Perceptual Content

GERALD VISION

When asked for a characterization of the universal ontological type of things we perceive philosophers seem to have hit upon no more opportune a moniker than 'material objects'. This answer was never meant to exclude our perceiving the sensible qualities of such objects, and that qualification is hereafter understood. Nor is it likely that anyone offering this answer believes that we do not also perceive such things as rainbows, shadows, sets of things (e.g., pairs of shoes), mirror images, what is emitted by objects rather than belonging to them (e.g., sounds, odours), perspectival phenomena (e.g. highlights), and various secondary qualities. Not all perception is of, in Austin's apt phrase, moderate-sized specimens of dry goods. And were we to extend a similar question to perceptual *experience*, limits on types of objects would fly out the window. But when properly qualified I believe the initial characterization suffices. More importantly, all sides to the issues I want to raise about the character of perceptual content agree, or can agree, so far. Thus, although significant issues remain about all the matters just touched on, agreement on this much allows us to proceed with a minimum of distraction.

The focal issue here is whether these things are all being received as such from the world (though *perhaps* distortedly), or whether our mode of apprehending them requires that perception processes them with concepts that the perceiver brings to perceptual encounters. The latter option is broadly Kantian, and a strain of it has been reinvigorated in the second half of this century by the likes of Wilfrid Sellars and John McDowell. We may call it a 'Kantian'[1] or a 'two-factor' theory. Views of this stripe are based on their ability to solve a difficulty to which the alternatives are alleged to fall victim. Against this I will defend a non-Kantian view: one that holds that apprehension normally is (or *can be*, the issue of scepticism not being addressed here) of things as they are in the world. This

[1] In calling such views Kantian I do not intend to suggest that they resemble Kant's final position in any respect other than including both an intuitive and a spontaneous (conceptual) element as aspects of perceptual evidence. In particular, the contemporary views I discuss neither confine themselves to nor accept all of Kant's particular slate of Forms of Intuition and Schematized Categories as the contribution of the internal (spontaneous) faculty.

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involves rejecting not only two-factor solutions, but their way of conceiving the circumstances in which perceivers find themselves. A hefty part of my defence is implicated with the details of my criticism of Kantianism because that material discloses how the view leaves room for other options. But I do not rest content with refutations alone: I trust that my alternative, even given its sketchy presentation here, has independent attractions.

A word of explanation. Perception is a huge topic. Although my solution doesn't slight the other senses, I will frequently take sight as my model, and use 'see' interchangeably with 'perceive' where the substitution doesn't bias the argument.

I

In an oft-quoted remark the translated Kant writes 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.'[2] By-and-large knowledge starts from evidence derived from the external world. But for the external world to yield evidence, to supply a step in reasoning—inductive, deductive, to the best explanation, what-not—it must be of a certain form. On the overview suggested by the quoted remark, this form, which we may dub conceptual, is not merely received as part of the intuitive package, but is the work of our constitution. '[Intuitions] are *thought* through the understanding, and from the understanding arise *concepts*.'[3] The evidence of our senses must belong to 'the space of concepts', as McDowell[4] puts it (following Rorty following Sellars). Kant called the inner resource responsible for the conceptual element the faculty of spontaneity. On such a view it seems as if perceptual evidence isn't simply delivered through unprocessed intuition, but is mingled with elements originating in the subject's constitution; and this in a manner that may make it impossible to separate their individual contributions. We want uncontaminated reality to underwrite our judgments, but we seem unable to attain that. We thus find ourselves in what appears to be an intolerable situation. Once it is acknowledged that our information, if it is to be of a suitable form to serve as evidence, cannot avoid being mixed with products of internal processing we may wonder how we can ever be in a position to obtain reliable belief about the external world. This has inspired a number of intermedi-

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (Macmillan & Co Ltd, London) A51/B75, Kemp-Smith p. 93.

[3] *Ibid.*, A19, K-S p. 65.

[4] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Harvard University Press, 1994). Subsequent references to McDowell in this essay are to that work.

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ate positions; idealisms and essentially qualified realisms that I have called two-factor theories. Although these are among the most celebrated epistemologies and metaphysics of the past two centuries, in the estimate of a number of thinkers each has unsettling consequences: the most that could honestly be claimed for any of them is that it is the least deficient of a bad lot of options.

Whereas it is the general problem that is of interest here, for critical purposes I shall concentrate on John McDowell's treatment of it in *Mind and World*. While he embraces a two factor theory, his solution is an effort to show why fear of it is unfounded. When the theory is properly understood, so the account goes, the problems dissipate. Thus, if we may set aside the term's pejorative associations, the solution is basically 'spin-doctoring' the Kantian account so that (a) the realist can continue believing all the important things she previously did, and (b), upon proper understanding the view doesn't have the unpalatable consequences critics have seen in it. In contrast, I argue that the view doesn't achieve what McDowell claims for it and that his reasons do not demonstrate the scheme of perception with which he ends up. The consequences of this are quite far ranging, spilling over into a number of other lively topics in epistemology and perception theory.

II

I begin with a preliminary point to set the stage for later argument: a quick foray into the polemics over foundationalist theories of knowledge. A common theme in such theories is, first, that there is a level or class of propositions—call its members *observational*—that can be known or justified, and, second, that the knowledge or justification of all other propositions rests (although not always totally) on the epistemic status of observational ones. For handy retrieval, let's call the latter, dependent, propositions *inferred*. This is not meant to exclude an observational proposition's also being inferrable in some circumstances. Observational propositions include empirical ones and in particular those that predicate observational properties—e.g., colours, shapes, sounds, textures, tastes, and odours—but observational propositions needn't be exhausted by the empirical. For example, a Cartesian could adopt the Cogito as among her observational propositions, and a mathematical foundationalist might discover both types of proposition among theorems of one or another branch of mathematics. Used in this way 'observational' covers more than it does in many of its more familiar nontechnical employments; but that does not affect the points raised here.

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I place this bare bones characterization up front in order to expose a basic flaw in a popular line of attack on foundationalism: an attack rooted in, and inspired by, holism or coherentism. Wilfrid Sellars' 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'[5] is a *locus classicus* of this attack, but the outlook is also exemplified, albeit in a telescoped fashion, in McDowell's writing. Indeed, McDowell credits Sellars with some of his own inspiration for rejecting the view that our perceptual evidence is uncensored (viz., nonconceptualized) intuition, a cornerstone of foundationalism.

The attack I have in mind begins from a review of the foundationalist contention that observational propositions do not depend upon the acceptance of propositions of any other kind. Let us take as our example of an observational proposition an assertion of Sellars' sentence 'This is red'. From such propositions we may then justify the remaining propositions, to the extent they are justified, by inference. But Sellars holds that the following is a necessary truth

x is red ≡ x looks red to standard observers in standard conditions.

He concedes that this is not, wholly or in part, *an analysis* of 'x is red'. Nevertheless because of its necessity whatever specifications are required to fill out the right hand side—'x looks red to standard observers in standard conditions'—will also be needed for 'x is red'. Just what is contained in or implied by the right hand side? For starters, the notion of standard observers and conditions, which in turn implies a physical world and space, among a number of other things.

> Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the colour of an object by looking, the subject must know that conditions of this sort are appropriate. And while this does not imply that one must have the concepts before one has them, it does imply that one can have the concept of [red] only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element. It implies that while the process of acquiring the concept of [red] may—indeed does—involve a long history of acquiring piecemeal habits of response to various objects in various circumstances, there is an important sense in which one has no concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all—and, indeed...a great deal more besides [p. 275].

[5] *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. I, Herbert Feigl & Michael Scriven (eds), (University of Minnesota Press, 1956), pp. 251–328.

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Where the needed presuppositions end is unclear, but it is evident that much of what foundationalism attempts to introduce as *underwritten by* observational propositions must already be in operation if the observational propositions are to have a use. Put otherwise, what the foundationalist takes for non-inferential knowledge presupposes at least some of what she takes as inferential proposition.[6] The part that is presupposed will be whatever conceptual resources need be embodied for the use of the so-called noninferential propositions, and that will be an extensive body of propositions indeed. It is tempting to conclude that a foundationalist theory of knowledge or justification is thwarted by the need for a holistic theory of meaning. But the point isn't restricted to *linguistic* meaning. If it holds at all it applies equally to mental or conceptual content. At bottom the issue is whether we could have acquired our conceptual knowledge of the items involved in the so-called observational knowledge (viz., words or concepts) by way of observation itself. The criticism makes it look as if observational and inferential knowledge are intertwined. We are left with something like a complicated multiple direction network of connections rather than a tidy hierarchy.

