

## *Experiencing the Facts*

**Critical Notice of: *Mind and World*, by John McDowell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1994)**

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The general topic of *Mind and World*, the written version of John McDowell's 1991 John Locke Lectures, is how 'concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world'. And one of the main aims is 'to suggest that Kant should still have a central place in our discussion of the way thought bears on reality' (1).<sup>1</sup> In particular, McDowell urges us to adopt a thesis that he finds in Kant, or perhaps in Strawson's Kant: the content of experience is conceptualized; *what* we experience is always the kind of thing that we could also believe. When an agent has a veridical experience, she 'takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*' (9). McDowell's argument for this thesis is indirect, but potentially powerful. He discusses a tension concerning the roles of experience and conceptual capacities in thought, and he claims that the only adequate resolution involves granting that experiences have conceptualized content. The tension, elaborated below, can be expressed roughly as follows: judgments must be somehow constrained by features of the external environment, else judgments would be utterly divorced from the world they purport to be about; yet our judgments must be somehow free of external control, else we could give no sense to the idea that we are responsible for our judgments.

McDowell explicitly relates this puzzle to the Kantian slogan, 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind'; and he often speaks in terms of 'receptivity' and 'spontaneity'. But despite the terminology and occasional references to Hegel or Gadamer, *Mind and World* – henceforth '*M&W*' – is written primarily for those schooled in the analytic tradition; although interest in *M&W* will not be limited to philosophers working in this tradition. McDowell makes heavy use of Davidson (on justification) and Evans (on content). Strawson's influence pervades the book. Sellars' notion of a 'space of reasons' figures prominently. Wittgenstein is a recurring character. This makes for a rich, stimulating text. But some readers will (like me) not begin *M&W* with all this background firmly in mind; and

McDowell's great strength is not that of presenting complex issues in clear simple language for the uninitiated. Coupled with the intrinsic difficulty of its subject matter, this makes *M&W* a hard read.

Effort is, however, repaid. McDowell locates an important tension in our thinking about thought, suggests an attractive way of easing the tension, and offers a plausible diagnosis of why the tension is acute. McDowell's criticisms of alternatives are less decisive than he suggests, and I have some reservations about his positive account. But he is right to say that philosophers often fail to recognize, much less argue against, the position he develops. *M&W* is a genuinely provocative book that should be discussed. For even if McDowell turns out to be wrong about experience and content, there is much to be learned by seeing the terrain as he presents it.

So much by way of general remarks. In section 1, I discuss the central Kantian tension and McDowell's response to it. Section 2 is devoted to McDowell's treatment of Evans and Davidson, the Scylla and Charybdis between which we are to steer in responding to the Kantian tension. In section 3, I turn to a troublesome aspect of McDowell's view about how facts are related to constituents of our environment. Section 4 provides a briefer discussion of *M&W*'s second half, which urges us to recover the idea that mature humans are 'rational animals': as animals, we are part of nature; but our animality is distinctive, due to our capacity to recognize justificatory connections – a capacity that manifests itself, given an appropriate upbringing in a suitable culture. I am not unsympathetic with McDowell on this score. But his emphasis on the role of language acquisition in the acquisition of our 'second nature' strikes me as unhelpful.<sup>2</sup>

1.

We hold ourselves responsible for our beliefs, in the sense that we regard only some beliefs as justified. Epistemically virtuous agents may be wrong in particular cases, while epistemically reckless agents happen to be right; justified beliefs may be false, unjustified beliefs true. But agents with well-grounded

beliefs are not epistemically blameworthy if they err, while agents with unfounded beliefs are not praiseworthy (even if they avoid error). The fact that we ascribe epistemic responsibility is striking, since we often think of an agent's beliefs as *caused* by features of her environment. Of course, we hold ourselves responsible for our actions, even though we often think of an agent's actions as caused by features of her environment. But reflection on this fact has suggested that our conceptions of responsibility (which we associate with freedom) and causation can engender puzzles that are not easily dispelled. So we should be unsurprised, if analogous puzzles attend our conception of ourselves as epistemic agents.

For now, let us follow McDowell in supposing that empirical knowledge requires justification, and that such knowledge stems from a cooperation of capacities to experience the environment and to deploy concepts. It seems truistic that without experience *and* concepts, there could be no thought. Thoughts without content (*i.e.*, agent-internal states unrelated to experiential intake) would be empty; they would lack a connection to the environment and so not be *about* anything. Intuitions without concepts (*i.e.*, uncategorized aspects of experiential intake) would be blind; they would not be intuitions *of* any feature in the environment. But McDowell thinks Kant was right to see a tension in this truism. And like Kant, McDowell takes empirical knowledge to be the product of cooperating faculties: receptivity, which deals with the intake of experience; and spontaneity, which deals with the operation of conceptual capacities.

Grant that our intuitive grip on the notion of experience is adequate for present purposes. Pretheoretic thinking about experience suggests that experience is a kind of passive receptivity. In experience, we are affected by the environment. The world that our thought is about impacts upon us. Getting a firm grip on McDowell's notion of the conceptual is trickier. His remarks on what it is to deploy concepts are spread throughout *M&W* (though his third lecture is especially important). And later, I discuss a *prima facie* tension between McDowell's thesis that the content of experience is conceptualized

and his claim that concept-talk should be understood in Fregean terms. But since McDowell has been 'more influenced than footnotes can indicate' by Strawson (viii), it may be useful to have the following quote from Strawson in mind:

...we can form no conception of experience, of empirical knowledge, which does not allow of our becoming aware in experience of particular items which we are able to recognize or classify as instances of general kinds or characteristics. We must have the capacities for such recognitions and classifications, *i.e. we must have general concepts*; and we must have the occasions for the exercise and development of these capacities, *i.e. we must have what Kant calls intuitions*.<sup>3</sup>

Most importantly, whatever conceptual capacities are, McDowell thinks their exercise is properly characterized in terms of spontaneity. Exercises of conceptual capacities must be free, in that they 'can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials' (47). Indeed, persons with a faculty of spontaneity have 'a standing obligation' to engage in such reflection (40). Noting Kant's view that reason and freedom are intimately connected, McDowell speaks of conceptual capacities as belonging to a 'faculty that empowers us to take charge of our lives' (73). He also cites Sellars' claim that we locate states of knowledge 'in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, McDowell offers the slogan, 'the space of reasons is the realm of freedom' (5).

