reason” which figures in Davidson's dictum.

I will begin with two points of clarification. The first concerns the passive character of experience, a character which distinguishes it from judgement and belief. For McDowell the hallmark of this passivity is that in having an experience that things are a certain way—for example, when one sees that the cube is green—one is not *eo ipso* committed to things' being that way. Even though in normal cases of perceptual experience one does in fact come to believe that things are as one perceives them to be, this is a matter of endorsing what is presented in one's experience and not intrinsic to the experience itself. The passive character of experience is important for McDowell's empiricism because it allows experience to be construed as what he calls “openness” to reality, so that the rational relation of thought to experience can be construed as a rational relation of thought to reality itself (1996, 27–9). Because experience is a matter of facts' impressing themselves on the subject, rather than of the subject's actively making a judgement, it “enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what the subject thinks” (1996, 26).⁶ If experience were construed instead as involving judgement, so that someone who sees the cube as green actively takes it to be green as opposed to passively taking in that it is green or having the fact of its greenness manifest to her, then experience would amount to perceptually caused belief, and the view would become a form of coherentism.

One might here question whether it is right to think of experiences as construed by McDowell—cases of seeing that *p*—as genuinely passive. Doesn't seeing that *p*

intrinsically involve commitment to *p*'s being the case? In some of his writings prior to 2011, McDowell responds to this challenge by citing cases where it veridically appears to a subject that *p* but where she refrains from endorsing *p*. Replying on this point to Stroud, he claims that someone to whom it appears, through the normal operation of the senses, that a green tie is green, but who is in doubt about whether the lighting conditions are suitable for color identification, may refrain from judging that the tie is green, but still acknowledge retrospectively that she had seen it as green. In such a case she “did see that the tie was green, though she withheld her assent from that appearance” (2002a, 278). He goes on to make the same point in response to Davidson's proposal to identify the notion of seeing that *p* with that of *p*'s causing, through the operation of the senses, the belief that *p*.

The difference between seeing that *P* and visually acquiring the belief that *P* can be brought out by noting that one can realize later that one was seeing that *P*, though one did not know it at the time and so did not at the time acquire the belief that *P*. “I thought that I was looking at your sweater under one of those lights that make it impossible to tell what colours things are, but I now realize I was actually seeing that it was brown.” (2003, 158)⁷

Cases of this kind offer an entering wedge for the idea that even in the normal situation where, in seeing that something is green, we also believe that it is green, we can draw a distinction between a nondoxastic component of the situation—the taking in of, or openness to, the greenness of the thing—and the component of endorsement whereby the thing is judged to be green. As we shall see, McDowell has since changed his mind about the kind of example he cites in response to Stroud, arguing that such cases are not, after all, cases of seeing that something is green. He continues to hold that perceptual experiences are passive, and appropriately characterized as cases of seeing that things are a certain way, but no longer defends the view by appeal to our willingness to describe someone as “seeing that *p*” in cases where we do not also ascribe belief that *p*. But for the time being I will develop my challenge to McDowell in connection with his earlier defence of it, returning later to the implications of his change of mind on the relevant cases.

The second point of clarification concerns the internalist character of the rational entitlement which, according to minimal empiricism, experience must confer on our thinking. McDowell formulates this in *Mind and World* by saying that experience must be conceived “not just as part of the reason why, but as yielding reasons for which a subject forms her belief” (1996, 164), where the notion of a “reason for which a subject thinks as she does” is tied to the notion of “reasons she can give for thinking that way” (1996, 165). In order for there to be this kind of rational relation between two states of affairs it is not enough to suppose that the second state of affairs “is as it ought to be from the standpoint of rationality (for instance true, if the explanandum is a belief)” (1996, 163). McDowell later expands on this notion of rational entitlement by

⁶ See also §5 of McDowell (2005): perceptual experiences “constitute an availability, to a judging subject, of facts themselves” (2005, 255). “If we conceive experience as I recommend... [w]e can see the facts in question as available to the subjects, as rational constraints on their activity of making up their mind” (2005, 256).

⁷ The same point is made at 1998, 47 and at 2006, 131.

characterizing the relevant notion of rationality as “responsiveness to reasons *as such*” (2006, 128; McDowell’s emphasis). Rationality of this kind requires the capacity to “step back and assess whether putative reasons warrant action or belief” and thus to “respond to reasons as the reasons they are” (2006, 129).⁸

With these two clarifications in place, let us now ask why McDowell thinks that experiences stand in a rational relation to beliefs. Consider an ordinary case in which there is a green cube in front of me and in which, seeing the cube, I come to believe that it is green. On McDowell’s view, my belief that the cube is green is rationally grounded on my experience of the cube, more specifically on my seeing that the cube is green. My seeing that the cube is green serves as my reason for believing that the cube is green, and it is a reason which I can come to recognize as such. As evidence for this kind of rational relation, McDowell points to our ordinary practices of reason-giving, in which we often cite experiences as reasons for beliefs.

Suppose one asks an ordinary subject why she holds some observational belief, say that an object within her field of view is square. An unsurprising reply might be ‘Because it looks that way.’ That is easily recognized as giving a reason for holding the belief. (1996, 165)

But he makes clear that it is not just experiences conceived as cases of things looking a certain way, but also cases of their being seen to be a certain way—experiences factively described—which can be cited as reasons in this way. Asked why I believe that there is a candle in front of me, I can reply “Because I see that there is a candle in front of me,” and in saying this I am vindicating a rational entitlement which consists in my seeing that there is a candle in front of me (2002, 281–2).

Now the examples just given are of cases in which, in contrast to the cases of the green tie and the brown sweater offered in response to Stroud and Davidson, I not only have things look a certain way to me, or see that they are a certain way, but also, in so doing, believe that they are that way. So it might be objected that these cases do not show that experiences, nondoxastically construed, can play a role in rationally entitling belief. But, at least prior to the change of view about these cases which I noted above, McDowell appeals to ordinary usage to show that even experience which is clearly nondoxastic can be cited as a reason for belief. Regarding the remark that he imagines the subject making after having been set straight about the lighting conditions under which she had seen the brown sweater—“I thought that I was looking at your sweater under one of those lights that make it impossible to tell what colours things are, but I now realize I was actually seeing that it was brown”—McDowell goes on to comment that “[in] saying this, one registers that one had, at the relevant past time, an entitlement that one did not then realize one had” (2003, 158). In this case, a clearly nondoxastic episode of seeing that the sweater is brown is recognized, in a way parallel to the normal cases where assent is not withheld, as a reason for believing that the sweater is

brown. So there is no reason to think, in the normal cases, that the entitlement holds only because we have smuggled in a conception of the entitling episodes as involving a doxastic element.

Do these examples tell against Davidson’s coherentist view that only a belief can be a reason for another belief? Of the brown sweater case in particular, McDowell says that it “violates [Davidson’s] dictum: it is a case in which there was an entitlement that was not a belief” (2003, 159). This allows him to claim that the same kind of entitlement holds also in the ordinary cases where we do not withhold belief: in these cases, what entitles us to form the belief that the cube is green is just the state of affairs we mention in saying “Because I see that the cube is green.” But I think that McDowell is mistaken in taking his examples to constitute a challenge to Davidson on this point. For, as I am about to argue, when Davidson says that only a belief can be a reason for another belief, he is using “reason” and its cognates in a different sense from the sense in which experiences, in these examples, are shown to be reasons for belief. To get clear about the two senses of “reason” I have in mind, consider someone who learns that the streets are wet and, as a result, comes to believe that it rained. In one sense of “reason” her reason for believing that it rained is that the streets are wet. Reasons in this sense—which I shall label reasons₁—are considerations which she cites, or can cite, in support of her belief. For example, if asked “Why do you believe it rained?” she can answer “Because the streets are wet.” And if she comes to reconsider her belief that it is raining, then the consideration that the streets are wet will be among the various reasons₁ for and against the belief that she brings into review (“The streets are wet, but on the other hand it’s the middle of July, and someone might have opened a fire hydrant”). This sense of “reason” fits most naturally into a first-personal context where the subject is seeking to justify his or her own beliefs, or to decide what to believe. But the question of the subject’s entitlement to her beliefs can also be raised from a third-person perspective, for example with the aim of assessing the rationality of her belief-forming processes, or, more ambitiously, as part of a project of radical interpretation in which the rationality of the subject’s beliefs in the light of her other psychological states is regarded as a constraint on ascribing them in the first place. In that kind of context, the term “reason” is often used in a different sense: namely as applying to those attitudes of the subject in the light of which her beliefs are rationally intelligible. In this sense of “reason,” which I shall label “reason₂,” the subject’s reason for believing that it rained is not that the streets are wet, but that she believes that the streets are wet. In asking whether or not the subject has reason₂ to believe that it rained, the evaluator or interpreter will ask, not whether the streets are wet, but rather whether the subject believes that the streets are wet, and it is this belief which the evaluator will describe as the subject’s “reason”—here reason₂—for believing that it rained.

