

Introduction

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Empirical thought is made true or false by how the world is. Through experience subjects are brought into contact with the empirical world. Hence, the following premise seems as solid a starting point for philosophical enquiry as any: Perceptual experience provides reasons for empirical thought. Though not uncontested¹ most philosophers agree that this premise must be true, understood some way or another. Experiences provide reasons for empirical thought by making our surroundings accessible to us in some epistemically salient way. The compelling nature of this premise allows one to ask questions on the form: what must experience/thought/reasons/the world be like if perceptual experience is to provide reasons for empirical thought? If anything unites the papers in this anthology it is their outset in a question of roughly this form. However, the seeming unity in outset is shattered once we look closer at how the individual authors understand the notions of ‘experience’, ‘reason’, ‘the world’, and ‘accessible’. With different understandings of the key notions, the shared agreement that perceptual experience must provide reasons disintegrates to a plethora of different philosophical theories and opinions. Our goal with this introduction is to provide what can at best be a minimal roadmap, which traces the various agreements and differences in views.

A fruitful starting point is McDowell’s interpretation of the shared premise, as many of the papers in this anthology situate themselves as responses to, or elaborations of, McDowell’s views. The first notion to look at is ‘perceptual experience’. To McDowell experience is an essentially passive mental occurrence.² It is thus not simply a species of belief that is especially tied to perceptual phenomenology or held in some peculiar way. Experience is a non-doxastic passive mental state attributable to the subject.³ Next in line is the notion of ‘provides’. One way of being the provider of something is by being the very thing provided. Milk provides nutrition because milk is nutritious. Another way of being a provider, which we may call mere providing, is by making that

¹ Davidson (1986) famously rejects this.

² McDowell (1996) p. 10.

³ On this point McDowell’s view is in contrast with the view expounded by Ginsborg in Paper 4 of this anthology.

which does the actual providing available. The milkman is a mere provider of nutrition by making the milk available; the milkman need not be nutritious himself. Equivalently, experience may be the provider of reasons by figuring as a reason itself or merely by making available other entities that are reasons or by granting these entities their status as reasons. We take McDowell to endorse the former position where the experience itself figures as the reason.⁴ There are two famous versions of the latter view. On the first, it is the perceived worldly entities (particulars, states of affairs, facts) themselves that are reasons. Experience merely makes these entities accessible to us.⁵ On the second version it is our perceptual beliefs that figure as reasons and these acquire their positive epistemic status or justificatory significance through a suitable connection to experience.⁶ All of these three views are compatible with explanations of one's reasons for belief along the lines of: I believe that P because I saw that P. On what we take to be McDowell's understanding, it is my state of seeing, the experience itself, that constitutes the reason. On the world-based view it is the mind-independent entity itself that is my reason, only this reason is made accessible to me through my state of seeing. Finally, the reference to my state of seeing that P can be seen as expressing my belief, or knowledge, that I see that P, in which case my reason is my belief about my perceptual state, rather than the experiential state itself.⁷ While all three versions are thus compatible with speaking of experience as providing reasons, we still take McDowell to favour the first view where experience figures as a reason itself.

With these terminological clarifications in hand, we are now in a position to present McDowell's more particular version of the shared premise, which he calls 'Minimal Empiricism'. Minimal Empiricism claims that passive experiential occurrences or states must themselves figure as reasons for thought.⁸ The central motivation for Minimal Empiricism is the intuition that our thinking must be rationally constrained by how things are in the world if it is to be recognizable as thinking that aims at getting right how things are in the world. And what else but our experiences could possibly

⁴ While this interpretation is controversial, see McDowell (1996) p. 162 where he talks of himself as 'crediting experiences with rational relations to judgement and belief' and later (p. 168) where he criticizes Peacocke on the grounds that his view makes it difficult to see 'how experiences... could constitute a believer's reasons'. Later (2009a, p. 268) he also states that judgements are 'displayed as rational in light of the experiences themselves, not just in light of beliefs about experiences'. All these quotes suggest a closer connection between the experience and one's reason than a role as mere provider.

⁵ The view that one's experiential reasons are worldly facts is held by Dancy (2000). McDowell rejects the attribution of this view to him in McDowell (2006, p. 134).

⁶ Gauker thinks that this latter solution is all we need to accept in order to have suitable empirical constraint on thought. Ginsborg's version is close to this in that she thinks experiential reasons are a form of belief. However, given her identification of experience with a form of belief it is a bit odd to say experience grants the belief its status; rather, it's the belief's status as an experiential belief normatively constrained by reality which grants it a special epistemic status.

⁷ The view put forward by Millar in his contribution is not captured by these three interpretations of the idea that experience provides reasons. Millar takes the fact that I see that P and not my belief that I see that P to be my basic experiential reason and regards my seeing that P as belief-involving and as constituting my knowledge that P.

