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Disjunctivism and Perceptual Knowledge in Merleau-Ponty and McDowell

[W]e must not wonder if we truly perceive a world; rather, we must say: the world is what we perceive. More generally, we must not wonder if our evident truths are really truths, or if, by some defect of our mind, what is evident for us would actually be revealed as illusory when measured against some truth in itself. For if we speak of illusion, this is because we have previously recognized illusions, and we could only do so in the name of some perception that, at that very moment, vouched for itself as true, such that doubt, or the fear of being mistaken, Simultaneously affirms our power of unmasking error and could thus not uproot us from the truth. We are in the truth, and evidentness is "the experience of truth."

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, lxxx.¹

Introductory texts on disjunctive theories of perception tend to begin with a discussion of how the term is applied to a wide range of views, and then set about distinguishing between different types of disjunctivism (see Haddock and Macpherson 2008, Byrne and Logue 2009b, and Soteriou 2009). This can make it difficult to determine what, if anything, the term really means. But in the midst of a such a discussion Matthew Soteriou (2009) provides a helpful broad definition: "we can at least say that the minimal

commitment of a view that can be labelled a disjunctivist theory of perception is that veridical perceptions and hallucinations differ mentally in some significant respect—i.e., there are certain mental features that veridical perceptions have that hallucinations cannot have.” Soteriou then notes that this leaves open the question of what the relevant “mental features” are, such that specific forms of disjunctivism can be further categorized.

If we substitute “illusion” for “hallucination” (and this is common in discussions of disjunctivism, see, e.g. Hinton 1967), the epigraph from *Phenomenology of Perception* seems to match up well with Soteriou’s definition.² First, we might reasonably take Merleau-Ponty’s talk of truth in perception as referring to veridical perception. Furthermore, it is clear that true perception is supposed to be contrasted with illusion, such that our experience of illusions and true perception are crucially different. In fact, it is because some perceptions “vouch for themselves as true” that we can identify illusions as being different. This “vouching” could further be taken as a “mental feature” of the veridical perception that is missing from the illusion.

When introductory texts further go about distinguishing forms of disjunctivism, John McDowell’s view is usually presented as one of the primary versions. McDowell develops his disjunctivism as a part of a broader view of the way that perception provides us with epistemic warrants. McDowell wants to support a view of perception as directly linking the perceiver with the world such that one can directly support one’s knowledge of the world through that perception. In order to deal with the possibility of illusion, McDowell further argues for disjunctivism; “an appearance is either a case of things being thus and so

in a way that is manifest to the subject or a case of its merely seeming to the subject that that is how things are" (2010, 244). The "manifestness to the subject" is crucial here because it enables the subject to know that their knowledge is genuinely underwritten by their connection with the world.

The epigraph also suggests that Merleau-Ponty holds a view like McDowell's. First, the claim that "the world is what we perceive" asserts the direct link between perception and the world that McDowell is after. Furthermore, Merleau-Ponty's talk of truth and his attempts to stave off worries about doubt suggest that he is interested not only in the character of perceptual experience but in the knowledge we can derive from perception. And he further suggests, like McDowell, that true perception is different from illusion because insofar as the perceptions vouch for themselves that they are true, it is manifest to the perceiver that one is "experiencing truth."

As it stands, though, this comparison is fairly superficial insofar as it relies on one quote from the preface to *Phenomenology of Perception*. The rest of this paper will add depth to this initially superficial comparison, and show that Merleau-Ponty holds a view that is strikingly similar to McDowell's in various ways. But it will also be argued that there are certain key elements that show up in Merleau-Ponty's thought that can make a stronger case for the kind of epistemological view that McDowell wants to support through his disjunctivism. To show this, the paper will first (in section I) present the basics of McDowell's particular form of disjunctivism. Section II will then show that McDowell's disjunctivism about perception cannot be fully understood apart from his epistemological

aims, and specifically his attempt to show that one can both accept the possibility of illusion and hold that perception can provide indefeasible warrant. Section III will then shift to a search for disjunctivism in *Phenomenology of Perception*, and section IV will show how Merleau-Ponty's views on perception and illusion can be connected with epistemological disjunctivist aims like McDowell's. Section IV will further show that a Merleau-Pontyan view can provide unique solutions to some problems that confront epistemological disjunctivism. Section V will provide some summary remarks, and conclude with a brief discussion of the broader import of a Merleau-Pontyan epistemological disjunctivism.

I. McDowell's Disjunctivism

Along with J.M. Hinton and Paul Snowdon, McDowell is usually taken to be a primary early defender of disjunctivism.³ In particular his essays "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge" (1998a) and "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space" (1998c) are taken to present his primary views on the matter. The overall view that is defended in those essays can be reconstructed as having the following three interrelated characteristics:

- a. A commitment to direct realism, with a corresponding rejection of views (such as sense-data theories, or other more broadly Cartesian theories) that problematize the direct link between perceptual experience and the world.
- b. A response to skepticism based on direct realism, which asserts that perceptual experience provides strong warrants for claims about the perceived world.
- c. An assertion of disjunctivism as a way of maintaining the direct realist response to skepticism while accepting the reality of perceptual illusions.

All of these points will be found in the deeper consideration of McDowell's views that

follow. After the examination of McDowell's views, we will return to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, and expand on the points found in the epigraph passage.

McDowell's earliest works on disjunctivism are not actually directly about that topic. Rather, "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge" is about Wittgenstein's notion of epistemic criteria, and its relation to our direct knowledge of other minds, while "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space" aims to defend the idea that singular thoughts are directly object-dependent, and criticizes a Cartesian conception of the mental that stands in the way of that idea. So why does disjunctivism crop up in these two fairly different contexts?

The first key to answering that question is the fact that each essay displays a version of naïve or direct realism.⁴ This is easiest to see if we consider "Singular Thought" first. There McDowell wants to defend Russell's view that singular propositions refer directly to objects. But at the same time he wants to reject Russell's limitation of singular propositions to instances where some incorrigible inner state is referenced (as in a reference to the features of sense-data).⁵ Against Russell, McDowell asserts that instead of seeing perception as only acquainting us with features of sense-data, we should accept that there are "at least some perceptual relations between minds and ordinary objects" (1998c, 231). The same basic point, but with an important qualification, underpins the argument in "Criteria" as well. There, McDowell's aim is to undermine the view that because we can only have indirect knowledge of another person's mental states--most obviously through experiencing their behavior--we have at best defeasible

knowledge of those states. A twist on direct realism is necessary here, because one would not want to say that we directly experience another person's mental states. But McDowell does assert the related view that 'we might think of what is directly available to experience in some such terms as "his giving expression to his being in that 'inner' state" (1998a, 387). In each essay McDowell criticizes a view that places an intermediary (i.e. sense-data or behavior) between mind and world that throws knowledge of objects in the world into question. So we see point A above as figuring in both texts.

