Ralph Schumacher (ed.)

Perception and Reality

From Descartes to the Present

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PADERBORN

Michael Ayers

SENSE EXPERIENCE, CONCEPTS AND CONTENT

Objections to Davidson and McDowell

Philosophers debate whether all, some or none of the representational content of our sensory experience is conceptual, but the technical term "concept" has different uses. It is commonly linked more or less closely with the notions of judgement and reasoning, but that leaves open the possibility that these terms share a systematic ambiguity or indeterminacy. Donald Davidson, however, holds an unequivocal and consistent, if paradoxical view that there are strictly speaking no psychological states with representational or intentional content except the propositional attitudes of language-users, since the source or fundamental bearer of intentionality is the employed sentence. Accordingly he claims that what has content in ordinary sense experience is not sensation, but propositional belief caused, but not justified, by sensation. John McDowell, sharing some of Davidson's premises, holds a less paradoxical, but (I will argue) equivocal and incoherent view that post-infantile human sensory experience must have content in so far as it is what grounds perceptual belief, but that this content is itself conceptual or propositional, dependent on language and culture. Reasons are given in the present article for rejecting both views, and their common premises. It is argued that perceptual or sensory states have intentional content which is no more conceptual or propositional than the world is. Recognition that perceptual content and conceptual content are, in a certain unsurprising way, incommensurable allows for a more realistic understanding of the relationship between language and the world as we experience it.

1. Davidson on sensation and belief

In "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge"[1] Davidson advances what might be called "two dogmas of idealism"[2]: first, the claim that the idea of a confrontation between beliefs and reality to test the truth of the beliefs is absurd; second, the claim that the pursuit of coherence among our beliefs is the only way in which we can justify them. His principal argument is that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief, i.e. for holding a sentence true, except another belief. Consequently "the relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes." For Davidson, "The notion of information ... applies in a non-metaphorical way only to engendered beliefs".

Davidson's supporting argument first attacks the view, in effect, that sensations have a given qualitative character and therefore justify basic beliefs that do not go beyond that given character. He quickly wins that old battle over again, also rebutting an attempt to found sense-datum theory on the principle that, as a matter of how language is used, "if we believe we have a sensation, we do." Against the latter he argues that, even if it were true, all that would follow is that there are beliefs whose existence analytically entails their own truth, not that sensations justify beliefs. He identifies an "obvious thought" lying behind such empiricist views, namely that "sensations are what connect the world and our beliefs, and they are candidates for justifiers because we are often aware of them". His general argument against this thought is that any such justification depends on the awareness, which is simply another belief.

Davidson now considers "a bolder tack" by the empiricist:

> Suppose we say that sensations themselves ... justify certain beliefs that go beyond what is given in sensation. So, under certain conditions, having the sensation of seeing a green light flashing may justify the belief that a green light is flashing.

It is true, Davidson responds, that the *belief* that someone is having a sensation of seeing a green light flashing may under certain circumstances, for those who possess it, make probable the belief that a green light is flashing, but that is an

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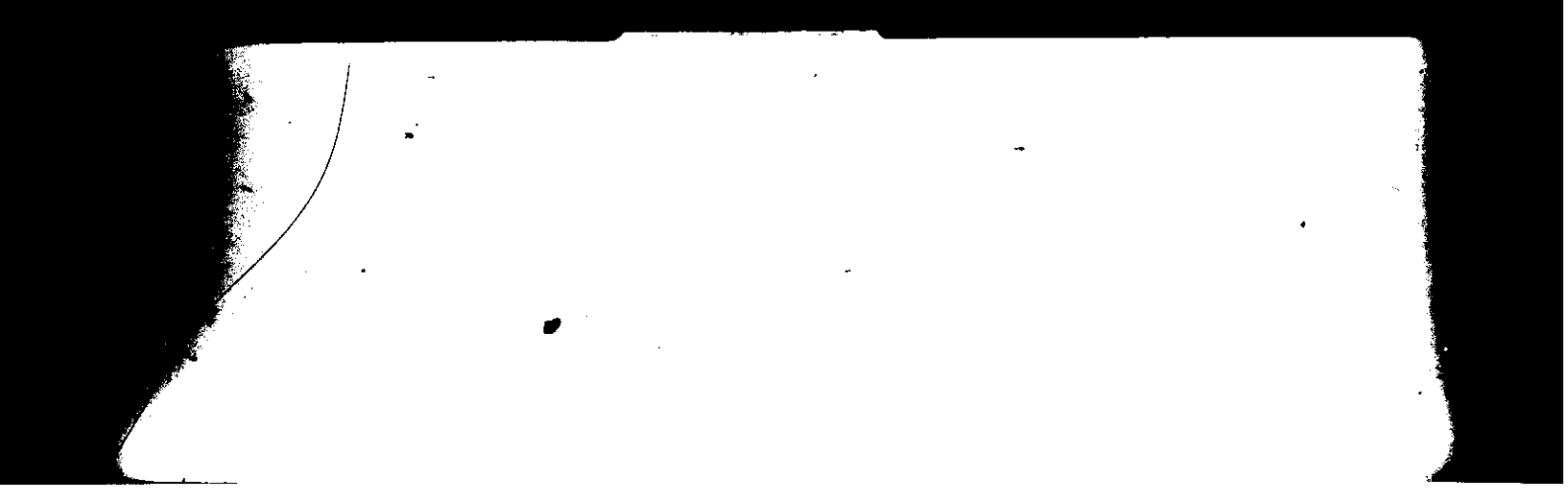
[1] Reprinted in E. Lepore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1986), pp. 307–19. All quotations are from p. 111.

[2] This is not lightly said. Both principles, which it is one purpose of this paper to rebut, are given top billing by the philosopher who was perhaps the first modern European idealist, Richard Burthogge. He likens the attempt to get at reality otherwise than through our notions to looking behind a mirror in the hope of seeing directly what is seen in the reflection. Burthogge wrote in the 1670s, a hundred years before Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Unlike his successor, Berkeley, but like Kant, he was a 'global' idealist, not limiting his idealism to the material world. Unlike Kant, but like Quine, he argued that any system of notions is open to replacement by some more coherent system. (See 'Burthogge, Richard', *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*).



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inference from one belief to another belief. It is not a case of a sensation justifying the perceiver's belief. The view that a sensation can justify a belief about the world independently of a belief about the sensation leads, Davidson suggests, to absurdity: "Suppose [the perceiver] believed he didn't have the sensation. Would the sensation still justify him in the belief in an objective flashing green light?"

First, it should be noted that, on this "bolder" empiricist tack, a belief that a green light is flashing "goes beyond what is given in" the sensation of a green light flashing[3] – "beyond", no doubt, because the sensation could exist without the belief's being true. So anyone who takes such a line holds that what is "given" in a sensory state is either the sensory state itself or some *internal* object of the sensory state which falls short of being the *external* green light flashing. What we have, then, is just a generic version of sense-datum theory, "bolder" only in allowing inference to something other than sense data. Davidson simply ignores a fundamentally different line of thought with a respectable empiricist ancestry.[4] This other approach to perception takes it that what is "given" in a sensation of a green light flashing (even, it might be held, "immediately given", since nothing is given before it) is just that, a green light flashing. So what is given or presented in our complex, but integrated perceptual state when we perceive a red, hard and heavy material cube by both sight and touch is the variously qualitied cube, not a set of internal impressions or sense-data taken to be red and cuboid, if not hard and heavy. In *that* sense, a perceptual belief about the world (by the very notion of a *perceptual* belief) does *not* "go beyond what is given in" sensation. Accordingly it may be said that perceptual beliefs are grounded on sensation not only in virtue of being caused by sensation, but in virtue of deriving their intentional content from the intentional content of sensory states. That, on this view, is what believing one's senses is. No inference is involved, and there is no intermediary. We just accept what the senses conjointly give. In ignoring this possibility, Davidson in effect assumes without argument his own view that sensations, not being propositional attitudes, cannot have intentional content. Yet surely that is an issue in question, perhaps, since the demise of sense-datum theory, the main issue in question.