⁸ McDowell (1996) p. xii.

deliver such an external constraint on our thinking? Because what is at stake with Minimal Empiricism is the very possibility of recognizing our thinking as having empirical content, McDowell also sometimes refers to it as Transcendental Empiricism (McDowell 2009b, p. 246). While Minimal Empiricism is indeed a version of our shared premise its more specific formulation of the premise is in no way accepted by all participants in this anthology.⁹

McDowell goes on to ask a question on the form: what must experience be like if passive experiential states are to, themselves, figure as reasons for thought? He draws two major conclusions. First of all, experiences must possess conceptual content.¹⁰ If they didn't they could not figure as reasons for thought at all. This conceptualism has been widely contested, and in light of our current discussion we can already see one easy point of contention. One may reject the part of Minimal Empiricism, which states that the experiences *themselves* must figure as the reasons. Instead one could cast experiences in the role of mere providers of reasons that aren't reasons themselves. This allows one to acknowledge that the very elements that figure as the reasons themselves, for example a perceptual belief, are conceptual. One can, thus, acknowledge McDowell's claim that the space of reasons is the space of the conceptual¹¹ and acknowledge our initial premise that experience provides reasons for belief, all the while one denies that experiences are conceptual. However, the cost of doing so is that one denies Minimal Empiricism.¹² Alternatively, one can accept Minimal Empiricism, but question that there is any sound argument from the claim that experiences are reasons, to the claim that they must be conceptual. McDowell claims that any theory which extends rational relations outside the bounds of the conceptual is a version of the Myth of the Given; however, one might question that there is anything mythical about such positions.¹³

McDowell's second major conclusion is that experiences must be understood as world-involving if they are to provide adequate reasons for empirical thought.¹⁴ If what we experience falls short of the very reality about which we think, then according to McDowell, experience cannot figure as an adequate reason for belief. McDowell's line of reasoning goes something along the following lines: Knowledge-yielding reasons for belief cannot fall short of ensuring the truth of what one believes.¹⁵ Therefore,

⁹ Clear adherents are McDowell, Gersel, and probably also Logue. Clear opponents are Gauker, Ginsborg, and Millar. Travis and Brewer are difficult to position. Their main concern is that what we are given in experience isn't conceptually structured. However, it is difficult to discern whether they think that our experiencing what is given or merely that which is experienced constitutes our reason. Importantly, Travis, Brewer, Gauker, Ginsborg, and Millar all accept something like our shared starting premise in its unspecific form.

¹⁰ See especially lecture two of McDowell (1996).

¹¹ McDowell (1996) p. 14.

¹² This line of response is taken by Gauker. Ginsborg is a bit trickier insofar as she equates experience with a form of perceptual belief. She accepts the conceptual nature of experiential reasons, but denies their passive nature.

¹³ This is roughly the response adopted by Travis in this anthology and Brewer (2011). Gersel defends and elaborates McDowell's appeal to the Myth of the Given.

¹⁴ McDowell (1996) p. 26.

¹⁵ See McDowell (1998a, 1998b). In his contribution, Gauker voices worries about such a requirement.

if experiences are to figure as knowledge-yielding reasons for belief about external reality, then what we encounter in experience must be this external reality itself. Presented this way McDowell's arguments lead him from requiring truth-ensuring reasons to the acknowledgement of epistemological disjunctivism. Once one requires that reasons be truth-ensuring then one cannot avoid scepticism without attributing different justificatory status to hallucinations and perceptions. Hallucinations do not ensure the truth of the empirical beliefs based upon them. Hence, if perception is to provide truth-ensuring reasons it must provide reasons with a justificatory force different from that of subjectively indistinguishable hallucinations. Now, if our reasons must have this truth-ensuring character and experiences themselves must figure as the reason, then it is natural to think that we cannot be in the same metaphysical type of experiential state when we perceive as when we hallucinate. Hence, beyond his obvious epistemological disjunctivism, McDowell might be viewed as committed to metaphysical disjunctivism as well. This view claims that we cannot metaphysically account for hallucinations and perceptions in terms of a single shared type of mental state, which simply differs in its external relations to reality. Instead, perceptions are metaphysically considered as some form of relational state in which the world figures as an inherent Relatum. However, it isn't clear that McDowell needs to go this far. He could restrict his characterizations of experiences as relational, or world-involving, to explanations in which we are concerned with the justificatory role of experience, and remain neutral as to how this relates to experiences when they are considered purely metaphysically, that is, independently of their role in epistemic explanation.¹⁶ However, we do not think this is indeed McDowell's strategy and the feasibility of this approach has been questioned by both Brewer (2011) and Travis (this anthology), who explicitly endorse both metaphysical and epistemological disjunctivism.¹⁷ An argumentative strategy different from McDowell's, but with largely the same consequence, is to start one's argument from the premise of metaphysical disjunctivism. One could then take the possibility of truth-ensuring reasons (and thus epistemological disjunctivism) to simply be a positive upshot of one's independently motivated metaphysical theory, rather than consider such truth-ensuring a requirement on the adequacy of reasons.¹⁸

Both metaphysical and epistemological disjunctivism leave the notion of phenomenology in a somewhat awkward position. Traditionally, people have tried to motivate the similarity in status, epistemological or metaphysical, between perception and hallucination in terms of their indistinguishability to the involved subject. This has often gone through some argument to the effect that shared phenomenology accounts for both the indistinguishability and metaphysical or epistemological sameness.

¹⁶ Another way to avoid metaphysical disjunctivism, but not one congenial to McDowell, is once again to reject that experiences themselves must figure as reasons for belief. This is the strategy that Millar explores in this anthology.

¹⁷ See Haddock and Macpherson (2008) for a discussion of the relation between McDowell's epistemological disjunctivism and metaphysical disjunctivism.

¹⁸ This seems more in line with Brewer's (2011) later style of argument.