These remarks are suggestive, but less explicit than one might like. So let me try to elaborate. One might think that, if ascriptions of moral responsibility presuppose a free will, ascriptions of (un)justified thoughts presuppose that agents have free minds – *i.e.*, capacities to form judgments not determined by the external environment. So one might hold that the judgments of an agent *á* are (un)justified, only if *á* had the power to form judgments other than those she actually formed. Of course,

the analogy is imperfect. (For example, one does not *decide* to judge that p as opposed to not p, as one decides to do one thing as opposed to another.) So consider how we describe and explain differences of opinion.

Suppose Holmes and Watson observe the same scene, but initially, only Holmes judges that the victim was killed by a snake. Holmes and Watson differ with respect to (i) their history of environmental stimulation and (ii) their dispositions to go into physiological states that do not obviously belong to the Sellarsian 'space of reasons'. But we also want to say that Holmes had reasons for his judgment – and that Watson changed his mind, once he saw those reasons. It is not that Holmes' belief was thrust upon him *via* some conditioned reflex. The difference between Holmes and Watson is not adequately captured by saying that their thoughts are controlled by the environment in different ways. Reasons may be causes, but they are not mere causes. And if we say that Holmes saw justificatory connections that Watson initially missed, it seems we must also say that the capacity to form judgments involves a kind of freedom from external control.

This poses the worry at the center of *M&W*. In so far as thought is free, how can our judgments be 'grounded in a way that relates them to a reality external to thought' (5)? Yet such grounding seems to be a requirement not only for empirical knowledge, but also for our conception of thoughts as being *about* a reality external to thought. On the other hand, in so far as thought is grounded in features of our external environment, how can our judgments be free, in the sense apparently required by the idea that we can give *reasons* for such judgments?

At this point, one can be tempted by the 'dualism of scheme and Given', according to which one can do two things in giving reasons for a belief: advert to other beliefs, or (once the 'available moves within the space of concepts' have been exhausted) simply point to a bit of experiential intake that is not conceptually organized (6). Holmes may judge that the cause of death was a snakebite, because he

believes that the victim's skin has certain markings and that snakebites leave such markings. But Holmes may judge that the victim's skin has certain markings, because he has a visual experience whose content is *not* conceptually organized (and so not correctly reportable with a 'that'-clause, if such clauses always denote Fregean senses). Beliefs justified by virtue of relations to the Given will involve the exercise of 'observation concepts', which are 'suited to figure' in judgments 'directly responsive to experience' (6-7).

This picture has been criticized on many counts. But McDowell's complaint is that, despite appearances, it fails to show how thoughts can be free of external control yet still be rationally grounded in features of the external world. For upon reflection, merely pointing to experiences seems to be no way of giving *reasons* for a belief. Instead, the relation between experiences and judgments directly grounded in experience comes to seem merely causal, thus threatening the idea that such judgments are free. But if exercises of observational concepts are not rationally assessable, then (absurdly) exercises of nonobservational concepts will not be *rationally* grounded in a world external to thought.

According to McDowell, we can only understand 'the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted' as 'relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities' (7). So if judgments can be warranted on the basis of experience, experiences must be in the space of concepts, which is the space of reasons. This is the main idea of *M&W*. Experiential intake already involves the same conceptual capacities at work in nonobservational judgments. When we 'enjoy experience', these capacities are 'drawn on *in* receptivity, not exercised *on* some supposedly prior deliverances of receptivity' (10). So in tracing the grounds of beliefs, one can grant that every step of the justification must lead to something with conceptual content, while still holding that empirical knowledge is grounded in experience.

According to the scheme/Given dualism, our epistemic contact with the world results in states that are unlike states of judgment, in that only the latter have conceptually organized contents. So if relations

of warrant can hold only between conceptually organized contents, this dualism does not speak to McDowell's concern. He thus proposes that states of experience are like states of judgment in the relevant respect. This is not to deny that experiences differ from states of nonobservational judgment in other respects. That would be equally fatal. In veridical experience, we *take in* that the world is a certain way; and this taking in must be passive, in a way that nonobservational judgments are not, if experience is to provide the friction needed to ground nonobservational judgments. But McDowell retains the idea that experience is a kind of receptivity. He holds that in experience, 'one finds oneself saddled with content....conceptual capacities have already been brought into play...before one has any choice in the matter' (10). However, one need not accept the deliverances of experience as veridical; judgment must be free in the relevant sense. The thought is that experience must represent the world in the same terms as judgments about the world, if only because one can have reasons to reject appearances as deceiving: a state of *experience* and a state of *judging that this experience is misleading* must each have contents, such that justificatory relations can obtain between the contents. But *how* experience presents the world is not in our rational control. (McDowell offers the example of Müller-Lyer illusions, where two lines known to be of equal length appear to differ in length.)

So on McDowell's view, experience has its conceptualized content by virtue of 'drawing into operation' capacities that can be 'rationally linked to a whole system of concepts and conceptions within which their possessor engages in a continuing activity of adjusting her thinking to experience' (46-7). For concepts are part of a revisable classificatory system that makes free thinking possible; although given a system of concepts at a particular time, we can find ourselves saddled with the conceptualized content of our experiences, in the sense that we cannot make the world appear differently. McDowell allows that experiences can have agent-internal states as causes, and that a scientific psychology may employ a notion of non-conceptual content. Thus, one is free to hold that states of experience have *as proximate*

*causes* states with nonconceptual content, if one does not suppose that the latter states can *justify* the former. One must not suppose both that nonconceptual content is a kind of content and that states with any kind of content can bear justificatory relations to one another. It would be useful to work out the implications for issues of modularity and the role of information encapsulation in human cognition. One would also like to hear more about what it is for experience to draw conceptual capacities into operation. But let me now turn to McDowell's criticisms of Davidson and Evans, each of whom respond to the Kantian tension in a rather different way.

2.