This is certainly not the only objection coherence theorists raise to foundationalism. But unlike certain other lines—such as the infinite regress argument—it exploits a Kantian conception of perceptual or observational content. Thus, for our purposes it is particularly instructive.

But the flaw in this line of criticism is easy enough to spot. At its strictest foundationalism claims that observational propositions stand in a rather specific relation to inferential ones: namely, the former are *evidence for* the latter. I am here using 'evidence' broadly to cover a variety of epistemic relations including proof, demonstration, and various forms of inductive and theoretical support. Nevertheless, it is a relationship that has limits: it does not mean everything and anything. Whereas x being red may be some evidence that it is a fire hydrant (given its location, shape, etc.), standardness of viewer and conditions, or there being spatial character-

[6] Cf. McDowell: 'Concepts of colour are only minimally integrated into the active business of accommodating one's thinking to the continuing deliverances of experience, and hence only minimally integrated into possible views of the world. Still, they are so integrated, even if only minimally. No subject could be recognized as having experiences of colour except against a background understanding that makes it possible for judgements endorsing such experiences to fit into her view of the world. She must be equipped with such things as the concept of visible surfaces of objects, and the concept of suitable condition for telling what something's colour is by looking at it' [p. 30].

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istics in general are not evidence for its being red. These, at any rate, are the most basic claims each side makes for its various *dependencies*. But the dependency is evidential in the foundationalist case, semantic in the critic's case. The criticism then relies on overlooking these differences in the species of dependency in order to declare that just as inferred propositions are dependent upon observational ones, so also are observational propositions dependent upon inferred ones. In a critique of a particular matter of fact taken to serve as a foundation Sellars makes it clear that he has run these together. He offers the following requirement for something to be foundational: it 'can not only be noninferentially known to be the case, but [it] presupposes no other knowledge either of particular matter of fact, or of general truths' [Sellars, p. 293]. Evidential primacy is insufficient to determine foundations, it must be supplemented by whatever other knowledge, including semantic, is 'presupposed'. But a foundationalist needn't acknowledge the requirement. The introduction of the conditions underlying an ability to gather evidence doesn't obscure or complicate the hierarchical evidential relationship foundationalism claims for observational propositions. No single evidential circle is created; thus none of the claims the foundationalist needs to make about the priority of the observational is thereby endangered.

The failure of this line of criticism does not imply that it isn't well-directed in other cases. Some foundationalists have been as guilty as their critics in supposing that their views promoted semantic as well as evidential dependency. Since at least Hume's time it has been easy to run together implicitly foundationalist efforts to account for the generation of our knowledge and for that of our conceptual content. And the linguistic turn in philosophy, which gave pride of place to questions of meaning, no doubt added encouragement to such conflations. But that does not absolve the criticism under review of confusion. Its importance here is not that without it a purified foundationalism is impervious to attack. Rather, the point is that this specific criticism has had a role in promoting the Kantian view of perception discussed at the outset. Here I note merely that the attack doesn't contribute to the plausibility of the two-factor view. Also, this is a useful object lesson because, as we shall see, McDowell's *pis aller* involves precisely just such a conflation of evidential considerations with those relating to concept acquisition.

III

Following McDowell, the faculty of *receptivity* is that with which we are affected by the raw of materials of perception. It would yield

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what Kant has called *intuitions*, and philosophers earlier in this century *the Given*. But our receptive faculties are not merely blank tablets. We also have internal resources by means of which we process and utilize these materials: Kant's faculty of spontaneity. It is the proper locus of justification as well as of concepts and reasoning. According to McDowell, the space of concepts must exactly match the space of reasons. Were the space of concepts broader than that of reasons some conceptualized material would be incapable of being used in the simplest of inferences; were the space of reasons broader than that of concepts some of our inferences would be carried out with unconceptualized material. Both consequences are unacceptable. But if the space of reasons belongs to the faculty of spontaneity, and that faculty isn't the source of empirical data, how is it possible for a sensory experience to play the role of being a *reason* for our beliefs? Perceptual input is only significant when it can serve as a reason for perceptual judgment, but the operation of reason lies outside the receptive faculty as such.

We can sharpen the ensuing dilemma. If pure intuitions leave us with no intelligible way to link up the results of perception with the remainder of our intellectual lives, reasoning about our environment is unconnected to the sort of information needed for it to be carried out. This leads ineluctably to a form of subjectivism. On the other side, if we are to avert this by bringing the external materials of intuition into our cognitive lives, we must read products of our own constitution, concepts, into them. Once mixed with aspects of our own constitution the material itself becomes, paradoxically, subjective again. This latter approach is a starting point for some of the most familiar coherence theories of justification and/or truth around. Given that even our perceptual contents are penetrated by conceptual elements, it may be argued that we cannot vindicate any of our judgments by comparing it with a reality unformed by our cognition. All comparison is between judgments, and thus the most we could achieve is to compare them for whatever epistemic virtues may arise from their mutual acceptance. Both roads lead to versions of idealism, whose most extreme incarnations may be scepticism about the external world and solipsism. What is needed is a way to bring the constraints of external reality, as apprehended via intuition, within the authority of reason without thereby nullifying the explanatory weight attaching to the fact that external reality has been apprehended.

McDowell's solution is to accept this combination—external unconceptualized information plus concepts—but to fashion it in such a way as to allay the concern that it insulates us from the empirical reality. Although McDowell's presentation of his solution

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is lengthy and richly detailed, two points stand out as particularly crucial.

First, any sharp dichotomy is blunted by insisting on the operation of spontaneity early at the level of receptivity. There is no such thing as 'pure' receptivity. That notion presented a faulty of arithmetic in which conceptual material was *added* to the receptive. Rather the purely intuitive element of the perception should be seen as something *subtracted* (or, better, abstracted) from the completed product of receptivity. Receptivity is saturated with conceptual activity from the outset: what we recognize already bears the imprint of a conceptual organization.

Second, the contribution of spontaneity looks less threatening when we recognize that it does not involve volition any more than perception in general. There is a sense in which perceiving is passive, despite activity in orienting and activating our senses. In that sense, so too is the operation of spontaneity. While Kant may have intended *spontaneity* to suggest that our will has no limits (= is free), the imposition of conceptual material onto what we receive from external reality is not a matter of our choosing it, but is as impressed as the external reality it characterizes.

We are now in a position to judge each point. Not surprisingly, the source of their shortcoming in each case is the same: they focus on *how* spontaneity enters our perceptual experience, while the more fundamental problem concerns its provenance—*where* it came from. Let us then turn to these arguments, taking them in reverse order.

Once our eyes are open and our senses trained we are passive perceivers. On the other hand, our conceptual contribution may seem to be a mental *activity*, the operation of our psychological freedom. But McDowell writes that although the fact that in the now discarded dichotomy everything conceptual falls on the mental side, for it to be accessible to and integrated with justification and reasoning the operation of concepts at the experiential level must be equally passive. The application of our concepts here is constrained by our receptivity, and is no more a matter of free-wheeling volition than anything else having to do with receptivity.

Before proceeding further a word of explanation is in order about the relation of judgment, or belief to perception. Although McDowell argues that perception is characterized by concepts—and he does not deny that possession of a concept may involve one or more beliefs—he is not maintaining that perception is a form of judgment or belief, or even an inclination toward one.[7] Perception

[7] McDowell distinguishes judgment from belief, p. 60, but they are connected as corresponding state to disposition and the grounds for their distinction doesn't affect the point under consideration.

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and perceptual belief are separate. Nevertheless, the concern raised earlier about coherence theories of justification (or truth) was *not* that conceptual elements already made perceptions types of beliefs, but that their credibility could not be ascertained by consulting reality directly. It could be achieved only by comparison with other, already conceptually endowed, elements (of which beliefs are a prime example). Concept-laden experiences needn't be fully credited beliefs to draw that consequence. However, to the extent that the commonsense realist's fear results from mistakenly regarding the contribution of spontaneity as voluntaristic, the two-factor theory is exonerated.