Epistemological and metaphysical disjunctivism thus seem to sever the envisaged connection between phenomenology and epistemic and/or metaphysical status. While McDowell indeed acknowledges that his arguments take no basis in phenomenology,¹⁹ others have found this severance problematic. What has been called phenomenal disjunctivism (Haddock and Macpherson 2008) is thus a third branch of disjunctivism which claims that the phenomenology can differ between subjectively indistinguishable experiences. While McDowell takes no stand on this form of disjunctivism, others have investigated whether his view has consequences in this regard.²⁰

At this stage it may seem that whatever unity there is among the views found in this anthology, it is at a level of abstraction with little philosophical bite. It seems like little to no agreement is left once we elaborate in more detail on the concepts involved in the shared premise that experience provides reasons for thought. This conclusion would, however, be too quick. A dominant view within mainstream epistemology is some form of externalism of justification where all that is required for *X* to justify *S*'s thought is that *S*'s thought is based on *X* and that this makes *S*'s thought reliably true. If one holds this view, very little of interest can be deduced from the shared premise that experience must provide reasons for thought. All it would entail was that some reliable connection, which involved experience, must exist between a series of a subject's thoughts and the world those thoughts concern. The reason such a fruitful debate exists between the authors of this anthology is that they all acknowledge some form of internalist restriction on rampant epistemological externalism. Somehow, in some way, the subject must be able to access or appreciate the connection furnished between experience and the world about which she thinks. Once again, how one spells out this internalist requirement will differ between the authors. At a minimal level one might simply require that the subject must be conscious of that which figures as her reasons. A stronger requirement endorsed by McDowell is that the subject must be able to appreciate her reasons as such, whatever that may require more precisely.²¹ Thus even though the precise role experience plays in providing reason differs between authors, and while the specific versions of disjunctivism endorsed, if any, also differ, there is still a core agreement that the subject's consciousness should play a crucial role in our characterization of her epistemic position. This puts the current anthology somewhat off-centre on the current epistemological scene. To us one of the most interesting things about the papers included here is precisely the way they contribute to the quest for the holy grail of epistemology (Pritchard 2009, p. 472): some form of non-sceptic internalist theory of empirical knowledge.

There is of course much more agreement between individual authors in the book than what may be stipulated within the group of authors as a whole. As the reader will find, each of the individual authors in this book engages with at least one, but most

¹⁹ In discussion at the workshop that led to this anthology.

²⁰ Logue's paper is concerned with the relation between epistemological and phenomenal disjunctivism.

²¹ Gersel attempts to spell out McDowell's and other competing notions of internalism in more detail.

often several, of the other authors. This engagement is most often based on the significant background of agreement that helps make philosophical discussion fruitful and constructive, rather than stubborn and destructive. We hope you will read these papers with the same constructive spirit in mind. The following section will present the included papers in more detail and try to highlight the individual debates rather than focusing on the overall picture.

The Papers of the Anthology

While the papers have connections and ties that crisscross the whole anthology, some of them are more directly engaged with the same issues. Our division into four separate topics should therefore be seen more as a hint to their focus than as an expression of a sharp segregation.

1. The Myth of the Given

The first four papers all explicitly engage with the Myth of the Given. This notion originates with Sellars (1956/1997), but has figured as one of the central driving premises in McDowell's thinking on experiential reasons. Again borrowing from Sellars, McDowell (1996) employs the notion of the space of reasons. The space of reasons is the logical space in which we account for the occurrence and propriety of certain mental states in light of what reasons the subject has for being in those states. The Myth of the Given consists in the extension of the space of reasons beyond its legitimate bounds. Mythical theories are those which argue that certain types of entities can figure as a subject's reasons even though those entities are of such a kind that they are unsuitable to fulfil this role. The core of McDowell's thinking on experiential reasons starts from the claim that any theory which extends a subject's reasons beyond what is conceptually given to the subject is a form of the Myth of the Given. In slogan form: the space of reasons is the space of concepts.²² This idea in combination with Minimal Empiricism leads him to the conclusion that experiences must possess conceptual content, as experiences must be able to figure as reasons for a subject's thinking.

Earlier Travis (2013a) has argued against the view that experiences have content. Yet given his adherence to the idea that experience must provide the subject with reasons, and perhaps even to Minimal Empiricism as a specific interpretation of this idea, Travis has felt obliged to explain how his theory does not succumb to the Myth in spite of McDowell's arguments to the opposite conclusion (Travis 2013b, 2013c). Travis's arguments have typically had two prongs. On the one hand he has attempted to show that if experiences were conceptual then they couldn't provide adequate reasons for thought. The second prong has been to elucidate the constraints implied by the danger

²² McDowell (1996) p. 14.

of the Myth and argue that his theory doesn't transgress against these. McDowell's present paper is a response to Travis (2013c). He argues that Travis is wrong to think that once we consider experiences to be conceptual then we lose access to the reality that makes our judgement true.

Travis's paper in this anthology continues their debate. The first line of attack remains constant insofar as he still considers conceptually laden experiences to be unable to present adequate reasons for thought. However, his second line of attack has altered. Instead of accepting the idea of the Myth of the Given, Travis now expresses that he is unable to feel the pull of McDowell's account of the Myth of the Given. He tries to expose various false premises, which he envisages may have led McDowell to accept the constraint on the space of reasons which is elaborated via the idea of the Myth of the Given.