The leading idea of *M&W* is that if judgments can be warranted on the basis of experience, then experiences must be in the space of reasons (and thus have conceptual content). Davidson accepts this conditional and rejects the Myth of the Given; but Davidson denies that experiences can warrant judgments, adopting a form of coherentism instead. On the other hand, Evans holds that experiences can warrant judgments; but Evans rejects the conditional, and instead assigns nonconceptual content to experiential states. McDowell's strategy is to argue that these responses to the Kantian tension fail deeply: despite initial appearances, they do not show how beliefs can be rationally grounded in experience. If one does not allow that experience has conceptualized content, it will seem that Davidson and Evans have staked out the available positions. This serves to make McDowell's own view attractive. And while I don't think the alternatives are 'demolished' (51) by the considerations advanced in *M&W*, McDowell's discussion should be of use to those interested in developing any of these three positions.

McDowell sees Davidson as starting with the recognition that unconceptualized bits of experience cannot provide *reasons* for holding a belief. Davidson is quoted as saying, 'nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief'.<sup>5</sup> But Davidson allegedly ignores the possibility that experiences have conceptualized content, and is thereby led to coherentism: experiences cause beliefs; but beliefs



are justified solely by virtue of their relations to other beliefs, none of which are justified by virtue of their relations to experience.

Unsurprisingly, McDowell holds that such a view preserves the freedom of thought by conceding that thought is not rationally constrained from outside itself. Of course, Davidson also argues that beliefs are mainly true. It is hard to get clear about what this means, and why it should be so. But McDowell does not deny that belief and interpretation are intimately related, or that correct interpretation requires that persons turn out to have mainly true beliefs. Instead, he denies the significance of this for his problem, claiming that Davidson provides an unsatisfactory account of how thought bears on reality. One might worry that, so far as Davidson is concerned, one might be (and always have been) a brain in a vat. McDowell thinks the Davidsonian response – *viz.*, that the envatted are correctly interpreted as having true beliefs about electronic environments – cannot provide the ‘reassurance we need if we are to be immunized against the attractions of the Given’. Instead of calming the ‘fear that our picture leaves our thinking possibly out of touch with the world outside us’, Davidson ‘gives us a dizzying sense that our grip on what it is that we believe is not as firm as we thought’ (17).

As Fodor once quipped, if you're a brain in vat, you have serious cause for complaint. And it is dizzying when considerations from epistemology, philosophy of mind, and the theory of reference converge in a single thought experiment. But while McDowell says that interpretive charity comes too late to help us escape the Kantian tension, Davidson can say that the objection comes too late to show that charity cannot calm the McDowellian fear. Coherentism can easily seem unduly ‘confining’. Davidson's coherentism, though, is embedded in a systematic account of *semantic* phenomena. If one accepts that account, with its consequence that beliefs are mainly true, I don't see why one should still worry that thought is ‘out of touch’ with reality. Truth is a paradigmatic semantic relation, a relation between representations and the world represented.

Simplifying a lot, I take Davidson's claim to be that *á* has thoughts, if: the totality of evidence concerning *á*'s dispositions to verbal and nonverbal behavior would confirm a theory of interpretation for *á*, given a suitable charity constraint for excluding many interpretation theories logically compatible with the evidence; where an interpretation theory for *á* includes at least (i) a theory of truth for *á*'s language, (ii) a set of sentences that *á* holds-true, and (iii) a set of sentences that *á* wants-true.<sup>6</sup> On this view, *á* is a believer if *á* is suitably interpretable, and believers are *eo ipso* in (intentional) contact with reality. Davidson offers an interpretationalist account of what it is to be in mental contact with reality, just as he offers an interpretationalist account of what it is to have mental states. But this does not obviously imply that 'spontaneity is not subject to rational constraint from outside' (17). For bearing semantic relations to features of the environment may be what it *is* for exercises of spontaneity (*i.e.*, judgments) to be subject to rational constraint from outside. While I do not advocate interpretationalism, Davidson has a well developed view that he justifies on the basis of how it accommodates various facts about mind and language. This view should not be rejected just because it fails to capture an allegedly more robust sense in which thoughts are about the very things Davidson says they are about (*viz.*, those things referred to in using sentences that correctly give the contents of thoughts).

In a footnote, McDowell grants that it 'takes care' to say what is wrong with Davidsonian coherentism. But he goes on to simply assert that, on Davidson's view, we can ring changes on the actual environment (as seen by the interpreter and brought into the interpretation) without changing how things strike the believer, even while the interpretation is supposed to capture how the believer is in touch with her world. This strikes me as making it impossible to claim that the argument traffics in any genuine idea of being in touch with something in particular. The objects that the interpreter sees the

subject's beliefs as being about become, as it were, merely noumenal so far as the subject is concerned (17, n.14).

The word 'strike' is interestingly ambiguous here. Changing a subject's environment will change how things strike her in one sense: envatted and embodied brains are struck by different things. But grant that in some sense, the qualitative aspects of envatted and embodied mentality will be the same. One still has to *argue* that interpretationalism renders the objects of thought objectionably noumenal. (And the argument must not apply to all forms of content externalism.) If Davidson is right about what it *is* to have thoughts, then perhaps he is not entitled to say that we *have* thoughts. But to defend this claim, one would have to engage with Davidson's account of radical interpretation and its role in determining what it is for mental states to have contents.

Metaphilosophical disputes are just beneath the surface here. Davidson's appeal to the radical translator is part of a constructive attempt to make meaning talk respectable. But *qua* advocate of Wittgensteinian 'quietism', McDowell says we should 'not indulge' but 'exorcise' the 'sense of spookiness' that surrounds questions like 'How is meaning possible?' (176).

(I return to this point.) It is also relevant that McDowell thinks 'philosophical concerns about the possibility of knowledge express at root the same anxiety as philosophical concern about how content is possible, an anxiety about a felt distance between mind and world' (146-7). He regards it as a 'shallow scepticism', if 'taking it for granted that one has a body of beliefs, one worries about their credentials' (17). But I see no reason to adopt this attitude. Do what ever it takes to eliminate the (vague, and dubiously coherent) worry that thinkers are somehow epistemically distanced from their environments. Challenges to the common-sense distinction between knowledge and accidentally true belief will remain. I find these challenges among the deepest in philosophy; although attempts at argument here would likely degenerate into a therapist's waiting room contest, where each patient claims to have the biggest anxiety.

