

# TAKING THE WORLD IN

by

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## Abstract

It is natural to think that in order to learn about the world from perceptual experience, a person does not need to *do* anything. All that is required is that she has her eyes open, or her ears unplugged, so that she can receive sensory input from without. On the basis of this input, she can form justified empirical beliefs. This way of thinking about experience is central to many philosophical views about perception. It is my contention that the approach is mistaken, and that in fact it cannot explain how perceptual experience justifies belief. This dissertation argues, in contrast, that perceiving is not something that merely happens to us, but something we do. On my view, experience is a source of justification in virtue of being an activity which aims at knowledge.

In Chapter 1, I present the topic of the dissertation and provide an analytical overview. Chapter 2 discusses and criticizes John McDowell's account of perceptual experience. I argue that McDowell is faced with a dilemma, as his original account mischaracterizes perceptual experience, and his later, revised account cannot explain how perception justifies empirical belief. The solution is to deny a claim common to both: that in experience we are *passive*. In contrast, I argue that experiencing is a full-fledged activity that is teleologically structured. In Chapter 3, I begin to substantiate my position by drawing on Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. Chapter 4 supplements this claim by appeal to some features of Alva Noë's enactive view of perception. The resulting account portrays experience as an activity that has knowledge as its end. This explains how experience justifies belief, for it shows how perceptual knowledge cannot but be the result of experiencing going well for one. Chapter 5 argues that perceptual activity can take different forms, varying in

complexity, as one aims at knowing features of one's environment. I argue, however, that keeping track of an object is the fundamental mode of perceptual activity. I conclude the dissertation by considering two objections to my account.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

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## 1.1 Preliminary Remarks

A great deal of our knowledge of the world comes from perceptual experience, or in one way or another depends upon it. We know that the soup is ready by tasting it, that the sweater is soft by feeling it, that the milk has gone sour by smelling it, that the violinist played an E by hearing it, and that the mailman is here by seeing him arrive. In each of these cases, we might pursue this knowledge for some other aim. We might taste the soup in order to decide whether to serve it to our guests. However, we can also inquire strictly in order to gain knowledge about our surroundings with no other aim in mind. We might taste the soup just in order to know what it tastes like. In doing this, we do something beyond meeting our local goals. We come to know things about the world. In doing so, we come to know our world. This, I think, makes us different from other animals, whose capacity for perception is always directed at some other goal, such as satisfying hunger, thirst, or finding a comfortable place to rest, and never simply at the goal of coming to know the world. In perceiving, we can aim to know, while they can only aim to do.

A person does not have knowledge if she just happens to believe something true. She must have the right kind of warrant if her belief is to count as knowledge. To have knowledge, she must be justified in holding that belief. And being justified entails that she can justify her beliefs when prompted. In the case of empirical beliefs, justification ends with perceptual experience. One cites one's seeing, or having seen, that things are as one believes them to be. To borrow an apt phrase from W.V.O. Quine, our justification ends with the 'tribunal of experience'.<sup>1</sup> That I saw the border collie chase the sheep into its pen is reason for my believing that the border collie

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<sup>1</sup>W. V. O. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', *The Philosophical Review* 60:1 (January 1951), p. 41.

chased the sheep into the pen. It is through perceptual experience that I come to have this knowledge. However, just how we are to understand the way in which perceptual experience plays this role is the topic of much philosophical contention.

In perceiving, we come to know something ‘other’: the so-called ‘external world’. And the nature of its externality introduces philosophical difficulties. We need to understand the objects of perception in a way that captures their otherness to our minds without characterizing that otherness in a way that makes it mysterious how such things could be present to our minds in experience. With the advent of modern science, the world has come to be seen as a physical system, the operations of which are in principle fully explicable by natural scientific laws. These laws make no reference to phenomena such as reasons, justification or rationality. The latter concepts seem to belong to our mental life, which takes place in a normative domain. What it is to be in such states as knowledge and belief requires description and explanation in normative terms, terms that invoke such notions of responsiveness to reasons and justification. There is thus often a tension present in thinking about perception. On the one hand, we want to conceive of ourselves as part of nature, part of that very same order that natural science aims to explain, and hence we aspire to see perception as a causal process explicable in scientific terms. On the other hand, we want to see perception as a source of knowledge and justification, as a way of responding to reasons and being justified by those reasons, and this seems to suggest perception cannot be portrayed simply as a transaction within nature. This tension requires resolution. In aiming to resolve it, philosophers fall prey to various temptations, which often lead to unsatisfactory positions.

Some philosophers are tempted to think of the mind as an enclosed space, one

which operates according to principles entirely separate from those that govern the world outside it. René Descartes famously characterized the mind and the material world as two different kinds of substance, and was accordingly left with an utterly unsatisfactory explanation of their interaction.<sup>2</sup> However, one need not think of mind and matter as wholly distinct to find oneself with profound problems understanding how perception can be both a natural, causal process, and one that issues in the justification of belief. As we shall see in Chapter 2, by thinking of the distinction between mind and world as one involving different orders of explanation, and locating perception within the causal order, the anti-Cartesian philosopher Donald Davidson ends up making the relation between mind and world a tenuous one.

On the other end of the spectrum, we find philosophers impatient with the idea that the relation of mind and world demands that we acknowledge two orders of being, or two orders of explanation. They prefer to ‘naturalize’ the mind, either by showing that all talk of the mental, the intentional, and the normative can be reduced to talk about phenomena, the doings of which are fully explicable by natural science, or by arguing that, since no such reduction is possible, we should simply eliminate reference to mental, intentional, or normative notions from our theories of reality. That such notions are not scientifically tractable is evidence of the unreality of the phenomena they purport to characterize, so the proper conclusion is that such notions ultimately pick out nothing real. Or so it is argued. Naturalistically-minded philosophers from Hume to Quine and beyond have vigorously pursued such reductionist and eliminativist strategies.<sup>3</sup> Though bolstered by their apparent alliance

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<sup>2</sup>See Mediation 6 in René Descartes, ‘Meditations on First Philosophy’, in: John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, editors, *Descartes Selected Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup>See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd edition (Oxford

with natural science, such views risk doing such violence to our conception of ourselves that it is difficult to see how we could ever authentically accept them as true.

Some philosophers try to resolve the difficulty by holding that the perceptual process (a) belongs to nature and thus does not involve the operation of rational capacities, but (b) nonetheless presents the perceiver with information about the world. This information takes the form of ‘non-conceptual content’, but is nonetheless capable of justifying beliefs, or at least contributing to their justification. We will see, however, that such views cannot meet the criteria of adequacy they set for themselves. Fortunately, recourse to non-conceptual content is not our only option. The alternative is to think of experience as somehow informed by rationality.

The latter strategy is my starting point. In Chapter 2, I begin with John McDowell’s account of experience in *Mind and World* and its revision in his paper, ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’.<sup>4</sup> I choose McDowell as my source, as his goal is to render intelligible the justificatory relation between experience and knowledge. McDowell aims to accomplish this by drawing on the work of Immanuel Kant and arguing that the involvement of rationality in perception need not presuppose that the mind is a closed sphere or otherwise threaten the possibility that the deliverances of perception impose an external constraint on thought. On McDowell’s view, thought can be genuinely constrained by the world in experience in a way that involves the operation of the perceiver’s rational capacities. His view is supposed to dissolve the apparent chasm between the causal and the rational domains, as perceptual experience can thus provide justification for belief while representing a genuine external constraint

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UK: Oxford University Press, 1978) and W. V. O. Quine, ‘Epistemology Naturalized’, in: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York NY: Columbia University Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup>See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) and John McDowell, ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, in: *Having the world in view: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

on our beliefs.

The view I argue for in this dissertation endorses most of what McDowell has to say, but not all. Though the above diagnosis of the difficulties in understanding perception is much influenced by his arguments in *Mind and World*, my position is different from McDowell's in an important respect. I hold that McDowell ultimately fails to explain the justificatory relation between experience and belief. The source of this failure is in the way he characterizes the involvement of conceptual capacities in experience as *passive*. For McDowell, rational (or conceptual) capacities are drawn into play *passively* in experience. This must be so, he thinks, in order to understand how experience imposes an external constraint on thought. While I agree with McDowell that perceptual experience must be characterized so as to make sense of external constraint, I argue that this can be secured even if we conceive of experience as active. Moreover, I further argue that we *must* conceive of experience as an activity if we are to rescue the idea that experience can serve as a source of knowledge. On my view, experiencing is something we do, not merely something which happens to us. We bridge the gap between mind and world not by letting the world affect us, but by *interacting* with it. Perceptual experience is an activity through which we *engage* the world in order to come to know something about it. Experiencing, I claim in Chapter 4, is the fundamental form of empirical inquiry.

Despite irreducibly employing normative notions, my view, like McDowell's own, describes a natural feature of human beings. My account falls under the guise of what

Michael Thompson calls ‘natural historical judgement’. Natural historical judgements take the form of assertions about life-forms, rather than individual living creatures: ‘*The wolf hunts in the spring*’.<sup>5</sup> They are not statistical generalizations, but rather normative facts about kinds of living beings.<sup>6</sup> For a human being, knowledge-gathering is such an activity. Exercising one’s perceptual capacities, I argue in chapter 4, is a means of gathering knowledge. What is crucial here is that ‘The human being gathers knowledge about its environment’ is a *natural* fact: perceiving is a way of gathering such knowledge. Thus, ‘The human being employs its perceptual capacities to gather knowledge about its environment’ is a natural-historical judgement about human beings that states a natural fact about the operations of rationality in human life. In this manner, we can see how natural facts about human beings can describe rational capacities, without having to appeal to something non-natural or supernatural.

When I say that human beings ‘employ’ perceptual capacities, I mean this to be understood actively, as something human beings *do*. The advantage of such a view is its introduction of a teleological order, whose end, properly conceived, is knowledge. In experiencing, one cannot aim at belief without aiming at true belief, and thus at knowing something about one’s surroundings. As I mentioned above, I argue that the right way to think of experience for human beings is in terms of inquiry. Thus, the relevant natural historical judgements about the acquisition of knowledge in perception are: ‘The human being gathers knowledge by inquiring into its surroundings by the use of its senses.’ In Chapter 5, I argue that there are various activities constitutive of experiencing that fit such descriptions. What enables us to

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<sup>5</sup>Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 64–67.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

know something about our environment, on my view, is our *bodily* interaction with the world in time. Experiencing is thus not a matter of entertaining states that are ‘in’ us, *experiences*, or impressions, if you will, but is rather a temporally extended activity that has its teleological end in knowledge.

In this dissertation, I aim to provide the groundwork for thinking of experience as an activity and furthermore, for thinking of the justificatory force of experience as flowing from the teleological order of this activity. I do this in four chapters.

## 1.2 Analytical Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 introduces the problematic of the dissertation by reconstructing and criticizing McDowell’s views in *Mind and World* and ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’. McDowell argues that the content of experience is conceptual in kind and thus unified by a capacity for rational thought. I agree with McDowell that conceptual capacities must be involved in experience in order to make sense of experience’s role in acquiring knowledge. However, I argue that McDowell’s account has insufficient resources to explain how experience justifies belief once he revises his view in his paper ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’. I end by arguing that the relation between experience and judgement should be conceived in terms of a teleological relation between experience and knowledge.

In Chapter 3, I seek to develop the idea that experience’s conceptual character already implies activity on part of the perceiver. To this end, I consider various interpretations of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations. After discussing and rejecting the interpretations of Saul Kripke, Robert Brandom, and Crispin Wright, I end by endorsing a version of McDowell’s interpretation of Wittgenstein. This

interpretation entails, I argue, that conceptual competence involves *practical* skills. Given that one must be engaged with the world conceptually in order to make world-revealing content available for judgement, then such engagement involves actively exercising a sort of practical skill.

In Chapter 4, I develop my account of such skills by drawing on Alva Noë's work in *Action in Perception*. I argue that the perceiver's possession of the relevant skills equips her with a capacity to interact with objects in perception, which in turn affords her perceptual experience that she can understand. Experience, on my view, is simply an exercise of the skill to employ one's sensory capacities, a skill that, when all goes well, discloses the world to one. The successful exercise of this skill just is, e.g., seeing. Experiencing is an inquiry whose end is truth. I then consider and respond to an objection from Hubert Dreyfus. I end this chapter by suggesting that my view is in harmony with C.S. Peirce's conception of truth as the end of inquiry.

In Chapter 5, I further develop my position by discussing varieties of perceptual inquiry, beginning with some of a demanding kind and moving to progressively simpler forms. I do this in order to argue that while there are many kinds of perceptual activity, there is one which is fundamental: keeping track of an object in perception.

In the final chapter, I briefly anticipate two objections. Though a full rebuttal would require more discussion than is possible within the limits of this dissertation, I sketch the outline of my response. The first objection is that, if my view were correct, then it seems that perception, strictly speaking, is the outcome of a process whose aim was to gain some particular bit of knowledge. And this seems clearly false. In perceiving, one gains knowledge at every moment. However, I show I am not committed to the objector's interpretation of my view. Knowledge should be

conceived in terms of what Sebastian Rödl calls an infinite end.<sup>7</sup> In perception, we do not aim at particular bits of knowledge, but rather we always-already aim to take in the world as whole. Our knowledge is thus not made up of individual, independent beliefs, but is rather a systematic whole. This makes the end of perception akin to an end such as health, the kind of end that is not exhausted by its realization.

The second objection challenges my claim that tracking an object is the fundamental perceptual activity. It is not only objects that are made available to us in perception. We see smoke, water, and other substances which are not to be understood in terms of singular units or particulars. If tracking is fundamental to perception, we need an account of what is involved in being perceptually aware of such non-singular substances, since tracking seems to require a particular to track. I suggest that we will need to re-think the role of tracking in such cases.

By addressing such issues, albeit briefly, I hope to show that my view is not only defensible, but offers the prospect of fruitful development through further inquiry. I conclude with an overview of my account.

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<sup>7</sup>Sebastian Rödl, *Self Consciousness* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 34–35.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Experience as a Source of Knowledge**

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## 2.1 Introduction

In *Mind and World*, McDowell maintains that the content of human perceptual experience is conceptual in character.<sup>1</sup> He argues for this view as the sole plausible alternative to two equally unsatisfactory options. The first endorses what Wilfrid Sellars has described as the ‘Myth of the Given’, a position that involves commitment to what Sellars and McDowell take to be two inconsistent claims: (i) that experience is non-conceptual in content, and (ii) that experience is such as to justify belief.<sup>2</sup> The second option, whose principal proponent is Davidson, avoids the inconsistency by denying (ii), holding instead that the only thing that can justify a belief is another belief.<sup>3</sup> Thus Davidson circumvents the mythical Given by denying that perceptual experience is a source of the rational justification of belief. On his view, justification can only be a matter of the fit between beliefs. Thus Davidson comes to embrace a ‘coherentist’ view of justification. McDowell’s alternative, in contrast, rejects (i). He insists that we can retain the idea that beliefs can be justified by perceptual experience so long as we recognize, with Kant, that experience is conceptual in character and hence fit to stand in justificatory relations to cognitive states.<sup>4</sup>

In *Mind and World*, McDowell writes as if the conceptual content of perceptual experience is propositional in form. Justification requires that what does the justifying stands in certain logical relations to what it justifies. So experiences must have a form that enables them to stand in inferential or evidential relations to belief.

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<sup>1</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>2</sup>See Wilfrid Sellars, ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’, in: *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York NY: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp. 130–132. However, the term ‘Myth of the Given’ shows up only in that article at p. 140.

<sup>3</sup>See Donald Davidson, ‘A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge’, in: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 142–146.

<sup>4</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998) A51–B75.

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Moreover, it is McDowell's view that standard cases of perception yield knowledge non-inferentially.<sup>5</sup> For example, walking from my home to campus, my attention is drawn to a red bird on a neighbor's terrace. By turning my head, I see that there is a cardinal perched there. I thereby come to judge that there is a cardinal on my neighbor's terrace and if asked to support that judgement, my justification is that I see the cardinal. My belief that there is a cardinal on the terrace is justified by what I see and not by an argument from premises about appearances to conclusions about what is the case.<sup>6</sup> It is thus crucial to McDowell's position that experience and belief can have one and the same content. Since belief is a propositional attitude, the content of the experience had better be propositional in kind.

Interestingly, in his recent writings on perception, McDowell renounces the idea that experiential content is propositional.<sup>7</sup> His current view holds that experience is conceptual but not propositional. Experience presents us with conceptual content structured otherwise than propositionally. This new view is surprising in that McDowell gives up precisely the feature of his account of experience that made possible a perspicuous explanation of how beliefs sourced in experience are justified without inference by an external reality. In what follows, I aim to reconstruct the motivation of McDowell's views, old and new, in order to reveal an enduring difficulty in the way McDowell articulates the justificatory force of experience, a difficulty that in my view affects both versions. In both accounts, the key to understanding the justificatory force of experience is a proper characterization of its given content. That characterization is supposed to disclose the possibility of experience playing a substantive

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<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', p. 270.

<sup>6</sup>See pp. 416–417 and 432–433 in John McDowell, 'Knowledge by Hearsay', in: *Meaning, Knowledge & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>7</sup>McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', p. 258.

epistemic role. This, I take it, is the core of many strands of empiricism that offer an account of the foundations of knowledge grounded in the deliverances of experience.<sup>8</sup>

In my view, McDowell's strategy here is mistaken. In revealing the weakness of his approach, I aim to carve out another way of conceiving the justificatory relation between experience and belief that does not rely on a feature of experiential content to capture the source of experience's justificatory force. No conception of experiential content can furnish such an account on its own. It can do so, as I shall argue throughout this dissertation, only in conjunction with an account of the practical dimension to experience. Justification does not flow from the content of experience, but rather requires the exercise of a capacity on the part of the experiencing agent, a capacity that equips her to settle beliefs about empirical matters non-inferentially. Such an account recommends a very different conception of experience, one that is not, as it seems to be for McDowell, content-centered in any episodic sense. Indeed, as I shall argue, understanding justification requires a conception of experience as an *activity*, something whose end, properly conceived, is knowledge.

But before I attempt to develop such thoughts, we should look in more detail at the strengths and weaknesses of McDowell's position.

## 2.2 The Myth of the Given

In *Mind and World*, when McDowell maintains that experience has a conceptual structure, he means that experience contains propositional content already apt for

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<sup>8</sup>McDowell is no traditional foundationalist who thinks that the deliverances of experience serve as a sole foundation for knowledge. On the contrary, McDowell's epistemology draws on Neurathian ideas of coherence. See McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 81. However, McDowell does endorse what he calls a 'minimal empiricism'. This amounts to the idea that experience 'must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are' without committing to the idea that experience is the material from which all knowledge is constructed. See *ibid.*, p. xii.

judgement. To gain knowledge from experience, one only needs to judge that things are as they are presented to one. If experience is already composed of judgeable content, there need be no further discussion of how experience can stand in rational relation to beliefs. In this, McDowell holds that experience has the conceptual structure it does without an active contribution from the experiencing agent. As we saw, McDowell contrasts his view with two others. On the one hand, we have the traditional empiricist view, held by, e.g., sense-datum theorists, that experience is non-conceptual yet justificatory. On the other, we have Davidson's coherentism, which holds that experience plays a causal rather than justificatory role.

One view that McDowell shares with his opponents, and with most philosophers writing on these topics, is that perceptual experience is fundamentally passive.<sup>9</sup> We can decide to open our eyes, but, having opened them, we cannot in any substantive sense decide what we see. We can ignore what we see, turn our heads, plug our ears, lie to ourselves about it, or fully endorse what experience gives us, but we cannot control what we see. In experience, something *other* impresses itself upon us. Regardless of how we develop this thought, it is *prima facie* attractive to link the passivity of experience to its epistemic role. It is precisely because experience is something outside of our control, that it can anchor our thinking by serving as the terminus of justification. When asked why I believe that there was a cardinal on the terrace, what better answer could I give than that I saw it there? Experience enabled the fact to impress itself upon me. Something like this thought is central to the empiricist tradition.

To a substantial segment of that tradition, it has seemed that to make sense of the passivity of experience we must hold that experiential content is non-conceptual in

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<sup>9</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 10.

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kind. On this view, concepts are something that we *contribute* to experience after its reception, when we organize and interpret that which experience has given us.<sup>10</sup> While seemingly innocent, this pervasive conception of experience in fact undermines the possibility of explaining how the deliverances of experience can play an anchoring role at all. McDowell persuasively argues it is a short road from conceiving experience as non-conceptual to the view that experience is epistemically inept. Following Sellars, he argues that all such views are committed to a myth: the Myth of the Given.<sup>11</sup>

For Sellars and McDowell, experiential content can only justify beliefs if the two can stand in rational relations, if there can be rational friction between them, to put it metaphorically. Justification looks like a relation between propositional contents, or something like them. In holding that experiential content is non-conceptual, the advocate of the Myth (who I shall call the myth-believer in what follows) thereby preempts the very possibility of rational friction. She has, in effect, conceived the given content such that it cannot serve a justificatory role. The point can be explained in a non-technical manner. In answer to the question of why I formed the belief I did about the cardinal I encountered the other day, the myth believer will point to the supposed Given in my experience. By so doing she seeks to determine a content present in my experience that is such as to justify a belief about the presence of a cardinal. But how are we to understand this? If what is presented to me does not have a conceptual shape, it is unclear how I can be justified in forming a conceptually

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<sup>10</sup>Historical examples can be found in the works of John Locke and David Hume. See especially the section on simple ideas in John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Niddich (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1975) II.5.1 to II.5.3 and Hume, *Treatise* I.i.1. Locke and Hume do not speak of concepts, but of 'ideas'. For examples in the analytic tradition, see C.I. Lewis, *Mind and the World Order: Outline of a Theory of Knowledge* (New York NY: Dover, 1956) and Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 1–6. Lewis's is especially telling, as he is alive to the very difficulty I am about to discuss (see Lewis, *Mind and the World Order: Outline of a Theory of Knowledge*, p. 59).

<sup>11</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 8.

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determinate belief on its basis. Given the conceptual inarticulateness of the given, it is unclear how exactly it is supposed to determine one belief rather than another. Why, in a justificatory rather than a causal sense, *should* I believe that there is a cardinal on the terrace rather than something else? The myth-believer's non-conceptual content is just not of the right sort to answer this question. Pointing to some bit of the Given can at most serve, as McDowell likes to say, as an exculpation rather than a reason.<sup>12</sup> For all the Given can determine for me, there could be a blue jay, an owl, or a pig in front of me, supposing we can even make sense of there being *something*, a this. In fact, the 'this' points to darkness.<sup>13</sup> The myth-believer is thus in the grip of a picture which in fact fails to contain a plausible account of justification. As Sellars rightly notes, the position is ultimately incoherent.<sup>14</sup> It embodies the claim that experience saddles one with content that justifies belief, but no content so conceived could justify anything.

Although the idea of the Given is incoherent, the motivation that inclines one to such a position is perfectly understandable. The myth-believer seems forced to hold that experience is non-conceptual in order to sustain the thought that experience is passive. For experience to be passive, she supposes, it cannot be the product of an activity of the intellect. But the deployment of conceptual capacities would be such an intellectual activity *par excellence*. If experience is to provide constraint from outside one's subjectivity, then concepts cannot be already in play in experience. The problem Sellars reveals, however, is that purely objective content – content that lacks any sort of subjective contribution – cannot be intelligible to a rational subject.

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<sup>12</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup>McDowell has a comprehensive discussion of this point in the context of Wittgenstein's private language argument in John McDowell, 'One Strand in the Private Language Argument', in: *Mind, Value & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 283.

<sup>14</sup>Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', p. 132.

As a result, the myth-believer appears trapped in an untenable position. Purely objective non-conceptual content leaves justification unintelligible, but insisting on a subjective contribution undermines the idea of external constraint. There must be a way out. McDowell aims to provide a way. Following Kant and Sellars, he argues that concepts can be passively involved in experience.<sup>15</sup> It is arguable that Sellars himself had such a view, where experience already contains claims which are conceptual and propositional.<sup>16</sup> *That there is a cardinal on the terrace* is such a claim, which can justify my belief *that there is a cardinal on the terrace*. This means that we can conceive of conceptual capacities as already operative in experience, where ‘operative’ marks a passive involvement that does not threaten the fundamental idea of givenness – the idea that experience is a matter of receptivity, of passively receiving content. It is central to McDowell’s view in *Mind and World* that to reject the Myth of the Given is not to reject the very idea of given empirical content.<sup>17</sup> Rather, his aim is simply to attack a particular popular, yet flawed, conception of the form that content takes.

### 2.3 Davidson’s Coherentism

At this stage, we can only interpret McDowell as having established a conditional: If experience justifies belief, then experience must be conceptual. As things stand, it is unclear whether we should assent to the antecedent. To persuade us that we should, McDowell offers a critique of Davidson’s coherentist epistemology. Davidson does not

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<sup>15</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup>Sellars, ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’, p. 190.

<sup>17</sup>I mark the distinction between given empirical content as conceived by the myth-believer and given empirical content as conceived by McDowell by capitalizing the former. Thus, ‘the Given’ refers to non-conceptual empirical content as conceived by the myth-believer and ‘the given’ refers to the content of experience as conceived by McDowell.

believe experience can justify belief – as he puts it, the idea of a rational confrontation with reality is absurd.<sup>18</sup> The deliverances of experience have a merely causal impact on the mind, and causal relations are not justificatory. Justificatory relations hold only between propositional contents, and thus, Davidson concludes, only beliefs can justify beliefs.<sup>19</sup> It follows that the justification of any particular belief can issue only from its coherence with a system of beliefs. Experience is passive – causally passive – and justification is secured by relations internal to the realm of belief. But, while avoiding the Myth, Davidson does not address a prior concern that is a central issue for the myth-believer and McDowell, together with a large contingent of the empiricist tradition. For it is unclear that coherentism can explain how the world external to thought both anchors belief and determines its content.

Davidson has a straightforward answer to the anchor challenge: thought is anchored to the world causally, not rationally. But his answer to the question about content-determination is not so straightforward. Davidson's coherentism must make plausible the idea that human beings are genuinely in touch with their surroundings in a non-trivial manner.<sup>20</sup> Davidson attempts to restore a non-trivial connection by treating it as a pre-supposition for the very possibility of interpretation. It is part of the constitutive ideal of rationality that interpreters must assume that those whom they interpret have largely true beliefs.<sup>21</sup> This means that, on the whole, if one speaks meaningfully, one must be for the most part *right* about the way things stand with

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<sup>18</sup>Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory', p. 142.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>20</sup>That the world causes our beliefs is trivial for these purposes, for it merely asserts a link that is not in itself contentful. Rorty and Davidson share this conception of experience. See Ibid., p. 143 and Richard Rorty, 'Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth', in: *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers, Volume 1* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 138–139.

<sup>21</sup>Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory', p. 138.

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the world. Davidson takes this argument to show that beliefs are world-involving.<sup>22</sup> McDowell counters, however, that Davidson begs the question at issue. In helping himself to the concept of belief Davidson simply assumes what he is supposed to prove: the possibility of empirical content. McDowell objects:

But the Myth of the Given has a deeper motivation, in the thought that if spontaneity is not subject to rational constraint from outside, as Davidson's coherentist position insists that it is not, then we cannot make it intelligible to ourselves how exercises of spontaneity can represent the world at all. [...] [We] can have empirical content in our picture only if we can acknowledge that thoughts and intuitions are rationally connected. By rejecting that, Davidson undermines his right to the idea that his purportedly reassuring argument starts from, the idea of a body of beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

While the possibility of interpretation secures that one's beliefs are on the whole correct, the argument presupposes that beliefs have content in the sense we are looking to explain. For Davidson, the source of that content resides in causal relations between thinkers and the world.<sup>24</sup> But, McDowell maintains, no such relation could furnish content. Thus Davidson merely assumes that content is in play, without having an explanation of how this can be so. At most he could concoct an account of how causal impacts come to be associated with mental content given proper training. But such a response would ultimately be circular. It would seem that content would have already to be operative for the proper associations to form, while the account was supposed to explain how content gets there to begin with. Davidson's interpretation-based explanation of thought's relation to the world thus comes too late to address

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<sup>22</sup>We can conceive this as an upshot of Donald Davidson, 'Radical Interpretation', in: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 137.

<sup>23</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, pp. 17–18.

<sup>24</sup>Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory', p. 143.

McDowell's concern. Coherentism doesn't just leave beliefs 'spinning in a void', as McDowell aptly puts it, it leaves us without a concept of belief at all.<sup>25</sup>

Thus by refusing to credit experience with conceptual content, we undercut the possibility of thought's bearing on the world. McDowell's solution is deceptively simple: rather than continue on the see-saw, oscillating between coherentism and the Myth of the Given, we must recognize that experience is already conceptual. Thereby we affirm a central Kantian tenet:

Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. [...] The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can cognition arise.<sup>26</sup>

From this quote, we can see that Kant had a full view of the difficulties facing us. If experience is conceived as separate from the deployment of conceptual capacities, then we risk rendering intuitions blind, unable to make a contribution to thinking. But if experience makes no such contribution, we risk rendering thought empty, as that which is blind cannot furnish content. Kant's solution is to conceive of experience as involving the collaboration of the understanding with intuition, thus portraying intuitions as already conceptual, governed by the very same unity operative in the understanding. Spontaneous thought is paradigmatic of an exercise of the understanding, where we actively generate thought. Receptive experience shares with spontaneity the organization bestowed by the understanding. The difference lies in how the unity conferred by the understanding is deployed. In the case of receptivity, it is deployed passively, not actively. On this point, McDowell is a faithful follower of Kant.

