

“Background and Implications of McDowell's revised theory of perception (2009)”

In this paper I critically assess John McDowell's paper “Avoiding the Myth of the Given” (2009) (AMG) and its theory of epistemological openness to the world. I trace its motivations back to Kantian, Sellarsian and Aristotelean roots. I argue that McDowell subscribes to a kind of Holistic Theory of Rationality (HTR). To explain the HTR, I will analyze the Sellarsian notions of the “Manifest Image,” the “Myth of the Given” and the “logical space of reasons.”

I argue that the holistic nature of McDowell's theory gives it particular properties that put it in need of conservatism, because all the elements of the theory “hang together” – i.e. cohere – in a dangerous fashion. I argue that McDowell cannot afford big changes without upsetting the apple-cart.

With this in mind, I shall assess the merits and demerits of AMG, and its modified theory of perceptual content, as an attempted conservative reform of HTR. I want to argue that, taken independently, AMG is a good and important change, but taken holistically it is non-conservative, and disruptive, of the McDowellian picture. Thus, if we wish to proceed with the McDowellian path, we are led to a choice between rejecting the local reform (and retreating back to an earlier version) or demanding further explanations of its global implications.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE BACKGROUND OF MCDOWELL'S THEORY

In “Mind and World” (1994; henceforth M&W), McDowell has provided a fresh new theory, with Kantian, Aristotelean, Wittgensteinian and Sellarsian roots (with a bit of Hegel added to the mix), that attempts to explain how human beings (*qua* “minds”) are capable of being directly – and rationally – connected to the world (at least when we are not deceived). The solution is found, according to McDowell, in seeing our thinking, perception and language as being constrained by our species nature, which is that of rational animals. In other words, our rationality – which is the faculty of “spontaneity” in the Kantian sense, or “normativity” in the Sellarsian sense – pervades, and informs, shapes, and is “passively actualized” in, our perceptual capacities.

This basic theory, of M&W, I call McDowell 1.0.

McDowell has continued to develop and refine this theory, but he has not, to my knowledge, strayed too far from the chosen path. His most significant addition to, or reform of, his Big Theory – which I want to call the “Holistic Theory of Rationality” (HTR) – is encapsulated in some of his later essays, of which I will focus on “Avoiding the Myth of the Given” (2009; henceforth AMG).

This new formulation of the old theory, I call McDowell 1.5.

McDowell 1.5 maintains the global, holistic structure of McDowell 1.0, but introduces some minor local changes. I will argue that the the relationship between the faculties of perception (aka. sensibility) and rationality (aka. judgement), as found in McDowell 1.5, is more palatable, and more

plausible, than the original formulation in McDowell 1.0. At the same time, it has some dangerous implications. But before we get into the nuts and bolts of McDowell 1.5, let us dig into the background of the “Holistic Theory of Rationality” underlying McDowell's analysis.

To do so, let us first look at what the “Myth of the Given” means for McDowell.

2. THE MYTH OF THE GIVEN AND THE HOLISTIC THEORY OF RATIONALITY

The Myth of the Given – the view to be rejected, according to McDowell and Sellars – is the idea that experience can, and does, give us reasons for acting that are not, themselves, grounded in the “logical space of reasons.” But in order for experience to be able to ground judgements in a non-arbitrary, non-question-begging and non-magical manner, the “givenness” of experience must come in a *form* that is *not* given to reason from *outside of reason*. Thus there can be no “Given.”

Avoiding the Myth of the Given is tantamount to defending the Holistic Theory of Rationality and its Minimal Empiricism, and the only way to do that is by accepting conceptualism, claims McDowell. **Avoiding mythical givenness grounds good empiricism**, which, in turns, grounds the HTR. All the parts form an interrelated whole that stands as a bulwark against incoherentism:

“Givenness in the sense of the Myth would be an availability for cognition to subjects whose getting what is supposedly Given to them does not draw on capacities required for the sort of cognition in question. If that is what Givenness would be, it is straightforward that it must be something mythical. Having something Given to one would be being given something for knowledge without needing to have capacities that would be necessary for one to be able to know it. And that is incoherent” (AMG: 256)