The fact that these views throw knowledge of objects into question brings skepticism onto the scene. The point is presented in a very general way in "Singular Thought," where the bulk of the essay (after the initial sections dealing with Russell) criticizes a supposedly Cartesian view that attaches certainty only to "inner" experiences, and thus has to build knowledge of the external world out of materials we grasp only in the inner. This problematizes the common-sense idea that we gain knowledge of the external world through perceptual experience, and "within the Cartesian picture there is a serious question about how it can be that experience...is not blank or blind, but purports to be revelatory of the world we live in" (1998c, 243). "Criteria" presents an analogous, but more specific, problem. One can be skeptical of the existence of other minds because the indirect evidence provided by the other's behavior is not sufficient to establish genuinely mental activity. But this problematizes the common-sense notion that we experience other human *beings* to whom we directly attribute mental states (1998a, 384). On the skeptical view, we only perceive human *bodies* construed as merely material

centers of behavior. To borrow the above phrasing from “Singular Thought,” such a skeptical view would pose a question about how it can be that experience purports to be revelatory of the human world we live in. If we take it, though, that experience puts us in direct contact with the world, there is no question of its revelation. So we have point B in the above reconstruction.

The kind of skeptical view that most concerns McDowell is illustrated through a consideration of illusion. While this point shows up in “Singular Thought” it is most developed in “Criteria.”⁶ McDowell notes there that the common understanding of criteria that he opposes is plausibly motivated by the possibility of pretense (1998a, 380). One may, for example, merely pretend to be in pain, and in that case our perceptual experience of that pretending might seem to us identical to an instance of someone actually in pain. If that is the case, experience can only give us defeasible evidence for the existence of a mental state like pain. As McDowell notes, this argument is analogous to the more general “argument from illusion” which states that because veridical and non-veridical perceptions can be subjectively indiscriminable, there must be something common between them that is the basis of our perceptual beliefs. And if this common element is all that we can know through perception, one has to question whether perception can really provide us with any knowledge of the world (or, to put the point another way, whether all perception might just be illusion).

Disjunctivism thus comes on the scene as a way of dealing with the argument from illusion, and the skepticism that follows from it. As McDowell famously describes the

skeptical view, “we have to conceive the basis as a *highest common factor* of what is available to experience in the deceptive and non-deceptive cases alike, and hence as something that is at best a defeasible ground” (1998a, 386). In response to this problem, he claims that “an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be *either* a mere appearance *or* the fact that such and such is the case making itself perceptually manifest to someone” (1998a, 386-7). Disjunctivism denies the highest common factor view by holding that the “directness” that the direct realist argues for is present in the veridical perception but not in the non-veridical perception. So despite the similarities between the two cases (including, potentially, the elements that make them subjectively indiscriminable) there is a crucially relevant distinction between them--one makes some element of the world perceptually manifest while the other does not. But what, exactly, is different about the two cases such that one could make facts manifest and the other could not?

There is a possible way of answering this question that is very common in the literature on disjunctivism but does not figure in McDowell’s essays. Setting aside the epistemological issue of making facts manifest, one might support the general disjunctivist rejection of the highest common factor view on metaphysical grounds. Such “metaphysical disjunctivism” distinguishes veridical from non-veridical perception on the basis that the two types of experience are fundamentally different kinds of things. Consider M.G.F. Martin’s way of putting the point:

For the Common Kind Assumption [Martin's version of the highest common factor view] to be a non-trivial falsehood...we need some conception of the privileged descriptions of experiences. For it to be a substantive matter that perceptions fail to be the same kind of mental episode as illusions or hallucinations, we need some characterizations of events which reflect their nature or what is most fundamentally true of them. (2006, 360)

These fundamental kinds would of course need further specification (for useful taxonomies of such views see Haddock and Macpherson 2008 and Byrne and Logue 2009b). But however that works out, it could be that the relevant metaphysical theory explains the epistemological question, if some fundamental kinds make facts manifest while others do not.⁷

Nevertheless, McDowell does not take this metaphysical disjunctivist route, and his view is usually distinguished as "epistemological disjunctivism."⁸ Of course, one could try to apply the terminology of "kinds" to McDowell's view, and distinguish between the "kind" of perception that makes the world manifest and the "kind" that does not, but McDowell does not provide the materials for any full theoretical description of those "kinds."⁹ He is content to present his views on perception only as far as is necessary to develop his epistemological concerns, and those concerns will be further discussed in the next section.

II. Disjunctivism and Perceptual Warrant

Following the previous section, we can summarize McDowell's epistemological disjunctivism as the view that veridical perceptions make facts about the world manifest while non-veridical perceptions do not, and for McDowell the explanation of this difference will not rest on metaphysical considerations about fundamental perceptual types. It must be emphasized that it is a crucial element of epistemological disjunctivist views that the facts are made *manifest* to the perceiver; i.e. the perceiver can self-consciously grasp them. McDowell puts the point as follows:

What does entitle one to claim that one is perceiving that things are thus and so, when one is so entitled? The fact that one is perceiving that things are thus and so. That is a kind of fact whose obtaining our self-consciously possessed perceptual capacities enable us to recognize on suitable occasions just as they enable us to recognize such facts as that there are red cubes in front of us, and all the more complex types of environmental facts that our powers to perceive things put at our disposal. (2009, 238-9)

We can then (following Neta 2008, 313) say that the crucial element of the difference between the disjuncts is that veridical perception gives us "reflectively accessible epistemic reasons for belief" (see also Pritchard 2012, 15). This access is presented with perception, as is suggested by very common claims of the type "I can tell a green thing when I see one" (McDowell 2011, 32). Such perceptions warrant knowledge that illusions do not, and we can directly know this about them (call this the "reflective accessibility claim").

This reflective accessibility claim is crucial to the explanation of the difference between veridical and non-veridical perceptions. But *prima facie* the claim might go too far; if veridical perceptions include reflectively accessible support while non-veridical

perceptions do not, then perhaps we could easily tell the two apart. But it would do away with the very idea of illusion if in the illusion one could grasp, due to the lack of reflectively accessible support, the fact that the perception is not veridical. Perceptual illusions depend, by definition, on the fact that one cannot tell in the illusory experience that it is not veridical, so the illusion must be in some way subjectively indiscriminable from the veridical perception (call this the “subjective indiscriminability claim”). This leaves McDowell (and any other epistemological disjunctivist) in a seemingly uncomfortable position. To properly respond to the argument from illusion, and thus fight off the skepticism regarding empirical knowledge that follows from it, he must accept both the reflective accessibility claim and the subjective indiscriminability claim.¹⁰

One can generalize the point of the argument from illusion by noting the fallibility of perception. By responding to arguments made by Tyler Burge regarding fallibility, McDowell has recently attempted to resolve the problem of subjective indiscriminability and reflective accessibility. Perception can possibly go wrong; as Burge puts the point, “because of every individual's perspectival limitations, and because of the nature of empirical warrant, every perceptual state...could in principle have been in circumstances in which it was prone to error” (Burge 2003, 535). If this is the case, it would seem that perception could only provide us with defeasible warrants and we could never reflectively know that a given perception is veridical. And It should be noted that Burge’s point is not just that we might not be able to “discern our own states,” but that the perceptual capacity itself is fallible; “it is realized in state types that could have been mistaken” (Burge 2005,

31). Perception as a capacity could not, on this view, provide us with the kind of reflectively accessible warrant that McDowell takes to be available in instances of veridical perception.

