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**Introduction**

Philosophers throughout the ages have struggled to explain the way or ways by which we can acquire knowledge about the external world. With an aim to meet the sceptical challenges regarding the possibility of knowledge, various accounts of knowledge have been developed across philosophical traditions. The worry to meet sceptical challenges is implicitly or explicitly present in almost every philosophical account of knowledge. Many philosophers, while explaining about the nature and the possibility of knowledge, have talked about placing it in the space of reasons or space of justifications. So, I think one of the ways in which we can respond to sceptical challenges is by developing a proper understanding of the space of reasons and justifications where we place our knowledge. When we talk about the space of reasons, it is also important to highlight, in this context, its relationship with the natural world. I would like to emphasize in this regard that there has been a normative turn specifically in the works of John McDowell and Robert Brandom after the naturalistic turn in epistemology. But one can ask- why is there a need of a normative turn after a seemingly successful naturalistic turn in epistemology? I call them normative epistemologists those who have argued that knowledge should be understood by placing it properly in the space of reasons which is necessarily a normative space. I think John McDowell, Robert Brandom and their philosophical heroes Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel fall into this category of epistemologists. Normative epistemologists have always argued

that a philosophical account of knowledge in order to meet the sceptical challenges has to place our knowledge satisfactorily in the space of reasons and various ways of placing knowledge in the space of reasons have been developed in this regard. The significant questions that have been asked in this context are- what could be the best plausible way to place knowledge in the space of reasons? Is placing knowledge in the space of reasons enough to avoid the sceptical challenges regarding the possibility of knowledge? According to some philosophers, the sceptical problems arise because of a certain misunderstanding of space of reasons i.e. the interiorization of the space of reasons. On the interiorized conception of the space of reasons, there is need of extra elements beyond the space of reasons which are required for our knowledge but are not part of the logical space. In this paper, my aim, following Kant and McDowell, is to propose a critique of interiorized conception of space of reasons and show how this conception leads to various problems regarding the possibility of knowledge. In this context, I will specifically discuss argument from illusion as a sceptical challenge for the possibility of knowledge and McDowell's response to it. In the second part of my paper, my aim is to discuss the debate between McDowell and Brandom on the nature and extent of the space of reasons.

### **The Problem**

Out of many reasons behind the normative turn in contemporary epistemology, one is to overcome the problems associated with naturalism with regard to epistemology. However, there is a need to understand this normative turn in a proper sense keeping in the background the implications of naturalized epistemology. With an aim to avoid the repercussions of naturalized epistemology, many philosophers who seem to be normative

epistemologists have not considered perception which is regarded as natural or causal as having any normative significance. Whatever is considered as natural, according to these philosophers, is not being considered as normative. Against this move, what I will try to argue is that 1. Perception itself is normative and a part of space of reasons. 2. While emphasizing on the point that we understand knowledge by placing it in the space of reasons or emphasizing that knowledge is a kind of normative relation, we are not taking knowledge or the space of reasons away from the natural world. If perception is taken merely as a causal happening, then it will not be possible to justify knowledge in terms of it. But that does not lead to losing perception itself from the normative relations we have with the world. Let us try to understand how perception has not been taken as having normativity and why it should be having normativity for a better account of knowledge.

Our various kinds of knowledge about the world have different subject matters or contents to which these knowledge-states are directed or are about. These subject matters could be facts, objects, people, state of affairs, etc. The immediate and fundamental question that has been asked in this context is-how are we to ensure the possibility of knowledge about things in the external objective world? For empirical content or knowledge to be possible, it should be in a minimal sense be in relation with and justified by the external world. After all we are talking about the knowledge of the world and it is the same world which gives us the reasons to think about and act in it. This very answerability of thought and knowledge to the world should be understood in a normative context, explaining which McDowell says, “the relation between mind and world is normative... in this sense: thinking that aims at judgment, or at the fixation of belief, is answerable to the world- to how things are...”<sup>1</sup> Our

thoughts about the world in particular should be answerable at least to the empirical world or to the way we grasp things or state of affairs empirically. Not only concerning our thoughts but also in the context of our knowledge, justifications for the knowledge episodes we possess are parts of the fabrics of the world. This idea of answerability would not make sense if we do not maintain that the world is independent of our knowledge of it. But if the world is independent of knowledge, then an important question regarding intentionality arises is- how our thoughts and knowledge are answerable to the world if the world is independent of our knowledge and thought? And in addition to that, if the world is taken as independent of thought and knowledge, it leads to many philosophers to embrace the view that the world is independent and outside of the space of reasons. Hence, the space of reasons could never reach the external world. The idea of “answerability” could be understood in many ways. One way is that our knowledge is answerable to how things are in mere brute disenchanted, pure physical and natural world. This is not what McDowell meant by “answerability” to the world. What he means when he says that the thought is answerable to how things are in the world is that how things are in the world is part of the normative relation that we have with the world. A factual world but nevertheless ingrained with reasons. It is in this sense that the idea of normativity comes to the fore. Whether the world to which our empirical knowledge is answerable is disenchanted or not, it is our experience through which we are answerable to the world. We need to appeal to our experience of the world in order to make our thought and knowledge answerable to the world. It is in this sense we need to accept it as a truism that the content of the world is the content of our experience. The content of the world does not get diluted once it becomes the content of our experience. But the problem that appears is: How can our experience which if taken as merely

