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McDowell and Experience: Self-Determination and Answerability to the World

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine John McDowell’s account of experience and perceptual judgment. McDowell’s principal thesis in Mind and World was that experience needs to be conceived as comprising conceptual content in order to assuage what he perceives as certain characteristic anxieties in modern philosophy in relation to empirical thought. In this way, McDowell’s notion of experience with a manifold of passively actualized propositional content became central to achieving that end. McDowell’s recently revised account of experience, now divested of propositional content, accordingly warrants an examination of the new form of conceptually shaped experience that he offers, and of the necessity of positing experience with conceptual content, in order to avoid the Myth of the Given (as McDowell understands it).

In accordance with the Mind and World paradigm of experience, I identify three central features that come to inform McDowell’s account of experience with conceptual content, which in turn constitute the divisions of Chapters in this thesis: 1. Rational Entitlement; 2. Objectivity; 3. Self-Determining Capacities. In this context, I come to elucidate the particular models of conceptual intelligibility that are offered by McDowell in order to substantiate his stipulation of conceptual capacities as they are to be understood as operative in experience. I then come to critically assess McDowell’s revised account of experience as conceptually shaped, in relation to these three central features, as they are understood in Mind and World.

Charles Travis presents an account of experience and perceptual judgment which contributes to McDowell’s critical rethink of his proposal in Mind and World that conceptually shaped experience has propositional content. In the context of discussing the three central features listed above, according to which I organize the discussion of experience and perceptual judgment, I consider those features as they are operative in Travis’s account, and how they may bear upon McDowell’s earlier and later accounts of experience.

I propose to present a clear and charitable reading of both McDowell’s Mind and World account of experience and the newly revised account. Even so, I do contend that, with McDowell no longer able to draw upon the more robust models of how to conceive of experience as conceptually shaped (which sets forth in Mind and World), and in light of certain aspects of Travis’s account of perceptual judgment, such a cumulative methodology places McDowell’s account of experience as conceptually shaped in serious difficulty – such that it may warrant a reconsideration of those higher-order concerns, specifically those associated with the Myth of the Given, that motivate and inform his treatment of experience and perceptual judgment.
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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine John McDowell’s account of experience and perceptual judgment. I aim to present a perspicuous picture of both McDowell’s *Mind and World* account and his newly revised account of experience put forward in his essay ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’. The topics under discussion in each of the three Chapters are offered as crucial features of McDowell’s account of experience as conceptually shaped. It is by way of examining these key aspects in focus that I ultimately claim to provide important reasons as to why McDowell’s conceptualist account of experience, and his associated therapeutic project in relation to the issue of mind-world relations, are now in serious difficulty.

The division of the Chapters is as follows: in Chapter 1, I set out McDowell’s story of ‘rational entitlement’ as it comes to inform his account of experience and perceptual judgment. In Chapter 2, I then consider relevant aspects of ‘objectivity’ as they are implicated in McDowell’s account of ensuring the content of perceptual thought and the possibility of ‘verdictive answerability’ to the world. And in Chapter 3, I clarify the relationship between relevant self-determining capacities and external constraint upon perceptual judgment as they are implicated in McDowell’s particular form of idealism.

The methodology by which I present my central theses is one which further divides the respective Chapters into three parts: the first (A) gives McDowell’s account as it was in *Mind and World*; the second (B) illuminates Charles Travis’s account of such issues as they find their place in his own alternative account of experience and perceptual judgment; and the third (C) attempts to clarify McDowell’s new position in respect to the relevant aspects – as they take their shape according to the newly revised account of experience.

In the context of these respective subject matters, I elucidate the relevant and distinct models – offered by McDowell – so as to intelligibly conceive experience as passively actualizing a conceptual content. Indeed, it is by way of these models that McDowell claims to substantiate the success of his philosophical therapy as applied to mind-world relations – and specifically, the interrelated issues of ensuring the very content of empirical thought and being answerable to the empirical world.
At the same time, I present the philosophy of Travis as providing a compelling source for relevant *external* pressures that can be placed upon these models of intelligibly conceiving experience as constituted by conceptual content, particularly as they are offered in *Mind and World*. As I present my discussion, McDowell’s earlier account of conceptually shaped experience is one which is viewed as vulnerable to certain persuasive criticisms put forth by Travis.

Viewed in this way, the success of McDowell’s revised account of experience is in turn weakened in light of certain *internal* considerations, specifically, the loss of these more robust models of intelligibly conceiving experience as conceptually shaped, which he once invoked as central in support of his therapeutic philosophy, as applied to issues of content and answerability. This cumulative methodology, I contend, thus places McDowell’s account of experience as constituted by conceptual content, and his associated therapeutic ambitions, in serious difficulty.
Chapter 1: Entitlement

A. The Issue of Rational Entitlement

1. The Myth of the Given

**McDowell:** “Empirical justifications depend on rational relations, relations within the space of reasons. The putatively reassuring idea is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingement on the conceptual realm from outside. So the space of reasons is made out to be more extensive than the space of concepts […] (last step) [...] pointing to something that is simply received in experience.” 1

**McDowell:** “Avoiding the Myth requires capacities that belong to reason to be operative in experiencing itself, not just in judgments made in response to experience.” 2

**Travis:** “How does perception make the world bear for the perceiver on what to think and do – in fortunate cases, as the world bears on what is so, or would be the thing to do? How, more briefly, does perception make the world available for thought (or what is it for it to do this)?” 3

According to John McDowell, to fall into the Myth of the Given is to suppose that one can acquire certain kinds of knowledge, in this case *perceptual* knowledge, without needing to have the relevant rational or conceptual capacities in place in order to acquire that knowledge in the first place4. The idea that one could in fact do so engenders the *mythical* aspect of the Myth of the Given. This then constitutes an identifiable incoherence that must be avoided in order to posit an intelligible picture of perceptual judgement.

Now exactly what model of perceptual judgement is required in order to avoid that perspicuous incoherence presents one of the defining issues which comes to characterise the

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differences that hold between McDowell’s and Charles Travis’s respective accounts. Of course, as the various aspects which come to inform perceptual judgment come into focus – rational entitlement, objectivity and self-determination – the substantive differences which obtain between the two philosophers certainly do extend well beyond the (initial) disagreement pertaining to that notion of sensory experience which is considered necessary to avoid the Myth of the Given insofar as it is a Myth. However, it is precisely the issue of what constitutes falling foul of the Myth of the Given that divides each account of perceptual judgment as it unfolds. So, before discussing the details of McDowell’s and Travis’s pictures of experience and perceptual judgment, it is first necessary to elucidate a brief account of their respective notions of the Myth of the Given.

Following Wilfred Sellars, McDowell situates episodes of perceptual knowledge in the space of reasons – the latter being a space in which one justifies what one judges or claims to be the case. This situation is then coupled with an ‘internalistic’ conception of knowledge, according to which, in order to have knowledge, one must also be able to self-consciously identify how it is that one came to acquire that very knowledge. So to claim to have a particular kind of knowledge, in this case perceptual, one then has to be able to offer reasons in order to justify one’s entitlement to that particular knowledge. And so, in accordance with the kind of knowledge which is perceptual, one must be able to offer reasons as to why one is rationally entitled to such a purported perceptual claim.

However, when we consider the case of perceptual knowledge a problem emerges. Perceptual knowledge is a kind of knowledge which comes to be acquired by way of sensibility. And, at least as it is traditionally conceived, sensibility does not belong to our capacities of reason. Accordingly, the sensory impressions of perceptual experience seem to resist any kind of rational or intelligible inclusion into the space of reasons, that is, the space

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wherein one seeks to justify one’s perceptual judgements or claims. How could we make a mere ‘dent in the tablet of mind’ into a rational consideration? 6

This then brings into focus McDowell’s own conception of the Myth of the Given. McDowell’s take upon the Myth of the Given is profoundly influenced by Sellars. From Sellars, McDowell takes it that it is precisely to fall into the Myth of the Given to think that sensibility without the involvement of rational capacities can make things available for cognition.7 Importantly, McDowell takes this to imply that conceptual capacities must therefore be involved in sensibility itself so as to avoid the Myth (whereas Travis does not). In other words, one would fall foul of the Myth of the Given, if one appealed to sensory experience as a rational justification for one’s claim to perceptual knowledge, on a conception of sensory experience, along traditional lines, as lacking the involvement of our conceptual capacities. In such a case that which would be appealed to in one’s purported justification would have to obtain outside of the space of the conceptual. So that to fall foul of the Myth of the Given, according to McDowell, merely requires that the space of reasons, in the context of perceptual rational entitlement, be treated as extending beyond the realm of the conceptual.

For McDowell, our rational faculties must then be operative in sensibility itself. This, and nothing less, is what is necessary in order to achieve a coherent account of perceptual judgement that – in the context of rational entitlement – can appeal to sensibility itself as providing reasons for what we judge to be so about objects visibly present to us. As will become apparent, in discussion to follow, just as it is from Sellars that McDowell gets his take on the Myth, so it is also under Sellars’s tutelage that he invokes his various models of

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conceptual intelligibility for making sense of his stipulated notion of conceptual content as passively actualised in experience itself.

McDowell’s notion of the intelligible extension of the space of reasons to sensibility itself is also informed by what he sees as (with amendment) Donald Davidson’s central insight into rationality, viz., that reasons-relations occur only between conceptual contents. For perceptual knowledge to be so placed in the logical space of reasons, in accordance with Davidson’s (amended) insight into rationality, the relatum of that logical space – both knowledgeable judgment and the experience that rationally entitles it – must then be constituted by conceptual content. Moreover, at least according to McDowell’s Mind and World paradigm, to so extend the space of reasons to the domain of sensibility requires that experience be treated as having propositional content.

Even so, from McDowell’ point of view, it is Davidson who provides the example of another model of perceptual judgement which would also render problematic a knowledgeable relationship in respect to the empirical world, viz., a ‘Coherentism’, which according to McDowell, insufficiently accommodates for rational external constraint upon perceptual judgment. By refusing to ground the justification of perceptual knowledge in sensibility, Davidson, as McDowell sees it, forgoes any rational assurance that such judgments are secured to the external reality that such thought purports to be about, any assurance that such judgments are not ‘spinning in the void’.

Davidson of course – as will be discussed further – was also concerned with avoiding the Myth of the Given. And indeed McDowell’s notion of the Myth of the Given, sensibility conceived of as something that does not itself involve our rational capacities, is very much influenced by Davidson. However, Davidson claims to avoid the Myth by limiting the space of reasons, that is, by limiting the rational justification for perceptual judgments to the
contents of other beliefs. In this way Davidson proposes to exclude sensory impressions themselves (treated as causes of our perceptual judgements) from figuring in the rational entitlement of those judgements. Davidson then, according to McDowell, refuses the notion that ensuring empirical content depends upon preserving ‘answerability’ to sensory impressions, and maintains that impressions are not the kind of thing which we could be answerable to.\(^8\) Re-establishing the intelligibility of this (repudiated) ‘answerability’ by crediting experience with conceptual content is precisely what Davidson is ‘blind to’.

As McDowell reads Davidson, his ‘Coherentist’ model of perceptual judgment fails to incorporate the quite benign and unproblematic motivations, at least at the outset, of those models of perceptual judgment which by his lights eventually come to fall foul of the Myth of the Given, viz., that, purporting to be directed towards the empirical world, perceptual thought ought to be conceived of as, through experience, under rational external constraint from, and so answerable to, that world. Such concerns, as McDowell claims in \textit{Mind and World}, provide the (understandable) motivation to then ‘recoil’ back into appealing to something like the Myth, thereby ensuring an ‘interminable oscillation’ between the two models of thought. It is in the context of this quandary, as he reads it, that McDowell, by way of therapy, offers his stipulated notion of conceptual content in experience.

Charles Travis provides an account of the relationship between thought and the world which he claims avoids the ‘mythical’ aspect of the Myth – viz., that one could acquire knowledge without having the relevant conceptual capacities in place to receive it. Travis presents a model of perceptual judgment which provides a cognitive role for the \textit{sensory}; however perception, as Travis understands it, does not itself involve or draw upon the conceptual capacities of the subject, as McDowell would have it.

\(^8\) McDowell, ‘Experiencing the World’, p. 246.
Travis takes as his point of departure what he sees as the fundamental question of perception: how does perception make the world available for thought? And his answer is that perception, which is not itself conceptually shaped, ‘silently’ affords us visual acquaintance with the objects in our surroundings, thereby making them available to recognition, given suitable expertise. Moreover, Travis holds that our perceptual thoughts stand in a verdictive relation to the non-conceptual objects that we make judgments about, given the visual acquaintance with them that perception affords. Travis presents such an account as one that avoids the trivial incoherence that he associates with the Myth of the Given, while at the same time avoiding what he perceives as McDowell’s problematically idealist notion of conceptual experience.

So whilst Travis may well agree with McDowell that ‘bare’ sensibility by itself cannot make things available to cognition, it does not follow, in his view, that conceptual capacities must therefore be in play prior to judgment, actualised in experience itself, so as to avoid the incoherent aspects of the Myth of the Given. Conceptual capacities are, of course, necessary in order to ‘unlock the outer world’, and make the world available to empirical thought; however, this does not occur in the senses themselves: the senses themselves are ‘silent’.

To establish reason’s reach as extending to the non-conceptual object itself, Travis posits a notion of recognition and experience by which to bind the conceptual content of judgement and the non-conceptual objects of perception in rational and reason-providing relations. As Travis’s notion of recognition plays out according to what he dubs Frege’s dividing line between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, it thus becomes apparent that Travis, unlike McDowell, evidently has no need for Davidson’s constraint against extending the space of reasons to the non-conceptual object itself.

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Of course, and as will be seen, by McDowell’s reckoning, Travis’s is a model which nevertheless falls into the Myth – that is, in light of McDowell’s notion of what it takes to avoid its incoherence. That conviction remains firmly in place despite the fact that McDowell comes to revise his account of experience in order to accommodate for those criticisms made by Travis in the course of the latter’s presenting his own Fregean model of perceptual judgement.

In Chapter 1, I propose to explore McDowell’s notion of conceptual experience, and to situate Travis as a central figure responsible for the change from his *Mind and World* propositional account of experience to his later picture of experience as having merely non-discursive intuitional content. I will then assess the intelligibility of what is left of McDowell’s model of experience, and its stipulated notion of conceptual content, and how this then comes to bear upon some of the primary aspects of McDowell’s *Mind and World* paradigm.

2. McDowell: Models of Intelligibility and Passively Actualised Content

*McDowell*: “Sellar’s key move here is to put forward a conception of experience as “so to speak, making” claims, or “containing” them [...] “thoughts”, including experiences, figure in the first instance as posits in a theory constructed to explain overt behaviour, both linguistic and non-linguistic [...] these posits come with a model [...] the model in the case of ‘thoughts’ is speech acts [...] the posited non-overt propositional episodes are modelled on episodes in which propositional content is overt, for instance claims literally so called. That goes for experiences in particular [...] expressed claims are the model we need to exploit in grasping the concept of experiences.” ¹⁰

*McDowell*: “What we need, and can have, is the idea of a case of receptivity in operation that, even while being that, is an actualisation, together, of conceptual capacities whose active exercise, with the same togetherness, would be the making of a judgment.” ¹¹

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In order to successfully navigate an intelligible path between Davidson’s externally unconstrained ‘Coherentism’ and the incoherence of the ‘Myth of the Given’, McDowell offers a notion of experience which is informed by certain models, analogies, and indeed disanalogies. McDowell makes particular use of overt speech acts and judgments. These models are of such importance because they are the paradigmatic model of the conceptual. Being propositional in their nature they are constituted by precisely the same content as the ‘ostensible seeings’ or ‘appearings’ McDowell wishes to posit in experience. And although they differ in respect to the means of their actualisation, they come to inform McDowell’s picture of conceptual experience, both in respect to his Mind and World paradigm, and his later changes.

The reasons why these models are significant is that McDowell’s extension of the bounds of the conceptual to experience requires that he substantiate that account with recognisable conceptual aspects within experience. So the importance of the models is in respect to intelligibility. McDowell makes it quite clear at the beginning of Mind and World that his extension of the conceptual to experience should not fall into mere ‘word-play’, by simply calling experience conceptual, yet divesting it of the recognisable features which (conventionally) characterise spontaneity.

In the Mind and World paradigm, we are directed by McDowell to understand the content of experience upon the model of judgment, just as thought itself was understood by Sellars on the model of overt speech. Across the three tiered system of speech, judgment, and intuition, McDowell supposes that the content of each is the very same. They just differ in respect to how that content manifests itself. And indeed McDowell expends a large amount of
philosophical effort to reinforce that notion of shared content, albeit with different modes of actualisation.