McDowell takes the problem of fallibility head on by trying to show that arguments like Burge's are mistaken, and that veridical perceptions can in fact provide indefeasible warrants even though perception is fallible. Fallibility, McDowell notes, applies to capacities as a whole rather than individual exercises of the capacity; for example, one can have a fallible capacity for shooting free-throws, yet still, on a particular occasion, succeed in making such a shot (2010, 245-6; 2011, 39 makes the same argument but with putting as the example). So the general fact of perceptual fallibility, which he accepts, need not impugn our ability to get things right in particular perceptions. He also accepts that when perception goes wrong, the perceiver might not know that it is going wrong. But just as one's missed free throws do not entail that one cannot make a free throw, it does not follow from such an instance of perceptual fallibility that "the capacity cannot be correctly described as a capacity to get into positions in which *one knows* that it is through one's perceptual state that one knows something about the environment" (McDowell 2011, 42, emphasis added). To put the point a different way, the fact of not knowing one is fooled when one is fooled does not prove that one does not know one is not fooled when one is not fooled.

The upshot of this argument is that there is an asymmetrical relation between illusions and veridical perceptions; the former cannot be discriminated from the latter, but

the latter can be discriminated from the former. As noted above, by definition illusions entail that one cannot tell in the illusory experience that it is not veridical. McDowell's point is to show that it is a bad inference to move from this point to the idea that one cannot tell that a veridical experience is veridical. Importantly, McDowell does not, in this argument, try to explain the fact that we can know that a veridical experience is veridical by describing what reflective accessibility is like. His point, rather, is to remove the supposed force of arguments from illusion or fallibility that can lead us to question our common sense belief that perception puts us in contact with the world.¹¹ Thus one should be able to accept that the subjective indiscriminability claim and the reflective accessibility claim can both be accommodated.

How well this argument works is unclear. As Burge notes, McDowell's distinction between capacities and exercises does not cover all possible meanings of fallibility; one can, for instance, understand fallibility in terms of the metaphysical possibility that some instance might be mistaken. So infallibility might require, on such a view, that "there is no possible world in which that very instance could have been inaccurate" (Burge 2011, 53). The split between capacities and exercises clearly cannot explain away this problem; if a capacity is fallible it is hard to see how any of its exercises could be metaphysically infallible. Given this, it seems wrong to conclude (as does Rödl 2007, 157-8, in a passage from which McDowell draws inspiration) that "I am in a position to distinguish my situation *from any possible situation* in which I would be fooled" (McDowell 2011, 42). In any event, the availability of Burge's response weakens the force of McDowell's argument,

and leaves one looking for a more positive defense of the reflective accessibility claim that can sit alongside the subjective indiscriminability claim.

There are other resources that one can find in McDowell's work for dealing with this problem. Consider the brief consideration of disjunctivist ideas (the term "disjunctivism" is not itself used) in *Mind and World*, which notes that:

It is true that we could not establish that we are open to facts *in any given case*; at any rate not to the satisfaction of a determined skeptic, who can always insist on exploiting fallibility to give bite to the question how we know the present case is one of the non-misleading ones. But that is beside the point. It would matter if it showed that the very idea of openness to facts is unintelligible, and it does not show that. For my present purposes, the sheer intelligibility of the idea is enough. (1996, 113, emphasis added)

One might, following the point of this passage, argue that one need not show that any particular individual perception must in itself be veridical; rather the point is to show that we can depend on the fact that there are veridical perceptions. So McDowell's argument against views like Burge's that is noted above might be cast in a different light. One need not know "that *the current exercise* of one's perceptual capacity was non-defective." One only needs to know that *the general exercise* of one's perceptual capacity is open to facts.

One could further connect this argument with the point of McDowell 2009, which aims to undermine global skepticism that throws into doubt the idea that perceptual experience provides real knowledge about the world. This undermining happens through an argument that has the basic features of a transcendental argument: it begins with a point that is taken to be indubitable, and then argues for a necessary condition for that indubitable point.

The indubitable point with which the argument begins is the common sense idea that “experience purports to be of objective reality” (McDowell 2009, 233). For this to be, as McDowell puts it, at all intelligible, it must be the case that there are some experiences that directly make objectivity available to us. To put the point succinctly, the argument “starts from the fact that perceptual experience at least purports to be of objective reality, and yields the conclusion that we must be able to make sense of the idea of perceptual experience that is actually of objective reality” (McDowell 2009, 232).

Again, according to McDowell the highest common factor view of experience entails that even in instances of veridical perception we cannot know that facts about the world are directly available to us. If illusion and veridical experience share the same status (the “highest common factor”), we would not be able to tell when our experiences are true. But if this is false, and there are some experiences that do make facts about the world directly available (e.g. if I can actually “know something is green when I see it”), then the highest common factor view cannot hold across the board, and epistemological disjunctivism is supported. Note that this argument works even if we cannot specify in a number of instances what kind of experience we are, at that moment, having. The reflective accessibility claim should be satisfied by the fact that perception considered as a whole can provide us with warrants, and we know that it can. This is completely compatible with subjective indiscriminability in particular cases.

It is important to note that this is a transcendental argument rather than an inductive argument. The point is not to show that there is some statistically significant

number of good perceptions in our general perceptual operations such that we can generalize from that group to the conclusion that perception is reliable.¹² The point is rather to suggest that we cannot even make sense of the idea of “objective purport” if we do not believe that we are usually directly open to facts about the world. And that is enough for us to be able to say that we, e.g. know green things when we see them (and, again, to satisfy the reflective accessibility claim).

On the basis of the preceding exposition, the ultimate upshot of McDowell’s epistemological disjunctivism is a bit unclear. One of his primary recent strategies for defending his view, which relies on the distinction between fallibility in capacities versus individual exercises of the capacity, seems flawed. One can try to support his view by looking elsewhere, using the consideration of disjunctivism in *Mind and World* in tandem with the transcendental disjunctivist argument, as shown above. But the result of this argument is perhaps weaker than McDowell’s favored conclusion, because it moves away from the idea that “I am in a position to distinguish my situation from any possible situation in which I would be fooled” (McDowell 2011, 42).

