

# MCDOWELL'S DISJUNCTIVISM AND OTHER MINDS

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John McDowell's original motivation of disjunctivism occurs in the context of a problem regarding other minds. Recent commentators have insisted that McDowell's disjunctivism should be classed as an epistemological disjunctivism about epistemic warrant, and distinguished from the perceptual disjunctivism of Hinton, Snowdon and others. In this paper I investigate the relation between the problem of other minds and disjunctivism, and raise some questions for this interpretation of McDowell.

## 1. Introduction

In his 'Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge', John McDowell uses a debate about other minds, as raised in the context of Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations, to motivate a disjunctive claim about those cases where things appear to a subject to be a certain way.<sup>1</sup> In the recent focus on disjunctive theories in the philosophy of perception, a number of writers have moved to distance McDowell's disjunctivism from the perceptual disjunctivism discussed and advocated by such writers as J.M. Hinton, Paul Snowdon and Mike Martin.<sup>2</sup> The standard way of effecting such a distancing is by distinguishing McDowell's 'epistemological

<sup>1</sup> [McDowell 1982], reprinted as [McDowell 1998a]. All references to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> [Hinton 1973], [Snowdon 1980-1], [Martin 2002], [Martin 2004].

disjunctivism’ from the ‘metaphysical’ or ‘perceptual disjunctivism’ of Hinton, Snowdon and Martin, and concluding – as Byrne and Logue do – that ‘[McDowell’s] epistemological disjunctivism is quite compatible with the denial of metaphysical disjunctivism.’ [Byrne and Logue 2008: p.67].

*Perceptual* or *metaphysical* disjunctivism is a thesis about the nature of perceptual experiences: it claims that perceptions and hallucinations – experiences in which things appear to the subject to be a certain way – do not share a common experiential element, for genuinely perceptual experiences involve, as constituents, the mind-independent objects perceived in the external environment.<sup>3</sup> *Epistemological* disjunctivism is a thesis about the perceptual evidence or epistemic warrant available to a subject in those cases in which things appear to her to be a certain way. According to the epistemological disjunctivist, there is a contrast to be drawn in such cases between those in which it is possible for the subject to know that something is so, and those in which she may only know that something appears to be so.

According to the growing consensus, the position enumerated in ‘Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge’ should be characterised as a version of epistemological disjunctivism, and not perceptual disjunctivism.<sup>4</sup> Snowdon summarises this characterisation as follows:

[D]isjunctivism is a claim about the nature of experience. It represents, that is, a claim in the philosophical theory of perceptual experience. It is not clear, though, that this characterisation fits with the thesis that McDowell famously endorsed. [Snowdon 2005: p.139]

He concludes that McDowell’s disjunctivism should be given ‘an epistemological interpretation’ [Snowdon 2005: p.140]. On such an interpretation, McDowell is not inclined to say anything about the *nature* of perceptual experience. Rather what is at issue is whether the perceptual evidence or epistemic warrant available to a subject is the same in all cases

<sup>3</sup> This is how Snowdon introduces perceptual disjunctivism in his [2005]. There are differences between the formulations favoured by different writers, but I will use Snowdon’s characterisation throughout. There is an added complication when considering McDowell’s disjunctivism, given his focus on cases of propositional perception of the form ‘S sees that p’, but I will assume that Snowdon’s characterisation of perceptual disjunctivism can be applied to such formulations.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, [Snowdon 2005: pp.139-141], [Snowdon 2008: p.36], [Byrne and Logue 2008: pp.65-68], [Pritchard 2008: pp.290-293]. Cf. [Millar 2008] for a discussion which stresses other aspects of McDowell’s disjunctivism.

in which things appear to her to be a certain way; and one can endorse a disjunctive claim about the epistemic warrant available to the subject in these cases whilst remaining neutral on the nature of the perceptual experiences. Experiences with the same fundamental nature may be able play quite different epistemic roles, depending on contextual or causal factors. Epistemological disjunctivism – disjunctivism about epistemic warrant – need make no claims about the nature of perceptual experience.<sup>5</sup>

Such interpretations draw attention to the important ways in which McDowell's discussion of disjunctivism differs, in both motivation and outcome, from those more clearly situated in debates about the nature of perceptual experience. But they also raise a *prima facie* puzzle about the role of the other minds problem in motivating McDowell's disjunctive theory. For Wittgenstein's discussion of the other minds problem in the *Philosophical Investigations* has often been thought to replace an *epistemological* problem of other minds with a *conceptual* problem: one on which what is at issue is not so much our ability to know what another is thinking, but our ability to think of another as a subject of experience at all.<sup>6</sup> In which case the question arises: which problem of other minds does McDowell use to motivate his disjunctive claim? And, more generally, what is the relation of the other minds problem to disjunctivism?