Now when Davidson says that only a belief can count as a reason for another belief, the relevant sense of “reason” is the reason₂ sense. He is not making the implausible claim that a subject trying to make up her mind what to believe, or considering the grounds for the beliefs she already has, has to restrict herself to considerations about

⁸ For more discussion of the idea of responding to a reason as such, see Johan Gersel’s “What is the Myth of the Given?” in Paper 3 of this anthology.

her own attitudes, such as the fact that she believes that the streets are wet, to the exclusion of other considerations, such as the fact that the streets are wet. Rather, his point is about the considerations which the evaluator or interpreter can cite as showing the subject's belief in a rational light. These considerations include, in our example, the subject's belief that the streets are wet, but they do not include the mere fact that the streets are wet, nor would they include the subject's idle thought or fantasy that the streets are wet. That the subject's belief that the streets are wet is her reason₂ for believing that it rained does not preclude our identifying something which is not a belief, namely the fact that the streets are wet, as her reason₁ for the same belief. So Davidson can perfectly well allow that things other than beliefs can be reasons for belief in the reasons₁ sense, and in particular that the fact of having an experience can, just like any other fact, be a reason₁ for belief. In order for his view to cut against Davidson's dictum, then, McDowell has to show that the subject's experience that *p* is not just a reason₁ but a reason₂ for the belief that *p*. He has to show that it plays the same kind of role that another belief might play, namely that of making rationally intelligible, from a third-person perspective, the subject's belief that *p*. However, the examples of our ordinary practices of reason-giving, which he cites, seem to support only the claim that experiences are reasons₁ for the corresponding beliefs. When I reply to the question "Why do you believe that the cube is green?" by saying "Because I see that it is," I am, on the face of it, citing a consideration which favours the belief, just as if I were to reply to "Why do you believe that it rained?" by saying "Because the streets are wet." My response is seemingly on a par with other responses I might give to the same question under different circumstances, offering different considerations in support of the belief: "Because I was told that there is," "Because the box says 'Contents: One Green Cube,'" "Because cubes around here are typically green," "Because of where the needle on the colour detector is pointing." On the face of it, saying "Because I see that it's green" answers the same first-personal justificatory question that is addressed by these other answers, all of which seem to fall under the reason₁ paradigm. There is of course the difference that the reason I am giving is conclusive, whereas the considerations in the other cases can be outweighed. That I see that the cube is green implies, given the factive nature of "see that," that the cube is green, so in having that reason₁ I am already in some sense committed to the belief for which I cite it as a reason₁. But this is no bar to saying that it is my reason₁: compare someone's answering the question "Why do you believe that Ben plays an instrument?" with "Because he's the pianist for the choir my sister sings in," or "Why do you believe that Italy was in the final of the 2006 World Cup?" with "Because they won it that year."

I have argued that the appeal to our ordinary reason-giving practices justifies only the claim that experiences can be reasons₁ for belief, and not the claim—which McDowell needs—that they can be reasons₂.⁹ But it would be open to McDowell to

⁹ Why does McDowell need this claim? Why isn't it enough for McDowell's purposes that experiences can be reasons₁ for belief, so that his empiricism is after all compatible with Davidson's dictum? To see why,

reply either that, contrary to first appearances, claims of the "Because I see that *p*" form are claims about one's reasons₂ rather than one's reasons₁, or that episodes of seeing that *p* can play both roles at once. On the first approach, my saying "Because I see that it's green" would be supporting my belief that the cube is green, not by citing a consideration from which it follows that the thing is green, but rather by describing a state of affairs in the light of which my belief that *p* can be judged, from a third-person perspective, as rational. It would be like replying to "Why do you believe it rained?" by saying "Because I believe that the streets are wet."¹⁰ Such an approach is not ruled out by our ordinary reason-giving practices, but it is not supported by appeal to them either, since the most natural understanding of answers like "Because I see that it's green" are as giving reasons₁. On the second approach, my saying "Because I see that it's green" would, as appearances suggest, give a reason₁ for believing the cube is green, but my seeing that it is green would also be my reason₂. My seeing that the cube is green would rationalize my believing that the cube is green both from the third-person perspective and from the first-person perspective, so it would simultaneously function as a reason₁ and a reason₂.¹¹

Regardless of which approach is adopted, the challenge for McDowell is to make persuasive the claim that seeing that *p* can be a reason₂ once it has been shown not to follow straightforwardly from the appeal to our ordinary reason-giving practices. The difficulty in meeting this challenge is that of combining the nondoxastic character which McDowell wants to ascribe to experience with his internalist conception of rational entitlement as involving the subject's capacity to recognize her reasons as the reasons they are. In our paradigm example of rational entitlement, on which the belief that the streets are wet is a reason₁ for believing that it rained, the internalist requirement is satisfied in that the subject is in a position to recognize the streets' being wet as a reason₁ for believing that it rained. That the streets are wet is, so to speak, in her view as a consideration supporting her belief. If she were not able to recognize the streets' being wet as a reason₁ for her belief, then we would not be able to regard her belief that the streets are wet as a reason₂ for—as rationally₂ entitling her to—the belief that it

recall that the point of arguing that thought is rationally answerable to experience is to be able to show that it is rationally answerable to the facts which experience makes available to us. But the relevant notion of rational answerability cannot be the reason₁ notion, since, to put it crudely, that kind of rational answerability to the facts is just too easy to come by. The rational relation of thought to the world which McDowell wants in his picture cannot merely be the kind of rational relation I recognize when I take the streets' being wet as a reason₁ for believing that it rained, since otherwise there would be no need for McDowell to bring experiences into his account at all: that sort of rational₁ answerability of our thought to the facts is a feature of any view which allows rational₁ relations among beliefs, including coherentist views. What McDowell needs, in order to secure empiricism, is a notion of rational answerability which can be ascribed from the third-person standpoint: it must be possible to say, from the third-personal perspective, that the fact that *p*, in making itself manifest to the subject in an episode of experiencing that *p*, rationally entitles her to the belief that *p*. And that is to say that the subject's experience that *p* must be her reason₂, not merely her reason₁, for believing that *p*.

¹⁰ Or, to bring the analogy closer, "Because I know that the streets are wet."

¹¹ Thanks to Christopher Gauker for pressing me to take this possibility seriously.

rained.¹² The streets' being wet must in some sense be in her view as a reason₁ for her belief. If seeing that *p* is to function in the same kind of way as a reason₂ for believing that *p*, then it would seem, again, that the subject must have a corresponding reason₁, something which is in her view as a ground for believing that *p*.

What, then, does the subject have in her view as her reason,—as the ground which she can cite—for believing that *p*? McDowell's talk of experiences' bringing facts into view, or making them available to us, might lead us to think that what she has in view, as her reason₁, is *p* itself. But McDowell appears to rule this out in a passage which specifically denies that, in a case of belief based on visual experience, *p* itself functions as a reason for believing that *p*. He rejects the suggestion that "when one forms a belief on the basis of the kind of experience that constitutes being perceptually open to a fact, it is the fact itself that is one's reason for believing what one does" (2006a, 134). Rather, he says,

[w]hen I believe, on the basis of my visual experience, that there is a hummingbird at the feeder, my reason for believing that is precisely that I see it to be so—that I experience, visually, its being so—or at least seem to. If I am asked to give my reason for believing that there is a hummingbird at the feeder, it would be absurd to respond by simply restating what I believe.

(2006a, 134)

Because McDowell does not draw a distinction between reasons₁ and reasons₂, this can be automatically interpreted as rejecting the suggestion that the fact of the hummingbird's being at the feeder serves as a reason₁, but the context suggests that he would deny that the fact serves the subject as a reason in any sense. The alternative suggested by the passage is that my reason₁ is the same as my reason₂, namely my seeing that *p*. On this alternative, seeing that *p* would be a self-conscious state such that, in seeing that *p*, I would thereby recognize the fact of my seeing that *p*. Seeing that *p* would thus function both as a reason₂ and as a reason₁.¹³

However, on the face of it, the claim that seeing that *p* involves either the conscious recognition that *p*, or the self-conscious recognition that one is seeing that *p*, conflicts with the claim that it is, itself, non-committal or nondoxastic. This is especially clear if we take, as our model of seeing that *p*, the kind of case illustrated by the examples of the green tie and the brown sweater. If these are cases of seeing that *p*, then they are precisely not self-conscious. In seeing that the sweater is brown, I do not recognize that I am seeing it as brown, and nor, *a fortiori*, do I recognize my seeing that it is brown as a reason₁ for believing that it is brown. Now, as already noted, McDowell in later writings goes back on his original claim that the brown sweater case constitutes a case of seeing

¹² For more on this point, see Ginsborg (2011a), section I.

¹³ The idea of seeing that *p* as self-conscious is suggested by this passage from *Perception as a Capacity For Knowledge*:

When an exercise of a rational perceptual capacity puts a subject in a perceptual state that is her seeing something to be so, the perceptual state that is her seeing it to be so comes within the scope of her self-consciousness, so the warrant it provides, as the perceptual state it is... [a] warrant that is accessible to the warranted individual. (McDowell 2011, 33)

that *p*. As we shall see, he limits cases of seeing that *p* to cases in which, if the subject were to form the belief that *p*, she would count as having knowledge that *p*. The brown sweater case fails to satisfy that condition because if, in spite of my doubts about the lighting conditions, I were to form the belief that the sweater was brown, my doubts—if rational—would mean that my belief would not amount to knowing that the sweater was brown. However, even if the notion of seeing that *p* is limited in this way, it is still not clear how it can, as such, qualify as self-conscious. In order to resist Davidson's claim that the notion of seeing that *p* just collapses into the notion of *p*'s bringing about, through the operation of the senses, a perceptual belief that *p*, McDowell has to insist on the passive, nondoxastic character of seeing that *p*. But that seems incompatible with the idea that, merely through seeing that *p*, I could come to recognize myself as seeing that *p*, and so have in view my seeing that *p* as a consideration favouring my belief that *p*. So, at least if we assume that a subject counts as having a reason₂ for belief only if she recognizes herself as having a reason₁, then seeing that *p* cannot—as long as we are construing it in a way which respects its passive character—constitute a reason₂ for believing that *p*.

Might McDowell reject the assumption that the attribution of what I am calling a reason₂ depends on the subject's recognizing herself as having a reason₁? I think that this is in effect what he does in suggesting that what the subject has in cases like the brown sweater example is an "opportunity" to know (2003, 158–9) or an "invitation" to believe (2002a, 278). These suggestions avoid the implication that the subject is presented with something which she recognizes as a reason₁ to believe, proposing something weaker, while still making it seem as though the subject's belief has a rational and not merely causal connection to her experience, and so to the fact presented. The difficulty I see with these suggestions, though, is that they risk losing the internalist character of the rationality. Many states of affairs not involving experience can provide me with opportunities to know, which may vary in how good they are. The fact of a green cube's being there on the table in front of me—even though I have not yet registered its presence—gives me an opportunity to know that it is green, which I would not have if it were inside a drawer. But if it is inside a drawer that is nearby and unlocked, I still have a better opportunity to know than if it is in a locked drawer to which I do not have the key.