Second, why agree that a sensation could only be involved in grounding a belief about the world via a belief about the sensation? It is again begging the main question to assume that *awareness* is neither more nor less than (appropriately

[3] To depart from Davidson's expression 'sensation of *seeing* ...', which he presumably reads as 'sensation we have when seeing ...' (by analogy with, say, 'sensation of weariness') in order to avoid anything like the (by his lights) misleading expression, 'visual sensation of a cube'.

[4] Cf., e.g., Hobbes, *De Corpore* I.vi.1–6; II.viii.2–3. Analytical philosophers sometimes use the term 'empiricism' more or less exclusively for views which, like classic sense-datum theory, postulate entities roughly equivalent to Humean impressions. That may in part be due to a dangerous approach to the history of modern philosophy which assumes progress from confusion to, at any rate, consistency, with Hume as the most consistent empiricist, closest to the archetype and so most worth considering.

caused) *belief*. Indeed, such confident reduction is strikingly implausible in so far as paradigmatic awareness, sensory awareness of the environment, seems clearly independent of belief. We do not always, as we say, believe our eyes.[5] As for Davidson's rhetorical appeal to the possibility of a subject who has a sensation without believing that she has it, an appropriate response depends on the case he has in mind.[6] Is it, perhaps, something like blindsight?[7] Here, to be rough, brain-damaged subjects can successfully tell when, for example, a green light is flashing in an occluded part of the normal field of sight although they do not (independently) know how or why they can do so. Although such hunches are caused by (some of) the mechanisms of sight, to the subject they seem to be no more than guesses. Is this a sensation's occurring without a belief that it is occurring? Let us grant it, although it is more natural to say that what is missing is the sensation itself, not just a belief that it exists. What is clear is that the difference between blindsight and normal vision consists in something other than that in the latter case the subject *believes* that she is having the "sensation". For that belief could be present just because the subject knows that she is blindsighted and that the light is flashing; or, indeed, it too could simply be a hunch caused by the blindseeing.[8] The difference between blindsight and standard vision is a matter of conscious awareness, not belief, and the awareness in question is sensory awareness[9] of objects, not a distinct second-order awareness of a sensory state.

On the other hand, Davidson might intend a quite different possibility, such as a case in which the perceiver has forgotten or never knew what green looks like, and so does not realise that he is seeing or, therefore, having a visual sensation of a *green* light. Yet that supposition does not rule it out that the perceiver's visual sensation

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[5] For example, Mary glimpsed a white-robed figure flitting through the ruined chapel, and put the experience down to imagination (or hallucination). It was in fact a prankster in fancy dress. Did she then perceive him? Was she aware of him? I take it that theories of perception that demand a negative answer to the first question are simply mistaken (of course she saw the man); and that a positive answer to the second may mislead only in so far as there may be a certain conversational implication that she believed her eyes (as with the claim that she saw *that the man was robed*). Suppose that she had not just glimpsed him, but paid close attention to him, and yet still judged that she was hallucinating. Who would then deny that she was aware of the man, or that she saw that he was robed?

[6] The sense-datum theorist would presumably respond that no one *could* perceive a sense-datum without knowing it, and there would be standoff. But on any interpretation we surely need more explanation as to just how the subject is supposed to have the sensation without believing that she has it.

[7] As described by Lawrence Weiskrantz, *Blindsight: a Case Study and its Implications* (Oxford 1986).

[8] In which case the causality of the belief would be at least a bit different from that of the normal perceptual belief, but on this see below.

[9] Or 'conscious sensory awareness', in case someone wants to ascribe the paradoxical state of unconscious awareness to the blindsighted.

supplies him with the appropriate visual grounds for the belief which he does not have.[10] In general, our possession of grounds for a belief is compatible with our not having the belief, and even with our not recognizing that we do possess grounds for it.[11] So what is to be said in response to Davidson's argument depends on the kind of case being supposed, but on any supposition it is difficult to see reason to accept his conclusion.

Davidson's argument radically misrepresents a basic kind of reason-giving. If I have seen a certain clearly observable event occur, such as a green light's flashing, I generally take myself to need no further reason for my belief that it occurred. I meet demands for a reason simply by saying that I saw it happen, but that is not to appeal, as to the premise of an inference, either to a *belief* that I saw it happen or to a *belief* about the content of my visual sensations. I am simply explaining how I am well placed to know what I know, and what grounds my belief – indeed, why no inference was necessary. In such cases my attention will normally have been on what was observed or presented, not on my own sensory state of mind, my visual sensation,[12] and my belief is well grounded precisely on what was presented, not on a premise about my psychological condition. What I say in justification in saying that I saw a green light's flashing certainly expresses a belief, but it is a thought worthy of Lewis Carroll that I here justify my belief by another belief, as if it was my *believing* that I saw it happen, rather than my having seen it happen, which supplies my justification or ground.

Let us make a comparison. Suppose it is asked, 'Does this photograph justify the belief that someone was shooting at President Kennedy from the ground?' Obviously we need all kinds of beliefs about the photograph before we get to ask this question, beliefs about who took it and where, where it has been since the event, whether it has been tampered with, and so forth. Suppose we rightly

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[10] Granting for the sake of argument that he does *not* have that belief. But if the perceiver lacking the concept green believes that he is seeing something of *that* shade (see McDowell's notion of demonstrative concepts, discussed below), and that shade is a shade of green, doesn't he believe that he is seeing something green (and doesn't he see it *as* green)? Compare: if a four-sided figure with just two parallel sides is called a trapezium (British meaning), and I believe that I am perceiving a four-sided figure with just two parallel sides (and am in fact seeing it that way), don't I believe that I am perceiving a trapezium (and don't I perceive it *as* a trapezium), whether or not I know what it is called (in Britain or anywhere else)? What it is appropriate to say here about my belief depends on the context, and on what is in question, just because these affect the conversational implications of what is said.

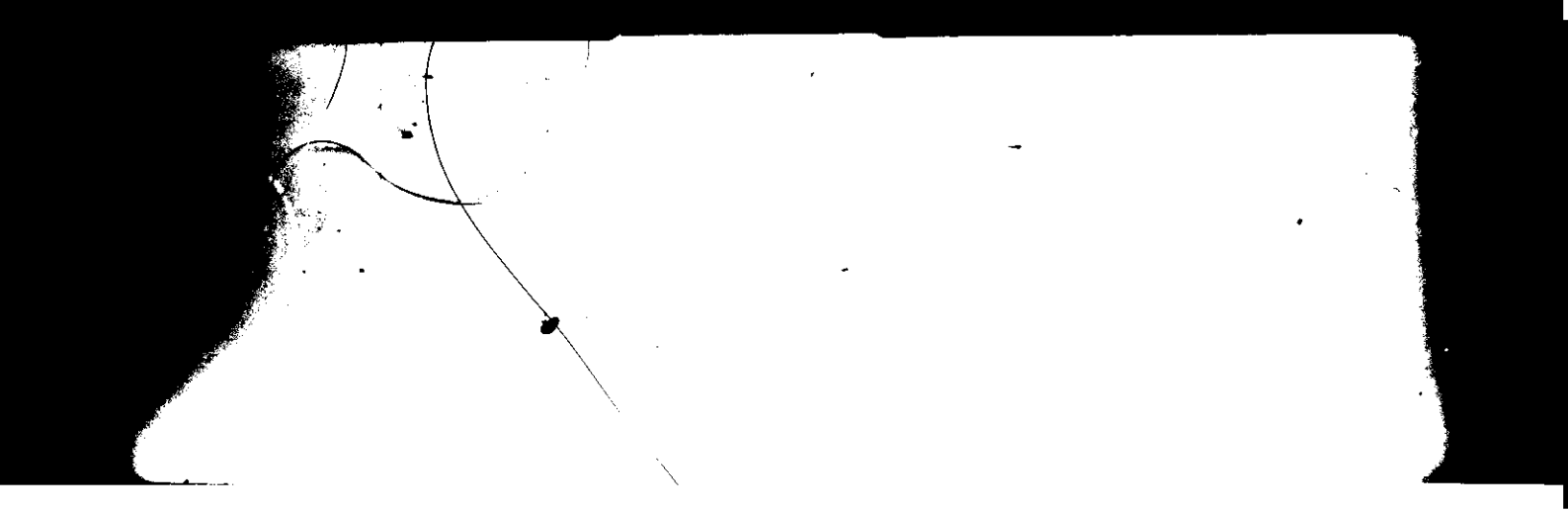
[11] If we *do* have a belief on certain grounds, then we will recognize what it is that grounds the belief: e.g. when we believe what we see, we know the ground of the belief, why we have it.