In the first part of this paper I will set out the structure of McDowell's argument, focusing on the role that the problem of other minds plays in motivating his endorsement of a disjunctive claim about appearances. This will show the role that the *epistemological* problem of other minds plays in motivating McDowell's disjunctive claims. I will then turn my attention to the *conceptual* problem of other minds, and argue that one issue which gets raised under this heading can be used to motivate the beginnings of an argument for a perceptual disjunctive claim about the nature of perceptual experience. Focusing on this problem of other minds motivates not an epistemological disjunctive claim about epistemic warrant, but a perceptual disjunctive claim about the nature of perceptual experience. This raises some questions about the epistemological interpretation of McDowell's disjunctivism. At issue is not simply McDowell exegesis, but clarification

<sup>5</sup> [Millar 2008] endorses a form of epistemological disjunctivism which makes no claims about the nature of perceptual experience.

<sup>6</sup> See [Avramides 2001] for a reading of the history of the problem of other minds in this vein.

of the relation between the problem of other minds and the nature of perceptual experience.

## 2. McDowell and Other Minds

McDowell orientates his paper in terms of a debate about the role and nature of 'criteria' in Wittgenstein's later philosophy, a debate which can look somewhat abstruse from a quarter of a century's distance. On the account he wants to challenge, criteria are to be understood as providing evidential support for knowledge claims; this support is a matter of 'convention' or 'grammar' [p.369], rather than empirical theory; and – most significantly – the support provided by criteria is *defeasible*.<sup>7</sup> The particular application of "criteria" that McDowell takes issue with is their use in responding to 'the traditional problem of other minds' [p. 369]. On this application of criteria, our knowledge claims about another's mental life are not based on a theory which extrapolates from observed behaviour to the presence of the mental state; rather the observed behaviour constitute criteria for the application of the psychological concept and when those criteria are satisfied we can know, as a matter of convention, that a subject is in a certain mental state.

McDowell's main criticism of this account of criteria is that, by insisting upon the defeasibility of criteria, it allows a situation where a knowledge claim could be ascribed to the subject on the strength of the satisfaction of criteria which were compatible with the falsity of the knowledge claim ascribed. That follows from the defeasibility of criteria. And this, McDowell thinks, is straightforwardly incoherent. Knowing that something is the case is meant to rule out the possibility that, for all one knows, things may be otherwise. If criteria are defeasible, then everything that is available to the subject is compatible with the knowledge claim being false, and that cannot secure our knowledge of other minds.

McDowell thinks we must reject this account of criteria, but of more concern to him is the epistemological assumption which makes the defeasibility of criteria seem compulsory, namely the thought that the possibility of pretence entails the defeasibility of criteria ([pp. 379-385]). If a person can pretend to be in pain when she is not, then it seems that the criteria for pain must be satisfied in both deceptive and non-deceptive

<sup>7</sup> For an example of this account, see P.M.S. Hacker's entry on 'criteria' in [Honderich 1995].

cases, and thus that the support criteria provide for any knowledge claim must be defeasible. Dislodging this assumption is the real task of the paper, and it is this that motivates McDowell's disjunctive claim. For the possibility of pretence only entails that criteria must be defeasible if we accept that the criteria are satisfied in both the actual case and the case of pretence. But this is not obligatory: we can instead hold that 'in pretending, one causes it to *appear* that criteria for something "internal" are satisfied...; but that the criteria are not really satisfied.' [p.380]. This allows us to dislodge the epistemological assumption that motivates the defeasibility of criteria.

As McDowell notes, the possibility of pretence in this context is simply an application of the wider 'Argument from Illusion' used in the case of knowledge of the external world, and noting this structural analogy allows him to extend his discussion to the case of perceptual experience more generally. Using the analogy, McDowell endorses a wider disjunctive claim about appearances: 'suppose we say – not at all unnaturally – 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.' [pp.386-7]. On this reading, the role of the disjunctive claim is to make knowledge possible by allowing that one's experience in the non-deceptive case extends to embrace the fact that things are a certain way, despite the fact that one's experience falls short in the deceptive case. Disjunctivism disarms the 'Argument from Illusion' in the same way that it disarmed the possibility of pretence, and opens up the possibility of genuine, direct perceptual knowledge.

