Corijn van Mazijk: *Perception and Reality in Kant, Husserl, and McDowell*, Routledge, 2020,

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Abstract:
Corijn van Mazijk's book is a critical exploration of the relations between Immanuel Kant's, Edmund Husserl's, and John McDowell's transcendental philosophies. His primary aim is not to conduct a historical study, but "to show that history provides us with viable alternatives to McDowell's theory of our perceptual access to reality" (Van Mazijk 2020, p. 6). The book covers a variety of McDowellian themes: the Myth of the Given, the space of reasons *vs*. the space of nature, conceptualism, disjunctivism, naturalism, and realism—uncovering the roots of McDowell's views and providing Kantian and Husserlian correctives where needed.

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The book is well-organized and clearly written. Though no beginner's introduction, it is generally consistent with van Mazijk's aim of writing "in such a way as to make [systems of ideas] accessible to anyone without any specialized background knowledge."[2] There are three parts, dealing with Kant's, Husserl's, and McDowell's views respectively, and comprised of two chapters each. The chapters are conceived as independently readable, so that the reader may go straight to the most interesting ones. In particular, who so wishes may skip ahead to the two

[1] Van Mazijk (2020, p. 6).
[2] Ibid.

McDowell chapters (Ch-s 5 and 6), which form the core of the book and where all the different threads come together.

By authoring this book, van Mazijk has significantly contributed to important developments in contemporary philosophy. Through much of the twentieth century, the analytic and continental traditions in philosophy made little contact with each other, and much of analytic philosophy was historically uninformed. Nowadays, however, philosophy is becoming more sophisticated in these respects, and this is where van Mazijk comes in, with a book which successfully bridges the two traditions, and teaches important Kantian and Husserlian lessons to philosophers of today. He is mining a rich vein, as attested to by the fact that the book has already received at least three generally positive reviews.[3]

Preparatory to my own critical comments, I will give a very brief chapter-by-chapter overview of the book, touching upon some of the key topics and ideas. In Chapter 1, van Mazijk discusses the relation between understanding and sensibility in Kant, with a focus on Kant's idea that sensibility makes a distinctive contribution to cognition. He also argues that Kant's transcendental idealism is not a form of metaphysical idealism. In Chapter 2, van Mazijk argues that, pace McDowell, Kant is to be regarded as primarily a weak conceptualist, not a strong conceptualist, about perceptual content. As explicated by van Mazijk, strong conceptualism is the view that "concepts structure sense experience," and weak conceptualism, that "all sense experience, at least insofar as it bears on our rational lives, [is] open to propositional explication in thought."[4] In other words, weakly conceptual content is merely conceptualizable.

In Chapter 3, van Mazijk introduces Husserl's early approach to intentionality, with a focus on the idea that perceptual experiences justify judgments by "fulfillment," a kind of synthesis by

[3] Cheng (2020), Doyon (2020), Guilhermino (2020).
[4] Van Mazijk (2020, p. 4).

which the former are revealed as having immediate (or "intuitive") evidential bearing on the latter. Second, van Mazijk brings to our attention Husserl's "core" demarcation of "a space of consciousness …, distinct from the space of nature through a unique sort of epistemic access, from which alone questions of reason, justification, knowledge, and reality can be asked and clarified."[5] In fact, both spaces contain one and the same comprehensive subject matter, viz., the mind *and* the world, but as regarded from the philosophical and scientific viewpoints, respectively—yielding a kind of "double-aspect theory," which will be seen to provide an alternative to McDowell's views.[6] In Chapter 4, van Mazijk argues that, on the Husserlian approach, perceptual content consists of several different "layers," which do not contain concepts. They are crucially dependent on the functioning of the kinaesthetic system, which serves to orient the perceiver in space and contributes a sense of self-movement. These "layers" of content are distinguishable from the point of view of Husserl's later, "genetic" phenomenology, which aims "to clarify, from within the space of consciousness …, the origins of intentionality, conceptuality, and ultimately of the inter-subjective, scientifically determinable world in which we, as adults, stand."[7]

In Chapter 5, van Mazijk argues that McDowell's views of perceptual content are ambiguous between weak and strong conceptualism. Since he regards the latter view as problematic, he draws upon Kantian and Husserlian ideas, from the previous chapters, to open up avenues for developing an acceptable weak conceptualist view. In Chapter 6, van Mazijk offers criticisms of McDowell's distinction between a space of reasons and a space of nature, identifying it as key motivating factor for McDowell's embracing strong conceptualism.[8] Here, the Husserlian idea of a space of consciousness proves helpful, since it encompasses more broadly than

[5] Ibid., (pp. 74-75).
[6] Ibid., (p. 80).
[7] Ibid., (pp. 96-97).
[8] Ibid., (p. 147).