So let me turn to Evans' view: experiences are informational states with nonconceptual content; while judgments '*based upon* such states necessarily involve conceptualization', since one exercises '*basic conceptual skills*' in making the transition from perceptual experience to judgment. But perceptual experiences are not said to be *mere* informational states. The relevant nonconceptual contents must be available as '*input to a thinking, concept-applying, and reasoning system*'.<sup>7</sup> For both McDowell and Evans, not only is experience crucial to thought, only thinkers experience the world (47-9). On both views, animals lacking conceptual capacities lack genuine states of experience. Mere animals have mere perceptual/informational states that are sensitive to various features of the environment. (I return to the differing strategies for making this consequence seem less unpalatable.) Unlike Davidson, Evans thinks that experiences can and must serve as reasons for judgments. But McDowell argues that 'Davidson is right, as against Evans, that if experiences are extra-conceptual, they cannot be what thoughts are rationally based on' (68). The issue, then, is whether or not there can be *rational* relations between Evansian experiences and the judgments caused by such experiences.

McDowell contends that, on Evans' view, relations between experiences and judgments

cannot themselves be within the scope of spontaneity – liable to revision, if that were to be what the self-scrutiny of active thinking recommends. And that means that we cannot genuinely recognize the relations as potentially reason-constituting. We cannot put limits on the self-scrutiny of reason (52).

Evans is charged with a kind of '*fraudulent labelling*'. For by saying that experiences have a kind of content (*viz.*, nonconceptual), Evans makes it seem that experiences can bear rational (and not merely causal) relations to judgments. But according to McDowell: the subject is in no position to revise the relations between the "contents" of her (Evansian) experiences and the contents of her judgments; this shows that these relations are not rational after all; so Evans is entitled to say that judgments are based

upon experiences, only on a purely causal reading of 'based upon', and not on any reading that implies a rational grounding of the judgments.

McDowell recognizes the obvious response in a footnote (53, n.7): even if states of experience are outside the scope of spontaneity when considered in themselves (*i.e.*, when ignoring relations to the concept-applying systems to which experiential states serve as input), perhaps one can show how certain *relations* between experiences and judgments can be rational. Peacocke tries to do just this in his recent book.<sup>8</sup> McDowell responds in a postscript to *M&W*.

Peacocke holds that visual experiences with the right nonconceptual content can rationally ground, for example, a judgment that a given object is square. The idea is familiar from reliabilist accounts of perceptual knowledge: if the subject's visual system is functioning properly, then (given that various abnormal/defeating conditions do not obtain) 'when such experiences occur, the object thought about will really be square'. The account is externalist. In describing why the experience/judgment connection is rational, one makes 'essential use of the fact that the nonconceptual content employed in the possession condition' for the concept *square* 'has a correctness condition that concerns the world'. So the proposed account of why the experience/judgment connection is rational 'turns on the point that when the correctness condition of the relevant nonconceptual contents is fulfilled, the object will really be square'.<sup>9</sup>

For McDowell, this is not enough. He requires that the nonconceptual contents of experiences 'intelligibly constitute *a subject's reasons for believing something*' (163). While he does not say so, McDowell's claims on this score amount to a rejection of any reliabilist component in an account of human knowledge. McDowell is not alone in this respect. But reliabilism cannot simply be dismissed, and McDowell offers no new argument here. Peacocke is challenged to say why his attributions of reasons are more plausible than attributions to a skilled cyclist of reasons concerning how her body ought to be

positioned when rounding a curve (if she wants to remain upright). The challenge is familiar from debates about whether a speaker tacitly knows a theory of grammar for her language; but McDowell says nothing about attempts to meet the challenge in the linguistic domain.<sup>10</sup> Instead, he insists that subjects be able to *articulate* their reasons (without insisting on any 'special degree of articulateness').

McDowell taps into strong intuitions here. But in my view, it adds nothing to be told that

there is a time-honored connection between reason and discourse...if we try to translate 'reason' and 'discourse' into Plato's Greek, we can find only one word, *logos*, for both.

Now Peacocke cannot respect this connection (165).

What the Ancients have joined together may need to be put asunder. McDowell rightly notes that mere attribution of nonconceptual content to experiences will not solve his problem. Even granting that nonconceptual contents confer a correctness condition on states of experience, it does not *follow* that a state 'whose content is given by the fact that it has the correctness condition that P' can be a subject's reason for judging that Q. (The mere fact that P and Q are rationally related, *qua* possible objects of judgment, is irrelevant.) But McDowell is excluding the possibility of a constructive theory of knowledge – and what it is to be a (subject's) reason – according to which the reason/discourse connection is not quite as tight as some have thought.

This is not to say that anyone defending the Evans/Peacocke line must say that the articulation of reasons has nothing to do with human knowledge. On the contrary, an Evansian might well hold that only those who can articulate reasons have genuine knowledge (just as only those with conceptual abilities have genuine experience). But this leaves room for the following view: those who can articulate reasons for many of their judgments make *some* judgments such that they cannot articulate the reasons for those judgments. Indeed, the ability to make judgments grounded in reasons that the subject cannot articulate (without considerable philosophical and/or psychological sophistication) may be a precondition for the kind

of distinctively human knowledge that is McDowell's primary concern – *viz.*, the kind of knowledge grounded in justifications that can be articulated and shared among members of a speech community.

Again, metaphilosophical views are at stake. As a defender of Wittgenstein's quietism, McDowell wants no part of the philosophical project that seems to be required, if assigning nonconceptual content to experiences is to scratch the Kantian itch. But by McDowell's own lights, 'We cannot put limits on the self-scrutiny of reason'. If all things considered, it seems best to loosen the reason/discourse connection, so be it; and if this tells against Wittgensteinian metaphilosophy, so be it. It is interesting to note that, when defending quietism, McDowell says that certain questions (*e.g.*, 'What constitutes the space of reasons?') should not be 'taken to be in order without further ado, just because it is standard for such questions to be asked in philosophy as we have been educated into it' (178). I agree. But the question of which questions are bad ones is itself a matter for inquiry and debate. And the Evansian should be as free as McDowell to reject some aspects of the Tradition, in the aid of resolving felt tensions.