It is of course possible to distinguish McDowell’s more ‘higher order’ concerns, foremost of which is dismounting from the ‘interminable oscillation’ he identifies, from the substantive details of the propositional models of intelligibility by means of which we are to understand how we can make sense of the idea that experience has conceptual content. So the particulars of the story of intelligibility ought not to be, at least at the outset, conflated with the higher order concerns of McDowell’s project. Such details of intelligibility merely facilitate a means to an end.

Even so, it is precisely those models of intelligibility which throughout lend substance to McDowell’s original response to his higher order concerns. So one of the central issues to be addressed in the chapters to follow is whether the radical diminishment of McDowell’s *Mind and World* picture of the conceptual content of experience, as he now moves away from the idea that experience has propositional content, ultimately thwarts his *Mind and World* project. Does the later McDowell then lose the right to call experience conceptual?

3. Givenness vs givenness: Traditional Empiricism vs Minimal Empiricism

McDowell: “That is what I mean by a “minimal empiricism”: the idea that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as it must be if we are to make sense of it as thinking at all. And this is one side of a combination of plausibilities that promises to account for the philosophical anxieties I alluded to. The other side is a frame of mind, which I shall come to, that makes it hard to see how experience could function as a tribunal, delivering verdicts on our thinking.” ¹²

The obvious starting point to distinguish McDowell’s ‘minimal empiricism’ from ‘traditional empiricism’ is to distinguish between their respective notions of the ‘given’.

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According to McDowell’s *Mind and World* account, that which we are given in experience is a manifold of propositional content. The ‘propositional given’ is thus intended to displace the notion of a Given of experience, understood as a non-conceptual sensory impression.

According to McDowell, such notions have succeeded only in contributing to a paradigm which has created the problematic ‘interminable oscillation’ that he has identified in *Mind and World*. Hence they have exhausted their usefulness as a means of understanding the relations between mind and world. The propositional given McDowell offers, allows us, he tells us, to look at things from a different ‘angle’\(^\text{13}\)– and what’s more it allows us to escape from that ‘interminable oscillation’.

Customary conceptions of experience as outside the conceptual sphere, according to McDowell, ultimately make it a ‘mystery’ about how our empirical thought has ‘content’ in the first place, or how our thought is ‘answerable’ to the empirical world for its correctness. This necessitates a change in the very mode of understanding the relation between experience, thought and the world. For McDowell, what is required is a means of understanding experience as itself as a sensory episode with conceptual content. This is the function that propositional content is intended to serve. It provides the means in which to intelligibly conceive experience as itself conceptual, and provides a content within experience that is amenable to normative discourse: a content that can itself be taken up as a reason in our thinking.

How could such a thing as a ‘bare sensory impression’ stand in a reason-providing function? Devoid of the concepts which figure in thought, the sensory can do no such thing as stand in normative relations. Without a conceptual apparatus that can, amongst other things, give the necessary means of intelligibly comprehending experience as itself within the

normative framework, one is left with nothing other than the incoherence of the Myth of the Given.

4. Davidson’s ‘Blindspot’

**Davidson**: “My view is that particular empirical beliefs are supported by other beliefs, some of them perceptual and some not. Perceptual beliefs are caused by features of the environment, but nothing in their causality provides a reason for such beliefs. Nevertheless, many basic perceptual beliefs are true, and the explanation of this fact shows why we are justified in believing them. We know many things where our only reasons for believing them are further beliefs.”

**McDowell**: “For Davidson, receptivity can impinge on the space of reasons only from outside, which is to say that nothing can be rationally vulnerable to its deliverances [...] if we go on using the Kantian terms, we have to say that the operations of spontaneity are rationally unconstrained from outside themselves. That is indeed a way of formulating Davidson’s Coherentism.”

**McDowell**: “But Davidson thinks experience can be nothing but an extra-conceptual impact on sensibility. So he concludes that experience must be outside the space of reasons. According to Davidson, experience is causally relevant to a subject’s beliefs and judgments, but it has no bearing on their status as justified or warranted. Davidson says that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief” (p.310), and he means in particular that experience cannot count as a reason for holding a belief.”

The best place to begin to develop an account of McDowell’s ‘minimal empiricism’ is with Davidson. Such a starting point is not however due to the fact that Davidson was in any sense an ‘empiricist’, but rather, it is under the influence of Davidson’s dictum that McDowell develops his rational entitlement account, and indeed his picture of intelligibly incorporating experience itself within the normative space of reasons. According to McDowell, it is

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16 Ibid. p. 14.
Davidson’s great insight that rational entitlement is constituted by rational relations between contents that involve an actualization of our conceptual capacities.

This is a rational constraint that McDowell shares with Davidson, and a position which comes to distinguish theirs from Travis’s. Of course, McDowell does indeed come to incorporate many aspects of Travis’s account, yet McDowell’s rational entitlement picture is one which remains grounded in what he takes to be Davidson’s central insight, viz., that rational relations between items essentially involve rational relations between conceptual items. For McDowell this commitment is a necessity in order to avoid the Myth of the Given.

That said, what becomes apparent is that Davidson and McDowell differ in respect to their motivation for avoiding the Myth of the Given. The motivation for avoiding the Myth of the Given is of such importance because it has significant implications in respect to their epistemic entitlement pictures. Davidson’s principal motivation for avoiding the Myth of the Given is a desire to avoid ‘skepticism’. And as Davidson sees things, such skeptical concerns are intrinsic to any ‘empiricist’ picture.

I’ll discuss these skeptical concerns in the context of addressing what Davidson sees as the ‘epistemic intermediaries’ in the empiricist picture of entitlement. For now, however, I wish to illuminate how Davidson comes to develop his ‘Coherentist’ position in respect to his avoiding the Myth of the Given.

5. Davidson on Experience

It is somewhat paradoxical that it is Davidson, and not McDowell, who assumes a model of perceptual judgment, a mode of intelligibility, associated more with the traditional empiricist position, as regards characterizing experience, than McDowell himself. Of course, Davidson gives experience itself no rational standing according to his rational entitlement
picture, as to do so would fall afoul of the Myth of the Given. And yet Davidson assumes from the very outset the very model which makes possible the oscillation back to the Myth of the Given.

Davidson does not indulge in a overly complex characterization of experience, as McDowell does in respect to intelligibility, because experience as he sees it, is of no immediate normative concern in the rational entitlement picture. His notion of experience is best understood as a ‘bare’ non-conceptual sensory impression. (Because the sensory is positioned outside the space of concepts, experience – given with the necessity of avoiding the Myth of the Given – is thus situated outside the normative entitlement picture). In other words, experience as a non-conceptual episode, is situated outside the space of reasons.

Davidson is committed to the dictum that ‘nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief’. He therefore refuses the idea that experience, as something outside ‘the scope of beliefs’, can provide a basis for knowledge, or can operate as a ‘tribunal’ that stands in judgment over beliefs. Experiences as ‘sensory impressions’ are outside the epistemic relata of conceptual content (beliefs) and are accordingly posited as outside the rational entitlement story. In Davidson’s space of reasons normative relations are thus restricted from tracing the justification for a perceptual judgment all the way back to experience itself. With Davidson’s assumed model of experience, any attempt to extend the rational entitlement picture to experience itself necessarily falls foul of the Myth.

The most that experience can do in Davidson’s story is play a causal role in the formation of perceptual beliefs about objects in an extra-linguistic reality. So that when it comes to issues of entitlement, any reference to ‘experience’, can at best merely acknowledge the particular causal source of such beliefs, i.e. via visual perception. Of course, some causal

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story is an essential aspect to any picture that intends to illuminate the acquisition of perceptual beliefs. However, the important point is that Davidson does not assign experience any rational justificatory role in his entitlement story of perceptual beliefs. This is certainly McDowell’s take on Davidson.

Perceptual beliefs therefore have rational support no further than in their ‘coherence’ with other beliefs culminating in something like a ‘world view’. So the ‘rational support’ of perceptual beliefs is co-linearly exhausted to the extent to which one’s provisions of beliefs are also. Davidson’s ‘triangulation’ story in respect to ‘content’ can, of course, be taken as feeding into the ‘rational support’ structure of perceptual beliefs, but for immediate purposes, that which is ‘reason-providing’ in the normative sense in Davidson’s account goes no further than a caused perceptual ‘belief’.

6. Davidson and ‘Appearings’

McDowell: “Perhaps a sensory impression causes it to appear to a subject that things are thus and so, and the appearing has implications for what the subject ought to think. But sensory impressions themselves, as Davidson conceives them, cannot stand in rational relations to what a subject is to think.”18

McDowell: “One can have an experience that reveals to one that things are thus and so without coming to believe that things are thus and so. One need not avail oneself of every rational entitlement one has. Consider a case in which one is misled into mistrusting one’s experience. One does not believe it is revealing to one how things are, but in fact it is doing just that.”19

One of the means by which McDowell comes to distinguish his ‘minimal empiricism’ from Davidson’s ‘Coherentist’ position is via a rational entitlement picture in which sensory experience can itself afford reasons for perceptual judgment. One of the ways this plays out


19 Ibid, p. 131.
grammatically is via ‘appearings’. Davidson himself does not initially use the term ‘appearing’ in his account; however, McDowell makes use of ‘appearings’ in such a way so as to draw out the differences in their entitlement pictures. Indeed, McDowell introduces the notion of ‘appearing’ as a way of illuminating the problems Davidson has in restricting his entitlement story within the boundary of ‘belief’, rather than acknowledging McDowell’s extended space of concepts.

In Davidson’s story, ‘appearings’, as states with propositional content, are indeed within the space of the conceptual. However, for Davidson, an ‘appearing’ and a belief, are not to be so distinguished so that the space of reasons extends beyond belief. Because “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief”, such ‘appearings’ are necessarily beliefs. It is only by an ‘appearing’ being a belief that it can stand in rational relations, i.e stand as a reason. So Davidson can ground an observational claim to the extent that it ‘appears’ that things are thus and so, on the understanding that this is indeed a belief that things are thus and so.

However, this does not (rationally) align ‘appearings’ with sensory impressions. It does not extend the justification story all the way to the experience, to receptivity, itself. The sensory impressions are not themselves constituted by content, the same content of ‘appearings’. As already mentioned, impressions are outside the space of concepts. Sensory impressions can impress upon the perceiver ‘appearings’, which are perceptual beliefs, but only in the causal sense of ‘impress’, not in any normative function. So, to yet again reiterate, Davidson’s take on experience is as sensory impression which is not an ‘appearing’. Sensory impressions are themselves outside the conceptual, and outside the space of reasons.  

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McDowell and ‘Appearing’

McDowell: “[… ] nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except something else that is also in the space of concepts – for instance, a circumstance consisting in its appearing to a subject that things are thus and so.”  

Attending to the grammar of ‘appearing’, as it supposedly takes shape in each of McDowell’s and Davidson’s respective entitlement stories, is an attempt on McDowell’s part to illuminate Davidson’s ‘blindspot’. McDowell essentially has two problems with Davidson’s (assumed) account in respect to ‘appearings’. The first is that ‘appearings’ are aligned with beliefs, and secondly, ‘appearings’ are not rationally bound to sensory impressions.

McDowell claims that the identification of ‘appearings’ with beliefs is an ‘unhappy’ one. ‘Appearings’, in McDowell’s picture, provide a conceptual space in experience in which a belief is not acquired, and a judgment is not yet exercised. Reasons are provided in experience, they are the given content of experience, and that content can be manifestly expressed through the grammar of ‘appearings’. However, McDowell offers a conceptual space which exceeds the sphere of judgment, a space of entitlement in which an item (an ‘appearing’) can stand in normative relations, but which in itself lacks the endorsement of judgment.

‘Appearings’, in McDowell’s account, provide a content that is passively actualized in experience, that can entitle a ‘taking to be so’ without yet being a ‘taking to be so’. Thus, for McDowell, ‘appearings’ are intended to provide an epistemic intermediary position of a kind (deflationary) before belief or judgment. ‘Appearings’ are epistemic intermediaries of a kind, because experience has the very same content as a judgment. ‘Appearings’ rationally (epistemically) mediate between the objects that we perceive and our perceptual beliefs about

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21 Ibid, p. 140.
them. They are reason-providing and entitling because they are propositional in form and in content. Like a judgment, the content of an ‘appearing’ purports something to be the case.

8. Intermediaries and Emissaries

Davidson: “I was clear from the start that unconceptualized “experience”, sense data, sensations, Hume’s impressions and ideas, could not coherently serve as evidence for beliefs: only something with propositional content could do this [...] I also thought then, and think now, that empiricism as I understood it leads inevitably to skepticism.” 22

Davidson: “Nor is McDowell right in thinking I do not want, as he does, to “give the deliverances of the senses an ultimate evidential role”. What the senses “deliver” (i.e. cause) in perception is perceptual beliefs, and these do have an ultimate evidential role. If this is what it takes to be an empiricist, I’m an empiricist. An empiricist, however, in the “pallid” sense, since I postulate no epistemic intermediaries between reality and perceptual beliefs about reality.”23

McDowell: “But the real trouble with conceiving experiences as intermediaries is that we cannot make sense of experiences, so conceived, as purporting to tell us anything, whether truthfully or not. When we take receptivity itself to impinge rationally on belief, we equip ourselves to understand experience as openness to the world. And now the problem of making it intelligible that experience is endowed with content lapses, and the question of truthfulness takes on a different look. We achieve an intellectual right to shrug our shoulders at skeptical questions.”24

Davidson essentially offers two distinct criticisms of ‘intermediaries’ in the rational entitlement picture. The first is bound to the traditional empiricist model, which would posit non-conceptual experience as evidence for empirical beliefs. According to such accounts there obtains a sensory intermediary between thought and the world, and this is in the form of a perceptual ‘object’ pertaining to one’s own sensory impressions. The second, which ultimately proves more problematic to McDowell’s minimal empiricist picture, and which is discussed further in the context of McDowell’s revised account, is the idea that sensory impressions

23 Ibid. p. 106.
24 McDowell, Mind and World, p. 143.
with propositional content, ‘appearings’, can function as epistemic intermediaries between the world, as perceivable objects, and judgment about those objects.

I propose to separate the two notions of intermediaries in the following discussion. The first is the notion of intermediary as object, and the second is intermediary as content. While intermediary as object is not of primary relevance in this particular discussion, it does however provide the necessary insight into Davidson’s own entitlement picture, and perhaps more importantly, it provides the opportunity to illuminate how McDowell’s empiricist picture appropriates a comparable space of reasons to Davidson’s, one which avoids the Myth of the Given, and in this manner differentiates itself from the traditional empiricist mould.

9. ‘Intermediary’ as Object: Sensory Impressions

Davidson is quite right to criticize the traditional forms of empiricism as leading to skepticism. Justifying perceptual knowledge claims upon ‘sense data’, ‘unconceptualized’ impressions, sensations etc, will indeed inevitably lead to the well known difficulties that are associated with (yet again) connecting the subjective mind with the objective world. If judgment is meant to pertain to a private intermediary, then this intermediary immediately problematizes our knowledge of the world, as judgment so conceived will take as its intentional object something not even of the (surrounding) world, let alone an item susceptible to truth or falsity.

Such thought, would be directed towards some inner object, a situation brought about merely by a causal relation with an outside world, a world which itself becomes epistemically out of reach. This would mark a break in the cognitive relation between the perceiving subject and outer objects, and so would render knowledge of the world as something indirect, at best inferential, and thus inviting skeptical disquiet. In fact, it is difficult to see how anything so conceived could stand as evidence for anything at all.
10. ‘Intermediary as Content’: Sensory Content

McDowell’s rational entitlement picture shares some of the characteristic features of an empiricist picture. No doubt because McDowell’s story is just that: a form of empiricism, albeit a ‘minimal empiricism’. Both share an epistemic picture that would have ‘experience’ and ‘receptivity’ as the ultimate tribunal in the justification of perceptual beliefs. However, McDowell’s ‘minimal empiricist’ picture is one which posits ‘sensory content’, and not ‘sensory object’, as warranting perceptual judgment. And this makes for the fundamental differences in the respective accounts. McDowell tries to make it intelligible how experience could indeed function as a tribunal upon thought.

As it is, McDowell and Davidson share many critical evaluations of traditional empiricism. And McDowell is quite cognizant of the fact that empiricism, as traditionally conceived, invites such sceptical appraisals. However, where Davidson is quite happy to accede to the more traditional model of experience as bare non-conceptual sensory impressions, and in turn revert to his ‘Coherentist’ picture, McDowell refuses at the outset the very model of receptivity as removed from spontaneity. So, despite McDowell espousing an empiricist picture of entitlement, he himself has no need whatsoever for those traditionally stipulated notions of bare sensory impression, impressions which as non-conceptual could somehow play the evidentiary role of justifier.