a natural happening in the world stand in a rational relation to the knowledge about the world? The problem we face here is that the phenomenon of experience as has been dominantly understood in contemporary philosophy, is the outcome of the way the world affects our sensibility. The very process of the world affecting our sensibility is a happening or event in the natural world which is describable in terms of scientific laws of nature like other natural events. These are understood in terms of the causal connections in the realm of law. However, on this conception of nature, one thing is related to another by means of causal connections, not by means of rational connections. Here one thing merely causes another thing, instead of justifying it and hence devoid of any kind of normative relations. Natural epistemologists thought that our experience of the world merely by being causal and natural can be able to justify our knowledge and thought about world. The problem here is that “experience” on the modern scientific interpretation of the term is in “disenchanted” form and is considered as something purely physical. The natural or physical sphere on this conception is not a proper place for placing meaning, intentionality and normativity. If it is a mere happening in the realm of law, then our experience cannot justify our beliefs about the world, our knowledge cannot be rationally connected to experience and as a consequence, it will not be about the world.

Given the above critical situation<sup>2</sup>, we are left with the intractable problem regarding the very possibility of knowledge about the external world. How to attain a conception of experience, which will be involved in a rational relation to our empirical beliefs and, at the same time, must be able to figure as a real and genuine world involving constraint to our knowledge? How to attain a conception of knowledge which will retain its normative relation with the world and be natural involving

genuine worldly content? Our experience should simultaneously be able to open the world to us and give reasons for holding our beliefs about the world. On one side of the reflection, there is a need for our knowledge to be justified by the world. On the other side of the reflection, we take experience as something in which our knowledge cannot be fully grounded. These two possibilities taken together constitute a difficult situation in the way of realizing that knowledge of the empirical world is possible.

### **Space of reasons and Empirical Descriptions of Knowledge**

Before discussing the relation between space of reasons and our experience of the world, I would like to go back to the significant points of Kantian epistemology as these have serious implications for the former. Moreover, I think that Kant's transcendental account of knowledge is in need of or at least go together with his transcendental account of experience. I will begin with his view on the relation between the faculty of understanding and the faculty of sensibility in the context of our perceptual knowledge of the world. Reflections on Kant's view regarding the relation between faculty of sensibility and faculty of understanding would give us significant insights on the relationship between space of reasons and natural world. The contemporary debate concerning our perceptual knowledge of the world, we can say, centers around the following well-known passage from Kant's first critique (1929).

“Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is, therefore, just as necessary to make our concepts sensible, that is, to add the object to them in intuition, as to make our intuitions intelligible, that is, to bring them under concepts. These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The

understanding can intuit nothing, the sense can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise. But that is no reason for confounding the contribution of either with that of other; rather it is a strong reason for carefully separating and distinguishing the one from the other.”<sup>3</sup>

It is not as simple and outdated as it seems to be. Still some philosophers think that a sensible reading of Kant on these lines would give us the best picture of intentionality that we can ever have. The basic problem arises from the above lines regarding the distinction and association between intuitions and concepts. Difficulties that arise in understanding Kant is due to whether he is suggesting that “intuitions without concepts” simply do not exist or are meaningless or is he suggesting that “intuitions without concepts” do exist and are meaningful but is, in a way, sharply distinct in nature from that of concepts.<sup>4</sup> What is the role of intuitions and concepts in mental representations? Can there be any kind of representation in the context of knowledge without the involvement of concepts? The problem also arises regarding the role of intuitions and concepts in mental representations when we know something. I believe that when we acquire knowledge and act in the world, there is some kind of mental representation going on in our mind. Taking mental representation to be the fundamental kind of representation on which other modes of engaging with the world depend, we can ask, which of these two, intuitions or concepts, plays a significant role in mental representation? Understanding Kant properly, in this context, would lead to the view that one, while thinking about the relation between intuitions and concepts, should not overemphasize one over and above the other. Non-conceptualists and conceptualists have both responded to these

problems in very different ways and that gives rise to the contemporary debate at hand.