But what of the claim that on Evans' view, relations between experiences and judgments are unrevisable (and so not rational)? Here one should bear in mind that, while rationality may demand readiness to revise judgments about how things *are*, it presumably does not demand readiness to revise judgments about how things *seem*. If agent *a* is in a state of experience whose nonconceptual content is given by the fact that the state's correctness condition is that *P*, then perhaps *a* will of necessity also be in a state of judging that *P seems* to be the case. It may be impossible to sever this connection between states of experience and judgments about how things seem. On McDowell's own view, how things seem (at a given time) is not in our control. And nothing in Evans' view requires unrevisable connections between a subject's being in a state of experience and her making an unhedged judgment that some proposition *P is* the case. On the contrary, I would have thought Evans gives a relational characterization

of what it is to *be* an experience partly to ensure that beings with genuine experiences have the capacity to not take those experiences at face value. Again, Evans says that *in making the transition* from perceptual experience to judgment, one exercises 'basic conceptual skills'. I assume that these skills bring with them the ability to reject appearances as deceiving.<sup>11</sup>

In a sense, this line of response rejects the problem as presented. As I noted in section one, McDowell follows Sellars in connecting the proper characterization of a state as one of knowing with the relevant subject's ability to justify what she says. And in introducing the Kantian tension, I allowed that empirical knowledge requires justification. But one can retain (as a stipulation) the claim that *empirical* knowledge requires articulable reasons. The Evansian proposal will then be that some judgments are grounded in ways that do not make them instances of empirical knowledge. It is worth noting, however, that there need be no principled obstacle to articulating reasons for the very propositions we currently judge to be the case on the basis of (unarticulated) experience. So the Evansian need not deny that what we judge (when we judge truly) is a potential object of empirical knowledge.

3.

Thus far, none of my remarks tell against the view that experience has conceptualized content. But if Davidsonians and/or Evansians can avoid McDowell's criticisms, much of the argument for his view is eliminated. Still, the alternative responses to the Kantian tension are somewhat revisionary of pretheoretic intuitions. So if we can simply say that the content of experience is conceptualized, thereby avoiding any need for (re)constructive philosophy, why not do so?

For McDowell, experience is a passive 'taking in' of a mind-independent world. So with respect to the plausibility of his positive proposal, the main issue is whether states of experience *can* have conceptualized content, given how these states are related to the environment. And here, there is a *prima facie* dilemma – or, if you like, a new threat of oscillation. By taking conceptualized contents to be



Fregean, as McDowell does, one seems to be individuating states of the mind-independent world too finely. Guarding against this prospect runs the risk of individuating mental states too coarsely. This worry may be misguided; or responding to it may be easier than the tasks facing Davidsonians and Evansians. But this remains to be seen.

Again, conceptualized contents are said to be *articulable* (6, 164-5). The ambiguity between having parts and being verbalizable may well be intentional. For on Fregean views, thoughts and sentential structures are intimately related. And McDowell says that if ‘we want to identify the conceptual realm with the realm of thought, the right gloss on “conceptual” is not “predicative” but “belonging to the realm of Fregean sense” ’ (107). Suppose that Fido is Rex. Fregeans can still hold that ‘Fido barks’ and ‘Rex barks’ express different thoughts/senses, even though (i) any abstract object having Fido as a constituent has Rex as a constituent, and (ii) the metaphysically possible situations in which Fido barks are those in which Rex barks. Senses are appealing, because they provide resources (for individuating mental states) that seem to be unavailable, if one is restricted to features of the world that thought is about. Correlatively, the individuation condition on Fregean thoughts is explicitly *epistemic*: ‘P’ and ‘Q’ express distinct thoughts, if an agent can without irrationality believe that P yet not believe that Q; where it is assumed that S believes that P, iff S believes the thought expressed by ‘P’. *Prima facie*, this fits ill with the idea of experiences having Fregean contents yet still being passive receptions.<sup>12</sup>

The passivity of experience is supposed to let us construe experience as ‘openness to the layout of reality’. The conceptualized content of experience is supposed to let us see how features of the environment can ‘exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks’ (26). If McDowell is to have and eat this cake, there can be no ontological ‘gap between thought, as such, and the world’ (27). The mind-independent world must be ‘made up of the sort of thing one can think’ (27-8). McDowell thinks this is a truism. (In this context, he offers useful discussion of Wittgenstein’s remark that our meanings do not

stop short of the facts.) According to McDowell, in a veridical experience, a subject takes in *that things are thus and so*. And '*that things are thus and so*' is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are'. While 'reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere' (26). But the worry is not dealt with so easily.

Fregeans can identify facts with true thoughts. But then the issue is whether the world is made up of facts. Wanting us to find this obvious, McDowell offers the Tractarian slogan: the world is all that is the case. But it is no truism that Tractarian facts – *i.e.*, the truth-makers for pictures of the world, the mind-independent configurations of objects – are Fregean thoughts. Fregean thoughts seem to be more finely grained than the states of our environment that make thoughts true. Intuitively, distinct Fregean thoughts (*e.g.*, that Fido barks and that Rex barks) can be made true by the same state of affairs; and many philosophers have been attracted to the idea that states of affairs are not individuated epistemically. Such intuitions suggest that subjects passively take in only *coarse-grained* contents (even if in specifying the correctness conditions of an experiential state, we employ a sentence that is also used to express a Fregean thought).

One expects Fregeans to say the world is made up of (not the sort of thing one can think, but rather) the *sorts of things one can think about*. These are the customary referents of our singular terms in assertive utterances. Senses are said to be *ways of presenting* (or for Evans, *ways of thinking about*) these very things. At least sometimes, Frege seemed to regard senses as entities that in no way depend on thinking subjects or the objects/properties that subjects think about. But for perfectly comprehensible reasons, Evans rejects this aspect of Frege's view – including its manifestation in the idea that a term lacking a *Bedeutung* can still have a *Sinn*.<sup>13</sup>

And elsewhere in *M&W*, McDowell emphasizes his broad agreement with Evans (*e.g.*, 106-7).

As I understand Evans, talk of *Sinnen* gets its grip only because subjects have the capacity to think about *Bedeutungen* in certain ways. In that sense, *Sinnen* are not part of the mind-independent world; they are not aspects of that which our (spontaneous) exercises of conceptual capacities are *about*. So it is not clear that Fregean facts can be *passively* taken in. Apart from thoughts about thoughts, our mental events are about dogs and such: constituents of our environment that are not individuated by the epistemic criteria appropriate to thoughts. So grant that facts are parts of reality. The question is whether facts are the right *sorts* of reality-parts to be the contents of experiences. The answer may lie in the idea (not spelled out in *M&W*) that experience 'draws conceptual capacities into operation'. In any case, more needs to be said.