So where Davidson buys into the dualist model, a model in which receptivity and spontaneity are separate functions in perceptual judgment, the very model which characterizes the problematical form of empiricism, McDowell essentially seeks to dissolve the model at the outset. In this way McDowell sees his empiricism as giving an ‘openness to the world’, rather than an empiricism which steers the way towards ‘skepticism’.\(^{25}\)

\(^{25}\) This theme of being ‘open to the world’ in experience is further explored in Chapter 2
So, in the context of the rational entitlement picture, a ‘minimal empiricism’ for McDowell, provides the last bastion, as it were, against the externally ‘unconstrained’ Coherentism of Davidson. Interestingly, however, it is not the considerable differences with Davidson that drive McDowell towards a version of empiricism, albeit a ‘minimal’ one, but rather the considerable similarities between himself and Davidson. And specifically, a conception of the space of reasons as confined to propositional content.

11. The Space of Reasons

McDowell: “I said that perceptually based belief is linked to experience by an explanatory nexus that depends on the idea of the workings of rationality. The notion of rationality I mean to invoke here is the notion exploited in the traditional line of thought to make a special place in the animal kingdom for rational animals. It is a notion of responsiveness to reasons as such.” 26

McDowell: “I use the idea of conceptual capacities in a way that is governed by this stipulation: conceptual capacities in the relevant sense belong essentially to their possessor’s rationality in the sense I am working with, responsiveness to reasons as such.” 27

McDowell: “It is incumbent on thought to be responsive to reasons recognized as such, and nothing can count as a reason for a thinking subject unless its authority as a reason can be freely acknowledged by the subject.” 28

As mentioned, McDowell offers a conception of experience according to which it can be intelligibly understood as conceptual, thus enabling sensory impressions themselves to figure in the space of reasons. That re-configuration involves utilizing Davidson’s very own formulation of the space of reasons, albeit an amended one. Experience as rationally entitling therefore has much more in common with Davidson’s space of reasons, than the traditional

27 Ibid, p. 129.
empiricism Davidson sees as inviting skeptical concerns. For McDowell, that which can stand as a reason must be *propositional*.

McDowell extols Davidson’s dictum as to the kinds of things that can be reason-providing, viz., states with propositional content. McDowell is in agreement with Davidson that to extend the space of reasons beyond the propositional (at least in the *Mind and World* model), would inevitably fall foul of the Myth of the Given. But, as already discussed, McDowell does not limit his own story of propositional content to belief, he seeks to extend it to the posited conceptual space of ‘appearings’. McDowell accordingly wishes to extend that which can be taken as a reason, and be seen as reason-providing in the normative sense, to content which obtains outside of judgment. And so extending the space of reasons to propositional content outside of judgment is an essential feature of McDowell’s criticisms against Davidson.

12. *External Constraint*

Of course, extending the space of reasons to something beyond the exercise of judgment is one of the motivations which lies behind the Myth of the Given. McDowell, in effect, considers that he has incorporated that motivation for external constraint within his extension of the space of reasons, and yet at the same time stayed within the (Davidsonian) model of propositional content as reason-providing.

Experience is reason-providing in McDowell’s picture because receptivity is bound to propositional content, and as such, it can function as a reason, yet intelligibly accommodate for external constraint. In this way the visible objects in our surroundings, those objects which we literally perceive, can come to be rationally significant for us, that is, via the passive actualization of conceptual content in receptivity.
According to McDowell, for Davidson to confine the space of reasons to the realm of judgment, or belief, as he does, thus problematizes not only rational ‘external constraint’ on thought, but also the very possibility for content in the first place. Without the object itself rationally figuring in empirical thought, there is no such content. So for McDowell to extend the space of reasons to receptivity in such a way also provides the means of ensuring the objective purport of judgement. Because the object of perception is itself within the reach of reason, given that the requisite conceptual capacities are actualized in experience, it can stand as the ultimate source of entitlement for a judgment that things are thus and so.

13. No Dualism: Sensory and Intellect

McDowell: “[…] A commonly held incredulity takes this form: if one supposes, as I do, that the content of our experience is conceptual, in a sense in which the conceptual is connected with rationality, one cannot do justice to the sensory way in which perceptual experience discloses reality to us.”

McDowell: “And what justification can there be for the dualism? It is taken for granted in the empiricist tradition, but in this dialectical context that would be an unimpressive basis for defending it. So much the worse for the empiricist tradition, we might say. Resting content with a dualism of the sensory and the intellectual betrays a failure of imagination about the possibilities for finding the rational intellect integrally involved in the phenomena of human life. We should argue in the other direction. Actualizations of conceptual capacities, capacities that belong to their subject’s rationality can present things in a sensory way, and that gives the lie to the dualism.”

While McDowell buys into a Davidsonian story as to the sorts of items which can enter into reasons-relations, Davidson’s restriction of reasons-relations to relations between beliefs gives his account a problematic ‘dualism’ between the sensory and the intellect. As Davidson conceives it, the sensory is beyond and distinctly separate from the conceptual (as propositional). So that the most that sensory impressions can do is to causally interact with conceptual capacities; the sensory can cause beliefs, cause things to ‘appear’ that things are

thus and so. ‘Receptivity’ does not rationally interact with spontaneity. In this way, there is a (causally) functioning – but, according to McDowell – problematic dualism in Davidson’s picture of sense and intellect. And as McDowell see it, any dualism between the intellect and the sensory will inevitably lead one back to the Myth of the Given.

McDowell repudiates any dualism which would separate the sensory from the intellect. In the *Mind and World* picture, this dualism is one between propositional content and the sensory. According to McDowell, any such dualism necessarily situates one in the ‘interminable oscillation’: on the side of either Davidson’s position of no rational external constraint upon thought, or a recoil to the Myth of the Given, if one indeed seeks to extend rationality all the way out to experience. McDowell thus presents a picture of experience that would dissolve any such dualism between the intellect and the senses, and he does this, in the *Mind and World* model, by conceiving of experience as the passive ‘actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness’.

14. Thinking in the Sensory

**McDowell**: “The sensory states enjoyed by a perceiver themselves already have intentional content, and the sense in which perceptual beliefs are grounded in sensation is that they derive their intentional content from the intentional content of the sensory states they are based on.”

**McDowell**: “[…] the intentionality of intuitions is accounted for by the fact that in intuitions sensory consciousness itself is informed by the higher faculty. The thinkings that provide for the intentionality of perceptual cognitions are not guided by sensory consciousness, as it were from without. They are sensory consciousness, suitably informed.”

**McDowell**: “Here is a characteristic remark: “visual perception itself is not just a conceptualising of coloured objects within visual range — a ‘thinking about’ coloured objects in a certain context — but, in a sense most difficult to analyse, a thinking in colour about coloured objects. In the view Sellars

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is trying to express in that remark, a distinctively visual character belongs to the thought itself (it is “a thinking in colour”), not just to its aetiology.”

The content of the thinking, or the sense of the thought, is such that it is immediately related to the very object directly in view in perception itself. So the intentional characterisation of experience and perceptual thoughts also includes the object being ‘sensibly present’ to the cognising subject. Hence experience does not simply cause one to have thought’s about the external world, such thoughts are had in the context of having directly in view the circumstances in virtue of which they are true.

McDowell’s model of experience is such that as a conceptual episode it is not just a seeing, but a seeing that. So we can see that the thinkable contents of intuition and judgment do not just constitute a cognitive and epistemic achievement of the subject, but also constitute a distinctly visual achievement also. So visual experience is a case of being under the visual impression that things are thus and so, with the visual aspect of experience necessary in order to determine the content of the thought. The content of the thought could not obtain just the same, if the subject lacked the capacity for visual perception, or closed their eyes from the world. So it is essential to McDowell’s account that ‘a distinctively visual character belongs to the thought itself.’

Another way to conceive the point is that the propositional intentional content of experience is not something which is separable from the (more traditional) non-discursive ‘object’-intentionality aspect of experience. The thinkable content of intuition and thought, its objective purport, and directness towards the world, is ensured only by way of the sensory aspect of experience. Such a picture of the intentional content of experience and thought thus


34 Ibid, p. 305.
binds the propositional content with a shaping of sensory consciousness itself. So the thinkable content of intuition is bound to the sensory way external reality is revealed to us via perception.

Again, this all ties into McDowell anti-dualistic stance against the sensory and the intellect. As McDowell see it, the conceptual, its mode of presentation, need not be seen as something at odds with a sensory mode of presentation. To presume as much, that is to say, a separation between the two modes of presentation, sets one down the slippery path towards the ‘interminable oscillation’, which his positing of conceptualised experience is precisely intended to therapeutically dissolve.

Now, in accordance with McDowell’s Kantian model of judgment, conceptual capacities are not first actualised with judgment; rather, they are in the first instance, passively actualised in experience itself. So it is that, in order for there to be a ‘thinking in the sensory’, the union between the content of thought and the sensory, it must first obtain in intentional intuition itself. Otherwise conceptual capacities would be conceived upon the problematic dualistic model which would posit conceptual content figuring only as a rational response to that which intuition brought into view via the sensory.

To further explore this notion of conceptual content in experience itself, I will now explore McDowell’s reading of Kant. It is indeed Kant, according to McDowell, who provides the best possible account of intentional experience and thus a thinking in sensory consciousness itself.

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15. McDowell and Kant

McDowell: “Minimally, it must be possible to decide whether or not to judge that things are as one’s experience represents them to be. How one’s experience represents things to be is not under one’s control, but it is up to one whether one accepts the appearance or rejects it.” 36

McDowell: “Kant says: “The same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgement also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations in an intuition; and this unity, in its most general expression, we entitle the pure concept of the understanding.”” 37

In *Mind and World* McDowell asserts that experience represents ‘that things as thus and so’. In order to better grasp the representative function that McDowell’s notion of experience is intended to serve, the logical starting point is Kant. Indeed, McDowell supposes that no one has come closer to giving a better account of the intentionality of experience than Kant. Furthermore, due to McDowell’s ‘minimal empiricism’ – in so extending the logical space of reasons to the very function of Kantian intuition – it makes illuminating Kant’s own position on the relationship between intuition and judgment a necessary priority. And that is precisely what McDowell sets out to do in his discussion of ‘The Clue’.

McDowell’s reading of Kant is entirely subject to the influence of McDowell’s ‘conceptualist’ agenda. According to McDowell’s *Mind and World* paradigm, one which takes shape according to Davidson’s dictum, only conceptual experience can provide an intelligible normative link between empirical thought and the empirical world. So for the purposes of this discussion, what is of primary relevance is illuminating McDowell’s take on Kantian intuition as conceptual.

For McDowell, ‘The Clue’ is the surest sign that Kant intended for spontaneity to feature with receptivity, as not even ‘notionally separable’, in experience itself. And according to McDowell’s *Mind and World* interpretation, what ‘The Clue’ is alluding to, is the possibility that experience, like judgment, has propositional content. ‘The Clue’ thus provides the means of giving substance to a conceptualist reading of Kantian intuition, by positing a shared representational unity, a shared propositional unity, between intuition and judgment.

As McDowell sees it, a normative relation between thought and sensible intuition is secured only by means of giving experience a content, a content with a logical structure which is understood via the propositional content of judgment. This is precisely how experience is normatively reconciled with the conceptual capacities exercised in judgment. It is with the same such representational unity that McDowell can normatively bind the Kantian representational functions of both intuition and judgment.

McDowell thus posits the same propositional content between the passively actualised content of intuition and the exercised content of judgment. Although actualised in different ways, reflecting different dimensions of freedom yet to be discussed, the contents are bound by their unity. The normative link between experience and judgment is thus provided for by the same logical togetherness, the same unity, that the two contents share.

So, according to McDowell, giving the full weight to ‘The Clue’ is effected only by positing a propositional content that is logically comprised of the same concepts that obtain in judgment. The importance of this is that the function of the Understanding is involved both in judgment and intuition, and although the latter is passively actualised and the former is exercised, they both have the same ‘logical togetherness’ in respect to their component concepts. By positing a shared propositional unity between the two ‘representing’ functions of
intuition and judgment, McDowell supposes that it can provide the means of rejecting the separation between sensory experience and the concepts exercised in judgments.

So the ‘logical togetherness’ of concepts in a propositionally unified content is imperative to McDowell’s normative picture as encompassing experience itself. As mentioned above, for McDowell, the rational entitlement story – normative intelligibility – is one which depends upon a shared content, between intuition and judgment. Only in this way is Davidson’s ‘blind spot’ overcome and the rational extension of conceptual capacities to experience ensured.

16. Model of Speech Acts and Meaning

McDowell: “If one judges, say, that there is a red cube in front of one, one makes a joint exercise of a multiplicity of conceptual capacities, including at least a capacity that would also be exercised in judging that there is a red pyramid in front of one and a capacity that would also be exercised in judging that there is a blue cube in front of one [...] the capacities have to be exercised with the right togetherness [...] the two capacities I have singled out have to be exercised with a togetherness that is a counterpart to the “logical” togetherness of “red” and “cube” in the linguistic expression of the judgment, “there is a red cube in front of me.”

McDowell exploits a model of intelligibility, so that the logical togetherness of conceptual capacities exercised in judgment (its propositional content) can be understood by way of overt linguistic expression – speech acts. So, for example, the judgment purporting that there is a red cube in front of one should be understood by analogical extension from its linguistic expression “there is a red cube in front of me”, specifically, by way of a similarity in the conceptual capacities and logical togetherness that holds in the overt linguistic expression.

This, in turn, is precisely how McDowell stipulates the logical togetherness that obtains in his conception of experience as a conceptual episode, precisely because, as mentioned, the

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content of intuition is the very same as that of the propositional content of judgment. Of course, that is not to say that it is put together in the same way – this is the crucial difference between the exercise of conceptual capacities in judgment and the given propositional content of intuition. However, the content is in fact, given endorsement in judgment of an intuition, the very same. And so, as both judgment and intuition are constituted by the same content, certain comparisons do hold.

The importance of illuminating a proposition’s ‘logical togetherness’ is not simply an attempt to illuminate an aspect of judgment per se; rather, McDowell’s main preoccupation in elucidating the actualisation of conceptual capacities with a logical togetherness involves the further imputation of such togetherness to such thought as occurs in sensory consciousness itself – via the content passively given in experience.

Why is it though, that such a unity, such logical togetherness, at the level of experience itself, is of such importance to McDowell? The logical unity of propositional content is important in respect to meaning. Meaning and representational content go hand in hand. The conceptual capacities which inform and make possible any particular judgment are logically exercised together, so that meaning can only be found in the whole of the proposition. Indeed, this is the principle function and importance of unity and logical togetherness. So that, for example, the concepts of ‘red’ and ‘cube’, as they combine in a particular judgement so as to purport the truth of a particular state of affairs, do so only as a whole unified content.

Because the (non-conceptual) red cube as object can only figure in thought and rational significances via a passively given propositional content, the sensory consciousness in which it figures must reflect, in its content, the same logical unity which is palpable in propositional judgment. So, when one looks at a red cube, and it is visually present to one in intuition, it
passively actualises a propositional content, the logical unity of which purports that there is a red cube in front of one – which is how the intuited red cube comes to have rational and cognitive significance.

So, an important aspect of the giveness of content is that what is given is a thinkable content, and that is just to say that it has meaning as given. One is given a sense. This is crucial as it allows for McDowell’s proffered model of Kantian judgment. On this model of judgment, one can judge that which is given in intuition only in virtue of the fact that one is given a meaningful content, something which is reflectively considered in empirical judgment. That given cognitive significance is precisely that which is rationally reflected upon in judgment. It is that given content which is judged to be so, or not so, in reflective judgement.

17. Open Manifold

Collins: “What can be said and what cannot depends upon the experience, but experience does not come, as though, with subtitles. For this reason I would also say that we experience things (and events) and not facts although our experience suffices for many factual claims about the world.” 39

McDowell: “A typical judgement of experience selects from the content of the experience on which it is based; the experience that grounds the judgement that things are thus and so need not be exhausted by its affording the appearance that things are thus and so.” 40

McDowell: “A judgment of experience does not introduce a new kind of content, but simply endorses the conceptual content, or some of it, that is already present by the experience on which it is grounded.” 41

40 McDowell, Mind and World, p. 49.
41 Ibid, p. 49.
Arthur Collins is skeptical of McDowell’s notion that experience has propositional content because perception allows one an open-ended manifold of propositional descriptions, anyone of which one could assert, yet which one is not compelled to assert. Collins goes on to claim that it is “things (and events) and not facts” that we experience, and experience provides the grounding of factual claims about the world. And he seems to conflate McDowell’s idea that experience has propositional content with the idea that experience is linguistic in form, as if sensory experience came with ‘subtittles’.

McDowell maintains, in response, that experience with subtitles "would indeed be disastrous". To say that experience has given propositional content is not the same as to claim that in experience we perceive propositions, or linguistic items, as if they were the objects of sight. Of course we experience, we perceive, objects and not facts. To claim, as Collins interprets McDowell as doing, that we perceive propositions, would be to confuse the content of experience with the object of perception.