[12] There is a question of what it *is* to pay attention to the sensation, as opposed to its object, which need not be addressed here. Any approach like Davidson's would seem to face huge problems dealing with sensory attention: how does one focus attention on an object of *belief*, apart from thinking hard about it?

have the appropriate beliefs about its credentials, and are now focusing on what the photograph presents (or re-presents), the events recorded, the photograph's visual content. Wouldn't it be strange to say that the picture thus 'taken objectively', as Descartes would have put it, cannot justify *any* conclusion about the events photographed, since only a belief can justify a belief, and a photograph is not a belief? Suppose someone said that she believed that Kennedy was shot at from the ground because she *believed* that the photograph (with its, let us suppose, unquestioned credentials) depicted someone shooting at him from the ground. Wouldn't we then be interested in the question whether the photograph actually justified this second belief, as if, instead of telling us what she *believed* about it, she had simply said, "Look at the photograph – that's my justification"? And wouldn't we look closely at the photograph, or rather at its content, the photographed world as it were, in order to judge whether the man leaning on the fence by the mound was indeed aiming a rifle? And wouldn't *that* be how we judged whether the photograph justified both the judgement that Kennedy was shot at from the ground and the belief that it depicted someone shooting at him? In one swoop the photo-content justifies or grounds both the judgement about the photographed state of affairs and the judgement about the photograph, although obviously we might want to distinguish these judgements, for example if the photograph's credentials were, after all, in doubt. The point is that what is asserted about the world may be justified by what a photograph shows about the world.

In much the same way, saying "I saw it happen" is drawing attention to what grounds or justifies my claim about the world, not stating a premise. A perceptual experience or sensation is, of course, very different from a photograph both ontologically and in its epistemic role. I can look and point at a photograph itself, but I cannot look or point at a perceptual experience, as I can point at its object. Nor can I point at its object in pointing at the experience, as I can point at a man in a picture in pointing at the picture. By pointing at an object seen I invite others to take a look for themselves, but no one other than I can make a claim non-inferentially grounded on *my* experience. A related epistemological difference is that, although the deliverances of the senses are defeasible, and sensible appearances can sometimes be untrustworthy, sensations are not, as photographs are, intermediaries needing credentials before any they can justify any judgement about the world. The analogy with pictures does, however, allow us to see how a belief with conceptual content can be based on a representation, or presentation, with non-conceptual content; and how it can be an appropriate and sufficient response to a request for a reason or justification simply to indicate that representation, or mention the occurrence of that presentation. What is asserted can be based on what is made manifest in sense experience.

On Davidson's model, as he puts it,



> The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical .... What then is the relation? The answer is, I think obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why a belief is justified.

So when I want to know what is in the next room, and go and look, I am simply putting myself in circumstances which are likely to cause a belief, one way or another, as to what is in the next room. It helps to turn my head this way and that, in order to have sensations which, in the context of my current belief-system, will cause certain beliefs about the contents of the room. Some of these beliefs may be about the sensations I am having. I may even infer a belief about the contents of the room from a belief about a sensation I am having. But none of these sensorily stimulated beliefs are justified or well-grounded except in so far as they support one another and fit into my on-going belief-system, tailored as necessary.

Photographs are even further than sensations are from being beliefs. On a Davidsonian view, then, my peering at the photograph (or, we might put it, peering *into* the photograph) is not endeavouring to see, or to judge, whether the *photograph* justifies the judgement (i.e., shows) that Kennedy was shot at from the ground, but is putting myself in a position for the photograph to cause a belief about the events photographed, or a belief about the photograph from which I can infer a belief about the events photographed (or a belief about my sensations from which I can infer a belief about the photograph, from which ..., etc.). I can then set my belief against the belief of the person who believes that the photograph records someone aiming a rifle. My belief can perhaps, confirm or disconfirm her belief, but neither of our beliefs is, or could be, well-grounded, or for that matter ill-grounded, except on other beliefs.

This analysis of the status and role of palpably non-linguistic representations[13] is surely untenable, with respect both to photographs and to experience. Just one way of bringing out its untenability is through the point that it represents the perceiver as simply having a hunch or yen to believe something about the circumstances he is in. Or rather, it makes available only a certain way of distinguishing between a perceptual belief and a mere hunch: the difference can only lie in the way in which the beliefs are caused. On a Davidsonian view, we *perceive* that something is so when our belief is caused *in the right way*. But this externalist proposal ignores the subjective or phenomenal "internal" difference between a belief grounded on sense experience and a mere hunch.

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[13] I say *palpably* non-linguistic, to avoid the question whether beliefs are of their nature linguistic or, for that matter (if it is different), 'conceptual'. Without something like Davidson's premise that sentences are the basic bearers of content, there seems no reason to reject the notion of unconceptualized beliefs or thoughts (as opposed to Fregean 'Thoughts'). But just here I am arguing that, even if beliefs are essentially linguistic, there are other palpably non-linguistic, non-conceptual bearers of content upon which beliefs can be grounded.

To take again the revealing example of blindsight, what makes the difference from the normal case of visual perception cannot simply be that some particular part of the brain does not make its usual active contribution. For who is to say, in abstraction from empirical investigation, what is the physiology of "the right way" to acquire a visual belief? The difference is that in normal perception and perceptual belief the objects of the belief are presented, or "given", to or in consciousness, and it is the brain damage responsible for this manifest difference which supplies evidence of the physiology of normal perception and, indeed, of the physiological basis of consciousness.

In normal perception, moreover, objects are presented from a point of view, located in their place on an integrated egocentric perceptual field, in the world as perceived by all sensory means from here. Our overall, integrated perceptual state, that is to say, does not just present objects "out there" in the world, but does so through presenting our bodies (i.e. ourselves) *as* ourselves; and also, at least coarsely, both the spatial relations of external bodies to ourselves and the causality through which they come to be presented.[14] It is of the nature of sensory presentation, that is to say, that in presenting objects the senses present (enough of) our physical-cum-epistemic relation to those objects. Hence the content of sense experience is such as to allow us not only to know something about our environment, but to know how we know it. To put the point another way, that perception of objects is always from the subject's point of view (taking 'point of view' in a broader than purely spatial sense) is itself a necessary condition of its being perception, and of our having perceptual knowledge. Here, then, is a fundamental reason why there is no possibility of explaining perception and perceptual knowledge in terms of a purely externalist conception of 'the right way' for perceptual beliefs to be caused. A perceptual state or belief is caused in 'the right way' only if the actual causality and the perceived causality are matching. The point is analogous to one that can be made with respect to inferred knowledge. Roughly, we know a fact by inference if the fact has come to cause the corresponding belief by just the route postulated in the inference on which the belief is grounded.

That perceptual awareness in general includes (coarse or partial) awareness of its own causality does not, of course, rule out illusion or hallucination, or even the conceptual possibility of a comprehensive 'brain-in-a-vat' delusion.[15] Yet it is a part

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[14] *Pace* the traditional view, dependent on an unrealistic abstraction of perception from agency, that causality cannot be presented in sense experience. Perception is essentially, inseparably involved with action within the sensory field, in looking, peering, attending, changing one's point of view, feeling, grasping, sniffing, etc. Contrary to a long-embedded conception of the *theoretical*, experiential content is imbued with an awareness of causality as an essential part of what it is to experience oneself as in the world – which does *not* mean that in order to have experience we must have the *concept* of causality (on which, see below, *passim*, esp. note 34).

[15] If we expect so much from a tenable philosophy of perception, then none will seem tenable. Davidson, op. cit. p. 312–3, seems to take it to be a serious shortcoming of any analysis of perception that it

of the crucial subjective difference between a well-grounded perceptual belief and a mere hunch about the situation that in fact caused that hunch through perceptual mechanisms.[16] By the same token it is a condition of our being in demonstrative contact with the world – of our being *acquainted* with anything – rather than simply having generic thoughts that tend to be appropriate to the states of affairs that cause them.