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<sup>25</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, pp. 14–15.

<sup>26</sup>Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A51–B75.

## 2.4 Some Crucial Features of McDowell's Position

McDowell develops this Kantian picture by denying that the experience of rational beings shares a common core with the experience of lower animals. Human beings are transformed by the acquisition of conceptual capacities. This is not the sort of transformation that a house undergoes when a second floor is added, but rather the sort manifest in going from flour and water to bread, where transformation produces something altogether novel that cannot be conceived as a mere totality of the original ingredients. Experience informed by concepts is a qualitatively different mode of engagement with reality than the kinds of perceptual sensitivity to the environment enjoyed by animals that do not possess concepts. Human experience is wholly rational, not partly rational and partly animal.<sup>27</sup> It is an aspect of the 'second nature' human beings acquire in the course of their maturation and education.<sup>28</sup>

This sort of thinking might suggest we should see human beings as rational spheres

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<sup>27</sup>Another way to describe McDowell's position is to call his conception of rationality 'transformative' and contrast it with an 'additive conception'. For a discussion of this distinction, see Matthew Boyle, 'Additive theories of rationality: A critique', *European Journal of Philosophy* (Forthcoming), (URL: <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:8641840>).

<sup>28</sup>There is a temptation to think that there must be a common factor in the experience of human beings and non-human animals. Perception is a natural process that involves a causal impingement upon sense organs. Such a causal process must sit squarely in the domain of scientific explanation. Hence it is natural to think that we can tell parallel stories for human and non-human animal perception, stories that will diverge only at the point when human beings apply concepts to interpret the deliverances of experience that lower animals confront non-conceptually. McDowell suggests this view issues from an underwhelming scientism. The acquisition of second nature transforms not just what human beings can do with the objects of experience; it transforms what the objects of experience are. McDowell's opponents will respond that he is therefore unable to countenance the continuity between animal and rational selves – human beings are, after all, animals. But in McDowell's picture, there is *genetic* continuity between human beings and other animals, and this is all that is required to account for what we share with the non-rational residents of our world – we share a beginning. Human beings can transform this beginning but non-rational animals cannot. See lectures IV and VI of McDowell, *Mind and World*. For an extended and illuminating discussion of *Bildung* and its significance see David Bakhurst, *Formation of Reason* (Oxford UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 8–14, and David Bakhurst, 'Freedom and Second Nature', *Mind, Culture, and Activity* 19:2 (2012), pp. 175–176.

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impinged upon by a non-rational reality. Even if experience is such as to justify belief, surely the world itself lies outside the rational sphere. We found such a picture operative in Donald Davidson's conception of experience, and as we will see when we consider McDowell's new view, Davidson interprets McDowell as holding such an account. But this mischaracterizes McDowell's conception. McDowell's position can be brought into view by starting with the picture we find in Davidson, and then erasing the outer boundary between the rational and the world as such. For McDowell, the conceptual goes all the way out to the facts, that is, to the world as it is. The world is structured so as to be a possible object of thought and experience, and in virtue of this structure, states of affairs (facts) can serve as the justification for belief. The world, so conceived, is Tractarian: it is all that is the case.<sup>29</sup>

This may be too idealistic a position to take seriously, suggesting that the world is composed of the stuff of thoughts. But while there is certainly an idealistic slant to McDowell's thinking, he is not committed to so pernicious a form of idealism.<sup>30</sup> McDowell does not think that the world is constituted by thought. He merely argues that it is *thinkable*.<sup>31</sup> Its structure is such that it can be the object of judgement that truly captures how things are.

It is crucial to McDowell's view that in thought and experience mind and world can be at one. We can experience what is the case. And we can think what is the case. He is therefore at pains to resist arguments, such as the infamous argument from illusion, which conclude that experience must necessarily stop somewhere short of the facts. Such arguments maintain that since cases of veridical experience (e.g. seeing

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<sup>29</sup>McDowell endorses this position at McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 27.

<sup>30</sup>John McDowell, 'Conceptual Capacities in Perception', in: *Having the World in View* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), pp. 143–144.

<sup>31</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 28.

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an elephant in the garden) and non-veridical experience (e.g. merely seeming to see an elephant in the garden, as a result of illusion or hallucination) can be subjectively indistinguishable from the point of view of the perceiver, we must conclude that in both cases the perceptual object is the same (i.e. an appearance that there is an elephant in the garden). Thus experience can take us only so far as this kind of object, only as far as awareness of appearances. In the veridical case, some further criterion must be met if the subject is to count as having perceptual knowledge of how things are (e.g. the appearance must have appropriate causal origins).<sup>32</sup> And that further criterion points to something over and beyond what can be given in experience itself.

McDowell calls this view the ‘highest common factor’ conception of experience (where what is contained in experience itself is the highest common factor between seeing that things are thus and so (the good case) and things only appearing to be thus and so (the bad case)).<sup>33</sup> He categorically rejects this view, embracing instead a ‘disjunctivist’ approach that denies that the content of experience is the same in veridical and non-veridical cases, even if the difference cannot be discerned by the subject of experience herself.<sup>34</sup> For McDowell, in the successful case, experience stops nowhere short of facts and this is sufficient for the justification of belief. I come to know there is an elephant in the garden because I see that there is. Seeing that  $p$  justifies my believing that  $p$ , not in virtue of that which my seeing shares with an

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<sup>32</sup>For an example of such a view see Tyler Burge’s recent criticism of McDowell in Tyler Burge, ‘Perceptual Entitlement’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67:3 (2003), p. 536. Burge’s failure, as McDowell persuasively demonstrates in his reply, is to think that illusory and veridical cases of experience both equally serve as reason for belief. As we will see, such a thought is central to highest-common-factor views of experience. For McDowell’s response see John McDowell, *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge* (Milwaukee WI: Marquette University Press, 2011), pp. 36–39.

<sup>33</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 113.

<sup>34</sup>John McDowell, ‘Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge’, in: *Meaning, Knowledge & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 385–389.

illusion that *p* plus some other justificatory ingredient; my seeing takes me all the way to the facts.

McDowell's opponent is likely to protest, claiming that the idea that there is a common core to experience in the veridical and non-veridical variants is beyond doubt. Surely, the way things look in the two cases is the same. It *looks* like there is an elephant loose in the backyard whether one is hallucinating or perceiving the results of the local zoo-keeper's forgetting to lock the elephant pen. How could there be more to the content of experience than how things look in these cases? It follows that how things look doesn't take you to how things are without the addition of some extra epistemic ingredient.

McDowell resists this argument. Of course there is a sense in which it looks the same to the subject in both cases. That is, in both cases how things look inclines the subject to make the same judgement, correct in one case, incorrect in the other. But there is no \*look\* that is the same in both cases. On this point, McDowell invokes Sellars, who argues that *looks talk* is not prior to, but dependent on, *is talk*.<sup>35</sup> When one utters 'It looks like there is a cardinal on the terrace', one does not refer to a sensation (an appearance) shared between veridical and non-veridical instances of seeing a cardinal on the terrace. Rather, the looks judgement is simply a hedged form of the assertion, 'There is a cardinal on the terrace.' It presents the claim, but withholds endorsement of it.<sup>36</sup> Thus, if I say that it looks like there is an elephant in the garden, I am expressing my reluctance to endorse that which experience seemingly presents – a claim about the presence of an elephant. The bad cases are not those where we *lack* some extra justificatory ingredient that supposedly

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<sup>35</sup>Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', pp. 146–148.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

supplements a shared content with the good cases, but rather those where withholding judgment would be (or would have been) appropriate. It is not that content common to good and bad cases serves as a basis on which good cases can be constructed by adding further reasons. Rather, the bad cases are just that: defective cases, failures to perceive. What is central to disjunctivism is that it portrays a capacity to perceive as a fallible faculty and that fallibility can only be understood against the background of its proper functioning.<sup>37</sup>

Disjunctivism thus tracks a familiar distinction between experience enabling one to see an elephant, and experience being impeded (by, e.g., strong anesthetics, hallucinogenic drugs, and so on) so that one merely hallucinates an elephant. ‘Seeing’, in typical English usage, is a success verb denoting the proper functioning of a receptive capacity – seeing that *p* goes straight to the facts.<sup>38</sup> Assenting to something ‘looking like’ *p* merely signals a negation or privation of this capacity. When we see that things are thus and so, we do not require any extra justificatory grounds for settling a belief about what we see – we form the belief without inference and what we see in itself justifies us in doing so. The view thus enables us to capture what the myth-believer wanted to capture: Experience is passive, and it justifies without inference. On such an account, experience can serve the sort of foundational role that empiricists typically ask it to serve.

This brings us to the central and most contentious hallmark of McDowell’s original view. Since experience must be such as to exhibit the same unity as that found in the understanding, and since the paradigmatic form of acts of the understanding is that

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<sup>37</sup>Just as we can only understand a flat tire as a defect in a vehicle insofar as we understand how a flat tire may impede its proper functioning, likewise we cannot understand receptivity as fallible unless we understand it against the background of its proper functioning. In this way, once again, understanding mere appearance is parasitic upon understanding veridical perception.

<sup>38</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 26.

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of judgement, the content of experience must be propositional in kind: ‘*That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world’.<sup>39</sup> We are presented in experience with a multitude of claims, claims with the form that things are thus and so, any of which are apt for judgement and thus candidates for belief. By portraying these claims as propositional in nature McDowell is able to render intelligible a non-inferential, passive, and justificatory relation between experience and belief, in precisely the way the myth-believer cannot. That the justificatory relation is non-inferential sustains the idea that experience itself, and not something else (i.e. that which licenses the inference), justifies empirical beliefs. It is crucial for McDowell’s original view that the very same *informed* content is both what is seen and what is judged to be the case. What we judge to be true are propositions, and not other sorts of contents.

The propositional character of experiential content is thus a seemingly essential tenet of McDowell’s early view. It is interesting to see what happens, then, when he gives it up.

## 2.5 Experience Without Propositions. The New View

McDowell characterizes his new view in ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’ as a revision of two central claims in the old:

How should we elaborate this picture? I used to assume that to conceive experiences as actualizations of conceptual capacities, we would need to credit experiences with *propositional* content, the sort of content judgements have. And I used to assume that the content of an experience

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<sup>39</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 26.

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would need to include *everything* the experience enables its subject to know non-inferentially. But both these assumptions now strike me as wrong.<sup>40</sup>

So, first, McDowell changes his understanding of conceptual content. Whereas in the original view conceptual content was claimed to be propositional, in the new view, this is not a requirement. Second, McDowell now claims that it is possible for us to gain empirical knowledge from an experience, without inference, even though that knowledge outstrips the content contained in the particular experience in question.<sup>41</sup> I will focus mostly on the first revision, though the latter will make a brief appearance.

In the previous section, we saw that in *Mind and World* McDowell ultimately takes judgement as the paradigmatic case of how conceptual capacities are involved in experience. Accordingly, he held that all content structured by the understanding had fundamentally the same propositional form and this assumption was central to his view of the justificatory role of experience: experience can justify belief because their respective contents are similarly structured. Moreover, the justification can be non-inferential: seeing can be believing because what can be seen can be judged to be so. In 'Avoiding the Myth of the Given', McDowell now abandons this view, arguing there that we must recognize a difference between discursively-structured conceptual content and non-discursively-structured conceptual content. Propositional content is discursive; that is, it is articulated in a form expressible in an assertion, where to make an assertion is to *make explicit* what one believes to another. (By parity of reasoning, judgement can be conceived as a kind of silent assertion, where one makes explicit

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<sup>40</sup>McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', p. 258.

<sup>41</sup>In the case of the cardinal, on the new view, one can know that the bird is a cardinal even if the concept denoted by 'cardinal' is not part of the experiential content itself. One can know this in virtue of exercising what McDowell calls a 'recognitional capacity'. It's supposed to work something like this. In virtue of having some experiential content available, I can non-inferentially judge that it is a cardinal in exercising a capacity I have for recognizing birds of that species.

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what one believes to oneself.)<sup>42</sup> However, experience, McDowell now recognizes, does not furnish content that is already assertorically structured. Often, McDowell notes, we must *single out* the content that is present in an intuition and restructure it into a form that can be asserted. This, he tells us, may be a matter of coining an adjective or employing a demonstrative: e.g., that shade of colour.<sup>43</sup> In order for such carving out to be possible, experience must still, as it did in *Mind and World*, contain conceptual content, but now McDowell thinks of experience as presenting content in an un-articulated state. Articulation is not a matter of supplementing or modifying that content, but of organizing it into an assertible form. Of course, to say that the content of experience is not discursive in form is not to say it has no form at all. McDowell continues to think that the same unity present in the understanding is operative in experience. What he gives up is the thought that the understanding furnishes only propositional unity. In the new view, as in the old, conceptual content must still exhibit the unity of an object, as it is structured by the categories of the understanding.<sup>44</sup> Thus, it is not as if experience presents us with conceptual content unorganized and without unification. Experience is just not unified in the same way as propositions are. The unity present in the understanding structures experience in an appropriate form for intuition, not for judgement.

McDowell thus concludes that all he needs to avoid the Myth of the Given is the idea that experience has conceptual form.<sup>45</sup> We do not also need to believe that

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<sup>42</sup>McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', p. 262.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 261. McDowell takes a wider view of the categories of the understanding than Kant, potentially including the categories of life for which Michael Thompson has argued. And still others might be included, such as a category for matter distinct from the category of object. For more on these categories, see Thompson, *Life and Action* and Henry Laycock, *Words Without Objects* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2006) respectively.

<sup>45</sup>McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', p. 260.

experience is propositional in form. Avoiding the Myth only requires the involvement of conceptual capacities in the deliverances of experience; it does not require that the conceptual content of experience is organized in discursive form. Moreover, McDowell also argues that this is all we require to explain the transition from experience to judgement. In forming empirical beliefs, we take the conceptual content present in experience and form it into a proposition. This process could be thought of as a singling out of particular objects and features present in experience, and reorganizing this content into a form that can be expressed in an utterance. Conceptual content does not become explicit until it resides in this form.

It is unclear, however, whether McDowell's new view is convincing as it stands. First, he seems to have lost a satisfactory explanation of how the justification of perceptual knowledge is supposed to function non-inferentially. Remember that in *Mind and World* justification required contents to bear a structure that would enable them to stand in rational relations – the sort of relations that two propositions can stand in to one another. If we can both experience and judge that  $p$ , we can understand how we can move from experience of the layout of reality to beliefs about how things are, and do so without inference. One just endorses that which is already there. According to the McDowell of *Mind and World*, in presenting one with propositional claims, experience presents content that recommends itself for judgement. But this is no longer the case on his new view.

Second, it is unclear what McDowell means when he says that experience is conceptual but not propositional. If experience presents us with conceptual content, one would think that content already has a certain form that determines that it is this content rather than some other – a form that perhaps we can describe, in its simplest

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manifestation, as  $F(a)$ ; where ‘ $a$ ’ denotes an object and ‘ $F$ ’ denotes some property of that object. By appealing to the generality constraint, we can perhaps see how this very same object  $a$ , could unify a multitude of properties in experience, thus  $H(a)$ ,  $G(a)$  and so on.<sup>46</sup> But  $F(a)$  is already the form of a proposition. It presents an object bearing some property, and the very same content can be asserted. Indeed, we cannot conceive of any properties outside of their connection to objects, nor can we conceive of objects distinct from their bearing some properties.<sup>47</sup> What could the *content* of experience in McDowell’s new view look like if not this? If the relevant unity is given by an object bearing properties, then it might seem as though the form is no different. Both propositions and this novel content, so conceived, share in same form symbolized by  $F(x)$  insofar as we only have this in view. However, there must be some distinction in the form of the content of experience between the old and the new view if the change is to be at all significant. Perhaps McDowell’s idea is to ‘drop the copula’. Whereas the old view portrayed experience as having the form  $a$  *is*  $F$ , the new view portrays experience as having the form  $F(a)$ . But such a move is empty unless one believes the copula makes a significant contribution, and given McDowell’s Fregean roots, he surely holds that the copula is grammatically significant, but not semantically so.

However, the copula might have another role that is missed in drawing on Frege’s work on the topic. Frege is concerned with content that is already in the form of judgement, and thus content that is, in its very nature, ‘claim-shaped’. If this is one’s concern, one has no reason to think that the copula serves any significant logical

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<sup>46</sup>For more on the generality constraint, see Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, edited by John McDowell (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 100–105.

<sup>47</sup>McDowell appears to be in agreement with this point. See McDowell, ‘Avoiding the Myth’, p. 265.

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role. However, the copula might serve a significant role in delineating propositional from intuitional content by signaling the involvement of judgement with its presence. It might, that is, be crucial to giving a proper account of perceptual experience. I think this is the crucial move in McDowell's thought here. However, to understand its significance, we must take a closer look at the criticisms that brought about McDowell's change of heart.

## 2.6 Why Perceptual Experience Cannot Contain Propositional Content

When his original view came in for criticism, McDowell was generally dismissive of critics, representing them as misunderstanding the nature of his position.<sup>48</sup> He does, however, cite two critics as instrumental in causing him to modify his view of experiential content. The first is Donald Davidson.<sup>49</sup> McDowell thinks that Davidson's criticism rests ultimately on a misunderstanding, but that this misunderstanding is invited by the position as developed in *Mind and World* and working through Davidson's critique caused him to reconsider his insistence on the propositional nature of experiential content. The second criticism is leveled by Charles Travis and it attacks the very viability of 'claimed-shaped' intuitional content.<sup>50</sup> Both criticisms, I think, ultimately target at the same feature of McDowell's early thought.

Davidson rightly thinks that McDowell believes that intentional properties are only realized in thinking creatures.<sup>51</sup> This is just another way of saying that the

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<sup>48</sup>See his responses to papers in Nicholas H. Smith, editor, *Reading McDowell on Mind and World* (New York NY: Routledge, 2002).

<sup>49</sup>Donald Davidson, 'Reply to John McDowell', in: Lewis Edwin Hahn, editor, *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Peru IL: Open Court, 1999).

<sup>50</sup>Charles Travis, 'The Silence of the Senses', *Mind* 113:449 (2004), p. 65.

<sup>51</sup>Davidson, 'Reply to McDowell', p. 107.

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world beyond the mind is not itself thought. However, Davidson fails to pick up McDowell's distinction between the world being thought and the world being thinkable, and this misunderstanding leads him to a distorted view of the theoretical options.<sup>52</sup> Without this distinction, we are inevitably led to the Davidsonian position that experience is merely the *cause* of propositional states, for the only alternative seems to be the view that thought contents are out there in the world to be received by us in perception. Thus on Davidson's account, in experience the world causes in us beliefs. Davidson therefore reads McDowell as claiming that in experience the world must cause in us not-yet endorsed propositions. Given this characterization, the difference between Davidson and McDowell turns on the description of the propositional attitude produced by experience. Davidson takes McDowell to be willing to admit an epistemically significant propositional attitude that is not belief. Naturally, this puzzles Davidson, who does not understand what such an attitude can be.

McDowell talks of our 'taking in' facts, but it is entirely mysterious what this means unless it means that the way the world is causes us to entertain thoughts. This is the point at which our disagreement, at least as I understand it, emerges. McDowell holds that what is caused is not a belief, but a propositional attitude for which we have no word. We then decide whether or not to transform this neutral attitude into a belief.<sup>53</sup>

In light of his interpretation, Davidson finds McDowell's view unsatisfying. Indeed, he identifies the very kind of failure in McDowell's position, as McDowell found in Davidson's own. McDowell, he says:

gives no explanation of why features of the world cause the particular

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<sup>52</sup>This is ironic, as McDowell explicitly foresees Davidson not recognizing this distinction, and proceeds in the latter part of his book to address this very blindness.

<sup>53</sup>Davidson, 'Reply to McDowell', p. 107.

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propositional attitude they do, nor of why an attitude which has no subjective probability whatever can provide a reason for a positive belief. He also seems to be committed to epistemic intermediaries, the propositional contents we ‘take in’, between the world and our opinions about the world.<sup>54</sup>

Davidson’s misunderstanding issues from a failure to appreciate McDowell’s disjunctivism with its insistence on thoughts being at one with the world and its attendant rejection of epistemic intermediaries. A similar misinterpretation is manifest in Crispin Wright’s criticism of McDowell.<sup>55</sup> The idea of experience containing propositional content suggests to Wright that McDowell’s account of empirical justification must be inferential: that is, intuitions contain propositional claims, and from these propositional claims one infers that things are thus and so.<sup>56</sup>

That such misreadings are possible gives McDowell pause, and he concludes that it is his commitment to the propositional content of experience that is the source of the problem.<sup>57</sup> It is natural to think that if our experiential access to the world is propositionally informed, it must somehow involve judgement: that things *are* thus and so. Hence judgement would be pictured as producing an epistemic intermediary, a ‘taking things to be so’, somehow present in what one is given in experience. Such an intermediary would be content that, in virtue of bearing propositional form and merely by being presented to one, *speaks* in favor of believing it. This makes what is given in experience something that comes, as it were, pre-judged. It makes it seem as though the world gives one testimony; that it tells one what to believe. This is surely wrong. The world, in that sense, does not speak. It does not judge itself to be

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<sup>54</sup>Davidson, ‘Reply to McDowell’, p. 107.

<sup>55</sup>Crispin Wright, ‘Human Nature?’, in: Nicholas H. Smith, editor, *Reading McDowell on Mind and World* (New York NY: Routledge, 2002), pp. 148–149.

<sup>56</sup>McDowell, ‘Avoiding the Myth’, p. 270.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

in one way rather than another and presents one with that judgement. Since judging is something that human beings do, not the world, such a view is very perplexing.

If this is the source of the misreading, then we can see why Davidson starts by reminding McDowell that they both hold that intentional properties are realized only in thinking creatures. From Davidson's perspective, McDowell therefore has to choose between thinking of experience as a kind of propositional attitude distinct from belief, or embracing a full-blown idealism in which the world serves up judgements to us in experience. McDowell therefore responds by aiming to render intelligible the possibility of a form of conceptual content that does is not somehow already judgement. McDowell recognizes that his old view has the following weakness: if facts are to be conceived as propositional, and experience goes straight to the facts, then in experience one is faced with something which is already presented to oneself in the form of judgement: that things *are* thus and so. Surely, this cannot be right: the world does not give one testimony in experience. We perceive objects and their properties, states, and relations. No persuasion is to be found in what is present in experience as in the way it might be found in talking with another rational being. Experience is merely receptive and not something akin to communication. No persuasion of this sort is to be found in experience itself.

Travis' criticism raises similar concerns.<sup>58</sup> Travis also holds that experience does not recommend its own content for judgement – whether things are thus and so is not settled by what is contained in experience. Experience, Travis argues, does not present us with claim-shaped content that is fit simply to become belief. Any such content would somehow have to speak for its own veridicality. But, Travis argues, experience does not present us with claims, taking the form 'things are thus and so';

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<sup>58</sup>Travis, 'The Silence of the Senses', p. 65.

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rather, experience presents us with the world.<sup>59</sup> Putting significances together into claims is something that we do after the fact.<sup>60</sup> McDowell, on his revised position, agrees, but he does not share Travis' insistence that in experience one is presented with non-conceptual content. Such a view would place us square within the domain of the myth of Given.<sup>61</sup>

It seems that McDowell is stuck with the following difficulty. In order for experience to come into rational friction with belief, experience must be such as to be judgeable, and thus it must contain conceptual content. If we take that content to be propositional in character, we make it possible to see how experience can justify belief and do so non-inferentially, but we end up with a bizarre view of experience as somehow containing claims about how the world is, and this is unacceptable. McDowell aims to meet this difficulty by developing the idea that experience has an intuitional form, which contains conceptual content organized non-propositionally, and thus does not possess an assertoric form. But, in my view, it is now unclear what the justificatory force of experience is to be. How is it that being presented with conceptual content that can be reorganized into a judgement can amount to justification for believing that content when it is articulated into a proposition?

Let us take stock. The problem McDowell's former view faces is this. If experience is taken to present propositional content, then it looks as if we are to understand how experience might play a justificatory role in the formation of belief by picturing the world as *making* claims on us. In other words, in experience the world tells us something about itself. But this view appears to saddle us with a problematic idealism. Davidson, suspecting that McDowell could not possibly embrace so implausible

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<sup>59</sup>Travis, 'The Silence of the Senses', p. 65.

<sup>60</sup>McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', pp. 266–267.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 268–269.

a view, suggests that, if what is given in experience has the same epistemic import as a belief – that is, it has the form and force of judgement, then it can only be belief by another name. And if that is so, then its epistemic credentials will be determined by its coherence with the perceiver’s other beliefs. Since McDowell thinks Davidson’s coherentism fails to explain how thought has a bearing on reality at all, his only recourse is to modify his original position and deny that the content of perceptual experience has the force of a claim. On his new view, experience is merely having objects and their properties within one’s perceptual field perceptually present. It is having the world in view in a way that is accessible to the operations of one’s rationality. But we now face a novel difficulty. Such an account leaves the epistemic import of experience unexplained. How is it that such content is positioned within the logical space of reasons in the role of justifier? The content itself is no longer a claim, something which presents the world as *being* one way or another.

## 2.7 Some Failed Paths to Resolving the Difficulty

Where do we go from here? We might think that the justificatory role of perceptual experience is derived from its provenance in perception. However, there can be nothing in the content itself to secure its epistemic role, for the content in itself does not advertise its origin in perception. That the content of our experience was brought forth in perception is something that we know in some other way.

We might be tempted to believe that this other way derives from the passivity of experience. That is, it is the givenness of the content that secures its epistemic credentials. They derive from the fact that in experience we are ‘saddled with content’, that we do not construct ourselves. However, this will not work. Consider

passing thoughts. They are, for all intents and purposes passively received. They are not something which we, in the relevant sense, put together in an act of thinking. Rather, they are propositional contents that are merely presented to us. If what gives perception its epistemic credentials is its passivity, then I see no reason not to bestow such epistemic credentials onto passing thoughts. But this would clearly be wrong. Passing thoughts may share content with experience but have no proper relation to knowledge.

We might appeal to experience being a self-conscious receptive faculty, whose deliverances are known by the perceiver to be those of a capacity for knowledge. Thus, in being presented with experiential content, I know that I am presented with content that is such to be knowledge.<sup>62</sup> But given the resources available at this stage in our argument, such a claim amounts to little more than an insistence that the content present in experience somehow has a special epistemic authority in virtue of the manner of its presentation. One might argue for this position by reflecting on the grounds of possibility of empirical knowledge. But it does little by way of rendering intelligible the distinction between experience and other passive forms of thought. And without understanding that distinction, we cannot render intelligible the sort of a capacity for knowledge a human being has in virtue of having perceptual experience.

## 2.8 A More Promising Path

Given these false starts, we are now in a position to see the devastating difficulty that threatens McDowell's new position. It is tempting to think that the problem

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<sup>62</sup>See Rödl, *Self Consciousness* Chapter 5.

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lies in characterizing his new conception of the content of experience as intuitional and not propositional. However, we miss the real force of Davidson's criticism if we focus entirely on whether McDowell gives an overly intellectualized account of experience, one which might make it look as though the world comes subtitled. For as Davidson would be quick to point out, even if we could make sense of the world 'speaking to us', it would still be a live question whether we should believe what it told us. The difficulty lies with giving a satisfactory elucidation of the justificatory relation between experience and belief. Without the *Mind and World* picture of claims impressing themselves upon one in experience, this relation becomes opaque. Indeed, it is unclear how we can even render such a relation intelligible.

The obvious move forward is to widen our context of inquiry. McDowell's treatment of experience, up to and including 'Avoiding the Myth of the Given', takes what may be called a 'theoretical slant' on perceptual experience. He treats experience as a capacity to receive content, neatly packaged, either in the form of facts, claims, or intuitionally-unified conceptual content. Experience is a receptive faculty which presents content that can be endorsed and thus become belief. However, perceptual experience for human beings is not *exactly* like this. We look, move, follow, and interact with our environment in experiencing it. My seeing involves activity on my part, a sort of active orientation in my egocentric space that is not independent of the experiencing itself.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, I shall argue that the content present to one in experience is not even notionally independent of engagement in such activities. This

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<sup>63</sup>It is worth noting that McDowell is not opposed to activity that is constitutive of experiencing. For example, on p. 34 of *Mind and World* he says: 'To understand empirical content in general, we need to see it in its dynamic place in a self-critical activity, the activity by which we aim to comprehend the world as it impinges on our senses.' However, McDowell embraces activity as something that happens after the reception of empirical content. It is the self-critical intellectual activity that must be in play in order to make sense of empirical content being conceptual. In my view, this activity comes too late in order to account for the justificatory force of experience.

is because experiencing involves movement and contains a temporal dimension that cannot be neatly accounted for by describing states of an agent. Once we recognize this, we should recognize that our previous view of experience dealt only with an abstraction, with one late stage of the phenomenon rather than the phenomenon as a whole.