I think that something like the latter, seemingly weaker type of argument can support epistemological disjunctivism, though making this case will require moving away from McDowell’s views. One could still hold that a person could “on an occasion when...that risk [of fallibility] does not materialize” express “knowledge, and knowledge that *she knew she had*” (McDowell 2011, 50) as long as we take “knowledge that she knew she had” to refer to the person’s acceptance that her perceptual faculty puts her in

touch directly with the world. But we need to more fully question one of the underlying assumptions of this whole discussion. The arguments under consideration issue most clearly from a view that considers perception in terms of discrete units (“current exercises,” for instance) that are to be each individually judged in terms of their accuracy or inaccuracy (for a thorough defense of such a view, see Burge 2010, especially ch. 2). If one need not think of perception this way, the problem of whether perception can at once live up to the subjective indiscriminability claim and the reflective accessibility claim looks quite different. And, following on this, we can present a stronger response to the argument from illusion. This can be further developed through a consideration of Merleau-Ponty’s thoughts on illusion.

III. Merleau-Ponty’s Disjunctivism

Clearly disjunctivism, as it is currently discussed and debated, was not a problem that Merleau-Ponty considered (insofar as the contemporary issue was first raised a few years after his death). So to some extent, the comparison being undertaken here is anachronistic. But the current debates regarding disjunctivism are also clearly based on long-standing philosophical questions surrounding the nature of perception and its relation to knowledge. Merleau-Ponty did consider issues that are relevant to disjunctivism, and one can use arguments made in *Phenomenology of Perception* to construct a view that is pertinent to the current debates.

To begin this construction, we should recall the three elements of McDowell's view noted above:

- a. A commitment to direct realism, with a corresponding rejection of views (such as sense-data theories, or other more broadly Cartesian theories) that problematize the link between perceptual experience and the world.
- b. A response to skepticism based on direct realism, which asserts that perceptual experience provides strong warrants for claims about the perceived world.
- c. An assertion of disjunctivism as a way of maintaining the direct realist response to skepticism while accepting the reality of perceptual illusions.

The previous two sections have shown that these three aspects are in fact present in McDowell's work. One can also add to point C the fact that disjunctivism must satisfy both the subjective indiscriminability and reflective accessibility claims. The following will show that one can find some version of all three aspects in Merleau-Ponty's work. But his version of these views is supported in a manner that differs in important ways from McDowell's own considerations.

There are passages in the *Phenomenology* that seem, at least, to actually state point c, (a disjunctivist position including the subjective indiscriminability and reflective accessibility claims) more directly than the earlier quoted passage from the preface. For example, in a discussion of illusion in the introduction, Merleau-Ponty writes:

[T]here is a difference between the motivated judgment of true perception and the empty judgment of false perception. And since the difference is not in the form of the judgment, but rather in the sensible text that it articulates, to perceive in the full sense of the word (as the antithesis of imagining) is not to judge, but rather to grasp, prior to all judgment, a sense immanent in the sensible. (PP, 36)

If one is able to judge that a perception is false, it is because there is a difference between it and true perception present *in the perception* prior to judgement. The difference is there in the “sensible text.” Much later, in the chapter “The Thing and the Natural World,” he says:

consciousness must at some moment cease to know what it does, otherwise it would be conscious of constituting an illusion, it would no longer adhere to it, and there would thus be no more illusion; and in fact, as we have said, the illusory thing and the real thing do not have the same structure. In order for the patient to accept the illusion, he must forget or repress the real world, he must cease to take his bearings there, and he must have at least the power to return to the primitive indistinction between the true and the false. (PP, 360)

Here we have one of the most straightforward claims in the text; “the illusory thing and the real thing do not have the same structure.” And this difference, again, must be present within experience, at least insofar as illusions require that consciousness ceases to know what it is doing. Correspondingly, one should be able to undo the repression of the “real world,” such that the two can be distinguished, in which case consciousness would know what it is doing. One needs to interpret the somewhat obscure reference to the “power to return to the primitive indistinction between the true and the false” in this light. While this might sound like a condition where truth and falsity are indistinguishable such that one could fall under an illusion, the real point is that one would return to a condition where worrying about that distinction is unnecessary because perception is putting us in direct contact with the world. For someone who is not wholly “primitive” (i.e. someone for whom knowledge of the world is at issue), I think this would have to mean returning to a

situation in which one can know that one is in contact with the world (though the extent to which one has *knowledge* of this contact, on Merleau-Ponty's view, will have to be more fully considered in Part IV below).

These views are further developed in Merleau-Ponty's remarks on illusion at the end of the chapter "Space." There he considers a case wherein someone takes a patch of light in the distance to be a stone:

The difference between illusion and perception is intrinsic, and the truth of perception can only be read in perception itself. If I believe I see a large flat stone, which is in reality a patch of sunlight, far ahead on the ground in a sunken lane, I cannot say that I ever see the flat stone in the sense in which I will see the patch of sunlight while moving closer. The flat stone only appears, like everything that is far off, in a field whose structure is confused and where the connections are not yet clearly articulated. In this sense, the illusion, like the image, is not observable, that is, my body is not geared into it and I cannot spread it out before myself through some exploratory movements. And yet, I am capable of omitting this distinction, and I am capable of illusion. It is not true that, if I hold myself to what I truly see, I never make an error, nor is it true that sensation, at least, is indubitable. (PP, 310)

I am capable of falling into illusion, and sensation (which, in this case, Merleau-Ponty does not mean to distinguish in any significant way from perception) does leave room for doubt. But at the same time "I cannot say that I ever see" the bad perception in the same manner as the good perception. Subjective indiscriminability is possible, but the two cases are still different, and this difference can be "read in" (reflectively accessed in) perception itself.

To see how Merleau-Ponty is not in contradiction here, we need to further examine the components of his broader views on perception that are at play. There are three key

elements to draw out. First, the illusion is said to occur in a “field whose structure is confused” which is “not yet clearly articulated.” Second, this lack of articulation is connected with the fact that the “body is not geared into it.” Third, this activity of articulation and “gearing in” is connected with the possibility of distinguishing truth from falsity.

The reference to the “field of confused structure” is connected to Merleau-Ponty’s general holism regarding perception, which is prominently displayed throughout the whole of the *Phenomenology*. As he says in the introduction, “[t]he perceptual ‘something’ is always in the middle of some other thing, it always forms part of a ‘field’” (PP, 4). One way to think about this view is that Merleau-Ponty is applying the figure/background relationship that Gestalt psychologists find in certain key instances of perception to perception as a whole. Taken to its extreme end, Merleau-Ponty says that perception “is not even an act or a deliberate taking of a stand; *it is the background*” (PP, lxxiv, emphasis added). While this is perhaps the case for perception as a whole, Merleau-Ponty does clearly allow for talk of instances of perception which amount to “taking up positions” by pulling things out of the background (and explaining how this happens is what much of the *Phenomenology* is about). But as is the case with any holism, the determinacy of elements in the holistic network is dependent on relations with other elements, so there are strictly speaking no atomic units of perception.