Still, that addresses only a relatively minor concern for realism. The more direct threat is that part of what we take ourselves as gaining through perception is in fact contributed by us. Perhaps that would be exacerbated by the further claim that the part we contribute is freely willed; making it seem as if the contribution of spontaneity is somehow a fanciful add-on to the empirical data. However, removing the aggravating circumstance does not resolve the initial difficulty. The basis of the misgiving was not that we have a choice of mental elements to mix with the incoming information, but that this internally generated ingredient is part of the mixture. And it scarcely improves matters to know that the conceptual element was imposed by Mother Nature rather than (willfully) by individual perceivers. If the conceptual part is not something received from the object of the experience, but is a contribution from our constitution working on the world, McDowell hasn't shed the spectre of idealism. Nor does it help to know that we cannot select from among conceptual elements to impose. It is the provenance of concepts, not their willfulness, which is the source of realist misgivings about this proposal.

Turning to the first point, nor does it improve matters to have the conceptual element make its contribution at the earliest possible point (receptivity) rather than by reprocessing the Given further down the production line. This, I imagine, was supposed to resolve the issue without tilting toward idealism or coherentism because it infects the very character of receptivity. On the side of receptivity it is supposed to make it more difficult to obtain an intelligible notion of the Given, and that notion is needed to formulate the conundrum. It makes sense to try to recapture receptivity in its purity if we suppose that its instances are fully-formed and complete phenomena, however difficult to detect they may have become due to the intermixture resulting from our unavoidable processing. Placing the conceptual contribution at the level of receptivity itself makes it more difficult to disentangle the two elements. Any notion of pure intuition or the Given must now be gained through abstraction

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from something we never possessed, not even in its earliest stages, in our experience. (On this basis McDowell criticizes the notion of nonconceptual (perceptual) content. That attack is discussed in §VIII.) However, even if the intelligibility of an unadorned Given is degraded, this does not lighten the problem posed by the fact that some measure of what we receive is not message from the world but rather the tinted spectacles through which we view it. The problem does not stem from an impossibly thick notion of pure intuition, but, once again, from the provenance of the conceptual element. At bottom it is neither being voluntary nor arriving at a later stage of perceptual processing, but rather being contributed by our constitution that generates the threat of idealism and empirically unresponsive coherence theories. Indeed, it is precisely this provenance of the conceptual that encourages us to abstract another part of perception, pure receptivity. In doing so we needn't rely on the 'fiction' that there is an early stage of perception at which concepts do not enter. The difficulties that ensue when we are incapable of doing this is motive enough.

There is one further juncture at which McDowell seems to believe that he is securing us against idealism [p. 28], although he phrases his point in terms of thoughts and their contents rather than in terms of perceptions and theirs. Thought or perception can mean either the episode (loosely, act) of thinking (/perceiving) or the content of what is thought (/perceived). The episode may be caused by external reality, although, according to McDowell, it is the mistake of epigones of the Given to suppose that the content is. (In fact, causal relations fit perceptual episodes more snugly than they do thinking episodes. Thus, his choice of example is also bewildering.) It is this causal connection that accounts for the passivity of experience and 'keeps us on the rails'; that is, prevents thought from taking flight from an independent reality.

This last line of defence against idealism is also rather cold consolation. If what gets caused is not content (as distinct from the episode of which it is the content), this allows the possibility of a causal theory like that of the earlyish Russell,[8] in which the world as discovered by physics causes us to have experiential states so unlike this world qualitatively that we ought to consider our conception of it drawn from experience illusory. Indeed, it even leaves room for Berkeley's objective idealism in which our ideas are caused by something as unlike the material world as God.[9] Earlier Descartes

[8] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1912), ch. III.

[9] George Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (Dublin, 1710), Part I, §33.

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had noted this loophole,[10] requiring to close it that our experiential ideas be formally adequate rather than merely eminently so. McDowell's solution doesn't heed Descartes's warning.[11] At most it addresses only versions of subjective idealism that are solipsistic or phenomenalistic. But it does little to show that our experiential contents are evidence (reasons) for what we take them to be evidence.[12]

It is important to recognize that I am *not* claiming that McDowell's problem is not genuine (though I might be prepared to do so on another occasion). The limited point here is that if there is a fatal obstacle with its idealist resolution, nothing in McDowell's version overcomes that despite his advertised refinements. This should prime us for a better solution.

IV

A solution is at hand if we can somehow relocate the categories, which get called conceptual when considered as part of our mental constitution, into the empirical world available to our receptive faculties. This does not mean that *all* the categorial material must be

[10] Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), VI. [Adam-Tannery ed. p. 79; Cottingham-Stootoff-Murdoch ed. & trans. of *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II (Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 55.]

[11] There is an ambiguity in McDowell's distinction. I have interpreted him as claiming that external reality is the cause of experiential episodes but not of the content of those episodes. But he might also be understood as claiming that (whether or not reality causes both episode and content) the *causal* reality itself cannot be understood as independent of the work of spontaneity. This latter interpretation presents problems of its own. Because *qua* cause that reality isn't apprehended, if we are to take causation as seriously as we must in order to provide McDowell's desired reassurance of realism, the most we can say is that it has the *potential* for having our conceptual capacities applied to it. But it is difficult to see how what is merely potential can bear on a cause's actual influence. In actuality, its work as cause occurs without the application of conceptual categories to it. If McDowell holds otherwise (about causes), why wouldn't this deliver him into the clutches of the Kantian transcendental idealism he disavows [pp. 42–3]?

[12] Of course, there is always the strategy of showing that I cannot sensibly state the 'gap' I am claiming persists. (McDowell shows signs of being attracted to this way of deflating the metaphysical problem on pp. 27–8.) But this tack is wholly independent of that involving the causal connection between the world and the experiential episode. If the problem could be resolved by that deflationary tactic it is difficult to see the point of the contention about causation.

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ready-made for our perception before we begin to perceive. Of course room must be left for learning and invention. But *if* the kinds of divisions into persisting solids, together with some range of their traditional sensory qualities, are available to receptivity from the outset, we will have overcome the philosophical barrier to locating hoards of learned or invented categories (though again not *all)* to the same place needed for them to be acquired by subjects via perception. This would overcome the problem of fit between what we perceive and what we judge because the former would already come in a form suitable for judgment and inference. Moreover the application of a battery of such categories to what we perceive removes the threat that we are somehow refashioning our perceptual material in ways that it is not received as a message. We may call this a view of Aristotelian or featured nature,[13] because on it many of the token properties that McDowell views as concrete applications of our faculty of spontaneity are present before the operation of this faculty comes into play. Very young children and nonlinguistic animals will have many fewer of them accessible to their perceptual recognition.[14] But many of those that mature language-using adults add to this collection will be the detection of features still external to our constitutions.

On another occasion this brief sketch would cry out for copious elaboration. But its only role here is to show why we aren't driven to a two-aspect framework to resolve the earlier problem. In addi-

[13] This must be distinguished from an Aristotelian conception that McDowell himself puts forward, having to do with naturalism extending to a learned 'second nature'. (See McDowell, lecture V.)

[14] The rapidly accumulating empirical evidence indicates that features such as the boundedness, cohesion, continuity, and rigidity of objects (all core notions for individuation and identification) are either innate or appear in children as early as their third month of life. See, for example, Elizabeth Spelke, 'Physical Knowledge in Infancy: Reflections on Piaget's Theory,' *The Epigenesis of Mind*, Susan Carey & Rochel Gelman (eds), (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1991), pp. 133–69; 'Principles of Object Perception,' *Cognitive Science*, 1990, vol. 14, pp. 29–56. Cf. R. Baillargeon, 'Object Permanence in 3.5 and 4.5 Month-Old Infants,' *Developmental Psychology*, 1987, vol. 23, pp. 655–64. Although the inability to test younger children prevents the data from clearly establishing the innateness of these constituents of perception, such children are, like the animals discussed in §VII below, clearly non- (or pre-) linguistic. This structure, achieved without the resources of natural language, should be as inhospitable to the McDowellian view of animal perceptual content summarized there as it is to the view that alien rational constraints must be imposed on human perceptual abilities before we are enabled to talk about content.

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tion, there are various ways of fleshing out this outline; and in the present setting there is some merit to remaining as neutral between the options as is consistent with plausibility. Even without the details, the resolution before us is very tempting. What prevents us from yielding to the temptation is a miscellany of arguments from Kantians, and McDowell in particular, to show that it won't work. I address a few of these objections (§V) and then elaborate the Aristotelian picture (§VI). But before undertaking either of those a few preliminary remarks are in order.