Even at such an early point in my inquiry, there are *prima facie* reasons to think this characterization correct. For experiencing the world is not best seen as the reception of a sequence of contents made available to judgement. On such a view, it would be mysterious how one could ever experience an event, like a train passing through a station. So conceived, experience would be analogous to a series of content-conveying events, in the form of packaged conceptual contents, related to one another only in virtue of the subject's ability to identify objects across such events. We might think of this as a silent inference, or, following Hume, a matter of habit or conditioning.<sup>64</sup> There would be no seeing a train moving through a station, but rather seeing a train in various positions, then somehow reconstructing from its various positions, that it is moving. This is surely a mischaracterization of experience. One might protest that the content of experience is *the train's moving through the station*. But then it will become difficult to make sense of when and how such content is present. Is it present when the train is entering the station? When it is leaving? Perhaps it is present all the way through? No answer to such questions could be satisfactory as we are trying to capture something which is intrinsically temporally extended with something which lacks temporal extension. Any sort of prior carving of the experience into pieces of sequential content would already be a carving out

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<sup>64</sup>David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 120–121.

of experience-in-process. Thus, the presence of the world in experience happens in an always developing temporal framework, in contrast to conceptual contents whose availability is only indexed in time but whose nature is not intrinsically temporally extended.

This suggests we should turn things around. We should think of experience as something that admits of a temporal dimension, as something fundamentally in-process, and think of experiential judgements as active delimitations on what is available in the flow of this process. We might then think that experience requires an active involvement on our part, where this involvement sustains and shapes the exercise of our capacity to experience making possible the carving out of facts. This carving out makes possible judgements about what one is seeing. Thinking along these lines, we are on the way to characterizing experience as more than just receptivity. Experiencing comes into focus as something we *do*, not just something which *happens* to us.

## **2.9 Some Preliminary Remarks About Justification**

At this stage, I recognize that it is not entirely clear how this wider characterization can be help us account for justification. A first step in clarifying this is to note that there are forms of justification that do not follow a theoretical model of justification whereby one is justified in virtue of some prior reason conceived as having a propositional form. Consider skilled activities. These are conceptual in that they require inculcation into an often difficult and rich practice. Playing an instrument, swimming properly, certain technical endeavors (especially the use of tools), are all informed by conceptual capacities – they require, that is, a practical understanding of what one

is doing in order to do it. Take what is involved in playing a musical instrument. Let us assume that Violet is a competent guitar teacher and player. She has undergone a significant amount of training yielding knowledge of her instrument and of musical theory in general. Much of this knowledge is the sort that can be discursively articulated: ‘You play a D major scale by first playing this note by placing your fingers thus, and so on’. In playing, she can organize her actions according to her conception of what should take place – a scale, a particular chord progression, or appropriate moves in improvisation. The way in which her conceptual competence figures in her activity is different from the way a set of propositions is organized in a deductive system. She does *not*, that is, entertain articulate and explicit propositions when playing. As the reader is likely aware, any such attempt would impede and disrupt her playing. This should not tempt us to question whether her playing involves the deployment of conceptual capacities at all; we just need to see how concepts are involved practically in a different way than they are involved in constituting thought content. The concepts structure the action itself. We can mark this difference by appealing to the well-known distinction between knowledge-that and knowledge-how as discussed by Ryle.<sup>65</sup> If experience is active, then concepts are involved in experience at least partially as they are in doing, and not as they are in entertaining thoughts. Earlier, I marked as crucial the idea in *Mind and World* that human beings are transformed through and through by the acquisition of rationality. What I am proposing is that we take this seriously in the case of the sensory modalities, recognizing that there is a parallel between perceiving and skilled activity, such as skillfully moving one’s fingers in playing a musical instrument. They are both, I will argue, conceptually-informed activities. Our employment of our sensory apparatus is not the same as it is for a

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<sup>65</sup>Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 28.

non-rational animal. We control our sense organs in a way that is rationally informed. As I will argue, we employ them in order to gain knowledge.

How does this illuminate justification? I believe it makes possible a teleological conception of experiential justification that is unavailable to us if we view experience as a matter of being in a state of being ‘saddled with content’.<sup>66</sup> If we deny that experience is this kind of passive phenomenon, then our conception of experience is that of an activity that is always-already in the background if content can be said to be available for judgement. The deployment of conceptual capacities serves a role in unifying that constitutive activity to judgement teleologically. I will argue that it is this unity that is experience for human beings. What is crucial to this unity is that one engages the world in experience *with a view to knowing something about it*. The content that one makes available to oneself in experience thus does not bear an accidental relation to judgement. It is brought forth by the agent herself with *the aim* of knowing something about her surroundings. It is content the nature of which is necessarily described as on the way to judgement.

I am here proposing that conceptual capacities are involved in experience in two related ways. They are first involved in structuring experience as an activity. And second, they are involved in structuring the content one makes available to oneself for judgement in the course of this activity.

Thus, on my view, experiencing is the product of an activity that itself draws on and is shaped by concepts. It is shaped in the way that concepts shape any activity. For example, a student may ask Violet what she is playing at any one particular moment. While her action, in contrast to a thought, cannot contain content that is just waiting for expression, we can still demonstrate that her activity is conceptual

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<sup>66</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 10.

because Violet can make explicit the position of her fingers, the kind of strumming involved, and so on, by expressing propositions that she knows without inference in virtue of what she is doing. She is here, as McDowell argues in the case of judgement, organizing concepts that are otherwise deployed in her activity into an articulate form – propositions which could be expressed to another in discourse. Her *authority* derives from her conceptual repertoire and from her capacity to deploy the concepts correctly in her action and in explaining her actions.<sup>67</sup> Her playing as she does falls within a wider conceptual framework that makes her playing possible. We can see this because, when asked by her student, she can give reasons for why a scale functions as it does and why she strums this way rather than another. Her playing is thus structured by reasons generated by her knowledge of her instrument and how to play it. In presenting these reasons, she makes *articulate* the conceptual and normative connections involved in playing. Her being the originator of the activity provides her with authority over her actions.

What is crucial here is that her knowledge of what she is doing has its source in her doing it well. I want to suggest that the knowledge that content present to one in experience is experiential rather than from another source is of a similar kind: it is being justified in believing that which one makes available to oneself in virtue of engaging well with the world in experience.<sup>68</sup> This provides a clearer view of how

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<sup>67</sup>I do not mean to suggest that in such cases having the right sort of conceptual repertoire is separate from deploying this repertoire in action. As we will see more forcefully in the following chapter, neither is independent of the other.

<sup>68</sup>Even on McDowell's new view there is room for this sort of justification – being justified in knowing what one is doing in doing it well. Indeed, as we saw at the outset, he even assents to there being cases where one can know without inference that, let's say, there is a cardinal on the terrace without having the concept cardinal contained in the experience itself – this is the second modification to the *Mind and World* view. See McDowell, 'Avoiding the Myth', p. 259. One can know in virtue of one's *authority* as a reliable recognizer of cardinals. The recognition itself furnishes the requisite authority for judging that over there is a cardinal.

concepts can be involved in experience. Concepts can be drawn on in the activity constitutive of experiencing.

However, we cannot lose sight of the second way that experiencing is the exercise of a receptive capacity. After all, it is the world that determines what is available for judgement. I am not arguing that we should give up the idea that experience makes available conceptual content for judgement. I am arguing for a different way of understanding the relation between the availability of this content and the nature of experience. Experience does not only involve the availability of content for judgement. It involves an activity which brings content for judgement into view. Experiencing, so conceived, is a matter of bringing the world into view by *taking the world in*. The world is thus not given in experience, but taken. Experience is, I will argue, a form of empirical inquiry.

This dissertation aims to provide the groundwork for thinking of experience as an activity by explaining its role in acquiring knowledge. In the next chapter, I argue that experience's conceptuality already commits one to an activity-based view of perception as the exercise of conceptual capacities already involve their possessor actively partaking in practices. In Chapter 4, I engage with a view similar to my own, that of Alva Noë who argues for what he calls an 'enactive' view of perception, where perceiving is a matter of exercising sensorimotor skills. While I do not think Noë's view is successful as a whole, I argue that we can find within his work a minimal commitment to an active conception of experience that is sufficient to establish the kind of teleological structure necessary for justification. In Chapter 5 I argue that experience cannot but be active, as having knowledge of the world requires keeping perceptual track of the objects of perceptual knowledge. In the concluding chapter,

I recapitulate my view as a whole and address certain complications.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Conceptual Capacities and Activity**

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### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that the relation between experience and judgement should be conceived in terms of a teleological relation between experience and knowledge. For a human being, experience is a capacity to acquire knowledge through the use of sensory capacities. As we saw, such a capacity is unified by rationality. Human experience is permeated with conceptuality, and once we deny that the content of experience is pre-conceptual in kind, then we must also deny that experience is a capacity we share with lower animals. I contend that to make good this view, we must think of experiencing as an activity. This is no straightforward task, for the typical, and perhaps intuitive, way of conceiving of experience is in strictly receptive terms: in experience, one passively receives something (often understood as an ‘impression’, sensation, or some other ‘mental intermediary’). As I argued, such views cannot be successful in explaining experience’s role in the justification of belief.

In the following, I seek to develop the idea that experience’s conceptual character already implies activity on part of the experiencer. To show this, I consider Ludwig Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations, which entail, I believe, that conceptual competence involves a particular sort of *practical* skill. Given that one must be engaged with the world conceptually in order to make world-revealing content available for judgement, then in being so engaged one is up to something, exercising a sort of practical skill. The exercise of this skill, I shall argue, is governed by an end: the end of learning about the layout of one’s environment, or, to put it as McDowell might, of bringing the world into view. In other words, the end of experience is knowledge.

### 3.2 Mind, World, and Rule-following: Starting with a Parallel

McDowell has discussed Wittgenstein's treatment of rule-following in several articles, and his reading of Wittgenstein is strikingly relevant to the view of experience he presents in *Mind and World*.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, McDowell makes much of Wittgenstein's claim that, in central cases, understanding a rule, which in this context amounts to the same thing as understanding a meaning, is not an interpretation. So when one understands the words of another, one does not invest the words she speaks with meaning through an act of interpretation; one hears the meaning in her words. This resonates with McDowell's view of experience, where grasping the world by one's senses is not a matter of conceptualizing an initially non-conceptual sensory presentation, but of having the world directly available to one in experience. Just as we understand signs and words without interpretation, so we take in the world in experience without putting a construction upon a pre-conceptual given. For McDowell, both cases are on a par: both involve perceiving something meaningful – in one case words or signs, in the other, the world.<sup>2</sup>

McDowell's position is controversial. It is one thing to say that words are vehicles of meaning, another to conceive the world as meaningful. But much of McDowell's rhetoric in *Mind and World* involves the idea of what he calls 'a partially re-enchanted

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<sup>1</sup>The most direct exposition can be found in John McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', in: *Mind, Value & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), shortly thereafter updated in John McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein's Later Philosophy', in: *Mind, Value & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). Similar ideas are developed in McDowell, 'One Strand' and John McDowell, 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following', in: *Mind, Value & Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). More recently, McDowell has criticised Brandom on this topic in John McDowell, 'Brandom's Wittgenstein: How Not to Read *Philosophical Investigations*', in: *The Engaged Intellect* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009) and further discussed the form of quietism that is central to his reading in John McDowell, 'Wittgensteinian Quietism', *Common Knowledge* 15:3 (Fall 2009).

<sup>2</sup>The parallel nature of the accounts is most clear in McDowell, 'One Strand', p. 280.

conception of nature', one which challenges the scientific conception of objective reality as bereft of meaning in a way that runs contrary to the naturalistic orientation of much modern philosophy.<sup>3</sup> In the previous chapter, I argued that we could overcome some of the difficulties in McDowell's conception by conceiving of experience as an activity, a *taking in* of the world, rather than a process in which we merely receive content passively. We can think of the world as imbued with meaning insofar as it is graspable in a rational manner. This corrects the impression, invited by McDowell's view, that the world itself somehow imposes conceptual content on perceivers by drawing into play the operation of specific conceptual capacities. In contrast, on my view, the world does not do anything to us in experience, but is rather revealed to us as we do something with respect to it. The world does not, as McDowell sometimes says, 'speak' to us or 'reveal itself to us'.<sup>4</sup> Perceiving is something we do, not something that merely happens to us. The world is within the reach of a particular sort of epistemic activity, exemplified by what I will later argue is a particular sort of perceptual inquiry.

In this chapter, I take the first steps toward such an account. Any account of experience must explain how experience can justify belief. I concur with McDowell that this requires us to portray the content of experience as conceptual in character – it must have the right sort of form to be articulable in judgement. However, our account must also show how experience can be a source of knowledge. To show the latter, it may be necessary to hold that experience delivers conceptual content, but it is not sufficient. We need to make perspicuous why experience is a capacity that secures knowledge. If we fail in this, the relation between experience and judgement

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<sup>3</sup>See lecture IV of McDowell, *Mind and World*, and especially p. 85.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 112.

remains mysterious. To this end, we need to make clear how the relation between experience and judgement can be normative: How does seeing justify one believing what one sees? In the previous chapter, I discussed McDowell's way of going about this. On his view, experiencing is a matter of the world's presenting itself to us: experience is already world-involving in virtue of being the sort of capacity that it is. Understanding the world is not a matter of actively employing a concept, but rather allowing the world to draw one's concepts into play – it is, as it were, having one's eyes open with a rich background of conceptual capacities ready to be drawn out by experience. Since experience is a self-conscious capacity, one knows that it presents one with already world-involving content. I do not find this argument adequate. If experience is the presenting to one of conceptually structured content – that is, the presence of something given in experiencing – then we cannot explain the difference between the content of experience, on the one hand, and that of a passing thought, on the other, in a way that brings out why the former, but not the latter, is a source of knowledge. Appeal to self-consciousness merely asserts a difference without securing its ground.

I believe we can make progress by considering the nature of concepts as disclosed by Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. The parallel noted above is my starting point – the parallel between two thoughts advanced by McDowell: (a) that grasping a rule is not a matter of interpreting something that is otherwise a 'dead' sign, and (b) that grasping the world is not a matter of conceptualizing or interpreting a pre-conceptual given. We need to attend to an important idea that figures in McDowell's elaboration of both thoughts, namely, that the ability to perceive meaning by the deployment of conceptual powers depends upon inculcation into practices and

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customs. One must have undergone *Bildung* in order to enjoy perceptual experience and to act in accord with rules and other normative standards of correctness.<sup>5</sup> Contra McDowell, I believe that this insight suggests a view of conceptual involvement in experience that is quite different from the purely receptive picture he advances, as inculcation provides one with skills that are actively employed in the course of experiencing. In other words, the rule-following considerations suggest that we do something in experience – that we *bring* the world into view.

### 3.3 Preliminary Remarks, Skepticism and Rule-following

Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations are often portrayed as formulating a skeptical argument targeting the concept of meaning.<sup>6</sup> If that is his purpose, the kind of skepticism at issue is Kantian rather than Cartesian in character, to invoke James Conant's distinction.<sup>7</sup> Cartesian skepticism is epistemological in kind. Thus Cartesian skepticism about meaning challenges whether we can ever know that we are correctly grasping the meaning of an utterance. Kantian skepticism, in contrast, is more radical. It concerns, in this case, the very possibility of meaning. Wittgenstein presents a Kantian rather than Cartesian problematic: he is concerned, not with the question of whether we can really know what someone means, but whether it makes sense to think of anyone meaning anything at all. Commentators have made much of Wittgenstein's answers to the problem he defines. Despite their differences, most

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<sup>5</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>See §§189–201 in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: MacMillan, 1953). The skeptical moment in the argument is most apparent in §201 where Wittgenstein says: 'The answer was: if every course of action can be brought into accord with the rule, then it can also be brought into conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.'

<sup>7</sup>James Conant, 'Varieties of Skepticism', in: Denis McManus, editor, *Wittgenstein and Scepticism* (London UK: Routledge, 2004), pp. 105–115.

agree that the issue turns on the normativity of concepts. Concept use is governed by standards of correctness, standards grasped, in one way or another, by anyone who possesses the concept. In what do these standards of correctness consist? If I grasp a concept, I grasp a rule for its use. What establishes the rule and determines whether I follow it rightly or wrongly? The skeptical side of Wittgenstein's reflections suggests that the answer to this question is nothing at all. And if there are no standards of correctness, then meaning, concepts, and the entire realm of the normative melts into thin air.

Wittgenstein's solution to his own skeptical argument is to remind us that rules have a place in our customs: 'I have further indicated that a person [follows a rule] only in so far as there is an established usage, a custom.'<sup>8</sup> Going on in the same way is not something one decides, but something one *does* when one is engaged in a practice of, say, adding by twos. Such engagement involves a form of understanding that is embodied in, and expressed by, the practice in question, rather than projected onto it by interpretative acts, and understanding the significance of others' words and deeds is again a matter of perceiving the meaning they express rather than reading meaning into them. This tells us something crucial about the normativity involved in grasping a rule or a concept. The correct grasp of a concept is not determined by something outside of a capacity to follow the rule in question. Those who have the concept understand its normativity *from the inside* and not in virtue of knowing a set of rules governing the application of the concept that stand at a distance from the concept. In interpreting another's words as expressing this or that concept one would employ such rules, and the same goes for the case of perception, wherein being presented with some content, one would need to interpret it by using rules for

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<sup>8</sup>See §198 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

applying concepts. Wittgenstein shows us that such a picture is mistaken. This is significant for our conception of experience as a source of knowledge. Since experience is conceptual, and since it is in the nature of concepts to be normative, it follows that the involvement of concepts in experience already brings in the notion of veridicality. It brings with it a standard of correctness. Moreover, Wittgenstein's arguments lend support to my view that the role of concepts in experience entails that the subject is active in experiencing – experience is not just the passive reception of content from without.

I will begin by discussing Saul Kripke's reflections on Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox, before moving on to Robert Brandom's reading, understood as a refinement of Kripke's. I will then turn to McDowell's criticisms of Brandom as a way of bringing into relief a crucial feature of the normativity of concepts – their relation to custom. Finally, I will return to the issue of the role of concepts in experience by reflecting upon the differences between McDowell's and Brandom's respective readings of Wittgenstein. Concepts are actively deployed in experience in the sense that their deployment depends on the exercise of skills. Seeing an object as green, for example, should be thought as something we do, and we do it by deploying perceptual skills, the exercise of which presuppose a background of shared practices.

### **3.4 The Rule-following Puzzle, Starting with Kripke**

In *Wittgenstein On Rules and Private Language*, Kripke starts out from §201 of the *Philosophical Investigations*:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition* (Cambridge UK: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 2.

This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule. The answer was: if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made to conflict with it. And so there would be neither accord nor conflict here.<sup>10</sup>

Wittgenstein's conclusion is striking. If one's grasp of a rule consists in the ability correctly to follow the rule in current and future situations, then in any particular situation (barring cases of vagueness) there should be answer as to the question of whether one is following the rule correctly. If I have the concept *red*, I should be able correctly to employ this concept to assert that the cup before me is red, if it is, or not red, if it is not. And this requires, minimally, that something determines whether I have done so correctly or incorrectly. But, if Wittgenstein is right, nothing in my understanding of the rule for the use of this concept, as I have so far deployed it, dictates how I should employ it now and in the future. *However* I deploy it may be made out to conform to my past usage. If that is so, then my supposed grasp of the concept gives me no guidance as to how I should go on. It seems I am free to call the cup 'red' or 'not red'. Such a conclusion leaves us spooked. Kripke comments:

Sometimes when I have contemplated the situation, I have had something of an eerie feeling. Even now, as I write, I feel confident that there is something in my mind – the meaning [to which I attach the sign 'red'] – that instructs me what I ought to do in all future cases.<sup>11</sup>

Here we find ourselves in the grip of a Kantian skeptical problematic, faced with what Conant calls the 'boggle'.<sup>12</sup> The eerie feeling that overcomes us stems from the realization that our conclusion undermines the capacity for meaningful thought.

<sup>10</sup>See §201 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>11</sup>Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, pp. 21–22.

<sup>12</sup>Conant, 'Varieties of Skepticism', p. 112.

We start on what we take to be solid ground, entertaining supposedly meaningful thoughts, yet the conclusion of our inquiry threatens the very intelligibility of the inquiry itself. The very thing that got us going, *thought*, comes into question. But how could we have arrived here? For Kripke, as for Wittgenstein, the journey begins by considering something utterly common-place: the meaning of the plus sign.<sup>13</sup>

A person who knows how to add has the ability to do a theoretically infinite number of operations. Someone who has grasped the concept of addition is able, at least in principle, to add any pair of numbers. They may fail to do so correctly if the numbers are very large, or if they are tired or distracted, but these are merely contingent constraints on their ability. To grasp the rule for addition is to grasp something that determines the correct answer in an infinite number of cases. Or so we think. Wittgenstein's argument is designed to undermine this confidence. Kripke illustrates it by introducing the 'quus' function, which operates much like plus with one important caveat. If one adds two numbers, both of which are smaller than 57, then the result is the same as for addition. But if one or both of the numbers are larger than 57, then the answer is 5.<sup>14</sup>

Assume that Maria has never added numbers greater than 57. Consider that she is now prompted to add 57 and 63.<sup>15</sup> What *should* Maria answer? One would like to say that she should answer 120, but how can she justify this? She might appeal to her past history, arguing that she is only doing here what she has always done before. But nothing in her past history can justify this, as her past behaviour is equally compatible with her having followed the quus function when she supposed she was

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<sup>13</sup>See §185 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>14</sup>Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup>If one is concerned about the artificial nature of this assumption, allow the rule to range over much larger numbers.

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adding. Nothing in her personal history determines that she has been following one rule rather than the other, so nothing in that history determines what she should do next. Recoiling from this conclusion, Maria might appeal to some further rule that can decide for her what her next move should be. But how is she supposed to interpret that formula? Would not the same difficulty arise? If she appeals to a further rule, then we are threatened by an infinite regress of interpretations. Alternatively, she might attempt to settle the issue by appealing to a disposition: ‘I am,’ she might say, ‘simply disposed to answer 120 rather than 5, and there’s nothing more to it. My grasp of a rule just comes down to being so disposed and nothing more.’ But such an answer fails to capture the normative dimension of the rule – the fact that the rule determines not what she will say, but what she *ought* to say. The rule must establish a standard of correctness, not just describe a causal disposition to act. As Kripke puts it: ‘The relation between meaning and intention to future action is *normative*, not *descriptive*’.<sup>16</sup>

It seems that nothing determines which rule Maria is following – no fact about her past behaviour, no interpretation she can offer, no disposition she may have. If that is so, there is no answer to the question of how she should go on. And if there is no such answer, then there is no meaning one thing or another by ‘plus’. Since the argument generalizes to any concept, the conclusion is that there is no such thing as meaning, no such thing as following a rule, no such thing as normativity. If anything goes, then nothing goes:

What can there be in my mind that I make use of when I act in the future?  
It seems that the entire idea of meaning vanishes into thin air.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 22.

### 3.5 Rule-following and Perceptual Experience

So far this is a story familiar to all students of Wittgenstein. What is less familiar is its bearing on perceptual experience. To bring this out, consider the following example, made famous by W.V.O. Quine in his discussion of ‘radical translation’.<sup>18</sup> Field linguist Isabella finds herself on assignment in a far-off foreign village. Her task is simple: she is to learn the hitherto unknown native language and produce a translation manual that maps sentences in ‘Nativese’ with sentences in English. As a rabbit goes by, a native points and calls out ‘Gavagai!’. How shall Isabella translate this utterance? It seems that the evidence is equally compatible with a number of translations: for example, ‘rabbit’, ‘undetached rabbit parts’, ‘continuous rabbit-stages’, and perhaps many others. Quine concludes that judgements about meaning are undetermined by the data. With this, he takes a step towards the apparent conclusion of Wittgenstein’s skeptical argument, namely, that there is no such thing as meaning. Nothing determines whether ‘gavagai’ means rabbit or undetached rabbit part, either for Isabella or the native speaker himself. It is crucial, however, that ‘Gavagai!’ is a perceptual report. Thus, if nothing determines what it means, nothing determines whether or not that which moves before the native and Isabella is gavagai. A similar eerie feeling besets us as we realize that, not only is it underdetermined whether what they see is a rabbit or undetached rabbit parts, but there is a real question about whether the native and Isabella can be said to be seeing anything determinate at all.

This might seem an eccentric conclusion. But it is inevitable once the skeptical side of Wittgenstein’s reflections is applied to a conceptualist account of perceptual

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<sup>18</sup>W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge UK: MIT Press, 1960), p. 29.

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experience. If the content of experience is essentially conceptual in character, and Wittgenstein's skeptical argument attacks the normativity that is a precondition of concept use, then the coherence of McDowell's conception of experience rests upon a satisfying response to Wittgenstein's argument.<sup>19</sup> If our concepts are in jeopardy, then so is perceptual experience itself.

Some may find this sufficient reason to recoil from a conceptualist account of perception. Why not deny that concepts are in play in experience and declare experiential content non-conceptual in kind? Why not think that perceptual content has a determinacy prior to the operation of conceptual capacities that bring intelligibility into the picture? This will not do. First, appeal to non- or pre-conceptual content lands us straight back in the Myth of the Given. We cannot admit a significant distance between the content of a report of experience – an assertion about things being thus and so – and what is made available in experience itself.<sup>20</sup> In any case, Wittgenstein's problem re-enters as soon as we consider how the supposedly pre-conceptual content is to be conceptualized, since conceptualization presupposes criteria of correctness in concept application. Thus the rule-following considerations threaten the possibility of perceptual judgement whether we allow non-conceptual content or not.

To sum up, by threatening the possibility of meaning, the difficulty posed by the rule-following problematic attacks the possibility of perceptual knowledge. This is not traditional epistemological skepticism which admits that some  $x$  is possible

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<sup>19</sup>Hence the parallels between McDowell's stance on experience in *Mind and World* and his exegesis of Wittgenstein on rule-following. As I previously mentioned, the parallel is most conspicuous in his paper 'One Strand in the Private Language Argument': 'The idea is that the "private linguist" succumbs to a version of the dualism of scheme and given: his thought is, as above, that a stream of consciousness is made up of non-conceptual items that justify conceptualizations of them.' See McDowell, 'One Strand', p. 280.

<sup>20</sup>Even on McDowell's revised view, the distance between inarticulate intuitional content and the articulation of that content in propositional form is not significant in that both are conceptual in character.

and questions whether we have the knowledge of  $x$  we think we do. Wittgenstein's skeptical argument undermines the very idea of meaning and hence the capacity to entertain meaningful thought. And with this, the possibility of perceptual knowledge is threatened because perception depends upon the exercise of concepts.

### 3.6 Resolving the Rule-following Problematic

What, then, is the correct response to the skeptical puzzle Wittgenstein poses? Kripke himself offers what he calls a 'skeptical solution', a term he adopts from Hume.<sup>21</sup> A skeptical solution is one that accepts that the skeptical argument in question cannot be refuted but offers an alternative account of the phenomenon in question. Hume, for example, concludes that reason cannot justify causal inferences; he then advances a 'skeptical solution' that maintains we are disposed by nature and conditioning to make certain kinds of causal judgements and hence, whether or not such judgements can be justified by reason, they will anyway continue to play the role they do in our reasoning. The sceptic's conclusions are valid, but irrelevant. Similarly, Kripke maintains that Wittgenstein's skeptical arguments are unanswerable: nothing determines the standards of correctness necessary for concept application. Hence normativity is essentially illusory. All there is and all there can be are facts about what human beings, by nature and conditioning, *take to be* correct or incorrect ways of using concepts. Normativity rests on nothing more than facts about what a community of language users license as appropriate, and this is revealed by what the community sanctions as correct usage.

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<sup>21</sup>See Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, pp. 68–69 and Hume, *Enquiry*, p. 28.

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McDowell rejects Kripke's skeptical solution out of hand, arguing that it is a profound misreading of Wittgenstein.<sup>22</sup> McDowell points out *Investigations* (§ 201), which is central to Kripke's interpretation, continues in a way inconsistent with Kripke's reading. Wittgenstein does not accept the paradox he has defined, but argues that it can be resolved – or at least dissolved. Wittgenstein is therefore a long way from *accepting* the mooted skepticism and agreeing that there is no such thing as rules, concepts, meaning or normativity. On the contrary, the spirit of his position is that it is the skeptical paradox itself that is an illusion.

Like Kripke, Crispin Wright responds to the paradox by appealing to the behaviour of the community. But Wright's appeal forms part of a 'straight' rather than skeptical solution to the puzzle. Wright offers an anti-realist reading where facts about meaning and normativity are genuine, but they are somehow constituted by the community's say-so. Wright's central thought is that rules are not ratification independent.<sup>23</sup> This means that what a rule requires in future instances of its application is determined by the community's ratifying one way of going on rather than another. The community therefore retroactively determines which rule was followed. My having added rather than 'quadded' depends on whether the community ratifies 5 or 120 when I sum (or 'quum') 57 and 63. This kind of response, however, seems to rescue normativity only at the level of the individual. Normativity has no place at the level of the community as a whole. Nothing guides whether the *community* should answer '5' or '120'. Normativity is grounded in community ratification, but community ratification itself is unguided. Ratification is therefore arbitrary, for the community as a whole has no way to distinguish which way to go on is the correct

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<sup>22</sup>McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', pp. 228–229.

<sup>23</sup>Crispin Wright, *Wittgenstein on the Foundations of Mathematics* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 216, 221, 227.

one. Correctness is determined by what the community *happens* to do, and there is nothing the community *should* do. For the community itself there is no authority and no standard to meet. The result is a descriptive picture that locates the basic source of normativity in community assent and dissent, but the norms that emerge are ultimately arbitrary, for the community itself is not bound by anything. As McDowell puts it, the community's 'freedom from norms will preclude our attributing any genuine substance to the etiolated normativeness Wright hopes to preserve.'<sup>24</sup>

We must go in search of a more satisfying resolution to Wittgenstein's paradox. To this end, the two most salient interpretations of Wittgenstein on rule-following are Brandom's and McDowell's. Let us turn to the latter.