Johan Gersel (2014: p.3) argues that McDowell sometimes seems to be begging the question when he accuses other theories of failing to live up to the requirements of McDowell's strict standards:

“If there is no more to the Myth of the Given than the trivial point that we must be consistent in our theory of what is given in experience, then the mythical status of the Myth is surely incontrovertible. However, ... [w]e won't be lead towards conceptualism simply by our need for avoiding the Myth on this reading of it. McDowell's recent interlocutors typically claim to endorse Minimal Empiricism yet deny conceptualism (Travis 2007 & 2013, Kalderon 2011 and Brewer 2011).” (Gersel, p.2)

Thus one can possibly avoid the myth without accepting HTR, *tout court*. But McDowell, of course,

cannot accept this. His reasons and arguments are complex. One reason, at least, is the nature of McDowell's theory as a holistic, coherentist and self-referential system. Any system whose parts are interrelated in such a fashion will veer towards tautologies and, at times, question-begging.

This is not necessarily a problem for its truth, but it makes it difficult to engage in dialogue sometimes, since every deviation, or call for local change, is seen as self-evidently false. Nor is McDowell wrong in insisting on self-consistency, because all local changes disturb the holistic pattern. It is to McDowell's credit, in AMG, that he is willing to accommodate Travis's criticisms, but, as we shall see, this leads to precisely the sort of problems that we would expect for him.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. What is the Myth of the Given *good for*?

At the bottom of it all, McDowell is trying to explain how and why both radical philosophical skepticism and naturalism are misguided, and why common sense is basically true.

The defence of common sense is basically a defence of the idea that human beings have free will and that they can perceive the real world – i.e. be “open” to the facts themselves (but *non-mythically*). He wishes to preserve a realm of free human beings, normative arguments and rationality, even more strongly than Sellars, from whom he borrows the notion of “the logical space of reasons.” From this Sellarsian-Wittgensteinian-Kantian basis, he is also trying to push back the encroachments of reductionist “scientism” and its attempts to *naturalize* the realm of concepts.

While McDowell is not willing to let go of naturalism altogether – he claims to be only opposing so-called “bald naturalism” - it is clear that McDowell wishes to distance itself from the extreme naturalistic prejudices of much of analytical philosophy (including his mentors, Sellars, Davidson and others). He accuses naturalism of stripping human rationality of reality altogether, or at least reducing it to causal explanations. He accuses this approach of denying common sense, and of putting in mortal danger the very notion of normatively binding reasons for human action.

3. BACK TO SELLARS: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF THE “HTR”¹

In order to understand what is at stake here, we will take a short look at Wilfrid Sellars's philosophy, because this forms an important backdrop to McDowell's theory. It will become clear that McDowell is a follower – but not an orthodox one – of Sellars.

Wilfrid Sellars was a system-builder, whose work attempted to connect all the different branches of philosophy into a singular project, however complex, and it seems that John McDowell has followed Sellars in this manner, as well, although one difference is that McDowell's philosophy

¹ In this chapter, I make use of two online articles by Sellars, and two YouTube-lectures by McDowell's commentators, neither of which have page numbers, for obvious reasons.

– at least in *Mind and World*, and related papers – seems to circle around a more limited set of problems, specifically those around the relationship between perception (the sensible realm) and reason (the conceptual capacity).

But the scope of these problems is largely anticipated, and foreshadowed, by the Sellarsian criticism of the Myth of the Given, and those people who have responded, critically and favourable, to the Sellarsian challenge. Thus the importance of Sellars can hardly be overstated.

But it is *not* my intention to go deeply into Sellarsian theory. We only need to understand a few things in order to understand McDowell's project of the holistic theory of rationality and overcoming the Myth of the Given. After all, even the title of AMG is a direct reference to Sellars.

There are major similarities between Sellars and McDowell.

In his “Autobiographical Reflections” (1975), Wilfrid Sellars writes that, when developing his theory, he wanted “a functional theory of concepts which would make their role in reasoning, rather than a supposed origin in experience, their primary feature. The influence of Kant was to play a decisive role. [...] [T]he solution of the puzzle lay in correctly *locating the conceptual order in the causal order*.” (unpaged; my italics)

It is clear how this informs M&W and AMG. McDowell's entire epistemological work is an attempt to address this problematic: how is it possible, for concepts, to have a privileged (non-naturalistic) “role in reasoning” while simultaneously have “a supposed origin in experience”?