According to Kant, knowledge is produced out of the cooperation between sensibility and understanding. Sensibility is responsible for producing intuitions and understanding is responsible for producing concepts and it is one of the higher faculties of knowledge. The transition from intuitions to knowledge via involvement of concepts is open to several interpretations because of the misleading way in which Kant explains the cooperation between these two faculties of knowledge. In Kantian theory of knowledge, the sensibility provides the raw material or sensory representations for our thinking through which we can relate to the object. The faculty of sensibility is the only means through which objects can be given to us. In Kant's opinion, sensibility is "the capacity (receptivity) for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by the objects"<sup>5</sup> and he describes sensation (*Empfindung*) as "the effect of an object upon the faculty of representations, in so far as we are affected by it."<sup>6</sup> However one should not forget that Kant himself made a distinction between sensory representations on the one hand and what he called experience. These sensory representations without having concepts of some kind or the other in their contents cannot be called experience of a subject as Kant himself says "Experience is ... the first product to which our understanding gives rise in working up the raw material of sensible impressions."<sup>7</sup> Mere sensory representations would not be intelligible to the subject as her experiences without the faculty of understanding. Hence, the faculty of spontaneity which produces concepts seems to enter into the very constitution of intuitions not only in receiving these intuitions but also to make these as the experiences of the subject. Our cognition is



immediately related to the object through intuitions. But our cognition of the external world is not possible without having our higher faculty enter into the very unity of intuitions which Kant calls the manifold of sensory representations. Apart from the involvement of faculty of understanding, sensibility is not capable of producing cognition independently on its own without the involvement of a free standing “I” or “self”. In this context Kant says, “The I think must be able to accompany all my representations; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing to me.”<sup>8</sup> Why is it the case that “I” in “I think” in order to accompany all representations, the subject must have to actively exercise and unify them when Kant himself says “all combination-be we conscious of it or not...is an act of the understanding (*verstandeshandlung*).”<sup>9</sup> Since Kant has kept possibilities open, it seems that the subject does not have to be conscious of the way concepts are drawn into in perception. So is the case with self-consciousness as the condition of experience. Without the presence of self-consciousness, representations remain mere subjective states and could not be called experience.

In Transcendental deduction of the categories, Kant says,

“There can be in us no modes of knowledge, no connection of unity of one mode of knowledge with another, without that unity of consciousness that precedes all data of intuition, and by relation to which representation of objects is alone possible. This pure, original, unchangeable consciousness I shall name transcendental apperception.”<sup>10</sup>

From the above points it is clear that, for Kant, the faculty of sensibility by which we get experience of the world is not merely natural or causal since it involves the faculty of understanding and the unity of consciousness. So, our experience of the world is part of the space of reasons or it can be called normative. Since the faculty of understanding is present in our perception, our perception of the world is conceptual in certain sense.

Both McDowell and Brandom are influenced by Sellars' ground breaking conception of space of reasons. The distinction between naturalist and normative explanation of knowledge can be seen in the following quotation from Wilfrid Sellars. Sellars while making a distinction between two kinds of explanation of knowledge says-

“In characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.”<sup>11</sup>

In the above lines, there is a contrast that Sellars seems to have made between “placing knowledge in the space of reasons” and giving an “empirical descriptions” of it. The subject matter of “empirical descriptions” or naturalistic explanation, according to Sellars, includes what is called natural in the modern scientific sense of the term “natural” and it is contrasted with our normative discourse that is constituted by the logical space of reasons where we locate various normative concepts such as knowledge, meaning, value, intentionality and agency etc.. But if the empirical characterization includes the characterization of perception then we cannot appeal to it while grounding agency, thought and knowledge in the world. “Empirical description”

here refers to the things that we place in the logical space of nature on a modern scientific conception of nature and following McDowell's interpretation of Sellars, we can describe it as below-the-line characterization in contrast to the above-the-line characterizations<sup>12</sup> of placing states and episodes in the logical space of reasons. Logical space of nature is the space where modern natural sciences operate. In this domain we describe things by various natural and physical laws. On this notion of nature, to place something in nature on the relevant modern conception is to situate it in the realm of causal and physical laws devoid of normativity, devoid of human value. We cannot say that in this space one thing is justified by another thing. In this realm, only causal relations among things make sense where as in the space of reasons normative relations make sense.

In McDowell's opinion, the contrast is present between the "internal organization of the space of reasons" and the "internal organization of nature". The contrast between logical space of reasons and realm of nature is also reflected in Kant's distinction between "the realm of freedom" and "realm of nature". It is the modern natural science which is responsible for providing resources for the construction of the internal organization of nature. On the conception of modern natural science, it is not possible to find meaning, normativity and rationality in nature, because these are part of the other logical space which is called "the logical space of reasons". The distinction between philosophers' articulation of space of reasons and modern scientific notion of nature need not be conceived as leading the gap between reason and nature as such.

So, if this is what we mean by the phrase "empirical descriptions", then Sellars would suggest that concepts and categories that belong to our rationality, while characterizing

knowledge, cannot be captured or explained with the help of concepts and categories that are parts of logical space of nature. In this context, Sellars notes that epistemology is subject to naturalistic fallacy if we try to explain knowledge in naturalistic terms.