### 3.7 McDowell's Wittgenstein

McDowell's neatly sums up his interpretation of Wittgenstein in the following paragraph:

Wittgenstein's problem is to steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla is the idea that understanding is always interpretation. This idea is disastrous because embracing it confronts us with [...] the choice between the paradox that there is no substance to meaning, on the one hand, and the fantastic mythology of the super-rigid machine, on the other. We can avoid Scylla by stressing that, say, calling something 'green' can be like crying 'Help!' when one is drowning – simply how one has learned to react to this situation. But then we risk steering on to Charybdis – the picture of a basic level at which there are no norms [...] How can a performance both be nothing but a 'blind' reaction to a situation, not an attempt to act on an interpretation [...] and be a case of going by a rule [...]? The answer is: by belonging to a custom (PI 198), practice (PI 202), or institution (RFM VI-31).<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup>McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', p. 235.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

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McDowell sees Wittgenstein as challenging us to find a path between two equally unsatisfying options – Scylla and Charybdis. Scylla involves the assumption that understanding a rule requires interpretation. Given that assumption, there are two untenable options. The first is that the correct interpretation of a rule is set by some further rule. But this lands us in a regress of interpretations that renders meaning impossible. The second is to maintain that the correct interpretation is somehow determined wholly independent of us. This is platonism about rules: rules have an independent existence and determine their extensions as if they were parts of a super-rigid machine. The Platonist picture is inviting: do we not after all feel that it is *the rule* that determines what counts as following it correctly? Such a picture, however, ultimately lacks explanatory power.

David Finkelstein's discussion is helpful.<sup>26</sup> Finkelstein argues that the rule-following paradox depends upon an assumption that one unreflectively accepts at the outset – that there is a gulf between a rule and its application. It is as if, having grasped the rule, there still remains an open question about how the rule is to be applied. It thus seems possible to ask what the rule of addition requires when we are asked to add, say, 57 and 63, and to feel that some explanation is needed for why 120, rather than some other number, is the correct answer. The platonist argues that the rules themselves somehow bridge the gap: the correct answer is determined by the contours of a platonic realm. To follow the rule correctly therefore requires an act of interpretation on behalf of the rule-follower, but this interpretation must aspire to grasp what the rules dictate, to lock on to the rails that will take the rule-follower from one correct

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<sup>26</sup>David Finkelstein, 'Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism', in: Alice Crary and Rupert Reed, editors, *The New Wittgenstein* (New York NY: Routledge, 2000), p. 67.

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application to the next, rails that stretch to infinity. Rules so conceived are members of what Frege called the third realm.<sup>27</sup> The problem is that such an apparent explanation is no explanation at all. The platonist merely postulates a property – the ability to reach out to infinity and determine all future applications – and then ascribes this property to the very phenomenon which we found mysterious: rules. As Finkelstein aptly makes the point: ‘The problem with saying this is *not* that there are no items which reach out to their applications (rules *are* such items!), but that the platonist has done nothing more than describe what he promised to explain – adding, misleadingly, that what’s going on is mysterious.’<sup>28</sup> Thus for the platonist, a word or sign is, in itself, dead. It derives its normative power in virtue of its relation to something outside of itself – the platonist’s rules. But this is a wholly mysterious and unsatisfying picture.

How about Charybdis? This is the idea, familiar from Wright’s position, that we should respond to the rule-following paradox with the words ‘this is just what we do’. For the individual, correctness in rule-following is determined by norms established by the community. At the level of the community, however, nothing determines correctness. The community as a whole is not subject to normative constraint. The community is that which *enacts* normative constraint. Only in virtue of there being a community can there be rules with which the individual can be in or out of step, but there is nothing for the community as a whole to be in or out of step with. The community ‘just goes’.

The problem with this position, however, is that if the norms the community enacts are groundless, it is unclear how they can be said to bind the individuals that

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<sup>27</sup>Gottlob Frege, ‘Thought’, in: Michael Beaney, editor, *The Frege Reader* (Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1997), p. 343.

<sup>28</sup>Finkelstein, ‘Wittgenstein on Rules and Platonism’, p. 67.

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are asked to follow them. Consider the relation between teacher and student. A student relies upon her teacher for normative guidance. But if the teacher simply makes up the norms as he goes along, then his instructions have no authority. The student could equally make things up herself. The teacher can guide the student only in so far as the norms he teaches have an authority that is independent of his say-so. Of course, the teacher is not a community, but just another individual. But why should that make a difference? If the teacher were a collective rather than an individual, why should that endow the proffered norms with substance? If the teacher or collective is not *onto* something that has, as it were, normative substance independent of their decisions, then they are in no position to offer *guidance* to the student at all.<sup>29</sup> On this reading, the appeal to ‘what we do’ makes correctness in a practice conditional upon facts about how the community decides to go on. But such decisions do not constitute normative ‘bedrock’, to use another of Wittgenstein’s metaphors found in *On Certainty*.<sup>30</sup> They just make normativity arbitrary. We can see this because in many cases of concept application we distinguish clearly between correct usage and community-established usage, and we recognize that the community can be out of step with how things are.<sup>31</sup> If a community concludes that  $720 + 720$

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<sup>29</sup>There is a marked difference between being ‘autonomous from the community full stop’ and being ‘autonomous from a communal decision about how to go on’ that is crucial for distinguishing a genuine response to the rule-following considerations from an unsatisfactory platonism. The former leads to platonism. The latter merely endorses the idea that norms require one’s participation within a community of rule-followers in order to be grasped. In picking the latter option, we do not endorse either that norms are community-independent, nor that they are susceptible to the whims of the community as a whole. I will say a little more on this issue below.

<sup>30</sup>See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, edited by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969) §97

<sup>31</sup>Such examples are available in Tyler Burge’s work on anti-individualism and can be derived from Hilary Putnam’s work on the same topic. I have in mind the cases of scientists who successfully challenge the scientific community’s understanding of a concept. These ‘renegades’ are out of step with their community, but clearly in the right in their use of a concept which the community makes possible. The community does not decide the right and wrong application of a concept, even though

= 1450, or that Pluto is a planet, or that astrological forces are causally efficacious, then the community is wrong. What the community says cannot constitute what it is correct to say.

To find a course between Scylla and Charybdis, we must drop the assumption that there is a gap between a rule and its application that must be bridged by an interpretation, or the doings of the community, or some other device. What we need to see, McDowell argues, is that there is a way of grasping a rule that is not a matter of interpreting it. This is Wittgenstein's advice to us in the part of *Investigations* §201 that Kripke studiously ignores:

It can be seen that there is a misunderstanding here from the mere fact that in the course of our argument we give one interpretation after another as if each one contented us at least for a moment, until we thought of yet another standing behind it. What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation*, but which is exhibited in what we call 'obeying the rule' and 'going against it' in actual cases.

Hence there is an inclination to say: every action according to the rule is an interpretation. But we ought to restrict the term 'interpretation' to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.<sup>32</sup>

McDowell argues that if we heed Wittgenstein's advice, we will be able to see how: 'Understanding is grasping patterns that extend to new cases independently of our ratification, as is required for meaning to be other than an illusion[...]; but the constraints imposed by our concepts do not have the platonistic autonomy with which they are credited in the picture of the super-rigid machinery.'<sup>33</sup> The idea is

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its taking up the concept in its practices is necessary for grasping it by its members. See Tyler Burge, 'Individualism and the Mental', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4:1 (September 1979), p. 716 and Hilary Putnam, 'Meaning of Meaning', in: *Philosophical Papers*, volume II (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>32</sup>See §201 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>33</sup>McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', p. 256.

the following. If one understands a concept, then one sees how that concept extends to novel cases in a way that does not require ratification: the concept's extension does not have to wait for approval by the community, as it were. A concept has a certain sort of generality in virtue of being the concept it is – nothing has to be done to make it apply in future cases. However, this does not mean that the concept (the rule) floats free of our practices, as if it were entirely autonomous of what we do, an inhabitant of the third realm 'out there' to be grasped. Rules must depend in some sense on what we do, on our practices. Practices generate rules, but do not determine their future application by decision. So following a rule is not a matter of interpreting some antecedent item, but of exercising a capacity that is available to us in virtue of our mastery of a practice which, *in some sense*, is internally related to the rule.<sup>34</sup> It is not that the practice generative of the rule can be characterized in non-normative terms, as if we can derive the normative authority of the rule from brute facts about behaviour. Rather, doing such-and-such is just what following the rule consists in. There is therefore no need for an argument to take us from doing such-and-such to following the rule. There is no gulf to be bridged. If someone does not see why doing such-and-such is required by the rule, then she does not understand the rule. What she requires is *Bildung*, and not a second-order explanation of how the rule is applied. When she understands the rule, there is no further question to be asked – at least no question to ask a philosopher – about what counts as following it. In grasping the rule, one just knows how to go on in future instances.

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<sup>34</sup>Mastering a practice here need only be conceived as being able to *act* in accordance with a rule or cluster of rules that define a practice, like the rules for moving pieces in chess. We can then follow Baker and Hacker in making the further claim that an act (an instance of a practice) is not separate from the grasp of the rule – that they are, as Baker and Hacker put it, internally related. See G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, *Skepticism, Rules and Language* (Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 100–101. This is just to further emphasize that there is no distance between a rule and its application. It is to deny the idea, as Finkelstein identifies it, that there is a gulf to be bridged at all.

Thus, in becoming part of a community, one acquires capacities different in kind from creatures whose lives are not informed by such practices. That which we do can in-itself be the following of a rule. Our use of language can be conceived along similar lines. My utterances themselves are doings which are instances of following rules. Our use of words is made possible by an immense framework of practices within which a custom of speaking in certain ways is formed. The idea is that without such framework, meaning would not be something within our grasp. However, when meaning is in our grasp when I speak to another, she can, among other things, hear meaning in my words in her recognition of my following the linguistic rules of our shared community in speaking. She can thus hear what I mean in recognizing what I am *doing*: speaking according to the practices of our shared language. McDowell makes this point explicit using a very apt metaphor:

If, on the other hand, we reject the anti-realist restriction on what counts as manifesting one's understanding, we entitle ourselves to this thought: shared membership in a linguistic community is not just a matter of matching in aspects of an exterior that we present to anyone whatever, but equips us to make our minds available to one another, by confronting one another with a different exterior from that which we present to outsiders.<sup>35</sup>

Due to our background of shared practices, I can make myself understood. I can, to use McDowell's words, show you an exterior that is indicative of my thoughts and actions that I cannot show those who do not yet share our practices. The capacity to hear meaning in one another's words is fundamental to our linguistic practice. However, having such an 'exterior' – one that can display our inner lives – *at all* is also dependent on having such practices insofar as such practices make concepts

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<sup>35</sup>McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', p. 253.

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possible. I not only make myself intelligible to others in such ways, but these are the very same ways that I am intelligible to myself.<sup>36</sup> I express my thoughts and think using the very same conceptual capacities.

Moreover, what I tell you is often about that which is outside us both. I might tell you that the bus left and that you will have to wait for ten minutes if you want to catch the next one. I can make my thoughts about the world intelligible to you and myself in virtue of those same practices. Those initiated into community acquire the capacity to take in the world as a meaningful domain in acquiring capacities to speak to one another about this domain. What I see, the bus leaving the station, and what I tell you about, the bus' having left, contain the very same meaning – the latter is merely a report of the former – and thus are operations of the very same capacity. I can report to you what I see and what I saw on the background of our shared customs. This means that seeing the world is not a matter of gaining a skill that operates on something that both the inducted and the uninducted share, but is rather a skill, the exercise of which makes available something unavailable to the uninitiated: a world intelligible in thinking.<sup>37</sup> The uninitiated do not have meaning available to them, nor have they a world. One acquires this capacity for meaning in engaging the world and expressing one's understanding of it to others. In being corrected and directed, one acquires both a world and an ability to talk about it. The two abilities are not underwritten by different capacities, but rather are exercises of the *very same* conceptual capacities.

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<sup>36</sup>This is one upshot of Wittgenstein's private language argument. See McDowell, 'One Strand', p. 293 and §384 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*. As Wittgenstein points out, one learns the concept of pain and thus gains capacities to express pain (something inner) in learning something which is inherently communal: a language.

<sup>37</sup>This is one of the upshots of the previous chapter, where I rejected non-conceptual accounts of perceptual experience.

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But does this appeal to initiation into practices answer the explanatory challenge that McDowell himself poses? McDowell recognizes that ‘until more is said about how exactly the appeal to communal practice makes the middle course [between Scylla and Charybdis] available, this is only a programme for a solution to Wittgenstein’s problem’.<sup>38</sup> It is not yet perspicuous what it is about a practice that makes possible our conceptual capacities.

McDowell’s mention of a ‘programme’ can be easily understood in a way that stands in tension with his overall picture of rule-following as advanced in ‘Wittgenstein on Following a Rule’. He recognizes this and intends to clarify his position in ‘Meaning and Intentionality in Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy’.<sup>39</sup> Specifically, in footnote 6 on that page, McDowell mentions that his account in ‘Wittgenstein on Following a Rule’ *might*, if it is read as too hospitable to such an account, be taken to suggest a constructive (even reductive) philosophy which explains meaning in terms of practices and community. One might view McDowell’s comment in the footnote as signaling a change of mind, or a retraction, but I think this is the wrong way to understand that footnote. I do not think McDowell ever meant his account in ‘Wittgenstein on Following a Rule’ to be programmatic in the sense that it recommends a further account of practice and community that is to be explanatory of meaning in a way that writes meaning out of the account.<sup>40</sup> This would be tantamount to suggesting

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<sup>38</sup>McDowell, ‘Wittgenstein on Following a Rule’, p. 242.

<sup>39</sup>McDowell, ‘Meaning and Intentionality’, p. 275.

<sup>40</sup>See, for example: ‘In the different picture I have described, the response to Wittgenstein’s problem works because a linguistic community is conceived as bound together, not by a match in mere externals (facts accessible to just anyone), but by a capacity for a meeting of minds.’ (McDowell, ‘Wittgenstein on Following a Rule’, p. 253). McDowell’s idea in this passage is that a practice enables us to grasp one another’s meaning in a meeting of minds. Meaning thus still plays a crucial and irreducible role. It does likewise in the following passage: ‘But if we respect Wittgenstein’s injunction not to dig below the ground, we must say that the community “goes right or wrong” according to whether the object in question is, or is not, yellow; and nothing can make

that an account of community and practice can *replace* an account of meaning, rather than serve a role in illuminating its possibility. As I hope the reader recognizes from my discussion of McDowell's interpretation of Wittgenstein, this is at odds with his overall approach.

We can distinguish two independent and distinct questions that McDowell's 'programme' might aim to answer: (i) how do practices make meaning possible? and (ii) how do practices *constitute* meaning? An answer to (i) can be simple. It can be answered simply by claiming that customs enable the availability of meaning within the reach of their domain. For example, we can say that a custom of calling things 'red' makes possible the *thinking about* and the *seeing of* red things. In saying this, we do not reduce the grasping of the meaning of 'red' (understanding 'red') to merely acting in a manner that the custom demands, but we do claim that acting in accordance with the custom is necessary for our having a grasp of what 'red' means. If someone claims that even after carefully listening to our explanation he still does not understand what 'red' means, no amount of further explanation could illuminate things for him. We would have to say, with Wittgenstein, that he should just do as we do, and then he will *understand* in so doing. This is not to be mistaken for the behaviourist thought that meaning merely amounts to behaving in ways that are taken to be correct. One must be brought inside a practice in order to grasp a concept as concepts can only be grasped from the inside. For Wittgenstein, understanding a rule, as Bakhurst helpfully explains, is a matter of being brought inside a 'perspective

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its being yellow, or not, dependent on our ratification of the judgement that that is how things are.' (McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', p. 256). The community's movements cannot serve as a replacement for meaning. The concept *yellow* applies to future instances in ways that are immune from the effects of our future decisions about how to use the word 'yellow'.

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of use'.<sup>41</sup> This perspective cannot be reduced to a set of assertibility conditions or any other codification. And this is why meaning can only be grasped from within a community and not from without. Providing an individual with this perspective is the goal of inculcating another into custom. Being so inculcated equips her with a capacity to understand instances of concepts from within the perspective of the community. The appeal to custom thus serves as a *reminder* that should dissolve the need for answering the rule-following problematic by way of a substantive account.<sup>42</sup> Outside of a perspective of use, there is no account to be given of meaning. And from within this perspective, there is no need for an account.

This, I take it, is McDowell's position throughout, which I will soon further discuss by contrasting it with Brandom's.<sup>43</sup> It does not explain meaning in virtue of something other, but reminds the initiated how practices and customs make meaning possible in a non-reductive sense. The notion of understanding is not explained away on McDowell's picture. Rather, he appeals to custom as the context in which a notion of understanding has application. In order to understand a concept, I must understand it from inside a practice. And to be inside a practice, I need to be inculcated into the customs of that practice. This cannot be replaced with an explanation or some other account of the concept on pains of an infinite regress. Answering (ii) instead leads us in the wrong direction. In asking (ii) instead of (i), we unreflectively assume that meaning is something which is to be explained away, and in so doing, we risk breathing new life into the problematic that got us here in the first place.

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<sup>41</sup>David Bakhurst, 'Wittgenstein and Social Being', in: David Bakhurst and Christine Sypnowich, editors, *The Social Self* (London UK: Sage, 1995), p. 37.

<sup>42</sup>Such an answer would, as McDowell notes, give something closer to a 'diagnostic deconstruction of the peculiar way of thinking that makes such a thing seem necessary' in contrast to a constructive account. See McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality', p. 278.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 276–277.

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Brandom attempts to give an answer to the question McDowell's work poses. However, as we will see, he ultimately veers towards answering (ii). In answering (ii), I think he spoils a promising insight into the practical nature of conceptual capacities that we should endorse: that their possession involves *know-how*.<sup>44</sup> I turn to Brandom next in order to draw out this insight and to better explain the mistake in asking (ii). Doing so will put us in a position to answer (i) more fully.

### 3.8 Brandom's Interpretation: Regulism and Regularism

Brandom takes Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations to delineate two unsatisfactory accounts of normativity. The first is regularism, where the distinction between correct and incorrect performance is reduced to the distinction between adhering to and violating a regular pattern of behaviour. I will not reiterate in detail the problems with such a view.<sup>45</sup> No appeal to mere regularity will settle the normative question of how the rule ought to be followed in the future, since any sequence of actions is compatible with a multitude of ways to go on, each with a claim to be cases of 'going on in the same way'. The second account is 'regulism', the view that the correct application of a rule is determined by some further rule. This position, of course, invites the objection that it is committed to a vicious regress.

Brandom's version of the regress argument is unique, for it starts from the demand for an *explicit* articulation of the further rule that determines the correct or incorrect application of the first. The correct application of this further rule equally requires determination, and hence we need recourse to a yet-further rule, and so on.

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<sup>44</sup>Robert Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 26.

The solution Brandom offers is to stop the regress by appeal to an *implicit* rule: ‘Norms explicit as rules presuppose norms implicit in practices because a rule specifying how something is correctly done (how a word ought to be used, how a piano ought to be tuned) must be applied to particular circumstances, and applying a rule in particular circumstances is itself essentially something that can be done correctly or incorrectly.’<sup>46</sup> Only explicit rules require their application conditions to be discursively articulated, implicit rules are simply acted upon. This thought resonates with Wittgenstein’s remark that appeal to practices, to ‘what we do’, is the key to resolving the paradox.<sup>47</sup> Brandom takes this to mean that there is some *feature* of practices that ends the regress and accounts for normativity. This way of thinking embodies a commitment to two different levels of correctness: correctness in accordance with the rule and correctness in applying the rule; the former depends on the latter.<sup>48</sup> It does so because implicit rules govern the application of a rule in a particular situation. Rules are general, and require particularizing in specific cases. Of course, implicit rules do not govern the application of a rule in the sense that one self-consciously applies them in particular situations – that would just give rise to the regress. Rather, knowledge of the implicit rule consists, not in a grasp of some formulation, but in the ability to do something correctly: it is know-how rather than knowledge-that.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, p. 20.

<sup>47</sup>See §217 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>48</sup>This sort of distinction is most salient when considering the relation between the directions in a manual and their application. I might be said to know that a particular piano performance is in accord with how one should play the piano in virtue of my having read a ‘how to play the piano’ booklet. However, I myself would be unable to play the piano well in accordance with those rules. I would thus have only cursory knowledge of how those rules are applied.

<sup>49</sup>In making this distinction, I, like Brandom, follow Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, p. 28.

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It is useful to approach the sort of understanding that is involved in mastering a practice[...] by means of Ryle's distinction between knowing *how* and knowing *that*. Knowing how to do something is a matter of practical ability.[...] Thus one knows how to ride a bicycle, apply a concept, draw an inference, and so on, just in case one can discriminate in one's practice, in the performances one produces and assesses, between correct and incorrect ways of doing these things.<sup>50</sup>

This is knowledge that one acquires through inculcation into the community of rule-followers. This is why the pragmatist order of explanation is primary for Brandom in contrast to the regulist-intellectualist order he takes Wittgenstein to be arguing against.<sup>51</sup> Brandom's implicit rules are thus to be understood as *proprities* of practices, those features which bear the normative weight.<sup>52</sup> They form the ground on which, in any particular situation, one can be said to have acted correctly or incorrectly.

Brandom takes this conclusion as an incentive to theorize the nature of practices by making explicit what is implicit, thereby articulating the know-how on which normativity rests. Indeed, this provides the principal rationale for Brandom's overall picture of philosophy (as one might gather from the title of his book): giving explicit articulation to implicit know-how.<sup>53</sup> Brandom recognizes, however, that his approach is not exactly Wittgenstein's.<sup>54</sup> While Wittgenstein, 'the principled theoretical quietist, does not attempt to provide a theory of practices, nor would he endorse the project of doing so', Brandom thinks the philosopher is beholden to 'come up with an account of norms implicit in practices that will satisfy the criteria of adequacy

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<sup>50</sup>Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., pp. 21–23.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 26, 649.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

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Wittgenstein's arguments have established'.<sup>55</sup>

It is worth pausing to reflect on Brandom's portrayal of Wittgenstein's stance. Brandom presents Wittgenstein as establishing criteria of adequacy for an account of normativity but then refusing to produce an account that meets those criteria, due to his commitment to quietism. On such a view, Wittgenstein's quietism looks like a stubborn affectation, a refusal to follow through on the conclusion of his arguments out of some principled distinction between what philosophy can and cannot say. Wittgenstein may have been a stubborn person, but this sort of refusal to do the hard philosophical work seems totally out of character. Surely it is better to read him, not as establishing criteria of adequacy for a theory he then refuses to give, but as attempting to dissolve the issue that generates the apparent need for theorizing. Quietism is the natural outcome of a view that shows that there is nothing about which we need to speak. Brandom's appeal to implicit rules is a move made to stop a regress. Wittgenstein's appeal to practice, however, looks like a move made to prevent the regress from getting going in the first place.<sup>56</sup> If there is no regress, then there is no problem that we have to look to theory to solve.

To develop this line of argument, I shall consider McDowell's response to Brandom.

### 3.9 Brandom and McDowell: Taking and Understanding

McDowell maintains that Brandom is wrong to see regulism as Wittgenstein's primary target.<sup>57</sup> This mistake explains why Brandom is puzzled by Wittgenstein's discussion of sign-posts, which he takes to involve a sloppy conflation of sign-posts and rules.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, pp. 29–30.

<sup>56</sup>McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality', p. 267.

<sup>57</sup>McDowell, 'Brandom's Wittgenstein', p. 100.

<sup>58</sup>Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, p. 64.

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Wittgenstein, however, is interested not just in the preconditions of following an explicitly articulated rule, but in how our actions are guided or directed by something meaningful, whether that be a sign or an explicitly articulated instruction.<sup>59</sup> I walk down a path, and I find a sign pointing left to a campsite where I am supposed to meet a friend. I follow the sign to the left understanding that it is pointing me in that direction. I might equally have been guided by a written set of directions given me by my friend, one which told me to go left to the campsite at such and such a point on the path. Would I then have been guided any differently than by the sign? One case is discursively explicit and the other not, but the issue is the same: acting in light of a conception of correctness. But Brandom does not see this.

Brandom construes the normativity of the signpost – its pointing one way rather than another – as a matter of applying an implicit rule in accord with a feature of our practice, proprieties as he conceives them. But this is to treat signs, words, and so on as somehow normatively inept. The sign, in itself, does not point any way – it is just an object among others. It is one’s applying a rule that bestows normative force on the sign. It is one’s *taking* that sign to point left that constitutes the sign’s telling you to go left. Compare this to McDowell’s position on which understanding a sign is not a matter of implicitly applying a rule but of *sensitivity* to the sign’s meaning. That meaning is not something platonic, but rather something the sign has in virtue of our custom of erecting and acting in accordance to signs.<sup>60</sup> But even if the originators of a sign were to disappear in some cataclysmic event, the sign post they left behind would not be devoid of meaning. One could, as archaeologists often do, learn something about the now-gone community by coming to understand the meaning of the sign in

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<sup>59</sup>See §198 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>60</sup>McDowell, ‘Meaning and Intentionality’, pp. 276–277.

unearthing and partaking of the long-unpracticed customs. Seeing that a sign points left is not a matter of applying a rule in accord with some further implicit rules for its application. That the sign plays the role it does is a matter of its having a life in our customs and, what is crucial here, that *the sign points left* is irrespective of something *I* do when confronted with it.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, when I act in accord with it, I do not apply a rule at all, I just see that the sign is pointing left. My having the customs I have enables my having a capacity to recognize the way signs point when I see them. This is the nature of my know-how. This is not a matter of application but of understanding. For those who understand it, it is the sign and nothing over and above it, that gives them reason to go left rather than right. My understanding the sign is my *seeing* my reason to go left. Its normativity is constitutive of its nature as a sign. The distinction between McDowell's and Brandom's respective interpretations can be understood in terms of the way they conceive of the skill one gains through *Bildung*. For Brandom, it is a skill to apply a rule in a particular situation. It is a skill to *take* states, attitudes and performances as having a particular meaning in conferring that meaning upon them. In doing so, we bestow meaning on an otherwise meaningless reality.<sup>62</sup> For McDowell, the skill is recognitional. It is a skill to recognize and thus identify meaning which is already there. Custom enables this capacity, but meaning is not necessarily constituted in the process of its practice.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup>McDowell illustrates this in saying: 'The point of the appeal to custom is just to make sure that that first move is not misunderstood in such a way as to eliminate accord, and with it understanding, altogether.'(McDowell, 'Meaning and Intentionality', p.277). In retaining an operative notion of understanding in our response, we no longer require something other to generate the standard of correctness. This means that my actions need not somehow *generate* the relevant meaning. The meaning is already there to be understood in the object's being a sign. This would not be the case if a squirrel were to have made the marks in an attempt to escape a predator. In that case, we might mistake the signs for man-made ones, but there is no sense in which we could be said to understand, or fail to understand them.

<sup>62</sup>Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, p. 117.

<sup>63</sup>I say 'necessarily', for there is a sense in which signs are constituted by the practice of our

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Let us return now to McDowell's idea of 're-enchanted nature', where the world itself is significant for our thinking and that significance is made available to us in perception. On this view, the world can guide the judgement of an individual who has acquired a background of shared practices through *Bildung* or inculcation into custom. Our practices enable us to find meaning in the world and, for the initiated, they make the world intelligible to themselves and others in experience. One's immediately understanding that a sign points left, entails that one can immediately see and judge that this sign points left, express this judgement to others, and act in accordance with what this meaning requires according to one's aims. Receptivity unified by the understanding just is a form of sensitivity to normative requirements. Seeing, judgement, and expression, we can say, are but three exercises of the same conceptual capacities enabled by our practices. Their exercise qua conceptual capacities, following Brandom's insight, is a matter of acting on know-how.

In order not to spoil this insight, we must overcome the idea that there is an explanatory lacuna between a rule and its application that something must fill. Brandom persists in this idea. On his picture, the gap is filled by an implicit application of a rule governed by a propriety of a practice. The relevant know-how ends up described as a capacity to apply a rule in accordance with another implicit rule and not as a capacity for recognizing meaning. And this just means the paradox restarts with the familiar question: Why *should* the rule be applied this way or that?<sup>64</sup> Claiming that

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customs which involve them. We build signs according to custom. This is just how it is with artefacts.

<sup>64</sup>David Bakhurst also identifies this failure of Brandom's. See Bakhurst, *Formation of Reason*, pp. 118 fn.12. Bakhurst goes on to argue in fn.14 that it is Brandom's situating of his own project alongside the Enlightenment that ultimately spoils his account of Wittgenstein. Brandom is engaged in a project that is supposed to show how ours is a world of 'meaningless objects and meaning generating subjects'. See Brandom, *Making it Explicit*, p. 49. He thus already assumes that Wittgenstein can only give a particular sort of constructive answer, and in doing so becomes blind to Wittgenstein's

its application is implicit does not take us to the answer Wittgenstein gives, where understanding is *fundamental*.

Brandom moves us forward by capturing a crucial feature of practices – that rule-following is a matter of know-how, but his appeal to practice is flawed by his assumption that it serves to bridge the gap between rules and their application. The relevant know-how is that which is associated with the possession of conceptual capacities. In having these capacities we can see, express, and act on meaning.