Gersel's contribution can be seen as an attempt to supply the elucidation of the Myth of the Given which Travis claims is lacking. The goal of that paper is to clarify why the claim that reasons are connected to the possibility of self-conscious scrutiny has the consequence that the space of reasons is limited to the space of the conceptual. The paper thus attempts to sharpen the disagreement between Travis and McDowell by locating an argument that could defend the actuality of the Myth, while eschewing the false premises that Travis thinks drive the argument. McDowell's and Gersel's papers can thus in unison be seen as an attempt at answering respectively the first and the second prong of attack present in Travis's contribution.

Ginsborg's paper engages with the Myth of the Given at one step's remove. For McDowell the insight of Davidson's dictum that only a belief can justify a belief is that only items with conceptual content can play a justificatory role. Ginsborg agrees but finds the further insight that only a committal, and thereby active mental state, can serve as a reason. This, however, brings her into conflict with Minimal Empiricism as envisaged by McDowell. The purpose of Minimal Empiricism was to ensure a rational yet passive constraint on our thinking. Ginsborg's view of the nature of reasons forces her to reject that experiences understood as passive can play such a rational role. However, Ginsborg argues, this does not rule out that experiences can still play a rational role because we can and should regard experience as itself belief-involving. This move brings her position dangerously close to Davidsonian coherentism, with its total dismissal of Minimal Empiricism—a position she, with McDowell, takes to be untenable. Her solution is to separate two elements that are put together in McDowell's understanding of Minimal Empiricism, namely the idea that our thinking must be normatively constrained by the world and the idea that our thinking must be rationally answerable to experience.

McDowell accounts for the normative relation between world and belief via the rational, normative relation between experience and belief. Ginsborg also takes experience to stand in a rational relation to beliefs, only she conceives of experience as belief-like. What clearly distinguishes Ginsborg's position from Davidson's is her account of experience in terms of a normative, but non-rational relation between the

object of experience and the concept-application involved in experience. Our seeing that a cube is green intrinsically involves recognition of the appropriateness of this very perceptual, yet committal response to the cube. However, the appropriateness in question is conceived as more primitive than the rational appropriateness of a judgement in light of certain reasons. Here Ginsborg introduces a notion of judgement and conceptual capacities that is less demanding than the one McDowell works with. The object is experienced as calling for a certain concept application, but such sensitivity to norms does not require that one has been initiated into the space of reasons through language acquisition. Importantly, the idea of an object calling for a certain concept application is not claimed to be intelligible independently of the child's actual ability to apply such non-linguistic concepts. For this reason, Ginsborg argues, her account does not succumb to the Myth of the Given.

The first four papers can be seen as aligned in roughly the following way. McDowell, Gersel, and Ginsborg agree that the space of reasons is exhausted by the space of the conceptual. Ginsborg and Travis agree that given how experiences are conceived by McDowell, as passive and conceptual, they cannot provide reasons for belief. However, Travis has a problem with the conceptual nature attributed to experiential reasons, whereas Ginsborg objects to their passivity. As Minimal Empiricism is the idea of a passive constraint on thought, this means that Travis²³ can share the view with McDowell and Gersel that Minimal Empiricism must be understood as a requirement for experiential reasons. Ginsborg is forced to reject such a view, but argues that a normative, yet non-rational, guidance of experience by the world suffices for possession of empirical concepts. However, Travis will have to reject the conceptual nature of experience and thus his position is challenged by McDowell's claim that all such views are versions of the Myth of the Given.

2. The Epistemology of Empirical Knowledge

The following two papers still explore the general themes discussed by the first four papers, only they are more narrowly focused on epistemic issues. Gauker's contribution aligns with Ginsborg in questioning the idea that experiences distinct from doxastic states can serve as reasons for beliefs. However, rather than argue that the activity involved in belief-formation is a virtue not a vice, he suggests that belief-like states can possess exactly the kind of involuntary and passive nature that McDowell's Minimal Empiricism requires.

The more specific target of Gauker's paper is an argument that attempts to show that experiences can justify beliefs on the ground that sentences of the form 'A looks F' can be used to justify claims of the form 'A is F'. Arguably, if such an argument is to succeed sentences of the form 'A looks F' must report the content of experience. Gauker presents

²³ On the assumption that Travis thinks it is the experience of the worldly entity, which is a reason for thought, rather than merely the worldly entity. As mentioned, it is unclear what Travis's view on this issue is.

what he takes to be an exhaustive argument to the effect that if 'A looks F' reports the content of experience then, on any relevant conception of a justificatory link, such sentences are unable to justify the claim 'A is F'. As Gauker notes, his paper targets a notion of experiential reasons that takes such reasons to be non-conclusive. This leaves us with an interesting question as to whether similar arguments will be effective against someone who argues that experiences can provide truth-ensuring warrant for judgements, which is precisely what McDowell claims.

Leddington's starting point is the basic intuition of infallibilist epistemology: Knowledge-yielding reasons must be truth-ensuring. His paper challenges the infallibilist to explain how their view of truth-ensuring experiential reasons is compatible with the undeniable fact that we are at times misled in our pursuit of perceptual knowledge. McDowell explains the possibility of error in terms of the fallible nature of our perceptual capacities for knowledge. Thus, we may exercise our perceptual capacity to the best of our ability and yet be in a position where it merely seems to us that we perceive, that is, where it only seems to us that we are in a position to know on the basis of experience. Leddington argues that such a view is untenable. In a first step, he argues that allowing for both non-defective and defective exercises of a perceptual capacity for knowledge commits us to the idea that, even under optimal conditions, such a capacity may fail. In a second step, he argues that such a conception of our fallibility itself gives us a concrete reason to rationally doubt, on any given occasion, that we in fact perceive. As a consequence, we can never be in possession of the kind of self-conscious, conclusive reason that both he and McDowell thinks is needed for knowledge. This is not the end of infallibilism according to Leddington. In Millar's work he finds a different conception of fallibility that takes every exercise of a knowledge-yielding capacity to be successful. On such a view, our fallibility is explained in terms of seeming cases of exercising such a perfect capacity rather than in terms of defective exercises of an imperfect capacity.