He says,

“The idea that epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder- even in principle- into non-epistemic facts whether phenomenal or behavioral, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives and hypotheticals, is I believe, a radical mistake- a mistake of a piece with the so-called “naturalistic fallacy” in ethics.”<sup>13</sup>

We can see that in the above lines that Sellars is making a crucial distinction epistemic and non-epistemic fact in terms of the distinction between “normative” and what is called “natural”. The components of the sphere of normative cannot be analyzed into the items of the natural sphere. Usually facts are considered as natural. However, a significant insight we get from the above discussion is that something which is epistemic on the relevant conception can not only become a fact but also a normative fact.

### **Nature and Extent of Space of Reasons**

For McDowell, the space of reasons is identical to the space of concepts and the conceptual relations. Though it is an autonomous space in the sense of Kantian idea of freedom, it is not a self-contained space because the world is very much part of it.<sup>14</sup> The important point here to be noted is that, according to McDowell, space of reasons cannot be said to have a location in the bare receptivity from the external world which is devoid of

conceptual capacities.<sup>15</sup> Does that mean our perception, if it is taken as a bare receptivity, should not be a part of space of reasons? Should the bare receptivity, what so ever it may be, kept outside of the space of reasons? In fact, the bare receptivity is part of the space of reasons in the sense that when we receive it our concepts are operative. So the bare receptivity in the form of perception need not be taken as bare receptivity devoid of concepts. It is difficult to understand whether McDowell wants to reject the bare receptivity as such or is he suggesting that the bare receptivity itself is determined by normative capacities and hence does not remain merely as bare receptivity. It is also equally difficult to include the world within the scope of space of reasons if we exclude the bare receptivity from the scope of the space of reasons.

McDowell defines “the space of reasons” and its scope and nature in the following ways,

“The logical space of reasons...is the logical space in which we place episodes or states when we describe them in terms of the actualization of conceptual capacities. Now what corresponds in Kant to this image of the logical space of reasons is the image of the realm of freedom.”<sup>16</sup>

“...the topography of conceptual is constituted by rational relations. The space of reasons is identified with space of concepts. When Kant described the understanding as a faculty of understanding as a faculty of spontaneity that reflects his view of the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it... the space of reasons is the realm of freedom.”<sup>17</sup>

If the space of reasons is identified with realm of freedom in the Kantian sense, then perception must be part of it rather than being an external element. If perception as a source of knowledge is kept outside of space of reasons, then the latter cannot be a realm of freedom. Freedom in the empirical thinking cannot be realized if perception of the world does not figure in the space of reasons. McDowell agrees on the Sellars' groundbreaking idea that the epistemic sphere is a normative space and a standing satisfactorily in the space of reasons is crucial to our knowledge of the external world. The satisfactory standing in the space of reasons is the key for characterizing our knowledge-states about the world. There is not much issue about whether our knowledge and thought should stand satisfactorily in the logical space of reasons. Many philosophers in a certain sense would agree that the knowledge should be placed in a space of reasons and thereby give importance to "reason" and "evidence" in the context of knowledge. But the question that arises is: how to understand this standing in the space of reasons? This is important because as we shall see that due to certain kind of understanding/misunderstanding of the space of reasons, we give room for sceptics to haunt the very possibility of our knowledge.

### **Argument from Illusion as a case of Sceptical Challenge to the Possibility of Knowledge**

Argument from illusion is one of the most important sceptical arguments discussed in contemporary epistemology. Responses to argument from illusion have been formulated in many ways. Arguing against scepticism in the form of argument from illusion<sup>18</sup>, McDowell suggests that the space of reasons should not be interiorized. Rebuttal of the argument from illusion cannot be successful if while responding to it, we interiorize the space of reasons. Sceptical problems rather are created instead of

solving them by interiorizing space of reasons. Philosophers often interiorize the space of reasons in order to counter the sceptical challenges that arise in the context of the possibility of knowledge. But to the contrary, we realize that the argument of illusion can be an upshot of the interiorized conception of the space of reasons.

Arguments from Illusion formulated in a particular way would take the following form.

1. S is not able to know that she is not in an illusion.

The subject is not able to distinguish between seeing the object and merely seeming to see the object. (Because the subject is fed with the experience of the presence of a chair)

2. If S is not able to know that she is not in an illusion, then she is unable to know that there is a chair in front of her.
3. Hence, she is not able to know that there is a chair in front of her.

It gives rise, according to McDowell, to a “hybrid account of knowledge” based on (Highest Common Factor).

**The Highest Common Factor Argument<sup>19</sup> is:**

P1. In the bad cases, the supporting reasons for one’s perceptual beliefs maximally can only consist of the way the world appears to one.

P2. The good and bad cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable.