This is how McDowell motivates his disjunctive claim. A couple of comments can be made about this way of presenting the discussion. First, it can seem surprising in some ways how *little* work is being done by the problem of other minds. At issue is a picture of the way in which perceptual experience provides evidence for perceptual judgements, and the discussion of other minds serves as an example of one place where this picture of defeasible evidence is at work. But nothing in this discussion turns on anything distinctive about our knowledge of other minds: the main focus is the defeasibility claim and the epistemological assumptions that support it. It is this more general thesis about the relation between perceptual experience and evidence which is McDowell's focus in his paper, and the other minds discussion is simply a convenient place to begin exploration of this issue.

Secondly, McDowell's explicit concern is the traditional epistemological problem of other minds. The possibility of pretence blocks a particular solution to the problem of other minds that McDowell wants to endorse, one on which one can literally perceive that another person is, say, in pain.<sup>8</sup> It blocks this solution by making it seem compulsory that the object of appearance in both cases must be the mere appearance that another is in pain. Endorsing a disjunctive claim about these cases enables McDowell to reject this thesis, and defend the thought that in the non-deceptive cases, the circumstance of another being in pain can be the direct object of experience.

Finally, we can see why McDowell's epistemological concerns have prompted Snowdon and others to classify his disjunctivism as an epistemological disjunctivism, one on which the epistemic warrant available in genuine cases of perception differs from those of deceptive cases despite the fact that in all cases it seems to the subject as if things are a certain way. For in rejecting the defeasibility of criteria, all McDowell needs to endorse is the thesis that the epistemic warrant differs across deceptive and non-deceptive cases: this epistemic disjunctive thesis alone is sufficient to explain the possibility of knowledge in those cases where the facts are made manifest to me. And no particular thesis about the nature of perceptual experience is necessary to defend this claim; hence his characterisation as an epistemological disjunctivist.

This is how McDowell uses the problem of other minds to motivate his disjunctivism. He uses a disjunctive claim about the nature of appearances to defend a perceptual response to the traditional epistemological problem of other minds, and then shows how this disjunctive claim can be used, more generally, to secure the possibility of genuine perceptual knowledge by disarming application of the 'Argument from Illusion'. And nothing in this project requires McDowell to endorse a perceptual disjunctive claim about the nature of perceptual experience: all he requires is the thought that the epistemic warrant available to the subject differs in deceptive and non-deceptive cases.

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion of M-Realism at [pp.370-1] and the clarification at [pp. 386-7]. To describe this as a perceptual model is not to say that in all cases the mental state must be directly observational: see [p.387, fn.34]. Note that here, and throughout, I take *perceive* to be factive.

In the next two sections I will turn to the *conceptual* problem of other minds, and argue that it can be used to motivate the beginnings of an argument for a *perceptual* disjunctive claim about the nature of perceptual experience. That is, once we turn our attention to the conceptual problem, we can see that it motivates a claim about the nature of perceptual experience. Given the fact that McDowell uses the problem of other minds to motivate his disjunctivism, this will allow me, in the final section, to raise some questions about the epistemological interpretations of McDowell.

### 3. Other Minds

The epistemological problem of other minds is a problem about knowledge: how is it possible to know that other people have minds? And the obstacle raised to this possibility is the claim that our standard sources of knowledge are insufficient for this task. Knowledge of my own mental life is based on introspection, but I cannot introspect another person's mental life. Perception and inference, broadly construed, are sources of knowledge of the external world, but neither seems adequate to account for our knowledge of other minds. Against perception it is claimed that we cannot perceive another person's mental states and against inference that the behavioural evidence base we perceive is too weak to ground any conclusion about other minds.<sup>9</sup>

Supporting this problem is a particular view about the nature of our experience of other people's mental lives. In ruling out perceptual and inferential models of knowledge, the problem assumes that all I can experience of other people is their behaviour; their mind is hidden from view. It is this assumption which rules out the possibility of perceptual knowledge of other minds, since my experience is confined to other people's behaviour. But it is also this claim which threatens the possibility of inferential knowledge, for the experience of mere behaviour is claimed to be insufficient to justify beliefs about another's mental states. Inferential