McDowell might reply that the opportunity I have if I nondoxastically see that the cube is green, in the kind of situation envisaged in the brown sweater case, is of a qualitatively different kind from these other opportunities. And indeed it does seem to be different in the respect that, unlike the others, it involves the cube's looking green to me. The question, though, is whether a difference in this respect matters from the point of view of rationality, understood in an internalist way. Suppose that I consciously refrain from judging that the cube is green because I have been given reason to doubt the lighting conditions, but then, after a while, find myself believing that it is green anyway. My belief under those circumstances is more psychologically explicable than if I were to form the true belief that a nearby cube was green without having seen it at all, but it is

not clear to me that it is any more rational. The invitation metaphor is more effective in distinguishing the case of nondoxastic seeing from the other cases in which I have an opportunity to acquire knowledge, but it still does not address the worry that the experience fails to make the belief rational. To say that the cube's looking green to me presents me with an invitation to believe that it is green—an invitation which I do not have if it is nearby without my having seen it—is to say that it influences me psychologically to form the belief that it is green, but again that seems neither here nor there with respect to the rationality of that belief.

As noted earlier, McDowell has changed his view about the kind of case just mentioned, conceding that a subject in this kind of situation lacks rational entitlement to believe that things are as they appear to her to be. In *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge* (2011), he claims that, if a subject presented with a green thing has been given good reason to doubt that the lighting conditions are suitable for detecting colours, she is not, even when the thing appears to her to be green, “in a position to know that... the thing is green... let alone to know that it is by being in the perceptual state she is in that she knows that” (2011, 46). In such a case—he gives as an example a situation where a subject in a psychology experiment has been told that in half of the occasions in which she is to report on the thing's colour, the lighting conditions will be undetectably unsuitable for identifying colours—“it would be irrational for her to take herself to be in a position to know that the present occasion is not such an occasion” and that implies that she is “not in a position to know,” and so *a fortiori* not rationally entitled to believe, that the thing is green.¹⁴

Taken on its own, this change of mind would be incompatible with McDowell's minimal empiricism. For if the case is understood, as in the cases of the green tie and brown sweater invoked in the responses to Stroud and Davidson described earlier, as a paradigm case of nondoxastic experience, then the claim that it does not involve the subject's rational entitlement to her belief stands in direct conflict with McDowell's view that an experience that *p*, nondoxastically construed, rationally entitles a subject to the belief that *p*. However, McDowell avoids this threat with a second and correlated change of mind about whether, in this kind of case, the subject counts as seeing that *p*, in the sense of “seeing that” relevant to his minimal empiricism.¹⁵ It is true that, in the context of the experiment, “her visual state is related to the actual colour of the thing in just the way that, outside this context [the context of the experimental set-up] would equip her to know that [the thing is green]” (2011, 47). But we should not conclude from this that “the thing's greenness is visually present to her in the relevant sense” (2011, 47)—that is, that she sees it to be green.

¹⁴ See also §10 of McDowell (2013).

¹⁵ Although this represents a change of mind from what McDowell says in his responses to Davidson and Stroud in his 2002a and 2003 respectively, it is prefigured in his 1993, where he cites a case “in which one has excellent reasons for distrusting one's vision, although as a matter of fact it is functioning perfectly” as one in which “one does not count as seeing something to be the case” (1993, n. 25).

A perceptual state in which a feature of the environment is present to a subject, in the relevant sense, would have to be a non-defective exercise of a self-consciously possessed and exercised capacity to get into perceptual states that put the subject in a position to know, through perception, that things are the relevant way in the environment. (2011, 48)

In the context of the experimental set-up, the condition is not met—the exercise of the capacity is defective—because the subject is not in a position to know that the thing is green. And, for precisely that reason, she does not count as having the thing's greenness present to her, that is, as seeing that the thing is green.

Regarding this last move, McDowell asks “Is this a cheat? Am I just defining away a difficulty that will persist in some different shape?” (2011, 48). He goes on to suggest that if one were to find the move problematic, this could only be because one had mistakenly generalized from the unavailability of knowledge in cases like that of the experimental subject to the unavailability of knowledge in all cases of perception. The denial that the experimental subject in this case sees that the thing is green would be “embarrassing” for his view, he says, if it committed him to denying that a subject's perceptual state can ever count as making a feature of a world visually present to her (2011, 48). But the conclusion that the greenness is not visually present to her in the experimental set-up does not generalize to the ordinary case “in which no specific possibility which would make knowledge unavailable is in the offing” (2011, 49). In the ordinary case of seeing that something is green, the subject must indeed recognize that her capacity to tell the colours of things is fallible, but in the absence of any specific reason for doubt, such as the reason she was given in the experimental set-up, she still counts as knowing that the thing is green. To think otherwise is to infer mistakenly from the “sheer fact of fallibility” (2011, 50) in the operation of our perceptual capacities to the conclusion that, even in the good case where the conditions are suitable for perception and we have no particular reason for doubting their suitability, what we have in the perceptual situation does not count as knowledge.

I agree with McDowell that we cannot infer from the subject's lack of perceptual knowledge in the experimental set-up, or in the cases of the green tie or the brown sweater, to a lack of perceptual knowledge in ordinary cases. To rephrase the point in terms of rational entitlement, I agree that the subject's lack of entitlement to a belief that the thing is green in these nonstandard cases does not imply that we are not, in ordinary cases, entitled to our beliefs that things have (say) the colours that they do. What I want to dispute, however, is that we can make sense of this entitlement in terms of rationalization by a nondoxastic perceptual experience, as opposed to merely re-describing it that way. McDowell's retraction of his original view that a subject in this kind of case sees that the thing has a certain colour, or has its colour visually present to her, is problematic, not because it calls into question whether we are ever entitled to perceptual belief, but because it undermines our intuitive grasp on the idea of a nondoxastic seeing that *p*, and so prevents us from appealing to the idea of a rational relation between beliefs and nondoxastic seeings as a way of accounting for that entitlement,

or making it intelligible. Recall that McDowell initially used the examples of the brown sweater and the green tie as a way of countering Davidson's assimilation of seeing that *p* to visually acquiring a belief that *p* and Stroud's related claim that seeing that *p* intrinsically involves commitment to *p*. These examples, I suggested, offer an entering wedge for the idea that we can distinguish, in ordinary belief-involving perceptual situations, a passive component which is the perceptual experience proper, in contrast to the endorsement of experiential content in perceptual belief. The cost of denying that they are cases of seeing that *p* is that we no longer have an intuitive rationale for drawing that distinction. This does not mean that the distinction cannot be drawn, but it does call into question whether the notion of nondoxastic experience carved out by the distinction can do the kind of work which McDowell wants it to do.

Now McDowell might respond that, even though the notion of perceptual experience which he now invokes to rule out the contested examples as cases of seeing that *p* is different from the one to which he appealed in his earlier writing, namely the one in which it was natural to describe oneself retrospectively as having seen that the sweater was brown, it is still an intuitive notion. He indicates as much in another passage from *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*, where he says that a conception of perceptual experience as conclusively warranting belief

fits ... a perfectly intuitive understanding of the idea of ... seeing something to be so. When one sees something to be so, one is in a perceptual state in which its being so is visually there for one, so that one has a conclusive warrant for a corresponding belief. (2011, 31)

The notion he describes here as "intuitive" is one in which it is built into the very idea of "seeing something to be so" that, while not believing that it is so, one has a warrant for believing that it is so. But—and here is where the question of whether he is cheating by "defining away a difficulty" seems apposite—one might worry that the notion, with both of those elements built into it, not only fails to fit an intuitive conception of perceptual experience, but trivializes McDowell's claim, against Davidson, that experiences, nondoxastically construed, can be reasons for belief. If a nondoxastic state can be counted as a state of seeing that a thing is green only if it rationally entitles the person who has it to the belief that it is green, then, so to speak as a matter of definition, seeing that something is green must be the kind of thing which can serve as a reason for believing that the thing is green. But in the absence of an independent motivation for supposing that there are such states, the notion of "seeing something to be so" looks like nothing more than an artefact of the wish to make intelligible our entitlement to visually acquired beliefs about how things are. In other words it is hard to see how the claim that our perceptual beliefs are rationally warranted by nondoxastic experiences is anything more than a restatement of the claim that we are entitled to them, or that they amount to knowledge.

I have formulated the difficulty under discussion in this section without taking into account a different and seemingly independent revision McDowell makes to his account in "Avoiding the Myth of the Given" (2008). On the view thus revised, the

perceptual experience of a green cube no longer has propositional content, and so no longer can be characterized as a seeing that *p*. While still conceptual, the content is "intuitional" rather than "discursive": what the perceiver has in view is not the fact, say, that the cube in front of her is green, but rather the cube itself, together with its greenness.¹⁶ Does this make a difference with respect to the difficulty I have raised? At first sight it might appear so. McDowell describes the revision as countering what he calls Davidson's "telling response" to his view that judgements can be displayed as rational in the light of experiences, not just of beliefs about experiences (or, in my terms, that experiences can be reasons₂ for beliefs, not just reasons₁).

Davidson argued that if by "experience" we mean something with propositional content, it can only be a case of taking things to be so, distinctive in being caused by the impact of the environment on our sensory apparatus. But of course his picture includes such things. So I was wrong, he claimed, to suppose there is anything missing from his picture. (2008, 269)

Now, as we have just seen, McDowell initially responded to this "nothing is missing" objection by appealing to the possibility of seeing that *p* without believing that *p*, as in the example of the brown sweater. That appeal was intended to show that seeing that *p* is not essentially doxastic, so that there is something in McDowell's picture—episodes in which we passively take in facts—which Davidson does not have in his picture. Here, however, he seems to concede that a view on which the content of experience is propositional makes it difficult not to treat experience as doxastic.