C1. So, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs in the good cases can be no better than in the bad cases. (From P2)

C2. So, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs can only consist of the way the world appears to one. (From P1 and C1)

According to McDowell, this interiorized conception of space of reasons leads to the hybrid conception of knowledge based on the highest common factor. He writes, "The deformation is an interiorization of the space of reasons, a withdrawal of it from the external world. This happens when we suppose that we ought to be able to achieve flawless standings in the space of reasons by our own unaided resources, without needing the world to do us any favors."<sup>20</sup> This HCF thesis suggests that the veridical knowledge at its best only can have the same content which is there in non-veridical cases. We need to understand why some philosophers thought that there is a need to interiorize the space of reasons in order to avoid arguments from illusion. Since, for them, on many occasions the veridical perceptions at best can have the same content that illusions have, they thought that perception is something that cannot be trusted with giving justifications for our knowledge. To keep the space of reasons safer and uncontaminated, it is better to keep our experience outside of justificatory and normative relations.

One of the important points of McDowell's argument, according to Pritchard, is that the reason that a subject has for her knowledge is both reflectively accessible and factive.<sup>21</sup> The reasons for her knowledge are reflectively accessible to the subject. McDowell's position cannot be easily put in to the category of either internalism or externalism following the



traditional conception of the internalism/externalism in traditional epistemology and philosophy of mind. The reasons for knowledge, according to McDowell, are stressed in the external world which is beyond the scope of the inner. It is also not a form of epistemic externalism in the sense that there is not something extra beyond the space of reasons which would give justification to our knowledge. For McDowell, the world is very much part of the space of reasons but it is independent of our thought and knowledge. Thus, he made a balance between idealism and realism. One can say that the world is part of the space of reasons in the sense that when we experience the world, the space of concepts is at work. But it is not clear in McDowell's account how the world itself is part of space of reasons. If he wants to retain his position of the unboundedness of the conceptual, then not only the experience of the world, but also the world itself must be part of the space of reasons. McDowell's view, in a certain sense, can be called as a form of epistemological disjunctivism<sup>22</sup> where it is argued that though veridical case and non-veridical case are not distinguishable phenomenally by the agent who is having experience, each of these cases have different content. What does it mean to say that veridical and non-veridical cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable? This could possibly mean that what it is like for me to have an illusion cannot be differentiated from what it is like for me to have a veridical perception. I think this indistinguishability thesis is undermining the richness of phenomenology of perception. If we accept the phenomenological indistinguishability thesis, then we need to accept the view that the world is not doing to us any favour when we experience the world. That's a very wrong picture of the perception of the world. I think if we take phenomenology of perception seriously into consideration, our experience of the world through various engagements cannot be just an illusion.

The reasons for the conclusion that a different content is there in each case would keep the sceptics at a distance. When the world does a favour to us, we have the veridical perception and when it does not, it leads to illusion.

In the good cases, the reason for my belief that now the seminar on epistemology is going on is that “I can see that the seminar on epistemology is going on”. The reason for one’s belief is factive because “I can only see something is going on if it is really going on”. The reason for my perceptual knowledge that “the seminar is going on” is justified by my perception “that the seminar is going on”. But in the non-veridical cases, the fact is that I seem to see that the seminar is going on due to some illusion. In this case, I am in fact a BIV. Thus, the reasons in these cases have two different forms. The point here, however, to be noted is that the fact that one is in a BIV or undergoing some kind of illusion, according to me, is also reflectively accessible to the subject. Although she does not realize that while she is going through an illusion, but immediately after the world does her a favour in believing that the seminar is going on, she also realizes that she is not in a BIV. It is a bizarre idea that the world never does us a favour to know that we are under the illusion. The world gives us the opportunities to know the world and it also gives us the opportunities to know that we were under the illusion. One of the virtues of McDowell’s view is that the external world itself constitutes the normative or justificatory relation by which it is connected to the thought and knowledge about the world.

Thus he says,

“That things are thus and so is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that

very same thing, that things are thus and so, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world.”<sup>23</sup>

The problem of scepticism about the knowledge of external world originates due to the interiorization of the space of reasons. According to McDowell, this interiorization of the space of reasons creates a withdrawal of mind and rationality from the external world and as a result of which the possibility of our knowledge of the external world remains a mystery. The supporters of various forms of epistemological externalism, under the influence of HCF, believe that we can have knowledge about the external world only by making our beliefs standing in relation to the world of external facts. On this conception, we do not require a notion of justification which stands in the logical space of reasons to be made available in the external world. We are justified in having knowledge about the external world by various factors of the external world. But the “entitlement” for having some knowledge is interiorized. McDowell argues that a satisfactory standing in the logical space of reasons is not only necessary but also sufficient for describing our knowledge. The warrants and justifications for our thoughts about the world have to be conclusive. There is no need to suppose extra elements beyond the space of warrants for giving justification because the world itself can be a part of space of reasons and space of warrants. He argued against the interiorized conception of “the space of reasons,” which is, in his opinion, a hybrid account of knowledge that states the satisfactory standing in the space of reasons is necessary, but not sufficient. Against this claim, He argues that standing satisfactorily in the space of reasons constitutes the whole of our knowledge. We can reformulate the above point by saying that it is not a good idea to suppose that a satisfactory standing in the space of concepts might be part but not the whole of what is thought. We can say that McDowell

rejects certain versions of both externalism and internalism about the scope of the space of reasons.