And how does the “conceptual order” - governed by the logical space of reasons – relate to the “causal order” - governed by the logical space of natural law?

These topics spill into what Sellars called the “Manifest” and the “Scientific” images.

The point of the division between the Manifest Image – the perspective of educated common sense – and the Scientific Image – the perspective of objective science – is to differentiate between two competing but seemingly true worldviews/perspectives. The former is the common sense realm of normativity. The latter is the privileged world of naturalist understanding. Both are meaningful.

At the end of the day, Sellars was a naturalist, who believed in the Scientific Image, at least as far as being able to say (1975) that “the mind as that which thinks is identical with the brain.”

McDowell, *also*, identifies himself as a naturalist, but there are major differences in the way they go about doing this. Sellars saw the origins of the Scientific Image in historical terms:

“[W]hile the main outlines of what I shall call the manifest image took shape in the mists of pre-history, the scientific image, promissory notes apart, has taken shape before our very eyes.” Historically speaking, the scientific image is the image of the *modern* era, while the manifest image has been a part of educated common sense, and philosophical debate, ever since *pre-history*.

“[T]he philosopher is confronted by two projections of man-in-the-world on the human understanding [,] equally public, equally non-arbitrary, [...] and he cannot shirk the attempt to see

how they fall together in one stereoscopic view.” (Sellars 1962)

Sellars attempts this **stereoscopic vision**. It means leaving room for both while trying to understand how they relate to each other. McDowell is also careful to try to bridge this gap - the division between *normativity* and *causality* - while letting it, at the same time, remain open.

The dualism is essentially unsolvable: the manifest image is the realm of normativity, while the scientific image is the realm of causality. There is also an evolutionary-emergentist anthropological account: the normative realm of the manifest image is the species nature of human beings, while the causative realm of the scientific image is, as it were, *all the rest* (of nature).

We know that McDowell makes much of this view. But Sellars (1962), already, supports this view, by saying: “The conclusion is difficult to avoid that the transition from pre-conceptual patterns of behaviour to conceptual thinking was a holistic one, a jump to a level of awareness which is irreducibly new, a jump which was the coming into being of man. There is a profound truth in this conception of a radical difference in level between man and his precursors.”

This “radical difference in level between man and his precursors” is emphasized by McDowell, because it not only grants human beings special ontological and epistemological status in relation to the rest of nature, but also grounds, in this dualism, the whole Aristotelean-Kantian philosophical approach towards normativity, space of reasons, sensibility and spontaneity.

So, by and large, McDowell picks up from Sellars the separation of the logical space of reasons from the logical space of nature. But what are the main differences?

James O'Shea, in his lecture “Sellars's Theory of Conceptual Change” (2014), points out that one major difference is that McDowell thinks that 'truth', 'knowledge' and 'meaning' are “basic relations to the world”; Sellars does not. This “basic relation” is surely present McDowell's notion of the *direct openness to the world*, which is introduced in M&W and reformed in AMG.

According to O'Shea, Sellars would consider “direct” awareness of the facts of experience as a *form* of the Myth of the Given, rather than as a *rejection* of it. He argues that this is a major difference between Sellarsian “nominalistic naturalism” and McDowell's “naturalized Platonism.”

Also, for Sellars, sensory content is **non-conceptual**. (For McDowell, it is obviously conceptual.) And for Sellars, the Manifest Image is “approximately true, but **strictly speaking false**” (1962: my emphasis). (For McDowell, when one is not deceived, it is, *sensu stricto*, true.)

O'Shea: “In Sellars's view, inquiry is supposed to force us to recognize that the conceptual structure, in which our Manifest perceptual judgments come, is *not* ultimately adequate [to the facts] – and, in that sense, the world's facts do not impress themselves on our sensory receptivity in its current shape”, even though there might be functional continuity and coherence (or perhaps consilience) between them, and between the Manifest and the (ideal) Scientific Image. McDowell, of course, would reject as the “scientism” any implication that the Scientific Image is “better.”

Both McDowell and Sellars agree that the Scientific Image has become the dominant paradigm of philosophers. To use Sellars's own metaphor, “language has become self-consciously militant” against the common sense conceptual structures of the Manifest Image.