<sup>9</sup> Standard responses to the epistemological problem claim that, in fact, one of these sources can account for knowledge of other minds. [Putnam 1975] and [Mill 1979] provide inferential solutions; [Cassam 2007: ch.5] advocates a perceptual model.

responses to the epistemological problem aim to counter this by showing how experience of behaviour can justify beliefs about other minds.<sup>10</sup>

The conceptual problem arises because this assumption – the assumption that all I experience of others is their behaviour – is thought to raise a deeper problem than simply accounting for our knowledge of other minds: it also calls into question our ability to *think* about other minds. Once again, we can phrase this question as a ‘how possible’ question, though this time our concern is not with knowledge but with thought: how is it possible to think about other minds? And the supposed obstacle to such thought is the assumption that all I experience of other people is their behaviour.

Why would this assumption threaten the possibility of thought about other minds? Thinking about other minds requires the use of general mental concepts: mental concepts which apply both to others and to ourselves. Calling such concepts general acknowledges that first- and third-person ascriptions of mental predicates are univocal. As Strawson puts it, ‘the dictionaries do not give two sets of meaning for every expression which describes a state of consciousness: a first-person meaning and a second-and-third person meaning.’ [Strawson 1959: p.99]. The conceptual problem arises because the claim that all I experience of others is their behaviour is said to conflict with the possibility of possessing general mental concepts.<sup>11</sup>

Why think there is a conflict? One influential argument in the other minds literature claims that experience of one’s own mental life is not sufficient to ground one’s conception of a mental state which can apply to another person. That is, I cannot understand what it is for another to be in pain purely on the basis of my own pain sensations. If this is right, then it cannot both be true that all I experience of others is their behaviour and that I possess general mental concepts, for an account of experience which is confined to my own mental life cannot explain the possession of such concepts. This is why the claim that all I experience of others is their behaviour is said to raise a conceptual problem of other minds.

<sup>10</sup> [Malcolm 1963b] argues that experience of behaviour cannot support inferences to beliefs about other minds. For a contrasting opinion, see [Price 1938].

<sup>11</sup> [Malcolm 1963b] motivates the conceptual problem of other minds in this way.



It is at this point that Wittgenstein's discussion of other minds traditionally enters the dialectic. For an argument to the effect that one cannot understand what it would be for another to be in pain on the basis of one's own pain sensations is often traced back to Wittgenstein's discussion of the relationship between sensation and behaviour in the Philosophical Investigations.<sup>12</sup> In a much quoted passage, he writes

If one has to imagine someone else's pain on the model of one's own, this is none too easy a thing to do: for I have to imagine a pain which I *do not* feel on the model of pain which I *do* feel. [Wittgenstein 1953: §302]

Interpretations of these passages are controversial, but the conclusion seems clear: experience of my own mental life is not sufficient to ground a general conception of the mental.

How should we understand this argument? For the argument to have any suasive force, it must do more than simply reflect inductive scepticism about whether the unobserved is like the observed. What needs to be supported is the claim that there is something distinctive about our own experiences which makes it impossible for them to ground a conception of unfeelt experiences. Perhaps the strongest consideration in support concerns the way in which our own sensations are presented to us. According to the conception of mental life under consideration, there is a distinct gap between behaviour and sensation such that the only sensations I can experience are my own. But – the Wittgensteinian thought sometimes goes – if this is how one conceives of mentality, sensations simply aren't presented to me in such a way that I could understand them to apply to other people. My understanding of what it is to be in pain is tied up with my own experience pain – and to use *that* experience to ground a general conception of the mental, I would have to somehow separate out the first-personal presentational character of my pain from the episode itself, and think of the pain in an objective, third-personal way. But what would it be to do that? Defenders of this Wittgensteinian argument claim that this model of experience doesn't possess the materials for distinguishing between the felt episode and the fact that it is felt by me, and thus we

<sup>12</sup> See in particular §283 onwards, where Wittgenstein asks the question 'What gives us *so much as the idea* that living beings, things can feel?' [Wittgenstein 1953: §283]. Related arguments are put forward in [Strawson 1959: p.100-102] and [Williams 1978: pp.94-101, pp.294-5].

cannot use such experiences to think about pain from a third-personal standpoint.<sup>13</sup>

This argument is controversial, but for my purposes here all I want to note is that if this argument can be made good, then we have support for the thought that experience confined to my own case cannot explain my grasp of general mental concepts and, more generally, my conception of another as a possible subject of experience. And that supports the claim (M1): that experience confined to my own mental life cannot explain my grasp of mental concepts. But, as Hanna Pickard points out, this will only tell against this conception of experience to the extent that one thinks that experience does explain my grasp of mental concepts.<sup>14</sup> Call this (M2): experience explains my grasp of mental concepts. Together these two premises provide an argument against the conception of experience on which my experience of mentality is confined to my own mental life.