When we have knowledge about the external world, in order to justify ourselves in having such knowledge, McDowell argues that we do not need to interiorize the space of justifications or reasons thinking that it has an outer boundary. If we do so, the external world remains detached to “space of reasons” and the external world remains outside of the “space of reasons”. On the “interiorized conception of the space of reasons,” a statement of our perception for example, “I see that...”<sup>24</sup>, according to McDowell, cannot have justificatory power in order to give reasons for our knowledge which is in the form “I know that...” because “I see that...” on the interiorized conception of space of reasons might not possess reasons to know something to be the case. According to McDowell, the statements like “...I see that...” are actually proper moves in the game of giving and asking for reasons, and their truth fully vindicates entitlement to the embedded propositions.”<sup>25</sup> McDowell writes,

“I argue against views according to which knowledge is only partly constituted by standings in the space of reasons, with the requirements that what a knower takes to be so is indeed so conceived as an extra condition, over and above her standing in the space of reasons.”<sup>26</sup>

Since space of reasons partly constitutes our knowledge of empirical world, “seeing that an object is thus and so” must figure as an extra condition beyond the subject’s standing in the space of reasons. This extra condition present in the form of experience is devoid of concepts. McDowell thinks that if concepts are introduced at the level of perception, then perception need not be considered as the extra condition to the

space of reasons and it should not figure outside of the space of reasons. “I see that things are thus and so” is not something which is merely brute impact on the subject who is experiencing the world. First personal givenness of the phenomena in the form of experience to the subject cannot be a mere brute impact of the world.

### **Space of reasons: McDowell vs Brandom**

Though internalizing the space of reasons is the main source of sceptical worries, only by freeing ourselves from such conception may not be enough to avoid the sceptical worries. According to Brandom what McDowell says about the space of reasons is necessary but not enough to explain our knowledge. After getting a reformed version of space of reasons, Brandom argues, we need to supplement it with the social and normative dimension of it. There is a need to concretize the exchanges of justifications in the space of reasons. We need to understand how the space of reasons is socially and normatively constituted involving the concrete practices of individuals and communities. Social articulation of space of reasons must be taken as an important feature of the space of reasons in the context of which we can properly understand our knowledge. In our talk about the content of beliefs and knowledge of ourselves and those of the others, we try to find out or seek for reasons which can be given to others and which can be asked from others. This refers to the concrete practices among individuals and communities. It is in this way we can attribute knowledge to others and can others also attribute knowledge to us.

Disagreeing with McDowell, Brandom argues that the former “makes nothing of the essential social articulation of the space of reasons.”<sup>27</sup> In his opinion, standing in the space of reasons is

necessary but not sufficient for our knowledge and due to this he seems to be acknowledging that there are extra elements beyond the space of reasons which are required for having knowledge. By merely placing our knowledge in the space of reasons, it seems, is not enough for a theory of justification because external factors are needed. He says,

“Space of reasons ought to be understood as an abstraction from concrete practices of giving and asking for reasons. The space of reasons is normative space. It is articulated by properties that govern practices of citing one standing as committing or entitling one to another—that is, as a reason for another. What people actually do is adopt, assess, and attribute such standings— and if they did not, there would be no such standings. For in the absence of such normative attitudes of taking or treating people as committed or entitled, there are no commitments or entitlements. They are not part of furniture of the pre-human world.”<sup>28</sup>

When we talk about the space of reasons in the context of placing knowledge in it, we need to take its social articulation seriously into consideration. Commitments and entitlements for knowledge are not to be understood as a part of the pre-human world. These are very much part of the human world and could not be understood without taking in to consideration the concrete practices of giving and asking for reasons in which human beings are involved in. For humans, natural is normative and vice-versa. Without understanding how actually people adopt, assess and attribute their standings in the space of reasons, there will be no such standings available to us. Understanding knowledge as the standing in the space of reasons cannot be

detached from the concrete practices of human beings in acquiring, attributing and justifying their knowledge.

The way a knower's standing in the space of reasons is assessed consists of three different attitudes.

1. Attributing a commitment
2. Attributing an entitlement
3. Undertaking a commitment<sup>29</sup>

Placing knowledge in the space of reasons, according to Brandom, “incorporates and depends on the social difference of perspective between attributing a commitment (to another) and undertaking a commitment.”<sup>30</sup> If placing knowledge in the space of reasons involves all the above three, then it is not clear why it would take us to outside of the space of reasons as Brandom seems to have suggested. Why is there a need to interiorize the space of reasons in relation to the external world?