[If we conceive] experiences as actualizations of conceptual capacities, while retaining the assumption that that requires crediting experiences with propositional content, Davidson's point seems well-taken. If experiences have propositional content, it is hard to deny that experiencing is taking things to be so, rather than what I want: a different kind of thing that entitles us to take things to be so. (2008, 269)

His answer is to give up the assumption that experiences have propositional content. An experience is indeed a "different kind of thing that entitles us to take things to be so," but it is different from taking things to be so not just in that it is nondoxastic, but in that it is non-propositional.

Here I want to make two points. First, I do not think that McDowell needs this revision in order to address the "nothing is missing" point. Even while continuing to hold that the content of experience is propositional, he can still say that there is something missing from Davidson's picture, namely a normative, as opposed to a merely causal, relation between the world and our beliefs about it. In saying that perceptual beliefs can do duty for McDowell's nondoxastic perceptual experiences, while holding that what makes them perceptual is that they are caused by the effect of reality on our senses, Davidson leaves himself unable to do justice to the idea that any of our beliefs,

¹⁶ See, for example, the formulation at §11: "In a visual intuition, an object is visually present to a subject with those of its features which are visible to her from her vantage point" (2008, 265).

perceptual or otherwise, are intentionally directed towards the world.¹⁷ That, I think, is the deepest reason McDowell has for thinking that there is something missing from Davidson's picture. And it is a reason which would remain even if he were to concede that experiencing, as he himself conceives it, amounts to taking things to be so, as opposed to having an entitlement to take things to be so.

Second, and more importantly in the present context, the difficulty I have been raising is not that nothing is missing from Davidson's account, but rather that something is missing from McDowell's. McDowell is not able to explain how, at least on an intuitive construal of perceptual experience conceived as nondoxastic, one which does not simply build in the idea of supplying rational warrant, experiences can rationalize beliefs in a way which respects the idea of rationality as responsiveness to reasons as such.

The revision just described does not help with that difficulty.¹⁸ If anything, in claiming that experiences are a "different kind of thing" from beliefs, not only in respect of being nondoxastic, but in respect of being non-propositional, it makes it worse. For if it is hard to see how a nondoxastic state with propositional content can be one in which a subject recognizes a consideration as favouring, or conclusively calling for, a belief, it is even harder to see how a nondiscursive state can satisfy that description. The revision admittedly makes it less tempting to think that the difficulty could be addressed by equating experiences with perceptual beliefs. But while that temptation might be a source of the thought that nothing is missing from Davidson's view, it does not account for the present difficulty. Removing the temptation by claiming that experiences are distinct from beliefs not only in being non-committal, but also in having intuitional rather than discursive content, only sharpens the question of how McDowell can insist that beliefs are rationally answerable to them.¹⁹

III

The second difficulty I want to raise is complementary to the first in that it focuses on the conceptual, rather than the passive, character of experience in McDowell's account.

¹⁷ See McDowell (1996), 141–2.

¹⁸ Perhaps it might be thought to address my objection to McDowell's view as articulated in *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*, after he changes his mind about the green tie and brown sweater examples. I objected that this leaves us without an intuitive handle on the notion of a nondoxastic seeing. Perhaps McDowell thinks that we can get more of a handle on this notion if we construe it as non-propositional. But he would then need to make plausible that I can have in view the cube and its greenness without taking the cube to be green. One way to do that would be to suppose that I see the cube and its greenness, but mis-ascribe the greenness, for example, mistakenly taking it that it is not the cube itself which is green, but the light which is shining on it, or the glass through which I see it. In that case, though, as in the brown sweater case, I would not be rationally entitled to form the belief that the cube was green. So we would have made independent sense of the experience as nondoxastic at the cost of the idea that the experience could rationalize belief. I develop a difficulty of this kind, although not specifically in reference to McDowell, in Ginsborg (2011a, 144–8).

¹⁹ Thanks to Randall Amano and Christopher Gauker for helpful discussion of the ideas in this section, and especially to Rasmus Thybo Jensen for bringing to my attention passages from McDowell which I had overlooked in an earlier version.

Experience for McDowell draws on antecedently possessed conceptual capacities: we can see that the object presented to us is a cube, or green, only because we already possess conceptual capacities corresponding to the concepts *cube* and *green*, capacities whose paradigmatic exercise is in making judgements whose content include those concepts among its constituents. But the broad question of how we are to make sense of thought's intentional bearing on the world—the question which McDowell's minimal empiricism is intended to answer—is most naturally understood as including, within its scope, the question of how to make sense of our possession of conceptual capacities. Specifically, it would seem to be part of the issue of thought's answerability to the empirical world in particular—that of how empirical content is possible—that we ask what it is for us to be in possession of *empirical* concepts: intuitively, concepts which are not part of our innate endowment, but which we have come to possess through having our senses affected by objects outside of us. And this question cannot be raised without asking how these concepts are acquired, and more specifically what role sensory affection by objects plays in their acquisition. On the face of it, though, McDowell's account of our sensory relatedness to objects as consisting in episodes which are already conceptual does not make room for a satisfactory account of how empirical concept-acquisition is possible. Because experience for McDowell draws on conceptual capacities, it cannot be invoked to account for how someone not yet in possession of concepts—a prelinguistic child—can come to acquire concepts. So his account cannot address the question of how empirical concepts as such are possible, as opposed to the question of how a possessor of empirical concepts—someone who has learned a human language—can form beliefs and entertain thoughts about the empirical world. McDowell's account can offer, then, at most a partial answer to the question of how our thought is intentionally directed towards the world, and so how it qualifies as thinking at all, as opposed to, say, the kind of psychological goings-on which we might ascribe to animals. In taking as its starting-point the experience and thought of creatures endowed with conceptual capacities, it leaves unaddressed what might seem to be the most pressing question associated with the idea of intentional content, namely how to make sense of our possession of conceptual capacities in the first place.²⁰

So far what I have been describing as a difficulty might look like no more than an expression of dissatisfaction with a fundamental commitment of McDowell's view, one which is manifested not only in his work on perceptual experience but also in other aspects of his view, in particular his work on meaning and rule-following. For it is a central theme of McDowell's philosophy that there is something wrong with the question I accuse him of not answering. In so much as raising the question

²⁰ I develop a version of this difficulty for McDowell's view, at much greater length and in connection with Kant as well as Sellars, in Ginsborg (2006). It should be noted that I follow McDowell, Sellars and Kant in adopting a relatively demanding notion of "concept" on which conceptual capacities are distinctively human, although, as will emerge, my notion is less demanding than McDowell's in not requiring that concept-users be rational.

I am attempting to adopt what he calls, in *Mind and World*, a “sideways-on” perspective on the relation between conceptual system and the world (1996, 34ff.), which seeks to understand concepts from outside the conceptual sphere. And it is the thrust of much of McDowell’s work that it is an illusion to suppose either that such a perspective is possible, or that it is necessary in order to make sense of linguistic meaning and the objectivity of judgement.²¹ However, I can give the difficulty more purchase by presenting it in the context of McDowell’s discussion of Sellars, in particular in his 1998 Woodbridge lectures (1998a, 1998b and 1998c).²² McDowell defends his own version of empiricism, in those essays, by comparing it to that of Sellars, and arguing that it offers a better answer to the question of intentionality than Sellars’ own. But, as I shall go on to argue, Sellars’ question of how thought can have intentional content includes the question—construed in a way which is illegitimate by McDowell’s lights²³—of how human beings come to acquire concepts. So McDowell at least cannot claim, for his view, that it constitutes a better answer than that of Sellars to the very same question. And, as I shall suggest, failure to answer Sellars’ question leaves McDowell vulnerable to a worry parallel to the worry that he himself raises for Davidson’s coherentism.

Where McDowell sees his view as superior to that of Sellars is in its dispensing with the idea of extra-conceptual sensations which guide the operation of our conceptual capacities.²⁴ Sellars’ picture, on McDowell’s reading, is like McDowell’s own in including visual experiences in which conceptual capacities—for example those corresponding to the expressions “green” and “cube”—are passively drawn into operation. Moreover, for both Sellars and McDowell, experiences are also, in the Kantian sense, intuitions of objects. Having a visual experience whose conceptual content includes the content that there is a green cube *there* (where “*there*” picks out a location identifiable from the subject’s point of view) is having the green cube itself in view. That, according to McDowell, is what secures the intentional directedness of our visual experiences. But Sellars maintains that if the picture is to avoid idealism, it must

²¹ McDowell’s idea that we must reject the aspiration to a “sideways-on” perspective makes what I think is its first explicit appearance in his 1981a, but it is implicit in his 1987 (based on a talk given in 1974) and in his 1977.

²² Since the publication of the Woodbridge lectures in 1998, McDowell has changed his view about Sellars in ways which suggest that he would no longer endorse the interpretation of Sellars I go on to describe him as giving. See his 2005, where he claims that Sellars’ talk of “guiding” is a euphemism for “shoving around” (2005, 100), suggesting that Sellars is not vulnerable to the accusation of lapsing into the Myth of the Given, and his 2008a, where he draws on Sellars’ essay “The Role of the Imagination in Kant’s Theory of Experience” to argue that guidance by extra-conceptual sense-impressions is not an essential part of Sellars’ view (2008a, 113–15). I am inclined to think that McDowell’s earlier interpretation is closer to the mark. However, as I shall go on to argue, even if Sellars should not be read as holding the objectionable “guiding” view which McDowell criticizes in his earlier discussion, he is nonetheless committed to holding that kind of view if sense-impressions are to account for the possibility of concept-acquisition. So my account here of McDowell’s treatment of Sellars will restrict itself to the earlier interpretation.

²³ That is to say, construed in a way which tries to explain the acquisition of concepts “from outside” concepts, by appealing to some kind of contribution from the world which goes beyond a mere causing of perceptual representations.