2. McDowell on the conceptual content of experience

Against Davidson, John McDowell insists, in his book Mind and World, that sense-experience can, after all, ground perceptual belief.[17] Nevertheless, much like Davidson, McDowell ascribes the "Myth of the Given" to the supposition that non-conceptual input, something not itself judgemental in form but given in sensation, could serve as a ground or warrant for an observational judgement – could have a role in "the space of reasons". He agrees with Davidson that nothing which is not a thought could imply or probabilify or, in general, ground a thought, "thoughts" in this sense being inherently conceptual, indeed propositional thoughts *that p*. But he reasonably complains that to see the relation between sensations and their objects as purely causal leaves out an essential ingredient, not only of empirical justification, but also of the *content* of belief. For it is in its implication with experience that the whole corpus of our beliefs contains more than empty syntax, and captures something of what the world is like.

McDowell's solution is to argue that sense experience can have a justificatory role just because it comes already conceptualized. Adopting Kantian terminology, he claims that the co-operation between "receptivity" (sensibility) and "spontaneity" (judgement) is such that their contributions are not even notionally separable: "In experience one takes in, for instance sees, that things are thus and so" (*Mind and World*, p. 26). "Experience", it seems, is propositional in form, but it is not

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does not refute a general scepticism. It is true that the sense-datum theory he attacks raises a special sceptical problem, but that is the problem of how we ever get to conceive of external things '*specifically* different from our perceptions' (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, I.ii.6), rather than the supposed problem of the possibility of global error. The former problem, of course, does not arise for the present view.

16 This feature of perception and its relation to attempts to define knowledge is explored in my *Locke I: Epistemology*, esp. chs 15 and 19–21. See also Bill Brewer, *Perception and Reason*, ch.6, and my review, "Is all perceptual content conceptual?", *Philosophical Books* 43.1, pp. 5–17.

17 McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 145: 'In my picture impressions are, so to speak, transparent. In the picture common to Sellars and Davidson they are opaque … they do not themselves disclose the world to one.' Davidson, according to McDowell, offers 'no rational constraint, but only causal influence' on our beliefs 'from outside' (p. 14).

to be understood, in Davidson's way, simply as one kind of beliefs (say, observational beliefs) in the system of beliefs. In experience, concepts which are "actively" exercised in judgement are "passively" exercised in sensibility. So something other than belief, something propositional but not itself a propositional attitude, exists in "the space of reasons" (*id.*, *passim*). An important, thoroughly un-Kantian consequence of McDowell's conception of "active" thought is in effect a concession to Quinean coherentism, in that the concepts exercised in passive sensibility, giving sensation its intentional content, are held to be themselves liable to revision or refashioning as they are employed in our whole revisable system of beliefs or world view. Consequently even the most immediately observational concepts (and therefore perceptual contents)[18] are in principle open to reshaping in the light of wider considerations, although McDowell says that the prospect is "no doubt unreal" in such cases.

What are we to make of this argument, and McDowell's purported path between the Scylla of "the Myth of the Given" and the Charybdis of coherence without content? A questionable premise, pretty obviously, is the principle he shares with Davidson that what does not have the form of a judgement cannot ground or be the basis of a judgement. We can allow both philosophers an easy victory on the question whether something not of judgemental form can, in some strictly logical sense of the terms, imply, entail, probabilify, or be a reason for a judgement. Strictly logical relations very likely only hold between conceptualized contents. Logic cannot be parted from language. But, as I have already suggested in response to Davidson's argument, we live in daily employment of the notion that a belief or judgement or description which is propositional in form may be based or grounded on something which is *not* propositional in form, or not conceptualized, or indeed which is not a kind of thing that could possibly be either of these things. My description of a zebra, for example, may be based on perceived zebras, living or stuffed, or on photographs, drawings or models of zebras, none of which are propositional or conceptual in form. Why then should it be thought that the experiences and memories that are necessary for my description to be based on these things must themselves be propositional or conceptual?[19]

Here various things might be said. It might be said that my description of a zebra is not really, philosophically speaking, based on these *objects*, but on certain *facts*, precisely those facts stated in the description. Yet that is to replace what is relatively straightforward and clear with something greatly fishy. Talk of "facts"

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[18] The implication is that perceptual content, and not just what we *say* we perceive, is tightly linked to our current system of concepts (cf. Richard Rorty, 'Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth', in Lepore (ed.), op. cit., pp. 333–55). The link would have to be logical, not contingent or causal.

[19] I will concentrate on descriptions, to avoid the issue over whether there can be inarticulate beliefs and judgements, which are themselves preconceptual or non-conceptual. (No doubt there can be, and are.)

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tual. (No doubt there can be, and

is just too obviously a projection of propositional form onto reality. Zebras are unproblematic objects as "facts" are not. Much the same goes for "states of affairs". If I set out either to depict or to describe a material object such as a zebra, it's the *object* that I am trying to capture, one way or another, with pencil or words, not a set of facts or states of affairs. Which facts I do succeed in stating will simply be consequent on the means I employ to describe the object and on how much of my description is true. Which facts I succeed in depicting in my picture will depend on which true descriptions of the object would also be true descriptions of the object as I have drawn it, the object "in" the picture. The descriptions will be propositional and therefore conceptual, but neither the object as it is nor the object as I have depicted it, (the picture content) are propositional or conceptual. The same goes, as far as I can see, for the object as I experience it, the content of my experience. An account of this content, like an account of anything else, will be propositional; but not the content itself.

Argument against the notion of non-conceptual or non-propositional content, especially the suggestion that such a notion is in itself a form of 'the Myth of the Given', is liable to slip into the presupposition that 'non-conceptual' *means*, in effect, 'non-intentional'. It would then be a tautology that giving an account of experience, supposing experience to be non-conceptual, would be giving an account of blank, non-intentional *qualia*. Yet, of course, once classical sense-datum theory has been discarded, the claim that experience has 'non-conceptual content' is the claim that it has non-conceptual *intentional* content. That is to say, what is held to be non-conceptual is *the way things are presented in experience*, the sensory mode of presentation, not some mysterious, "immediately" presented mental intermediaries between perceiver and external things. In effect, the assertion that sense experience has non-conceptual, non-propositional content is the assertion that the way the world is presented in sense experience is not quasi-linguistic. It is difficult to see how making this common-sensical assertion is endorsing anything describable as 'the Myth of the Given'.

That well-worn, but compelling Wittgensteinian argument[20] to the effect that an accompanying image or mental picture could not possibly be the vehicle of linguistic meaning can here be employed in reverse, in order to demonstrate that the content of a mental image or picture or sensory experience or perceptual state could not possibly be propositional or conceptual. For if such content were propositional or conceptual, it would do very well as the vehicle of linguistic meaning. Why not? Those who accept the argument about meaning, but are also prepared to argue that the intentionality of sensation is due to sensory experience's being, as Strawson

[20] Generally ascribed to Wittgenstein, but previously used by Russell, *Analysis of Mind*, lect.x.

puts it, "permeated by concepts",[21] at least owe the rest of us an answer to that question.

To come at the same point from a slightly different direction, a picture of a horse standing under a tree does not have the logical form or the precise, conceptually determinate content of the judgement that a horse is standing under a tree. Much criticism has rightly been poured on Wittgenstein's early idea that judgements are very like pictures, but the idea that pictures are very like judgements is reciprocally problematic. Yet the very nature of pictorial content is pretty obviously tightly bound up with the nature of the visual content on which pictorial content is essentially parasitic. Both are, in the core sense, aesthetic, indeed visual. A representational picture captures its objects literally from a point of view, as seen. Why should it be supposed that visual content is conceptual when pictorial content so evidently is not? Rather, aesthetic content, whether pictorial or sensory, is in a certain sense *incommensurable* with conceptual content, and each has its own kinds of determinacy and indeterminacy. In one way a picture is more precise than a judgement, for a judgement might be illustrated, as it were, by indefinitely many determinate pictures. Yet in another way it is less precise, since indefinitely many determinate things might be said of the content of a picture. A pictorial content no more has to be proposition-shaped in order to be described than a description has to have pictorial meaning in order to be illustrated.