Moreover, the propositional content of experience is not to be thought of as sentential - hence the subtitle claim. Two different speakers of different languages can express the same true proposition (as the content of experience) yet in different linguistic expressions or sentences. This will be discussed much more in the context of objectivity in McDowell. It’s merely important for now to clarify that in Mind and World experience is held to offer a ‘manifold’ of linguistically expressible propositional content.

So, in Mind and World, McDowell acknowledges the very thing which Collins himself desires when it comes to rational entitlement: a large and open-ended number of possible, justified propositional judgments. However, in order to avoid the Myth of the Given, the

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rational entitlement to such an open-ended number of judgments requires, according to McDowell, a corresponding open-ended propositional content actualized in experience.

Because of this, the exercise of a particular judgment, the endorsement of given propositional content, does not ‘exhaust’ the content of intuition. The selection of content in a judgment is a selection from a manifold of given content: the scene one takes in thus entitles a manifold of corresponding judgment. It would indeed be disastrous if experience only allowed one propositional content per visual perception, as if there were one propositional content per sensory impression.

18. Demonstratives

McDowell: “Why not say that one is thereby equipped to embrace shades of colour within one’s conceptual thinking with the very same determinateness with which they are presented in one’s visual experience, so that one’s concepts can capture colours no less sharply than one’s experience presents them?” 44

McDowell: “[...] one can give linguistic expression to a concept that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, by uttering a phrase like “that shade”, in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample.” 45

In *Mind and World* McDowell considers a role for the non-conceptual in perceptual judgment. Such a possibility is considered given the sheer breadth of the sensory and phenomenological aspects which are impressed upon us in experience. The potential explanatory precedence of the non-conceptual over the conceptual thus rests upon the evident fact that we do not have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate. And it’s an issue which again presents itself in McDowell’s later treatment of intuitional content, as McDowell readily acknowledges that much that is given in

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intuition is such that the subject has no means of making it overtly discursively explicit, that is, in making the appropriate predication in a judgment.

However, rather than adhere to the non-conceptual in this respect, McDowell supposes that demonstratives can fill in the gaps, so to speak, in between those more general colour concepts of ‘red’, ‘green’, etc., and all the shades and fine-grained aspects in between. In this way, via demonstratives, conceptual capacities can be seen as much more extensive than those concepts we at a particular point in time have predicative expressions for.

The essential feature of the use of such demonstratives is that they exploit the presence of a particular ‘sample’, such a sample being an aspect of the sensory e.g. ‘coloured thus’. This is how those fine-grained sensory features can figure in the actualisation of conceptual capacities. So, with demonstratives, the sensory can in fact be made overtly explicit, and so can feature as a predicate in a propositional claim. In this way, McDowell hopes to preclude an argument for a place for the non-conceptual in experience.

Now importantly, the conceptual content of demonstratives is reliant for its ‘sense’ upon its immediate relation to the sensory features of perception. The sensory shades of colour, for example, in their very sensory form, thus inform the sense, the meaning, of that predication in judgment.

Again, perhaps we can use the model of speech acts to illuminate what McDowell hopes to achieve in the context of demonstrative thought. With overt demonstrative expressions such as ‘that shade of colour’, the sense, the meaning, of the utterance intended by the utterer, cannot be fully determined without the relevant visual acquaintance with the intended contextual circumstances. The relevant contextual factors are therefore not extraneous to the comprehension of the intended sense of the expressed propositional content of the utterance;
rather, the sense of the utterance is precisely understood by having such a visual acquaintance with its intentional object of reference. Hence the importance of the contextual factors in ascertaining the sense of the predicative.

**19. Duration of capacity**

McDowell: “We had better not think it can be exercised only when the instance that it is supposed to enable its possessor to embrace in thought is available for use as a sample in giving linguistic expression to it.”

According to McDowell, such demonstratives can intelligibly amount to a conceptual capacity, because it is a capacity which can extend (in time) beyond the mere presence of the sample. The capacity to embrace a colour ‘in mind’, in empirical thought, can persist beyond the duration of the sensory intuition itself. The capacity’s persistence into the future is what McDowell attributes to ‘recognitional capacity’, and so is what ensures that it is indeed classifiable as a conceptual capacity at all.

Importantly, the duration in time gives the thought a ‘distance’ from what would determine it to be true. The content of the capacity, and so the recognitional capacity, can be made explicit with the further presentation of the appropriate sample, the sample which was present at the time the capacity was acquired. So that one gives the capacity a linguistic expression with the presence of the sample.

The conceptual capacity therefore does not depend entirely upon the presence of the sample. The capacity can be exploited in thoughts based upon memory. And yet the thoughts are not necessarily capable of being given overt expression, so that, outside the visual presence of the sample and the overt expression, the content may not be fully determinate.

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McDowell maintains that there is no saying which conceptual capacity it is in abstraction from the actualising experience itself.
B. Travis: Perception and Recognition

Travis: “What perception provides — just as it should — is acquaintance with that non-conceptual the
world presently provides. Now Pia, exercising (perhaps better, drawing on) her capacity to recognize what
would and would not count as a pig being beneath that oak, recognizes something about the participation
of a bit of the conceptual (thus something invisible) in the instancing relation. In seeing what she does of
things being as they are, she is able to recognize things being as they are as instancing (as a case of) a pig
being beneath the oak. At that point she has already judged that that is how things are. Conceptual
capacities are certainly in the picture here, but all on the response side. They are drawn on in judging
based on what the senses offer.” 47

Travis: “On the story, Pia’s reason for taking it that there is a pig beneath the oak is simply that there is
one, or that that is how things are — such as to be a case of that. It is perception (sight) that reveals this to
her.” 48

1. Travis and the Myth of the Given

Travis claims that it is not at all apparent why conceptual capacities would need to be
engaged in experience in order for experience to furnish us with things that we can come to
know non-inferentially via perception. As Travis reads McDowell, McDowell has not at all
substantiated his progression from a (trivial) notion of the Myth of the Given — in which one
can supposedly acquire knowledge and yet lack the capacity to get it — to that model of
experience and judgment that is promoted by McDowell, in which the incoherence of the
Myth can only be avoided by way of the involvement of conceptual capacities and content
within experience — sensibility — itself.

Indeed Travis, contra McDowell, does not adhere to Davidson’s perceived insight that it
is only the content of beliefs — propositional contents — which can be taken as a reason. On

47 Charles Travis ‘Unlocking the Outer World’, p. 12.
48 Ibid, p. 12.
this point, according to Travis, the reason as to why someone may come to take it that there is a pig beneath the oak, is not by virtue of some given propositional content of experience, expressible as ‘there is a pig beneath the oak’, but rather because, there is in fact one there, there is a case of a pig beneath the oak in front of one and that is precisely how things are. In this way, according to Travis, the non-conceptual instance of a kind serves as the reason why one ought to judge, and would judge correctly, that there is such a pig. And so it is the function of ‘silent’ experience to provide one with that acquaintance with that non-conceptual instance of a kind.

In this way – by refusing Davidson’s insight – does Travis purport to avoid the problem of the Myth of the Given, and also the perceived problematic idealism of McDowell’s conceptualized experience. Thus Travis’s account, as set out in what follows, can be seen as an attempt to present an intelligible and coherent account in respect to how the non-conceptual object, with which we are acquainted via perception, can come to bear upon thought, and so provide reasons for non-inferential perceptual knowledge – with conceptual and rational capacities all involved upon the response side to that which is immediately and directly in view in perception.

2. Travis and Perception

According to Travis’s account, in visual perception one simply sees things being as they are. The objects in the immediate surroundings are visibly present to the perceiver, and the perceiver sees those objects, as they occupy their positions in those surroundings. The function of perception therefore is to merely afford one an awareness of those non-conceptual objects.

Up until this point, in Travis’s picture of perception, no conceptual capacities are in play whatsoever. Perception merely provides an acquaintance with the non-conceptual objects in
the surroundings. That acquaintance is not a knowledgeable one, nor a discursively intentional one, rather, it is a visual one. Such visual acquaintance with the non-conceptual is completely outside of the rational control of the perceiving subject.

Once situated in that perceptual context one can then (given suitable expertise) recognize those perceptible objects, or features of such objects. In what Travis calls the ‘instancing-relation’, that which is visibly in view ‘participates’ with a conceptual capacity, so that that which is visibly seen is recognized as instancing a particular conceptual capacity that one has and draws upon in so recognizing it.

It is perception which facilitates the recognition of that instancing relation; it allows the conceptual to relate to the non-conceptual via this sensory visual acquaintance. Perception simply (silently) puts something’s being as it is on offer for recognition by us as instancing a certain generality; only thereafter, as a rational response, does one recognize that which is revealed as falling under concepts, concepts which are intrinsically general in form.

Now importantly for Travis, recognizing that which is in view in perception as an instance of a kind involves judging it to be so. This complements Travis’s notion that conceptual capacities are only engaged in the context of perception as a rational response. With conceptual capacities only entering the perceptual picture with recognition and the instancing relation, and with recognition being so bound to judgment, to exercise conceptual capacities is precisely to judge things to be so. That which is judged to be an instance of a way for things to be is that with which we are visually acquainted.
3. Non-Conceptual

Travis’s notion of recognition and the instancing relation involves a relationship between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, in which an object in one’s surroundings, being as it is, can itself come to figure in the picture of rationality. The function of recognition, as Travis sees it, is precisely to allow those non-conceptual objects to figure in cognitively significant relations. If the non-conceptual is to in any way figure in the picture of rationality, then the non-conceptual object requires recognition and judgment – on the side of the exercise of conceptual capacities – for it to so figure.

So what proves to be one of the defining differences between Travis and McDowell is that, according to Travis, while the non-conceptual requires recognition and judgment to figure in cognitively significant relations in perceptual contexts, the non-conceptual nevertheless maintains its rational significance precisely in its non-conceptual form. It does not do so via McDowell’s notion of passively actualized content.

Although the rational significance of the non-conceptual is only made possible by drawing upon the relevant conceptual capacities in recognition, the intelligibility of the instancing relationship does not then in turn consign the non-conceptual as a spent source, so to speak, in the rational entitlement picture.

It is essential to Travis’s picture that the non-conceptual maintains its rational significance in its non-conceptual form. It is precisely the role of perception to bring non-conceptual items directly into view and to thus enable them, as non-conceptual, to normatively bear on that which we are to think.
4. The Condition

**Travis:** “In any case, being liable to correctness of some sort (being, say, truth evaluable) is not, and cannot be, the only way of engaging with normativity. For where there is such liability there is also such a thing as bearing on it—e.g., making for the relevant correctness in a given case.”

**Travis:** “Something non-conceptual, the idea is, could not impinge rationally on what one is to think. It could not stand in a rational relation. Hence the Condition. But, though facts belong, truistically, to the conceptual, and though there is a notion of perceiving on which one can sometimes see a fact (to be one), there precisely must be rational relations between the conceptual (what satisfies the condition) and something else if we are to make sense of experience bearing on what one is to think.”

According to Travis, McDowell accepts ‘the Condition’. The Condition is a constraint upon rational entitlement. According to ‘the Condition’, the logical space of reasons does not extend further than the space of concepts. In this way rational relations must belong entirely within the space of concepts. Rational relations thus obtain only between things which are conceptually structured – of the form that things are thus and so. As Travis sees McDowell’s picture, because such conceptually structured content is the given of experience, such content is the only thing that can rationally bear on what to think. Hence the non-conceptual does not bear rationally on what one is to think.

Travis, on the other hand, rejects ‘the Condition’. According to Travis, the objects of experience, the objects in one’s surroundings, which, being non-conceptual, do not meet the requirements of McDowell’s ‘Condition’, do nonetheless bear upon what to think. Indeed, for Travis there have to be rational relations between the conceptual and the non-conceptual; otherwise we could not make sense of experience bearing on what one is to think. It is


50 Ibid, p. 229

51 Ibid, p. 227
constitutive of judgment that the non-conceptual bears upon the conceptual, so that the former stands in a verdictive relationship to the latter.

5. Frege’s Line:

Frege: “But don’t we see that the sun has set? And don’t we thus also see that this is true? That the sun has set is no object which sends out rays that reach my eyes, no visible thing as the sun itself is. That the sun has set is recognized on the basis of sensory impressions. For all that, being true is not a perceptually observable property.”

Travis introduces Frege’s line as a means of distinguishing conceptual content from non-conceptual object in perceptual judgment. In so introducing Frege’s line, Travis endeavors to make McDowell’s ‘Condition’ problematic in the context of rational entitlement.

Situated upon the left-hand side of Frege’s line are the objects of perception, the non-conceptual items which are literally before one in the surroundings. As the perceivable objects, any questions of truth are inapplicable.

Situated upon the right-hand side are the conceptual representations of those non-conceptual items. Conceptual representations are not the literal perceivable objects of perceptual judgment – they are invisible, so to speak. These representations have a propositional form, and as constitutive of empirical content, these contents are amenable to questions of truth or falsity.

Frege’s line in effect provides a heuristical means of separating the conceptual from the non-conceptual in perceptual judgment, and so imparts a dualism of a kind which holds in both McDowell’s and Travis’s picture. The dualism itself is not one which is philosophically contentious, it is as ‘truistic’ as anything McDowell and Travis are inclined to mutually

52 Travis, ‘Reason’s Reach’, p. 229.
acknowledge. Both philosophers offer models of perceptual judgment which are intended to accommodate just such a truistically functioning dualism.

What is a palpable point of contention, however, and the reason why Travis explicitly brings Frege’s line into the discussion, is how it is exactly that Frege’s line is supposed to harmonize with McDowell’s supposed ‘Condition’. As Travis sees it, explicitly distinguishing between the respective sides of Frege’s line brings into focus a problem with McDowell’s anti-dualist picture of experience (between the sensory and the intellect), in which conceptual capacities, and conceptual content, are engaged in experience itself. This picture of the unboundedness of the conceptual means that the conceptual content of thought (which pertains to the right hand side of Frege’s line) cannot stand in rational relations with non-conceptual objects (items on the left hand side of Frege’s line).

Travis’s criticisms of McDowell can be seen as a kind of two stage procedure. The first step is illuminating the intrinsic qualities of propositional representation, in such a way that ‘reason’s reach’, the space of reasons, is seen to necessarily extend beyond the conceptual sphere. Because of this, a normative ‘space’ must be found in perception for non-propositional relata with which propositional thought can enter into normative and rational relations.

The second aspect to Travis’s criticism (discussed below) is that there is anyway an issue of whether it is really the role of perception to be performing functions characteristically associated with the actualization of propositional content, such as occurs in recognition.
6. General and the Instanced

**Travis:** “The key feature of the conceptual, on its present understanding, is that for anything conceptual there is a specific form of generality intrinsic to it. There is then a range that is the range of cases, or circumstances, which would be ones of something instancing that generality (or, again, a range of things not instancing it).”

**Travis:** “The meat, in being as it is, instances being meat. Its so being is one thing, among indefinitely many, that would so count; one way of so counting. The meat fits within a certain range of cases. If you judged it not to fit (it being as it is), you would be wrong. Its being as it is dictates that verdict.”

**Travis:** “Judging is exposure to error (so, too, correctness) decidable solely by things being as they are [...] For a given judging, things being as they are may be their being as judged, or, again, their being otherwise [...] Where there were no such facts there would simply be no judgement. There is a determinate way in which things being as they are thus matters to a judgement’s truth.”

As already mentioned, upon the right-hand side of Frege’s line is situated the realm of the conceptual. It includes propositional representations. These representations include the contents of ‘seeing that’, for example, ‘seeing that the sun has set’. As propositional, the content is truth evaluable, and according to Travis’s account, it is determined according to the verdictive relation with the non-conceptual object.

Now according to Frege’s paradigm, these discursive representations are ‘general’ in their form. A concept is always of (being) such and such. Propositionally representing as being thus and so involves recognizing the particular object of perception as belonging to a range of cases. Via recognition, the object of perception is subsumed, so to speak, under general

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53 Travis, ‘Reason’s Reach’, p. 231.
54 Ibid p. 234.
55 Ibid, p. 245.
56 Ibid, p. 231.
concepts. This is how the non-conceptual comes to figure in perceptual thought via the generalities intrinsic to the conceptual content. The representations of the non-conceptual are therefore not visible, but rather the means in which the visible can meaningfully figure in thought.

Items on the left-hand side of Frege’s line (non-conceptual objects) can come to instance those conceptual generalities. As the literally visible items in the surroundings, they figure in perceptual judgment as that which the conceptual is about, that which is represented in propositional representation. For example, a piece of meat in one’s surroundings is not conceptual, and so is not amenable itself to being instanced. It is an instance of the general. As the non–conceptual, it has no range of cases.