Sellars argues that while there is no easy naturalistic reduction to be had – hence the rejection, also, of the Myth of the Given - the Scientific Image is a kind of *ideal* towards which we are moving: to repeat, the Manifest Image is “approximately true, but strictly speaking false.”

McDowell insists, with Sellars, as William deVries puts it, that “[a]s long as we are making progress on the objective causal story, we can retain our presumption of the transcendental right,” but, unlike Sellars, he doesn't help us to understand the causal and evolutionary underpinnings of the transcendental right, without which the Manifest Image will be “strictly speaking false.” (2014)

The McDowellian picture promises self-evidently veridical at-home-in-the-worldness. Sellars is open to the possibility that such at-home-in-the-worldness might prove illusory.

According to deVries: “It is a principle of Sellars's transcendental naturalism that transcendental structures must be reflected in causal structures, even if there is no reduction *of* the transcendental *to* the causal.” (2014) On the other hand, for McDowell, it is not clear if normativity derives *at all* from, or is reflected in, causal structures - except in the sense that rationality somehow ultimately derives from our first (Darwinian) and second (Gadamerian) natures. I agree with Daniel Dwyer (2013: p.2), that “[w]ithin this [neo-Kantian] framework, according to which conceptual spontaneity and sensible receptivity remain two fundamentally different faculties, there is no room to highlight the gradual and developmental way in which conceptual capacities emerge”.

McDowell is primarily defending the “Manifest Image” - i.e. defending its self-evident truthfulness - from the encroachments of the “Scientific Image” of man, while Sellars was open to the possibility that Manifest Image could be “approximately true, but strictly speaking false.”

Thus we can see McDowell's work as both *in line* and *out of joint* with Sellars's work.

We need not delve any deeper into these Sellarsian waters, since we have learnt enough. This Kantian-Aristotelean perspective, which McDowell takes up from Sellars (but refines it further towards anti-reductionistic naturalism), informs his holistic theory of rationality (HTR).

We have seen some differences between Sellars and McDowell. Let us now, with this in mind, turn back to the latest version of McDowell's theory, in AMG, where the “direct openness to the world” is defended. We shall analyse how the latest version of his theory – HTR – holds up.

4. CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN MCDOWELL'S “HTR”

The following seem to be truism:

1. There is a profound *continuity* between M&W (1.0) and AMG (1.5).
2. AMG proposes local and limited, but profoundly *non-conservative*, changes to M&W.
3. This creates a contradiction: *either* we should modify the global system *or* repudiate the local innovations. (Later I propose some ways we could try and solve this problem.)

A) THE CONTINUITIES ARE PROFOUND AND CONSERVATIVE

We do not need to dwell upon the profound continuities. They simply refer to HTR, as we know. For the sake of summary, here is a list of some of the most important elements of HTR:

- The vindication of common-sense realism with its direct being-in-the-worldness
- The conceptual capacities are seen to operate (are “passively actualized”) in perception
- The Kantian framework of the interplay of the faculties of sensibility and understanding
- Avoiding the “Myth of the Given” while *also* grounding the “logical space of reasons”
- The understanding of human beings as rational animals (viz. Kant, Aristotle, Sellars)
- The recognition that rational animals are *different* (also perceptually) from other animals

In AMG, the vision of the HTR remains fundamental: “[R]ational capacities are pervasively in play in human epistemic life” (271), and this “rationality enables knowledgeable judgments” (257). This involves the Sellarsian notion of the “logical space of reasons” (256). The rational animal is the (potentially) knowledgeable human perceiver in touch with the world in its species-specific way. Our “capacities of reason [are] operative even in our unreflective perceptual awareness. [...] Such is the form that animal engagement with the perceptible environment takes in the case of rational animals.” (271-272) All these aspects – Kantianism, Sellarsianism, Aristoteleanism – form an interrelated whole, although one subject to (patient, conservative, quietist) critical review.

To sum up: AMG is fully committed to the holistic theory of rationality (HTR) that M&W implied. As a holistic theory, one cannot change one aspect of it without affecting the others. All local changes must be introduced conservatively, in order to preserve its coherence.