Leddington takes his argument to leave open what exactly constitutes our perceptual reasons, whether it is, for instance, our experiences as particulars, facts about experiences, or the perceived object. Furthermore, his conclusion stays neutral between two different conceptions of where we should place our infallible capacities for perceptual knowledge. On McDowell's conception these capacities are perceptual capacities distinct from judgemental capacities, whereas Millar places them at the level of judgement. Leddington favours Millar's view but emphasizes that the understanding of the fallibility of infallible capacities he presents is, on this point, compatible with McDowell's view.

3. The Nature of Experience

The following two papers discuss the nature of experience itself. Their primary concern is thus within philosophy of mind. However, both Millar and Logue regard it as a constraint on any account of the nature of experience that it must allow us to see

how our reasons for perceptual judgements can be such as to ensure the truth of our perceptual judgements.

Millar questions whether an acceptance of epistemological disjunctivism should lead us to embrace metaphysical disjunctivism in the form of a relational view of experiences. Millar's general strategy is to show that we can preserve what he takes to be the real insight of relational views within a sophisticated non-relational view. The real insight of relationalism is that both an adequate account of perceptual reasons and of perceptually based demonstrative thought must appeal to relational mental items.

Millar argues that the main arguments, to the effect that a non-relational view cannot account for perceptual, demonstrative thought, only succeed if the non-relational view implies that the primary object of perception could not be a mind-independent, physical object, an implication no sophisticated non-relationalist need accept. The positive account of perceptual, demonstrative thought sketched by Millar is inspired by Evans' account in *The Varieties of Reference*. Millar proposes that we should understand the perceptual awareness involved in perceptual discrimination as constitutively dependent, not only on the sensory experience as such, but also on certain behavioural dispositions that relate us to the mind-independent object itself.

In the last part of his paper, Millar discusses McDowell's Minimal Empiricism. He accepts that we need to regard our thinking as answerable to experience if we are to regard it as possessing empirical content. McDowell thinks this demand can only be fulfilled if it is experience understood as a passive, non-judgemental state or occurrence that constitutes our reason. Millar urges that it is sufficient that our empirical beliefs are answerable to what we know perceptually. If I possess the right recognitional capacity I can perceptually know that a seen bird is a magpie. A distinct recognitional capacity also applied to the bird allows me to know that the bird is seen by me (see also Millar 2011). It is the fact that I see that the bird is a magpie that constitutes my reason for the belief that the bird is a magpie. Here Millar departs from Minimal Empiricism on two points. First, it is the fact that I see that P which constitutes my reason, not the experience as such. Second, my seeing that P is understood as constitutively involving my belief that P. On the second point Millar is in agreement with Ginsborg; on the first point Millar and Ginsborg diverge, since Ginsborg takes it to be the experience as such, understood as a doxastic state, that justifies.

Logue's paper also concerns the consequences that epistemological disjunctivism has for our theory of experience. She presents her version of metaphysical disjunctivism in order to develop a new and improved version of epistemological disjunctivism.

A question facing the epistemic disjunctivist is to explain why experiences that are subjectively indistinguishable can provide different reasons for a subject. Millar's account allows him to evade this question because he denies that experience as such constitutes our reasons. A more common response is to argue that the epistemic role of an experience is not determined by phenomenal character. There are two typical suggestions: either it is said that it is the content that differs between hallucinations and perceptions; or it is said that the one state is a direct conscious relation to reality

whereas the other is not. Logue goes against this trend in wanting to defend disjunctivism, all the while claiming that the rational contribution of an experience is constituted by its phenomenal character. Her suggestion is to reject that phenomenal character is what explains the subjective indistinguishability between perceptions, illusions, and hallucinations. She argues that phenomenal character is constituted by a relation between the perceiver and her environment. An immediate consequence of this view is that hallucinations do not possess any phenomenal character. Cases of illusions are characterized by Logue as cases where the subject perceives the real property of the object but the object appears differently from how it is.

To explain the indistinguishability in question, Logue appeals to the idea that hallucinations and illusions present defective contexts for our capacity for self-knowledge. Inspired by Evans she adopts an outward-looking model for self-knowledge according to which I gain knowledge of the phenomenal character of my experience by attending to the perceived object. Because there is no such object in the case of hallucinations, such cases present a defective context for our capacity for self-knowledge. The defectiveness of the context provides part of the explanation for how we can be fooled into believing that the hallucinatory experience does have a phenomenal character. In cases of illusions, we are said to be blocked from attending to the real property of the object and this again provides an unfriendly context for the exercise of our outward-looking capacity for self-knowledge. The general strategy here is similar to McDowell's. Just because an exercise of a capacity for knowledge can, under non-favourable circumstances, mislead one into thinking one is in a position to know, we should not conclude that such a capacity for knowledge cannot, under any circumstances, provide us with knowledge. This strategy commits Logue to an explanation of our fallibility that goes against the one favoured by Leddington and Millar.