How should one react to this argument? Clearly both premises can be challenged, either by denying (M2), or by challenging the Wittgensteinian argument used in support of (M1).<sup>15</sup> But if one thinks both premises are sound, then the argument can be used to motivate a conception of experience on which other people's mental lives are publicly manifest.<sup>16</sup> On this proposal, we move towards resolving the conceptual problem of other minds by replacing the problematic conception of experience with one on which our experience of other people extends beyond their behaviour to take in their mentality. And what motivates this new conception of experience is a concern about how experience explains our ability to *think* about other minds.

#### 4. Disjunctivism

How does this problem of other minds motivate an argument for disjunctivism? In McDowell's original paper, the linking point between the two debates is a structural analogy between the role that the possibility of pretence plays in debates about other minds, and the role that illusions

<sup>13</sup> For interpretations of the conceptual problem in this vein, see [McGinn 1984], [Dancy 1985: pp.68-73] and [Pickard 2003].

<sup>14</sup> [Pickard 2003: p.89]

<sup>15</sup> For commentary on Wittgenstein's argument, see [Malcolm 1963a] and the appendix to [Kripke 1982].

<sup>16</sup> [Strawson 1959] and [Pickard 2003] present solutions of this sort. See also [Cook 1969]. [Malcolm 1963b] seems tempted by another solution: that of denying that statements of pain, say, are really statements at all, but are instead expressions.

and hallucinations play in debates about perception. So the first concern, one might think, for any attempt to motivate an argument for disjunctivism from the *conceptual* problem of other minds is that the possibility of pretence plays no role in setting up the conceptual problem, and thus we lack the material to motivate a link into those issues which arise in discussions of perception.

One way to see that there is a link here is to return to the thought that what is at stake in the conceptual problem is the possibility of providing an account of those requirements that must be met in order for us to credit an individual with the understanding that her concept of pain can be applied to another even when she is not in pain. According to the conceptual problem, what we have to explain is how a subject can make sense of the idea that *pain* might exist even if she were not feeling it. To grasp such a concept, one must understand that mental episodes are independent in a certain sense: the existence of a mental episode does not depend on whether *I* am undergoing it. This is not to say that they are independent of *anyone* undergoing the episode: mental events require a subject for their existence. But a subject's grasp of general mental concepts requires her to understand that mental episodes can exist independently of whether she herself is the subject of them.

This can provide us with a link into issues in perception because a commonly accepted definition of realism takes empirical objects to be independent of our thought or experience of them.<sup>17</sup> Assuming we can think about such objects, it is a condition on the grasp of empirical concepts that a subject understand that the existence of such objects is independent of her perception of them. In the case of empirical objects the independence is iteratively stronger: grasp of an empirical concept requires that one understand that they can exist independently of *anyone* perceiving them. But the motivating thought remains the same: if there is a philosophical issue about how a subject might grasp the conception of a mental event which could exist independently of her feeling it, then a similar problem may arise when considering how a subject grasps the conception of an empirical object which could exist independently of anyone perceiving it.

<sup>17</sup> [Brewer 2004: p.61] provides an account of empirical realism along these lines.

On this way of motivating the issue, our concern is the requirements that must be met in order for us to credit an individual with an understanding that empirical objects can exist independently of her perception of them. What account of experience can explain this grasp of empirical concepts? If an account of experience *cannot* explain our grasp of empirical concepts, then we would do well to reject it. And one claim that resurfaces in a number of places in the disjunctivist literature is that non-disjunctive theories of perceptual experience cannot explain how experience enables us to grasp empirical concepts.

This charge is clearest in the claim made by some supporters of disjunctive theories that non-disjunctive theories prevent us from thinking about the external world, for a theory which cannot explain our possession of empirical concepts cannot explain our ability to think about the external world. So Bill Child writes of non-disjunctive theories, ‘if this is what experience is like... how can it yield knowledge of an objective world beyond experience, and *how can it so much as put us in a position to think about the world?*’ [Child 1994: pp.146-7, my emphasis]. And Putnam makes the claim that non-disjunctive models of experience ‘make it impossible to see how persons can be in genuine cognitive contact with a world at all’ [Putnam 1999: p.11], a charge which makes sense if non-disjunctive models prevent our grasp of empirical concepts. Call this claim (P1): experience conceived of on the non-disjunctive model cannot explain our grasp of empirical concepts.