We cannot isolate one aspect of it – like the rationality of our animal nature, or the conceptuality of experience, or the world-revealing nature of perception – without simultaneously modifying the other parts. As with any carefully constructed system, by fiddling with *one* aspect, the rest are affected, too. But McDowell *does* fiddle with an important aspect of his theory.

This causes a disturbance, and thus instability, to his edifice of thought.

B) THE DISCONTINUITIES ARE MINOR BUT DESTABILIZING

As we have seen, McDowell retains, in AMG, the idea of HTR that perception/sensibility is informed/shaped by the “passive actualization” of the rational animal's conceptual capacities.

There is one crucial difference, however: in the earlier doctrine, in M&W, perception was taken to have *propositional* content. He now, in AMG, rejects this view and proposes a version of the Kantian idea that there exists **a unity of form** (or **formal unity**) between the (non-propositional) content of perception and “the content of discursive activity” (AMG: 262).

In the new view, the content of perception is taken to be non-propositional, but in such a *form* as to be always *capable of being taken up* (“*carved out*”), as such, by the faculty of reason.

There is a pre-existing formal unity, guaranteed by our nature (as rational animals), between the non-articulated intuitional content of perception and the articulated discursive content in judgements. There is non-mythical but also non-articulated givenness in perception that is informed *by and for reason*: “The unity of intuitional content *is given*, [but] not a result of our putting significances together.” (AMG: 263) This is a new interpretation of Kant and an attempt to maintain the “a priori” structure of perception (first postulated, of course, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*).

This change is introduced as a result of Travis's criticism of the relationship between perception and reason in M&W. It is thus an answer to critics – a concession, even.

However, this local change seems to problematize McDowell's global theory (HTR), since it makes it difficult to see why the supposed unity of the faculties could not equally plausibly, now, be explained using some *other* theory that McDowell so opposes – say, interpreting non-propositional content as non-conceptual? After all, in the new view, there is something active that *reason adds to intuition*: “articulating goes beyond intuiting” (AMG: 263). Isn't this what his *opponents* say?

In the old view, in M&W, perception was “given” propositionally (although perhaps not in the epistemologically problematic sense denounced by Sellars). After accepting AMG, perception cannot any longer act as a transparent conduit for propositional content, since its content, while still conceptually informed, is *non-propositional* “*raw material*” for *discursive articulation*.

McDowell uses various metaphors to describe the process of “linguistic expression” and “discursive articulation”: A) We “carve out ... from the categorically unified but as yet unarticulated content of the intuition”. B) We “isolate an aspect of the content of the intuition”; C) We “make explicit” what was merely implicit. D) We “put[...] significances together”. (AMG: 263)

The profusion of these metaphors makes it hard to specify the nature of this process. It is not clear if the “carving out of content”, the “isolation of aspects”, the “making explicit” and the “putting significances together” are just *synonyms* (i.e. identical processes), or whether they

represent *different stages* in a complex process whereby the content of perception is transformed into the (articulated and discursive) content of judgement, reason and normativity. And if there is a complex process – which, let us say, begins (stage 1) with the process of “carving out” and/or “isolation”, and ends (stage 2) with the discursive articulation of “putting significances together” - whereby the content of perception has been “made explicit” - we are left to wonder about the precise nature of the “active” and “passive” operations of conceptual capacities in this process.

The process seems to be something like the following:

- 1) Conceptual capacities are *passively* actualized to produce content of perception.
- 2) Conceptual capacities are *actively* used to carve out (aspects of) the content of perception.
- 3) Conceptual capacities are *actively* used to “put significances together” in discursive articulation.

This process seems straightforward enough. (Stages 2 and 3 could be understood as identical under one reading, but this doesn't matter much, since it wouldn't change the fundamental picture.) And it seems to cohere with the HTR articulated in *Mind and World*, with only the precise process of the interplay of the faculties explained in a slightly different, and more lucid, manner. So, it is certainly *possible* to see this as reinforcing, or strengthening, the HTR picture. Under this auspicious and sympathetic reading, the result *is*, indeed, conservative of HTR in all its implications:

1. Every stage of the process (1-3) is determined by conceptual capacities.
2. Thus there is no need for non-conceptual capacities.
3. And our species being as “rational animals” is involved all the way from the primary level of perception to its most sophisticated articulation in language.
4. Thus there is no need – or even room - for non-rational capacities in perception.
5. Thus human beings are seen as fundamentally different from other animals, etc.