²⁴ There are other respects in which McDowell takes his own view to be superior to that of Sellars (see his 1998b, §§4–5), but they can be set aside for present purposes.

include, as an additional element, guidance by extra-conceptual sense-impressions. As McDowell puts this aspect of Sellars’ view: “for thought to be intelligibly of objective reality, the conceptual representations involved in perceptual experience must be guided from without” (1998b, 39). For McDowell, this is an unnecessary addition to the picture, for we can say that the representations are guided from without, while at the same time recognizing that “there is no need for manifolds of ‘sheer receptivity’ to play this guiding role” (1998b, 39). Once we understand that the conceptual representations involved in perception amount to intuitions of objects, we can acknowledge that “the guidance is supplied by *objects* themselves, the subject matter of those conceptual representations, becoming immediately present to the sensory consciousness of the subjects of these conceptual goings-on” (1998b, 39).

For McDowell, Sellars’ appeal to guidance by extra-conceptual sense-impressions is not only unnecessary but also, by Sellars’ own lights as well as McDowell’s, problematic. McDowell brings out its problematic character in terms of Sellars’ reference to the manifold of sensory impressions as having a “strong voice” in the outcome of the mental activity which gives rise to conceptually informed perceptual experience. The talk of “voice” not only suggests that the non-conceptual manifold can impart knowledge of how the activity should proceed, which would be a version of the mythical Given, but also—given that we are not supposed to be conscious of its guidance—raises the question “to whom or what . . . it [is] supposed to speak” (1998b, 40). Does it speak to us, or to our understanding conceived as a distinct faculty within us? But we do not face either of these problems if we suppose that the guidance is carried out by the objects presented in intuition. For now

the image of voice fits more easily. A seen object as it were invites one to take it to be as it visibly is. It speaks to one; if it speaks to one’s understanding, that is just what its speaking to one comes to. “See me as I am”, it (so to speak) says to one; “namely as characterized by *these* properties”—and it displays them. (1998b, 41)

What “tells” us, in perception, to represent the given object as a green cube, rather than as (say) a red cylinder, is not sensations of a certain kind, but the green cube itself; and it “tells” us that by being visible to us as the green cube that it is.

McDowell takes his approach to be more effective than Sellars’ in escaping the charge that a conceptualist view of experience is idealist, in the sense of construing reality as a mere reflection of our thinking. He acknowledges that there is a “kind of circularity” in his account, in that the external constraint on our perceptual representations—the constraint which allows us to understand them, and the operations of our conceptual capacities more generally, as directed towards reality—is provided by “elements of the very independent reality towards which we are in the course of our entitling ourselves to see conceptual activity, in general, as directed” (1998c, 46). But the account, he says, avoids idealism because of the specifically sensory, which is to say receptive, character of perceptual representation as opposed to thinking. It is on account of the receptive character of experience, that is, its being a matter of having in

view or taking in the cube's being green, rather than taking the cube to be green or judging that it is green, that "the objects we are entitling ourselves to see as present to subjects in intuition are genuinely independent of the subjects" (1998c, 46).

Now one way to take the line of argument developed in the previous section would be as casting doubt on McDowell's right to insist that perceptual experience is receptive, and hence on his response to the charge of idealism. For if the difficulty I raised is genuine, then McDowell cannot say both that experience is receptive and that it affords rational entitlement for belief. However, that is not my concern in the present section. Rather, my concern here is that in substituting guidance by the green cube itself for guidance by extra-conceptual sense impressions, McDowell fails to address the problem of intentional content as Sellars himself understands it. As we have already seen, McDowell holds that the green cube can play its guiding role for us only because we already possess the concepts corresponding to the words "green" and "cube." Objects "speak to us... only because we have learned a human language... less fancifully put, the point is that objects come into view for us only in actualizations of conceptual capacities that are ours" (1998b, 43). But this means that they cannot do the work which Sellars wants sensory impressions to do, which is precisely to make possible the learning of language, that is the acquisition of conceptual capacities. That Sellars' concern is with concept-acquisition is clear from his discussion, in *Science and Metaphysics*, of the question to which he takes extra-conceptual sense impressions to provide the answer: "Why does the perceiver *conceptually represent* a red (blue, etc.) rectangular (circular, etc.) object in the presence of an object having these qualities?" (1968, 18). So formulated, the question might be taken in the way McDowell takes it, as applying to a perceiver who already possesses conceptual capacities corresponding to the words "red" and "rectangular." In that case it could be answered as McDowell proposes to answer it, by saying that the red and rectangular object comes into view for her as red and rectangular, putting her in a position to form the belief that it is red and rectangular. But Sellars goes on to make clear that it is a question about the acquisition of conceptual capacities by considering, as possible answers, first that "the tendency to have conceptual representations of a red...and rectangular...physical object is innate," and, second, that "one is taught by one's linguistic peers, who already have the relevant concepts and propensities, to play the color-shape language game, and, by so doing, acquire these concepts and propensities" (1968, 18–19). He rejects the first answer, but sees the second as supplementing, rather than replacing, his own answer in terms of guidance by non-conceptual sense-impressions.

[T]he ability to teach a child the colour-shape language game seems to imply the existence of cues which systematically correspond... to the colour and shape attribute families, and are also causally connected with variously coloured and shaped objects in various circumstances of perception. (1968, 19)

To learn the use of words like "red" and "rectangular," then, the child needs not only to hear those words uttered in the presence of red and rectangular objects but to be

"cued" or "guided" in their subsequent utterance by sensations which—since the situation is precisely one in which concepts are being acquired—cannot themselves be conceptual.²⁵

McDowell, I think, misses this aspect of Sellars' motivation. He does so, I suspect, because he underestimates the scope of the problem of intentionality as Sellars conceives it, that is, the problem of what it is for thought to be "of objective reality." McDowell himself approaches the problem of intentionality, in *Mind and World*, by way of the question of how empirical judgements can be warranted. He rightly sees that this question is relevant not just to epistemology narrowly construed, but, as he puts it, to "transcendental" philosophy. If empirical judgements can be warranted only by one another, so that they are not answerable to facts which are independent of them, then we cannot make sense of there being such a thing as empirical thought or judgement at all. McDowell identifies this question with the problem of intentionality because he holds, again rightly, that our thoughts cannot be directed towards objects in the empirical world unless our judgements are answerable to the empirical facts. And this requires, as he sees, that the facts be genuinely independent, and not just projections of, our thinking.

But McDowell fails to acknowledge that, in recognizing the possibility of this kind of warrant as a necessary condition of empirical thought, we have not yet exhausted the question of how empirical thought is possible, at least as Sellars understands that question. For the problem of intentionality has another, and, I believe, more fundamental dimension, that of how the mental episodes brought about by our interaction with objects can so much as take a conceptual form. This is the dimension which comes into focus when we ask how empirical concept-acquisition is possible. The question of how sensory affection can put us in a position to have empirical concepts is not just a question for psychology but, like the question of how sensory affection can put us in a position to have warranted belief or knowledge, a question for transcendental philosophy. If there is no place in our understanding of concept-acquisition for the idea that in acquiring empirical concepts we are answerable not only to other concepts we already have, but to objects conceived of as independent of our empirical concepts, then—or so the worry goes—we cannot make sense of there being our empirical concepts at all. In other words, we can be accused of helping ourselves to an idea of ourselves as concept-possessors in something like the way Davidson is accused by McDowell of "[helping]

²⁵ The same point is made in Forman (2006). Forman also argues, persuasively in my view, that Sellars intends sense-impressions to play the same role in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." However Forman, in agreement with McDowell's later interpretation but not the one under discussion (see note 22), does not think that Sellars' view represents a lapse into the Myth of the Given. Note that McDowell's own account of concept-acquisition as a matter of initiation into linguistic practices already conceived of as involving the exercise of conceptual capacities, could be understood as a sophisticated version of Sellars' second answer. McDowell could then be understood as holding that an "account in terms of the transmission of the colour-shape language game from generation to generation" is not a mere supplement to the kind of answer Sellars offers, but suffices on its own to explain the acquisition of concepts. But that would be, as I argue below, to miss something essential to the problem of intentionality.

himself to the idea of a body of beliefs, a body of states that have content" (1996, 68). It is this kind of worry which I think underlies Sellars' question why a perceiver conceptually represents a red and rectangular object in the presence of a red and rectangular object.

McDowell might reply here that if he has not addressed Sellars' question, it is because the question is not a genuine one, and Sellars should not have been concerned with it. This would be of a piece with his denying the genuineness of the problem about the possibility of meaning which many philosophers, most strikingly Kripke, have associated with Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations.²⁶ For even though Sellars himself does not put the concept-acquisition problem in this form, we might see the need for extra-conceptual "guidance" as stemming from a worry that the child needs guidance in going on from the uses of a word she has already been shown, to new uses. How does the child who has been taught to utter "green" in the presence of green cones, spheres and cylinders know, in the presence of a green cube, that she should utter "green" here as well, if not because she is "cued" by a sensation of green (where the "of" here is non-intentional)? This is a close cousin of the question why her training does not bring her to mean by "green" not *green*, but some variant like "green unless a cube" or some form of the classic *grue*. I have argued elsewhere against McDowell's rejection of this kind of problem,²⁷ so I will not pursue that line of thought here. But another motivation McDowell might have for dissociating himself from this aspect of Sellars' thought is that he sees Sellars' question as leading inevitably to the Myth of the Given. To ask how the child can recognize the appropriateness of the word "green" to the green cube, prior to recognizing either that "green" means *green* or that the cube is green, is, as he sees it, to seek some item of knowledge which is supposedly given in advance of learning concepts, but which one could not in fact conceivably have without being a concept-possessor. In the next section, however, I shall challenge that motivation. I shall argue that we can address Sellars' question without appealing to the idea of guidance by extra-conceptual sensation, nor to any other form of the mythical Given. This will prepare the way for a defence of the suggestion I offered in section I: that we can make sense of the intentionality of thought in terms of a normative, yet non-rational, constraint by objects.