To avoid difficulties that may arise later, I begin with a terminological clarification. For simplicity, let's confine ourselves to sight. On the Aristotelian view being proposed what we see is already characterized by general features and principles of individuation and identity (viz., as solid objects rather than fleeting splashes of colour). These aspects need not be contributed by our constitution. Standardly our faculty of receptivity is discussed in terms of (*visual*) *experience* rather than *seeing*. Whereas I intend to be claiming something incompatible with McDowell's view, the difference between experience and vision may seem to lend itself to the following elucidation to remove any appearance of disagreement:

> What is received is visual experience, which has, at that very stage, conceptual material applied to it. At a later stage, perhaps the very next one, this becomes visual *perception*, in which both elements are included. Thus, it is perfectly in order to say that we perceive fully characterized arrays from the world, because the level at which we say we *perceive* things is already one at which the material at which perception is directed is fully characterized by both receptivity and spontaneity.

Let me proceed to explain why this division of contents won't work. The problems have to do with the permissible forms of perceptual reporting.

Like McDowell, by perception I do not mean perceptual *belief*. Seeing ϕ may be *evidence for* a visual belief about ϕ, but it is not and doesn't contain, as such, a visual belief. Whether or not seeing involves the application of conceptual-level material, McDowell and I agree that the objects of seeing are intermediate between experiences and visual beliefs.[15] But although visual experiences

[15] The view that perception is not a form of belief is defended in Vision, *Problems of Vision* (Oxford University Press, 1997), chs. 4–6. It is worth noting that there is a similar distinction between talk of vision there and John Searle's talk of visual experience [*Intentionality* (Cambridge University Press, 1983)], although Searle is a central target of the attack. Considerations exactly parallel to those raised here apply to that difference as well.

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may be distinguishable episodes from seeings, treating their objects as distinguishable is fraught with difficulty.

I am supposing, for the sake of argument, that nested within episodes of seeing are episodes we call visual experiences. In its common, normal occurrences, a visual experience is a constituent of, or identical with, a seeing. There is no consensus on whether to call *what* is experienced or seen an object or a content (or whether there are important distinctions between these). But whichever it may be, consider those cases in which the experience is (also) a seeing. What is experienced will be either (numerically) identical with what is seen or different from it. If *not* identical, one is left in the predicament of the classical sense-datum theorist: that is, of having distinct subjective contents from which the seeing subject must infer or construct the things we ordinarily claim to see. Although there are a few sense-datum theorists around these days, they are relatively rare, and I have no reason to suppose that McDowell wants to be among them. But if he were, the view would be vulnerable to the full panoply of difficulties that have led to the near extinction of sense-datum theories. This is not the place to rehearse those difficulties. Suffice it to say that if this is the line McDowell plans to pursue, we are owed a detailed explanation of how those familiar difficulties are to be averted. On the other hand, if McDowell is, as seems most plausible, a direct realist, the content of visual experiences will be precisely the same as that of the seeing in which they are incorporated (or with which they are identical). This precludes using the different levels ploy, as imagined above, to import new or even enriched content at higher levels. Thus, I do not foresee any mileage to be gained from the difference between my perceptual idiom and McDowell's (or Searle's) experiential one.

But if McDowell chooses to identify the objects, things get even stickier. To insure that perceptual experience can serve as a *reason* for a perceptual judgment, he requires that the former be of the same form as the latter. That form for judgment is propositional, therefore the form of perceptual experience is propositional: say, that things are thus and so [p. 26].[16] But as just noted some perceptual experiences *are also* perceptions. If our guide to the character of perception is our current perceptual idiom (and what else could it be?), that Daphne *sees that* things are thus and so implies that Daphne *judges that* things are thus and so. How then can perception remain distinct from perceptual judgment (/belief)? McDowell seems to have one of only two recourses for preserving the distinc-

[16] In part McDowell insists upon this because he maintains that our perceptual content is conceptual [see pp. 48–9]. We revisit that issue in §VIII.

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tion, one of which commits him again to sense-datum subjectivism, the other of which lands him in mystery. On the first he can claim that the objects of perceptual experience are always distinct from those of perception. While this debars our reading the implications of our ordinary perceptual idiom into that of experience, it also requires objects apparently other than the states of affairs in the external world that we perceive. On the second McDowell might accept the identity of objects between a perceptual experience (when veridical) and its perception, but refuse to identify the sort of propositional object he has in mind with what gets reported by the ordinary 'see that' idiom. However, I do not see how we can understand those idioms other than through their current conceptual implications. Once we lose those I believe we have lost any sense of the implications of such a view. What is now involved in claiming, contrary to McDowell, that such experiences are *not* propositional?[17] Since standard patterns of implication are no help, what could be? (Bear in mind that a stipulation would be unhelpful here. If no psychological reality subserves the forms in question, it is useless to proclaim that perceptual experience is enabled to do so-and-so only because it is of such-and-such a form.)

V

A *featured* external reality, received simply as a matter of intuition and thus describable in ordinary descriptive terms, is rejected by Kantians such as Sellars and McDowell. They are not likely to allow even that we can supply intelligible descriptions of the supposed products of pure intuition. On their reckoning pure intuition could be nothing more than an indiscriminate porridge. This might be the sort of thing Anaximander had in mind by *apeiron* (the indefinite), or, as Benjiman Whorf put it, 'a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our mind [and which we] organize into concepts, and significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way.'[18] Were it coherent, this would be one possible avenue for understanding receptivity without the contribution of spontaneity. For handy cross-reference let's call this view of receptivity immaculate reception. Its opponents are not exclusively responsible for promulgating it. One of the more influential defenders of the Given in this century, C. I.

[17] For more on this see Vision, *Problems of Vision* (Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. IV.

[18] Benjiman Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality*, John B. Carroll (ed.), (MIT Press, 1956), p. 213.

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Lewis (Sellars' target in the article that inspired much of McDowell's own critique, and himself a devoted Kantian) viewed what we received pretty much along the lines of Whorf.[19] But while it is clear that embracing immaculate receptivity as the only picture available to the non-Kantian realist prevented any of these thinkers from taking seriously a reality received as featured, it is less clear what reasons they might have had for thinking that anyone who rejected their own view was driven to immaculate reception. Thus, let us probe further whatever arguments there might be against a perceivable, prepackaged nature.

In an essay of this scope we cannot explore the broader outlook in which Kant's own specific conclusions about the particulars of schemata are embedded. But a number of the particular pure intuitions and categories he relegates to the internal side neither include nor exhaust those in which more recent figures have been interested. In this connection there is a long history of criticisms of Kant's specific proposals, say, about space, time, or causation; and it would take us much too far afield to review those arguments. It will have to suffice to note that these specific proposals are, at best, still moot. But we may also observe that a main attraction that Kant himself noted for his two-factor doctrine had to do with his belief that ultimately the only alternative to it was a disastrous Berkeleyan idealism. Nowadays few believe that the Berkeleyan threat can be met only by such an expedient. That removes a salient motivation for (and inducement to) Kant's version.

That aside, McDowell and others rework the Kantian material to suit contemporary sensibilities (no pun intended), claiming, say, that everything needed to ascribe continuous identity, or principles of individuation, or to attribute features to perceptual objects is contributed by spontaneity. And for all its roots in Kant's original division of faculty labour, this is a rather different, if overlapping,

[19] C.I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order* (Dover Publications, 1929): 'While we can... isolate the element of the given by these criteria of its unalterability and its character as sensuous feel or quality, we cannot describe any particular given *as such*, because in describing it, in whatever fashion, we qualify it by bringing it under some category or other, select from it, emphasize aspects of it, and relate it in particular and avoidable ways. If there be states of pure aesthesis, in violent emotion or in the presence of great art, which are unqualified by thought, even these can be conveyed—and perhaps even retained in memory—only when they have been rendered articulate by thought. So that in a sense the given is ineffable always. It is that which remains untouched and unaltered by thought' [pp. 52–3]. However, Lewis also wants to distinguish the given from a mere Bergsonian 'undifferentiated flux' [p. 58].

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view and must be defended in its own terms. Still, it is not clear what Kant's modern-day defenders would say against featured reality. Often expositions simply begin with the assumption, regarded as too obvious for further comment, that the sort of pristine reality we could receive through intuition would need to be wholly fluid and/or unfeatured. Yet, I believe we can distil some grounds from a few brief comments in McDowell [pp. 7–8] for rejecting a featured reality received as such.