None of this implies an unbridgeable opposition between the propositional and the pictorial. Indeed so-called 'demonstrative concepts' may mingle the two, if what is demonstrated owes its demonstrability to its having been depicted. So we may say 'Mary has just that complexion', as we point to the face of a girl in a soap advertisement. We overtly employ the depicted face, as we might have employed an actual face, in saying something which could not, taken precisely, have been said *without* referring to what is non-conceptual. Conversely, as in some 'conceptual art', pictorial and propositional content may be fused in pictures which depict, among other things, sentences, and which are consequently not seen in the same way by non-readers as by readers.[22]

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[21] P.F.Strawson, 'Perception and its Objects', in G F Macdonald (ed.), *Perception and Identity: Essays presented to A J Ayer*. Strawson's argument nicely illustrates the tendency of conceptualists to assume that intentional content, simply in being intentional, is by the same token conceptual. For criticism, see my 'Can there be a New Empiricism?', in *Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Vol. 7, *Modern Philosophy*. ed. Mark D. Gedney. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Philosophy Documentation Center).

[22] It is noteworthy that both these kinds of mixed or bridging examples have been employed in the conceptualist cause, the former by McDowell himself with respect to so-called 'demonstrative concepts' (see below), the latter in the view that sees everything as a 'text' (see next note). My talk of 'depicting' written sentences, as if different from writing them, is intended neutrally. But someone could depict, say, a sentence in Japanese with painstaking accuracy without knowing that it was a sentence, and that would not, I think, be to write it.

It is, then, no more a *deep* truth about experience that we perceive, e.g. see, *that things are thus and so* than it is a deep truth about photographs that they record *that things are thus and so*, or, for that matter, than it is a deep truth about the world *that things are thus and so*. Broadly speaking (and except in special cases),[23] concepts and propositions only come into the act when we endeavour to *say*, to others or to ourselves, how we are perceiving things, or how photographs have recorded them, or how things are. When language is employed to describe things seen, or photographed, as they are seen, or photographed, the thought expressed has propositional form. But that does not mean that the experience itself, i.e. what is presented in the experience, any more than what the photograph shows, mysteriously takes on propositional form. And, to repeat, in each case the propositional account of non-propositional representational content is based or grounded on that content, not simply caused by it. It has to be so grounded, in order to be an account of the thing of which it is an account. The cause of a description is not *thereby* its object. The object of a non-accidentally true description has both to cause and to ground it.

3. McDowell and Idealism

In Chapter II of his book *Mind and World*, McDowell considers the imagined charge that he is an idealist. In a veridical experience, he has said, one takes in *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is (1) the content of the experience; (2) the content of a possible judgement and therefore conceptual; and (3) what McDowell calls "an aspect of the layout of the world," adding, " it is how things are." Hence,

[23] The necessary qualification of the point that concepts and propositional form only enter the story when linguistic representation does so, and not before, is nothing particularly recondite. Experience and knowledge can *affect* the way we perceive things (or, indeed, misperceive things), partly, but not only, by determining what is salient for us, what we notice or attend to, or the operative *gestalt*. That effect may involve conceptualization. For example, just possibly only someone who knows what a coin is will see coins as we do, at least at a glance. And someone who cannot read will surely never perceive a printed page in just the way a reader does – a case which involves language, but as object presented rather than as means of representing or expressing what is presented. What makes this a qualification of my thesis that perceptual content comes first, concepts later, is the point that concepts and propositions may in such cases enter the story at an earlier stage than that of *description* of what is presented, in helping to determine or even to constitute just what *is* presented, or how it is presented. Yet it is a minor qualification, not a ground for serious objection. It would clearly be unjustified to generalize from such special cases to McDowell's conclusion that, without concepts and propositional form entering in these ways into perceptual content, there would be no content – as if then nothing would be salient enough to be perceived, or as if the world were indeed a text, but a text set out in print mysteriously visible only to those engaged in reading it.

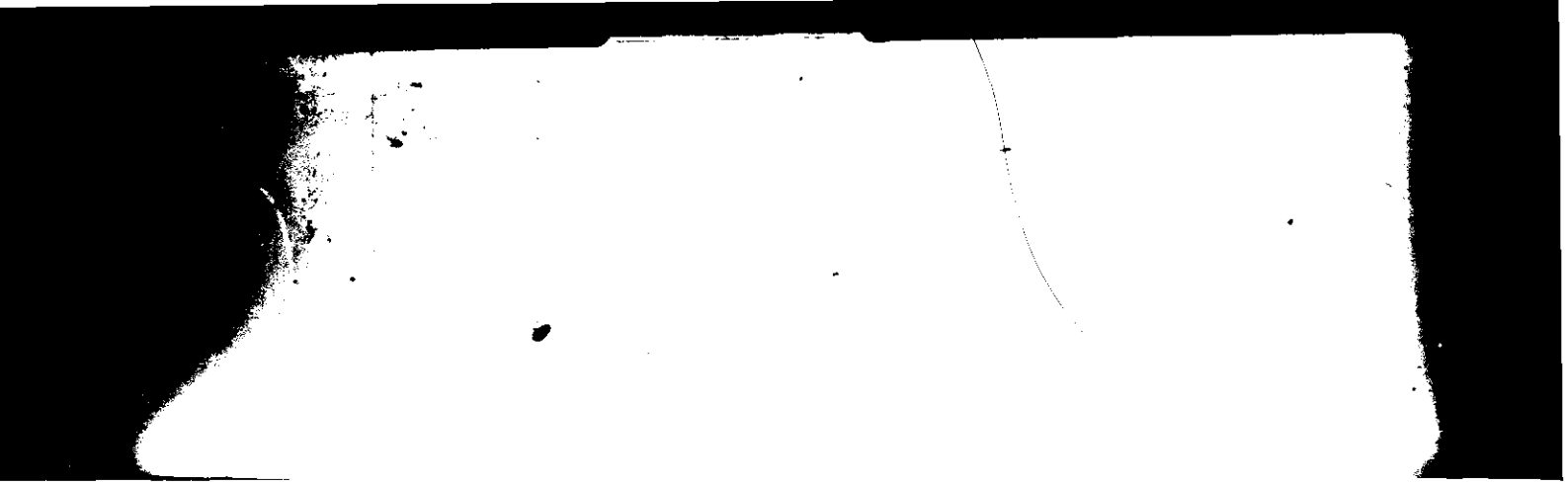
> Although reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere. *That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of an experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world. (P.26)

McDowell now remarks, truly enough, that 'it can seem that this refusal to locate perceptible reality outside the conceptual sphere must be a sort of idealism.' In other words, his view suggests that reality in so far as it is accessible to us consists of items, facts or 'aspects', neatly tailored by thoughts and concepts (in effect, the view just considered that descriptions of zebras are not based on perceived or depicted zebras, but on perceived or depicted facts about zebras). This charge of idealism is mistaken, McDowell claims, because it presupposes that there is an alternative possibility which allows us to take in, in experience, bits of 'the Given' in an objectionable sense. As he puts it, 'When we trace [empirical] justifications back, the last thing we come to is still a *thinkable content*; not something more ultimate than that, a bare pointing to a bit of the Given (p. 28–9).' These 'final thinkable contents', he says,

> are put into place in operations of receptivity, and that means that when we appeal to them we register the required constraint on thinking from a reality external to it. The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experiences, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain [independently] and impress themselves on one's sensibility. (p. 29)

McDowell assures us that to insist that it is facts which impinge on sensibility is not to adopt a grand ontological or metaphysical vision that "the world is everything that is the case", but is just to insist that the world is *thinkable*, that experience takes in the thinkable world, that what one thinks can be the case. Moreover, (as we have seen) he calls a particular fact *that things are thus and so* 'an *aspect* of the layout of the world'. If the apparent ontology of facts is really just his way of saying that the world is propositionally thinkable (let us say, *describable*) then the metaphor of an aspect would seem appropriate enough. A true description of a thing does not capture how it is *in toto*, but captures certain *aspects* of the thing.[24] The terms of the description itself supply, as it were, specific points of view on the thing. Yet such metaphorical 'aspects' are importantly different from literal aspects. A pictorial representation or visual impression may literally be from just one point of view, and may capture one aspect of a thing in a literal sense, yet (as has just been remarked) indefinitely many things may be said about the object from just that point of view. When we come to count metaphorical, conceptual 'aspects' of an object, on the other hand, we are

[24] I am sensitive to, but here ignore, the possibly different implications of philosophical talk of 'aspects of the world', and less exalted talk of aspects of particular things in the world. The former is more consonant with the tenor and antecedents of McDowell's argument. A certain kind of idealist, for example, might regard particular material objects as themselves aspects of the World (or the Absolute).



simply counting particular things we can say about the object. McDowell's notion of an aspect is tightly proposition-relative, or concept-relative, as the notion of an aspect in the literal sense is not. Indeed, this very difference between metaphorical and literal uses of the term 'aspect' is simply a manifestation of the difference between incommensurable types of content, conceptual and non-conceptual: the difference between the essentially linguistic and the essentially aesthetic or sensory.