### 3.10 Understanding and Experience

Let us consider in more detail McDowell's conception of custom. He holds that the kind of immediate understanding involved in correctly reading a sign-post presupposes initiation into common practices or customs. A custom is sustained by its members, by what they do with signs:

The reply – which corresponds to the first sentence of §202 – is that the training in question is *initiation* into a custom. If it were not that, then the account of the connection between sign-post and action would indeed look like an account of nothing more than brute movement and its causal explanation; our picture would not contain the materials to entitle us to speak of following (going by) a sign post.<sup>65</sup>

Initiation into custom makes meaning available to us. However, custom is not merely a background to conceptual competence. Being initiated into a custom is not something merely bestowed on me. Customs are that which communities of human beings *engage* in. I must earn my status as a member of the community. And I earn it insofar as I develop the sorts of capacities that our customs make possible. I must learn to *act*

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employment of understanding.

<sup>65</sup>McDowell, 'Wittgenstein on Following a Rule', p. 239, emphasis my own.

in accord with custom. The sort of correctness in question is practical in nature – it is correctness in doing (in this we can agree with Brandom). And this means that initiation is a matter of attaining a skill, a capacity to render the world intelligible. When customs are that which communities of human beings *engage* in, faced with a sign, I exercise my skill, which enables me to relate to a sign as a sign (rather than to a plank with a squiggly line on it, or to a nothing).<sup>66</sup>

However, in my view this way of speaking is in tension with the picture of experience, advanced by McDowell, on which initiation equips us with capacities that are somehow passive in their application, like pieces of mental furniture which can be brought into play irrespective of our activity, by being switched on when we are in perceptual contact with objects. The latter view gives rise to a devastating difficulty, for we are either stuck (a) with the belief that static objects make themselves present to us, or (b) left without explanation for how experience justifies belief. As we saw in Chapter 2, (a) leaves us with a spooky conception of nature, where the world must somehow ‘speak to us’ in experience and (b) merely presents a question with no clear way of answering it. I argued that we are only stuck with the task of answering this question if we believe that knowledge of the world can only arise in our being passive in respect to it. What I am proposing is that in having a concept, I have a capacity which is *exercised* in rendering intelligible that which is before me, whether it be a signpost, a basil leaf, or a bird moving between the trees. In perception, I render the world intelligible to myself by exercising this capacity in interacting with it. This is not a matter of *applying* a concept or a rule. The idea that it is either, requires something to which my concept is applied that could conceivably constrain my judgement

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<sup>66</sup>I do not mean to say that there is a temporal development here. I am not first faced with the sign and then exercise my skill on it. Rather, the exercising of my skill is my being faced with the sign. The two are one and the same.

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– some pre-conceptual ground – or it suggests that I somehow constitute the content of my experience, that it somehow issues from me. The former option lands us with the Myth of the Given, the latter treats concepts as operating in perception as they do in spontaneity, and threatens our sense that experiential judgement is rationally constrained from without.

The bind we are in is this. If we think of ourselves as applying conceptual capacities in experience, then we can no longer rescue the thought that experience can justify judgement, for the content made available to us is generated from within, not determined from without. McDowell's response is to maintain that we do not do anything in experience, but rather, it is objects that do something to us by drawing into play our conceptual capacities.<sup>67</sup> However, apart from the fact that the idea that tables, chairs, and other objects *do* something to one in experience engenders a somewhat spooky feeling, we have lost sight of that which, on McDowell's view, supposedly makes concept possession possible: partaking in a practice or custom. It will not do merely to gesture at *Bildung* as the source of the ability to hold the world in view. For how are we to think of the transformation that *Bildung* supposedly effects? Surely what is at issue is the acquisition of abilities to do something that the uninitiated cannot. And this cannot be conceived as something merely passive. There must, that is, be some middle way of conceiving of the involvement of concepts in experience, one which treats experiencing as an activity, but does not conceive of this as a matter of applying concepts to a pre-conceptual given or of conceptual activity constituting the world. I think such a middle way is at hand in our prior discussion of rule-following. It follows from the thought that inculcation bestows upon one recognitional capacities.

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<sup>67</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 31.

### 3.11 The Middle Way

Consider the following passage from Wittgenstein's *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* to which McDowell alludes in the quotation that defines the basic dilemma he seeks to overcome:

How do I know that the colour that I am now seeing is called 'green'? Well to confirm it I might ask other people, but if they did not agree with me, I should become totally confused and should perhaps take them or myself for crazy. That is to say: I should either no longer trust myself to judge, or no longer react to what they say as to a judgement. If I am drowning and I shout 'Help!', how do I know what the word 'Help' means? Well, that is how I react in this situation. Now that is how I know what 'green' means as well and also know how I have to follow the rule in the particular case.<sup>68</sup>

How should we conceive of the protagonist's confusion? Is it really about whether the colour present in his perception should be *called* green? We might think this if we thought there was some intelligible content to perception independently of having concepts. But we've now been convinced otherwise. As Wittgenstein immediately adds, given a lack of agreement, one begins to doubt not just what one should *call* what is before one, but one's very capacity to judge that something *is* green. Once we recognize the involvement of concepts in experience, then the capacity to judge that something is green is not accidentally related to the capacity to see it as green. After all, this is not a case of wondering whether something that looks green really is green. We are imagining a case where the very concept is brought into question. Judgement and perception, so the argument goes, are not independent – intuitions

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<sup>68</sup>See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics*, edited by G.H. Von Wright, G.E.M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees (Cambridge MA: MIT University Press, 1983), VI-30, VI-9.

without concepts are blind, and concepts without intuitions are empty. But Wittgenstein adds something to that Kantian formulation. To know what ‘green’ means is to have knowledge of how to react, knowledge of how to identify green things – this is what it means to be part of a practice, a custom. It is not that my partaking of the practices of my community turns otherwise dead signs into meaning as if by magic. Rather, it equips me with know-how I employ in my daily interactions with the world and with other people. And this means that acting in certain ways (i.e. identifying green things, telling others about green things, bringing green things when prompted) is constitutive of my possessing the concept green, and thus of my capacity to see green things. My capacity is recognitional. In having it and exercising it, I can recognize green things. Not only are perception and judgement interdependent, but judgement, perception and action are too. It is not that the capacity to see green things is somehow independent of knowledge of what to do: perception so conceived involves action, the deployment of practical knowledge, know-how.

And here the familiar objection arises. Is there no such thing as merely perceiving? Merely seeing what things are without being, not even implicitly, up to something? What we need is a way of rendering intelligible how experience involves activity, which nonetheless makes sense of ‘taking the world in’ and accommodates experience’s justificatory role. It is to this end that we must make sense of ways in which concepts can have an active role in experience that is distinct from their active application by the perceiver. We need, that is, some middle way.

We can get a clear picture of this middle way by considering the contrast between McDowell’s Wittgensteinian view of conceptual capacities and his Kantian conception that is operative in *Mind and World* and ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’. As

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we saw, for McDowell's Wittgenstein, concepts equip one with recognitional and expressive capacities in a unsurprising way. Such capacities are part of a human being's natural history.<sup>69</sup> If I possess a concept, then I can (a) identify its instances in my surroundings, (b) express thoughts about these instances to others, (c) act as appropriate given my projects. My conceptual capacities are thus necessarily world-involving, other-involving, and salient to my agency. It is thus fundamental to the nature of a concept that its possession equips an agent with a capacity to identify instances of that which falls under this concept. My having the concept *rabbit* and my ability to perceive rabbits are not separate capacities. McDowell's Kantian conception is different. It takes as fundamental the role concepts play in active thinking, or *spontaneity*.<sup>70</sup> On this view, having a concept primarily means that one's possession of it equips one with a capacity to actively construct thoughts with it. Dealing with concepts is paradigmatically an expression of one's freedom in thinking. Starting with this commitment and given that experience must be an actualization of these same conceptual capacities, it should come as no surprise that McDowell must insist that concepts are drawn on *passively* in experience by some outside force. The way concepts are involved in experience in this picture is derivative of the way they are involved in active thinking. Given that we cannot be thought to construct the content of experience if we are to retain its justificatory role, insisting on passivity is a way of making this conception hold together. However, as we saw previously, this won't do.

I think the Kantian starting point in *Mind and World* is the wrong one for understanding the involvement of conceptual capacities in experience. We saw in Chapter

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<sup>69</sup>See §25 in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>70</sup>McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 31.

2 that it forces us to chart a path of inquiry whose terminus is a dilemma where we have to choose between a pernicious form of idealism and an underwhelming epistemology of perceptual experience. This signals the need for a new starting point. I there suggested that a promising one starts with conceiving of experience as active, as something which we do. I thus propose that we should instead start with a Wittgensteinian conception of conceptual capacity, where concept possession fundamentally involves having a *recognition* skill. On this view, my exercising this skill in perception just is my seeing the relevant feature captured by that concept. In undergoing *Bildung*, I become equipped with a capacity whose exercise makes available the world to thought. Seeing thus involves the active deployment of a multitude of conceptual capacities. The aim of this deployment, I will argue in later chapters, is knowing one's surroundings.

How we should conceive the exercise of these capacities is the topic of the following chapter, where we will draw on the work of Alva Noë to consider further the place of action in perception.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Experiential Activity: The Enactive View**

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## 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I argued to the following conclusion: If one describes perceptual experience as a passive capacity, one cannot account for how experience serves to justify belief. My solution is simple. We must conceive experience as an active capacity, one whose operation brings the world into view. This view can account for experience's justificatory role, because it can make sense of a teleological relation between experience and judgement. In exercising this capacity we aim at knowledge. It is not that one is simply presented with some content in experience on the basis of which one can be justified in believing such-and-such. The mere presence of content is not enough – content, after all, is similarly present in passing thoughts that provide no grounds for judgement whatsoever. Rather, having content available for judgement in experience is an achievement of the operation of one's capacity to perceive, not something that merely happens to one. In the previous chapter, I argued that a network of practices must already be present for experience to furnish conceptual content. It is only in the midst of active involvement in such practices that concepts have a life. On my view, in experience, conceptual content is furnished by the exercise of conceptual capacities in a recognitional role. Their successful exercise just is seeing. In this chapter, I begin my account of the nature of this experiential activity.

A proper account of the justificatory relation between experience and judgement must explain exactly what an experiencing agent does in exercising the perceptual capacities that enable her to take in the world. In the previous chapter, I argued we should follow McDowell in thinking that concepts are essentially involved in human experience, and follow Wittgenstein in thinking that to possess a concept is to partake

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in a practice. In contrast to some commentators on Wittgenstein, who see participation in a practice simply as conformity to socially-sanctioned patterns of behaviour, I believe that one partakes in a practice insofar as one gains and exercises skills that the practice enables. Thus we should understand the role of concepts in experience as involving the exercise of *recognitional* skills by the perceiver. And to understand such skills we need to place them in a wider context, one that recognizes that the end of experience is knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

To this end, I shall consider the work of Alva Noë, which nicely brings out the sort of skills that feature on the ‘ground floor’ of perceptual activity. But before I do so, I want briefly to revisit the debate between Davidson and McDowell in order to focus my discussion of the teleological dimension of experience.

#### 4.2 A Brief Return to McDowell and Davidson

As we saw in Chapter 2, Davidson holds that experience is to be understood as a merely causal process that results in candidates for belief. The epistemic credentials of these states are to be assessed exclusively in terms of their fit with the subject’s other beliefs. McDowell argues that Davidson’s picture fails to make sense of how experience has a rational, and not merely causal, bearing on belief. Indeed, if we ignore the rational relations between experience and judgement, we cannot make sense of the very idea of belief, a concept to which Davidson simply helps himself. Davidson in turn, unmoved by this criticism, expresses puzzlement about McDowell’s view of the states that are supposedly produced by experience. These seem instances of a hitherto

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<sup>1</sup>I mean to invoke Anscombe’s use of ‘wider context’. Anscombe’s thought is that the character of an action that is done for the sake of doing something else (breaking eggs in order to make an omelet) is determined by the latter. See G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 46.

unencountered propositional attitude – something less than belief or judgement, but nonetheless propositional in form. McDowell responds by revoking his view that experiential content is propositional in favour of the idea that intuitions present non-discursive conceptual content that can be articulated in the act of judgement. But this adjustment to McDowell's theory does not speak to a problem to which Davidson implicitly draws attention; namely, that the relation between the mere presentation of such content and judgement is obscure. Why should the presentation of such content provide a reason for belief? When McDowell spoke as if experience yields judgement, this issue was hidden, but now it is all too obvious that he owes us an account of why seeming is (or at least warrants) believing, if I may put it like that. Davidson has an answer to this question, provided by his coherentist view of justification. But McDowell has none.

This is the point at which I believe we need to countenance a teleological connection between experience and judgement. To understand the justification of perceptual knowledge, we should focus, not on the nature of the content presented in experience, but on the activity of perceptually taking in the world. In experience, one *engages* the world to gain knowledge about it. Experience is the acorn to the oak of empirical knowledge.<sup>2</sup> When we claim that someone is experiencing, we conceive that individual as actively managing her relation to the world while gaining knowledge about her surroundings. Experiencing is an aspect of a creature's life, one that can go well or badly, and its nature is such that, when it goes well, it ends in judgement expressing knowledge; that is, knowledge justified by awareness of how the world is. This marks a sharp distinction between human experience and the sort that non-rational animals

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<sup>2</sup>As an acorn is such as to become an oak, so is the content of experience such as to become knowledge.

enjoy. Unlike other animals, which enjoy perceptual relations to objects determined by their broader animal goals (food, rest, safety, and so on), human experience is bound up with knowledge-gathering for its own sake. Humans can be concerned with how things stand with the world independently of other aims. We are interested in truth not merely as a means to the satisfaction of natural ends. A cat's perception does not aim to gain some truth about the cat's environment, but only to meet some end or other of the cat's – acquiring food by stalking prey, finding water, and so on. Experience for human beings is not like this: it affords us a grasp of the world independent of our current aims and purposes. Only once we have this teleological perspective in view can we understand how the deliverances of experience are ripe to justify belief, for they are attained with the purpose of deciding what to think.

At this point the Davidsonian might reply that there is no obstacle to his recognizing a teleological dimension to experience. After all, on his view, experience is causally such as to end in belief, and since belief is for the most part veridical, it follows that the end of experience is knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, while the rational grounds of perceptually acquired beliefs are not derived from experience itself, we can still recognize that experience enacts rational constraint – once removed, as it were – through the relevant belief facing the tribunal of antecedent beliefs. So why is the teleological view I favour supposedly antithetical to Davidson's approach?

The difficulty with Davidson's view lies in how he conceives perceptual *judgement*. For Davidson, experience is quite independent of judgement, which happens somewhere down the road once perceptual beliefs are already in play.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a sense in which, for Davidson, there is no such thing as perceptual judgement. Thus

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<sup>3</sup>For my discussion of Davidson, see Chapter 2, §2

<sup>4</sup>We can gather this from his discussion of the role of experience in Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory', pp. 142–146.

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it is never the world itself that one actively judges to be one way or another; rather, judgement is made only in light of considerations about the coherence of beliefs. This is why Davidson's view leaves thought 'spinning in a void', even if one may, in some distant sense, be causally constrained by the external world.<sup>5</sup> Because he conceives experience as independent of judgement, the former cannot, in any interesting sense, be said to be teleologically linked with the latter. There is nothing in a description of a causal exchange that requires any of the causes to be conceived in terms of a higher unity. And this brings us to the central point. External constraint simpliciter is not the issue, but rather the *right* kind of external constraint, the kind that properly bears on judgement. It is not sufficient that experience makes available content about the world. Experience must somehow go straight to the world in perception so that the content it presents to the perceiver is not independent of judgement. The experiential acorn, that is, must already be striving toward knowledge. There must thus be a higher unity that joins experience and judgement in a structure that exemplifies the capacity to acquire knowledge through experience – something which we might call, with Sebastian Rödl, a *power of knowledge*.<sup>6</sup>

What is central to a teleological conception of a phenomenon is that there be a higher unity in the order of its explanation through which we understand it as having an intrinsic aim, or end. This sort of structure becomes salient once we see, as McDowell wants us to, that experience for human beings is only fully intelligible in connection to a rational capacity for knowledge.<sup>7</sup> We can elaborate this point by saying that judging is constitutive of the wider context necessary for the very intelligibility of ascriptions of experience to human beings. This amounts to the

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<sup>5</sup>See McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup>Rödl, *Self Consciousness*, p. 83.

<sup>7</sup>McDowell, *Perception as a Capacity*, p. 44.

claim that knowledgeable judgement is the proper end of experience. It is not that experience *must* end with knowledgeable judgement to count as such, but that cases that do not so end are necessarily defective. Illusions are defective cases of experience, cases where experience does not reach its proper end.<sup>8</sup>

We can now refocus the original question. How, exactly, are concepts in play in experience such that the end of experience can be knowledgeable judgement? McDowell does not succeed in answering this question merely by holding that the understanding is involved in experience. As I have stressed, the mere presence of conceptual content in experience does not yet account for why experience can be a source of knowledge. We need some way of grasping how experiencing is striving for empirical truth. To answer this question, we must understand how experience can be unified under an end of knowledge. The crucial step is to understand how experiencing is doing something – that is, being engaged with the world in an active manner. When such activity is in view, we can understand how the content available to one in experience, the content one makes available to oneself, is already part of a larger project – inquiry whose end is knowledge.

### 4.3 Action in Perception

In *Action in Perception* Alva Noë argues for an ‘enactive’ view of perception.<sup>9</sup> Perception is enactive because having practical knowledge is constitutive of our ability to perceive.<sup>10</sup> Noë calls this practical knowledge ‘sensorimotor’ knowledge, making

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<sup>8</sup>As discussed in the second chapter McDowell argues for this in McDowell, ‘Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge’, p. 389 and McDowell, *Perception as a Capacity*, pp. 36–39 in presenting his disjunctivist account of perception. The view is also discussed in McDowell, ‘Knowledge by Hearsay’. For a further discussion of fallibility, see Rödl, *Self Consciousness*, pp. 157–158.

<sup>9</sup>Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 2.

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reference to its nature as knowledge of how sensation varies with movement.<sup>11</sup> He begins his account by rejecting, as I do, a strictly receptive picture of experience: ‘The main idea of this book is that perceiving is a way of acting.[...] we enact our perceptual experience; we act it out.’<sup>12</sup> A strictly receptive picture conceives of the perceiver as given content, the receipt of which does not require any activity on her part; receiving perceptual content is something that happens to her. Insofar as the eyes are open, the ears unplugged, etc., content streams in. I argued that such views, among others, fail to account for the justificatory force of experience. Noë argues for a different sort of failure. He holds that such views harbor a mistaken conception of what it is to be receptive at all. On his account, ‘[p]erception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do.’<sup>13</sup> Though I am not sure that his account is correct in every one of its aspects, I am confident that it provides an excellent basis on which to work towards an active conception of experience.<sup>14</sup> He writes:

[...] one of the main themes of this book has been that to perceive you must have sensory stimulation that you understand. But unlike Kant and the tradition spawned by him, the form of understanding I have taken as basic is sensorimotor understanding. Mere sensory stimulation becomes experience with world-presenting content thanks to the perceiver’s possession of sensorimotor skills.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, pp. 63–65.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>I will argue that, contrary to what these quotations might seem to entail, Noë actually holds a view that stands in opposition to mine. My aim in the following will *not* be to stay true to Noë’s full position, but to draw on a few of Noë’s arguments, which provide grounds for a more thoroughly active account of experience than follows from his account. I will discuss the tension between my view and Noë’s in more depth in the coming sections.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

For Noë, enjoying receptivity qua stimulation is insufficient for experience. Like McDowell, he thinks that experience must involve conceptual capacities.<sup>16</sup> However, unlike McDowell, Noë holds that conceptual capacities in perception are to be understood as sensorimotor skills.<sup>17</sup> Sensorimotor skills, Noë tells us, are bodily skills.<sup>18</sup> Having sensorimotor skills means that one knows how movement affects sensory stimulation.<sup>19</sup> Examples of the exercise of such skills are readily available. Indeed, as he points out, mastery of these skills is displayed in our every waking moment:

An object looms larger in the visual field as we approach it, and its profile deforms as we move about it. A sound grows louder as we move nearer to its source. Movements of the hand over the surface of an object give rise to shifting sensations. As perceivers, we are masters of this sort of pattern of sensorimotor dependence. This mastery shows itself in the thoughtless automaticity with which we move our eyes, head and body in taking in what is around us. We spontaneously crane our necks, peer, squint, reach for our glasses, or draw near or get a better look.<sup>20</sup>

Noë believes that a plethora of empirical research supports the claim that such skills are *constitutive of*, rather than external to, a capacity to perceive. For example, in descriptions of cataract-surgery cases, the patients report lacking visual content even when what we take to be their strictly receptive capacities are functioning normally.<sup>21</sup> Their eyes are not closed, their vision not blurred, they possess concepts, and so on. But they are nonetheless experientially blind – experience presents to

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<sup>16</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 181.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp. 1–2.

<sup>21</sup>Noë cites R.L. Gregory and J.G. Wallace, *Recovery from early blindness: A case study* (Experimental Psychology Society, 1963), p. 366, O. Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales* (New York NY: Knopf, 1995), p. 114, and A. Valvo, *Sight Restoration after Long Term Blindness: the Problems and Behaviour Patterns of Visual Rehabilitation* (American Federation for the Blind, 1964), p. 9.

them nothing intelligible. Given that this experiential blindness cannot be explained by appeal to a typical defect of the perceptual apparatus, something else must be missing. This suggests to Noë that there is a dimension to experience not captured by a purely receptive picture.

The existence of experiential blindness [...] demonstrates that merely to be given visual impressions is not yet to be made to see. To see one must have visual impressions that one *understands*.<sup>22</sup>

According to Noë, what such patients lack is a capacity for understanding that is equivalent to a peculiar sort of *know-how*.<sup>23</sup> This view finds support in narratives detailing the case histories of such patients. As most salient, he cites the following passage from ‘Recovery from early blindness: A case study.’:

At first impression, he seemed like a normally sighted person, though differences soon became obvious. When he sat down he would not look round or scan the room with his eyes; indeed, he would generally pay no attention to visual objects unless his attention were called to them, when he would peer at whatever it was with extreme concentration.<sup>24</sup>

Such patients lack a skill to interact with their environment. As long as they lack this skill, they are unable to report or act on perceptual experience. As these studies show, they lack visual perceptual experience that they can understand, which means that they do not enjoy visual perceptual experience at all.<sup>25</sup> From these cases, Noë suggests that the cause of their blindness is lack of sensorimotor skills.<sup>26</sup> To bring this

<sup>22</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>23</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 117–121. For the operative notion of know-how, see Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, pp. 16–20.

<sup>24</sup>Gregory and Wallace, *Recovery from early blindness: A case study*, p. 364.

<sup>25</sup>As we saw in Chapter 2, §2, perceptual content must be such as to be intelligible to the perceiver. It cannot be non-conceptual.

<sup>26</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, pp. 6–7.

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into focus, he discusses another study, which involves the use of displacing spherical prism spectacles. In reversing directions (left—right), these spectacles distort vision such that the subject is no longer presented experience that he can understand. The usual use of sensorimotor capacities just results in confusion.<sup>27</sup> However, Noë observes that such subjects begin to have intelligible visual perception once they re-develop the relevant sensorimotor skills. In so developing them, perception is restored.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the re-development of sensorimotor skills is such that taking the glasses off produces the same effect as putting them on in the first place.<sup>29</sup> From this, Noë concludes that cases of experiential blindness show that ‘[g]enuine perceptual experience depends not only on the character and quality of stimulation, but on our exercise of sensorimotor knowledge.’<sup>30</sup>

Sensorimotor skills are constitutive of a capacity to perceive, as one perceives only if one has attained them. The studies offer a persuasive reason to think this is true of visual perception, but even if we set aside such empirical data, there is much that speaks in favor of this view. It is unclear how experience could have determinate content if we did not possess skills we deploy in experiencing. For example, determinate experience depends upon an ability to focus on particular objects. The capacity to attend to various features within experience makes available to us features and properties of objects that would otherwise be unavailable – the fine texture of cotton chambray, the precise symphony of flavors present in a well-prepared plate of gumbo, or the subtle tone of a flute. Such features are not present to us before we focus on

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<sup>27</sup>I. Kohler, ‘Formation and transformation of the perceptual world’, *Psychological Issues* 3:4 (1964), p. 64.

<sup>28</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10 and Kohler, ‘Formation and transformation of the perceptual world’, p. 65.

<sup>30</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 10.

and interact with these objects.<sup>31</sup>

The central idea is that bringing the world into view in experience depends on knowing how to do something well rather than merely on things going well. Perception is something we attain insofar as we master sensorimotor skills. Noë believes sensorimotor skills are conceptual capacities.<sup>32</sup> In this, I believe he shares a version of my point in the previous chapter: that conceptual capacities are something one has in having know-how. And given that experience is conceptual, experiencing involves the exercise of know-how. On his view and on mine, what the cataract patients lack is knowledge of how to relate to the world in perception. Their blindness is thus not the result of some failure of a physical sensory system. It is lack of know-how. And, indeed, as we saw, the research supports this interpretation, as patients gain visual experience as they learn how to engage their surroundings in a skilled manner. Noë summarizes his position thus:

[E]xperiential blindness exists and is important for two reasons. First, it lends support for the enactive view. Genuine perceptual experience depends not only on the character and quality of stimulation, but on our exercise of sensorimotor knowledge. The disruption of this knowledge does not leave us with experiences we are unable to put to use. It leaves us without experience. For mere sensory stimulation to constitute perceptual experience – that is, for it to have genuine world-presenting-content – the perceiver must possess and make use of sensorimotor knowledge.<sup>33</sup>

Experiencing is something these patients do, not something that happens to them. They learn how to interact with objects in visual perception, and the world becomes visually present to them. It bears repeating that this need not be in tension with

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<sup>31</sup>I expand on this thought in Chapter 5.

<sup>32</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 183.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

the idea that the content available in experience is, in an important sense, not up to us.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, it cannot be up to us if experience is to justify belief. To address this concern, We should think of experience as having two inter-related dimensions. In one, it is a taking in, a receiving. In the other, it is active and not mere receptivity; it is a *taking* in. One receives insofar as one is *taking* in, and one takes in insofar as one receives. The enactive approach has the resources to acknowledge the point of McDowell's conception of receptivity. But it can also claim that McDowell's view is incomplete – only having one dimension of the experiential capacity in view.<sup>35</sup> The active dimension of experience is not constructive of the content available to one in experience; in my view, it is the making present of such content. It is also my contention, that to understand the justificatory relation between experience and judgement we must have both dimensions in view. What we require, then, is a better understanding of this active dimension.

#### 4.4 A Point of Contention

However helpful Noë's view is, my position parts ways with his on our understanding of the character of the active dimension in experience. It does so, for he seems to adamantly hold that movement and action are *not* necessary for experience:

Perceptual presence requires that the perceiver possess and exercise sensorimotor understanding. This is the central claim of the theory I present in *Action in Perception*. It is in terms of this central claim that the theory advances a substantial connection between perception and action. Perception is an activity that requires the exercise of knowledge of the ways

<sup>34</sup>See my discussion of this in Chapter 2, §9.

<sup>35</sup>As we will soon see, there is some tension between Noë's position and this sort of view. I just mean to flag it here as to not mislead the reader into ascribing this characterization of the enactive view to Noë.

action affects sensory stimulation. Notice that *it is no part of this view that perceiving actually requires action or movement.*<sup>36</sup>

Noë provides this in response to Ryan Hickerson's criticism, who suggests that Noë should rename his book *Possible Action in Perception*.<sup>37</sup> This is by way of criticising what he takes to be a lack of clarity in Noë's position, where it seems that Noë speaks of knowledge of how one would move rather than actual movement.<sup>38</sup> The reader should note that passages from his book are in tension with this claim. In the passages that I have previously cited, Noë says things like: 'the perceiver must possess and *make use of* sensorimotor knowledge';<sup>39</sup> '[m]ovements of the hand over the surface of an object give rise to shifting sensations';<sup>40</sup> 'The main idea of this book is that perceiving *is a way of acting*. Perception is not something which happens to us, or in us. It is something we *do*.'<sup>41</sup> Such passages, along with others, strongly suggest that he speaks of experience as an activity.<sup>42</sup> He speaks of something someone is *doing*. However, Noë's official view is that actual activity is not required. What is required is the sort of *understanding* one enjoys when one possesses sensorimotor skills.

My proposal is that what brings the world into focus for perceptual consciousness is our understanding of the ways movement alters sensory events. Mere sensation does not rise to the level of perceptual experience. For perceptual experience we need sensation that we understand.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Alva Noë, 'Understanding Action in Perception:Replies to Hickerson and Keijzer', *Philosophical Psychology* 20:4 (2007), p. 2. Emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup>Ryan Hickerson, 'Perception as Knowing How to Act: Alva Noë's Action in Perception', *Philosophical Psychology* 20:4 (2007), p. 511.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 509.

<sup>39</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 10. Emphasis mine.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 1. Emphasis mine.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid. Emphasis mine.

<sup>42</sup>See pp. 15, 96–100, 164, 166–167, 215–216 in Ibid. Hickerson also cites some of these to the same end.

<sup>43</sup>Noë, 'Understanding Action in Perception:Replies to Hickerson and Keijzer', p. 532.