The two-factor view may begin from the observation that reality is richer than our actual ways of dividing it. This is shown by the ease with which one can cross-classify any bits of reality that have been categorized in some particular way: indeed case studies have claimed that this is in fact done from community to community. Accordingly, perceivers must favour only a few from amongst the inexhaustible ways of carving things up. Since no one of these schemes is privileged by perception alone, the fact that we carve up reality in one or a few of the myriad possible ways shows that our 'choice' for carving up the world must be generated by something in us rather than being stamped on the data by the empirical reality we apprehend. This is the simplified version, but it is a basic complaint underlying many major attacks on perceiving an already featured reality.

But the argument from the contingency of our actual perceptual classifications is flawed. The fact that such selectivity is integral to our perception need not depend on our contribution, but may simply result from the fact that we are certain kinds of information-processing engines and not others. That a certain organ routinely registers only particular features of the external array, and blocks out or places obstacles (e.g., of time and effort) on others, need not indicate that the subject projects stray material onto the scene. Nor do we have here an argument to the effect that what our perceptual faculties register is not itself an original, and mind-independent part of the scene. All this can be accounted for if our perceptual faculties are sensitive only to certain features. No doubt we haven't shown that our receptivity is an instrument of this kind. But if the view is not ruled out by cross-classification, we lack a compelling reason for assenting to a two-factor view.

There are at least the two following sorts of argument used to indicate that a factor is internal. First, there are the recently reviewed arguments emphasizing the fact that nothing in reality itself shows why we should carve it up in this way rather than that. Second, there may be arguments to show that a certain feature, say F, of perceptual content couldn't have been obtained through receptivity alone because F doesn't (can't) characterize things in mind-

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independent empirical reality. Arguments of the first kind are always subject to the rebuttal that we perceive things in this rather than that way because we have evolved as selective information processors. Arguments of the second sort, were they available, would be impervious to this particular rebuttal. But the arguments of McDowell and Sellars have always been closer to the first pattern than the second.

No doubt our perceptual faculties are discriminating and, therefore, partial; they naturally register only certain chunks of reality. (Other classifications are possible, but not without psychic cost.[20]) If my earlier conjectures are correct they divide reality into persisting solids rather than seeing the scene, following William James famous description, as a blooming buzzing confusion; although we may assume for the sake of argument that both are ways a potential detecting device might operate. But selecting from among the various things that are in some sense 'out there' to be selected does not require that an inner faculty make a contribution to the scene taken in. Certain restrictions on the kind of device in question will serve.

Thus far we have only shown that there is in the offing a sketch of an explanation alternative to, and perhaps as good as (if no better than) the two-factor view. This may look like a standoff. But have we any reason to suppose that my alternative is better than the Kantian approach? I think so. There are grounds for concluding not only that the two-factor view isn't mandatory, but that it is *ad hoc* or at least arbitrary: to wit...

The general run of those who appeal to cross-classification considerations to support a two-factor theory don't appear at all tempted to invoke such considerations at other places at which they should equally apply. There is an obvious reason for this: such considerations don't seem relevant in those other places. But this serves to weaken the grip of such considerations where supporters *do* insert them. The sorts of cases I have in mind are the varieties of size scales at which we might have seen things. We might have seen things as clouds of molecules, or even tinier. Or we might have seen things only at planetary level, making the discernment of detail possible only via macro-microscopes. If our eyes had been constructed to detect the world at either scale, without aids such as microscopes or telescopes, but our bodies were still their present size, we would have great difficulty navigating around the world we inhabit, much less foraging for food in it. There are perfectly understandable selectionist reasons why our unaided visual systems detect things

[20] For clever examples to prime the imagination pump see Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius,' *Labyrinths* (A New Directions Book, 1962), pp. 3–18.

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roughly at the scale we do rather than microscopically or mega-macroscopically. Once we are satisfied that an evolutionary explanation of this kind is in the offing no one believes we need a faculty of spontaneity to explain further our scalar selection, although this would be just as much a matter of selectivity from among the ways of regarding visual reality as any other. Of course, I haven't offered a serious explanation for perceptual scaling. Nothing has been done to indicate that scaled vision of radically different kinds is even biologically possible. But we don't need to wait for that result to rule out analogous two-factor theories for that subject. It is perfectly obvious that if radically different scales (even short of those given as extreme examples) were biologically possible, natural selection would work against our having them in place of our current visual scaling. The explanation anticipated is sufficient; any further tinkering with internal faculties would be gratuitous. But if so brief and vague a hypothesis satisfies us about why we see only at one among massively different scales at which external reality might be eyeballed, why shouldn't a comparable account explain why our faculties carve external reality in some few of the various ways it might be classified?

Our capacity to reason, subsequently, with such material would then be due not to spontaneity shaping it to suit our rational capabilities, but to the fact that evolution would have selected our visual abilities to fix on information that our rational capacities, at the most elementary level, can make use of. Other perceptual material, if possible, would not compensate the expenditure of evolutionary energy needed for organisms with a perceptual life. When thus compared with explanations for visual scaling Kantian explanations look like special pleading confined in an unnatural way to a specific area of perception. We do not have anything like a detailed evolutionary explanation of either phenomenon. But when we look more closely at the problem we are asked to solve, potential evolutionary explanations look like more fertile ground. Once those facts have been settled, there may be nothing left for a two-factor theory to explain.

Once past these generalities, are there more specific reasons to reject immaculate reception? The closest McDowell comes to offering one is an allusion (p. 7) to Peter Geach's[21] criticism of abstractionism. Abstractionism, according to Geach is 'the doctrine that a concept is acquired by a process of singling out in attention some one feature given in direct experience—*abstracting* it—and ignoring the other features simultaneously given—*abstracting from* them' [Geach, p. 18]. Geach argues at length against this sort of account.

[21] Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), §§6–11.

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Although his exposition contains a number of detailed comments on various specific matters—e.g., concerning logical (e.g., NOT and SOME), numerical, and relational (e.g., BIG and SMALL) concepts—two lines of argument that might bear on perceptual content can be extracted from his discussion. First, Geach notes that concepts are *abilities* (and not only recognitional ones). The supposition that they might be somehow implicit in so simple a procedure as selectively attending to experiential presentations doesn't go very far toward explaining abilities. Second, even for clearly perceptual concepts (e.g., RED), the account of what we are to abstract and how we are to accomplish it is beset by serious difficulties. For example, what other than being red do red patches have in common? What, on the order of a definition by genus and species (the favourite model of abstractionists), is on offer here?

If any of this is to serve McDowell's ends we must assume that the only alternative is a Kantian combination of intuition and conceptualization working together at the level of receptivity. But even if we accept Geach's arguments *sans* qualification, it is difficult to see how they serve McDowell's purpose.[22] Several observations are in order here.

First, it is unclear that the argument can be used to exclude the Given, since the original scene from which the abstractionist is supposed to be starting doesn't involve an indiscriminate mass, but rather a jumble of 'features'. The latter could not be McDowell's or Sellars' Given, which would be an indistinct mass below the level of feature introduction.

Second, Geach is objecting to a method of concept *acquisition* suited to the employment of concepts in judgment. It is unclear what lessons this holds for perceptual content, though it may be more transparent how it applies to perceptual judgment or recognition. (Cf. §III.) McDowell acknowledges this, remarking that 'if concepts are to be even partly constituted by the fact that judgements in which they figure are grounded in the Given, then the associated conceptual capacities *must be* acquired from confrontations with suitable bits of the Given...' [McDowell, p. 7, my emphasis]. He says nothing more

[22] Geach does accept the view that concepts are 'made' and are subjective entities [see pp. 40–1], which sounds very much like the view for which McDowell invokes Geach's authority. But, first, this doesn't follow from Geach's criticism of abstractionism (although that criticism doesn't rule out adding it), and, second, Geach's point is addressed exclusively to *judgments*. I don't know where he stands on the distinction between judging and perceiving, but both McDowell and I accept such a distinction, disqualifying Geach's claim (for us) from showing anything about the content of perceptual representation as such.