On Logue's view it is the phenomenal character of experience qua mental state that grounds our perceptual judgements, though we only gain knowledge about such characters by attending to the world. Here we find an interesting parallel between Logue's and Millar's views. They both take perceptual knowledge about the world to be explanatorily prior to our access to the reasons that ground such knowledge; something they both claim is compatible with a reasonable internalism concerning justification. On Millar's view, perceptual knowledge is even possible without the capacity to access perceptual reasons, which makes his view come out as clearly at odds with what Cunningham in his contribution calls 'the Reasons Priority Thesis'.

4. The Object of Experience

The two previous papers considered the rational roles of different types of experiential states and investigated how our obligation to account for these differences restricted a feasible theory of experience. Another way of elucidating the nature of experiential reasons is by considering what limits are placed on the objects of experience when they must be such that perception of such objects can provide reasons for thought.

Brewer defends the view that there exist natural continuants. These are mind-independent objects that are naturally unified over time in such a way that no two natural continuants share precisely the same location at any time. He defends this view by arguing that, if we are to understand our experiences as bringing us into contact with a mind-independent reality then we are committed to the view that we encounter natural continuants in experience. According to Brewer it is only if we view our experiences as encounters with natural continuants that we can make sense of our experiential conditions as jointly determined by our spatio-temporal route and by what is there anyway, present to be viewed independently of whatever location we may be at. Brewer's claim is that only if we can provide such a simple theory of our perceptual condition can we understand ourselves as encountering the mind-independent reality in perception. Brewer's defence of this position is tied to his endorsement of naïve realism, according to which experiences do not possess content of any kind. Rather, like Travis, his view is that the experiences involved in perception are a simple conscious relation between a subject and the entities present in his surroundings.

In the final paper of the anthology, Cunningham argues against what he calls the truth-maker theory of reasons, a view he tentatively ascribes to Brewer. The truth-maker theory of reasons argues that the concrete entities, which make our empirical judgements true, can also count as our reasons for those judgements. It seems a reasonable claim that we can perceive those entities. Hence, our perceptual reasons can be the truth-makers of our judgements. Given their commitment to a relational conception of experience and the idea that one's experiential reasons are the perceived entities missing in hallucinatory cases, truth-maker theorists are committed to both metaphysical and epistemological disjunctivism. Cunningham's argument is built on the idea that reasons must be capable of being identical to the *explanantia* of rationalising explanations. In effect Cunningham is arguing that we should identify what Ginsborg separates as reasons₁ and reasons₂. Reasons₁ are reasons understood as considerations that favour certain beliefs. Reasons₂ are reasons ascribed to the subject from a third person point of view in order to make her behaviour rationally intelligible. Cunningham considers particulars (objects, properties, and events) and states of affairs as entities that could be truth-makers for our beliefs. Each of these connects with a version of the truth-maker theory of reasons. He then argues that neither particulars nor states of affairs are capable of playing the required rationalizing explanatory role. The only alternative candidate left for the role as both reason and rationalizing *explanans*, Cunningham argues, is the category of true propositions.

Comparing Brewer's and Cunningham's arguments we may say the following: Brewer's argument starts from a presumption of naïve realism and argues that if we are to understand the nature of experience in the light of a simple theory of perception, then we must conceive of the objects we encounter in experience as natural continuants. Cunningham argues that, if all we are given in experience are entities such as Brewer's natural continuants, then what is given in experience cannot be identified with our experiential reasons.

A Brief Overview

The following questions highlight some of the important fault lines throughout the papers of this anthology: Do experiences themselves figure as reasons or are they mere providers of reasons? Are experiential reasons belief-independent? Do our experiential reasons consist in facts, states of affairs, or particulars? Do they consist in mind-dependent or mind-independent entities? Should we conceive of experiences as having content? Should we conceive of the experiences involved in perceptions as relational? Should we conceive of experiential reasons as truth-ensuring? Assuming that such reasons are truth-ensuring, how should we account for our fallibility? Depending on which question we ask, different divisions amongst the authors will show up.

Most, if not all, of the papers in this anthology favour the idea that experience must be capable of providing the subject with reasons. However, Gauker, Millar, and Ginsborg explicitly oppose the idea that experiences understood as belief-independent states or occurrences can as such figure as reasons. Gauker suggests that beliefs caused by experience may act as entry-level justifiers, whereas Ginsborg takes experiences to be intrinsically belief-involving. Millar departs from Gauker and Ginsborg in taking the relevant notion of reasons to be reasons understood as facts ('I see that P') and not as mental states or occurrences. Cunningham argues in favour of Millar's general conception of reasons. Millar, however, is in line with Gauker, Ginsborg, and Logue in thinking that perceptual reasons are mind-dependent entities, whereas Travis and Brewer seem to regard the mind-independent objects of experience as reasons. Cunningham puts pressure on the idea that we can account for perceptual reasons without ascribing content to experience, while Millar thinks there is a serious question of whether we need ascribe any content to experience in order to give such an account. Travis and Brewer give a negative answer to this question whereas McDowell and Gersel maintain that we need to attribute conceptual content to experience. Travis, Brewer, and Logue all share an explicit commitment to both epistemological and metaphysical disjunctivism. Millar agrees that our perceptual reasons must be truth-ensuring but argues that the crucial disjunctive move in our explanation of perceptual knowledge should be located at the level of judgement not at the level of experience. This view is also favoured by Leddington, who argues for Millar's conception of our perceptual fallibility opposing the views of McDowell and Logue.