Thus Noë's view is much closer to McDowell's than we might have thought. Indeed, his view is a sort of variant of it. Noë holds that conceptual capacities in perception are *informed* by sensorimotor know-how in a similar way to how perception is informed by conceptual capacities for McDowell: 'Perception is an activity that requires *the exercise of knowledge of the ways action affects sensory stimulation*.'<sup>44</sup> Thus, Noë's account of the activity necessarily present in experiencing is more like mental activity, like adding numbers in your head. What goes on need not leave the realm of the mental. While sensorimotor knowledge is practical – it is supposed to be *know-how* after all – its exercise in perception is not a practical deployment of the skill because it does not issue in action. For him, perception does not necessarily involve actual interaction with an object. One can enjoy a perceptual experience in virtue of having sensorimotor know-how of how perceptual experience varies with movement, and in so having this know-how, one knows how what appears to one in this perceptual experience *would* change with movement. Noë insists that this knowledge is 'practical', for it is know-how rather than knowledge-that.<sup>45</sup> For Noë, exercising one's know-how in perception is productive of counter-factual knowledge rather than bodily movement.

The involvement of sensorimotor skills in this counterfactual knowledge is like this. Consider a case where it is obvious how know-how is involved without issuing in action. A tennis pro can know what is wrong with his student's back-hand in

<sup>44</sup>Noë, 'Understanding Action in Perception: Replies to Hickerson and Keijzer', p. 532.

<sup>45</sup>See Noë, *Action in Perception*, pp. 118–119. This means that his view does not entail that one has *general* knowledge-that about what things generally would look like if we were to move in respect to them. Such knowledge would belong within the wider context that one must have available to oneself if one is to have concepts at all. It would be general knowledge-that. The point here is that the counterfactual knowledge is not derived from some sort of general knowledge that must be there for concept possession (having a concept of an apple means that we understand appeals as the sort of thing that is three-dimensional and has a back), but rather that the counterfactual knowledge issues from one's know-how particularized to that situation.

virtue of knowing-how to strike a tennis ball from the left. In this, his know-how is involved, but not in an action. It is not a striking of a ball on the left, but rather a judgement of how a ball would be struck correctly in these circumstances compared to how the student is actually striking it. This judgement is informed by the tennis pro's know-how. I take it that sensorimotor knowledge is involved in perception not by way of the perceiver's interaction with an object, but rather in the same way know-how is involved in the tennis pro's judgement of his student's performance. It informs a particular sort of judgement of what things would be like if one were to interact in perceiving.

If this analogy captures Noë's thought correctly, Hickerson is right. Contrary to Noë's objections, his title *is* misleading.<sup>46</sup> If action is not necessary to perception, sensorimotor knowledge does not necessarily play an active role in perception: it is only drawn on and not exercised.

I think Noë is mistaken in his view of the relation between know-how and perception. His position turns out to be close enough to McDowell's view to inherit some of its flaws.<sup>47</sup> It also has a devastating flaw which is particular to it. It presents the involvement of sensorimotor capacities at too high an intellectual level. To have the relevant sensorimotor skill (the relevant concept, let's say), I must not only be able to exercise that skill in movement, and assert the content of my experience in exercising it correctly, I must also know what content *would* (mind the counterfactuals) be available to me if I *were* to exercise this skill. The skill itself must somehow involve a capacity to imagine the skill's exercise without actualizing it. The skill, that is, must give me a rich capacity for imagination. While I do not want to deny that such

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<sup>46</sup>Noë, 'Understanding Action in Perception: Replies to Hickerson and Keijzer', p. 532.

<sup>47</sup>See Chapter 2.

a capacity would yield knowledge, I want to deny that such knowledge is, properly speaking, perceptual.

It is a mistake to think that perceptual capacities are to be understood in this way. Better to say, and this something Noë's best arguments support, that genuine perceptual experience requires the *actual* exercise of sensorimotor skills, and this requires movement. To see why this is so, we should return to our skilled tennis player. Would we consider her any less skilled in the back-hand if she were to have mastered the back-hand without also being able to reflectively identify the mistakes of others in hitting tennis balls from the left? As long as she has a reliable ability, as Ryle might say, to hit balls from the left, it seems not.<sup>48</sup> A capacity to exercise one's skill in counterfactual cases in the imagination is not contained in the description of the skill itself. This is because counterfactual thinking (what the student would have to do in order to hit correctly in that situation compared to what he did do, and so on) requires a reflective exercise of the imagination. It is a separate act of the intellect that involves the know-how. My point is that, just like the tennis player, the skilled perceiver need not have a capacity for imagining how things would be were he to move.<sup>49</sup>

It seems that Noë's articulation must credit the perceiver with an intellectually powerful imagination. She can know how, in perception, sensation *would* be affected by movement and not only how sensation is being affected by movement in interacting with an object. However, in these cases, the content present to one for judgement in experience is not only sourced in perception. It has part of its provenance in an

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<sup>48</sup>Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, pp. 26–27.

<sup>49</sup>This is not say that we all do not have such skills. My aim is only to point out that one is not necessary for the other.

exercise of a concept in creative spontaneity as determined by the particular situation. Perception, so conceived, would be partly the product of imagination.<sup>50</sup> The knowledge of how things would look if I were to move in respect to them cannot be unproblematically involved in perceptual knowledge.<sup>51</sup> Given this objection, I believe we are back to where we started before we began discussing this difference between Noë's view and my own. The original idea was that my movement, my liveliness, in respect to the world was constitutive of perceiving. It was not a matter of assigning counterfactual knowledge as a background for successful perception, but rather of establishing a deep relation between perception and activity. We need to show that enjoying perceptual content is a matter of actualizing know-how in action, and thus perception does require movement.

The reason Noë does not hold that action and movement are necessary for perception, is because he thinks that claim is indefensible: 'There is a low-level sense in which that is true, i.e., as a matter of fact, retinal cells would fatigue and cease to function if there were no eye movements. But it would be silly to suggest that there is some deeper reason why perception requires movement.'<sup>52</sup> However, as we saw in the previous chapters, being bodily active in experience provides not only a plausible teleological link between experience and knowledge, but also stays true to the idea that conceptual competence is a matter of mastering the practices of a community of language speakers. There is thus independent plausibility to the view that one is constitutively active in experience not only intellectually but bodily. As Noë himself

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<sup>50</sup>I have to admit, I cannot ascribe in good faith such capacity to myself. If asked whether I know how an object would look if I were to move in respect to it, I would only be able to claim cursory knowledge. Perhaps artists can be credited with such imaginative skills. Painting and sculpting take much reflection on the appearance of an object from different positions in respect to it.

<sup>51</sup>There are various difficulties relating appearance and perception in this way which I will discuss in the following section.

<sup>52</sup>Noë, 'Understanding Action in Perception: Replies to Hickerson and Keijzer', p. 532.

says, we ‘crane our necks, peer, squint, reach for our glasses, or draw near.’<sup>53</sup> These sorts of activities are bodily exercises of a perceptual skill. They are not like adding two in your head. They are a matter of actually managing the relation between your body (the location of your perceptual organs) and the world. ‘Perceiving is a way of acting’ as Noë himself says.<sup>54</sup>

#### 4.5 The Active Dimension

We can help ourselves to many of Noë’s insights without having them spoiled by his specific conception of the role of know-how in perception. Let us set aside this difference, and return to the question originally asked. But what, then, is this active dimension? What exactly do we do to acquire visual experience short of keeping our eyes open? In the previous chapter, I argued that we deploy conceptual capacities in the form of recognitional skills. However, saying this does not yet give us a perspicuous picture in respect to our bodily interaction with our environment. Let us set visual experience aside for a moment and consider other ways to experience the world. Even given our disagreement, some of Noë’s discussions in *Action in Perception* are of great help on this topic. Noë gives the illuminating example of a blind man using a cane to perceive the world around him and encourages us to understand perception with it as our paradigm.<sup>55</sup> His subtle and calculated hits of the cane on the ground are means of acquiring tactile and auditory information that affords experience of the world around him. His use of the cane is a complex practical skill, the exercise of which makes information available to him. The movement of the cane, the striking,

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<sup>53</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

is a *recognition capacity* in action. To bring the world into view, the blind man is doing something – he makes content available to himself by interacting with the world with a specific tool. Touch also exhibits this general form of perception. We need to employ a practical skill to learn about our environment by moving our hands over objects in the vicinity. Like the cane, we use our hands as tools to bring shapes and texture into view.<sup>56</sup> In both cases, it is only in virtue of success of these sorts of ‘probing’ actions that the agent is able to perceive the world. I suggest we understand visual experience on the model of these cases. The eyes, and indeed the whole body, are a vehicle for movement and attention. We suppose that visual perception is a matter of simply taking in the whole scene at once, but in fact our eyes are constantly at work, moving over objects analogous to the way our hands feel their way over an object we cannot see to construct an image of its shape. The eyes are the tools of vision. Using our eyes we are able to bring particular items into focus, which we then keep track of in perceiving. It is in this process that the world becomes available to us in a way that makes judgement possible.<sup>57</sup>

However, while it is clear that, for the unsighted, receptivity depends on the successful exercise of a skilled activity, can we really maintain that vision is analogous merely by appealing to the role of eye movement? It is true that one must occupy a perspective, but this does not entail that one must *do* something to have visual experience. It only means that one’s visual system must be located somewhere.<sup>58</sup>

But the issue is not just that we must have a perspective, but we must have the skills

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<sup>56</sup>I am only using ‘view’ here as a metaphor for having perceptual content available for judgement. Also, I do not mean to identify using tools with using one’s appendages and sensory systems. This parallel is only meant to track the idea that one does something with one’s sensory systems in perception and not that one uses one’s sensory systems in perception as one would use a tool.

<sup>57</sup>I will have more to say about this in Chapter 5.

<sup>58</sup>For a discussion of the role of egocentric location to perception and action, see §6.3 of Evans, *Varieties of Reference*.

to manage that perspective. For Noë, the skills in question are sensorimotor in kind and deploying them yields world-revealing content. As he puts it:

According to the enactive view, to see a spatial feature [...] is to keep track of movement-dependent changes in [perspectival]-properties.<sup>59</sup>

For him, the relevant practical knowledge in the visual case is sensorimotor knowledge of how appearance varies with movement. It is in virtue of our having an inherently *practical* grasp on how moving oneself affects the way the world appears to us that our experience has content. Unlike Noë, I think that such practical grasp must be exercised in experience. One thus must act with this know-how in order to enjoy perceptual experience. And one does so in engaging the object by way of one's perceptual capacities. On my view, we are actively engaged with the object of our perception through visual movement just as the blind man is engaged with the object of his perception by way of a cane. The movement of our eyes produces visual perception as the striking of the cane produces tactile/auditory perception. The exercise of one's sensorimotor know-how allows one to *transform* mere appearances to perception of objects and their properties, that is, to content that can be judged. The blind man's practical knowledge allows him to go from auditory/tactile appearance to judgeable content – from how things sound and feel to him to hearing and feeling how they are.

This way of putting things, however, is open to objection. We seem to be assuming that there is content present in the form of appearance prior to the possession of what one may call world-revealing content and that the former is transformed by the latter. And if this correct, how we are to understand this supposedly prior content? We can,

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<sup>59</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 84.

of course, speak of how things appear to us – that, say, this plate *looks* oval. However, these sorts of appearances are perfectly determinate – they are world-revealing insofar as they reveal how something looks to us from a particular perspective.<sup>60</sup> Is Noë saying that sensorimotor knowledge requires some prior knowledge of appearance even though at times he explicitly denies this?<sup>61</sup> If this is the correct way to understand the enactive view, then there is deep internal tension within it. All experience is supposed to require activity, but this activity now seems to presuppose experience. But, according to Noë, there cannot be intelligible content prior to the possession and exercise of sensorimotor skills.

While this cannot be the right interpretation of the *enactive* view, Noë certainly seems to invite this objection when speaks of ‘two moments’ to experience, one perspectival, the other factual.

In this way, we can appreciate the truth in that basic idea of the sense-datum view – that perception has two *moments*, the encounter with how things appear and the encounter with how things are. We experience the world by experiencing how it looks.<sup>62</sup>

Since moments are temporally distinct, Noë *seems* to be saying that there are literally two stages to our experience. First, we are faced with appearances, and then, second, we experience facts by deploying our sensorimotor capacities in light of appearances. However, another facet of Noë’s view speaks against this interpretation. As we noted, looks talk is itself factual in his account; it provides us with genuine

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<sup>60</sup>Noë appears to agree with this view when he says: ‘[...] this encounter with how they appear is itself an encounter with the world. For how things appear is a matter of how things are in the world.’ See Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 85.

<sup>61</sup>The denial is made, e.g., at p.120 of *Action in Perception*: ‘There is no sense, then, in which the enactive approach is committed to the idea that perceivers have cognitive access to the content of experience prior to their grasp of sensorimotor knowledge. Sensorimotor knowledge is basic.’

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

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world-revealing content in the form of relational properties of objects relative to the perceiver.<sup>63</sup> And if appearances fall within the factual domain, they too are reliant upon sensorimotor skills for their presence.<sup>64</sup> At first sight, this seems only to enhance, rather than extinguish, the objection. For if the exercise of sensorimotor know-how is to make experience possible, and factual experience is supposed to rely on appearance as its raw material, then claiming that appearance is another form of factual experience, lands us in vicious circularity.

However, this reading is unfair to Noë. We should not take his speaking of ‘moments’ too literally, as if he were offering a quasi-inferentialist account of the movement from appearance to world-revealing content. He does not take experiencing the world to be a matter of inference from one set of data to another. Rather, he holds that perception is non-inferential: one just sees how things stand.

[..]perception, according to the enactive approach, is direct and noninferential. We don’t conjecture or infer how things are from how they look. In actively encountering the way in which how things look varies with movement, we directly encounter how things are. The circularity of the plate is made manifest in the way the profile changes as a result of movement.<sup>65</sup>

In his example, Noë argues that the plate’s circularity is manifest to us in our interacting with the object – in the flow of experience – and not in the mere reception of content in an experiential episode. The circularity of the plate is presented in experience because we are actively engaged with the object, focusing on its features as we move in relation to it. The availability of content – even perspectival, relational, content – depends on a capacity to interact with the object of attention – appearances

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<sup>63</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 85.

are always to be conceived in terms of a wider activity. Since experiencing is an active movement, a description of experience as having two moments is misplaced. One could not have relational-content available without having the relevant sensorimotor capacities deployed in one's experience and same goes for factual content. The two are interdependent, and this suggests the appropriate metaphor is that of dimensions rather than moments of experience. There are places in his book where Noë puts his view like this. For example:

Perceptual content – what philosophers call representational content, or how the experience presents the world as being – is two dimensional. It can vary along the factual dimension, in regard to how things are. And it can vary along a perspectival dimension, in regard to how things look (or appear) from the vantage point of the perceiver. [...] This corresponds to the fact that perception is, at once, a way of keeping track of how things are, and also of our relation to the world. Perception is thus world directed and self-directed.<sup>66</sup>

The talk of dimensions suggests that Noë does not think of the relation between sensation and experience as one between two distinct moments. This enables us to clarify what Noë means when he endorses the sense-datum theorist's claim that we establish how things are by encountering how things look. It is not that we have a capacity for sensation that yields appearances to be further processed by a separate capacity for perceptual experience. Rather, an appearance is always to be conceived in relation to what we can call the flux of experience, a flux we actively sustain in exercising a skill whose role is to bring the world into view as it is, not only as it appears. We may begin our lives with sensation, but in being initiated into practices, the capacity for sensation is transformed into our adult receptive capacity. Only

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<sup>66</sup>Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 168.

then can we be said to have experience proper, where we bring an intelligible world into view by exercising know-how. These, I argued in Chapter 3, are the very skills that we acquire as we are introduced into language. We do not only acquire the capacity to express what experience presents to us, we acquire the very capacity to have experience at all. In this framework, we should think of appearance as privative: the oval appearance of the glass can only be understood as a privation of our seeing the glass's circularity, as a moment in the activity that brings its circularity into view.<sup>67</sup>

Whatever difficulties there may be with Noë's idea that the relevant sensorimotor skills involve practical knowledge of how sensation changes with movement, I believe he is right to stress that experiencing requires the possession of practical skill. In understanding how this is so, it is important not to think that the content made available to us in experience comes to us in singular intuitions, momentary glances, which require the additional exercise of a further capacity to unite them into that which can be judged. Rather, experience should be conceived as an active engagement with the world that enables the presentation of the world to us. It is in exercising these practical skills that one makes the world available for judgement. Of course, as I argued earlier, admitting an active dimension to experience is not to forsake the idea that in experience thought is constrained by the world. Experience, on my view, is simply an *exercise of a skill to employ one's sensory capacities*, a skill which, when successfully exercised, discloses the world to us. In other words, the successful exercise of this skill just is *seeing*.

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<sup>67</sup>As previously discussed, Sellars presents us with a similar view when he argues that 'looks'-talk is parasitic on 'is' talk. See Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', pp. 146–148.

In thinking of experience this way, we can complete our understanding of experience's relation to judgement. Just as one always employs a tool with an end in mind, the application of one's sensory capacities is similarly informed by an end. In my view, this is the critical insight in understanding the justificatory relation between experience and belief.

In virtue of bearing a practical form, most know-how has an end. Sensorimotor skills are not an exception; they too are deployed with a particular aim. That aim is the possession of truth. This must be so insofar as experience serves our capacity for knowledge. If experience aims at belief, it cannot but aim at true belief. A belief settled on some other basis than truth can only be conceived as an exercise in self-deception. The formation of belief can of course be motivated by some other end than truth, such as the acquisition of peace of mind (e.g. parents believing that their son did not commit a crime contrary to all evidence), but such cases are defective exercises of the capacity for judgement.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, one cannot knowingly form beliefs on any other basis than fidelity to truth. In deploying a conceptual skill in experience, one aims to see the world aright, to see things for what they are, not what they merely appear to be. In experience, I engage the world in order to figure out how things stand in my egocentric space. In other words, I aim to grasp truths about what is around me. I need have no other aim in mind. This is to say that in deploying these capacities, I am engaged in inquiry, where the end of my inquiry is judgement aimed at truth. Judgement and truth are no more accidental to experience than an oak tree's growing from an acorn. Of course, experience is fallible. It is paradigmatic of a teleological form that an activity can aim at truth but fall short of it. Just as a wolf

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<sup>68</sup>For an illuminating account of the rich variety of self-deception see Alfred R. Mele, *Self Deception Unmasked* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

can lack a limb and yet still be of a four-legged kind, so cases of experience can be of a kind that aim at truth even if they sometimes fall short.<sup>69</sup> What is crucial is that such failings do not form part of the nature of experience, but are contingent features that may undermine experience in a particular circumstance. (Similarly, I may break your whisk and in doing so prevent you from making an omelet, but the absence of whisk breaking has no place in the description of omelet making.) Experience thus understood is a fallible capacity, prone to error and illusion. But such impediments are to be understood as failings of an activity of inquiry whose proper end is truth.

#### 4.6 Intellectualism and Experience

The claim that experience is a form of inquiry will likely attract the complaint that it casts experience in too intellectual a role. In fact, I think this is exactly the right way to characterize experience in human beings, whose conceptual capacities transform the kind of experience they enjoy in comparison to non-rational animals. However, the objection clearly needs to be addressed. Hubert Dreyfus has leveled a criticism of this sort at McDowell's position in *Mind and World*. McDowell's account is, Dreyfus's argues, too rationalistic to capture various pre-intellectual dimensions that are essential to lived experience. Dreyfus takes issues with McDowell's insistence on the conceptual character of experience, maintaining that McDowell ignores more fundamental modes of experiential engagement with reality. He asks:

Can we accept McDowell's Sellarsian claim that perception is conceptual 'all the way out,' thereby denying the more basic perceptual capacities we seem to share with prelinguistic infants and higher animals? More generally, can philosophers successfully describe the conceptual upper floors of

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<sup>69</sup>See Michael Thompson, 'Apprehending the Human Form', in: A. O'Hear, editor, *Modern Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 52.

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the edifice of knowledge while ignoring the embodied coping going on the ground floor; in effect declaring that human experience is upper stories all the way down?<sup>70</sup>

In contrast to McDowell, Dreyfus advances an additive rather than transformative conception of rationality.<sup>71</sup> For him, judgeable (conceptual) content enters, if it does, only on the basis of a prior pre-conceptual confrontation with reality. To characterize the pre-conceptual character of experience Dreyfus invokes the Gibsonian idea of ‘affordances’, which are, as it were, invitations to activity.<sup>72</sup> In relating to an affordance, one is presented with inherently practical content: the buttons present themselves as pushable, the door as openable, and so on. When responding to affordances in her environment, the agent is often engaged in the kind of absorbed skilled activity that Dreyfus calls ‘embodied coping’.<sup>73</sup> These are cases where one is engaged in a specific practical activity – from mundane everyday activities such as brushing one’s teeth, driving, to playing sports, or operating machinery. In all such cases there is a fluid interrelation of perceptual experience and activity, much of which does not reach the level of consciousness. Moreover, we do not act out of judgements about what to do; there is no reasoning or deliberation, no making up one’s mind; one is absorbed in the activity and unthinkingly follows the contours dictated by the specific task.

It is important that Dreyfus is interested in perfected skills. He is not thinking of the novice chef who always has to keep an eye on what she is doing or the person beginning to learn a musical instrument. He is interested in cases where activity

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<sup>70</sup>Hubert L. Dreyfus, ‘Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise’, *APA Pacific Division Presidential Address* (2005), p. 1.

<sup>71</sup>At this point, it is worth re-mentioning Matt Boyle’s illuminating account of the distinction in Boyle, ‘Additive theories of rationality: A critique’.

<sup>72</sup>See Chapter 8 in J.J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1979).

<sup>73</sup>Dreyfus, ‘Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise’, p. 1.

seems to proceed without practical reasoning, where there is no place for judgement about what to do. These are cases where it is natural to describe the agent as with the ‘flow’ or in the ‘groove’; here, it seems, thinking only gets in the way of the agent’s performance. Dreyfus thinks McDowell’s view cannot accommodate such cases:

[A]bsorbed coping is not just another name for involved coping. It is involved coping at its best. Experts experience periods of performance, variously called ‘flow’, ‘in the groove’ and ‘in the zone’, when everything becomes easier, confidence rises, time slows down, and the mind, which usually monitors performance, is quieted. Yet performance is at its peak. Something similar happens to each of us when any activity from taking a walk, to being absorbed in a conversation, to giving a lecture that is going really well. That is, whenever we are successfully and effortlessly finding our way around in the world.<sup>74</sup>

On Dreyfus’s view, as on mine, experience is essentially related to activity. But Dreyfus sees the activity in question as something below the level of concepts and rationality. The activity in question is ‘finding one’s way around’. Its aim is therefore not truth, but rather whatever the aim of the relevant specific activity is – getting to the next room, typing ‘p’, scoring a goal, machining a bearing. In such engaged perception, one does not self-consciously take up the content available to one and make judgements. If there is knowledge here, it is not conscious knowledge articulated in thought. It is rather a form of bodily or ‘somatic’ knowledge. This sometimes leads Dreyfus to write as if our bodies know things we don’t. Citing Merleau-Ponty, he writes:

In perception we do not think the object and we do not think ourselves thinking it, we are given over to the object and we merge into this body

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<sup>74</sup>Hubert L. Dreyfus, ‘Response to McDowell’, *Inquiry* 50:4 (2007), p. 373.

which is *better informed than we are about the world, and about the motives we have and the means at our disposal*.<sup>75</sup>

Such a position provokes two obvious objections. First, it is committed to an almost Cartesian split between body and mind, which are represented as separate centres of knowledge.<sup>76</sup> Second, its commitment to experience as something prior to and independent of judgement is a version of the Myth of the Given, which leaves Dreyfus without a plausible account of how experience is related to judgement. Naturally, McDowell seizes on both points and rejects Dreyfus's position out of hand.<sup>77</sup>

Yet Dreyfus's reflections do seem to present us with a dilemma. The phenomenon of embodied coping is something we must countenance. It seems we must either recognize a mode of experiential engagement with reality that is essentially pre-conceptual, thereby rejecting McDowell's conceptualism, and take the consequences, metaphysical and epistemological. Or we can follow McDowell and insist that embodied coping is no less infused with concepts as conscious perceptual awareness.

But a phenomenology of embodiment should be conceived not as a corrective to the thought that our orientation towards the world is permeated with conceptual rationality, but as a supplementation, filling out the details of something that needs to be presupposed by any acceptable version of that thought. Phenomenological attention to embodied coping should not be conceived as Dreyfus conceives it – as a way to answer the question 'how the non-conceptual given is converted into a given with conceptual content'. That question should be rejected, not answered.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 238. My emphasis.

<sup>76</sup>This comes up in John McDowell, 'Response to Dreyfus', *Inquiry* 50:4 (2007), p. 369 and again in John McDowell, 'What Myth?', *Inquiry* 50:4 (2007), p. 339.

<sup>77</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 349–350 and McDowell, 'Response to Dreyfus', pp. 369–370.

<sup>78</sup>McDowell, 'What Myth?', p. 349.

The latter is surely the way to go. I think, however, the Dreyfus-McDowell debate leaves an important stone unturned. The question that needs to be asked is this: How, exactly, is perceptual experience involved in coping? I will argue the following. In cases of narrowly described skilled activities that Dreyfus makes especially problematic, perception is not involved. In wider cases, where perception is clearly involved, we can account for its involvement unproblematically on my view.

Surely, my opponent will say, description of a skilled activity of the kind Dreyfus discusses will necessarily make reference to perception. Consider a footballer. We will need to describe him as seeing the goal-posts, hearing his teammates call for a pass, seeing which position to take up, and so on. Football commentators describe the action in such terms: a player sees the chance to steal the ball from an opponent, passes it expertly to a teammate he saw was open. These perceptual moments seem essential to the exercise of the skills constitutive of the activity in which one is absorbed when playing football. This presents a problem, however, only if we think that the determination of truth does not matter in cases of perception, or if we think that experience is constitutive of the exercise of some perfected skills, where truth is beside the point. But we need not think either. On the contrary, at certain points in the skilled activity, the agent will need to make perceptual judgements. For example, he needs to see where the ball is, that it has been kicked towards him, etc. But here we have perceptual judgement aimed at truth. The case that is supposed to be problematic, I take it, is that of dribbling a ball. Trying to judge where the ball is while dribbling will undo the player's groove, and he will lose the ball. However, once engaged in 'embodied coping', the footballer need not perceive the location of a football in relation to his feet. He may know its location in virtue of being in the

midst of exercising the relevant skill, but in that case the knowledge is present to him in a different way than in perceptual experience. If perception ruins the groove, then this is a sign that perception is not constitutive of the exercise of the skill. In this case, one can know the location of a ball in some other way than perceiving it. So where embodied coping involves experience, then experience aims at truth no less than in conscious cases of perceptual inquiry. And where we are fully absorbed in the activity like in cases of dribbling, then the knowledge at issue is not experiential in kind.

In response, it might be contended that insisting on an intellectualist account of experience's role in skilled activity opens up a gap between the knowledge in question and the skilled activity itself. But there is no gap here insofar as the skills themselves bear a conceptual form, involving what McDowell calls 'concepts of things to do'.<sup>79</sup> Their realization involves, not *thinking* about the thing to be done, but *doing* it. It's just that the relevant concepts are not involved here as they are in experience – as constituting content to be judged.<sup>80</sup> The wider activity – such as playing football – obviously requires experience in some role or other. But this just points to the skill being a complex unit that involves various skills. There should be no difficulty in thinking that one requires perceptual knowledge for the exercise of a skill insofar

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<sup>79</sup>McDowell, 'Response to Dreyfus', p. 367.

<sup>80</sup>McDowell makes the point the following way when discussing one of Dreyfus' examples, that of Chuck Knoblauch, who famously lost his ability to skillfully throw a baseball once he began thinking about how he exercised his skill: 'The practical concepts realized in acting are concepts of things to do. Realizing such a concept is doing the thing in question, not thinking about doing it. In the most fundamental kind of case – the case of kinds of things to do that are basic actions for the agents in question, in one of the senses of that phrase – there is, by definition, no room for thought about how to do the thing in question.[...] Knoblauch had an ability to realize a certain practical concept (the concept of throwing efficiently to first base). But he lost his ability because he starting thinking about "the mechanics", about how throwing efficiently to first base is done. The effect was that throwing efficiently to first base stopped being a basic action for him. The most this case could show is that when mindedness gets detached from immersion in activity it can be the enemy of embodied coping [...]. It cannot show that mindedness is not in operation [...]'. See Ibid..

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as one must know certain truths – it helps to know the location of the goalie before shooting at goal. It would be a mistake to think that this does not involve judgement and a further mistake to think such judgement entails an interruption of activity, a stepping back in order to perceive. Indeed, if judgement is itself part of a teleological structure present in experience whose end is the acquisition of knowledge, then one can get very good at acquiring truths in such situations. That is, one perceives the location of the goal post in order to score a goal.<sup>81</sup> There's no more an interruption here than there is between breaking eggs and throwing them in the pan in making an omelet. This answers Dreyfus's worry that judgement inevitably involves a sort of interruption of flow that is damaging to performance. Of course, this can be so (e.g. the Knoblauch case quoted in note no. 80). Thinking about the 'mechanics' of an activity can certainly sometimes get in the way of the doing (though not always). What Dreyfus fails to see is that it is not just judgement that threatens to break the flow of skilled activities issuing from truly perfected skills. Any activity that is external to the teleological order of the skill will throw one off. But looking, and looking deliberately, in order to see who is open is central to being a successful football player. Having this skill is internal to knowing how to play football well. And here perception is clearly in the service of the pursuit of truth.