In Travis’s picture, it is the requirements of truth, and verdictive answerability, which bind the left-hand side and the right-hand side of Frege’s line together in rational relations. Because ‘general’ conceptual representations necessarily extend beyond themselves to the non-conceptual objects that instance them, the means of determining the truth of those representations necessarily binds the conceptual with the non-conceptual in rational relations. The content of a conceptual representation, under a particular understanding, specifies that which, on the left hand side of Frege’s line, would satisfy its purported truth. So it is inherent to the discursive representational mode of perceptual thought that its truth turns upon that which, outside of itself, it asserts to be the case. In this way, on Travis’s account, reason’s reach, in cases of perceptual judgment, necessarily extends beyond the conceptual content and form, to the very object of perception.

So the verdicts associated with experience in Travis’s picture are provided by the left-hand side of Frege’s line – those items which would instance the relevant generalities of the thought. The instances of generalities thus provide the verdicts upon the ‘error liability’ of
perceptual judgment. In this way also does rational entitlement stem from something distinctly non-conceptual.

In Travis’s picture, the correctness of a perceptual judgment, understood as a conceptually structured representation, thus cannot be determined by another such conceptual representation. That which it purports to be the case, that which bears on its truth, cannot be yet another conceptual representation. The form of that upon which the truth of a judgment turns must be something lacking in such a general representational quality. The form of that normative determinant is, in Travis’s picture, necessarily non-conceptual. Hence, according to Travis, we must conceive of perceptual judgement as something which necessarily extends beyond itself, and content like it.

So, as Travis would have it, perceptual judgment is best conceived as a mode of rational response to ‘things being as they are’. As a rational response, and as intrinsically extending beyond its conceptual content, the truth of its purported representation therefore is normatively determined by the external non-conceptual relatum the judgment is a rational response to. Perceptual judgment is the propositional representation of how things are outside one’s self, outside one’s subjective exercise of conceptual capacities. To perceive is to see the objects in one’s surroundings, and perceptual judgment is necessarily about those verdict-dictating non-conceptual items.

7. Recognition and Having Directly in View

Travis’s account of recognition involves a rational relationship between the sensible and the non-sensible, in which an aspect or object in one’s surroundings is brought into conceptual thought as an instance of a kind that one has the ‘expertise’ to recognize. Recognition as an aspect of the application of conceptual capacities thus involves a judgement that something is
the case. Conceptual content is hence something understood as the product of a recognitional capacity and as a rational response. The discursive as a categorizing function, as Travis explains, involves recognizing a given instance under a certain generality. So to recognize is to categorize, and the application of a concept is to recognize. There is no purported representation whatsoever without such intentional categorization of the object as an instance of a kind, and so there is no application of the conceptual without drawing upon a capacity for recognition.

In this way Travis offers an account of perception, the conceptual capacities involved in recognition, and the inherent aspects of perceptual thought, which is at odds with McDowell’s picture in which experience is ‘invested’ with conceptual content. For Travis, McDowell’s notion of conceptual content in perception itself is not something which fits with what he sees as the necessary function of perception, a function which provides a mere (silent) acquaintance with the non-conceptual, in having an object directly in view.

8. Conceptual Representation, Recognition and Commitment

_Travis:_ “Where Pia can just see that there is a pig beneath the oak (by seeing the pig beneath the oak), on McDowell’s story her visual experience is invested with the content things being such that a pig is beneath the oak (in some role or other). It thus purports to reveal to her — and in favorable cases does reveal to her — that there is a pig beneath the oak. But where experience purports to be revelatory, it thus incurs commitments in one way or another.”

_McDowell:_ “The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on in receptivity. It is not that they are exercised on an extra-conceptual deliverance of receptivity. We should understand what Kant calls “intuition” – experiential intake – not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of occurrence or state that already has conceptual content. In experience one takes in, for instance sees, that things are thus and so. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge.”

57 Travis, ‘Unlocking the Outer World’, p. 18.

58 McDowell, _Mind and World_, p. 9.
McDowell: “A judgment of experience does not introduce a new kind of content, but simply endorses the conceptual content, or some of it, that is already possessed by the experience on which it is grounded.” 59

As discussed, according to McDowell’s picture of experience, receptivity and spontaneity are not even notionally separate, so that conceptual content is “already possessed by impressions themselves.” 60 And McDowell wishes to insist, against Davidson, that such propositional content is neither a judging nor a taking to be so. Experience, in Mind and World, involves the actualization of concepts, the same concepts that would be exercised in a judgment that things are thus and so. So the propositional content of experience is of the very same kind as that of judgment. The differences between the two, in respect to characterizing the content, are differences only in their actualization. How is it that the two modes of actualization come about? Intuitional content is passively actualized, it is given in intuition, whereas the content of judgment involves the active exercise of the Understanding, which can take up that very content of intuition in its exercise. The conceptual content is otherwise the very same.

This raises a question in light of Travis’s model of recognition: do the differences in the distinct modes of conceptual actualization also include differences in respect to the involvement of recognitional capacities? That is, is recognition involved in the given of intuition or in the exercise of a judgement? If the application of concepts necessarily involves recognition, as Travis would have it, then intuition as understood in McDowell’s Mind and World account, would indeed involve recognition.

According to McDowell’s account, the content of intuition is given, it does not involve a rational response to the object literally in view. Rational response, the exercise of conceptual capacities, is the sole domain of reflective judgment. If recognition is involved in intuition
this would mean that recognition would have to be somehow passively involved with the
given intuitional content, according to McDowell’s picture – thus implying that recognition
somehow occurs as something prior to the rational exercise of thought of the perceiving
subject. And this, indeed, is McDowell’s picture, in *Mind and World*. McDowell explicitly
links intuition – in particular those intuitions which involve color concepts – with recognition
of instances of a kind.\(^{61}\) Intuition, in such cases, is said to involve an actualization of our
recognition capacities, whereby we bring instances under general concepts.

Such an outcome is the result of McDowell binding the conceptual, as passively
actualized, to the shaping of sensory consciousness itself. Binding recognition to the sensory
in such a way would mean that recognition does not have its own space from the sensory; it
and the sensory are, as McDowell might say, not even notionally separable.

That experience would involve recognition in this way also complements McDowell’s
picture of judgment, as it is conceived in *Mind and World*. Experience as actualizing a
manifold of propositional content leaves the function of judgment with very little to do in fact.
In contrast to Travis’s picture, where concepts, recognition and judgment are all bound
together as a rational response to the non-conceptual, McDowell, rather, separates the
conceptual, and thus recognition, as they figure in intuition, from the exercise of judgement
itself. This is a feature of his Kantian picture of the intentionality of intuition.

The recognitional categorizations of instances, as instances of a kind, are taken to occur
within intuition. Intuition thus appropriates many of the functions usually characteristic of
judgment. Judgment is left merely as an ‘endorsement’ of the propositional content already
actualized in experience itself. Of course, McDowell in *Mind and World* wants precisely that:
experience with propositional content which is nevertheless not a judgment. His criticism of

Davidson’s ‘blindspot’ is that the propositional content of intuition acts as a constraint upon judgment, but as it is, it does not necessarily commit one to a particular propositional thought.

It is in light of this model, with experience conceived of as propositional in content, so usurping the function of judgment in so many respects, that Travis queries “whether it is really the role of visual experience to pronounce on what it would be pronouncing on if invested with such content.” This then brings into consideration an aspect of propositional representation, which Travis sees McDowell as seemingly neglecting, that being the notion of ‘commitment’ to things being a certain way.

In respect to the case of Pia, Pia sees that there is a pig beneath the oak by looking at the pig beneath the oak. McDowell claims that Pia’s visual experience is invested with the content that there is a pig beneath the oak. This is how experience purports to be revelatory: it purports to reveal to Pia that there is a pig beneath the oak. However, in that case, says Travis, experience incurs commitments – such as that Pia is in a position to tell whether there is a pig under an oak simply by looking, and that this being as things in fact are is actually to be counted as a case of a pig beneath the oak.

And such commitments, according to Travis, properly belong on the response side – to the exercises of our ability to judge things to be, that is to say, to recognize them for being, what they are. Propositional content within experience that purports to be revelatory can’t do anything but commit one to a purported state of affairs. Travis thus poses the right question, do we really want visual sensory experience to be ‘pronouncing’ and committing us in such a way?

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62 Travis. ‘Unlocking the Outer World’, p. 18.
9. The Necessity for Content in McDowell: the Greater Incoherence

Of course, McDowell’s counterintuitive notion in *Mind and World*, that recognition is involved in intuition itself, is the direct consequence of his insistence upon avoiding the Myth of the Given (as he conceives it). According to McDowell, for Travis to hold that, in perception, the conceptual is limited in its operation to the exercise of a rational response (i.e. to judgment) is a form of the Myth.

So McDowell, at this point, is apparently presented with the choice, the anomaly of recognition involved in experience, or the Myth of the Given? As will be discussed, McDowell in effect seeks to avoid both such options. To do so he posits a new stipulation of the conceptual. Although Travis’s notion of recognition undoubtedly informs McDowell’s new picture, McDowell makes the change principally in deference to Davidson’s criticisms, which if properly understood, complement Travis’s own – despite the fact that the two philosophers, as McDowell sees them, are situated upon opposing sides of the rational entitlement paradigm that McDowell himself seeks to dismount from.
C. McDowell’s Revised Account of Experience

McDowell: “I used to assume that to conceive experience as actualizations of conceptual capacities, we would need to credit experiences with propositional content, the sort of content judgments have. And I used to assume that the content of an experience would need to include everything the experience enables its subject to know non-inferentially. But both these assumptions now strike me as wrong.”^63

McDowell: “What we need is an idea of content that is not propositional but intuitional, in what I take to be a Kantian sense.”^64

McDowell: “In Travis’s picture, having things in view does not draw on conceptual capacities. And if it does not draw on conceptual capacities, having things in view must be provided for by sensibility alone. The trouble with this is that it is a form of the Myth of the Given.”^65

According to McDowell’s revised account, visual experiences merely bring our surroundings into view. The function of experience is no longer to *represent* as so. Because experience is no longer constituted by a manifold of content *that things are thus and so*, discursive concepts are no longer reckoned to be passively actualized in experience itself. In this way, at least on the face of it, McDowell’s picture of rational entitlement comes to resemble something very much akin to Travis’s own account of experience and perceptual judgment.

However, while McDowell’s picture of the function of experience now seems to share aspects of Travis’s account – viz., experience as a mere having in view – experience, on McDowell’s account, nevertheless retains conceptual content. So that experience as a ‘having in view’, and experience as rationally entitling, still essentially turns upon experience having

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^64 Ibid, p. 260.

conceptual content. So while McDowell no longer offers a propositional model, sensibility, on pain of the Myth of the Given, continues to be infused with rational and conceptual capacities. Such content however is largely disabused of those models of conceptual intelligibility which, as earlier discussed, came to inform McDowell’s account of experience in *Mind and World*.

As will be become apparent, the conceptual status of intuition, and the very notion of intuitional content, as McDowell comes to re-conceive it, is one which is for the most part founded upon its *potential* to feature in discursive activity and content. Before I present a discussion in respect to McDowell’s new account of rational entitlement, I first wish to address the specific reasons offered for the change in McDowell’s account. Such motivations are of importance because they not only illuminate the problems associated with experience conceived of as providing a manifold of propositional content. They also come to demarcate the defining limits within which McDowell must now operate in order to achieve his objective of conceiving of experience as involving genuine conceptual capacities (in order to avoid the Myth).

1. *McDowell’s Change and Davidson’s Criticism*

Davidson: “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.”

McDowell: “If experiences have propositional content, it is hard to deny that experiencing is taking things to be so, rather than what I want: a different kind of thing that entitles us to take things to be so.”

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Faced with Davidson’s own reply to the criticisms directed towards his account in *Mind and World*, McDowell recognizes that his propositional content model of experience, as that which can rationally entitle, must be modified.

The *Mind and World* paradigm of rational entitlement was one modeled upon Davidson’s dictum (of rationality), one which depended upon the propositional content of beliefs, and yet found a way to extend rational entitlement to receptivity itself. In *Mind and World* McDowell offered an amended version of Davidson’s dictum; one which overcame the latter’s apparent ‘blindspot’ in respect to normative relations: “nothing can count as a reason for a belief except something with conceptual form”\(^6^8\). What McDowell meant by this is that nothing can stand as a reason for a belief except something conceptual that is of the same form as the content of a belief, viz., something propositional. He thus proposed that experience had a propositional content – and in such cases when that content was true, the same content constituted a ‘perceptible fact’.

In the earlier discussion of sensory impressions and ‘appearings’, we saw that McDowell desired a notion in which something could look or appear to be so but was not judged to be so. Experience itself thus provided a given propositional content that was not yet a ‘taking to be so’. Hence the relevance of McDowell’s notion of ‘appearings’, which could rationally entitle, and which rationally incorporated external constraint as receptivity, yet did so without being a taking things to be so. In McDowell’s new account however, he concedes to Davidson that it is hard to deny that experience, conceived of as something with propositional content, caused by the impact of our surroundings on our senses, is no less than a judgment, a no less than a ‘taking to be so’.\(^6^9\)

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\(^6^8\) McDowell, ‘Conceptual Capacities in Perception’, p. 137.

\(^6^9\) This ‘taking to be so’ issue is also bound up with recognitional capacities being misplaced in experience itself. I discuss this issue earlier in the Chapter.
2. Entitlement by Experience and Inference

Another reason for McDowell’s shift in his picture of rational entitlement is due to his aversion to an ‘inferential’ model of rational entitlement by experience. In the inferential conception of rational entitlement, championed by Davidson, giving a reason for a belief would have the content of a belief as the conclusion of an inference, with the content of another belief providing the premise of such a conclusion. McDowell, in *Mind and World*, proposed that experiences could also be reasons for belief, and they had the same content as beliefs.

McDowell now openly acknowledges that it was understandable why he should be taken as recommending an inferential conception of the way experience entitles us to perceptual beliefs. While the propositional content of experience was not a belief, its content was still in a problematic sense apparently figuring in an inferential model of premise and conclusion – which McDowell, of course, did not want, as he wanted a picture in which ‘experience directly reveals things (i.e. facts) to be as they are believed to be in perceptual beliefs’\(^\text{70}\).

Even so, McDowell still takes issue with Davidson because of what he sees as a picture which lacks rational external constraint upon thought. Hence there is the continuing importance of having conceptual content bound to experience and sensory receptivity itself. McDowell claims that in *Mind and World* he required, and still now requires no less in his new account, a rational entitlement picture in which the content of experience can function as rational external constraint, and so can ‘entitle’, while leaving it a further question whether something is in fact taken to be so.

So as will be seen, along with the many changes in McDowell’s revised account of experience, the rational entitlement story is one which no longer reiterates his amended

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version of Davidson’s dictum. McDowell opts for a notion of rational entitlement which stems from the object and its visible properties, made visually present via intuitional content that, while conceptual, is not itself propositional in form. And so the rational external constraint that was lacking in Davidson’s account, which was the motivation behind McDowell’s amended dictum in the first place, is now assumed by the role of intuitional content, now conceived as non-propositional and non-discursive.

In the new account, the way intuition entitles the perceiver to certain beliefs removes the temptation to see the relation between intuition and perceptual judgment on an inferential model. McDowell more clearly advocates a model of intuition in which it is a mere ‘bringing into view’ of objects in our surroundings. With intuition more clearly in focus as a ‘bringing into view’, the rational entitlement picture shifts in focus from propositional content to the object and its properties, and the non-discursive intuitional content whereby an object is present to one through some of its perceivable properties. Such intuitional content is not in a form such that it can intelligibly stand as a premise to a conclusion, as in the discursive, propositional model of experience.

And yet, McDowell’s revised rational entitlement picture, on pain of the Myth of the Given, refuses to part entirely with what he takes to be one of the central insights of Davidson’s dictum, viz., that rational entitlement fundamentally occurs between conceptual contents. McDowell continues to insist upon following an intelligible path between the Myth of the Given, and what he takes to be Davidson’s unconstrained Coherentism. So it is evident that, in the end, it is not so much ‘propositional content’ which McDowell is adamant upon, but rather external constraint, secured by intuition with conceptual content. The question which remains then is: how far can McDowell stretch his picture of conceptual content within experience before it become unintelligible?
3. Recognition and Entitlement

McDowell: “On my old assumption, since my experience puts me in a position to know non-inferentially that what I see is a cardinal, its content would have to include a proposition in which the concept of a cardinal figures: perhaps one expressible, on the occasion, by saying “That’s a cardinal”. But what seems right is this: my experience makes the bird visually present to me, and my recognitional capacity enables me to know non-inferentially that what I see is a cardinal. Even if we go on assuming my experience has content, there is no need to suppose that the concept under which my recognitional capacity enables me to bring what I see figures in that content.”

McDowell now distinguishes two ways in which intuitions enable non-inferential knowledgeable judgments. In what McDowell casts as the second kind of rational entitlement – which I shall discuss first of all – experience merely makes the object situated in the immediate surroundings visually present to a subject. And it is only by drawing upon a recognitional capacity that the subject can know or judge that things are thus and so. Importantly, the concepts under which the recognitional capacity allows the respective judgment are not a feature of the content as it is given in intuition. So the entitlement does not stem from the fact that the concepts, or their non-discursive counterparts, are actualised in experience itself.