But is this a *necessary* picture? Only if we accept the explanation of the interplay of the faculties described above. McDowell wants to cherish the “Kantian conviction that rationality and autonomy are inherently connected notions, and rational autonomy doesn't enter the picture until one is able to treat one's reasons *as such*.” (Gersel: p.9) But the new picture in AMG leaves the door open for alternative explanations. For one, it inches McDowell closer, however slightly, to the language of the **non-conceptualists** and the **skeptical naturalists**.

If perceptual content is no longer taken to be the *same*, but only *formally similar*, to

discursive content, the argument that (human) **reason shapes perception** becomes less obvious. Under the new model, we have two types of content (or perhaps one kind of content under two different attributes): implicit/explicit, unarticulated/articulated, given/put-together.

The implicit set of assumptions – which make AMG cohere with HTR – are the following:

1. Only such perceptual content can be articulated which is formally similar to that of reason.
2. Only such perceptual content can be formally similar to reason which is *shaped* by reason.

The first thesis seems plausible. (Although not beyond criticism.) The latter thesis, however, is very problematic, and we should question it. Doing so opens the door for at least two types of anti-McDowellians: the *non-conceptualists* (who argue for the existence of non-conceptual content in perception) and the *skeptical naturalists* (who argue that the world is not directly perceived but is represented in the mind non-disjunctively, i.e. in a way that is compatible with its being an illusion).

McDowell now holds that “in discursive activity one puts contents together, in a way that can be modelled on stringing meaningful expressions together in discourse literally so called.” (263) The activity is literally *active* in the sense that it organizes, or reorganizes, content. Thus discursive activity seemingly takes something that has different form (or no form), and puts it in a new form (or into form). By “*putting contents together*” and “*stringing... expressions together*” one is clearly *articulating a new formal unity* to where there either was none, or where there was different kind.

This nature of discursive activity “is not how it is with intuitional content. The unity of intuitional content is *given*, not a result of our putting significances together.” (263) In order to pragmatically *make use* of that intuitional unity in “discursive exploitation”, McDowell writes, “one needs to carve out that content from the intuition's unarticulated content.” (*ibid.*) Thus there are two completely different ways – passive and active – that the faculty of reason operates. Does it even make sense to call upon the notion of “conceptuality” to explain *both* types of activity?

He anticipates the obvious retort that follows from this line of argument: “If intuitional content is not discursive, why go on insisting it is conceptual?” (264) I believe his dismissal of this question is all too swift and unsatisfactory. We are led to wonder whether HTR falters.

In other words, after abandoning one of the major glues that held the theory of Mind and World together – namely, that intuitional content *is* discursive (or, what comes to the same thing, that perceptual content is propositional) – why should we not abandon its **pan-conceptualism**?

5. DOES THE NEW THEORY OF PERCEPTION LEAD US TO ABANDON “HTR”?

Let us recapitulate what McDowell 1.5. *should not* mean: 1) Rejection of the idea that conceptual

capacities are operative in perception. 2) That there could be non-conceptual content in perception. 3) Rejection of the common-sense realist world view. 4) Giving up the Kantian framework of the faculties. 5) Falling into the Myth of the Given. 6) That rational animals, not only in their thinking, but also in their perception, are *not* fundamentally – one might say constitutively – unique.

(When I say “should not mean...” I wish to express that it would be bad for McDowell if it did.)

McDowell argues that perceptual content, while not inherently propositional, “is already **suitable to be the content associated with a discursive capacity**, if it is not – at least not yet – actually so associated.” (p. 264, my emphasis) Let us look at this “**suitability doctrine**”, and probe its limits.