There is a core of truth in Dreyfus' central idea that some perfected skills do not require judgement. But I believe this is best captured by the thought that in exercising such a skill, one is in touch with one's surroundings in a more intimate manner than

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<sup>81</sup>I am here appealing to Anscombe's action form in intention, where one does something in order to do something else. The suggestion is that an active conception of perception makes such embedding possible – perceiving is something one actively does in order to do something else. Both perceiving, and kicking, in this case, are scoring a goal. That is, perception here, like running and kicking, is with a view to goal scoring. See Anscombe's discussion of the A to D order in Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 45–47.

perceptually. A perceptual relation presupposes a distinction between perceiver and perceived that is not apposite here. Here knowledge of the object coincides with a form of bodily knowledge. One knows the modification and transformation of the object of one's activity just as one knows the position of one's limbs in moving them: without observation.<sup>82</sup> To know the one is to know the other. Perception is external to such skills. This is perhaps the sort of case Merleau-Ponty had in mind in the passage quoted above. Indeed, as one is related to the location of one's limbs, or of a ball under one's control, one can be related to one's surroundings. Expert footballers, such as Zinedine Zidane, have such an intimate connection with their surroundings during a game that their need for perceptual judgement is diminished. Of course, we must admit that, although cases of a perfected skill do not require perception conceived on the model of self and other, such cases are very rare. Only the very best practitioners of a skill and only in specific instances are able to exercise it in a way that transcends their perceptual capacities. In other cases, there should be no difficulty in thinking that perception, which aims at judgement, is constitutive of the exercise of a skill when we recognize that perception is itself a skilled activity.

Typical cases pose no danger to conceiving of experience as internally related to judgement, and the other cases simply do not involve perception. Dreyfus' objection only gains intelligibility if we thought perception was different in kind from an activity and thus would have to be the deployment of a different capacity altogether and thus a capacity that is external to the skill. If this were the case, then one could see why Dreyfus could argue that perception would break up one's 'groove'. However, perception in my account is not vulnerable to this objection as it is conceived as an activity which one can perform well or badly. Perceiving well as required by the skill

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<sup>82</sup>See Anscombe, *Intention*, p. 13.

can be part of being ‘in the groove’. And given perception’s nature as an activity, it can itself be for the sake of something else: perceiving in order to know the location of the goalie for the sake of scoring a goal. The aim of any part is determined by the overall immediate end: kicking a ball in such and such direction, and so on. All a player’s movements are understood in terms of the unity bestowed upon them by a final aim: scoring a goal, winning a game and so on. The wider unity is not the unity of judgement, but of the primary aim of the skill itself. Perceiving the location of the goalie, is having a truth available to one for the sake of doing something else. I further discuss the relation of perception to broader activities in the next chapter. For now, all we must see is that Dreyfus’ objection has no traction with a view that conceives of experience itself as an activity.

Thus cases of embodied coping pose no difficulty for a view that conceives of perceptual experience as teleologically related to judgement. Indeed, the activity constitutive of experiencing should be thought of as the exercise of a conceptual skill aimed at truth. I will take up this point in the following chapter, but for now, let us take stock of the view as so far developed.

#### **4.7 The View so Far**

One way to characterize my view is to say the experience is an aspect of the life of an animal, and thus, the capacity to experience can be described in what Michael Thompson calls a ‘natural historical judgement’.<sup>83</sup> Experiencing is something which we human beings do: a human being acquires knowledge about her surroundings by perceptual inquiry. Now, a human being may fail to satisfy the relevant natural

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<sup>83</sup>Thompson, *Life and Action*, p. 62.

historical description by having a defect in her sensory apparatus. But there is another sort of failure, one that can occur regardless of whether or not a defect of the former sort is present. This is the sort of failure present in cases of hallucination – where it falsely seems to one that the world is a certain way because of a defective exercise of one’s sensory capacities. This sort of failure cannot be captured at the level of a natural historical judgement, for it is merely a defect in the way the capacity to experience is deployed in a particular instance. We may aim at truth but be thwarted in our endeavor. It is hard to accommodate this if we think of experience as merely something which happens to us, rather than something we bring upon ourselves. In this chapter, I have argued that we can conceive of experience as an activity and drew on Alva Noë’s views in *Action in Perception* to make my case. The idea is not that perceptual activity somehow constructs the content of experience. Rather, the activity makes such content available for judgement. On my view, one’s moving one’s sensory system is one’s exercise of a recognitional conceptual capacity.

This is a wider view of experience than some might be comfortable endorsing. It is wider in the sense that it builds perceptual judgement into the nature of experience itself. It does not portray experience merely as a matter of the passive reception of impressions. The latter view fails to capture the relation between experience and judgement; it is not merely accidental that experience ends in judgement – that is, in experiencing, one aims at truth. As we saw when we considered Davidson’s criticism of McDowell, McDowell now holds that experiencing is not like judging.<sup>84</sup> This is what generates the shift to his new view of intuitional content as conceptual but not discursive. But this, I argued, makes the link between experience and judgement opaque. My view is that a teleological conception of experience helps make the

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<sup>84</sup>See Chapter 2, §6.

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link transparent. A capacity for knowledge is involved in experience just as a wider context is involved in determining the character of a particular instance of any activity. Experiencing is the activity which places us in an active relation to objects so that the content that one makes available to oneself can be judged. Experience is thus a form of inquiry, a way of coming to grips with reality by using one's sensory capacities.

#### 4.8 Truth as the End of Inquiry

C. S. Peirce famously held that truth *is* the end of inquiry.<sup>85</sup> The beliefs left standing after inquiry has run its full course are the true ones. Peirce's view is a natural development of a sensible empiricism that starts from the intuitive idea that knowledge is acquired through experience. By linking knowledge to inquiry, Peirce's view requires no substantive premises about the nature of knowledge beyond this intuitive idea, and it avoids metaphysical extravagance. It is not as if what counts as knowledge is separate from a being's capacity to arrive at knowledge by means of experience. Experience is, as it were, the basic mode of inquiry.

Of course, Peirce's view is not without difficulties. It worried Peirce himself that his definition of truth was rendered implausible by the possibility of an accidental, arbitrary, and permanent end to inquiry.<sup>86</sup> If we take the word 'end' to mean 'cessation', then Peirce seems committed to the idea that whatever beliefs are in place at the time of inquiry's premature end are true, and this seems obviously wrong. While Peirce's own responses to this challenge are inadequate, Cheryl Misak argues that

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<sup>85</sup>See Charles Sanders Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', in: *Writings of Charles S. Peirce, Vol. 3* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), p.273 and Volume 5, p. 569 of Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1958).

<sup>86</sup>Cheryl Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 67.

one can derive a satisfactory response from them.<sup>87</sup> Misak argues that where inquiry comes to a premature end, then the true beliefs are not those that people happen to hold at the moment of inquiry's end, but those that would have been left standing had inquiry run its course.<sup>88</sup> This is what it means to say that the conclusion of inquiry was 'premature'. But what about a case in which a despot, benevolent or otherwise brainwashes his subjects into a resolute commitment to certain beliefs, which they will not give up come what may? The fact that these beliefs would endure to the end of inquiry surely does not make them true. Misak's response to this case is interesting. She argues that this is not a case of genuine belief. Genuine belief requires proper inquiry; states that look like beliefs but are generated by, e.g., indoctrination, do not count.<sup>89</sup> This might seem an artificial stipulation, but in fact it reflects a specific, and plausible, view of the relation of belief and inquiry. Inquiry is an activity which aims at truth.<sup>90</sup> And insofar as inquiry aims at truth, it is not accidental that the beliefs that ultimately survive the process are true. Knowing is to not be conceived as an independent product of inquiry, but as constitutive of inquiry. Indeed, when we speak of the 'end' of inquiry, we should think not of cessation, but of teleology. Truth is the end of inquiry in a teleological sense. It is thus not fortuitous that inquiry ends in truth, the acquisition of knowledge is internal to the activity of inquiry. It is, as I argue, internal to experience conceived as inquiry.

<sup>87</sup>Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., pp. 68–69.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., pp. 55–56.

<sup>90</sup>Peirce, and Misak cannot help themselves to this point due to a naturalist understanding of the relation between inquiry and truth that leaves no room for teleology. See Ibid., p. 56. This is no difficulty for my project, as my conception of naturalism is not averse to normative notions. Indeed, as I discussed in Chapter 1, I endorse McDowell's view of a naturalist project which aims to explain how reason and normativity are natural without explaining them away in the terminology of natural science. McDowell mentions Peirce briefly in *Mind and World* on p. 40, but fails to note that a teleological version of Peirce's claim is available to us in McDowell's own naturalistic framework: 'But the idea of an end to inquiry is no part of the position I am recommending.'

## 4.9 Conclusion

I ended Chapter 2 by suggesting that the relation between experience and judgement is to be conceived teleologically – that experiencing is such as to end in judgement. Being perceptually affected by the world is not to be treated as somehow independent of activity on our part; it is rather a result of activity. This activity is crucial to understanding perceptual content and its relation to judgement. In this chapter, I tried to argue for this position by drawing on Alva Noë's views on the role of action in perception and by developing the idea that the end of perceptual activity, teleologically conceived, is truth. In experience, we do not merely aim at getting hold of how things appear to us, but how things really are. It is this feature of experience that remains hidden from view insofar as we conceive of experience as something which *merely* happens to us, not something which we bring upon ourselves. I then defended this view from a criticism Dreyfus makes of McDowell, which has particular force when deployed against a view such as my own.

So far I have said little about the nature of the activity central to experiencing. In Chapter 3, I have argued that the activity is an exercise of a recognitional capacity. All that I have established in this chapter, is that the activity cannot be understood as operating on some prior basis to be found in sensation passively received, but must be conceived as that which makes possible the unity of sensation and knowledge. The latter was established in establishing that the end of experience is truth. In the next chapter, I will offer a more positive account, and argue that perceptual activity is constituted by various abilities that are exercised in different circumstances. However, I shall also maintain that there is one ability fundamental to experience and that is keeping track of an object in thought; such tracking, I shall argue, is a capacity to

keep an object in view across time with the end of knowing something about it.

## CHAPTER 5

### Keeping The World In View

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## 5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4, I argued that experience justifies belief, not in virtue of the nature of the content made available to one in experiencing, but because experience is an active form of inquiry. Inquiry has truth and knowledge as its end. I arrived at this position by arguing against views that place the epistemological burden on the passive features of experience – things presenting themselves to us irrespective of an active involvement on our part. There are at least three arguments against such views. The first points out that being passively presented with content does not give one any reason for belief – if it did, passing thoughts would give us grounds for belief, but they do not.<sup>1</sup> This entails that justification is not secured merely in virtue of passive reception. The second, derived from Alva Noë, argues for the dependence of experiential content on the exercise of skills – ‘sensorimotor capacities’, as Noë calls them, or skills to bring the world in view.<sup>2</sup> Their exercise is directed at attaining knowledge of the immediate environment; their exercise thereby makes the world available to us. The third argument applies to views which hold that experiential content is conceptual. Derived from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s rule-following considerations, the third argues that conceptual capacities are to be conceived as skills. Since experience is conceptual, and since conceptual capacities are understood as skills, then the involvement of concepts in experience must be conceived as an exercise of such skills.<sup>3</sup> These skills are exercised within a teleological structure, one whose end is truth. In employing them, we always-already aim to acquire knowledge. Perception is thus a taking in of the world, rather than our simply receiving what the

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<sup>1</sup>See Chapter 2, §7.

<sup>2</sup>See Chapter 4 §3 and Noë, *Action in Perception*, pp. 63–65.

<sup>3</sup>See Chapter 3.

world presents to us. This picture enables us to understand the justificatory force of experience without having to represent experiential content as the content of a judgement.<sup>4</sup> But it nonetheless preserves an important link between experience and judgement, so that we can understand experience's justificatory force. In perceiving successfully, we are in a position to know something about the world. This, I suggest, is in harmony with one of the central insights of C.S. Peirce, who held that truth is the end of inquiry. Perception, as I conceive it, is the fundamental form of empirical inquiry.<sup>5</sup>

In this chapter, I seek to develop my position further. I start by discussing a demanding kind of perceptual inquiry and move to progressively simpler forms, culminating in an account of the most *fundamental* form of perceptual activity. This fundamental form is the capacity that allows one to keep track of an object. While it is often mentioned in the philosophies of mind and language, the importance of 'tracking' to the philosophy of perception has not been adequately discussed. Understanding how its exercise enables knowledge of particulars reveals how experience is essentially an activity.

I shall begin by considering a particular, complex form of experiential activity, that of experiencing colors in adverse conditions. Such experience is temporally extended. My account treats experience, not as a collection of episodes or temporally indexed seeings, but rather as a proper activity happening in time. Such a conception of experience invites an account of the relation between sensation and perception consistent with Noë's view, where, say, a round object's appearing to be oval is understood as a presentation mediated by relevant sensorimotor skills for approaching

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<sup>4</sup>See Chapter 2, §6.

<sup>5</sup>See Chapter 4 §8.

circular objects.<sup>6</sup> Seeing something round as oval is thus only a sort of moment in a temporally complex exercise of seeing something that is round. This way of approaching the role of sensation provides us with a novel way to develop Wilfrid Sellars' view that 'looks talk' is parasitic on 'is talk'.<sup>7</sup> In this case, looks talk expresses a failed or as-yet-in-progress exercise of an active perceptual capacity, in which one's perceptual inquiry is not yet brought to a close. However, notwithstanding the details of the story we might tell about the relation between sensation and perception, the crucial point is that sensation is to be conceived as a *privation* of the exercise of a capacity for perception and understood in its terms. It is not that sensation can be understood as something prior to, and in principle independent of, perception.

I will then consider Thomas Crowther's discussion of various forms of perceptual activity directed at cognizing what an object is up to. Watching, observing, looking, looking out for, are all ways in which we are perceptually engaged with the world around us. Such vocabulary describes some of the many forms of perceptual inquiry in which we engage. These activities, I will argue, are constitutive of perceiving and are primarily aimed at truth and knowledge. Yet, though these activities are various, there is one which I will show is fundamental to perceiving: that of keeping track of an object. This is the last stage of the argument.

After, I will pick up a thread from the argument of Chapter 4. I consider again the role of perception in action, where the end of perceiving is not always to be conceived as truth. I then aim to clarify the relationship between the passive and active dimensions of perception and argue that there is a sense in which our relation to experiential content is passive, even though its presence is brought forth actively. In

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<sup>6</sup>See Noë, *Action in Perception*, p. 85 and Chapter 4 §5.

<sup>7</sup>Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', pp. 146–148.

the final section, I re-articulate the view of perception that I have defended throughout this dissertation: we can understand how perception serves a justificatory role only insofar as we conceive perceiving as an activity that aims at truth and not merely a passive reception of content.

## 5.2 Looks Talk, Perceptual Activity, and General Concepts in Sellars

Let us consider a famous example from Sellars' 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind': John the tie merchant. John works in a tie shop prior to the invention of electric light, so he only views the ties and reports on their colors in natural light.<sup>8</sup> When the town installs an electrical system, John continues in the same way. But now when he reports the colors of ties in his shop, his customers are sometimes perplexed. They point out, say, that a tie John says is green is actually blue; it just appears green under electric light. Barring the possibility that electric light causes ties to change color, John learns to report how things look to him, rather than how they are. That is, John begins to tell his customers: 'That tie looks green in here, but take it outside and you will see that it is blue'. When John prefaces his claims by using the word 'looks', he withholds endorsement from the judgement invited by his present experience. Sellars writes:

Now, the suggestion I wish to make is, in its simplest terms, that the statement 'X looks green to Jones' differs from 'Jones sees that x is green' in that whereas the latter both ascribes a propositional claim to Jones' experience *and endorses it* the former ascribes the claim but does not endorse it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', p. 37.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

Sellars' ultimate point in this discussion is that looks talk is parasitic on 'is' talk, and thus, a capacity to report how things look depends upon one's capacity to report how things are. It is in virtue of one's knowing there is a discrepancy between how things appear at one moment and how they actually are that makes 'looks' talk possible.

The point I wish to stress at this time, however, is that the concept of *looking green*, the ability to recognize that something *looks green*, presupposes the concept of *being green*, and that the latter concept involves the ability to tell what colors objects have by looking at them – which, in turn, involves knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its color by looking at it.<sup>10</sup>

I discussed Sellars' view in Chapter 2 §2. What I want to do here is explore how to accommodate Sellars' insight within the terms of the account I have been developing – to understand looks talk in the context of inquiry. My view is at odds with Sellars' overall picture as he holds that looks talk reports an experience that is 'intrinsically' indistinguishable from a veridical seeing.<sup>11</sup> I think this is the wrong approach, as experience should not be conceived as composed of receptive episodes in which their veridical deliverances are taken to be distinct from non-veridical ones only in their generation. However, I think Sellars is right if what he means by experience is what I call sensation, which, as I have argued, is to be understood as a privation – a moment in experiencing that falls short of experiencing proper. But the language of the 'intrinsic' is misleading. So how should we understand looks talk on an active conception of experiencing?

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<sup>10</sup>Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', p. 43.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

In knowing how to inquire into the nature of something's color, one knows *how to bring* the object to the relevant conditions of observation. And this means that one knows how to *interact* with one's environment in order to come to know something about it. This Sellars seems to endorse. One knows, that is, in what kind of light and at what angle one should be looking at the object. It is important, however, that this knowledge is understood from a practical, rather than merely theoretical, perspective. One knows how one should turn the tie toward the light in order better to see its color. The knowledge is displayed in the interaction with the object and not in an act of deduction from premises (as would be the case were it theoretical knowledge). This is not knowledge that helps contextualize an experiential episode, but practical knowledge deployed in action of how to interact with the object in order to discover something about it.

On this view, John's withholding judgement about a tie's color is not merely a matter of some knowledge that environmental factors may render his perception non-veridical. Something like this would be the right description of an illusion. However, it seems misleading, if not plain false, to characterize such cases as illusions. John would be under an illusion if and only if he took the tie to be green in ignorance that he is viewing it in electric light. That is, an illusion requires one to be in its throes – when one thinks one is justified in believing what one's experience makes available to one when in fact experience has not come to its teleological end. The gullible might come to believe that the illusionist made the man disappear. That is what it is for an intentional illusion to be successful. It is for its 'victims' to believe that the man disappeared. Those who do not believe are not under an illusion. For them,

judgement is suspended about what happened, pending further inquiry.<sup>12</sup> If John is well aware of the lighting conditions, and knows that the appearance of the tie's color is due to them, then he is missing something so far as experiencing the tie's color goes. His interaction with the object does not yet place him in a position to know its color. But this is not because John is in the throes of an illusion – there is nothing exceptional about ties looking different in diverse lighting conditions – but rather because John has not exercised the various skills whose end would be knowledge of the color of the tie. Just like the more skeptical members of the illusionist's audience, John knows there is something missing from his experience, something which could be added by taking the tie into natural light.<sup>13</sup>

We can understand the tie's looking green to John in the way we conceived a round object's looking oval in Chapter 4: as a privation of the relevant perceptual activity. It is a moment in the activity of seeing a circular object. Just as one learns the relation between one's perspective and the shape of objects by employing sensorimotor skills, so one understands the relation between oneself, one's object of inquiry, and lighting conditions in the case of colors. In both cases practical knowledge is at issue. Insofar as one is engaged in the relevant perceptual activity, one is not under an illusion. Looks talk in such cases expresses an incomplete inquiry: it looks as though so and so, but I'm not done yet! I must take the object outside, or find a full-spectrum light bulb. By employing the word 'looks', one marks that one's inquiry is not yet complete.

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<sup>12</sup>Of course, this might be all that an illusionist might hope for given the marquee's advertisement that she is an illusionist. In such cases, her success should be conceived in terms of the temptation one has to believe that her illusions are no illusions at all and not in terms of actual belief.

<sup>13</sup>This is not to say that John can know the color of the tie only through experience. He might, that is, conclude from the tie's looking green that it is indeed blue. In that case, John's knowledge would not, strictly speaking, be receptive, but inferential. He draws an inference from the way things look at a particular moment in the flow of experience to the way they actually are. This is not purely perceptual knowledge, but something more complex as it involves either general knowledge-that, or the possession of know-how plus an act of imagining.

One's taking the tie outside is, on my view, a matter of pursuing a perceptual inquiry whose end is seeing the tie for what it is, that is, acquiring knowledge about the tie's color. Bringing the tie outside is thus part of a perceptual activity, not to be conceived as independent of one's capacity to perceive the color of the tie. Such activities form part of the nexus that comprises the capacity for receptive knowledge.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, Sellars argues that there are two dimensions or layers to experience – his is a ‘two-ply’ account of experience as Brandom calls it.<sup>14</sup> Brandom's account can be misleading. It might seem that we are giving an additive rather than a transformative account if we are to follow the metaphor through. However, this need not be the case. In building a piece of ply wood one does not end up with a mere conglomeration of layers, but rather with something whose properties are very different from those of the original constituents. Each layer transforms that which is built in ways that cannot be accounted for by adding some feature to a whole. There is, first, a passive dimension and, second, a conceptual dimension, where the perceiver's broader conceptual capacities are drawn into play. Portraying concepts as involved in experience is central to dispelling the Myth of the Given, for it determines that experiential content is the sort of thing that can justify belief. My argument can be understood as taking the ply analogy one layer further. Experience, so conceived, involves not two dimensions but three – it is three-ply. Receptivity is structured by conceptual capacities, which are in turn exercised as practical skills in perceptual inquiry. This latter is equally constitutive of experience. Making content available is something we do – we take the world in – and by so doing we place ourselves in a position to gain knowledge.

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<sup>14</sup>Robert Brandom, ‘The Centrality of Sellars’ Two-Ply Account of Observation to the Arguments of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind”’, in: *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 349.

The epistemic difference between passing thoughts and the deliverances of receptivity resides in self-knowledge of this activity. I know there is a red candle on the table not in merely being presented with a content that can be so specified, but in having brought that part of the world into view. By being successful in that endeavor, I am in position to know there is a red candle on the table. This is what the self-consciousness of perception consists in, knowing that I am on my way to knowledge in the course of actively getting there in interacting with the world around me. It is an exercise of a practical capacity whose role is to make the world available for judgement aimed at knowledge. In being awake and conscious, we are always-already epistemically involved because we are inquiring into the nature of things using a variety of perceptual skills. In the next section, I consider a small variety of these skills in more detail.

### 5.3 Seeing Life

In a recent article, Thomas Crowther has argued that watching a material object is a matter of watching what that material object is doing:

A puzzle about watching has occasioned reflection about the nature of the objects of that kind of activity. I have proposed that watching a material object is watching what that object is doing. Watching what an object is doing is a kind of agential maintenance of visual awareness of an object, where the aim of that activity of maintaining visual awareness of the object is knowledge of what that object is doing.<sup>15</sup>

The puzzle Crowther mentions has to do with the relation between watching and seeing. If I am watching a bird zigzag through some trees between times  $t_1$  and  $t_{10}$ , do

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<sup>15</sup>Timothy Crowther, 'Watching, Sight and the Temporal Shape of Perceptual Activity', *The Philosophical Review* 118:1 (2009), p. 23.

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I see the bird at every moment in between? The puzzle arises because watching seems to entail seeing. If I am watching (rather than merely watching *for*) an object then surely I must be seeing it. I cannot watch what I cannot see. Crowther maintains there is a mistake in this reasoning. An individual watching something is in a position know what the object is up to. Being in this position does not entail that the watcher must see the object at every moment throughout the watching. I can still know what the bird is up to even in moments where I am unable to see it, because, for example, it is momentarily obscured by a tree. Watching has knowledge of an activity as its aim, and this can be met even if, at particular moments during one's watching activity, one cannot see the relevant object. There is thus no puzzle, for one must only see *what* the object is up to, not see the object for every moment it is up to something.

If one watches a particular material object throughout a period of time, one doesn't necessarily see it throughout that period of time. What is entailed by one's watching something throughout a period of time, given the role of that activity in sustaining knowledge of what something is doing, is only that one sees it  $\phi$ -ing throughout that period of time. In the puzzle case described earlier, a subject watches O from  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$  while seeing O  $\phi$ -ing from  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$ , but without seeing O at every instant of time during  $t_1$ - $t_{10}$ .<sup>16</sup>

Crowther arrives at knowledge as the end of a specifically perceptual activity in the course of resolving this puzzle. I arrived at it by considering the teleological relation between experiencing and knowledge. Now, watching an object being up to something cannot be the only sort of activity that sustains this relation to knowledge. When dealing with inanimate objects, such as the all-too familiar middle-sized dry goods that much of our everyday activity centers around, it seems forced to speak

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<sup>16</sup>Crowther, 'Watching, Sight and the Temporal Shape of Perceptual Activity', p. 21.

of what the object is ‘up to’ – what the object is up to (if anything) is often beside the point for the sort of information we are interested in. We might want to find something out about the object’s constitution, features, or location. The sort of activity relevant to this cannot be that described by Crowther when he considers how we keep visual track of an object throughout its activity – the object is, more often than not, inactive. Crowther is well aware of this:

To look at O is not to maintain visual awareness of O with the aim of knowing what O is doing. The aims of the perceptual activity of looking at O may be many and various. Any particular instancing of perceptual activity in which S looks at O may be an agential process that has the aim of providing S with knowledge of what kind of thing O is, or knowledge of what kind of stuff O is made of, or what color O is, or what shape O is.<sup>17</sup>

He continues:

These are programmatic suggestions. Whether they are vindicated will depend on whether they can do significant explanatory work for us[...] Nevertheless, there are linguistic intuitions that, in conjunction with a suggestion fairly straightforwardly derivable from the account of watching offered here, seem to provide some measure of support, no matter how indirect, for this proposal.<sup>18</sup>

As we saw in previous chapters, there is indeed an explanatory lacuna that can be filled by appealing to activity in experience along these lines. The need for explanation is prompted by a challenge to make sense of the justificatory force of experience. In another article, Crowther argues for a relation between activity and knowledge in the case of hearing:

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<sup>17</sup>Crowther, ‘Watching, Sight and the Temporal Shape of Perceptual Activity’, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

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Where a perceiver listens to a producer of a sound, what puts that agent in a position to know what sound the producer of the sound is making is the agent's hearing the sound-producer  $\phi$ -ing (where ' $\phi$ -ing' can be an answer to the question: "What sound is O making?") Listening to O is the kind of process the aim of which may be realized in knowledge of what sound O is making because for as long as an agent listens to O, that agent can hear O  $\phi$ -ing.<sup>19</sup>

While I agree with Crowther's overall picture of the relation between hearing and knowledge, I disagree that listening is merely placing oneself in a position to hear what sound an object is making. But as stated, Crowther's position suggests that there can be an independent conception of perception that does not involve perceptual activity and this is what activity operates on: the presence of the sound which one tracks.

Throughout this dissertation, we have seen this thought figure as a reason to reject an active view of experience. Activity is relevant to the perceiver's getting herself into position to receive experience, but experiencing itself is simply a matter of that which is received – that which is given to one in virtue of one's being in such and such position. However, as we saw in the Chapter 4, such a view cannot ultimately account for the presence of content in experience. Nor, as we saw in Chapter 2 can it account for experience being a power of knowledge. That conclusion already puts us in a position to argue that having a sound present to one, and keeping track of it, is a matter of the operation of a capacity conceived as paradigmatically productive of knowledge. However, I think there is a stronger argument available, one that shows that seeing or hearing already involves a more basic activity than watching or listening, and thus discloses a perceptual activity whose aim is attaining knowledge

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<sup>19</sup>Timothy Crowther, 'Perceptual Activity and the Will', in: Lucy O'Brien and Matthew Soteriou, editors, *Mental Actions* (Oxford UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 185.

about the object one is perceptually interacting with. The form of activity I have in mind is keeping track of an object.

#### 5.4 Tracking: The Fundamental Experiential Activity

We begin with one of Gottlob Frege's central ideas: a demonstrative thought about a particular object had today can be had again at a later time so long as the thinker keeps track of the relevant object.<sup>20</sup> Tracking plays a significant role in Frege's philosophy of thought. Frege, however, is mostly concerned with the idea of expressing the same thought one day as the next. The sort of tracking of particular relevance to our present topic plays a central role in Gareth Evans's development of Fregean ideas in *Varieties of Reference*.<sup>21</sup> For Evans, if one can be said to be thinking of a particular object, one must be in a position to keep track of it. Evans considers various ways one can keep track, but the most salient for our current inquiry is keeping track perceptually. My central point is this. If one is in perceptual contact with some object, one is *always-already* tracking that object insofar as it is available for thought. Thereby, a capacity to keep track is a fundamental perceptual skill. That is not to say that a capacity to track is not fallible. One can, of course, lose track of an object after tracking it a while. I aim to show that the noticing of an object and the tracking of it are the exercise of the very same capacity. My noticing an object is my already having started keeping track of it – the noticing is necessarily the first moment in my keeping track.

This might seem surprising. We typically think that noticing an object must be prior to keeping track of it. If one has not already noticed the object, how can one

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<sup>20</sup>Frege, 'Thought', p. 332.

<sup>21</sup>Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, p. 146.