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in defence of this desideratum, but it is certainly less than obvious why it should be so. Following the first of Geach's two points mentioned earlier, concepts are *abilities*[23], and since such abilities seem to require so much more than perceptual recognition it is implausible to suppose they could be acquired by occasions of perceptual attention. But how can this can hold any lesson for perceptual content on occasions when it is received? Perhaps the most that might be claimed is that we could not perceive (*de dicto*) some content if we didn't possess the concept of that thing. This is something McDowell seems to favour in his attack on nonconceptual content. Perhaps this even equates perception with perceptual recognition, a controversial view at best. However, even if we have the ability that counts as our having the concept RED, it doesn't follow from tenets about concept acquisition alone that the red we see on a given occasion exercises this ability (much less has the ability as part of its content). And the only issue here is the reading of the products of spontaneity into the contents of perceptual episodes.

Third, part of Geach's attack is directed at the notion that we actively abstract one from among an arbitrary selection of features. Thus, when I see a red object, I also see something having the feature *chromatic colour*. How is my selective attention toward one different from my selective attention toward the other? The evolutionary hypothesis I floated earlier as an alternative to a two-factor view conceives of our perceptual faculties as selective detectors from the outset. Since our organs are attuned only to certain packages of reality, no conundrum of voluntary or even forced choice between a wider collection gets raised. The wider collection, and even an indiscriminate Given, may be available to the subject; but if so this will be due to sophisticated use and active work on her part, not due to such a collection being part of an initial matrix that she must then form into manageable kinds. Thus, scientists and artists, among others, have mounted various efforts to reconfigure our perceptual content. But this is the accomplishment of top-down processing, not a component of an original perceptual problem that naive subjects must each solve for themselves.

[23] McDowell's passage suggests *capacities*, which is also Geach's preferred term though he uses *ability* on p. 34. The difference is significant in discussions of concept acquisition. I may have the capacity to read Sanskrit, since I could learn to read it. But I don't have the ability to read it. (This is not to say that the distinction noted here is always respected in fluid ordinary conversation.) If all modalities were on a par, this would be representable by a difference between $\Diamond\Diamond p$ (=I am *capable of being able* to read Sanskrit) and $\Diamond p$ (= I am *able* to read Sanskrit) (which would, incidentally mark the failure of a distinctive axiom of S4).

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Later [pp. 19–22] McDowell connects Geach's abstractionist argument against the Given with Wittgenstein's attack on private language. According to McDowell, a private language would consist of just such a Given. But even playing along thus far, supposing that the Given falls below the level of articulable characterization, the comparison is still enigmatic. If the Given were private, this would not follow from its lack of characterizability alone. It could be a public something that is simply uncharacterized. There is reason to tread carefully here, since philosophers have very divergent conceptions of the anti-private language argument. But *if* at the centre of Wittgenstein's worry is the thought that nothing remains to keep us on track in naming a private object—neither memory nor other users nor the world—so that the distinction between being right and merely thinking one is right cannot take hold,[24] a public Given does not generate that problem. *It* is there to keep the namer on track. The proper contrast to private is public, not social. Something is public if it is accessible to more than one subject. A physical array, however indescribable it may be, is public. Thus if the appeal Geach's attack has for McDowell is essentially linked to what the latter takes to be the polemic against private language, it is fraught with even greater difficulties than those previously mentioned.

Finally, an important element of McDowell's argument is to rule out what Gareth Evans[25] called 'nonconceptual content'. In Evans' chief argument for nonconceptual content (according to McDowell) he cites the fact that we can make finer discriminations—say, among colours—than our conceptual 'vocabulary' allows. Against this McDowell argues that we can generate conceptual knowledge of a determinately graded colour scale by thinking to ourselves that something is of 'that shade', and keeping that shade in at least short term memory for repeated use [McDowell, pp. 56–7]. We will evaluate this ploy in section VIII. Here I only want to remark on its character. If it is not just the procedure castigated by Geach as abstractionism, then I have thoroughly misunderstood that attack. Although I haven't a firm grasp of McDowell's use of the metaphor, this would seem to be a case of what he repeatedly calls offering 'exculpations where we wanted justifications' [p. 8; Cf. p. 51]. Of course, this is a circumstantial *ad hominem*; but a revealing one. It shows that we cannot accept both the prohibition against abstractionism and the method for acquiring/employing the concept (on a concrete occasion) of *that* shade. At least one must be unsound. If we scrap the prohibition against abstractionism, then—

[24] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd. ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (The Macmillan Co., 1958), §258.

[25] *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

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ignoring, arguendo, the other problems with its current application—McDowell is without even this remnant of an argument against my proposal. On the other hand, if we scrap his method for generating absolutely determinate concepts of perceptual features, then we have been offered no other basis for avoiding nonconceptual content; and the latter supports at least one viable alternative to his own version of experiential content.

VI

A salient feature of the material of receptivity, perceptual input as we might say, is its role in justifying or warranting perceptual judgments. McDowell's way of marking that role is to say that this material belongs to (or 'in') 'the space of reasons'. To be in the space of reasons is more than to stand in an immediate relation to perceptual judgment; it is also to stand in the right kind of relation to any other reasoning to which we are capable of subjecting empirical data. None of this is as yet to claim that the faculty of spontaneity is involved in receptivity, but 'we *cannot really understand* the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts' [McDowell, p. 7 my emphasis]. To be a member of the rational community seems to require the prior application of conceptual resources because relations such as implication and probabilification 'hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities' [*Ibid*.]. And McDowell has already staked the claim that the space of concepts is that of the faculty of spontaneity.

On this line of reasoning, given that perceptual contents already must be within the space of reasons, it would be remarkable if they were not also within the space of concepts (thereby falling under the authority of spontaneity). How else could the concepts necessary for the exercise of reason be applicable to them? It is concluded that the space of reasons cannot extend beyond that of concepts. But perceptual content supplies reasons for perceptual judgment. At one stroke this rules out nonconceptual perceptual content and guarantees a role for the faculty of spontaneity in exercises of receptivity.

Regarded as a knockdown argument for things needing to be this way, the foregoing is deficient because it simply overlooks equally plausible alternative scenarios. The task is to connect raw perceptual output with higher exercises of reason, including the contemplation of mere possibilities, nonperceptual assumptions, and prospective premises. The last of these seems to require the exercise of internal capacities. To be sufficiently commensurate to interact as a premise our perceptual output must already be apprehended with

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classificatory notions as well as principles of identifying and individuating individuals ('no entity without identity'). The two-factor theory contends that subjects must contribute these notions in making sense of their perceptual experience.[26] However, the featured reality tale will do as nicely. We detect certain things, not others. But why should things have happened in this way? Easy, because of natural selection. The perceptual recognition of anything inaccessible to our capacity to make perceptual and probability judgments, or to draw implications from them, would be of little value to sentient creatures having such recognition. If there ever were such perceptual capacities, they would have squandered vital resources and energies of their possessors in ways that would have placed those possessors at a substantial reproductive disadvantage. Consequently it is not surprising that *what* we can recognize in perception conforms to a great extent to what we can make further use of in judgment and reasoning.

Any appeal to evolution, and its master stroke natural selection, will no doubt raise some philosophical hackles. For example, Thomas Nagel—discussing a related evolutionary account of human reasoning power—calls an explanation in terms of the survival value of a large brain capacity 'laughably inadequate'.[27] And Jerry Fodor[28] has recently spoken disparagingly of 'dump[ing] the load on Darwin; a standard tactic when a philosopher gets in over his head'.

In fact, my sympathies are with this cautionary about heavy reliance on Darwinism. But I hope I have avoided the crude Darwinian tale-telling that some recent philosophy has indulged in. For one thing, Darwin is not being invoked for a naturalistic reduction of perception. Nor is it safe to imply that because the deliverances of perception are an evolutionary product they are reliable or evidential, any more than we should imply that a behavioral disposition's being the product of selection underwrites its moral credentials.

But after taking to heart all the apt warnings it is still true that our perceptual faculties are evolutionary products, and, as such, philo-

[26] I purposely avoid putting this in McDowell's terms of spaces of reasons versus spaces of concepts because the precise alternative I am proposing, the Aristotelian view, places at least some of what he calls conceptual in the material itself, rather than in our constitutions. Thus, the linking up of the external with the internal need not be viewed as the coordination of those two spaces.

[27] Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press, 1997), ch. 7, see p. 75 for the quoted remark. Cf. Alvin Platinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (Oxford University Press, 1993), ch. 12.

[28] Jerry Fodor, *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming), the quote is from p. 86 of the manuscript version.