This fits with Merleau-Ponty’s much discussed views on the indeterminacy of perception, which he famously wants to be taken as a “positive phenomenon” (PP, 7). The

point here is not that there is no possibility of determinacy, but that determinacy is not predetermined.¹³ We rather have to create it through our perceptual activity; perception is both holistic and active.¹⁴ Recall that in the sunlight/flat stone illusion the confused field is not yet clearly articulated. But it can be articulated, and this involves “gearing into” the world, which is to say that our bodily actions fit with the external environment.¹⁵ To illustrate this point, Merleau-Ponty helpfully suggest that in vision (which he refers to as “the gaze”) “we have available a natural instrument comparable to the blind man's cane” (PP, 154). The point of this analogy is to say more than the fact that like the cane, vision can register information about one’s environment. In the case of the cane, that information only has meaning insofar as it plays a role in facilitating the blind person’s travel and the registrations have to be understood within that task. Merleau-Ponty thinks that vision works roughly the same way; the “task(s)” for vision might be much more varied and general than travel is for the cane, but the information registered by vision nonetheless only has a sense within the practical actions that it helps facilitate.

The combination of perceptual holism and the action-centered view of perception can lead us to a uniquely Merleau-Pontyan way of putting together the subjective indiscriminability claim and the reflective accessibility claim. We have already seen that Merleau-Ponty thinks illusions must be different from genuine perceptions. Illusions, like in the stone/patch of light case, come about because of perceptual indeterminacy; they are moments when we do not properly gear into the world. In such a case, it can be momentarily unclear to us that we are not properly geared in to the world, and thus we

can be genuinely fooled. Nevertheless, illusions have to be understood as being mere moments of a larger process. Perception, properly construed in its full meaning, is the process through which we continuously refine our connection with the world. Or, to put the point another way, the normal subject is not stuck entirely in illusion, because the perceptual process is generally moving toward gearing into the world.¹⁶

To some extent we can apply one of McDowell's main points to Merleau-Ponty's view here. That we can be fooled by illusion does not entail that good perceptions cannot be known to be different. We can be momentarily fooled by indeterminate perceptions, but as we come to get a better perceptual grasp of things, we can feel that we are doing so. In this regard Merleau-Ponty speaks of feeling a "tension" in perception that is presumably lessened as one gears into the world (see *PP*, 218, 245, and 316).

It was noted above that given the possibility of Burge's response to McDowell's argument regarding fallibility, McDowell's view is left wanting for a more positive account of reflective accessibility. The foregoing suggests just such a positive Merleau-Pontyan account; when the perceptual tension is being relieved and we come to gear properly into the world, we could reflectively know it. There are two problems with this proposal, however. First, feeling is not necessarily knowing, and it is not clear that Merleau-Ponty's consideration of the felt tension in perception can lead to the kind of reflective *knowledge* that is necessary to satisfy the reflective accessibility claim. Second, this proposal suggests that for Merleau-Ponty there is such a thing as completely or optimally gearing into the world which would be the equivalent to veridical perception in his view. But that is not

exactly his considered view. The rest of this section will take up this second problem; the first problem noted above will be considered in the next section.

For McDowell's epistemological disjunctivism, it is important that in instances of veridical perception the perceiver can reflectively know that the perception is putting her in contact with the world. The proposal here is that a Merleau-Pontyan theory can explain this reflective knowledge with the idea that in veridical perceptions she comes to properly gear into the world, and that gearing in can be felt. So veridicality might thus involve complete or optimal gearing in (something that is frequently referred to, in the literature on Merleau-Ponty, as "maximum grip").¹⁷ There are passages in *Phenomenology of Perception* where Merleau-Ponty describes something like this:

My body is geared into the world when my perception provides me with the most varied and the most clearly articulated spectacle possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they anticipate from the world. This maximum of clarity in perception and action specifies a perceptual ground, a background for my life, a general milieu for the coexistence of my body and the world. (PP, 261; see also the similar passage on 316)

Note that such maximal gearing in involves two elements, one perceptual and one related to action. Perceptually, we get clear articulation, which we might think of in terms of determinacy; we perceive the various elements of the scene clearly and distinctly. Regarding action, full gearing in happens when our intended actions fit the elements of the perceived scene properly. Based on the discussion above, one must note that these are

two sides of the same coin for Merleau-Ponty; perceptual articulation unfolds as our actions receive the appropriate responses.¹⁸

Following this, optimal gearing into the world cannot be exactly the same thing as veridical perception, at least insofar as the latter is generally equated with representational accuracy. This further sheds new light on Merleau-Ponty's references to truth in perception that we have seen previously. Truth in this case is a much broader idea than representational accuracy, as it involves not just representing an environment but being able to engage in practical action in the world. Per the above quote, Merleau-Ponty thinks that there are elements in the environment that can be perceived in a more or less articulated or determinate manner, so something like representational accuracy is not entirely missing from his view.¹⁹ But within the truth of perception as a whole, accuracy conditions could not be separable from other elements, such as our practical desires and goals.

Even if we factor in the qualification mentioned in the previous paragraph, we still cannot take maximum grip/optimal gearing in to be equivalent to the kind of veridical or good perception that fits with the reflective accessibility claim, however. This is because it turns out that maximum grip is something more like an ideal than it is an actual state that is commonly achieved in perception. In many cases of perception, there may not be any obvious optimal state to be attained; Merleau-Ponty notes this, for instance, in his discussion of color constancy. There he refers to the idea that there is one best way to perceive a color (he suggests "in daylight, at close proximity, under 'normal' conditions")

as an “artificial reconstruction of the phenomenon” (PP, 318). The basis of this claim is that color perception (like all perception) is so dependent on specific characteristics of both the environmental context and the perceiving subject that it is impossible to specify an actual optimum state.

But while there may be no clear optimum state, there are more or less optimum conditions. We might not be able to say, for instance, that there is some ultimate “true” perception of a color, but we can tell that certain lighting conditions or distances can give us a better sense of the color of an object. Furthermore we can feel this, and can be motivated to seek out more optimal conditions. This is, for instance, how we should interpret the claim in the last block quote that “maximum clarity” is a “ground,” “background,” or “general milieu.” It is not always a state that can be obtained, but it is a kind of ideal toward which we strive.²⁰

The upshot of this for epistemological disjunctivism is that while we can say that there is potentially a reflectively accessible element to our perception that tells us that perception is connected to the world (i.e. the feeling of “gearing in”), we cannot link this reflective element in a straightforward way to all discrete instances of veridical perception in the manner that standard epistemological disjunctivist views (like McDowell’s) want. This is partly because Merleau-Ponty’s holism runs counter to the general idea that there are discrete separable instances of perception. But it is furthermore due to the fact that there is not necessarily a single clear state of gearing (optimally) into the world. Rather, gearing in is a process that stretches out over time and can admit of degrees. Due to this

fact, more needs to be said about the way in which a Merleau-Pontyan epistemological disjunctivism can be developed.