In formulating this concern, I have been influenced by a recent paper of Julian Dodd, who argues that McDowell conflates two kinds of theories about what facts are: modest theories, according to which facts are true thoughts (where thoughts are held to be denizens of the realm of sense); and robust theories, according to which facts are 'items with particular objects and properties as constituents whose totality makes up the world'.<sup>14</sup> Senses cannot be fact-constituents on a robust theory, at least not if fact-constituents can be the customary referents of our singular terms. And for Fregeans, no coarse-grained abstract object having a dog (with all its fleas) as a constituent can be the sort of thing one can think; such objects cannot serve to properly individuate episodes of thinking. But if facts belong to the realm of sense, identifying true thoughts with facts seems to carry no implications for mind-world relations. So despite suggestions to the contrary, McDowell is not *merely* saying that 'perceptible facts are essentially capable of impressing themselves on perceivers' (28).

In one of the postscripts, McDowell explicitly says that thoughts are individuated in a Fregean manner, and that (given his Tractarian slogan) this is to 'incorporate the world into what figures in Frege as the realm of sense' (179-80). But the only potential objection he sees is the following: one might worry

that McDowell can say how thought bears on *objects*, only if he views Fregean senses through the lens of 'some version of the generalized Theory of Descriptions'. To this kind of concern, McDowell responds (rightly, in my view) that Evans showed how appeal to Fregean senses can 'accommodate the sorts of connection between thinkers and particular objects' emphasized by direct reference theorists (106). As should be clear by now, however, my worry is not that McDowell is Russell-in-disguise (and thus open to the kinds of charges levelled by Kripke and others against so-called description theorists).

Nor do I think that McDowell is an idealist in his sense of the term – *viz.*, one who equates facts with exercises of conceptual capacities. Grant that if the correctness condition of a veridical experience is given by 'P', it is the case that P. It is no part of Frege's view that minds determine what is (and is not) the case. So in that sense, the contents of veridical experiences are mind-independent 'aspects of the world' on McDowell's view. McDowell may want to leave matters here. But I still cannot help thinking that the individuating criteria appropriate to Fregean thoughts do not apply to those aspects of the world *that can be passively taken in*.

Someone otherwise convinced by McDowell might conclude that all propositional objects of judgment are (like the contents of experiential states) coarse-grained. One might then try to account for the familiar Fregean data without appeal to the realm of sense. This is no easy task, but there are proposals. *If* one of them can be made to work, then instead of distinguishing kinds of content (conceptualized or not), perhaps one could distinguish kinds of *transformations* of contentful mental states: those that are free in the relevant sense, and those that are not. On such a view, the world might be said to exert a rational influence on thought, if experience 'draws into operation' capacities responsible for free transformations; but the operation of such capacities, whether passive or active, would not correspond to a special kind of content.

A less radical departure from McDowell's view would be to suppose that agents have propositional attitudes by virtue of being related to coarse-grained states of affairs *under* Fregean senses: 'Sam believes that Fido barks' would be true (relative to a context), iff Sam believes the state of affairs expressed by 'Fido barks' (and 'Rex barks') under a contextually determined sense. On this view, one might be able to say that the content of experience is as conceptual as the content of any propositional attitude state, while holding that *that p* is an aspect of how the mind-independent world is. For perhaps this is just to say that the very coarse-grained proposition we would ascribe belief in, if we ascribed to Sam the belief that *p*, is also a way the world is. The idea would be that, while uses of 'that'-clauses implicate our conceptual capacities (and even though this is crucial for propositional attitude ascription), 'that'-clauses refer to coarse-grained entities. While this view is not without difficulties, it also has some independent advantages.<sup>15</sup> But space constraints forbid exploration of this variation on McDowell's proposal.

4.

Recall that for both Evans and McDowell, animals lacking conceptual capacities cannot have genuine experience. But adult humans are *like* dumb brutes in at least some cognitive respects. Evans holds that we (like mere animals) have perceptual/informational states with nonconceptual content, and that our thought is the result of conceptual and nonconceptual factors. McDowell agrees that we share with mere animals a 'perceptual sensitivity to features of the environment'. But he rejects the 'factorizing' approach, holding instead that there are two kinds of perceptual sensitivity to reality, 'one permeated by spontaneity and another independent of it' (69). McDowell thinks there is understandable intellectual pressure to reject this claim, because we are so easily tempted to 'conceive nature as the realm of law' (71). As a result, we are inclined to think that any intelligibility found in nature must be the kind of intelligibility associated with the discovery that certain phenomena are governed by natural law. McDowell holds that,

while the kind of intelligibility associated with spontaneity (and the space of reasons) is not that of natural law, it is still a kind of intelligibility found in nature; it is found in our nature as *rational* animals. So if one is to fully escape the Kantian tension, one must reject the modern notion of nature as the realm of law, in favor of a more inclusive notion that allows for spontaneity.

McDowell embeds these claims in a familiar (Sellarsian) story. In trying to make their environment intelligible, prescientific humans mislocated many phenomena not really associated with persons in the space of reasons (the manifest image). The scientific revolution let us locate much of the world in the space of law (the scientific image), and this led to better explanations of nonpersonal and subpersonal phenomena. But the great success of revealing this new kind of intelligibility in so many domains has raised the possibility that *nothing* is properly explained by locating it in the space of reasons. The threat is that the manifest image will collapse, leaving the scientific image as the only means of rendering any phenomena (including those concerning rational judgment) intelligible. McDowell does not urge a return to the idea that all of nature is a 'book of lessons for us'. Nor should we regret the mere fact that banishing a phenomenon from the space of reasons can 'empty it of meaning' and 'leave it disenchanting' (71). Rather, he wants us to 'recapture the Aristotelian idea that a normal mature human being is a rational animal, but without losing the Kantian idea that rationality operates freely in its own sphere' (85). And McDowell thinks we must let go of our modern view that being natural is a matter of being located in the realm of law, if we are to see how persons can be both rational and natural.