What kind of argument can be used to support (P1)? In the case of other minds, the comparable claim was supported by the thought that experience confined to my own case couldn’t underwrite the grasp of a general mental concept because it failed to provide the material for distinguishing the felt experience from its being felt by me, and thus gave no purchase on the idea that an experience of the same sort might exist without my feeling it. If the other minds case is to motivate perceptual disjunctivism, then the comparable claim would be that non-disjunctive models of experience fail to provide the material for distinguishing between the object of the experience and the act of experiencing it, and thus give no purchase on the idea that the object of the experience might exist without me experiencing it.

John Campbell provides an argument of this sort. Non-disjunctive theories, he claims, are committed to experience of the object providing

you with a conscious image of the object, an image whose existence is dependent on the existence of the subject who is experiencing the image. But experience of this sort cannot distinguish the existence of the object from the act of your perceiving it: 'we cannot extract the conception of a mind-independent world from a mind-dependent image.' [Campbell 2002a: p.135]. Here we find a parallel to the Wittgensteinian argument above used in support of (P1).

This argument, as it stands, is not sufficient to motivate a disjunctive theory of perceptual experience. For it seems to assume that non-disjunctive theories of experience involve the presence of a mind-dependent object of experience, a conscious image of which the subject is aware. And while that might be true of traditional sense-datum theories of experience, it seems clearly false of intentional theories of perception, those on which perception is to be understood as an intentional state with representational content.<sup>18</sup> So, as it stands, the conceptual problem of other minds only motivates part of an argument for perceptual disjunctivism, since the argument leaves standing those theories on which perceptual experience does not involve the presence of mind-dependent entities, but instead involves representational states which do not involve, as constituents, the objects perceived in the environment.

But it may be that we can use the other minds discussion as a clue towards how one might complete this argument. We noted above that the Wittgensteinian argument was committed to a claim about the role of experience in explaining our grasp of mental concepts. Call a comparable claim in the case of perception (P2): experience explains our grasp of empirical concepts. One way to extend this argument to take in intentional theories would be to examine the extent to which intentional theories can account for this explanatory role of experience.<sup>19</sup>

The way in which this argument is to proceed will depend on how exactly the intentional theorist's notion of representational content is to be explained, but we can summarise the disjunctivist challenge in the form of a dilemma for the intentional theorist. Either the representational content

<sup>18</sup> [Martin 2002: p.397] voices this concern about the Putnam passage quoted above. It is unclear whether Campbell intends this part of his argument to also apply to intentional theories.

<sup>19</sup> John Campbell has pressed this line of thought most forcefully. See his [Campbell 2002b].

of perceptual experience is conceptual, in which case empirical concepts are required to specify the content of experience, and experience presupposes the possession of empirical concepts rather than explaining it. Or the content of perceptual experience is non-conceptual, in which case the aspect of the experience which fixes the reference of the representational content falls outside the subjective viewpoint of the subject. Both options are meant to conflict with our conviction that phenomenological experience explains our grasp of empirical concepts.<sup>20</sup>

I said that the conceptual problem of other minds could be used to motivate only the beginnings of an argument for perceptual disjunctivism, and this illustrates why, for more needs to be said about how this extension is to take place. In particular, the claim that experience explains our grasp of empirical concepts needs to be clarified and defended in order for us to be confident that the argument will engage the multiple ways a non-disjunctive intentional theory of perception might be formulated. But what is important to note is that to the extent that there is an argument for perceptual disjunctivism here, it relies upon a claim about the role of experience analogous to that used in Wittgenstein's discussion of other minds. The structure of the other minds discussion helps us to clarify the way in which the argument for perceptual disjunctivism might proceed.

The conceptual problem of other minds, then, can be used to motivate part of an argument for a perceptual disjunctive claim about the nature of perceptual experience. I have only sketched how this argument might proceed, but we can see that in both cases the concern is with which accounts of experience can explain our ability to grasp certain concepts. And explaining this ability requires attention to the nature of experience itself. The problem of other minds motivates claims about the nature of perceptual experience.