On the grand philosophical scene most of the contributions to this anthology are in wide agreement as to how we should approach an investigation of experiential reasons. Some internalist notion of reasons and some kind of disjunctivist inclinations shape or form a central part of most of the arguments. However, once the details are in focus the appearance of unity is shattered. There may be many views on perception and rationality that have had no say at all in this anthology. However, its explicit goal is to present and further a debate within the general philosophical approach exemplified by the contributions.

We hope that you, the reader, will find the book as interesting and illuminating as we have found the editing and writing of this book.²⁴

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The Travis–McDowell Debate

Johan Gersel

The included papers by John McDowell and Charles Travis deserve a separate introduction. They are the latest instalments in an ongoing debate that has stretched across a series of exchanges (the main texts are Travis (2013a), Travis (2013b), McDowell (2009), Travis (2013c)). The present paper is meant as an aid to the reader unfamiliar with these earlier exchanges or to the reader merely in need of a reminder of the discussion. The outset of the debate is McDowell's view which, as mentioned, holds that experience must be conceived both as possessing conceptual content and as a passive element of cognition, separate from the active judgements one might form on the basis of undergoing some experience. McDowell's motivation for endorsing this view is his conviction that only if the passive element in our cognition, 'experience' in McDowell's terminology, is conceptual can we make sense of how it provides a rational constraint on our thinking. Travis's debate with McDowell consists of two lines of argument. The first line is developed in 'The Silences of the Senses', where he argues against McDowell and other representationalists that the passivity of experience is incompatible with its possession of representational content. The second line not only defends the view that experiences can provide reasons for thought without having content, but also argues, based on interpretations of Frege, that only if experience provides us with acquaintance with the non-conceptual can it provide the proper constraint on thought. This second line of argument is developed in his 'Reason's Reach' and 'Unlocking the Outer World'. I want to briefly present both arguments and McDowell's response.

In 'The Silence of the Senses' Travis argues that whichever way experience provides reasons for thought it must be in terms of how things look to the subject of the experience (2013a, p. 34). However, according to Travis, we can only sensibly talk of 'looks' in two ways. On the one hand, there is how things look. This is an objective feature that various things have under various conditions. In this sense, a wax lemon looks like a lemon under most conditions. A blue shirt in this lighting may look exactly like a white shirt looks under certain different lighting conditions. Looks in this sense are objective and independent of any activity of subjects. They are fully determined by features of the visual appearances that things possess in certain circumstances (*ibid.* p. 35). Hence, if experience is conceived as awareness of how things look in this sense, then experience

can indeed be conceived as a form of passive awareness of our surroundings. However, this sense of ‘looks’ is unsuited to provide any determinate representational content for the experience. Representational content presents the world as being a certain determinate way. For the representation to be true, correct, or veridical is just for the world to be in that determinate way. However, on the sense of ‘looks’ under consideration there is no determinate way the world should be for it to be as it looks. For given how things look, one could equally well be aware of a lemon, a wax-lemon, or a strangely shaped orange under weird lighting conditions, or any number of different objects. An encounter with either of these would be compatible with the world looking as it does. A myriad of things has what are objectively similar looks under various conditions, and a particular look gives no priority to one of the scenarios in which it obtains. Hence, while the first sense of ‘looks’ may be something we are passively aware of, it is not something which can suffice to determine any representational content (*ibid.* p. 37).

Things are opposite for the second sense of ‘looks’. ‘Looks’ in this sense are ways in which people take things to be, or should or would take things to be if they went by their visual appearance alone. It is in this sense that we can say: ‘it looks to me as if Pia will sink the put’; meaning I think that she will sink it given how things look to me. Likewise, we can say of someone else that it looks to him as if P, most often in order to explain why he judged that P (he based his judgement on his experience) when we know that P is in fact not the case (*ibid.* p. 40). This second sense of ‘looks’ certainly suffices to settle a way the world must be in order for it to be as it looks. Pia must sink the put, and P must be true. However, that something looks like this to someone isn’t a passive element of cognition anymore. Rather, it is an active judgement in which someone takes the world to be a certain way in light of his experiences, or at the very least a claim that one ought to judge so if one went on how things looked alone. Travis argues that these two notions of ‘looks’ are the only ones available, and concludes that McDowell’s view of experience as both passive and representational is incoherent (*ibid.* p. 47).

His rejection of conceptualism about experience leaves Travis a supposed victim of the Myth of the Given as it is developed by McDowell. McDowell famously claims that only if experiences present us with conceptually structured generalities, things being some way, can experience provide reasons for the perceptual judgements in which we judge things to be those very ways (McDowell 1996). To McDowell (2009, p. 264) experience counts as conceptual as long as it presents the world as being in some general way it could be judged to be. Travis (2013c, p. 237) has a more liberal notion of the conceptual according to which we should consider something to fall within the conceptual as long as it presents things as being a way at all. The key difference is that McDowell’s definition leaves logical room for non-conceptual representational content, whereas Travis’s does not.¹ However, as long as Travis maintains the generality of

¹ Importantly, McDowell doesn’t think we can suffice with attributing non-conceptual content to experience, but he acknowledges a distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual content. On the other hand, when Travis objects to attributing conceptual content to experience he means this to target any representational view of experience.