McDowell considers two alternatives to revising our notion of nature, so that it includes spontaneity/reason. The first is 'bald naturalism', which 'aims to domesticate conceptual capacities within nature conceived as the realm of law'. The idea is that, 'even so conceived, naturalness does not exclude the kind of intelligibility that belongs to meaning'. The bald naturalist will 'dismiss the fuss' over spontaneity, denying that it is really *sui generis*, and then get on with saving 'whatever is worth saving in

our conception of ourselves, by reconstructing it' in terms of conceptual equipment that clearly belongs to the scientific image (72-3).<sup>16</sup>

The second alternative is suggested by Davidson. Perhaps the space of reasons is not part of the space of law, because a constitutive ideal of rationality precludes any psychological or psychophysical laws. Still, while reason/spontaneity is *sui generis* in this sense, the particular items that belong to the space of reasons may also belong to the realm of law. McDowell does not challenge the truth of token physicalism. His objection is rather that: if one rejects bald naturalism, but grants that something is natural by virtue of 'its place in the realm of law', then

the fact that sensibility is natural works together with the fact that the concept of spontaneity functions in the space of reasons, so as to rule out the possibility that spontaneity might permeate the operations of sensibility as such....we are debarred from holding that an experience has its conceptual content precisely as whatever natural phenomenon it is (75-6).

Suppose (*pace* Davidson) that experiences have conceptual content. If I understand the objection, it is similar to the charge that anomalous monism is a kind of epiphenomenalism, since mental causes are not held to be causes by virtue of having mental properties. So analogs of replies to this charge seem germane. The idea would be that, while no particular fails to be located in the realm of law, no particular is natural *by virtue of* its place in the realm of law. (Davidson denies that a cause is a cause by virtue of its physical properties.) And while there are anomic properties, they *supervene* on nomic properties. I am no fan of token physicalism. But if need be, one could live with this kind of epiphenomenalism. For it does not deny that there are mental causes. Similarly, even if Davidson offers a kind of nonnaturalism about reasons (by denying that reason-properties belong to the realm of law),

particular reasons are still natural. So argument is required to show the superiority of other routes to naturalism about reasons.<sup>17</sup>

There is also a third alternative to McDowell's approach. Instead of expanding our notion of nature, one might take the notion of law to be less restrictive than some (including Davidson) have assumed. Mental predicates may not figure in strict laws. But perhaps they figure in *ceteris paribus* laws, and perhaps that is enough to guarantee that mental particulars can be located in the realm of law.<sup>18</sup> One might regard this as a notational variation on McDowell's proposal. But it might equally well be viewed as a notational variation on some form of bald naturalism. And this raises the question of just what (if anything) differentiates McDowell from the bald naturalist, apart from a desire to avoid constructive philosophy.

Still, it would be a strong consideration in favor of the overall project sketched in *M&W*, if McDowell could show why mature humans naturally belong to both the space of reasons and the space of law *without* supposing that concepts of the former space (or particulars falling under those concepts) in any way owe their naturalness to their location in the latter space. McDowell moves towards an account of our 'second nature', in virtue of which we are at home in the space of reasons, by offering a provocative analogy to Aristotelian conceptions of how mature humans are related to ethical requirements. On such views, 'ethics involves requirements of reason that are there whether we know it or not, and our eyes are opened to them by the acquisition of "practical wisdom",' which McDowell takes as his model 'for the understanding, the faculty that enables us to recognize and create the kind of intelligibility that is a matter of placement in the space of reasons' (79). What is rationally required of us is always open to scrutiny. But 'when a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking', which will be 'rooted in' a certain tradition of thinking (187), our eyes are opened; and then our grasp of the 'detailed layout' of the space of reasons is 'indefinitely subject to refinement' (82).



We are born into our first nature, that of an animal who belongs to the realm of law. Infants are said to be mere animals, although they have a capacity for acquiring a faculty of spontaneity. McDowell says – though I do not see why – that it is ‘not even clearly intelligible to suppose a creature might be born at home in the space of reasons’ (125). But grant that humans acquire conceptual powers after birth, and only in the presence of suitable interaction with their environment (which includes other thinkers). McDowell describes his realism about the space of reasons as a ‘naturalized platonism’, as opposed to a ‘rampant platonism’ that views nature as the realm of law and the space of reasons as supernatural – thereby leading to a withdrawal of our *agency* from nature. (But ‘naturalized platonism’ is expressly *not* ‘a label for a bit of constructive philosophy’.) In defending this view, McDowell notes that ‘nothing occult happens to a human being in ordinary upbringing’ (123). But he infers too quickly that humans are *introduced* into their second nature, in a way that makes it appropriate and illuminating to speak of either learning or the crucial role played by culture and tradition.

The physical changes associated with adolescence, for example, are manifested only given suitable environmental conditions (like a proper diet); and even though such changes occur late in development, they are predominantly determined by the child’s genetic endowment. Similarly, humans may come to acquire their second nature at the age of reason, mainly because that is when the relevant portion of our genetic endowment kicks in. Where the truth lies with respect to rational capacities – between rabid nativism and the view that everything of interest is in the stimuli – is a matter for empirical inquiry. But the history of attempts to formulate nonvapid learning hypotheses that are subsequently confirmed is not inspiring. One does not acquire conceptual capacities in a vacuum. But McDowell’s rhetoric adds little to this truism.

In fact, only at the very end of his lectures does McDowell raise what seems to be the key question: how does it happen that some animals acquire a second nature? He rightly notes that

Mere ignorance about how a human culture might have come on the scene in the first place is hardly a plausible starting point for an argument that initiation into it must actualize an extra-natural potential in human beings (123-4).

But this is no reply to those suspicious of extending our notion of 'nature' beyond the realm of law.

Skeptics will want to be told *how* humans are initiated into their alleged second nature as creatures at home in the (*sui generis*) space of reasons. McDowell gives 'pride of place to the learning of language' (125): we acquire our second nature by acquiring our first language. McDowell thus holds that 'questions about thought are to be approached through language'. But for him, language is not primarily a vehicle of thought, nor is it primarily an instrument of communication. The crucial feature is rather that 'a natural language...serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what' (126).