IV. Merleau-Ponty's Disjunctivist Transcendental Argument

In the previous section, I set aside a problem regarding the use of Merleau-Ponty's view for specifically *epistemological* disjunctivist aims. If this account is to be put to use in supporting the reflective accessibility claim, it must be the case that one can *know*, and not just *feel*, that one is gaining a better perceptual grip on the world. As it turns out, this problem can be resolved, and the points raised at the end of the last section can be clarified, by further comparing McDowell and Merleau-Ponty. Specifically, we can look for a Merleau-Pontyan correlate to McDowell's disjunctivist transcendental argument considered at the end of Part II.

For some, two things that would stand in the way of a deeper comparison between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty would be McDowell's supposed intellectualism and Merleau-Ponty's supposed anti-intellectualism.²¹ But this line of thought over-intellectualizes McDowell's views and under-intellectualizes Merleau-Ponty's views. Working through this point will help us see the sense in which Merleau-Ponty accepts something akin to McDowell's transcendental argument regarding disjunctivism.

McDowell has recently argued that his view is not overly intellectualistic, because it does not hold that inferential steps are necessary for reason to engage perception (McDowell 2010, 246-247). This can be applied to his views on the reflective

accessibility claim. When people say things like “I can tell a green thing when I see one,” they do not need to engage in a string of reasoning that moves inferentially from the perceptual presence of a green object to the belief that they can attribute to themselves a bit of empirical knowledge. For rational beings there is an implicit non-inferential awareness that perception puts us in contact with the world. This could, through added rational activity, be developed into the explicit belief that perception provides knowledge of the world, though such rational explication is optional.²²

What would Merleau-Ponty think of such a view? It is important to first note a primary theme of his criticism of intellectualism in *Phenomenology of Perception*. In attempting to fill lacunae in empiricist theories of perception, intellectualists posit rational operations that fill in the gaps. For example, ‘[j]udgement is often introduced as what sensation is missing in order to make a perception possible,’ and an example of such a view is Descartes’ claim that because his senses only reveal hats and coats through his window, he must judge that he is seeing men (PP, 34-35). This intellectualism is akin to the view that McDowell denies, i.e. that the transition from perception to knowledge requires reasoning. So we need to look further to see if Merleau-Ponty would disagree with the idea that perception can provide a reasoner with direct, self-conscious knowledge.

Per the point regarding perceptual ‘tension’ being a feeling, we do not yet have evidence that Merleau-Ponty thinks perception provides such knowledge. But there is evidence that Merleau-Ponty would agree with the McDowellian view. We can see this

by considering his notion of “perceptual faith,” which first comes up explicitly several pages before the discussion of the stone/patch of light illusion in the “Space” chapter.²³

The phrase is first used in a discussion of depth perception, which he says is “a moment of the perceptual faith in a unique thing” (PP, 274). Just after the earlier quoted passage on the stone/patch of light illusion, Merleau-Ponty further develops this general idea:

[C]orrect vision and illusory vision are not distinguished in the manner of adequate thought and inadequate thought...I say that I perceive correctly when my body has a precise hold on the spectacle, but this does not mean that my hold is ever complete; it could only be complete if I had been able to reduce all of the object's interior and exterior horizons to the state of articulated perception, which is in principle impossible. In the experience of a perceptual truth, I presume that the concordance experienced up until now would be maintained for a more detailed observation; I put my confidence in the world. To perceive is suddenly to commit to an entire future of experiences in a present that never, strictly speaking, guarantees that future; to perceive is to believe in a world. (PP, 346, emphasis added)

Gaining perceptual truth requires engaging in a process, which Merleau-Ponty suggests might be unending (since it is in principle impossible to reach the state that would allow for an all-embracing hold on the world), of attempting to gain a “precise hold on the spectacle” (and this further supports the idea that optimal gearing in is an ideal). But even though he thinks that it is in principle impossible to gain a complete hold on things, there is “belief in a world.” There is faith that future experiences will continue to reveal the world to us through perception, and thus allow us to continue to gear into the world. We do not need to despair of having perceptual contact with the world, because we always live through an attempt to further grasp the world. This is perceptual faith. One can recognize in this idea something like the point of McDowell’s transcendental disjunctivist

argument, insofar as we have a general acceptance that we are in perceptual contact with the world.

Perceptual faith is, in itself, not a bit of knowledge; “if we believe what we see, this is prior to all verification, and the error of classical theories of perception is in introducing, into perception itself, intellectual operations” (PP, 399). But the Merleau-Pontyan view can still satisfy the reflective accessibility claim because the act of gaining a grip on the world, which is underwritten by perceptual faith, can issue in knowledge. Thus Merleau-Ponty says that when something is made determinate through perceptual activity, it “gives rise to the *‘knowing event’* that will transform it” and the “passage from the indeterminate to the determinate, this continuous taking up again of its own history in the unity of a new sense, *is thought itself*” (PP, 33, emphasis added). Here he is suggesting more than the fairly basic point that we can derive empirical beliefs from perception. Instead, the point is that perception directly motivates us to carve meaning out of the world, and give rise to knowledge. We can also consider the following passage:

We do not have to choose between...a rationalism that only accounts for perception and truth, and a philosophy..of the absurd that only accounts for illusion or error. We only know that there are errors because we have truths, through which we correct the errors and recognize them as such. Reciprocally, the explicit recognition of a truth is much more than the mere existence of an uncontested idea in us, or the immediate faith in what appears: it presupposes an examination, a doubt, and a break with the immediate, it is the correction of a possible error. (PP, 309)

For our purposes we can set aside the specific discussion of “the absurd” and note that Merleau-Ponty is clearly saying that we can have a conception of gaining *explicit* truth

through perception that does not fall prey to an overly intellectualistic rationalism. Perceptual faith might in itself not be a bit of knowledge, but the link to the world it ensures can allow us to go beyond faith toward knowledge that can correct error.

In other words, Merleau-Ponty thinks we are able, at points, to know that we are in perceptual contact with the world. This ability is undergirded by perceptual faith. As discussed at the end of the previous section, such instances of reflectively accessible knowledge are not exactly the same thing as veridical perceptions. On the one hand, complete truth, i.e. optimal gearing into the world, is more of an ideal goal than a commonly attained state. But on the other hand, perception is constantly motivated toward better gearing in. And this overall process fits well with the faith that the perceptual process is in general connecting with the world. Regarding illusion, we can now say that such perceptions are merely moments in a greater process, and to conceive of it as a moment is necessarily an abstraction which is secondary to the main point. As the perceptual process continues, the appropriate connections are made and the perceptual field is more clearly articulated. When this happens, the illusion is shown to be an illusion, and knowledge of the external world is approached.

This way of dealing with illusion also provides a response to skepticism; as Merleau-Ponty puts it “there is indeed a human act that, in a single stroke, cuts through all possible doubt in order to install itself in the fullness of truth: this act is perception” (PP, 42). But for both Merleau-Ponty and McDowell this is not so much a refutation of skepticism as an attempt to undercut its basis, and for each the point is not to “satisfy the

determined skeptic” about every perception. It is just to show that perception itself is safe from skepticism overall (see Rouse 2005, 287-8, for a similar view). But the Merleau-Pontyan view, at least, goes further than this general point by undercutting the force of the argument from illusion. The fact that there are illusions in no way calls into question the possibility of having non-illusory contact with the world, because illusions only show up as illusions within the greater context of a process that eventually shows them to be illusory.