According to McDowell, Brandom (many others) has already taken for granted that the “space of reasons” is an interiorized space where the factors of the external world are something extra to the space of reasons. The external world cannot enter into the entitlement which a subject possesses in order to claim something about the external world. Brandom seems to have thought that the entitlement for a claim about the world cannot rule out the falsehood involved in an empirical claim because it cannot reach the external world. Entitlement for a knowledge claim always stops at the account of experience which has the form “seeming to see”. Factors of the external world cannot construct the entitlement of the subject. On this conception, our perception of the external world is situated beyond the “space of

reasons” and thus is considered as an external condition for the knowledge. Therefore our “standing in the space of reasons” is not sufficient because there are other external conditions which are situated beyond “the space of reasons” and “entitlement.” According to McDowell this picture of knowledge is wrong. In his opinion, perceptual experience of a subject can be able to constitute the entitlement of the subject for believing what he saw in the world. One’s perceptual experience is not just an appearance which one can claim following argument from illusion. The interiorized conception of reason and concepts which McDowell rejects makes it impossible for the content of world and experience of it to provide the content and justification to our knowledge.

According to McDowell, Brandom in his account also interiorized the space of reasons in the sense that, for him, space of reasons or justifications cannot guarantee truth. The interiorized conception of space of reasons is present in Brandom’s view when he says

“If you are standing in a darkened room and seem to see a candle ten feet in front of you, I may take you to have good reasons for believing that there is a candle in front of you, and so take you to be entitled to your commitment. But that may be my attitude even if I know, as you do not, that there is a mirror five feet in front of you, and no candle behind it, so that I am not in a position to endorse or commit myself to what you are committed to.”<sup>31</sup>

The above lines by Brandom seem to suggest that the presence of the candle cannot be part of the entitlement of subject to claim that she knows that there is a candle in front of her. In the case of



perceptual knowledge, the entitlement for knowing on the part of a particular subject that there is a candle in front of her, for example, at best can be that she seems to see that there is candle in front of her. She seems to see that there is a candle in front of her is not going to guarantee that there is a candle in front of her. Therefore, the entitlement for subject to have knowledge about the presence of something cannot include the very presence of that thing. In best possible veridical cases, her entitlement is that she seems to see that there is an object in front of her. On the one hand, subject's entitlement to know something cannot guarantee that there is presence of something in the external world. On the other hand, external world cannot become part of the entitlement to know something. The space of reasons is internalized here in the sense that the external world cannot be part of the space of reasons or space of entitlements.

McDowell arguing against this view says that in the case of veridical perception, the subject sees that, that there is a candle in front of her can be part of her entitlement to know that there is a candle in front of her. The presence of candle in the external world enters into space of reasons or space of entitlements. He, in this context, says, "...the appearance that there is a candle in front of her is the presence of the candle making itself apparent to her."<sup>32</sup> Here the presence of the candle in front of the subject is the reason for her entitlement to know that there is a candle in front of her. In the case of veridical perception, the entitlement which the subject has for knowing something is not that she seems to see that thing in front of her. Rather, her entitlement in these cases is that she sees that object which is in front of her.

McDowell works out a Wittgensteinian therapy towards showing that the very idea of thinking that there is something "inside" the conceptual sphere and something "outside" of it is not a coherent

and compelling idea and this picture needs to be deconstructed. The severe consequence of getting this picture activated is that it seems under these conditions the ‘outside’ can never be a part of ‘inside’ and ‘inside’ can never reach to the outside. The concept of ‘mind,’ ‘rationality,’ ‘subjectivity,’ ‘meaning,’ etc. are taken as residing in some inside space (either immaterial or material) and the concept of ‘object,’ ‘given,’ ‘world,’ etc. are taken to be situated in outside space. The nature of inside and outside is so conceived that it is a problem for the picture of intentionality. The metaphor of what is ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ is deeply entrenched in our everyday language and also in many cultural practices. Thus, McDowell in ‘Knowledge and the Internal’ writes,

“The space of reasons is the space within which thought moves, and its topography is that of the rational interconnections between conceptual contents; we might equally speak of the space of concepts. So we can see the interiorization of the space of reasons as a form of a familiar tendency in philosophy: the tendency to picture the objective world as set over against a “conceptual scheme” that has withdrawn into a kind of self-sufficiency. The fantasy of a sphere within which reason is in full autonomous control is one element in the complex aetiology of this dualism. The dualism yields a picture in which the realm of matter, which is, in so far as it impinges on us, the given, confronts the realm of forms, which is the realm of thought, the realm in which the subjectivity has its being... the picture is hopeless. It is the source of the basic misconception of modern philosophy, the idea that the task of philosophy is to bridge an ontological and epistemological gulf across

which the subjective and objective are supposed to face one another.”<sup>33</sup>

In his opinion, Philosophers tend to have a “sideways-on” picture of relationship of conceptual sphere with the external world. It leads them to interiorize the space of reasons and also similarly space of concepts. For them, it is the objective world which impinges on our thought and sensory organs by remaining outside the conceptual boundary. The view that the subjects meet the external world which is outside of the space of reasons has to be rejected. Making the interiorized space of reasons effective makes the external world stand apart from our thought in dualistic manner. It makes the space of reasons a self-sufficient realm by withdrawing itself from the external world. Philosophers either stand on the side of subjective conceptual realm or on the side of objective external world. There has been a tendency in many theories of modern philosophy to give an account of the relation between subject and object by overemphasizing one over the other.