How then is experience rationally entitling? Experience figures in rational entitlement via how it reveals things to be: it gives perceptual access to the objects immediately in one’s surroundings, thereby making them available for recognition by a perceiver with suitable expertise.

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72 I shall return to this notion of experience as ‘revealing’ (reconfigured according to the revised account) in Chapter 2.
So this is essentially the same function for perception as Travis stipulates in his own account. It is no longer the function of experience to provide (propositional) reasons for judgment. However, while McDowell now has a notion of experience which is just like Travis’s, in that it is a merely bringing into view, he retains his concern in respect to avoiding the Myth of the Given. The intuitions that enable recognition, given suitable expertise, and which ground our rational relations with the objects of perception, have a conceptual content of a kind. I will return to a discussion of the nature of intuitional content shortly.

‘4. Carving out’ Aspects

McDowell: “The content of an intuition is such that its subject can analyse it into significances for discursive capacities, whether or not this requires introducing new discursive capacities to be associated with those significances. Whether by way of introducing new discursive capacities or not, the subject of an intuition is in a position to put aspects of content, the very content that is already there in the intuition, together in discursive performance.”

According to McDowell’s first kind of rational entitlement, the exercise of a perceptual judgment articulates some of the aspects of intuition, the content of which is given in intuition. Thus the ‘carving out’ of an aspect provides one of the new means by which the given intuitional content of experience can enable a manifold of entitled claims. According to this model, intuition as a having of the object directly in view, via the intuitional content, places one in a position to discursively exploit that given content in a perceptual judgment, such as “that’s a red cube there”. In this way the content of intuition comes to itself ‘feature’ in the propositional content of judgment.

So as McDowell would have it, the content of intuition is given in a form in which it is suitable to be content associated with discursive content – that is, meaningful expressions. In Mind and World, the propositional content of intuition was understood as involving both

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receptivity and spontaneity – the propositional content was inseparable from the sensory impressions. In McDowell’s new account, these ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition are essentially purporting to provide the same such function – the inseparability of intuition and propositional content. So that, via the means of ‘association’, aspects of (the content of) sensory receptivity are intelligibly bound to the discursive content of thought. The connection, however, unlike the ‘appearings’ of *Mind and World*, does not come as given, readymade so to speak – such a connection is only made in the rational process of ‘carving out’ and association.

Only with articulation can any real sense be given to the notion of such ‘carved out’ aspects figuring in rational entitlement, although they may obtain prior to judgement itself. This is because the relevant ‘carved out’ aspects – as they are to come to feature *explicitly* in entitlement – necessarily require being associated with meaningful expressions. Indeed, the aspects themselves are not given as ‘carved out’, nor can it be determined which such aspects feature in rational entitlement outside of their featuring in the relevant propositional content of judgment. So, whilst the intuitional content is given, the aspects only become rationally significant in the context of discursive articulation.

Furthermore, the ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition do not come to feature in empirical thought via the *passive* actualisation of the relevant ‘associated’ conceptual capacities in intuition, which are then taken up and endorsed in judgment. Intuitional content is given, and does not involve discursive concepts. Any such shift from the given intuitional content to determinate ‘aspects’ that are associated with discursive capacities implies the *active* exercise of the relevant conceptual capacities. So that for the aspects of intuition to figure in the rational entitlement picture requires them to feature in the judgment itself. With discursive
articulation comes judgment. There is no longer any sense or any role in which discursive content obtains in McDowell picture outside of a judgment that things are thus and so.

In this way, McDowell’s revised account of intuitional content comes with an alteration in his *Mind and World* picture of judgment – that is, despite the content of intuition *featuring* in the propositional content of the relevant perceptual judgment. As McDowell would have it, discursive content – the articulated content of thought – is only brought about via the process of ‘association’ with the unarticulated content of intuition. And so the manifestation of discursive content in the perceptual context stops nowhere short of judgment. This means that judgment is no longer conceived as simply *endorsement* of content given. Such a picture was apt for capturing the notion that experience was propositional, and had the very same content of thought as corresponding judgment. Rather than endorsing content already given, it now takes ‘carving out’ and the ‘putting together’ of discursive significances so as to realise the discursive content of empirical judgment.

5. Aspects and Demonstratives

According to McDowell, the content of intuition is intelligibly conceptual because it is constituted in a form in which it can be associated with the thinkable content of discursive articulation. The intuitional content is given, it requires discursive articulation in order to feature in empirical thought, but all of the intuitional content given is capable of so figuring in discursive articulation. And yet, McDowell himself readily acknowledges that with much of the content of intuition, it is not readily susceptible to such discursive articulation – given the apparent limitations of conceptual capacities in respect to the sheer breadth of the given content of intuition, pertaining to the sensory aspects of perception.
In *Mind and World*, it was said that the conceptual capacities exercised in demonstratives exploit the presence of a ‘sample’ such that the sample is a necessary constituent of determining the thought’s content, its sense. There is no (fully) determining what that conceptual content is in abstraction from the visual presence of the sample.

In McDowell’s first kind of rational entitlement story, in the revised account, perceptual judgement ‘redeploys’ the content of intuition: intuitional content itself ‘figures in discursive activity’, with the ‘carving out’ of an aspect. The ‘carved out’ intuitional content thus provides the analogue to the demonstrative ‘sample’. The non-discursive intuitional content is carved out so that an aspect of it is associated with discursive content. ‘Having that shade of colour’, as the overt discursive manifestation of a conceptual capacity, has a content such that intuitional content figures in it: it figures in the discursive content’s specification. The sensible features of the object, presented via intuitional content, thereby entitle one to such meaningful, and truth purporting empirical judgments like: “I am visually confronted by an object with such-and-such features”\(^74\), or “the aspect has that shade of colour”.

So the discursive content is dependent for its content, for the overt specification of its content, upon the ‘carved out’ non-discursive content of intuition. And so the ‘carved out’ aspect of the intuitional content is a necessary component of the rational entitlement account. This is because, analogous to the use of perceptible demonstratives in *Mind and World*, the conceptual capacity involved in the discursive articulation lacks a certain sense without the involvement of the non-discursive content of intuition. In this way the rational entitlement picture is such that the visible features present to us in intuition themselves can figure in thought.

\(^{74}\) McDowell, ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, p. 266.
6. Intuitional Content:

How then does McDowell suppose that are we to conceive of the new form of intuitional content? To begin with, McDowell insists that intuitional content retains a structure and a unity which reflects the involvement of the Understanding in sensory experience itself. The unity is of a kind that pertains to the having of a formal concept of an object – with the aspects of that categorically unified intuitional content being expressible by terms having to do with the proper and common sensibles.

So the unity of the intuitional content is no longer understood by way of representation. Where once the unity of intuitional content in *Mind and World* was understood as propositional – a unity which reflected a given thinkable sense – the new form of unity offered is altered so as to accommodate for intuition now reconceived as a mere having in view of items in one’s immediate surroundings, viz., the non-conceptual objects of perception. Thus intuitional content is characterized such that it can accommodate for a mere having in view, which is nonetheless structured by the Understanding.

It is via the newly posited unity of intuitional content – as limited to the formal concept of an object comprising only content expressible by concepts pertaining to the proper and common sensibles that McDowell continues to pursue a path which can acquire rational external constraint by intuition, whilst avoiding the incoherence of the Myth (as he conceives it).
7. McDowell’s Stipulation of the Conceptual

McDowell: “Our relation to the world, including our perceptual relation to it, is pervasively shaped by our conceptual mindedness [...] if a perceptual experience is world-disclosing [...] any aspect of its content is present in a form in which it is suitable to constitute the content of a conceptual capacity.” ⁷⁵

McDowell: “What is important is this: if an experience is world-disclosing, which implies that it is categorically unified, all its content is present in a form in which, as I put it before, it is suitable to constitute contents of conceptual capacities.” ⁷⁶

McDowell’s revised account of experience is accompanied by a revised stipulation of how to grasp the conceptual as it is to inform his account of intuitional content. The newly revised stipulation of the conceptual is one which, yet again, takes its shape primarily in deference to the necessity of avoiding the Myth of the Given. Indeed for McDowell, even while he is now deprived of propositional content and its more robust models of conceptual intelligibility, it is essential to his picture that our rational capacities continue to infuse sensory impressions, on pain of the Myth. McDowell therefore connects the necessity of the success of such ‘permeated mindedness’ with the new form of intuitional content now offered.

In accordance with McDowell’s new stipulation of the conceptual, the content of experience need not already be the content of a conceptual capacity – which is possessed by the subject of the experience – in order for it to qualify as conceptual. As McDowell would have it, one may indeed need to determine aspects to be the contents of a conceptual capacity, via ‘carving out’ and association with discursive significances.


The mere fact that the content can come to be determined as the content of a conceptual capacity is sufficient, according to McDowell’s stipulation, for it to be conceptual. So the content of intuition is conceptual because it can potentially come to figure as the content of conceptual capacities – the content is discursively conceptualizable; it is in a form such that it could become the content of a conceptual capacity.

Seen in this way, there are different notions of the conceptual in play, in McDowell’s revised account of intuition and perceptual judgment – notions that must be taken as complementary. And it is with his new stipulation of the conceptual as it figures in experience, that experience remains conceptually shaped and involves our facility for rationality and a ‘permeated mindedness’. However, McDowell’s insistence upon such a stipulation, incurs a variety of changes and anomalies in his picture of experience and rational entitlement, when considered in the light of his guiding commitments in the Mind and World model.

8. What Then is Left of the Dictum?

Davidson’s dictum, which restricts the intelligibility of rational relations to a content’s exploitation in an inferential structure, is advocated by Davidson as a means of avoiding the Myth of the Given and the skepticism of empiricism. For my present purposes, it can be said that Davidson’s dictum was used to espouse, or inform, two relevant doctrines, which hitherto have been largely understood as functioning together. The first, (1) being that receptivity, as sensory impression, cannot itself feature in the rational entitlement story. The second, (2) being that only the content of a belief can intelligibly stand as a reason for a belief. So the

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purpose was twofold: to acknowledge experience as beyond rational entitlement and to insist on rational relations as relations between the contents of beliefs.

Now in *Mind and World*, McDowell supposed he could amend Davidson’s dictum to ‘propositional content’, and in the process he could (1) incorporate receptivity into the rational entitlement picture, and accordingly (2) have the propositional content of intuition itself stand in rational relations to a corresponding judgment (without itself being a belief that things were thus and so). So McDowell’s amendations to the dictum did not extend beyond expanding the normative scope of the conceptual, understood as propositional content. He thus appropriated and amended Davidson’s dictum for the sole purpose of extending rational entitlement to experience itself.

Rational entitlement, I will argue, was and remains McDowell’s principle concern in respect to Davidson’s dictum, rather than the insistence upon propositional content as the kind of content that can enter normative relations; normative relations, at least, which are relevant to extending rational entitlement to intuition itself.

Now McDowell, in his revised account, remains committed to (1) incorporating receptivity within the rational entitlement picture; however he no longer remains committed to (2) propositions as the only kinds of content which can intelligibly stand in normative relations. He now allows (a) rational relations between propositional contents as reasons, and (b) rational relations between propositional content and *intuitional* content, understood as something less than propositional content, less than a reason itself.

McDowell therefore has no problem with the kinds of content that can count as a *reason* for a belief, viz., the content of another belief. What McDowell does, however, insist upon is that rational relations can obtain between contents, which on one side are less than propositional, less than a ‘reason’ itself. So that understanding rational relations between
contents is no longer just about the relations between propositional contents: now it includes relations between perceptual beliefs and (sub-propositional/or non-discursive) intuitional content which may inform the very content of those beliefs.

Therefore, in McDowell’s revised account, the dictum is largely irrelevant in respect to the story of rational entitlement and experience. In fact, McDowell in a sense may well have been brought back into the fold of Davidson’s original dictum, i.e. nothing can stand as a reason for a belief except another belief – despite insisting upon rational entitlement extending to experience. This is because, as mentioned above, there is now an intelligible distinction to be made between those contents which can stand as a *reason* in normative relations, and the new rational entitlement story which allows rational relations between propositional content, and contents less than propositional, i.e. intuitional content.

So McDowell can give Davidson his dictum, but the dictum nevertheless remains insufficient in respect to meeting the demands of experience as rationally entitling perceptual beliefs. Whilst the dictum may be adequate in respect to rational relations between reasons, it is of limited use when it comes to intuition as rationally entitling and externally constraining – which is the cornerstone of McDowell’s ‘minimal empiricism’, in which receptivity is ultimate in rational entitlement. Of course, in the revised account, McDowell still operates according to the general model or spirit of Davidson’s dictum, on pain of the Myth. However, there is no succinct or pithy ‘slogan’ in which rational entitlement and rationalizing contents can be expressed.

Of paramount concern to McDowell is avoiding the Myth of the Given, hence the space of reasons remains commensurable with the space of the conceptual. Receptivity remains within the bounds of both accordingly; however, it does not do so in virtue of McDowell’s once preferred amended dictum. Receptivity in McDowell’s new account is understood as
featuring in rational entitlement because it is given in a form in which it can come to feature in discursive representation. So he breaks with his *Mind and World* amended dictum in respect to how receptivity features in rational entitlement, i.e. rational entitlement now extends beyond propositional content.

There is also a break of sorts in respect to the kind of content which can stand in rational relations: McDowell introduces specifically intuitional content, as non-discursive content that can now enter normative relations of a kind with propositional content. So where we once had a picture in which rational entitlement from experience to perceptual judgment was explained as a function between propositional contents, rational entitlement is now reconfigured as a relation between a reason-providing content and a judgment – where the former is not itself in the propositional form of a reason.

McDowell’s move away from experience with propositional content presents a corresponding shift in his story of warrant. His *Mind and World* picture of rational entitlement, working with Davidson’s amended dictum, was seemingly intelligible because experience provided reasons for reflective judgement, viz., what one takes in is that things are thus and so. So perceptual judgement was warranted in light of the very same content being given in experience. In McDowell’s revised account, the content of intuition comes to rationally entitle. However, not being propositional in its content, it does not entitle as a self-constituted reason – that is, as something which can stand as a premise for a conclusion. Rather, the non-discursive content of intuition may, with the appropriate cognitive activity, yield a self-constituted reason by way of its discursive exploitation, but it does not itself function as a reason for perceptual judgment. The logical space of reasons thus comes to be understood as incorporating potentially ‘reason-providing’ content, and not merely the propositional contents which can themselves stand as reasons and enter inferential relations.
This rational innovation enables McDowell, under pressure from Travis, to bring more sharply into focus the idea that intuition is a merely having in view of an object, and that entitlement to a perceptual judgment stems from the presence of an object to the perceiving subject. Of course, for McDowell, unlike Travis, it is not the non-conceptual object itself which so entitles, but it is the intuitional content of experience. Both Travis and McDowell posit rational relations with the non-conceptual object of perception, so as to garner rational external constraint upon thought. So as to not fall into the Myth of the Given, McDowell, in his revised account, stays upon the side of Davidson’s idea that rational relations essentially involve relations between conceptual contents. However, this now comes at the cost of experience not itself furnishing the mind with fully self-constituted reasons for perceptual judgment.

9. ‘Appearings’: Experience and Perceptual Judgment

In *Mind and World*, the given contents of ‘appearings’ were bound to receptivity, and so beyond the voluntary rational control of the perceiver. To express the content of the intuition was not yet to exercise one’s judgement or believe that things were that way. However, the ‘appearing’ itself did nevertheless purport to claim things to be a certain way according to it, i.e. the representational contents of ‘appearings’ did in fact, even as given, warrant notions of truth and falsity.

‘Appearings’, in McDowell’s new account however, must necessarily go beyond the given content of intuition. Indeed, insofar as they involve the discursive exploitations of the given content, they are judgments that things are thus and so. Of course it may be that one, upon reflection, comes to have reason to distrust the propositional content of an ‘appearing’, and comes to discount it as false. However, the propositional content once formed, by way of

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78 I discuss McDowell’s response to Travis’s view of his commitment to the Condition in Chapter 2.
making explicit what is given in experience is no less a judgment, or belief. In such a case, one is merely seemingly rationally entitled, in light of what is given in experience, to the judgment one makes.

Taking this state of affairs into consideration, Davidson and McDowell are now evidently reconciled in respect to ‘appearings’: we simply do not have a propositional content in experience – an ‘appearing’ – waiting for ‘endorsement’ in judgment. Articulating the content given in experience, or indeed drawing upon recognitional capacities, carries endorsement with it, and yields a perceptual judgment (true or false). It thus commits one to a state of affairs. Of course, such endorsement may come to be withdrawn upon reflection, with the assessment that a particular experience is misleading.