V. Conclusion

To conclude we can consider whether or not we can now say that the constructed Merleau-Pontyan view is a form of disjunctivism, and whether/in what way that matters. One thing that comes out of this discussion is that the Merleau-Pontyan view does not really accommodate metaphysical disjunctivism. Whether the Merleau-Ponty of *Phenomenology of Perception* would be interested in such metaphysical considerations is debatable. But to the extent that he would be, it seems clear that the ontology which undergirds his views on perception would have to be holistic, and thus the most fundamental ontological level would not separate perceptual types.²⁴ On the other hand, the foregoing considerations do show that the Merleau-Pontyan view fits Soteriou’s “minimal commitment” necessary for disjunctivism that was mentioned at the beginning of the paper. To review, Soteriou defines disjunctivism as holding that “veridical perceptions and hallucinations [illusions] differ mentally in some significant respect.”

Keeping in mind the caveats made regarding the relation between Merleau-Ponty's views and the contemporary conception of veridicality, Merleau-Ponty clearly does think that there is a significant difference between good perceptions and illusions; the former involve gearing into the world in a way that the latter do not. And insofar as this gearing in is experienced by the perceiving subject, it is reasonable to call this difference "mental."

The way in which the Merleau-Pontyan view fits Soteriou's minimal definition leads to the more specific consideration which is really pertinent to this paper. Is the Merleau-Pontyan view, like McDowell's view, a form of epistemological disjunctivism? The preceding sections show that one can construct such a view out of Merleau-Ponty's works. Epistemological disjunctivism hangs on the idea that while perception can sometimes be deceptive or illusory, there are instances of perception that provide reflectively accessible knowledge that we are in actual contact with the world.²⁵ To sum up the results of the previous two sections: The Merleau-Pontyan view holds that there can be illusions. But illusions are a part of a greater process of perceptually gearing into the world. This gearing in involves fitting our perception and action with the actual external environment, and we can feel it doing so. This feeling is something that can further lead to the knowledge that perception is geared into the world. So the Merleau-Pontyan view fits with the above description of epistemological disjunctivism.

Why should this matter? Duncan Pritchard has recently argued that epistemological disjunctivism is potentially the 'holy grail' of epistemology primarily because it combines key elements of epistemic internalism and externalism in a way that

no other view has (2012, 1). If Pritchard is right, the Merleau-Pontyan view is a unique version of a kind of view that could have great import for contemporary epistemology. Clearly, more has to be done to show that this is really the case. The ways in which Merleau-Ponty's views differ from the contemporary views that undergird the debates over internalism and externalism (and contemporary epistemology generally) would have to be further explored. For example, the differences between his views on truth in perception and contemporary views on veridicality suggest that there are further differences to be explored between the Merleau-Pontyan view and contemporary views on truth. Also, while connection with the external world is clearly a key element of Merleau-Ponty's views, the Merleau-Pontyan view likely differs substantially from standard externalist views that consider the matter in terms of reliable causal connections.

These problems need to eventually be addressed. And it should be noted that addressing the problems will likely take one outside of Merleau-Ponty's main concerns. This paper should show, however, that his work can provide a useful resource for working on such issues, even when those issues were not exactly his own. And if this paper has shown that the Merleau-Pontyan view can be profitably compared with the most prominent version of epistemological disjunctivism (i.e. McDowell's view), it should go a long way toward showing that a (generally) Merleau-Pontyan view is a live option for contemporary considerations of perceptual knowledge.

1. The version of the text used is the 2012 translation by Donald A. Landes, which will hereinafter be cited as PP. The quote at the end is a reference to Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*.

2. Merleau-Ponty does discuss hallucination as well as illusion in *Phenomenology of Perception*. But his views on hallucination are not as pertinent to the present consideration of disjunctivism as are his views on

illusion, for three reasons. First, this paper will focus on comparing Merleau-Ponty's views with John McDowell's, and McDowell's view is primarily concerned with illusion, as will be shown below. Second, Merleau-Ponty does not consider the type of hallucination (i.e. thought experiments regarding metaphysically conceivable hallucinatory experiences) that is usually considered in the Anglo-American literature; rather, he only considers empirical instances of hallucination as might be associated with mental illness or drug use. Third (and most importantly), he takes hallucinations to be experientially different from veridical perceptions, and to be largely non-perceptual. This makes some of the key problems for disjunctivism (such as the issue of subjective discriminability considered below) moot. For a helpful overview of the second and third point see Romdenh-Romluc 2007.

3. See, for example, Soteriou 2009 and Haddock and Macpherson 2009, 1. McDowell himself links his work to Hinton's and Snowdon's in McDowell 2009, 231 n.9.

4. "Naïve realism" and "direct realism" are often used synonymously; see, for instance, Crane 201, which says that the view that one is immediately aware, in perception, of ordinary objects is "sometimes called 'naïve realism' or 'direct realism.'" Some do, however, distinguish between the two; see, for example, Smith 2002, which attaches to the meaning of "direct realism" a form of metaphysical realism. For his own part, McDowell does not use either term frequently. But he does, in 1998b, 272, approvingly reference John Searle's use of the term "direct realism." Interestingly, he cites Searle 1983, 57, which actually says "the account of visual perception that I have been arguing for so far is, I guess, a version of 'naïve' (direct, common-sense) realism." For simplicity's sake I will refer to the view as "direct realism" in the rest of this paper.

5. Along with features of sense-data, McDowell notes that Russell could allow that singular propositions refer to items in memories or perhaps aspects of our selves; see 1998c, 229. In each case, the reference is to an element of supposedly certain inner experience.

6. It shows up in 1998c in the discussion of Russell and in the consideration of an argument proposed by Simon Blackburn, see especially 229-32 and 247-9.

7. It is not necessary that metaphysical disjunctivism would lead to such an epistemological point, because one might argue that what marks the fundamental differences in perceptual kinds is separate from anything that we can know about them. But this would probably end up being an odd view; see Byrne and Logue 2009a, 68-72, for an argument to the effect that metaphysical disjunctivism will normally lead to epistemically disjunctivist claims.

8. For example, Byrne and Logue 2009b, Haddock and Macpherson 2009, and Soteriou 2009 all make this classification. Characteristic arguments for such a classification can be found in Byrne and Logue 2009a, 68, and Snowdon 2005. Byrne and Logue in particular strongly argue that McDowell's view is not a form of metaphysical disjunctivism. For a counterargument see Gomes 2010.