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sophical accounts of perception are responsible to being biologically possible in this light.[29] Taking this a step further, it helps things along for them to be biologically *feasible*. Only rarely do philosophical accounts violate biological possibility: and their innocence may be presumed until a concrete reason for guilt appears.[30] But fewer philosophical accounts may be biologically feasible. Thus, it is apposite to support a view by noting that there is a perfectly good reason compatible with what we do know about the general character of evolution for supposing that our perceptual faculties would have been highly selective detectors. On the other hand, while nothing we know about evolution prohibits perception working as the two-factor theory outlines, unless there are biological constraints preventing us from apprehending things purely as enduring solids it is hard to see why the process would work to develop things as that theory requires. Thus, the two-factor theory is less feasible. Recall that one central motivation for appealing to a second factor was to supply concepts to limit the unusable myriad options present in receptivity. If this myriad is already eliminated by selectively detecting faculties, the second factor is superfluous. Kantians who have difficulty distinguishing this view from their own need only ask themselves what place is left in perception itself for the work of a faculty of spontaneity on this featured reality proposal. This does not require that an account of concepts be in terms of the processes that led up to their development (the evolutionary process) rather than the way they are now formed and found by us. Not including in the finished account the processes by means of which perception came to be constituted this way does not abolish the obligation for any account that is offered to be congruent with the feasible ways the evolutionary process might have formed subjects.

Nor am I claiming that the general run of what we perceive is somehow linked to our survivability. The cortically rich homo sapien brain that enables us to read and write has been fully evolved for a 100,000 years. But reading and writing are rather recent innovations; our brains couldn't have been evolved so that we might perform these very useful tasks. They are, stretching the term a bit, happy pleiotropisms. Indeed, change the context in which virtually *any* selected trait occurs, and we can find it doing things for which it hasn't been selected (as recent discussions of frog detec-

[29] Stephen Jay Gould nicely illustrates biologically impossible adaptation in 'Kingdoms without Wheels,' *Hen's Teeth and Horse's Toes* (Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 158–65.

[30] For a violation of biological possibility see the discussion of Daniel Dennett in Gerald Vision, 'Blindsight and Philosophy,' *Philosophy and Psychology,* vol. II, no. 2 (1998), pp. 151–2.

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tion of 'flies' illustrates). In these matters some have indiscriminately incorporated radical adaptationist assumptions in their discussions of evolutionary hypotheses. Perhaps because of biological necessity combined with constraints imposed by cost-benefit considerations in optimizing energy output, natural selection often produces—as in the case of brains or human perceptual faculties (or their combination)—multi-competent organs or aspects that are usable in the circumstances for specific work, but that may be utilized for a variety of different purposes in other contexts. Moreover, not everything that has evolved has selectional advantage in an organism's actual circumstances. (Witness the elongated optic nerve in various cave creatures that have virtually no useful eyes.[31]) The vigorous subdiscipline of molecular evolution should be enough to warn off philosophers that not every evolved trait is like the anteaters snout or the giraffe's neck. Nevertheless, it is beyond serious question that our perceptual faculties and our brains have been, *inter alia*, of some survival value even for our antediluvian ancestors, and even if it is idle to speculate on why exactly these general purpose organs evolved rather than something more specifically suited to the tasks at hand. This is all we require to see how to avoid the siren song of Kantian schematisms to account for faculties suited to receive and select only certain sorts of unprocessed information from the material world.

Introducing even a merely conceivable competitor to McDowell neutralizes the force of his argument. (And I want to claim more for the Aristotelian view than mere conceivability.) For the argument was that if we don't locate the space of reasons—and thus the products of perception—partly within the faculty of spontaneity, we cannot see how we are able to do what we in fact do with perceptual information and representations. There are alternative tales to tell, including the natural selection speculation on behalf of featured perception. This renders McDowell's Kantian tale as merely one among various possibilities. It cannot be claimed that things *must be* that way.

VII

Consider perception in nonhuman animals (hereafter, just plain animals). Obviously other animals have different perceptual systems; many altogether lack a cerebral cortex, a crucial factor in our perception. But let's consider only animals whose perceptual systems are relatively similar to our own: say, macaque monkeys, used extensively in studies whose ultimate aim is to map brain areas comparable to

[31] See H. Allen Orr, 'Dennett's Dangerous Idea,' *Evolution*, vol. 50, no. 1 (1996), pp. 467–72.

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those in human vision. Even here no one imagines animals have the full, rich repertoire of concepts and conceptual resources that mark even the dullest normal human existence. Nevertheless, such creatures do treat many visual objects as persistent solids, as evidenced by their avoidance of obstacles and predators, and their grasping behaviour. (Those with fingers may also show normal grip apertures related to visual sizing of objects.) And they may be credited even with further concepts, though these will always fall far short of those ascribed to users of human languages. On my proposal this presents no special difficulty. To the extent that an animal's biological make-up and behaviour can be physically and/or functionally compared to our own, we should have no trouble ascribing to them perceptual experiences of an order comparable to our own.

On McDowell's view animal perception is problematic. For one thing, he regards all conceptual material—all features and all notions of identity and individuation—as contributed by the subject, and he holds that animals have no concepts. Thus, the only thing an animal's perception of a certain part of its environment could have in common with our own would be its nonconceptual content. But by the very terms of McDowell's account, there can be no such separable element in perception. Spontaneity makes its contribution to the perceived array at the very earliest stage of receptivity. Thus, not only can we not know 'what it's like' to be a bat, but we cannot imaginatively grasp what it is that other higher mammals see or hear. This account might be easily amended by granting animals some crude internal conceptual scheme—allowing them an impoverished selection from among our own set of concepts that would thereby give them a modicum of spontaneity to contribute to their own perceptions. But at a minimum that would be incongruous because the point of engaging the faculty of spontaneity is to bring in, at the most rudimentary level of perception, the entire scope of our powers of judgment and reasoning. This integrates our perceptual life with the information gathering ends to which we put it. And it is quite clear that it would be implausible to ascribe to animals anything approaching human powers of reasoning and judgment because those call for delays in gratification and the contemplation of ends and factors far beyond anything of which animals are capable.[32] Having concepts that share only a bit of this,

[32] There is the redolence of old-fashioned complacency in McDowell's presumption that animal behaviour can all be brought under this umbrella. After all, animals do store things: squirrels hide nuts, dogs bury bones. This is probably backed up by a confidence that appearances of delayed gratification can be explained away in the end as biological imperatives. But we needn't press this point here.

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since all conceptual material is internal for McDowell, would be like being only a little bit pregnant. We just don't know how to make sense of the notion. In lieu of being able to ascribe a richer set of concepts to animals, McDowell ascribes to them none. But this immediately makes whatever experiential life animals have seem incomparably different from our own; not only quantitatively different, and not only qualitatively different because of the great quantitive grasp, but qualitatively different, *period*! Now because many animals seem to have much the same biological equipment as we do (say, eyes and ears formed much like ours) this may not strike one as intuitively plausible. Let us see what might be said in that proposal's defence.

McDowell names the nonshared perceptual subjectivity of animals *proto-subjectivity*. It is a something, but not a something shared with, or extractable from, human subjectivity. This is because animals have an entirely different mode of life, 'structured exclusively by immediate biological imperatives' [p. 115]. Animals may be said to live in an environment, while humans live in a world. Of course, humans also perceive things in an environment, but not exclusively so. Human perception is shaped not by a short list of biological imperatives, but in large measure by its accessibility to a realm of reasons and reasonings that issue in ever more complex perceptually based judgments.

A first natural reaction (for example, mine!) is to suppose that this commits the double error of underrating the complexity and variety of animal behaviour while at the same time neglecting the prospects for reductive biological accounts of the superficial polymorphous appearance of human behaviour. Indeed, I believe McDowell ignores the second source of concern throughout, with no attempt to refute it. But in an afterword [pp. 182–3] he qualifies his remarks about animals, insisting that they are by no means intended to be independent views about animal behaviour, that the behaviour's scope may be impressive indeed, and that his interest is only in the yet persisting contrast with the scope of ours. 'The point is just that dumb animals do not have Kantian freedom' [182]. Now, while this gives us a less simplisitic account of animal behaviour, in the process it nullifies the original force of the supposed distinction. The distinction in behaviours which was to bear the weight of the contrast and incommensurability of human subjectivity and animal proto-subjectivity is now so muddied that it is difficult to reconstruct the argument. That aside, McDowell's backtracking on animal behaviour exposes a defect present, if not quite as apparent, in the unmodified argument: namely, that the argument does little more than repeat a familiar fact that should be part of the original

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description of the problem rather than an element in its solution: that is, it says nothing more than that animals cannot reason as humans can. And while this is an obvious truth, it doesn't show by itself why this brings off the sort of quantum difference McDowell envisages in the character of their experience. In this light the fact that animals nevertheless perceive is still a part of the original challenge to McDowell's Kantianism.