Crucially, however, the content of ‘appearings’, so understood, is not the given of experience, and qualifies itself as the content of a judgment that, true or false, is thus free to enter the inferential reasons-relations of Davidson’s dictum. In the case of a judgment that does articulate the content of an intuition, it enters into such relations with indefeasible warrant: viz., the presence to a subject in an intuition of an object through some of its perceptible properties.

So, with his revised account of intuitional content, just as McDowell loses his ability to utilize an amended form of Davidson’s dictum, so it is also that McDowell can no longer draw upon the grammar of ‘appearings’ by which to substantiate his posited notion of passively given conceptual content in experience. Being deprived of the utility of such a model is merely the first (of many) of those forms of intelligibility which McDowell could formerly present in respect to successfully conceiving experience as itself conceptually shaped.
10. Intelligibility of ‘Carved out’ Aspects

McDowell: “In discursive dealings with content, one puts significances together. This is particularly clear with discursive performances in the primary sense, whose content is the significance of a combination of meaningful expressions. But even though judging need not be conceived as an act spread out in time, like making a claim, its being discursive involves a counterpart to the way one puts significance is together in meaningful speech.”

McDowell: “I mean this to be consistent with rejecting, as we should, the idea that the contents one puts together in discursive activity are self-standing building blocks, separately thinkable elements in the contents of claims or judgements. One can think significance of, say, a predicative expression only in the context of a thought in which that content occurs predicatively. But we can acknowledge that and still say that in discursive activity one puts contents together, in a way that can be modeled on stringing meaningful expressions together in discourse literally so called.”

As already mentioned, McDowell’s revised rational entitlement story is one which shifts from rational relations between propositional contents, according to Davidson’s amended dictum, to an entitlement story between propositional contents and intuitional contents. Rational entitlement thus stems from intuitional content, and in respect to McDowell’s first entitlement picture, from its ‘carved out’ aspects.

Propositional content does nevertheless remain central to the rational entitlement picture. And yet, according to McDowell’s account, the rational entitlement story does not, indeed it cannot, assume propositional content at the outset. To be content at all requires rational external constraint. And so, according to McDowell, the constituent contents, the sub-parts, which inform the proposition as a whole, must rationally stem from the aspects of intuition. McDowell therefore offers an account of how those sub-parts are rationally informed by intuition, so as to inform the propositional whole. So McDowell’s first kind of rational

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80 Ibid, p. 263.
entitlement is one which essentially relies upon an analysis of the propositional contents, such that the content of thought is itself bound to receptivity – the content of intuition.

According to McDowell, the content of intuition can itself figure in the rational entitlement picture because it figures in the ‘carved out’ aspects. It comes to figure in the perceptual thought itself, via the association of aspects with meaningful expressions. So the rational entitlement is due to the intuitional content itself featuring in the propositional thought. In this way, the rational external constraint can thus be seen as constituted in the very makeup of the discursive content of the thought itself. The constraint and the entitlement does not need to defer to something outside of itself, from without the conceptual as it were. This is because the discursive significances of the propositional content are already rationally bound to the intuitional content. And so perceptual judgment, in the context of this particular rational entitlement account of McDowell’s, need not defer to the propositional content of experience in order to be entitled to its claim, as in the *Mind and World* paradigm; rather, the judgment is entitled due to the constituent sub-parts and aspects of its very content.

Judgement itself, according to the first rational entitlement story, thus becomes something irrevocably bound to the intuitional content. Now, in one respect, this can be seen as a drawing closer to Travis: something of a non-discursive quality can be seen as operative as an external constraint in the rational justification of a propositional claim (contra Davidson). And yet McDowell maintains his deference towards Davidson’s insight into rationality: the ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition must be conceptual, if they are to feature in the space of reasons, on pain of the Myth of the Given.

That which rationally entitles is conceptual content – content that is itself understood as bound to receptivity. The intelligibility of all this depends, of course, on making sense of the
idea that, with the ‘carving out’ of aspects, we put discursive significances together. And it is precisely a picture such as this which Travis refuses (see below).

McDowell’s account, in respect to his first kind of rational entitlement, allows for a ‘putting together’ of discursive significances, such that judgment itself is ‘put together’ with sub-parts that are bound to externally constraining content. The ‘break down’ into such composite parts is apparently due to a necessity of illuminating the rational edifice upon which the perceptual thought and its contents are grounded.

So, in a sense, McDowell requires a more basic unit, in respect to that which rationally entitles, than a whole propositional content – that being the propositional content’s sub-propositional parts. Seen in this way, propositional thought has a composite structure, with each composite part bound to an aspect of intuitional content. The sub-propositional significances, as so bound to the intuitional content, thus provide, in their very manifestation of and relation to intuition, external constraint upon the propositional content. They do this as an inherent feature of their meaningful significance.

But how is the putting together of significances to be understood?

Travis writes:

“For Frege, there is no intelligible task of forming the unity of a thought, or judgement, out of things which, on their own, anyway, do any less than form a unity. Thoughts, and judgements, are not built out of building blocks. Thoughts must be decomposable if they are to enter into the full panoply of logical relations between them. But a thought’s parts on a decomposition can do no other than add up to itself.” 81

“Perceptual experience (auditory, or visual, or the combination) may now force on me the view that Sid is snoring. But it does not (certainly need not) force this on me by forcing on me, severally, the view that Sid

is up to something, that someone is snoring, and the need to put these together into the view that Sid is snoring.” 82

Travis, following in the footsteps of Frege, claims to ‘put the word true to the fore’, and proceeds to thoughts as the things in relation to which truth can come into consideration. 83 Such a model of intelligibility means that perceptual experience may ‘force’ upon one a particular judgment; however, it does not force upon one the various sub-parts, with those parts then being put together into the judgment.

Travis claims that the task of a thought can indeed be broken down, decomposed, into ‘sub-tasks’. However such parts of a thought must necessarily add up to itself. 84 That is, those identifiable sub-tasks can only add up to the whole task. So the sub-task is performed only in the context of the performance of the whole task. Furthermore, those sub-tasks are not decomposed in only one way; rather, there are many ways of decomposing the sub-tasks of the thought. Nevertheless, the possibility of multiple analysis nonetheless requires that the analysis add up to the whole.

Travis also maintains that thoughts decompose into ‘generalities’, with such generalities being necessary for the thought to enter into various logical relations. And yet while any such generality may be shared between thoughts, or figure as a constituent feature of other thoughts, Travis insists that this should not be confused with its being a part of a thought, which could just as well function in different ways and in different thoughts – as if the part could be put together differently with other parts. In other words, the part does not maintain an independence in such a manner. Hence, the parts of a thought cannot be put together in different ways to form other thoughts, depending upon how the sub-parts are unified.

82 Ibid, p. 20.
Travis’s Fregean picture of thought is such that, there is no intelligible task of working up to a unified propositional whole – which he sets against Kant’s unifying function, out of parts which on their own provide less than a unity. There is no such work to be done in unifying judgments, which fashions whole judgments, by putting together such sub-parts, conceived of as ‘building blocks’ of thought. So Travis maintains that because there is no such task to be performed, there is no ‘psychological explanation or otherwise’ of how it is performed. Judgment rather, Travis maintains, is having a view of the world imposed upon one – so that one cannot hold an alternative view. One holds such a view in the pursuit of truth.

So where McDowell draws parallels between speech and thought, so as to garner an intelligible picture in respect to his rational entitlement picture, Travis rather, makes a point of identifying certain disanalogies between them, so as to reinforce his Fregean picture of thought. One of particular concern, which is related to the sub-parts of propositional content, is that of ‘interpretation’.

Travis claims that, as a point of grammar, thoughts answer questions of interpretation, so that such questions are applicable only to the particular meaning of the words of speech. So the thought as a whole, and thus its sub-parts, ought not to be thought of as a ‘cognitive prosthetic’, such that an intention can attach to it, as it may attach to a picture or image. The representational function of a thought is not susceptible to multiple interpretations. Thoughts, Travis maintains, ‘represent in the only way they could’: we identify a thought – we identify the reach of the thought – via that which in the surroundings the thought is intentionally directed towards. So there are two aspects here which Travis does not want to come into play in characterizing thought. The first being that thoughts have sub-parts which could obtain

85 Discussed further in Chapter 3
independently from the whole content. The second being that thoughts are open to interpretation the way that speech is.

Now McDowell explicitly claims, in ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’ that his new model is not one which ought to be understood on the self-standing building blocks model, viz., separately thinkable elements which are then put together to form a whole judgment. And whilst McDowell claims that the putting together of significances in a judgment ought to be understood on the model of meaningful speech, it ought not be understood as an act which is spread out in time. This is important because, in not being spread out in time, the parts of the thought are not each separately existing (outside of the whole) and reflectively considered. So this would imply that the significances are unified at once, and without intermittency.

McDowell denies the ‘building blocks’ model. Why then does he insist upon the metaphor of ‘putting together’ discursive significances on the model of meaningful utterances? What is it that such an insistence is intended to achieve, in the context of differentiating his picture of empirical thought from that of Travis? Or Davidson, for that matter? As will be discussed, McDowell’s point is one that has to do with rational entitlement. Yet first it is necessary to distinguish McDowell’s account from the concerns of Travis.

To begin with, McDowell’s discursive significances, and sub-propositional parts, ought not to be understood as the same sub-parts as those of Travis. Travis’s sub-parts involve generalities of a kind, and complexity, that McDowell would not admit into his ‘carving out’ picture of rational entitlement. Generalities to do with Sid being up to something, someone snoring, and the like. Furthermore, Travis’s sub-tasks can be broken down in multiple ways. This does not necessarily affect McDowell’s picture. Again, McDowell’s concern is not with the sub-parts of the various concepts which figure in recognition. McDowell is concerned
only with those limited concepts which pertain to the aspects of the content of intuition. His notion of ‘putting together’ is concerned with the external rational underpinnings of judgments that articulate intuitional content.

McDowell’s notion of ‘putting significances together’ is just a way of illuminating the sub-parts of the propositional content which relate to intuitional content itself – with those sub-parts acquiring their external rational entitlement from the intuitional content. So whilst there is a unity, and there is a rational underpinning to that unity which occurs at a sub-propositional level, because the putting together of the significances is not understood as an act spread out in time, the sub-parts of that unity are precisely not separately thinkable contents. McDowell merely provides a model by which we can understand the rational underpinnings of the content of the thought. So that the demonstrative ‘this’, for example, can be seen as rationally bound to an aspect of intuition – and so inform us as to how it contributes to the whole sense of a thought.

So the putting together of discursive significances need not necessarily be understood as McDowell positing a different structure to thought itself, say, to that of Travis’s Frege. As if the structure of thought which did involve drawing upon recognitonal capacities differed from the kind of thought which did not. Such a two tiered structure of thought would indeed be disastrous. The propositional structure of thought and its discursive contents need not come to define the differences between McDowell and Travis. McDowell’s account pertains rather to illuminating certain (rational) aspects of that structure so as to accommodate entitling experience within the conceptual realm.

So the way in which the two can be distinguished, has to do with how it is that the contents within the propositional structure of perceptual thought are rationally related to that which obtains outside of the propositional structure itself. Travis has perceptual judgement
operating as a whole – a whole thought rationally bound to the non-conceptual object; whereas McDowell breaks down the propositional whole into significances which precisely attain their significance in view of an aspect of intuitional content. And, according to McDowell, it is his own story, on this revised account, which allows him to avoid the Myth of the Given, in a way in which Travis’s account cannot.

So perhaps we can distinguish between a potential point of logic, the structure of thought itself, which concerns the (propositional) form content must take in order to have meaning at all – the logical togetherness and unity of content in respect to empirical thought; and a point of concern regarding rational capacities, which are operable at a sub-propositional level, and which enable the very content which is bound in that logically together thinkable content. So that determining the sense of a sub-propositional content, which operates in reference to its figuring in the proposition as a whole, is not the same question or task as determining from whence that sense was (externally) rationally derived. So McDowell can maintain that the contents put together in thought are not separately thinkable; however, the contents, as ‘carved out’ and put together, are susceptible to their own rational entitlement account in the context of the whole thinkable propositional content.

McDowell’s concern is how discursive content, in a certain range of perceptual judgments, is bound to unarticulated intuitional content, content which stands without, as it were, from the thinkable contents of thought. Such content may come to ‘feature’ in perceptual thought, but as given, the content lacks articulation and thus lacks sense. This concern, of course, has its own dynamic: it is driven by McDowell’s continuing pre-occupation with avoiding the Myth of the Given, in giving his revised account of rational entitlement.
Conclusion

In *Mind and World*, McDowell presented a rational entitlement picture that sought to dislodge itself from a way of understanding ‘experience’ that manifested what he identified as an ‘interminable oscillation’ between Davidson’s Coherentism and the Myth of the Given. In order to avoid the associated problems of each, McDowell offered a notion of experience – sensory impressions – as conceptually shaped. McDowell presented a stipulated notion of the conceptual, as it was to be understood as actualized in experience, as having *propositional* content. That stipulated notion of conceptual experience collected its intelligibility via a series of *models* of the conceptual, foremost of which was judgement and the form of its content. In this way familiar models of thought and its expression in language provided the intelligible characteristics which could thereby inform and substantiate his stipulated notion of conceptually shaped experience.

In respect to rational entitlement, these conceptual models accompanied McDowell’s extension of Davidson’s notion of the space of reasons, so as to incorporate that which he considered lacking in his predecessor’s picture: rational external constraint upon empirical thought, in the form of experience with conceptual content. This in turn required an anti-dualist understanding of the relationship between the sensory and the intellect, the outcome of which was McDowell’s notion of sensory consciousness as a conceptual mode of presentation, with a given ‘sensory content’. McDowell in turn drew upon Kant’s ‘Clue’, and the view that the Understanding was to be (with modification) involved in experience. So experience was constituted by a manifold of given representational content – with a face value – which could be taken to be so in the exercise of deciding how things are in reflective judgment.
McDowell’s revised account continues to maintain an allegiance to what he sees as Davidson’s central insight into rationality, viz., that ‘reason’s reach extends no further than conceptual capacities can take it’. This is one of the central motivations why McDowell continues to resist Travis’s Fregean model of experience and perceptual judgment. From his point of view, no matter how informative Travis’s account may prove to be, specifically in respect to the function of recognition, Travis’s account of perceptual judgment necessarily falls foul of the Myth of the Given, because Travis posits rational relations that extend beyond the bounds of conceptual.

McDowell resists Travis’s account because of ‘higher-order’ concerns that he has, which pertain to the Myth. Even with his revised account, it remains essential to McDowell’s project that experience is ‘permeated with mindedness’, so to speak. Indeed, it is critical to McDowell’s thinking that the possession of language informs not only our ability to rationally respond to the world in judgement, but that it also conditions our sensory experience of the world. Our ‘second natures’ as linguistic creatures – our rationality which is autonomous and operates in its own sphere – must come to be reflected in that very medium by which we come to have knowledge of the world, viz., sensory experience. As McDowell would have it, it is a notion of experience with conceptual content that provides one of the central means via which we can distinguish ourselves from non-rational animals – a content which reflects our rationality as language users.

According to McDowell, being initiated into a natural language is to be initiated into a space of reasons. This in itself need not be a contentious idea. However, in order to secure this idea, and with his insistence that perceptual judgment must have rational external constraint,

90 McDowell, Mind and World, p. 85.
McDowell holds that sensory experience must itself have a content which reflects those items amenable to figuring in the space of reasons, in accordance with Davidson’s insight into rationality. So too, in his view, must experience have a content which reflects the prevalence of language in our rational dealings with the world.

While experience with propositional content is no longer the preferred means by which this rational relationship is established, nor that which reflects our second natures in experience itself, the new form of intuitional content – however minimal that may be – is such that it must come to reflect, or be suitably related to, these aspects of our normative and rational lives as linguistic creatures. So, as McDowell’s revised picture would have it, the stipulation of the non-discursive content of intuition as conceptual necessarily succeeds.

For its part, Travis’s account of perceptual judgment is one which simply rejects at the outset one of the key premises from which McDowell presents his notion of experience – viz., that rational and conceptual capacities must necessarily be involved in experience itself. According to Travis, McDowell offers no substantial argument as to why experience with conceptual content provides the only means by which we can avoid the (trivial) problem of the Myth. In doing so, Travis resists what McDowell considers Davidson’s ‘central insight’ into rationality. On Travis’s account, the space of reasons extends beyond the realm of the conceptual and any involvement of our conceptual capacities in experience, such that non-conceptual objects directly in view themselves, outside of conceptual content, can come to stand in rationally significant relations to perceptual thought.

Travis’s account of recognition influences McDowell’s change in mind about the content of experience as being propositional. While he did not ignore recognition in *Mind and World*, McDowell misplaced it in the function of experience itself. This misplacement strengthened Davidson’s criticism of the early picture that experience with propositional content did in fact
constitute a ‘taking to be so’. McDowell’s treatment of experience as propositional in content, therefore, had far too many of the characteristics of judgment. Such an outcome can be seen as a direct consequence of those models which he so enthusiastically employed in order to substantiate his stipulated notion of conceptually shaped experience – despite his various attempts to distinguish the modes of actualization of conceptual content in experience and judgment.