McDowell's space of reasons, and thus enables us to avoid unduly separating the conceptual and non-conceptual aspects of perceptual experience, or even downplaying or eliminating the latter, so as to cut down perceptual content to the size of its (strong conceptualist) Procrustean bed.[9]

As I have already noted, the main contention of the book is that due consideration of Kantian and Husserlian views enables us to correct certain problematic aspects of McDowell's position. I believe that van Mazijk's argument to that effect is, on the whole, successful, but it also seems to me that, at certain junctures, he could have done more to clarify his concepts, as well as the demands of the dialectical situation. Thus, we have already seen that van Mazijk distinguishes between weak and strong conceptualism about perceptual content, i.e., he effectively distinguishes two kinds of conceptual content, the merely conceptualizable and the conceptually informed. But clearly, this also yields a corresponding distinction between two kinds of non-conceptual content, which, as far as I can tell, van Mazijk never explicitly makes. It would conduce to clarity if he did—e.g., regarding what look to me like two incompatible strands in his discussion of Husserl's view. On the one hand, Husserl is a non-conceptualist in the sense that he embraces weak conceptualism—even if perceptual experience may involve other elements (not what we, nowadays, would call "contents") that are not conceptualizable.[10] On the other hand, Husserl is a non-conceptualist in the sense that he invokes "fullnesses" and "fields of sensations," which are rightly regarded as content, and yet are *not* conceptualizable.[11] These are two significantly different alternatives to McDowell's view. E.g., the latter might be the better fit with the perceptual experiences of non-human animals. Yet, it might also draw objections to the effect that the putative

[9] Ibid., (p. 157).
[10] Ibid., (p. 71).
[11] Ibid., (pp. 134-135, 154).

non-conceptualizable aspects of content are, in fact, no more than extrinsic enabling conditions of content.

Remember also that the idea of a space of consciousness plays a central role in van Mazijk's argument, viz., as a sphere wherein it is possible to unify the conceptual and non-conceptual aspects of content. I believe that van Mazijk is right to invoke this idea, but it also seems to me that the discussion might have benefited from certain modifications. For one, in explicating the "double-aspect theory" of consciousness and nature, it might have been a good idea to also touch upon Husserl's concept of the soul (*Seele*), by which Husserl means roughly what we nowadays refer to as the mind, and which can be studied either from the psychological or from the phenomenological perspective.[12] For Husserl, even the empirical psychologist can study the soul in such a way as to do justice to the what-it-is-like (or the phenomenal character, e.g., of sensations), and some of the motivational, as opposed to causal, nexuses which pervade the life of the soul—i.e., without reducing the ensouled "animal nature" to mere material nature. We would be dealing with a psychological study of aspects of consciousness (*qua* consciousness, it seems to me), but it is not immediately obvious to me that this would, by the same token, amount to regarding consciousness with a view to its normativity, for it to bear on McDowell's concerns, as intended by Van Mazijk.

There is also another respect in which Van Mazijk could have made his argument for (and from) the space of consciousness more compelling, especially for those readers who are not very familiar with Husserlian phenomenology. Namely, he invokes genetic phenomenology, at least in part, "to show how all accomplishments of consciousness are closely connected."[13] The way he sets up at least some of his central arguments in the book, they no less than stand or fall, depending

[12] Husserl (1989, *Section Two*).
[13] Van Mazijk (2020, p. 97).

on whether the reader understands Husserl's genetic phenomenology and is ready to buy into it. Van Mazijk appears optimistic in these regards, but to me genetic phenomenology seems a quite difficult topic, which segments of Van Mazijk's intended readership may have real difficulty grasping.[14] I believe that his argument could have had considerably broader appeal if he had also explored whether, for his purposes, the space of consciousness could be sufficiently unified based on Husserl's more familiar, and more accessible, "static" phenomenology, which likewise studies foundational relations among different layers of consciousness.

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[14] Ibid.

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