On a general level, the suitability doctrine is compatible with a McDowellian HTR. But it leaves the door open for alternative explanations. Where do we go from here? The following short and incomplete list is intended as all-too-sketchy “food for thought” for further research:

1. In order for perceptual content to be usable by knowledge, some “formal unity” is probably necessary. However, rather than assuming that perception, as the “subordinate” faculty, is “shaped” in accordance with the faculty of reason, it could, for all we know, be the other way around, that *our faculty of reason is shaped in accordance with our perception*. There is nothing to *force* us to continue to maintain a belief in the rationalist hegemony of reason.
2. Who says we need one overarching faculty? We can easily imagine an autonomous faculty having the kind of content that is “suitable to be taken up” by another autonomous faculty. All we need are some *mapping rules* ($A \rightarrow B$) between mutually independent faculties.
3. We can have multiple functional explanations of the interplay between the faculties. In order for there to be formal unity of content, all we need, at the minimum, is one faculty *mimicking*, or being *informed* by, another. Multiple explanations fit the same facts!
4. AMG leaves open the possibility that one faculty could have its own *sui generis* content. Reason could produce content without input from experience; and *vice versa*.
5. We could then, theoretically - could we not? - have *merely* perceptual content, without the use, or even presence, of the discursive faculties.
6. Humans, after all, can have all kind of “unarticulated content” *that never gets articulated*, of the sort that McDowell mentions: birds without recognizable names, percepts without articulation, forms without labels. It seems question-begging to suppose we need the capacity of reason to get *those*. Could we not, then, have *those* in common with animals?
7. McDowell claims: “Though they are not discursive, intuitions have content of a sort that embodies an immediate potential for exploiting that same content in knowledgeable

- judgments.” (267) But does “potentiality for exploitation” imply that the form of the *exploited* is necessarily “shaped” by the *exploiter*? Isn't this a logically unsound move? A Christian Creationist once claimed that the shape of the banana is proof of God's benevolence, since it fits the human hand so perfectly. But surely that is putting the cart before the horse: our hands, and our capacity for reason, *were themselves designed* to fit pre-existing demands. Our hands fit the objective shape of fruits, and our reason fits the perceptual input of sensibility. We should expect no less from natural adaptations.
8. In a framework of AMG, there is nothing, except the HTR prejudice, that precludes non-conceptual content being exploited in knowledgeable judgments. Perhaps the faculty of reason has a natural capacity to exploit non-conceptual content for its own use, in a way that “injects” perceptual content – already present in perception – into the space of reasons? (McDowell would claim this is a form of the Myth of the Given. But is it?)
 9. Explaining a function, a purpose, through the actualizing of a potential is ontologically fishy, especially if, as McDowell claims, “the potential need not be actualized.” (270) This kind of Aristotelean terminology might lead one to say crazy things, such as the following: America was always *potentially* a European colony. This implies *false teleology and bad faith*. Perhaps perception was as little “pre-shaped” for the purpose of becoming discursively articulated as America was “pre-shaped” for the purpose of becoming a European colony?
 10. We can criticize McDowell without “denying that conceptual capacities are in play in experience at all.” (267) Perhaps they are at play, but not *fundamentally*? Perhaps they are at play without *dominating* it? It is the loose notion of “play”, here, that is problematic.
 11. McDowell now is able to say: “I agree with Travis that visual experiences just bring our surroundings into view, thereby entitling us to take certain things to be so, but leaving it a further question what, if anything, we do take to be so.” (269) This is a pretty strong shift. He still claims this avoids both the Myth of the Given *and* intellectualism, since it provides a *link between* perception and reason. Yet it does so by leaving open the idea that the content of perception could be separable from that of reason. This option still remains possible.
 - 12. All this makes McDowell's position seem almost indistinguishable from his adversaries, and it does not fit with the stronger stuff contained in his bigger project (HTR).**

To sum up, McDowell has presented a reformulation of the mechanism whereby perceptual content and discursive content are purportedly linked. This mechanism, while inherently more plausible than the one given in *Mind and World*, leaves the rest of McDowell's theory open to attack. McDowell's theory – at least as presented in *Mind and World* - is carefully constructed, logically coherent, and near-watertight (although based on non-obvious premises). As with any

carefully constructed system, by conceding to a weakness anywhere, the other parts shake, as well.

Then the motivation to follow McDowell is weakened: “If intuitional content is not discursive, why go on insisting it is conceptual?” (AMG: 264) This remains *possible*, and *arguable*, but is no longer *necessary*. Of course McDowell is not sitting idle: he spends all his energies trying to preserve and improve the HTR. He is perfectly aware that *every non-conservative move threatens the essentials of his system*. We have merely shown that his own concessions, in AMG, are not conservative enough, since they make possible further criticisms, or global reforms, of his HTR.