9. McDowell 1998c, 255-6 does refer to "thought's intentional nature." Tyler Burge makes heavy weather of this fact, interpreting McDowell to be saying something about psychological state types (see the section of the appendix on McDowell in Burge 2005, 43-50). I think a more natural reading of the text at this point would rather take 'thought's intentional nature' to refer to a very general claim about thought's directedness. This would not necessitate the implications Burge supposes.

10. Pritchard 2012 (20-21 and 63-100) refers to this as the "discriminability problem." He handles the problem a bit differently, though, because rather than considering illusion he relies on instances of misleading perception of the type associated with Gettier-style cases. His problem is still equivalent to the issue considered here, however.

11. The argument considered here thus needs to be placed in the context of McDowell's quietism. His aim is not to develop a complete theory of reflectively accessible perceptual warrant. Rather, he wants to lean on a common-sense conception of such warrant (as seen in the statement "I know a green thing when I see one") and dispel certain philosophical problems--like the problem of illusion--that can get in the way of accepting such a conception.

12. On this point see McDowell 2011, 44-53. He also notes, in response to a criticism posed by Crispin Wright, that it does not undermine the argument if we can think of specific circumstances, such as the design of a psychological experiment, that create a "determinate possibility" for the subject that their

knowledge is faulty. The upshot is, I think, that we do not live under such conditions in the normal course of human life.

13. As will be seen in the following discussion of optimal gearing into the world, on Merleau-Ponty's view complete perceptual determinacy is more of an ideal to work toward than an attainable state. The creation of determinacy to which I refer here can be thought of as working toward the ideal discussed below.

14. In this paper, key elements of Merleau-Ponty's views on perception are more or less taken for granted. While some elements of his views are controversial, one can find a fair bit of support for his ideas in the current literature. Regarding holism, standard contemporary views generally accept some form of holism in perception (see, e.g. Burge 2010, 152 and 281). For a discussion of the more thoroughgoing form of holism found in phenomenological views of perception, see Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, 94-100. As noted below, Merleau-Ponty's holism comes out of his consideration of Gestalt psychology; for an overview and discussion of the contemporary relevance of Gestalt holism for empirical studies of perception see Wagemans et. al 2012. The action-centered view of perception is perhaps more prevalent, and is a key component of contemporary "embodied cognitive science." For an overview of much of the recent philosophical and empirical literature supporting the action-centered view, see Gibbs 2006, ch. 3.

15. What it exactly means for our actions to properly fit with or "gear into" the world is a complicated question, as will be shown in the discussion of optimal gearing in below. At this point, though, one can refer to simple examples to show the basic point. If I see a cup, reach for it, and successfully grasp it, my perception and action has geared into the world. But if I incorrectly perceive the shape of an object that I take to be a cup such that when I attempt to grab it I fail, my perception and action is not geared into the world. There are, of course, many examples of action for which success and failure would not be so straightforward, but this should still give us a sense of what "gearing in" means.

16. Merleau-Ponty frequently refers to the 'normal subject' without worrying too much about how "normal" is to be defined. Given that it is usually used as a contrast with a subject who has some major illness or injury (i.e. subjects like "Schneider" who have suffered brain trauma), one can assume that the normal subject, when applied to issues regarding perception, is any subject who does not have some such injury or trauma that affects perceptual activity. This is still obviously vague, but I think Merleau-Ponty's points of contrast provide a reasonable rough-and-ready conception of "normal" for our purposes.

17. I am primarily referring to "gearing in" rather than "grip" in this paper because of the way the former is used in PP. In particular, the above quoted passage regarding the stone/patch of light illusion differs in the translations. While PP renders "*mon corps n'est pas en prise sur elle*" as "my body is not geared into it," Merleau-Ponty 2002, 346 renders it as "my body has no grip on it." For the original French see Merleau-Ponty 1945, 343. In a translator's note (PP, 496-497 n.47) Donald Landes provides a helpful explanation of the translation of "*en prise*" and notes that it is connected to "grip" and "gearing in." The phrase "maximum grip"--which fits better with the old translation--is especially favored by Hubert Dreyfus (e.g. 2005, 136). This phrase (or the French *maximum prise*) is not actually used by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*, but he does develop something like the basic idea expressed by the phrase, as will be discussed below.

18. What I am suggesting here is very similar to points made by Sean Kelly (see, e.g. 2010, 146-59) and Romdenh-Romluc 2007. But I think both make too much of the idea that there is some particular optimal perceptual state to which we are drawn. As I will explain below, Merleau-Ponty does not actually think that there is some optimal state to be obtained for every perceptual state.

19. This point opens up a very large question regarding whether Merleau-Ponty thinks perception is representational or has "content" in the manner that those terms are currently used in philosophy of perception. Merleau-Ponty makes numerous criticisms of the concept of representation, though his targets obviously predate the specific current use of that concept. But the general point being made here should largely swing free of this bigger issue. Merleau-Ponty clearly thinks that at least part of what perception does is to present the external environment to us, and it can do so with more or less clarity and articulation.

20. See also PP, 332 and the reference to "full coexistence with the phenomenon at the moment when it would be in all relations at its maximum articulation" as being the experience of "absolute reality." The "absolute" suggests that it is a kind of ideal.

21. This is a theme of the recent exchange between McDowell and Hubert Dreyfus; see, for example, the contributions to Scheer 2013. McDowell is also accused of ‘hyper-intellectualizing’ perception in Burge 2003 and 2011.

22. Burge 2011 responds that the ‘hyper-intellectualization’ claim does not rest on the notion that there are inferences between perception and reason. Part of Burge’s response is on target, in that he thinks that the “I know a green thing when I see it” claim still relies on attributing to adult humans the ability (perhaps as a bit of “know how”) to use factive concepts, and that is overly intellectualized. Here there might just be a disagreement on how much intellectualization is too much. But the rest of Burge’s response misses McDowell’s point, insofar as he repeats the claim that McDowell’s view cannot accommodate the fact that some non-rational animals have warranted perceptual beliefs. But McDowell’s view is about the role perception can play for rational beings who exercise rational capacities, so there is no need to accommodate--or not accommodate--something outside that scope. McDowell’s views could sit alongside the possibility that some non-rational (or proto-rational) animals have perceptual beliefs that are entitled in something like Burge’s sense.

23. For a similar discussion perceptual faith, see Romdenh-Romluc 2007. I think, however, that Romdenh-Romluc underplays the epistemic import of Merleau-Ponty’s view.

24. That Merleau-Ponty would favor such a holistic ontology is strongly suggested by the holistic ontology that he does actually develop in his later works (such as Merleau-Ponty 1968). We need not worry about the large interpretive questions concerning the relation between Merleau-Ponty’s early and late works here, however.

25. It should be clear from the preceding discussion that this construal of epistemological disjunctivism fits McDowell’s view. It is also close to the general definition provided by Pritchard 2012, 13. Pritchard’s definition is perhaps a bit stronger in that some instances of perceptual belief must be *factive*, and this must be reflectively accessible. How such a view should be squared with the Merleau-Pontyan view is the kind of further issue to be pursued that I refer to below.

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