## 5. McDowell and Disjunctivism

With this in mind we can return to our discussion of McDowell's disjunctivism. According to the epistemological interpretations of McDowell, his disjunctivism about appearances makes no claim about the metaphysical nature of perceptual experience; its sole concern is with the epistemic warrant provided by perceptual experience. But I have argued

<sup>20</sup> See [Campbell 2002b: pp.124-126] for presentation of this dilemma.

that concern with the conceptual problem of other minds can be used to motivate a perceptual disjunctive claim about the nature of perceptual experience. That would suggest that the conceptual problem of other minds is absent from McDowell's discussion – a suggestion which sits ill at ease with the Wittgensteinian context in which he addresses this issue. How should we understand McDowell's response to the problem of other minds?

The important thing to note is that the position that McDowell endorses goes further than what is strictly required for a solution to the epistemological problem. McDowell follows Wittgenstein in endorsing a solution to the other minds problem which challenges the divide between "bodily behaviour" and "inner state" and instead puts the concept of a *human being* at the focal point of our experience [p.384]. It is this divide between "mind" and "behaviour" which – McDowell claims – underwrites the problem of other minds, and once we reject the distinction, we open up the possibility of a perceptual model of knowledge of other minds. We have to make sense of the idea that human beings, and not mere behaviour, can be a feature of our experience.

But this goes further than what is strictly required by the argument against the defeasibility of criteria.<sup>21</sup> All McDowell's argument requires is that bodily behaviour can sometimes non-defeasibly warrant knowledge claims about a person's inner mental life. That would be enough to explain how we can gain knowledge of other minds. McDowell goes much further and attacks the distinction between "mind" and "behaviour" which underlies this whole approach. The perceptual model of knowledge he endorses involves not just the non-defeasibility of criteria, but the confrontation in experience of facts about another's mental life.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, however, note that this perceptual model *does* provide the material for a response to the conceptual problem of other minds as set out above. For if we are to reject the claim that all we experience of another is their "bodily behaviour", in favour of the thought that we are confronted

<sup>21</sup> As McDowell seems to acknowledge: [p.382, fn.24].

<sup>22</sup> Of course, knowledge claims presuppose conceptual capabilities, so if McDowell's rejection of the distinction between "mind" and "behaviour" is relevant to the conceptual problem – as I suggest in the main text below – then it is needed to explain our knowledge of other minds. But if one's sole concern is the traditional epistemological problem, McDowell's argument motivates nothing more than the non-defeasibility of behaviour in certain circumstances. Thanks to Bill Child for comment here.

with facts about human beings and their mental lives, then we have a route to explaining how it is that other people's mental lives can be publicly manifest – as required by the Wittgensteinian response to the conceptual problem. Rejecting the ontological distinction between “mind” and “behaviour” opens up the possibility not only of a perceptual model of knowledge of other minds, but the beginnings of an account of how another's person's mentality can be publicly manifest in a way which explains our grasp of mental concepts. McDowell's perceptual model provides the basis for an explanation of our ability to think about other minds.<sup>23</sup>

Finally note that, although McDowell is clearly preoccupied with issues of knowledge, there is still a concern in his paper with the type of experience necessary to explain the conceptual capabilities of a subject. In particular, he discusses and rejects the claim that a theory could be used to extend a subject's conceptual capabilities from experience restricted to bodily behaviour to thoughts about other people's mental states.<sup>24</sup> This rejection draws upon ideas found in Wittgenstein's response to the argument from analogy, and demonstrates an involvement in the issues raised by the conceptual problem.

So McDowell's discussion of other minds does involve some recognition of the conceptual problem of other minds. And this raises a concern, I think, for the epistemological interpretations of McDowell. According to such interpretations, McDowell defends a claim about epistemic warrant, whereby the warrant provided by experience differs between deceptive and non-deceptive cases. That is surely right, as an account of McDowell's epistemological concern. But when we examine how this applies to the case of other minds, we can see that McDowell's positive account of experience of other minds goes beyond the minimum needed to establish epistemological disjunctivism.

Epistemological disjunctivism claims that epistemic warrant differs across deceptive and non-deceptive cases. But in order to defend this claim about knowledge of other minds, it is not necessary to endorse a perceptual model of knowledge of other minds. In particular, it is not necessary to

<sup>23</sup> In saying this I am rejecting Pickard's claim that 'it is wholly unclear why [McDowell's] proposal should matter to the conceptual problem' [Pickard 2003: p.91], though more would need to be said about how the explanation should proceed.