Due to their advanced cognitive faculties, humans can rationally process their perceptual experiences in manifold ways unavailable to animals. Moreover, it is part of the common lore that this is implicated with the fact that we, unlike other creatures, are language-users, or, if we allow nonhuman animals rudimentary use of language, with the fact that there is a great disparity in our levels of linguistic achievement. (However, there are differing views about the directions of causation with respect to this link between reasoning or thought capacity and language.) But these facts form the background against which questions about the character of animal experience and its relation to our own are raised. They are not of themselves an answer to those questions. It is simply not evident, on its face, just what the connection between reasoning capacity (past a certain primitive level) and experience is supposed to be. This is not to claim that there cannot be such a connection. But if it is present, it is the sort of thing that must be explained. For the whole problem arises against the background of the appearance of the possibility of largely insulating our exercise of higher cognition from the experiential states that the exercise may make use of. Thus, simply to point out that we have higher rational functions that animals lack, or possess much less of, is to reiterate the initial conundrum. In particular, to leave things in that state should prohibit us from using these differences of cognitive function to explain *why* animal and human experience are incommensurable. For the former difference to explain the incommensurabiltiy we need further information about a palpable connection between them that would make the former eligible to be an explanation of the latter. It is precisely this that McDowell's discussion lacks. He merely mentions, with a nod to Gadamer to provide the rich details, the different roles our experiences play in our respective lives, and expects his readers to draw from that the view that there is no intelligibly separable common denominator that we can point to in our respective subjectivities. Whereas this would have been difficult to prove even with the initial hard-and-fast distinction drawn between animals being merely biologically dictated creatures while humans are in part freed from the constraints of biological immediacy, it is well-nigh impossible when the differences are (as in McDowell's 'Afterword') further obscured by rejecting any such hard-and-fast distinction. It would require a more principled gap, in

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terms of different kinds of abilities, to explain the gap in qualitative differences of perceptual content. An evocative phenomenological description of the vast differences in our lives and the behaviours of animals carries no polemical weight.

Perhaps it will be claimed that McDowell's earlier argument made this connection. Against that we may note that his reason for raising the issue at this stage is just the threat posed by animal sensibility to that preceding account. It begs the question to defuse that threat by appealing to the exercise of spontaneity that the issue of animal experience, and its connection to our own, was introduced to throw into doubt. This set of recalcitrant data is so central to any account of perceptual experience that the theory should never have been allowed to establish its *prima facie* credentials if there were no way to neutralize it save by appealing to the fact that it doesn't conform to the theory. I do not see how McDowell's earlier arguments on behalf of the two-factor theory can avail him here.

VIII

A number of philosophers have claimed that the content of perceptual experience is nonconceptual. There is more than one conception of nonconceptual content, but among other things such content is supposed to be capable of serving as a material part of a perceiver's perceptual information even if she is incapable of directly applying concepts of perceptual features and kinds to it. It is more difficult to motivate this distinction if, following my earlier proposal, we think of what we experience as already featured. Nevertheless, part of the original issue complex is left over, and ultimately it has to do with the role of perceptual recognition in perceptual experience. That and my own view aside, McDowell contends that the content of perceptual experience is thoroughly conceptual. Since his reasoning has to do with our focal topics, and flaws in it complement the case I have been building against the two-factor theory, it will be instructive to look at his treatment.

As mentioned, a chief argument in Evans that McDowell cites for nonconceptual content is the fact that our perceptual experience outdistances our conceptual resources for classifying the many determinate features (e.g., colours, shapes, odours) that we experience. McDowell goes about dismantling the argument first by claiming that although nonconceptual content is supposedly representational it must be 'blind' (to capture the force of its being nonconceptual). He then remarks:

> How should we cash out the image of blindness? To say that an experience is not blind is to say that it is intelligible to its subject

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> as purporting to be awareness of a feature of objective reality: as a seeming glimpse of the world [p. 54].

Using colours for illustration, he then proceeds to show that we are in fact aware of such determinate features, bringing them under a rubric we could articulate as 'that shade'. As long as tokens of that rubric are available for application (and it needn't be very long), the information is conceptual.

I take it that the first three words of the second sentence in the quoted passage, 'to say that', indicate that McDowell takes what follows as, among other things, necessary and sufficient for an experience not to be blind. Since not being blind is also necessary and sufficient for being conceptual (recall that nonconceptual content is blind), this makes being 'intelligible to its subject as purporting to be an awareness of a feature of objective reality' at least sufficient for a content to be conceptual. (The only reservation preventing a complete condition is that McDowell's definitions allow that some blind contents might be conceptual. But it is hard to imagine instances.) I believe the main fault with this way of drawing the distinction is that it mislocates the issue. The would-be distinction, we are told, is between different kinds of content. But McDowell locates it in the subject—that a complex condition be intelligible as a kind of awareness to her—rather than in her content.

Connected with this is another questionable assumption. While McDowell agrees with me in drawing a distinction between

(a) perceptual experience

and

(b) perceptual judgment,

he does not distinguish (a) from

(c) perceptual recognition.

To have a perceptual experience is just to recognize the object/content of that experience. Thus, in arguing that the capacities activated in (a) are conceptual, he asks rhetorically, 'what reason could there be for refusing to accept that such *recognitional* capacities are conceptual?' [p. 58, my emphasis.] The identification of (a) as a form (perhaps the only form) of (c) makes it easier to locate the conceptual/nonconceptual distinction in the subject rather than (directly) in the content. But it seems clear that in many cases in which someone sees something, she does so without recognizing it. Cases such as the mended weave of a coat or a moth that blends in with the bark of a tree on which it has lit are paradigms. In fact, the situation here is a good deal more complicated than the usual treat-

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ments of it.[33] There are degrees of recognition, and some have insisted that no experience is possible without at least the recognition of something (even if it is misrecognition). It might even be maintained that when one mistakenly believes she is hallucinating (and thus not recognizing anything in objective reality at all), there is a sense in which she is recognizing something of a certain kind (again, even if it is just misrecognition). But anyone who pushes the recognition requirement this far is in fact maintaining nothing more substantial than that (a) requires perceptual awareness of some sort.[34] While this too has been disputed, I shall accept it as plausible. Nevertheless, it is much too weak to support a thesis demanding that whenever we perceive recognitional capacities are activated.

But what of the claim that whenever we experience an absolutely determinate perceptual feature we may invoke something on the order of 'that shade' to encapsulate the working of conceptual apparatus on the content? Earlier [§V] I noted that this is precisely the sort of abstractionist strategy that McDowell rejects in his appeal to Geach. That aside, it is surely not what happens *whenever* we experience something of a certain shade. This would be a metajudgment, and even if it is a possibility our experiencing of a shade does not demand that we make such metajudgments.[35] I can experience the shade without picking it out thus. We might try to amend McDowell's formula so that it would be the mere ability to be intelligible that it be an awareness that... which mattered, rather than actual intelligibility on the occasion. But this version of conceptual content would overlap significantly with the usual notion of *non*-conceptual content. On this amended view for a content to be nonconceptual we would need it to be impossible that conceptual resources be applied to it. Such a version of nonconceptual content would be a straw man.

While McDowell's argument may rule out certain very ambitious notions of nonconceptual experiential content, it leaves the versions that have attracted support intact. That, combined with the inadequacies of the treatment of animal experience seem serious obstacles to a two-factor theory. But there is an alternative in the offing. If we adopt the view that what we perceive, and may experience, is already featured, thereby placing at least some of the work of conceptualization outside the ambit of our psychological constitution, we may continue to explain without difficulty how perceptual expe-

[33] See Vision, *Problems of Vision*, *op. cit*., ch. 4.

[34] But this has also been questioned, for example by John Heil, *Perception and Cognition* (University of California Press, 1983) and Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Little, Brown and Company, 1991).

[35] I owe this point to Michael Tye.

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rience can occupy the same space as whatever prior ability a subject may have to make perceptual judgments and to reason about its material.

Temple University, Philadelphia

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