IV

To get the relevant kind of normativity into focus, it is easiest to consider its role in the activities of children who are pre-linguistic or at the early stages of language-learning. For an example of such an activity, consider the "spontaneous sorting" carried out by children starting at about nine months, well before the advent of language. Presented, in an experimental situation, with an array of eight randomly arranged objects of two

clearly differentiable kinds—for example, four yellow cubical pillboxes and four blue balls of clay, or four striped bottle caps and four red cylinders—children around this age will often, without any prompting or encouragement, move the objects around so that objects of the same kind are placed together. Most one-year-olds do this with a fair degree of accuracy, putting together, say a group of three out of the four pillboxes, or a group of all four pillboxes with one clay ball.²⁸ By around eighteen months, most children will sort the objects systematically into two clear groups or piles, putting all the balls in one pile and all the pillboxes in the other.²⁹

Suppose now that an eighteenth-month-old in one of these experiments has made two piles of three pillboxes and three balls each, has picked up the fourth pillbox, and is now adding it to the pile with the other pillboxes. How might we try to make sense of what she is doing? Should we think of her behaviour, as she puts the pillbox on the pile, as manifesting the exercise of rationality in McDowell's sense of responsiveness to reasons as such? Or should we think of it on the model of something which McDowell specifically contrasts with rationality in this sense, namely an animal's responsiveness to the reasons for behaviour presented by its environment?³⁰ Neither approach seems right. Regarding the first, it would be a distortion to describe her as putting the pillbox on the pile because she recognizes that it is a pillbox (or a yellow cube, or yellow) and that the other objects on the pile are pillboxes (or cubes, or yellow), and because she has the intention of putting all the pillboxes (or yellow cubes, or yellow things) together. Even if we allow that she recognizes some facts of this kind, she does not yet have the capacity to reason from such facts to conclusions about what she should do, or to consider whether what she does is warranted in the light of the facts. And, as McDowell makes clear, we need to be able to ascribe such a capacity to her if we are to regard her as responding to reasons as such, even though it is not required that she exercise it in the particular case in question.³¹

However, it would be just as much of a distortion to think of what she is doing on the model of a rabbit fleeing a fox or, to give an example more closely related to the one at hand, of a squirrel assembling a cache of nuts. One obvious difference is that it is not immediately connected with the exigencies of survival; another is that, unlike the squirrel's nut-assembling behaviour, it represents the exercise of a general capacity for sorting objects which can be flexibly and spontaneously applied to objects of any number of kinds. But a deeper, although perhaps more elusive, difference is that it shows a kind of intelligence or understanding which does not seem to be present in the case of non-human animals. It is natural to think that the child's putting the pillbox with the other pillboxes is not just an automatic response, something which is either instinctive or a consequence of conditioning, but rather something which reflects an intelligent grasp of the situation. Even though she does not think of her behaviour as warranted in

²⁸ Starkey (1981). ²⁹ Gopnik and Meltzoff (1987, 1992).

³⁰ For this kind of responsiveness to reasons, and the contrast with responsiveness to reasons as such, see McDowell (2006, §§2–5; 2007, §§3–4).

³¹ See McDowell (2006, §§2–3).

²⁶ See in particular McDowell (1993a).

²⁷ Ginsborg, draft.

the light of any facts about the objects presented to her, she carries it out, not blindly or mechanically, but because of something she sees about the situation, something whose recognition leads her to respond to the situation as she does. By contrast, even though the rabbit sees the fox and the squirrel sees the nuts, there remains a sense in which their respective responses are naturally characterized as blind or mechanical. We can indeed use intentional language to describe these responses, saying that the rabbit sees the fox as dangerous, and so as calling for flight, and that the squirrel sees the nuts as something to be eaten later. But there is something tendentious about these characterizations, and they are at least optional. For we can explain the behaviour of the rabbit and the squirrel quite satisfactorily in terms of an innate disposition to flee foxes and to cache nuts, without having to suppose that there is anything that they grasp about the objects—anything, so to speak, in their view beyond the objects themselves—which leads them to behave as they do under the relevant circumstances.

Is there a middle ground here? That is, can we make sense of the child as responding to her situation in a way which does not require a capacity to reason about what to do, or to consider whether what she is doing is warranted in the light of how things are, without giving up the natural intuition that her response is intelligent, reflective of something which she sees about her situation? We can find such a middle ground, I suggest, by supposing that what the child is in a position to see in her situation, or to grasp about it, is not a consideration or set of considerations which she can recognize as reasons for her to respond in a certain way, but simply the sheer appropriateness of her responding that way. In other words, she can see the situation—the three pillboxes in one pile, the four clay balls in another, the pillbox in her hand—as normatively calling for, making appropriate, her putting the pillbox where she does. It is her capacity to grasp this normative feature of the situation, which we can describe interchangeably as the appropriateness of her response to the situation or as the situation's making appropriate or calling for her response, which allows us to think of her response as different in kind from the “blind” response of the squirrel, and different in a way which justifies describing it as intelligent or as manifesting understanding.³²

This suggestion requires that we give up an assumption which is often taken for granted, namely that, in order to recognize a situation as calling for a response, in the normative sense I have in mind, we must recognize a reason in the light of which the situation makes the response appropriate. In the present case this assumption would lead us to think that the child could not see the situation as calling for her response except in virtue of her recognizing facts about the situation—such as the fact of the object in her hand being a pillbox, or of its being the same colour as the other pillboxes, or of its being more similar to the pillboxes than it is to the clay balls—whose recognition would put her in a position to know how to respond, or which could be cited to justify the appropriateness of the response. But I am proposing that we give up this

³² For more on the idea of an “intelligent” response as one which involves the recognition of normativity, see Ginsborg (2011, section 4).

assumption. We can simply suppose the child is able to recognize her behaviour as normatively constrained by the situation, without taking this to require that she has, or is capable of having, anything in mind which tells her that this is how she should behave, or justifies her in behaving that way. This is of course problematic if we understand the idea of normative constraint as equivalent to the idea of rational constraint, so that a piece of behaviour cannot be normatively called for by a situation unless there is some fact about the situation which constitutes a reason for that behaviour. But that is part of what I am proposing we deny. I am suggesting that we can make sense of a kind of normative constraint which is more primitive than—does not depend on, and, as I shall suggest later, is presupposed by—the idea of rational constraint. If we allow that there can be constraint of this kind, and that it can be recognized by creatures who do not yet have the capacity to reason, then we can do justice to the intuition that the child's sorting behaviour is fundamentally different from that of an animal even though she lacks the capacity to appreciate reasons.³³

This conception of the child's sorting behaviour as involving her recognition of primitive normative constraint³⁴ has immediate relevance to the kind of language-learning situation described by Sellars in the passages from *Science and Metaphysics* quoted in the previous section. For the most basic forms of the “colour-shape language game,” for example, learning to utter words like “green” and “cube” in the presence of green things and cubes, are simply versions, albeit more demanding, of the kind of sorting exercise described above. When a child who has been taught to utter the word “green” in response to the green sphere and the green cone goes on to utter “green” in response to the green cube, it is as though she is putting it in a pile with the sphere and the cone. So in this case, too, we can say that her behaviour involves the recognition of the situation as calling for her utterance of “green.” But we need not suppose that this requires her to grasp something about the situation which constitutes a reason for the utterance. She need not, for example, grasp that the cube is green, or that it is the same

³³ Although I am drawing a sharp boundary here between human and animal behaviour, my labels “human” and “animal” might be better understood as picking out paradigms of human and animal behaviour (say, the normal intelligent child on the one hand, and the laboratory rat on the other). While I am inclined to think that there is in fact a sharp boundary, I do not want to rule out the possibility that some of the “higher” animals, for example primates, might behave in ways which partially approximate to paradigmatically human behaviour, and that we might want to explain that behaviour in terms of the “primitive normativity” invoked here. That possibility is explored by Olga Sultanescu and Kristin Andrews (2013), who draw on the notion of primitive normativity, as presented in Ginsborg (2011, 2011b), to account for pointing gestures in apes. Christine Korsgaard describes animal behaviour more generally (fleeing, chasing, mate-seeking and the like) as involving “a primitively normative response, an automatic sense that a certain action is called for or made appropriate by the representation” (2004, 84). However, on the notion of primitive normativity I am proposing, its primary application is to human beings, and we could have reason to ascribe it to animal behaviour only—if at all—in special cases like those described by Sultanescu and Andrews.

³⁴ I will speak of the “recognition” of normative constraint even though all that is necessary, in order for her sorting response to be intelligent in the distinctive human way I have in mind, is that the child have the capacity to recognize her response as normatively constrained. The point here parallels McDowell's point, mentioned above, that it is the capacity to reason about her response, and not actual reasoning, which makes someone's behaviour on a given occasion a case of responding to a reason as such.

colour as the objects earlier associated with the vocable "green." To put the point another way, she need not be aware of anything which tells her to say "green," or clues her in as to the appropriateness of saying "green." She can simply grasp the appropriateness of "green" to her present situation, without needing to have in her view anything to which she can appeal to justify its appropriateness to the situation.

Now, in the previous section I suggested that Sellars' concept-acquisition question could be put as a question about how the child who has been taught to utter "green" in the presence of green cones, spheres and cylinders can know, in the presence of a green cube, that she should utter "green" here as well. Sellars' answer to that question is to appeal to guidance by non-conceptual sense-impressions associated with the presence of green things, which "guide" or "cue" the child in the subsequent utterance of "green." Does the suggestion I have made offer a better response to Sellars' question? It might seem that it does not answer Sellars' question at all, since—in contrast to Sellars' non-conceptual sense-impressions—we cannot appeal to it to explain why the child says "green" rather than, say, "blue" on seeing the cube. If the question is why the child goes on from the teaching she has previously received regarding the use of "green" in the particular way she does rather than, say, in some non-standard way suggestive of her understanding it to mean *grue*, then the appeal to her recognition of primitive normativity does not help. The question is just pushed back to the question of why she finds "green" rather than "blue" appropriate in the new situation.