<sup>24</sup> [pp.391-2]



challenge any divide between “bodily behaviour” and “the mental”. Say that all we are aware of is bodily behaviour, something which falls short of the fact that another is in a particular mental state. Still there could be a difference in epistemic warrant between deceptive and non-deceptive cases if something extrinsic to the experience of bodily behaviour was responsible for determining epistemic warrant. So causal or contextual factors could explain the difference in warrant, whilst one’s experience remained understood as falling short of the circumstance itself.<sup>25</sup>

This model of epistemological disjunctivism would be anathema to McDowell, leaving in place, as it does, the distinction between “behaviour” and “mind” that he seeks to dislodge. So what does a perceptual model of knowledge of other minds add to this reduced epistemological disjunctivist position? The natural thought is that the differing objects of perception provide an explanation for the difference in epistemic warrant. Genuinely perceptual experiences reach out to the circumstance itself, whereas mere appearances fall short, and it is this feature of perceptual experiences which explains the difference in epistemic warrant: that one is confronted in the non-deceptive case with the circumstance itself explains why the subject is in a position to know that things are so.

How does this affect the characterisation of McDowell as an epistemological disjunctivist? Certainly he *is* an epistemological disjunctivist, for he believes that the epistemic warrant differs across deceptive and non-deceptive cases. But in the case of other minds this is backed up by claims about perceptual experience: that in non-deceptive cases one’s experience extends to take in the mental states of the subject observed. Now is this a claim about the nature of perceptual experience? That will depend on whether the genuinely perceptual experiences are constituted, as opposed to simply caused, by the facts themselves. If the epistemic warrant of non-deceptive experiences is simply a result of them being *caused* by the facts of the matter, then there is no reason to think that the nature of these experiences differs from the deceptive experiences,

<sup>25</sup> One might still class this as a perceptual model on the grounds that the experiences of behaviour were to be classified as cases of seeing that someone is in a particular mental state, but on the basis of extrinsic casual or contextual factors. But whether or not we call such a model perceptual, it does not involve McDowell’s rejection of the ontological divide between “behaviour” and “mind”.

and thus no need for McDowell to embrace any version of perceptual disjunctivism.<sup>26</sup>

But given McDowell's endorsement of a perceptual model, it is hard to see why simple causal facts, extrinsic to the nature of the experiences, should be thought of as explaining the difference in epistemic warrant, since one could embrace a causal account of the difference without any commitment to the perceptual model. Indeed, the discussion of whether the 'blankly external obtaining of a fact' can make a difference to the epistemic warrant of an experience seems precisely to rule out the possibility of something extrinsic to the nature of the experience determining the epistemic warrant of the experience itself.<sup>27</sup> Instead the fact that McDowell endorses a perceptual model for the case of other minds is evidence, I take it, that we should treat the facts as constitutive of non-deceptive, genuinely perceptual experiences. And that means that genuinely perceptual experiences have an intrinsic nature which is distinct from mere appearances.<sup>28</sup>

I suggest, then, that McDowell's claim about the difference in epistemic warrant, as applied to the case of other minds, is backed up by a claim about the nature of perceptual experience of other minds. And given that he uses the case of other minds to motivate his wider disjunctive claim about appearances, the same will be true of his epistemological disjunctive claim for perceptual experience more generally. The difference in epistemic warrant in these cases is explained by a difference in the nature of perceptual experiences. Those who have put forward the epistemological interpretation of McDowell are right both that McDowell is a proponent of epistemological disjunctivism and that epistemological disjunctivism need not say anything about the nature of perceptual experience. But it

<sup>26</sup> Haddock and Macpherson make this point in their [Haddock and Macpherson 2008: p.8]

<sup>27</sup> [pp.388-9]

<sup>28</sup> This reading of McDowell arguably better fits with other themes in his writings. In his [1986], reprinted as [McDowell 1998b] he suggests that the contents of perceptual experience are object-dependent demonstrative senses; content which is unavailable to feature in perceptual experience in the absence of a referent for the demonstrative. In his [2008] he amends this to clarify that the content in question is not propositional but 'intuitional', further stressing the unavailability of the content in the absence of intuitions – that is, in the absence of perception of objects.

may do so. And, arguably, McDowell does. Focusing on the relation of the other minds problem to disjunctivism helps to make this clear.<sup>29</sup>

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