Chomsky and others have argued, for some time now, that this is a theoretically fruitless conception of language. But perhaps one can explain *something* by appealing to the alleged mastery of various language-games in childhood. The important point is that, so far as I can tell, acquiring a McDowellian language just *is* acquiring whatever it takes to be at home in the space of reasons. So it is unilluminating to be told that humans acquire their second natures by acquiring their natural languages. In the last forty years, we have learned a great deal about the phonology, syntax, and semantics of human languages (in Chomsky's sense of 'language'). But this has not shed appreciable light on how a mere animal comes to be a fully rational being. So in McDowell's sense of 'language', language acquisition is as much a mystery as ever. (And if one abstracts from appeals to tradition, the mere fact that a nonhuman animal does not speak a language in the intuitive sense cannot establish that it lacks a second nature. For those who think that being rational has little to do with being part of a tradition, this will

suggest that McDowell is not entitled to assume that dogs and chimps lack states with conceptual content.)

Many theorists hold that talk of public languages is best construed as a reflection of the fact that (for obvious reasons) the idiolects of a given geographic region are often very similar. McDowell intends to reject this view, when he says that 'a shared language...stands over against all parties to communication in it, with a kind of independence of each of them' (184). For he is 'suspicious of the thought that we can simply credit human individuals' with a sense of how the space of reasons is laid out 'without the benefit of anything like my appeal to initiation into a shared language and thereby into a tradition' (185-6).<sup>19</sup> But it is practically tautologous that *something* like what McDowell has in mind is required – viz., that which lets (allegedly) prerational humans enter the space of reasons. What this has to do with the notion of language – as it figures in, say, Chomsky or Davidson – remains to be seen. In particular, acquiring a Chomskian language may be a precondition for being fully rational, but have little to do with culture and tradition; and even if initiation into a tradition is required for becoming at home in the space of reasons, this may have little to do with language in any intuitive sense of the term.

So we are offered the intriguing idea that humans acquire a second nature in virtue of which they cease to be mere animals. But we are offered no real account of how this takes place. This makes it hard to compare McDowell's position with alternatives. Still, McDowell has initiated what promises to be a fruitful discussion – a discussion that will be greatly enriched by his work. For this significant accomplishment, he deserves thanks and response.<sup>20</sup>

## Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted, page numbers will be references to *Mind and World*.
2. In addition to the six lectures, which have been lightly revised for publication, *M&W* contains a thirty-page essay and postscripts to three lectures. Major points in the postscripts are included in my exposition. But I do not address the essay, which usefully locates Davidson in a space of other responses to the Kantian tension (those of Quine and Rorty) that McDowell rejects.
3. Peter Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (London: Methuen 1966), 47-8, my italics. McDowell takes 'conceptual thought' to be a redundancy; and in a postscript to *M&W*, he is almost explicit that having concepts is constituted by having recognitional capacities (172).
4. Wilfrid Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,' in Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven, eds., *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol.1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1959), 299.
5. Donald Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge,' in Ernest LePore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986), 310; quoted in *M&W* at 14 and 140.
6. See the essays in Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984), especially 125-54.
7. Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1982) 158, 227.
8. Christopher Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1992).
9. Peacocke, 80; quoted in *M&W* at 163.
10. See, e.g., Martin Davies, 'Tacit Knowledge and Semantic Theory: Can a Five Percent Difference Matter,' *Mind*, 96 (1989) 441-62. Davies there develops an Evansian response.
11. Following Sellars, McDowell offers useful discussion of how 'This is F' and 'This seems to be F' are related, especially with respect to color judgments (see, e.g., 29-34). McDowell brings out the subtleties needed to accommodate the thought that, while being red is to be glossed in terms of looking red (to normal viewers in normal conditions), being able to judge that things look red depends on being able to judge that things are red. But because the issues here are subtle, McDowell cannot obviously take for granted (in replying to Peacocke) that one offers a *reason* for believing that something is square by saying 'It looks that way' (165).
12. When Evans argues that experiences have nonconceptual content, he may have been trying to make this tension vivid. As McDowell notes, the arguments are not themselves decisive. But the issue is whether *neo-Fregeans* can assign conceptual content to experiences.

13. See Evans, 7-41. It may be that McDowell's notion of a 'naturalized platonism' (discussed below) is relevant here; though I am unsure on this point.

14. Julian Dodd, 'McDowell and Identity Theories of Truth,' *Analysis*, 55 (1995) 160-65. But Dodd's worry turns out not to be quite the same as mine. And unlike Dodd, I do not think robust theories are obviously unable to account of error.

15. For discussion of some difficulties facing the so-called hidden-indexical theory, see Stephen Schiffer, 'Belief Ascription,' *Journal of Philosophy*, 89 (1992) 499-521. Cf. Peter Ludlow, 'The Hidden-Indexical Theory and the Addicity of "Believes",' *Analysis* (forthcoming).

16. McDowell recognizes that bald naturalists can be motivated, not by a refusal to engage with the Kantian tension, but by a sense that other responses are unsatisfactory. In a review of *M&W*, Fodor defends naturalism motivated in the latter way, suggesting the label 'hirsute naturalism'. See Jerry Fodor, 'Encounters with Trees,' *London Review of Books*, 17 (1995) 10-11. But I will not explore this position here. And like McDowell, I ignore eliminativist positions that conjoin (bald or hirsute) naturalism with a claim that McDowell (and I) would be inclined to accept – viz., that the needed reconstruction within the scientific image is not to be had.

17. See the essays in John Heil and Alfred Mele, eds., *Mental Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993). McDowell says that being at home in the space of reasons 'could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism. This gives enough of a foothold in the realm of law to satisfy any proper respect for modern natural science' (84). And in expanding the notion of 'nature', one is constrained by human first nature (and facts about how children are raised); so 'we are not irresponsibly cutting the concept of nature loose from the realm of law' (108-109). But McDowell does not say which supervenience theses he accepts and rejects.

18. I defend an account of mental causation along these lines in 'Mental Causation for Dualists,' *Mind and Language*, 9 (1994) 336-66.

19. Although equally at odds with Chomsky (who is not mentioned), McDowell mainly objects to Davidson's view that linguistic knowledge shared by speakers in advance of communication is a mere aid to interpretation – and thus dispensable in principle. (See Donald Davidson, 'A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,' in LePore, 433-46; *Inquiries*, 433-46.) I offer a Davidsonian position that avoids this strong claim (and is fully compatible with Chomsky's program), in 'A Defense of Derangement,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 24 (1994) 95-118.

20. My thanks to Susan Dwyer and Tony Atkinson for helpful discussion. I would also like to acknowledge financial support from SSHRCC and FCAR.