If we take a charitable view of what McDowell is saying about the *world*, interpreting it as no more than a way of putting the platitude that the world and things in it are describable, it becomes mysterious why we cannot extend such an approach to experience itself.[25]

Is saying that experience is conceptual, that we always perceive *that things are thus and so*, any *more* than saying that experience is describable in that an account can be given that will capture 'aspects' of its content or objects? The point is that, if McDowell's quietist patter is sufficient to avoid commitment to a metaphysics which has reality (or accessible reality, reality for us) *literally* propositionally or conceptually structured, much the same patter will allow us to deny that *sense*

[25] Essentially the same point may seem to be made by Crispin Wright in 'McDowell's Oscillation', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, LVIII,2 (1998), p. 402:

'McDowell is quite clear – as he had better be if the accusation of idealism is as undeserved as he wishes – that facts are [conceptually structured] only in so far as essentially conceiv*able*. So a fact is essentially such as, for an appropriate subject, to be conceived as the fact that P; but its existence – what makes for the truth of the proposition that P – need not depend on anyone's actually exercising any of the concepts constituent in that proposition. What, then, is the obstacle to an absolutely parallel conception of experience?'

Yet, as is made clear in his later explanations in *Reading McDowell* (ed. Nicholas H. Smith), especially 'Postscript to Chapter 8', Wright is suggesting, not that experience is intrinsically and non-conceptually contentful, and in itself justificatory, but that, like the world, it is 'conceiv*able*' or 'readable', any actual reading being what is conceptual and justificatory. This, Wright argues, offers a way in which animals and infants can be supposed to share sense experience with concept-possessing human beings, although their experience does not actually justify any beliefs. McDowell's response ('Reply to Commentators', p. 430–1) is to claim that facts can be merely conceiv*able* just because they are independent of thought. An 'occurrence in consciousness', on the other hand, is not so independent, and to suppose that it could ground a 'conceptual articulation' without being itself conceptually articulated is to subscribe to the Myth of the Given.

The part of my point that seems to be shared with Wright is that the possibility of a conceptually articulated *account* of things-as-experienced no more entails that the experience expressed or described is conceptually articulated than it entails that the things described, the things that enter into that experience-content, are conceptually articulated. But my whole point is that, just as reflection on visual representation and its relation both to how we see things and to linguistic representation should force us to conclude that sense experience is *not* conceptually articulated, such reflection gives as much reason to accept what Wright's argument does not envisage, that experience is in itself contentful and justificatory. I will also suggest below that such articulation as the content of sense experience possesses (experience presents discrete material objects as such, for example) derives from the reality experienced, not from our concepts.

experience is literally so structured, without asserting or implying that it thereby lies outside the 'sphere of thinkable content' or the 'space of reasons'. What argument does he offer for distinguishing 'experience' from 'the world' in this respect? If the thinkability of the world is not a reason for *seriously* ascribing propositional or conceptual form to the world, then the thinkability, or thinkable content, of experience is not a reason for seriously ascribing propositional or conceptual form to experience either. Or so it would seem. Indeed, it would seem to be a healthy move to bring a similar objection against the thesis that thought itself is always and necessarily conceptual. 'All thought (or all belief) is expressible' is not a good reason for the conclusion that there is no such thing as inarticulate thought, thought lacking propositional logical form. All that is entailed is that determinate concepts (not necessarily possessed by the thinker) can be employed to capture 'aspects' of the content of inarticulate thinking. No thoughts are in principle ineffable, as no objects of experience are in principle indescribable.

I cannot find in *Mind and World* any general argument designed to meet this appeal for parity of reasoning about the world and about experience of it, which seems hardly to have been foreseen. But hints in the text suggest a certain line of reply. Consider again a passage from which I have already quoted:

> When we trace justifications back, the last thing we come to is still a thinkable content; not something more ultimate than that, a bare pointing to a bit of the Given. But these final thinkable contents are *put into place* in operations of receptivity ... the thinkable contents that are *ultimate* in the order of justification are contents of experiences, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility. (p. 29, added emphasis.)

Now we are not to suppose that talk of 'facts' means that the world (or 'our world') is literally propositional in form, since that would be too much like the *Tractatus*, whether interpreted as grand metaphysics or as transcendental idealism. How then do we get from the non-propositional but thinkable world to the propositional thoughts that think it? It seems that experience, receptivity imbued with spontaneity, is the mechanism that works the supposedly necessary transformation. The very concepts exercised actively in, for example, the predicative judgement 'The cube is red' (i.e. *cube* and *red*) are exercised passively in the perception of a red cube. Indeed, according to a more recent exposition of this claim by McDowell,[26] in both judgement and perception the exercises of these two concepts are linked by the same 'mode of togetherness', a psychological counterpart to the propositional bond. Experience is a conceptually shaped product of mind and world, ready to fall into experienced facts in some way in which, presumably, the real world does not fall into real facts. It is indeed easy to see this as idealism: the form

[26] 'Having the World in View: Sellars, Kant and Intentionality', *Journal of Philosophy* XCV,9 (1998), pp. 431–487.

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of judgement structures the world as experienced and known. Yet however that may be, it requires a rather special philosophical cast of mind in order to accept that, for it to be possible to describe the world, experience of the world, or the world as experienced, has to be description-shaped. A more straightforward view is that descriptions are description-shaped, whereas the things described, whether in themselves or as they figure in pictures or in the content of experience, do not have to be description-shaped in order to be describable.

That is not to say that there is *no* sort of consonance between the logical structure of our descriptions and the structure of the far from amorphous experienced world, for that would imply that the latter contributes nothing to the former. On the contrary, (to take a prime and crucial example) the physical unity and discreteness of perceptible material objects is very much a structural feature of the world, literally a matter of the world's independent physical structure, however to be scientifically explained. And it is no accident that all natural languages are (metaphorically) structured around such naturally and perceptibly discrete objects as the basic, given, individual objects of reference. Yet in many other respects there is no structural consonance between our prelinguistic experience, or the world as we experience it, and language, or the means of predicative thought. It is bad metaphysics to attempt to explain the possibility of describing or characterizing objects by means of predicates, or the possibility of referring to such entities as *attributes*, *states of affairs*, or *facts*, in terms of structural consonance or correspondence between language and the world. The world, on the scale at which we experience it, is to an extent broken up into unitary material objects, and that is *how* we experience it. It is not broken up into properties, tropes, states of affairs, or facts, nor do we so experience it. Of course, predication is our linguistic means of 'capturing' how things are and how we perceive them to be, the 'aspects', resemblances or differences that strike us. But language and conceptual thought are not responsible for experience's having any content at all. In general, experience comes before concepts, and it is because we experience the world as we do that we are in a position to acquire the concepts appropriate to any account of things in the world, or of that experience.

4. McDowell's Holism I: colour concepts

So far from allowing that the experienced structure of the world gives anything to the structure of natural language, McDowell holds that experience would not be the way it is, or any way at all, unless it were permeated and shaped by a systematic way of thinking of the world, a scheme of interdependent concepts, a 'world view' embodied in language. He sees such a degree of coherentism as the only way of allowing experience to have content while avoiding the 'Myth of the Given'.