6. CONCLUSIONS: WHERE TO NEXT?

AMG feels like McDowell 1.5, rather than full-blown 2.0. So, what next?

We have seen that McDowell 1.5 puts into question some aspects of HTR. This poses a problem, because McDowell wants it to preserve HTR. Something has to give.

McDowell 1.5 does not cohere globally in a way that conserves HTR – McDowell's version of the Kantian, Aristotelean, Sellarsian story – in all its glory. At the same time, the new theory of the interplay of the faculties *is* a real improvement, I think. So, in order to make the new theory cohere globally, one would have to choose between a few alternatives. We have a dilemma:

1. We should try to preserve the new theory of perception, because it is an improvement.
2. We cannot preserve *both* the new theory of perception *and* the McDowellian HTR (without modifying the global theory in ways that AMG alone does not show or directly warrant)

To solve it, we have three alternatives - listed from the most conservative to the most radical:

A) **GLOBAL CONSERVATISM**: Revert back to the theory of Mind and World, i.e. McDowell “1.0” (and *preserve* old McDowellian coherentism)

B) **GLOBAL REFORMISM**: Further elaborate the implications of the new theory to the whole system – “McDowell 2.0” (and *rebuild* new McDowellian coherentism)

C) **GLOBAL REVOLUTION**: Fully embrace some alternative theory to replace HTR.

All of these moves are possible projects. *Whatever* we choose, the following must be true:

- 1) If we choose (A) – and revert back to McDowell 1.0 – that would be to disregard the local improvements in plausibility as delivered in McDowell 1.5. This seems like a bad move, and would require considerable bad faith, since it forces one to retreat to the implausible and

sketchy account of the interplay between perception and reason given in *Mind and World*.

2) If we choose (B) – and try to develop McDowell 2.0 – we have a long way to go, since in order to establish a new holistic equilibrium, we would have to explain why the changes instigated in 1.5 support, rather than undermine, the global HTR provided in McDowell 1.0.

The “**suitability**” doctrine, as I have called, which emphasizes a sketchy *formal unity* between sensibility (perception) and judgement (reason), loosens the tight-knit unity, and self-evident interdependence, argued for in *Mind & World*, between the contents of the faculties.

I have argued that this provides ammunition to the traditional adversaries of McDowell's thought. It makes it seem like a modified HTR could incorporate, e.g. *non-conceptual content*.

It also provides reasons for fans of M&W to either reject the version presented in AMG, or to demand further reasons for its acceptance. I have urged that they should accept (some version of) the new story, because it is a real (local) improvement in plausibility, despite problems for HTR.

And because of the nature of the sort of holistic theory it is, McDowell's theory is susceptible to local changes non-conservatively introduced. And because AMG, I claim, introduces changes non-conservatively, we are faced with the problems diagnosed in this essay.

By opening up fissures at the heart of his theory, the new and improved McDowellian doctrine – while more plausible locally - seems to weaken, rather than strengthen, the rest of the edifice of his thought.

It is possible to accept a weaker version of McDowell's local argument, that there must be something *like* a Kantian interplay of the faculties at play in perception, without accepting *all* of the aspects of HTR. There are many *equally plausible* versions of Kantianism, so we need some further grounds for accepting McDowell's wider claims in defence of the global structure of his HTR.

But we need no other grounds for disbelieving them, at least if another global theory can answer the same questions more plausibly. And while we have no time to develop things here, I would argue that a reformed Sellarsian non-conceptualist picture, or a Davidsonian coherentist picture, remain as viable alternatives, since they, too, can *holistically* explain the relationship between unarticulated and articulated content; and they, too, ground the *space of normativity*.

For now, I merely wish to express the hope that McDowell's reintegration of the HTR is successful, and that we see a proper McDowell 2.0, where HTR – under all its aspects – is defended fully. Until then, versions of non-conceptualism and skeptical naturalism seem like equally viable *alternatives to, or versions of, HTR* – on the basis of AMG's non-conservative reformism itself.

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