But this is to mistake the role that the recognition of primitive normativity plays in my account. I am not suggesting that the child's recognition of the appropriateness of her response explains why her previous training leads her to say "green" rather than "blue" when she sees the cube, and more generally why she responds to language-training in the way that she does rather than in some non-standard *grue*-like way. That fact, I am assuming, is to be explained in the same way that we would explain why, after being rewarded a certain number of times for pecking at a green light, a pigeon acquires a disposition to peck preferentially at green lights rather than blue ones. We do not need to account for it by appealing to any kind of personal-level awareness of the appropriateness of "green" as compared to, say, "blue," but can instead rest with the assumption of what Quine calls an innate "quality space" or "sense of similarity," of a kind which can also be hypothesized in animals.³⁵ What the recognition of normativity provides, on my account, is not a different kind of explanation of why she says "green" rather than "blue" from the explanation we might give in the case of a parrot trained to make the same noises, but a different way of understanding what her saying "green" amounts to. It allows us to make sense of her response as something different in kind from the behaviour of a trained animal, so that we can think of what she does in the "colour-shape language game" as learning the meaning of a word or as coming to possess a concept, as opposed to simply acquiring a disposition like that of the pigeon.

³⁵ See for example Quine (1969).

Now Sellars assumes that, in order for the child's behaviour to count as word-learning or concept-acquisition, we have to think of it as guided by something which tells the child what she ought to say. In other words, we have to think of the child as grasping something like a reason for saying "green" when, after having heard "green" associated with the green sphere and the green cone, she is now presented with what is in fact a green cube. That is what motivates the question of how the child knows that the appropriate response to the green cube is to say "green." If we cannot give an answer to that question in terms of something which guides her behaviour, then we cannot distinguish between her behaviour and what Sellars calls "discrimination behaviour" of the type which can be acquired by flatworms and encouraged in white rats" (1968, 17). My proposal, however, allows us to answer that question in a way which does not require appeal to something which guides her or tells her what to say. She counts as knowing what to say—as opposed to merely being disposed to say what she does—because, in responding as she does, she is in a position to see her response as called for by the situation. We can thus think of her use of "green" as manifesting genuine understanding, while at the same time explaining the fact that it is "green" rather than "blue" that she comes out with, along the same lines that we explain sorting behaviour in non-human animals.

I am suggesting, then, that we answer Sellars' question, "Why does the perceiver *conceptually represent* a red (blue, etc.) rectangular (circular, etc.) object in the presence of an object having these qualities?" (1968, 18), by replying: "Because she is in a position to recognize the object as normatively constraining her response to it." This answer addresses the question in a way which takes seriously the need Sellars sees to account for our acquisition of conceptual capacities. On the account I have given, we acquire conceptual capacities in the first instance by acquiring dispositions to produce distinctive responses to the various kinds of objects around us: paradigmatically, verbal responses of the kind figuring in Sellars' "colour-shape language game." The worry that this does not count as the acquisition of conceptual capacities, but only of discriminative dispositions, is addressed by pointing out that, in human children, the responses are not just bits of behaviour, nor even just bits of behaviour informed by some kind of consciousness of the objects being responded to, but bits of behaviour informed by a consciousness of the object as making the behaviour appropriate. Understanding a child's discriminative responses as involving this kind of normative attitude allows us to understand her acquisition of a reliable disposition to respond in this way to green things as amounting to the acquisition of at least some rudimentary form of the concept *green*.

It might be objected here that the child who has learned only the very basic form of the colour-shape language game so far described, does not possess the concept *green* even in a rudimentary form. Even if we supplement the game by supposing that she not only responds to objects by uttering "green" and "cube" but also responds to utterances of "green" and "cube" by pointing to or bringing the corresponding objects—something which in any case children typically learn to do in the course of learning

the game as Sellars describes it—this still, according to the objection, fails to include something which is essential for the language-game to have a properly conceptual character. This is that the child have a capacity to connect words like “green” and “cube” in whole utterances as in “some cubes are green” and, relatedly, to use them in inferential contexts, as when one infers (wrongly, in this instance) from “that is a cube” to “that is green.”³⁶ One impetus for an objection along these lines might be the Kantian thought that concepts are essentially “predicates of possible judgments,” where that thought is understood as implying that we possess concepts only to the extent that we can combine them in accordance with forms of judgement along the lines specified in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Or it might be held, drawing less directly on Kant, that concepts are essentially constituted by their role in practices of reasoning. Either way, according to this objection, we are not in a position to think of the child as possessing conceptual capacities at all unless we think of her as possessing a great many conceptual capacities whose exercises stand in systematic relations to one another.

One possible reply is that we can, while remaining within the spirit of the account I am proposing, raise the bar for concept-possession. For we can draw on the model of dispositions to behaviour informed by the awareness of normativity to show how, as the child’s behaviour becomes more complex, the more demanding requirements for concept-possession can be met without any radical break from the original account. A child who is disposed to respond to cows both with “Cow!” and with “Moo!” will also, under normal circumstances, acquire a disposition to respond to “what does the cow say?” with “Moo!” and, on occasion, prompted or not, to come out with “Cows moo.” And as she engages in these more complex behaviours, the awareness of normativity which characterizes her responding to the cow with, say, “Cow!” will carry over to these other responses. She will thus hear “What does the cow say?” as calling for the response “Moo!” and, when she herself says “cows moo,” hear the occurrences of “cow” and the “moo” as appropriate to each other in a way that, say “sheep” and “moo” are not. As her behaviour increases in complexity, including more verbal responses to other verbal responses, and more combinations of items in her verbal repertoire, it will become increasingly plausible to think of her both as combining concepts in judgements, and as carrying out inferences from one judgement to another.

There is, however, a deeper reply available, which goes further towards addressing the Kantian motivation behind the objection. This is that we can accept Kant’s idea of concepts as essentially predicates of possible judgements, while denying that a judgement has to consist in a combination of concepts according to the forms of judgement laid out in the first *Critique*. We can draw instead on Kant’s broader conception of judgement in the third *Critique* as a matter of “thinking the particular as contained under the universal,” and so as accommodating, as genuine judgements, simple

³⁶ Relatedly, it might be objected along lines suggested by Sellars (1963, §19) that in order to have the concept *green* she needs to have the concept of standard conditions for telling the colours of things. But I think there is a rudimentary concept of green which can be ascribed even where this condition is not met.

demonstrative claims such as “This is green,” “This is a cube” and—to take Kant’s own paradigm of the exercise of judgement as such—“This is beautiful.”³⁷ Even before the child has got to the stage of responding to questions or putting words together in sentences, we can think of her utterances of “green” or “cow” as amounting to judgements, albeit in a rudimentary form. What the child is missing, before she can relate concepts according to the forms of judgement, is not, on this understanding of Kant’s view, the capacity to judge or to conceptualize as such. Nor is it the capacity to have representations which are intentionally directed towards, as opposed to merely caused by, the particular objects which affect her senses. Rather, it is the capacity to recognize rational relations between states of affairs which she judges to hold. What she acquires, in becoming able to make a judgement like “All bodies are heavy” or “The sun warms the stone,” is the capacity to recognize that that something’s being a body is a reason for judging that it is heavy, or that if the sun is shining, then the stone will get warm.³⁸

I have been arguing that we can make sense of empirical concept-possession in a way which does not presuppose the possession of rationality, with a view to showing that the kind of non-rational normative constraint which figures in my account of empirical concept-possession offers a more satisfactory way of spelling out the normative relation between mind and world than McDowell’s rational relation between perceptual experience and belief. However, it might be objected that my view fails to cut against McDowell’s because it applies only to a different, and weaker, notion of concept-possession. McDowell says in “Conceptual Capacities in Perception” that “the connection between conceptual capacities and rationality is a stipulation” (2006, 132; see also 2006, 129), and, since I am arguing that concept-possession does not presuppose rationality, this suggests that I cannot be talking about concept-possession in the sense which he has in mind.

³⁷ I develop this thought in Ginsborg (2006b).

³⁸ What I say here runs counter to the commonly accepted view that it is unification of empirical representations in accordance with the categories that, in providing our experience with “relation to an object,” accounts for the intentionality or object-directed nature of those representations. But I think that it is a mistake to identify Kant’s concern with the relation of representations to an object in the *Critique of Pure Reason* with the problem of the intentionality of our empirical representations, that is, the question of how those representations can be directed towards, as opposed to merely caused by, the objects presented to us in perception. Rather, as suggested in the text, I take the role of the categories in securing objective unity among our representations to be a matter of making it possible for one judgement to serve as ground for another. While I cannot here argue the point in full, a relevant consideration is that Kant’s primary concern in the first *Critique* is not with the possibility of empirical knowledge but rather with the possibility of *a priori* synthetic knowledge. So when Kant argues that the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, his point is not to address a problem about the possibility of perceptual experience or of empirical knowledge more generally, but to use the dependence of experience on the categories to argue for their objective validity, and hence for our entitlement to the synthetic *a priori* propositions in which they figure. Even though it might be a consequence of Kant’s argument for the possibility of *a priori* knowledge in the first *Critique* that even our simple empirical demonstrative judgements depend on the categories, he does not appeal to the categories in order to explain the intentional character of such judgements, and, if they do involve the categories, it does not follow that the categories are responsible specifically for their intentional character. I say more about this in Ginsborg (2006).