McDowell takes it that the 'Myth' has been refuted by Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument, and he stresses a central implication of that argument that the primary role of secondary quality adjectives is in their application to objects, to things in the world. Talk of a 'sensation of red', or of 'perceiving red', where these are descriptions of inner experience, is secondary to straightforwardly objective predications, 'The ball is red', 'the patch on the wall is red', and the like. But now McDowell attempts to get from this important and generally accepted point to the conclusion that experience inherently and of its nature involves a scheme of concepts. First we are told that the concept of being red is indeed tied to the subjective character of experience:

> What it is for something to be red is not intelligible unless packaged with an understanding of what it is for something to look red. The idea of being red does not go beyond the idea of being the way red things look in the right circumstances. (p. 29)

This closeness to experience means that colour concepts are 'minimally integrated' into the thinker's scheme of beliefs or world-view. Nevertheless, McDowell says, they *are* necessarily integrated. The thinker 'must be equipped with such things as the concept of visible surfaces of objects, and the concept of suitable conditions for telling what something's colour is by looking at it.' This claim, McDowell suggests, is consonant with Wittgenstein's rejection of 'the thought that, if being red and looking red are intelligible only in terms of each other', we can only break into the circle by explaining both being red and looking red in terms of the 'inner' experience of 'seeing red' (p. 30). McDowell's alternative is to recognize that colour concepts 'come only as elements in a bundle of concepts that must be acquired together' – that is, to embrace a form of conceptual holism.

This argument is significantly unconvincing. First, although a philosopher (amateur or professional) might claim with some point that, when it comes down to it, being red is just a matter of looking red to normal observers in normal circumstances, that does not mean that the child who can distinguish colours and correctly employ colour predicates must also have the concepts employed in that philosophical reflection before properly being credited with the concept *red*: e.g. the concepts of *normality* or *rightness* and *circumstances*, exercised, as it might be held, with a specifically propositional 'mode of togetherness'. McDowell's further unpacking of the alleged conceptual bundle does little to help his case, since both concepts mentioned (the concept of visible surfaces of objects and the concept of suitable conditions for telling what something's colour is by looking at it) are distinctly sophisticated by comparison with the concept *red*. A *visible surface* is a fairly abstract entity,[27] not at all the first kind of thing we learn to talk about, while

[27] Surfaces are not, of course, abstract in the way that universals or numbers are abstract, but in so far as they are conceived of by abstraction from what is concrete and discrete.

the notion of *suitable conditions* is even less likely to be bandied about by young children.

It might be objected that this criticism is absurdly uncharitable. Perhaps 'concepts' or 'conceptual capacities' are not, after all, so tightly linked to language. Possession of the concept *red* involves a wide range of experiential and agent capacities, and perhaps it is right that a child who takes its bricks out of the dark room into the light room to sort them thereby manifests one (or a set) of these capacities such as is reasonably characterized as its concept of 'suitable conditions for telling what something's colour is by looking at it'. Yet this approach, however it may be developed, does not seem to offer a defence of McDowell's claim compatible with his general position. Our child has twigged something about vision, perhaps about colour. Yet McDowell's generalized description or characterization from the outside of the child's intellectual achievement is deeply problematic as an analysis of that achievement from the inside, purporting to identify a *concept* possessed by the child, a distinguishable member of a bundle of concepts which the child *must* possess if it is to acquire a full understanding of the term 'red': i.e. which the child must acquire along with such concepts as *red*. McDowell's argument at best conflates two different notions of a concept. One is linked to language, and such that we acquire the concept *red* when we achieve a full understanding of 'red' or a synonym. The other is evidently not so linked, since it is palpably *not* necessary to learn the meaning of an expression equivalent to 'suitable conditions' when learning the meaning of 'red' or, for that matter, when realizing that it is easier to see the colours of things if they are in a good light. To repeat, such an expression may be in place in a *characterization* of the latter achievement (as it is in a philosophical reflection on redness), but that achievement does not of itself involve coming to understand such an expression.

It is surely true that a certain wide, practical familiarity with the world and how we relate to it in perception, including skills at picking out, examining and manipulating objects and stuffs, and perhaps some grasp of how light behaves (not to speak of some degree of natural, partly empathetic or emotional appreciation of the communicative agency of those others from whom the infant learns its first language)[28] are normal conditions of an infant's acquiring a full understanding of such predications as 'This is red' and 'That is a dog'. Being thus at home in the world itself depends (as well, perhaps, as on general intelligence) on a variety of sometimes surprisingly specific capacities or mechanisms, innate or acquired, identifiable by their absence in cases of genetic defect or brain-damage, or possibly by significant, distinct steps in normal infant development. Yet it is a question worth

[28] A recent approach to autism proposes that an autistic child lacks an innate empathetic response to others, learning by inference, if at all, what is normally embodied in natural emotional attitudes.

taking more slowly than is appropriate here how far all this cognitive achievement is best described as the possession and exercise of *concepts*, rather than taken to constitute such command of the perceived environment as is necessarily prior to the acquisition of any concepts.[29]

One way to go, taken by some psychologists, is to identify virtually all distinguishable steps in a child's progress in perceptual discrimination and in its comprehension of the world as *conceptual* advances, right from the infant's first tracking physical objects as objects of attention.[30] Whether this is a helpful or wise employment of the term 'concept' is here irrelevant. What is to the present point is that McDowell cannot consistently appeal to such considerations to bolster his conceptual holism, just because his notion of what is conceptual is tied so closely to propositional form. He cannot have it both ways. Either he is claiming, with minimal plausibility, that a child cannot understand colour-words without also understanding, at least as they are employed in the relevant context, such words and phrases as 'looks', 'normal people' and 'suitable conditions'; or he is asserting (contrary to his main thesis, if, as some of us might think, platitudinously) that, before acquiring colour-words or, we might add, any language at all, a child must be to a significant extent cognitively and actively at home in the world of perceptible physical objects: i.e. must have experience, if not thought, with structured and determinate (but not, in McDowell's sense, *conceptually* structured and determinate) intentional content.

5. McDowell's Holism II: Self and World

Other holistic arguments advanced by McDowell are no more convincing. Like Quine and many others, he runs together possession of a set of systematically inter-related concepts with possession of a system of beliefs, possession of a 'world view' with possession of a conceptual scheme. The natural opposite thought is that a view on the world is embodied in the ordinary experience and active life of many animals, and indeed is so in human experience as a *condition* of the acquisition and possession of language and concepts. McDowell tries to forestall this thought by

[29] One identifiable genetic defect is an inability to judge numbers of small groups without counting (an ability seemingly possessed by some non-human animals). What would be the point of saying that such individuals lack number *concepts*, or the concept of number? What concept would be lacking in the case of a similar inability to judge distances? There would seem to be something deeply wrong in treating such recognitional or judgemental capacities and incapacities as in general conceptual.

[30] Elizabeth Spelke is a currently influential example, apparently influenced, like Piaget, by broadly Kantian philosophical ideas. For those who adopt this approach, there is an easy route to identifying the concept in question: for a start, just *say* what the child has grasped! But however objectionable the term 'conceptual' so-used may be, it is surely better than 'theoretical'.

building up contrasting accounts of what is involved in a world view and of the nature of animal life and sensitivity which keep clear water between them.

The firmest line of this argument, somewhat rhetorically developed with acknowledgements to Kant, Peter Strawson and Gareth Evans, is to the effect that not only awareness of oneself as an enduring subject of thought, but any thought or experience which has reference to things in the world, requires as a condition 'the thinker's competent self-conscious presence in the world' as one material object among others. Awareness of oneself as a material thing and awareness of an objective world are mutually dependent. But such awareness, McDowell takes it, involves the concept of a person, namely an understanding

> that the first person, the continuing referent of the "I" in the "I think" that can accompany all my representations is also a third person, something ... such that other modes of continuing thought about it would indeed require keeping track of it [in the objective world]. (p. 102)

Accordingly, he argues that the links between the subject and other particular objects are also conceptual, through 'demonstrative concepts' constituting Fregean senses or modes of presentation. This is not the only place in which McDowell's thesis leans heavily on the notion of a demonstrative concept, and here he explains that by 'conceptual' he means something wider than 'predicative', namely 'belonging to the realm of Fregean sense'. A demonstrative concept has earlier been explained as a concept exercised when we pick out an object for thought by means of 'a phrase like "that shade", in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample' (pp. 56–7).