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track it? However, this straight-forward and intuitive view of the relation between tracking and noticing must be mistaken. Let us assume that noticing is prior to, independent of, and a prerequisite for tracking. How, then, is tracking supposed to get going? We need an account of what bridges the noticing and the tracking. Something must ensure that I track the *same* object that I noticed. But that just requires me to keep track of the noticed object. But if I can do this, then I must have been tracking the object from the moment of noticing it, which would leave us with the paradoxical claim that one can track an object only if one has been already tracking it. For obvious reasons this cannot be: my keeping track of an object cannot be a pre-requisite for my tracking it. This entails that having the object available to one by noticing it must already involve keeping track of it. It must, that is, always-already involve the exercise of a perceptual capacity, a particular sort of perceptual activity, a form of perceptual tracking. It is important to note that such a capacity is fundamental to all sense-modalities. Keeping track of a sound source and of particular sounds is a matter of deploying a similar, if not the same, capacity.<sup>22</sup> It follows from the fact that there are no such things as instantaneous sounds. Sounds are temporally extended, and thus to hear any one sound, one must keep track of it through its temporal unfolding. Touch has similar properties, one must keep track of that which one is touching to find out something about its texture or shape.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>This is something I suspect Evans was onto: ‘More distinctively, demonstrative thoughts take place in the context of a *continuing* informational link between subject and object [...] This already imports an element of discrimination, and it rests upon certain very fundamental perceptual skills which we possess: the ability to keep track of an object in a visual array, or to follow an instrument in a complex and evolving pattern of sound.’ (Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, p. 146).

<sup>23</sup>Smell is more difficult to pin down. I will discuss the relevant difficulty in my concluding chapter, but its core has to do with the fact that smells are not particular objects, but rather fall into the metaphysical category expressed by mass terms. Sounds might also fall into this troublesome category, because, as Strawson famously demonstrated, they cannot be re-identified as all objects can. (P.F. Strawson, *Individuals* (Routledge, 1990), pp. 59–64) They unfold, and they are gone. As

Our conclusion is this: there is no having an object available to one in perception without one's already keeping track of that object. Perceptual contact with an object already involves one's tracking it. Exercising an ability to keep track of an object is therefore fundamental to perception. This provides an immovable ground to the conclusion that perception must already involve activity on part of the perceiving agent. Perception must, that is, be always-already active.

This is not to say that my discussion exhausts the varieties of perceptual inquiry. I want to leave it open that there are many activities constitutive of perception. My aim here is not to describe all the forms that perceptual inquiry can take, but only to agree with Crowther that they are various and that their common form is found in a particular sort of teleological structure: the employment of sensory capacities to attain knowledge.

It follows that certain kinds of practical inquiry are part and parcel of conceptual competence and rationality. Some, of course, are more fundamental than others. Tracking an object is not on par with carrying an object into daylight to discern its true color. To keep track of an object is fundamental to a capacity to think of particular objects, fundamental to the most basic of thoughts – That is F. Tracking introduces a particular form of thought, thought of particular objects. Insofar as perception involves particulars, seeing that That is F or that That is  $\phi$ -ing, perception always involves tracking or keeping track. There is no separating this activity from perception.

Thus we cannot theorize experience as somehow a merely passive faculty and expect to account for its role in our acquisition of knowledge. Of course this is not

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mentioned, I will also briefly discuss this in Chapter 6. The issue would take us off track here, so I will set it aside for now.

to say that experience is wholly active. We do not make up the beliefs we come by from perceiving. I go on to discuss this in the following section.

### 5.5 Passivity and Activity in Perception

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued for a picture that recognizes both active and passive elements in experience. However, I have not discussed the relation between these elements explicitly and in a unified way. In this section, I aim to remedy this omission.

To say that experience is active is not to claim that there are no passive elements to experience. One of the central pillars of my argument is the claim that the passive elements cannot account for the justificatory role that experience plays. That one did not make up the content of experience does not account for how experiential content can be an external constraint of the right sort – the sort which can serve as to justify empirical knowledge. Similarly, if the content of experience were something we ourselves concocted, then the deliverances of experience could not serve to justify belief – this thought, which I fully endorse, is central to McDowell’s critique of the Myth of the Given.<sup>24</sup> As I have shown, the fundamental thing an agent does in experience is maintain perceptual contact with the object of her inquiry. This maintenance of contact is a familiar form of tracking which renders possible the receptivity of facts about particulars. The maintenance of perceptual contact is not a secondary moment, for noticing an object is always already keeping track of it. Taking perceptual hold of particulars and keeping track of them are two sides of the very same capacity, a capacity that is central to judgement, to judging that this, here, is thus and so.

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<sup>24</sup>See Chapter 2 §2 and McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 9.

Focusing and tracking go hand in hand. Focusing on an object is tracking it and vice versa.

Activity in perception goes deep. Any presence of perceptual content issues from the exercise of a perceptual skill. The exercise of such skills brings content into view for judgement. In this sense, one makes the world available to oneself, without that which is made available springing from within. One's success in making such content available places the available content on its way to knowledge. Content, conceived as independent of perceptual inquiry, has no more epistemic weight than a passing thought. The character of the passive content of experience is transformed by our bringing it forth actively rather than being passively struck by it. It is made such as to be believed, for it is brought to mind within an activity whose aim is precisely that – the acquisition of knowledge. Knowing that I see a condor perched on a branch on the tree across the river is partially practical knowledge. I know what I am up in keeping track of the bird. By focusing on it and following it, I have brought myself to a point where I can sustain an epistemic relation to the world. As Evans might articulate this point: in doing this, the condor itself is a source of information for me.<sup>25</sup>

It is ultimately misleading to describe perception as passive. The term is taken to apply to what an agent is doing in perceiving, which is, according to the typical view, nothing. Perception is taken to be passive insofar as an agent is represented as simply receiving content in experience. But this is a distortion of the truth. An agent is up to something in perceiving and only for that reason can she make the world available to herself for judgement. The dimension of passivity that my view acknowledges and accommodates, however, is this: what it means for experience to be passive is that

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<sup>25</sup>For Evans on information, see Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, p. 122.

what we experience is not up to us. One does not invent the content one believes. But this does not entail that one does nothing in experience. In experience, one takes the world in. It is in the taking that one can be justified in forming perceptual beliefs. One is not given perceptual knowledge, one has to take it.

### **5.6 Perception in Action, a Rejoinder**

With my account more clearly in view, I want to return to an issue that warrants further discussion. I argued earlier that perception paradigmatically aims at truth even when it is in the service of a broader activity governed by a different end. I want to reconsider this issue to defend my view (which may strike the reader as flat out wrong) and to advance our explanation of the teleological character of experience.

In trying to score a goal, I am not, all things considered, aiming for some truth. Rather, I'm aiming to get the ball into the net. Here the very same capacities I employ in knowledge gathering in perception seem to take on a different character. Here it is unclear how it could be said that I am in some sense aiming at knowledge. Even if certain perceptual acts are aimed at knowledge, when playing football, I am engaged in getting the ball into my opponents' goal. To see things aright let's place my perceptual activity in the context of G.E.M. Anscombe's A to D order (I am moving up the field because I am placing myself in a position to score, I am moving my foot back in such and such way because I am striking the ball in such and such way, I strike the ball with my foot in such and such way because I am shooting the ball at the net, I shoot the ball into the net in order to score): in looking for the net, I am engaged in getting the ball into it.<sup>26</sup> The distinction in end here is important,

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<sup>26</sup>Anscombe, *Intention*, pp. 45–47.

for it changes the character of the constituents of the action, which are determined by its end and place in this teleological structure. The nature of each element in the teleological structure is determined by the wider context, that is, by what one is doing in doing it. One's raising a baseball bat in playing baseball is a different action than one's raising a baseball bat to inflict violence upon a wasp's nest. One action is what one does in playing baseball, the other a reckless attempt to frighten the wasps, and so on. Someone's stumbling through a room in the dark feeling her way with her hands is usually not aiming to learn something about the room, but just to get through it.<sup>27</sup> In stumbling through, one does not aim to learn anything about the room, one just aims to get through the desired doorway. One's experiencing in such a case seems different from experiencing as truth-seeking, just as the two examples of raising a bat are different from one another. In this case, the perceiver perceives in order to do something else.

As I previously suggested, the heart of the problem is whether knowledge, qua end, is beside the point in these cases. I think it would be a mistake to think so. When sizing up the opponents' goal, one aims to gather knowledge about its location so that one's footballing endeavors will be non-accidentally successful. Unless one knows where the goal is, where the defenders are, and so on, one's success in scoring is not entirely one's own. This much, I said previously. But is it the case that the person stumbling through the dark room learns something about her surroundings? Well, she seems to learn that she cannot go that way, or that the way forward is right here, where she meets no resistance. But this is not knowledge which stays with her in any typical sense. Indeed, after the fact she might be unable to say anything about what she knew at that particular time. What she learns is subordinate to her end

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<sup>27</sup>I got this example from Anton Ford.

and has a meaningful lifespan only within that structure. And something similar is true of the footballer. The knowledge she gains through perception is dependent on her broader practical aims and is often forgotten shortly thereafter. Of course, if the incident is memorable, then she may retain knowledge of her position relative to the goal and so on, but only if she has a special reason to retain it (e.g. she scored!); much such knowledge is lost as soon as it is no longer in use. This lack of permanence is the central mark of perception deployed in a practical context. The knowledge in question is for the sake of something else, not for the sake of truth conceived as an ultimate end. Once the particular end is met, this knowledge is usually discarded and forgotten. This suggests that the nature of the relevant knowledge gained in perception is of a peculiar, practically-directed type. However, that is not say that its localized end is not knowledge. Clearly, if the stumbler aims to get through the room, she aims at getting its layout right insofar as her purposes go. Doing so is still aiming at truth, however limited and subordinate that end may be.

When one's ultimate aim is something other than enduring knowledge, the character of the activity of perceptual inquiry is distinct from the familiar knowledge-gathering case. I have argued that, in a typical perceptual inquiry, one's end is gaining some knowledge. This is the primary function of perception in a rational being – it is a receptive capacity whose role is to provide the one who is exercising it knowledge. However, this does not entail that this is its only function. All it entails is that the involvement of perception cannot be independent of finding something out about the nature of one's environment. That its temporality is limited to a practical context does not speak against its internal aim being knowledge. One still aims to break eggs in making an omelet and one still aims at truth in stumbling through the

room. However, there is no reason to retain what one has learned in these practical contexts and this marks the difference between perceptual knowledge in the practical and in the theoretical case.

### **5.7 Conclusion**

It is the conclusion of this chapter that a capacity for empirical knowledge must be approached from both a practical and a theoretical dimension, where the practical furnishes the framework in which one can know one is justified in believing that things are thus and so on the basis of experience. I argued for this view by showing that a capacity to keep track of objects is a fundamental experiential activity. In being constitutive of noticing or focusing on particulars, it is necessary for the very possibility of having perceptual knowledge. Experience cannot be theorized in lieu of at least this practical capacity. And it cannot be completely accounted for without mention of various other experiential activities that, while less basic than tracking, are constitutive of the rich capacity for perceptual experience which we all possess.

# **CHAPTER 6**

## **Conclusion**

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## 6.1 Two Difficulties for Future Discussion

Before concluding, I want briefly to consider two potential objections to my view.

(1) My account of tracking as a fundamental capacity seems to require that the objects of perception are always individual objects. However, we perceive water, smoke, coffee and innumerable other substances which do not, as Henry Laycock argues, admit of singularity.<sup>1</sup> As tracking seems to require individual objects, it is unclear how my view is supposed to capture these other obvious instances of perception, given that I argue that tracking is a fundamental perceptual capacity.

(2) My account of experience as an end-governed activity seems to suggest that knowledge is gained when the end of this activity has been reached. Thus, gaining knowledge in experience is like fulfilling one's intention to, let's say, eat an apricot. Once an apricot has been eaten, then one's goal has been reached and is no longer one's goal. This seems false of experience, as one gains knowledge throughout experiencing, and not only at what might be conceived as the conclusion of a particular intention. One need not, that is, form an intention to know something specific in order to gain knowledge from experience.

I cannot provide complete answers to these objections here, but I will lay out suggestions for responses that I intend to develop in the future.

## 6.2 Tracking Non-singular Substances

In response to (1), I want to suggest that our conception of tracking can be extended to such cases. Doing so will not be straightforward. Part of what's baffling, and I suspect why there has been little attention paid to categories distinct from those of

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<sup>1</sup>Laycock, *Words Without Objects*, p. 99.

a singular object, is that non-singular substances such as water, smoke, and so on do not admit of identity claims.<sup>2</sup> What it is for smoke to be the *same* smoke *here* and *there* or *now* and *then* is at best unclear.

There have been attempts to characterize our reference to non-singular substances by singularizing the referents by parceling. Helen Cartwright makes a sophisticated attempt of this sort. When discussing the statement ‘The water Heraclitus bathed in yesterday = the water Heraclitus bathed in today’, Cartwright is aware that its analysis cannot involve the claim that ‘There is exactly one *x* such that *x* is some water that Heraclitus bathed in *x* yesterday.’ She notes that the statement can be true and the supposed analysis false even when we take for granted the fact that Heraclitus only took one bath yesterday: ‘[he] bathed in most of what he bathed in; he bathed in all but a quart and all but a pint; and these things are surely distinct.’<sup>3</sup>

Cartwright ultimately proposes that the right analysis is given by the statement: ‘There is exactly one *x* such that *x* is *all* of the water Heraclitus bathed in yesterday, and exactly one *y* such that *y* is *all* of the water Heraclitus bathed in today, and  $x=y$ .’

However, while promising, this won’t work. As Laycock argues, using notions of containers (cups, amounts, etc.) or boundaries in order to singularize mass terms, one does not ultimately resolve the difficulty. One merely begs the question.<sup>4</sup> Laycock brings his criticism by pointing out that Cartwright’s solution is no solution at all, just as her ultimate analysis of the original sentence is no analysis:

<sup>2</sup>Frege, for example, only has two fundamental categories in his logic: that of a concept and that of an object. One move, which I endorse, is to expand the table with a category for the non-singular. See Gottlob Frege, ‘On Concept and Object’, in: Michael Beaney, editor, *The Frege Reader* (Oxford UK: Blackwell, 1997).

<sup>3</sup>Helen Morris Cartwright, ‘Heraclitus and the Bath Water’, *Philosophical Review* 74:4 (1965), p. 481.

<sup>4</sup>See Laycock’s discussion of Cartwright’s views in Laycock, *Words Without Objects*, pp. 97–100.

In fact, however, it is not difficult to see that as it stands the proposed analysis of [a] [The water Heraclitus bathed in yesterday = the water Heraclitus bathed in today] as [c] [There is exactly one  $x$  such that  $x$  is *all* of the water Heraclitus bathed in yesterday, and exactly one  $y$  such that  $y$  is *all* of the water Heraclitus bathed in today, and  $x=y$ ] is wholly spurious. For the definite descriptions in [a] are not, as in ‘On Denoting’ unpacked in [c], but are baldly reproduced behind the quantifier. Cartwright might just as well have said ‘There is exactly one  $x$  such that  $x$  is *the water*.’ – were it not for the fact that it would then be patently obvious that no analysis of [a] has so far been produced.<sup>5</sup>

Laycock suggests that a way forward might have been for Cartwright to drop the definite articles in the resulting formulae, by giving an analysis that goes something like this: ‘There is exactly one  $x$  such that  $x$  is or includes each and every object that is water Heraclitus bathed in yesterday, and exactly one  $y$  such that  $y$  is or includes each and every object that is water Heraclitus bathed in today and  $x=y$ .’<sup>6</sup> However, as Laycock correctly notes immediately after proposing this, this analysis merely begs the question, as it assumes that Heraclitus bathed in a multitude of objects. It assumes the concept of ‘a water’, which it was supposed to vindicate. The analysis is thus viciously circular.

Given the failures of even sophisticated views such as Cartwright’s in analyzing non-singular expressions as singular, keeping track of smoke in perception cannot be keeping track of some amount of smoke or some such concocted object. Part of what is at issue here is that talk of the same water does not involve our typical notion of identity. There is no one water which Heraclitus bathed in today and yesterday. If my aim is to extend tracking into situations of seeing water, smoke and so on, this conclusion seems to entail that I am committed to a vision of tracking that somehow

<sup>5</sup>Laycock, *Words Without Objects*, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

does not involve singularity and thus does not involve the idea of identity of the same object over time. But since tracking is to be understood as keeping track of the *same* x through time, it is surely a paradox that one can track that which cannot admit of this sort of identity. This answer might seem inescapable. However, I think this is partly because we are only recently gaining a better understanding of the metaphysics of non-singular substance, or ‘metachemistry’, to use Laycock’s term. It is at this stage not entirely clear how to characterize thoughts that are about non-singular substances. It is partly my hope that in getting clear on this question, we might be in a better position to respond to the matching difficulty in the philosophy of perception. However, we can still make some headway in answering the question at hand.

Part of the difficulty in answering is that most non-singular substances are always in flux.<sup>7</sup> I have already, following Laycock, rejected the idea that we keep track of smoke or water by parceling it out: the same smoke cloud, the same glass of water etc. I think the only way to go forward here is to fully embrace this idea that non-singular substances are in flux. Smoke is rising and dispersing from the campfire. Alcohol is swiftly evaporating from the beaker. Water is mixing with the earth forming mud. Ice is melting in my gin and tonic. What remains identical across time from start to finish is not an object, or a parcel which can be kept track of, but rather what we might call ‘a process’ that unfolds before our eyes. My suggestion is this. We gain knowledge from perception of non-singular substances not by keeping track of *something* which is them, but rather by keeping track of what is *going on* with them. The ‘them’ is intelligible in virtue of what is going on, and not the other way around as it is with singular objects. We gain knowledge from perception about smoke, let’s say, not by keeping track of it – however we are to understand ‘it’ – but rather by

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<sup>7</sup>Laycock, *Words Without Objects*, pp. 26–27.

keeping track of the process of dispersion. This stands in contrast with the singular case, where knowing something about a particular – what it is up to or what is happening to it – is a matter of keeping track of it throughout in order to know its goings-on. In non-singular cases, one keeps track of the goings-on as a way of knowing something about non-singular substances. This idea not only does justice to the fact that non-singular substances are *non-singular*, but also does justice to the idea that they are in flux or always flowing. While this is not a complete answer, I think it provides a promising path to one.

### 6.3 Knowing as an Infinite End

The objection in (2) assumes that, on my view, one must form an intention to know some specific fact (specified in framing one's inquiry as finding out whether *p* or *q*, or some such specification) in order to gain knowledge through perceptual experience. This is obviously incorrect. I can come to know things about the world from experience without forming such an intention. In response to this objection, I want to draw on a distinction made by Sebastian Rödl between finite and infinite ends.<sup>8</sup> Finite ends are those ends which are met upon the completion of one's intentional action. If one aims to consume a rare Jelena apricot that is only found in Tajikistan, then one's intention is completed upon traveling to Tajikistan and eating a Jelena apricot. As the apricot is eaten, the action comes to completion and the end is extinguished. Infinite ends have a different structure. If one's intention is to be healthy, then there is no completion to this intention in the way there is in the finite case. My eating well and exercising today meet the goals of my intention to be healthy. But they do

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<sup>8</sup>Rödl, *Self Consciousness*, pp. 34–35.

not, and no particular action can, exhaust this end, as eating the apricot does in the previous example.

One might think that experiencing involves both sorts of ends. In some cases, such as when I'm looking whether there is tea left in the container, the knowledge which I gain is a finite end. My seeing that the container is empty is the completion of an intention to know whether or not there is tea. We might call this sort 'an intention to know some particular fact'. In saying this, I do not mean that my intention is to know some pre-determined fact. This would involve an antecedent grasp of this fact, which would undermine the very idea of my pursuing it. Rather, in saying that one intends to know some particular fact, the relevant description of the intention is such as to specify the end in a way that determines a particular *sort* of fact. It can be described in terms of whether or not something is the case, or perhaps looking for the location of some object.

On the other hand, there are cases where no such intention can be specified. In these cases, I can at most specify a broad end such as to get to know my neighborhood or one like it. For example, in experiencing my surroundings in going for a walk, my aim is to gain some *general* knowledge and thus nothing specific. This aim can never be extinguished, as my neighborhood is always changing. As I can never have complete knowledge of my neighborhood, my aim is infinite and must be maintained just as in the case of health. Thus, aiming to know my neighborhood is not an intention that can be extinguished. It is something I maintain by always-inquiring. It involves an infinite rather than a finite end.

With this distinction in mind, we might conclude that the capacity to know from perception can be employed in two different teleological structures, one infinite and

the other finite. This would respond to the objection, for it would account for how one comes to know things about the world on the basis of perception without forming an intention that specifies gaining some particular sort of fact as the end on my account. One does this insofar as one employs one's capacity in a teleological structure that involves an infinite end. This might seem a promising path, but I'm unsure that it is a satisfactory one. It splits the sorts of ends that one can pursue in experience, and in doing so, delineates two distinct sorts of inquiry. While clearly there are two such sorts, giving an account of the end of experiencing should show us the unity between these two and not merely assert the difference. We must understand how the two are exercises of the same capacity.

I think that this unity can be revealed in showing that these two sorts of inquiry are both undergirded by a pursuit of an infinite end. My suggestion is that knowledge, as this dissertation conceives it, is an infinite rather than a finite end *in all cases*. On my view, in perception, one always-already aims at an infinite end. I think this is so because knowledge is comprehensive and systematic. To see this, we begin by noting, as does the objection, that I do not only gather knowledge in accordance to my current aims and purposes in perceiving.

I might come to know that an eagle is perched on the tree northwest of me in aiming to know its location. However, unless I am completely absorbed in this aim, I will also come to know that there are ducks in the field before me, and that a pelican just landed on the lake northwest of here. I did not aim to know such facts explicitly – I did not have an intention to come to know the location of these animals – but I have come to know them while pursuing knowledge of the eagle. This should suggest that there is an underlying activity in perception that frames inquiry into particular

facts within a wider context. If it were not so, because such facts do not fit in the instrumental structure of pursuing knowledge about the eagle, then we could not explain how we came to know them.

One option might be to think that we are engaged in two activities as delineated above. One has an infinite end, and the other a finite one. I am both looking for what the eagle is up to, and I am also inquiring more generally. However, I think this is unlikely as it threatens the unity of experience. The other option, which I endorse, is that I am doing something further *in* pursuing particular knowledge of the eagle that accounts for how I come to know these other unrelated facts. On the account I favor, I am not doing two things but one.

This wider context is in full view when considering what it is to look around or to merely relax and take in one's surroundings. In these cases, where I pursue general knowledge, there is no particular knowledge that I want to gain. My aim is general. As discussed, in these cases, knowledge itself is my aim as health is my aim in exercising. I think such cases are more revealing of the teleological structure that lies at the core of all experiencing. And thus, I think that the very same sort of structure underlies our search for the eagle. This means that figuring out what the eagle is doing is an activity that is teleologically related to an infinite end in knowledge.

We can start explaining this claim with the help of the analogy to health. My local end today might be to exercise on *this* bike, over *here*. However, *in doing this*, I am meeting my infinite end of health. I am not doing two things, but rather one. Likewise, in pursuing this fact about the eagle, in a narrow sense, I am aiming to know just what the eagle is up to. However, in a wider sense, I am aiming to have knowledge of the world more generally, which is an aim that I am meeting but not

exhausting in knowing something about this eagle.

My knowledge of the eagle is to be found within a system of knowledge which I possess. My knowledge that the eagle is on this tree over there does not stand alone, but only as part of a wider body of beliefs.<sup>9</sup> This includes general knowledge related to facts about eagles, trees, environments, as well as more particular knowledge about the location we are inquiring in, about the trees in this location, and so on. We understand my aim in experience on this occasion as part of a wider project that I pursue in inquiring into the world more generally. In the widest context of perceptual experience, we aim at bringing a body of knowledge closer to completion, and not at particular knowledge. Thus, the kinds of ends for knowledge that we delineated above are revealed to be *one* in their widest description. They are exercises of the very same capacity which always-already aims at knowing qua infinite end. This is what it is to aim to know.

There are two potential issues here, which together seem to form a dilemma. One might think that experiencing might come to an end if I could somehow come to know all of the facts. This would make experience a very long finite end. However, I do not see how this can be accessible to us as finite beings. I cannot have all of the knowledge not only because I am forgetful, but because my living in *time* means that there is always more to know. It is an aspect of my finitude that my perceptual capacities are employed to meet an infinite end of empirical knowledge that cannot be exhausted. And thus, knowing anything empirically is to be understood within this structure of an infinite end.

However, if I think this, then it seems that I must be intentionally pursuing something which, upon reflection, I know that I cannot accomplish. I cannot intend

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<sup>9</sup>I draw here on the work of Davidson on coherentism. See Davidson, 'A Coherence Theory'.

to do something which I know I cannot accomplish. I cannot, that is, intend to leap over a building.<sup>10</sup> This might send me to the first horn of the dilemma. However, I do not think this is disastrous.<sup>11</sup> As *finite* rational beings, I suspect this is our condition: to aim at completing a body of knowledge which is a task we cannot achieve. Unlike in the case of leaping over a building, it is not as though my attempts to fulfill my aim of completing this body are fruitless. I do not get any closer to leaping over a building by getting an inch higher on some attempts. However, I do get closer to knowing in coming to know more facts, in continuing to shape and add to my body of knowledge by inquiring.

I am thus tempted to say that it is merely our lot in life as finite rational beings that we can aim at knowing and continue to so aim even though upon reflection, it is obvious that we can never get there. Unlike in the case of leaping over a building, we edge closer and closer to this goal. However, on this account our predicament might also seem hopeless. I can only inquire so much, so my knowledge can only encompass a minute, inadequate, fraction of the body of knowledge I aim to complete. There is something that softens the blow of this realization, and perhaps makes aiming at something one cannot achieve reasonable in this case. Qua individuals, we know we can never meet this aim. However, this project itself is not something which is limited to the individual. It is a project which we share with others, not only in our lifetime, but with those who come after us. Thus, while individually the project might

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<sup>10</sup>For a discussion of this, see Kevin Falvey, 'Knowledge in Intention', *Philosophical Studies* 99 (2000), p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>I mentioned something similar in my discussion of Peirce in Chapter 4 §8. There too it might have seemed disastrous that, when thinking of the end of inquiry in terms of cessation, a proper end to inquiry could only be achieved by luck. That things went well for us and we achieved knowledge was to be thought accidental to our capacity for inquiring. However, the disaster is there averted by acknowledging that knowledge, as the end of inquiry, is not accidental to the activity of inquiring. It is its teleological end, and thus any time we inquire we edge closer to knowledge without accident. As I go on to argue, a similar response is called for here.

seem hopeless, as a collective, we can be thought to make adequate progress. Unlike the goal of jumping over the building, the goal of knowing is not subject-relative, but subject-general. It extends across all empirical subjects and is a fundamentally shared project. We can thus form an intention in intending together.

While all of these claims require defending, I hope this answer is sufficiently suggestive to show a way to answer this objection within the framework that I developed in this dissertation.

#### **6.4 Conclusion: The Epistemology of Perception as Activity**

I began this dissertation by considering the sort of capacity perception is in human beings. Drawing on the work of Michael Thompson in *Life and Action*, I suggested that perception is a feature of the human life-form that can be described in natural historical judgements. The description of this feature must contain an appeal to knowledge: the human being gathers knowledge about her surroundings by exercising her perceptual capacities. This sets our inquiry into the nature of our perceptual capacity on a particular track, one where the attainment of knowledge is front and center. Such an account must make sense of how experience can serve a justificatory role.

In the second chapter, I discussed John McDowell's view of experience, which rightly argues that human experience must be conceived as rational, where rationality is transformative of perceptual capacities. This entails that human beings acquire conceptual content in experiencing. However, McDowell's view left us with a dilemma. His original view characterized experience in a way that could not be properly distinguished from judgement. His updated position made the justificatory

relation opaque. Thus within the confines of his view, we cannot render intelligible how experience can serve the justificatory role which McDowell aims to secure. On a model where experience merely presents content, there is nothing in the nature of that content which can secure its veridicality. As I made the point, there is nothing to distinguish that content from the content of a passing thought. To claim that the source of perceptual content is distinct and self-conscious (in seeing, I know that I see) is useless, as it appeals to a capacity for knowledge which we have not yet rendered intelligible. I then argued that the way to conceive of justification in the case of perceptual capacities is to conceive the content available to us in experience as part of a teleological structure: a structure whose aim is knowledge. The human being employs her perceptual capacities with the aim of knowing something about her surroundings. But such a teleological structure cannot be made intelligible if experience is conceived as passive, where features of the world merely strike us because we, e.g., have our eyes open.

In the third chapter, I began to argue for an active conception of experience by drawing on the literature surrounding Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations. Wittgenstein's arguments speak in favor of an active conception of experience. If experience is conceptual in character, and concept possession is a matter, not merely of entertaining some mental entity in one's head, but of doing something – of following rules in engaging with one's surroundings – then the conceptual dimension of experience presupposes activity.

In the fourth chapter, I supplemented this idea with a discussion of Alva Noë's enactive view of experience in *Action in Perception*. Employing some of Noë's insights, I argued that having content available to one in experience is a matter of exercising a

battery of skills. I further argued that the exercise of such skills has an end in knowledge, thereby securing a justificatory role for experience. I took this to vindicate one of C.S. Peirce's central claims, that truth is the end of inquiry.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, experience is the fundamental form of empirical inquiry.

In the fifth chapter, I argued that the sort of activities that are paradigmatic of experiencing are various. However, there is at least one perceptual activity which is fundamental – that of keeping track of a particular object in perception. It is fundamental, for it is constitutive of noticing or focusing on particulars, which, in turn, is necessary for the very possibility of having perceptual knowledge of particulars. Experience thus cannot be theorized independently of the practical capacities that constitute its exercise. We must approach our capacity for empirical knowledge from both a practical and a theoretical dimension, where the practical furnishes the framework in which one can know one is justified in believing that things are thus and so on the basis of experience.

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<sup>12</sup>Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', p. 273.

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