Now in the context in which McDowell makes this stipulation, the only alternative he offers is to understand conceptual capacities as capacities of “non-rational animals,” and the only animals which he considers under that heading are non-human animals. So he does not seem to consider the possibility which I am trying to defend, of capacities which are, so to speak, on the “rational” side of the divide between rational and non-rational animals, in that they belong only to species of animals which are capable of rationality (that is, to humans), but which can be made sense of without appeal to the idea of rationality. But elsewhere he does allude to the cognitive capacities not only of “non-rational animals” but also of “pre-rational human children,” claiming that the perceptual knowledge of rational animals (that is adult humans) is a “sophisticated species of a genus that is also instantiated more primitively in non-rational animals and pre-rational children” (2011, 20). He could thus object that my account applies only to a primitive species of conceptual capacity to be found in children, not the sophisticated species operative in adult human cognition. While he might be willing to concede the possibility of what I am calling primitive normativity, and even to recognize something of value in it, as helping us make sense of a developmental stage which humans go through on the way to being fully rational, he would reject the more ambitious suggestion I am making, that the recognition of this normative yet non-rational constraint continues, after the attainment of rationality, to play a role in the cognitive lives of adult humans.³⁹ He would claim that, while what I am describing applies to a certain developmental stage, that stage is superseded once rationality (more precisely, the responsiveness to reasons as such characteristic of adult human rationality) has been attained. There is no more reason to think of ourselves as retaining a capacity for the kind of non-rational yet normative attitude to the world which I am ascribing to children, than there is to think of ourselves as retaining the kind of perceptual relation to the world characteristic of the non-human animals from which we have evolved.

I will make two brief points in response. First, while I accept McDowell’s view that we should not think of our adult cognitive capacities as continuing to include, as an essentially unaltered component, the kind of perceptual and cognitive relatedness to the world characteristic of non-human animals, I do not think that the case of children is parallel. The idea that we have a distinct species of knowledge, or of sensory relatedness to the world, from that of animals is plausible in part because we literally constitute a distinct species—distinct, that is, from all the other species of living thing to which we attribute cognitive and perceptual capacities. But human children are obviously not a different species from human adults, and even though the acquisition of language and rationality represents a kind of transformation, there is no reason why the capacities whose exercise makes that transformation possible should not continue to be available—and to be exercised—once the transformation has been accomplished.

³⁹ In fact McDowell offered a response very much along these lines at the Copenhagen workshop where this paper was first presented.

Second, there is reason to think that we continue to need the kind of capacities implicated in the acquisition of concepts and language—and thus, if my account of those capacities is correct, that we continue to rely on the recognition of primitive normativity—even once we have attained the status of competent language-users. McDowell himself writes of the “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” (1996, 40) suggesting that this reflection takes the form of “ensuring that our empirical concepts and conceptions pass muster” (1996, 40), and, when reflection recommends, of “refashioning” and “reshaping” them (1996, 13). Presumably, in the revising of our concepts to accommodate newly encountered objects—perhaps the revision of scientific concepts like *mammal* or *acid* to accommodate new discoveries about anatomy or the structure of matter, or the revision of everyday concepts like *chair* and *clock* to accommodate new inventions—a substantial role is played by our capacities to recognize reasons, capacities not exercised in the simple cases of sorting and language-learning mentioned earlier in this section. But one might argue that there is also an ineliminable role for the sorting capacities exercised in those simple cases: for the capacity to see, for example, that a newly discovered fossil skull should be grouped with early mammalian rather than early reptilian skulls, or that deckchairs and beanbags should both be sorted together with what we have up to now been calling “chairs,” even though hammocks and large cushions should not. If this is right, and if, as I have argued, the exercise of these capacities involves the capacity to appreciate the objects themselves as normatively constraining our sorting behaviour, then the capacity to recognize primitive normativity continues to be required as a condition of our “ensuring” that our empirical concepts continue to “pass muster.”⁴⁰ And as McDowell recognizes, that in turn is a condition of our counting as possessors of empirical concepts—and concepts more generally—in the first place.

V

McDowell, as noted in section I, understands empiricism as requiring that the world serve as a normative constraint on our thought, and he assumes that this is equivalent to the more specific “minimal empiricist” requirement that the world present us, via experience, with reasons for belief. I have been suggesting a different way to think of the world as normatively constraining thought. On this suggestion, the world constrains thought by constraining our sorting behaviour—paradigmatically the kind of sorting behaviour manifested in our learning of verbal responses—and in so doing

⁴⁰ I argue further in Ginsborg (2011b) that appeal to primitive normativity is needed in order to avert the kind of sceptical threat to meaning and concept-possession posed by Kripke’s Wittgenstein, but since McDowell does not consider the sceptical problem to be genuine (see e.g. McDowell 1993a) he would not accept this as a response.

constrains the psychological activity through which we acquire and maintain our empirical concepts. Our empirical thought is answerable to the world not just in the sense that our empirical judgements depend for their correctness on what the empirical facts are, but, more fundamentally, in the sense that our empirical concepts depend for their adequacy on which objects are presented to us. I have presented this account as an answer to a question which I think McDowell's own version of empiricism fails to address, that is to say the question of how empirical concepts are possible. A satisfactory empiricism requires that we can explain not only how experiences, conceived as conceptual, warrant beliefs, but also how experiences can be conceived as conceptual in the first place. My account attempts to offer such an explanation. We can explain what it is to see that the cube is green, without taking for granted the antecedent possession of conceptual capacities, in terms of our disposition, given appropriate training, to produce a distinctive (paradigmatically verbal) response to objects that are green, and to do so in a way which involves the recognition of that very response as appropriate to the object eliciting it.

How does my account fare in connection with the other difficulty I raised for McDowell's account, that the passive character of experience, as he conceives it, debars experiences from rationally—and hence normatively—constraining beliefs? It avoids the difficulty by construing experiences as active rather than passive. More precisely, the items which correspond on my account to McDowell's perceptual experiences, that is, cases of seeing that things are thus and so, are doxastic or committive: seeing that the cube is green already involves commitment to the cube's being green, or taking the cube to be green.⁴¹ This means that experiences can serve, just as on McDowell's view, as reasons for belief. The subject's perceptual experience of "the cube is green" involves judgement that the cube is green, and so can rationalize further judgement, for example, the judgement that the number of green cubes in the room is greater than or equal to one. So, while the perceptual experiences themselves have content in virtue of a relation to the world which is normative without being rational, other cases of taking things to be thus and so, that is, cases of non-perceptual belief that things are thus and so, have content in virtue of rational relations to perceptual experience.

In taking this approach to the difficulty, I am endorsing Davidson's view that seeing that the cube is green, is, in the normal case, also taking the cube to be green or believing it to be green. But my account avoids coherentism by denying that the relation between the green cube and the episode of seeing the cube to be green is a merely causal one. Our capacity to see a cube to be green depends on our capacity to sort the cube with other green things, and more specifically, to see the cube as calling for, or normatively constraining, our sorting it in the way we do. So when we see that the cube is green we are, at least potentially, recognizing a normative relation between our psychological response to the cube—that is, the psychological episode which is the seeing of

the cube to be green—and the cube itself. That psychological episode qualifies as a seeing of the cube to be green, as opposed to a merely discriminative response to its greenness, precisely because it incorporates the recognition of itself as normatively constrained by the cube. But this normative constraint is different from the constraint, via non-conceptual sense-impressions, invoked in the Myth of the Given. For as I argued in section IV, objects do not exert their normative constraint on our responses to them by giving us some item of knowledge from which we can somehow tell in advance how to respond to the object, or what to believe about it, even though we lack any concepts for grasping that knowledge. Rather they simply put us in a position to see how to respond to them, the way that the objects in the spontaneous sorting case put the child in a position to see where the pillbox should go, and the green cube—in conjunction with the other objects to which "green" has been applied—puts her in a position to see the appropriateness of saying "green." As on McDowell's view, then, objects do not "speak to us"—do not "tell us" how we are to respond to them—unless we have learned a human language. But we do not need to have learned a human language in order for objects to *show* us how we should respond to them and, in consequence, how we should represent them as being.⁴²

I have been emphasizing my differences with McDowell, but I will end by drawing attention to a point of agreement. A central feature of McDowell's conception of the relation between language and thought is the idea, ascribed by Charles Taylor to Herder in a disagreement with Condillac, that "there is no making sense of the idea of naked thought lying behind linguistic clothing" (1987, 106).⁴³ Linguistic behaviour is not a process or activity distinct from thinking itself, through which trained speakers can convey independently existing thoughts to other speakers who possess the cognitive apparatus to decode it, but rather something which we must understand as already informed by thought, as, say, making determinate assertions whose content is there to be immediately perceived by someone who understands the language.⁴⁴ His view of perceptual experience as informed by concepts is, I think, parallel to this conception of linguistic behaviour. Perceptual experience is not something which precedes the entertaining of thoughts and which then exists alongside them, as a distinct stratum in consciousness. Rather, perceptual experience is already a kind of entertaining of thoughts, or at least of conceptual content, where this content is delivered by the world to someone who has become able to receive it through having mastered a language.

My own picture borrows from McDowell's the idea that linguistic behaviour and perceptual experience respectively must be understood as "already informed" by

⁴¹ Which does not mean—although this is to raise a large question which cannot be fully addressed here—that we cannot, in the special case of known perceptual illusion, disavow the commitment.

⁴² Given the central role of verbal responses in the child's acquisition of sorting dispositions, and hence of concepts, objects typically show us how to respond to them by showing us what verbal behaviour is appropriate to them. So the learning of a language plays an essential role in the acquisition of our capacity to think about objects. But this is not an objection to the present point, since the contrast with McDowell, which I am emphasizing here, is that language mastery is not a prior condition of our recognizing the normative constraint imposed by objects on our responses to them.

⁴³ See also McDowell (1989).

⁴⁴ See in particular McDowell (1981).

thought. And I agree with McDowell that, for someone who has mastered a language, the world presents itself in experience as already conceptually determinate, just as another person's verbal behaviour (in that language) presents itself to her as that person's saying things with determinate content. But I think there is more to be said than McDowell allows about what it is for linguistic behaviour and perceptual experience to be conceptually informed in these determinate ways. For, as I have tried to argue, there is a more fundamental way in which behaviour and experience can be informed by thought, namely through being informed by the consciousness of their own appropriateness to the objects which cause them. This consciousness of normativity in one's responses to objects—a consciousness in virtue of which those responses are constituted as expressive of thinking—can be seen as yielding an account, at a more basic level, of how experience and verbal behaviour can be intrinsically contentful in the way that McDowell takes them to be.⁴⁵

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PART II

The Epistemology of Empirical Knowledge