

Mind, experience, language (by “Le McDowell” Edward?)

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Abstract. This paper identifies three positions on the relationship between language and experience, the third of which I was not acquainted with before from my reading. It seems absurd.

Draft version: Version 1 (9th December 2022).

What is the relationship between language and experience? On one account, experiences comes first. You have experiences and then you learn a vocabulary for talking about them. On a second account, you have experiences but you cannot have an experience with content X without a way of articulating that content, a vocabulary for doing so, a vocabulary for stating the content. Is this John McDowell’s position in *Mind and World*?

“What an absurd position?” Who said that? A ghost. Anyway, I think there is a third position, which may seem even more absurd. You cannot have a certain type of experience unless there is an external word signifying that this is a place for such an experience. For example, imagine that you are a silent monk and you suddenly desire to have a conversation. There needs to be a sign somewhere which says, “CONVERSATION HERE,” in bright lights even, or words to that effect (!), or you cannot have a conversation, according to this third position anyway. That applies to anyone.

Reference

McDowell, J. 1994. *Mind and World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.