This argument is supported by a series of claims, echoing Gadamer, alleging a fundamental difference in kind between merely animal and linguistically socialized human mentality. Animals and infants may be 'perceptually sensitive' to features of their environment, but do not have 'outer experience' in the Kantian sense. They are incapable of the 'disinterested contemplation' that makes room for reasoning and free intentional action, and they therefore lack a 'free distanced orientation to the world', possessing only 'protosubjectivity' rather than fully-fledged subjectivity. Yet, to pass over the question whether all this seriously underestimates the cognitive capacities of some animals, such rhetoric begs the main question, since proponents of non-conceptual intentional content need only suppose (as is pretty evident in itself) that the sense experience of animals and infants from an early age, and for that matter the experience of adults, will indeed include inarticulate, *non-conceptual*, sensory bodily awareness of themselves as acting within a partly manipulable, partly intractable environment.

We need not suppose that a hound requires mastery of the first personal pronoun or a sophisticated general conception of 'the world' in order to be sensorily aware of its physical and active inter-relation with the hare it chases, or for that inter-relationship to fit into the structure of the hound's perceptual-cum-agent

consciousness.[31] Indeed, unless an infant had first achieved such inarticulate self-consciousness it is difficult to see how it could ever advance to the use of first and third person predication, not to speak of meditating on the logical relationship between self-reference and reference to others. McDowell's main thesis concerns intentionality, and it therefore hangs, not on whether the actions of animals and infants can count as 'free'or fully intended, or on whether their experience and reactions are sufficiently reflective to count as rational, or on whether they take their immediate environment to be part of one wider World, but simply on whether they are subject to sensory or perceptual states with intentional content.

In developing his claims for the importance of demonstrative concepts,[32] McDowell seems at least to envisage a certain way out of the problem that animals pose for his thesis. Evans himself had in effect assumed what may seem no more than a piece of common sense, namely that the notion of a 'demonstrative concept' presupposes a *nonconceptual* sensory presentation of the sample or object in question. For how could a sample be demonstratively exploited that was not *already* experientially available? McDowell's difficult counterclaim (appealing *ad hominem* to an idiosyncratic feature of Evans's own position) seems to be that it is the availability of the demonstrative concept itself that makes the outcome of the sensory processes available as 'experience' to the self-conscious subject. He cites and glosses with qualified approval the view of Evans that

> a state of the perceptual informational system counts as an experience only if its non-conceptual content is available as 'input to a thinking, concept-applying and reasoning system' . . . ; that is, only if its non-conceptual content is available to a faculty of spontaneity, which can rationally make or withhold judgements of experience on the basis of the perceptual state. (p. 49)

By McDowell's lights, of course, the non-conceptual contents of the sub-personal perceptual states of linguistically socialized human beings are available as the *basis* of judgement only as and when already transformed into the conceptual contents of conscious (= self-conscious) experience.[33] Prior to this mysterious metamorphosis, the 'blind' non-conceptual actualizations of sensitivity are identified with informational states as conceived of by 'cognitive pychology' (p. 54–5; p. 121). Yet this daring, but surely doomed attempt to deal with late twentieth-century functionalism within the Kantian framework naturally stimulates yet another question about McDowell's meaning. Is it his considered view (as it seems to have been

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[31] Cf. Gassendi's reaction to Descartes's conceptualism: *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Fifth Set of Objections (AT IV 272–3).

[32] And elsewhere, as in his commentary on Evans's claim that non-conceptual content is more "fine-grained" than the concepts available to express it (pp. 56–60).

[33] The reader could be forgiven for wondering whether all the problems that are alleged by McDowell for the idea that the non-conceptual should ground the propositional, as well as for the contrary idea that sensation can at best *cause* the propositional, have simply been shifted to this mystical transformation.

Evans's) that the attribution of contentful perceptual states to animals and infants lacking a world view embodied in language is after all acceptable, provided only that we understand the content functionally or causally, as 'information' in a technical sense, and do not suppose that animals have sense experience, that is *conscious* sensation?

Here we seem to be left with contrary interpretive considerations. On the one hand McDowell's overall position (like Davidson's) seems to have a strong need for just this eerily Cartesian view of animals as a way of allowing them states with a kind of intentionality less than the true intentionality of the propositional attitudes of the rational animal. On the other hand, his argument is larded with disclaimers (reminiscent of seventeenth-century *anti*-Cartesianism) to the effect that it would be 'outrageous' and an 'obvious falsehood' to deny animals sensitivity to pain or, more generally, 'perceptual sensitivity' to features of their environment (which surely has to be perception *of* things) (p. 50). The indeterminacies and stresses in the argument seem essential to it, manifestations of a characteristically twentieth-century attempt to tie intentionality and even consciousness in with language and human rationality with a rope that is a way too short.

It is nevertheless true enough, if not for McDowell's given reasons, that concepts are acquired in bundles. Clearly 'red' could not be fully understood without some grasp of predication,[34] and so a grasp of other terms such as 'brick' or 'flower', and of the role of their conjunction in such sentences as 'The brick is red'. Similarly the term 'red' will be acquired along with other colour-terms (at a theoretical minimum, perhaps, a colour-term with the extension of 'not-red'), and the distinct role of colour-terms will be marked by a contrast with other kinds of predicate. It is not necessary to adopt some extravagently super-Saussurian view that no word has meaning except in relation to the whole of the language to which it belongs[35] in order to recognise that an appreciation of the syntactic and semantic role of one word will necessarily include appreciation of the roles of others. That such basic bundles can in fact be relatively small is partly because language comes in layers, so that such abstract or second-order terms as 'surface', 'conditions', 'predicate', 'number', 'shade' and 'belief' naturally and necessarily come later to the learner than words like 'dog', 'round', 'two', 'red', 'Danny' or 'I'.

Moreover basic predication comes to be grasped in the context of communication about a structured environment of prelinguistically identifiable, perceptibly various, variously manipulable and interacting material objects and stuffs. Coming to understand a first language is not a matter of learning a key to all permissible

[34] Which does not, I take it, mean that the child must have the sophisticated and second-order concepts, *subject* and *predicate*. Even to explain the achievement of conceptual thought we need the notion of inarticulate, non- or pre-conceptual understanding. In this case we could use something like the scholastic distinction between the ability to predicate, and possession of the concept *predication*.

[35] One of the softer targets of Fodor and Lepore, *Holism: a Shopper's Guide*

combinations of linguistic elements, any more than it is a matter of learning the names of given phenomenal simples. It is a matter of getting the point of what is being done by others, and here the child can and must call on the world as she experiences it and is already at home in it, as well as on her prelinguistic rapport with other people, not to speak of any more specific innate linguistic dispositions or capacities there may be. That bundles of expressions have to be learnt alongside one another even at the start is not to be explained, I would suggest, by the need to possess sufficient material for a 'scheme of beliefs or world view' into which all our concepts can and must be integrated, as if the expressions functioned as the inter-definable terms of our first, lisping theory, giving us our first hypostasized objects. Rather, it is necessary because of a more mundane need for adequate prompts and cues to stimulate an inarticulate, practical grasp of the fact that, and the ways in which, certain humanly produced sounds[36] constitute articulated sequences of elements that in combination manage (in the basic case) to *refer* to certain perceptibly, physically discrete objects of shared preconceptual experience, and to *describe* those objects. To grasp all that is at least inarticulately to grasp how an articulate, propositional judgement may be grounded on what is not propositional.[37]

[36] Or gestures – many people, deaf from birth or early childhood, have learnt signing as their first language. Jonathan Ree's *I See a Voice* offers thought-provoking reflections on the relation of signing to speech.

[37] See note 34. I am grateful to those who have commented on earlier drafts of this article, and especially to Quassim Cassam and Tom Crowther, many of whose helpful comments have stimulated changes of text or footnotes.