all representation and the utter particularity of what is given in experience their disagreement is genuine in spite of the slight difference in terminology. Both McDowell and Travis agree that we must hold onto the idea that experiences figure as a reason for thought, that is, to Minimal Empiricism.² If McDowell (1996) is right, Minimal Empiricism entails that experience must have conceptual content. Yet, according to Travis, experience cannot be conceptual for there is no particular way in which experience presents the world as being. Only subjects can take the world to be in some way and that is not something passive, but rather an active commitment. Experience merely acquaints us with things being as they are; it presents us with what Travis, in his contribution to this anthology, calls ‘the unfolding of the historical’. Travis responds to the challenge of explaining how the non-conceptual can provide reasons for thought in ‘Reason’s Reach’. However, his argument has a peculiar structure. Rather than showing us how an encounter with something non-conceptual can provide a reason for thought, he argues that if anything that is given in experience can provide a reason for thought at all, then it must be possible that something non-conceptual can provide reasons. He follows Frege (Travis 2013b, p. 123) in drawing a line between particular things, like the setting of the sun, and generalities, like that the sun has set. To Frege, and Travis, the former, a particular, is a thing that can be perceived, whereas the latter, a way that things can be, is not something that can be perceived at all, and thus not something we can be given through perception. Hence, if anything that is given to us in perception forms a reason for thought, then something non-conceptual must be able to figure as a reason.³ For general ways that things can be are not perceivable at all. Travis goes on to suggest that McDowell’s mistake is in restricting the sum of reason giving relations to those of logical relations which merely hold between the general ways that things can be (ibid. p. 141). One lacuna in Travis’s argument is that we are given very little in the way of a positive story as to how these non-logical reason-giving relations function. We are hardly told anything as to how the particular unfolding of reality we encounter in experience can provide reasons for our conceptual judgement that the world is a certain general way. Travis simply informs us that part of what it is to be a thinker is to have the expertise required to recognize that the surroundings one experiences instance a particular generality, say that the sun is setting (ibid. p. 128).

In ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, McDowell concedes some points to Travis. In this paper McDowell attempts to insert a wedge between experiential content and judgemental content, which to some degree accommodates Travis’s argument in ‘the Silence of the Senses’. McDowell (2009, p. 267) claims that things are only presented as so in judgements with *propositional* content. In contrast, experience presents us with conceptuality-structured *intuitional* contents, from which we carve out the conceptual

² As mentioned in the introduction, there is a worry as to whether Travis views the experience as the reason or merely as the provider of the reason. I read Minimal Empiricism as requiring that the experience figures as the reasons itself.

³ Notice that one may worry here whether Travis is guilty of misreading McDowell. Travis seems to focus on what is given in experience as a reason. To McDowell, by contrast, it is the episode of having it given, the experience itself, which plays the role of the reason.

contents which are then employed in the judgements that we choose to form upon its basis. The crucial element in his response to Travis is that McDowell maintains that, unlike propositional content, intuitional content brings the very mind-independent objects of reality into view. Unlike judgements where we *represent* the world as being such that these objects are in some specific way, in intuition, we are *presented* with the ways things are (ibid. p. 268). One might question why intuitional content should be said to be conceptual at all, given its significant difference from the content of judgements. However, McDowell maintains this point by arguing that the very unity present in intuitions is a function of the very same capacity that gives unity to our thoughts: ‘The unity of intuitional content reflects an operation of the same unifying function that is operative in the unity of judgement, in that case actively exercised’ (McDowell 2009, p. 264). McDowell’s second concession to Travis is the acknowledgement that recognitional abilities may at times enable us to rationally and non-inferentially form a judgement whose content isn’t present in the experience upon which it is based (ibid. p. 259). This seems to go some way towards acknowledging Travis’s (rather slim) picture of how we recognize particular occurrences as falling under some general way things can be. However, McDowell is adamant that we cannot rest content with Travis’s picture of how “experience provides reasons for thought without falling prey to the Myth of the Given (ibid. p. 269). While we may rationally form perceptual judgements whose contents extend beyond the content of the experiences upon which they are based, this extension cannot amount to a leap from experiencing something entirely non-conceptual to the formation of a conceptual judgement. Thus, McDowell maintains the charge that Travis’s theory is a form of the Myth of the Given.⁴

Travis’s ‘Unlocking the Outer World’ forms the last instalment of their debate prior to this book. In this paper Travis challenges the idea that the function of the understanding is to unify in any significant sense. According to Travis (2013c, p. 223), we should follow Frege rather than Kant and question that unification is required for experience and judgement. According to Frege judgements are the basic elements of thought rather than something unified out of concepts. Instead, any talk of concepts is by way of abstracting from or decomposing the inherently unified structure of thought (ibid. 252). Likewise, no unification is required at the level of experience. If unification was required for the objects of experience to come into view, then Travis questions that those experienced objects could be mind-independent (ibid. p. 230). Hence, according to Travis, when McDowell claims that the same unifying function is at play in both judgement and experience, his argument in favour of the conceptual nature of intuitions fails at two stages. He is wrong in assuming that unification is required for, or even compatible with, acquaintance with mind-independent objects and, secondly, wrong in assuming that unification forms a central element in judgement. McDowell’s contribution to this anthology is a response to this critique. Travis’s contribution tries

⁴ For an extended discussion of this issue see Gersel, Jensen, and Thaning (2017).

once and for all to provide a principled argument as to why the requirements McDowell imposes on experiential reasons cannot be an acceptable demand.

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