### **Conclusion**

Though it is true that social articulation of space of reasons is significant for understanding knowledge, it should not go beyond the space of reasons. Items which are responsible for the social articulation of the space of reasons are not extra to the space of reasons and are perfectly within the scope of it. Following the normative turn in epistemology, one can say that knowledge can be understood in a better way by placing it in the space of reasons. It is not possible to respond to sceptics successfully if one in her account of knowledge keeps the external world away from the space of reasons. This happens when one internalizes the space of reasons following normative turn and when one

naturalizes the world and our experiences of it on the conception of modern natural science. Internalizing the space of reasons leads to the acknowledgment of the extra element beyond the space of reasons which is said to be required for the possibility of knowledge. It creates an unbridgeable gap between the space of reasons and the external world. The gap between the subject who is having knowledge and the world which provides reasons for her knowledge is created on the basis of this conception of space of reasons. Internalizing the space of reasons would place external world and our perception of it outside of space of reasons. Anti-sceptical strategy cannot be successful if one operates with this conception of space of reasons. Following a reformed conception of the space of reasons, one can say that our experience of the world can give us genuine content to our thought and knowledge about the world and at the same time it is very much a part of the space of reasons.

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#### Notes and References:

- <sup>1</sup> McDowell, John. *Mind and World, with a new introduction*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, xii.
- <sup>2</sup> This is one of the significant concerns of John McDowell's *Mind and World*.
- <sup>3</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith, Palgrave Macmillan, 1929/2007: 93. B 76/A 52.
- <sup>4</sup> Some philosophers like Robert Hanna have tried to argue that intuitions without concepts exist and can be meaningful to the subject.
- <sup>5</sup> Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Norman Kemp Smith, Palgrave Macmillan, 1929/2007, A 19/B 33.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, A 19-20/B 34.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 1929/2007, A 1.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, B 131-132.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, B 130.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, A 107.
- <sup>11</sup> Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandom. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1997, pp. 298-99.

- <sup>12</sup> McDowell, John. *Having the World in view: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 5.
- <sup>13</sup> Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandom. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1997, § 5.
- <sup>14</sup> McDowell has argued for the unboundedness of the conceptual. I am not here discussing how according McDowell world is already part of space of reasons.
- <sup>15</sup> I am not going to discuss this claim here.
- <sup>16</sup> McDowell, John. *Having the World in view: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 5.
- <sup>17</sup> McDowell, John. *Mind and World, with a new introduction*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 5.
- <sup>18</sup> McDowell presents the argument from illusion saying, “Seeing, or perhaps having seen, that things are thus and so, I take it that things are thus and so on the basis of having it look to me as if things are thus and so. And it can look to me as if things are thus and so when they are not; appearances do not give me the resources to ensure that I take things to be thus and so, on the basis of appearances, only when things are thus and so. If things are thus and so when they seem be, the world is doing me a favour. So if I want to restrict myself to standings in the space of space of reasons whose flawlessness I can ensure without external help, I must go no further than taking it that it looks to me as if things are thus and so.” See McDowell, *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 396.
- <sup>19</sup> Here I have followed Duncan Pritchard’s formulation of Highest Common Factor Argument. See Pritchard, Duncan. “McDowellian Neo-Mooreanism”, in *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action and Knowledge*, (eds.) A. Haddock & F. Macpherson, 283-310, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 294.
- <sup>20</sup> McDowell, John. *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998, P. 395.
- <sup>21</sup> See Pritchard, Duncan. *Epistemic Angst: Radical Scepticism and the Groundlessness of our Beliefs*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 124.
- <sup>22</sup> McDowell’s view is generally known as Epistemological Disjunctivism which is different from other forms of disjunctivism.
- <sup>23</sup> McDowell, John. *Mind and World, with a New Introduction*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 26.
- <sup>24</sup> McDowell, John. *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 279.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- <sup>27</sup> Brandom, Robert. “Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 55, 1995: 902.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 898.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 903.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 904

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 903.

<sup>32</sup> McDowell, John. *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2009, p. 281.

<sup>33</sup> McDowell, John. *Meaning, Knowledge and Reality*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1998, pp. 408-9.

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