Even so, at least in his early attempt to avoid the Myth of the Given and secure a permeating mindedness in experience, McDowell’s picture of experience as propositional in content came with what purported to be robust models of intelligibility offered to secure the stipulation of the conceptual – models informed by Sellars and Kant, and by Davidson’s conception of reasons-relations. The dissolution of the propositional model in McDowell’s revised account of intuition marks the unavailability of those models which once figured so prominently in his attempt to imbue experience with intelligible, substantial conceptual qualities. And despite McDowell’s insistence upon an alternative stipulation of the conceptual, in accordance with his revised notion of intuitional content, such models are not lost without threatening his conceptualist agenda.

McDowell’s new stipulation of the conceptual as it figures in intuitional content creates interesting anomalies in his picture of rational entitlement, in respect to some of those defining features of of his account of entitlement in Mind and World. This in turn raises the question as to whether these anomalies are such that they impugn the intelligibility of his new picture of intuition as conceptual in content, and warrant a reconsideration of his concern to avoid the putative Myth of the Given.

Gone now from McDowell’s picture is Davidson’s amended dictum in respect to rational entitlement, it’s utility withdrawing with the withdrawal of the model of experience as having
propositional content. In its place now stands a space of reasons which, whilst commensurate
with the space of the conceptual, is limited in its expanse to a tenuous notion of intuitional
content. Because of this, the content of experience cannot itself stand as a self-constituted
reason.

Where McDowell’s amended form of Davidson’s dictum supposed rational relations
between propositional contents, in later McDowell, rational relations involving the uptake of
experiential content are reduced to rational relations between non-discursive intuitional
content and the propositional content of judgment that articulates that intuitional content.
Intuitional content now provides rational entitlement which is served (merely) by the object in
Travis’ uniform account of perception and recognition. So, at the level of experience,
McDowell’s notion of ‘content’ claims to succeed (with respect to avoiding the Myth) where
Travis’s object fails. Yet the consequence of this is a space of reasons which extends to a
content almost totally lacking in substantial conceptual characteristics, and which cannot itself
stand as a reason.

Furthermore, in the context of McDowell’s revised account of intuitional content, a
dualism between the sensory and the functioning of the capacities of the intellect does indeed
emerge, that is, in respect to all the *substantial* aspects which inform the engagement of
conceptual capacities. With discursive content no longer given with the newly conceived
conceptual shaping of the sensory, it no longer can be said that there is a ‘thinking in the
sensory’, as once was the case with McDowell’s notion of a shaping of sensory
consciousness, understood as itself a discursive conceptual mode of presentation. We can now
distinguish the given intuitional content from the discursive propositional content which may
rationally stem from it in a judgment based on it. Of course, McDowell may insist that the
intellect and the sensory are still bound in the intuional content; however, because the
content of intuition is not discursive, this certainly would not constitute a ‘thinking in the sensory’, at least as a thinking in the sensory was once understood. ‘Thinking in the sensory’ seems to have no more purchase in the revised account than it does in Travis’s account of perception.

One of the defining differences between Travis and McDowell is the relationship between the conceptual and recognition. This is apparent in respect to intuitional content which entitles, both via recognition and via ‘carved out’ aspects. Where Travis unites the functions of recognition and conceptual content, so that there is no conceptual actualization without recognition in respect to empirical thought, McDowell’s notion of intuitional content apparently eschews such a restrictive, mutually inclusive relationship between recognition and the conceptual. Experience is posited as remaining conceptually shaped, yet without recognition, without representation, without face value, and without sense.

So McDowell’s notion of non-discursive conceptual content essentially is one which is premised upon the notion that conceptual capacities can be passively actualized in intuition, yet be divested of those aspects which intelligibly imbue the conceptual with substantial qualities – qualities which figure so saliently in his Mind and World paradigm. Where Travis substantiates his account of the conceptual via recognition and the content of judgment, McDowell is left only with a depleted notion of intuitional content as conceptual in that it has a ‘potential’ to feature in the exercise of discursive rational capacities. So, in respect to recognition and conceptual capacities, temporarily leaving aside McDowell’s concerns for the Myth, it must be said that Travis’s account comes out the better, at least in respect to a uniform notion of the conceptual’s substantial characteristics.

McDowell’s rational entitlement story which involves the ‘carving out of aspects’ is premised upon the intelligibility of distinguishing the internal logical structure of the
propositional content of a judgment from the rational underpinnings of the conceptual parts which inform the whole. And his notion of ‘putting significances together’ is a model of intelligibility which rather misleading pertains to illuminating the rational connection of parts of the whole content with aspects of intuitional content. So McDowell can claim to maintain a single structure of propositional thought, albeit with two notions of rational entitlement – ‘carving out’ and recognition – in play.

However, even with such a sympathetic interpretation of later McDowell, the judgments that articulate intuitional content are limited to a very restricted range of empirical thoughts. The fact that McDowell’s revised account apparently hinges upon such a potentially confusing notion of rational entitlement in the ‘carving out’ case, so limited in its range anyhow, further suggests that McDowell’s project of avoiding a relation between experience and the world which he sees as caught up in the Myth of the Given is in difficulty, and that perhaps its motivation – the preoccupation with the Myth – ought to be reconsidered.
Chapter 2: Objectivity

A. The Issue of Objectivity

1. Lack of Intelligibility: the Myth and Davidson

McDowell: “Now how should we elaborate the idea that our thinking is thus answerable to the world? In addressing this question, we might restrict our attention, at least tacitly, to thinking that is answerable to the empirical world; that is, answerable to how things are in so far as how things are is empirically accessible. Even if we take it that answerability to how things are includes more than answerability to the empirical world, it nevertheless seems right to say this: since our cognitive predicament is that we confront the world by way of sensible intuition (to put it in Kantian terms), our reflection on the very idea of thought’s directedness at how things are must begin with answerability to the empirical world. And now, how can we understand the idea that our thinking is answerable to the empirical world, if not by way of the idea that our thinking is answerable to experience? How could a verdict from the empirical world – to which empirical thinking must be answerable if it is to be thinking at all – be delivered, if not by way of a verdict from (as W.V. Quine puts it) “the tribunal of experience”?  

McDowell: “That is what I mean by “a minimal empiricism”: the idea that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as it must be if we are to make sense of it as thinking at all. And this is one side of a combination of plausibilities that promises to account for the philosophical anxieties I alluded to. The other side is a frame of mind, which I shall come to, that makes it hard to see how experience could function as a tribunal, delivering verdicts on our thinking.”

According to McDowell, one of the incoherent aspects of the Myth of the Given, is the idea that ‘bare sensory’ experience can intelligibly pass verdicts upon empirical judgment. So just as it was unintelligible how rational entitlement could obtain from something outside of the realm of the conceptual, it is unintelligible how it is that ‘bare sensory’ receptivity could function as a ‘tribunal’ in respect to thought directed at the empirical world. As McDowell would have it, given that ‘reason’s reach extends no further than conceptual capacities can

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91 McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. xii.

92 Ibid, p. xii.
take it', extending the space of reasons beyond the conceptual, and hoping to gain entitlement and answerability via something like mere pointing, is simply incoherent.

As was discussed, Davidson, in light of the Myth of the Given, accordingly renounces empiricism all together. Wary of such unintelligibility, experience according to Davidson, performs no such role of ‘tribunal’. Davidson’s paramount motivation for avoiding the Myth of the Given is a desire to avoid skepticism. As already discussed, this is in deference to what he sees as the inevitable epistemic intermediaries between thought and the world in the empiricist picture. So the rational entitlement of empirical thought, and its truth, is ensured not by way of its rational relationship to receptivity, but rather with its ‘coherence’ with a body of beliefs.

McDowell, as was discussed, agrees with Davidson when it comes to that which can rationally entitle – that which can operate in the space of reasons: it is conceptual content. Whilst that may be the case, as McDowell sees things, Davidson does not show us how it is that we can do without the empiricist picture: ‘The attractions of empiricism are not explained away’. Specifically, empirical thought, as directed towards the world, must be then answerable to the empirical world (and thus impressions). This in turn problematizes Davidson’s story of content in respect to empirical thought. With experience outside the space of reasons, and with no such external constraint upon the exercise of spontaneity, empirical thought is left ‘spinning in the void’. How is thought itself then intelligibly about the world? Again the notion of answerability and the possibility for the content of thought are inexorably bound together. To dispose of one is to problematize the other.

McDowell is thus critical of Davidson’s Coherentist picture because it simply takes for granted that our thoughts can get things right or wrong, or in other words, Davidson assumes

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93 McDowell, ‘Reply to Travis’, p. 259.
94 McDowell, Mind and World, p. xvii.
that they have ‘objective purport’. The Myth of the Given, whilst incoherent, at least attempted to inform conceptual capacities from without as it were, so that external constraint upon conceptual capacities put them in touch with some form of objectivity.

With no rational external constraint upon thought, empirical thought in Davidson’s picture is the mere semblance of just that. With no rational connection with receptivity, (receptivity being the means via which we are put into touch with the objective empirical world), the exercise of spontaneity thus cannot intelligibly be seen as ‘directed towards’ the objective world at all.

McDowell’s primary concern in respect to the Myth of the Given is not with avoiding skepticism, but rather ensuring the empirical content of those thoughts in the first place. For McDowell, the reassurance, the rational entitlement, which is required when utilising concepts in the exercise of judgment, is constraint from outside our acts of thinking. If empirical judgment is to recognizably bear upon reality at all, there must be such external constraint. Therefore, there must be a role for receptivity as well as spontaneity – not just in respect to the rational justification of empirical judgement, as directed at the world, but also for those empirical judgments to have empirical content in the first place.

2. Answerability to The World as Fact; Facts and Objects

McDowell: “In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is that things are thus and so. That things are thus and so is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgment: it becomes the content of a judgment if the subject decides to take the experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. But that things are thus and so is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are. Thus the idea of conceptually structured operations of receptivity puts us in a position to speak of experience as openness to the layout of reality. Experience enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks”.

McDowell: “ Impressions can fit in the logical space of reasons because impressions can be actualisations of conceptual capacities”  

I will begin my account of McDowell’s picture of ‘objectivity’ in respect to his *Mind and World* shift in how to make sense of ‘verdictive answerability’. Faced with the dilemma of being (necessarily) answerable to the empirical world, yet without a conception of experience which makes it possible to so function as a tribunal, McDowell with diagnosis and cure in mind, seeks to transform the very picture of intelligibility in respect to both experience and verdictive answerability. So that McDowell’s notion of the answerability of empirical thought to the empirical world becomes answerability to content, ‘perceptible facts’, and hence precisely not to the non-conceptual – be it object or the sensory, which is situated outside the conceptual (Myth) – nor to a coherent body of beliefs without rational external constraint (spinning in the void). In doing so, McDowell hopes to explain away the attractions of supposing that sensory impressions are not the kinds of things to which we are answerable.  

McDowell’s notion of empirical thought and verdictive answerability, in accordance with his rational entitlement picture, is one which obtains between conceptual contents only. A judgment, whose content is that things are thus and so, is a posture which is correctly or incorrectly adopted, in accord with whether or not things are indeed thus and so. Perceptual judgment which is directed towards the empirical world is answerable to the world as fact, to how things are, for whether or not it is correctly executed. Such a judgement is intelligibly answerable to the world, because ‘how things are’ is constituted by conceptual content to the effect that that things are thus and so. This is how the world can come to exert its normative determination upon empirical thought.

97 Ibid, p. 246.
So a paradox of sorts emerges, which incurs much potential confusion. Although our perceptual thoughts are directed towards the empirical world, the realm of non-conceptual objects, the fact that such thoughts are answerable to it does not transpire merely by way of that intentional relation between thought and the non-conceptual object. Rather, such answerability occurs by way of verdictive answerability to propositional facts.

As the discussion below of Travis and McDowell unfolds in respect to answerability, this indeed becomes a central defining factor. Where both accounts hold that we are answerable to the objects of experience, Travis supposes that this is so because the objects are necessarily situated outside of conceptual content. Whereas McDowell supposes that we are answerable to the non-conceptual object only via its already figuring in conceptual content.

In order to offer a more illuminating account of this notion of verdictive answerability, I now turn to a discussion of McDowell’s notions of ‘how things are’ and ‘the world of fact’.

3. ‘How Things Are’ and the ‘World as Facts’ – Fregean Sense

McDowell: “This joint involvement of receptivity and spontaneity allows us to say that in experience one can take in how things are. How things are is independent of one's thinking (except, of course, in the special case in which how things are is that one thinks such-and-such). By being taken in in experience, how things anyway are becomes available to exert the required rational control, originating outside one’s thinking, on one’s exercises of spontaneity”\(^99\)

McDowell: “But that things are thus and so is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are.”\(^100\)

McDowell: “The Sinn expressed in an assertoric utterance is what one says in making the utterance. What one says is, schematically, that things are thus-and-so, and that things are thus-and-so is what is the case, if one's assertion is true. And something that is the case is, in a quite intuitive way of speaking, a state of


affairs. So an intuitive notion of states of affairs is perfectly available to Frege, but at the level of Sinn rather than Bedeutung.”

McDowell, like Travis, speaks of and posits a notion of ‘how things are’. For both McDowell and Travis, this notion can be seen as a grammatical remark intended to situate ‘verdictive answerability’ – that which normatively determines the truth or falsity of perceptual judgment – in the model of such judgements. And as seen in the discussion of rational entitlement, each ultimately differs in respect to which side of Frege’s line how things are and verdictive answerability are to be situated.

According to McDowell, in referring to how things are, he is referring to conceptual content, propositional content which is understood as how things can be truly said to be. How things are can constitute the given manifold of experience, whether or not taken up in thought, and it can also obtain independently of what is so represented in intuition. So despite potentially constituting the content of thought and experience, as will be discussed, how things are does indeed obtain, independently from one’s exercise of thought, or what is given in the intuition.

How things are therefore has an objective independent status, outside of one’s subjective representing function of intuition and empirical thought. Now this would seem to be analogous to the non-conceptual object. And whilst that may be the case, with McDowell’s shift in how to make sense of verdictive answerability, there is accordingly a shift in respect to which side of Frege’s line verdictive answerability is situated. McDowell places how things are decisively upon the right-hand side of Frege’s line – the side of Sinn and propositional

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content. As McDowell would have it, such a shift is warranted so as to avoid the Myth of the Given.

Even so, the verdictive answerability of propositional content to how things objectively are does not obtain outside of the external constraint of the non-conceptual – the left hand side of Frege’s line. McDowell maintains that his picture of perception does not deny rational relations with the non-conceptual, nor reason’s reach extending to the left-hand side of Frege’s line. How things are – understood as how things are truly sayable to be – includes those instances of a kind which Travis refers to. The non-conceptual object as instantiating conceptual content is thus included in the specification of how things are. To explore this further, I will now address McDowell’s notion of ‘perceptible facts’ and ‘the world as everything that is the case’.

Following Wittgenstein, McDowell embraces it as a ‘truism’ to assert that the world is the totality of facts, in contrast to the totality of objects. McDowell, in deference to that ‘truism’, offers a model of verdictive answerability that treats the world as the totality of facts (understood as true propositions). Via that ‘truism’, McDowell supposes that the incoherence of the Myth of the Given in respect to experience passing verdicts upon thought is overcome. It is overcome by the intelligibility of (veridical) experience, conceived of as factual in content, normatively informing empirical thought.

In the context of verdictive answerability and rational entitlement, there is nothing outside or beyond the world as the totality of facts. While we are perfectly able to acknowledge the ontology of the non-conceptual, that domain does not constitute the realm of the objective, as if facts were somehow further answerable to that non-conceptual realm. As will be seen, McDowell’s world of facts incorporates that non-conceptual domain within its very determination. In this way also, the bounds of objectivity are commensurate with the
bounds of facts. McDowell’s picture of objectivity thus extends no further than reason’s reach and the realm of Sinn (thought and thinkable content.)

4. No Outer Boundary and No Gap

McDowell: “A gap threatens to open between us and what we would like to conceive ourselves as knowing about, and it then seems to be a task for philosophy to show us ways to bridge the gulf. It is this threat of inaccessibility on the part of the world that we need to dislodge.”102

McDowell: “But I am trying to describe a way of maintaining that in experience the world exerts a rational influence on our thinking. And that requires us to delete the outer boundary from the picture. The impressions on our senses that keep the dynamic system in motion are already equipped with conceptual content. The facts that are made manifest to us in those impressions, or at least seem to be, are not beyond an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere, and the impingements of the world on our sensibility are not inward crossings such a boundary. My point is to insist that we can effect this deletion of the outer boundary without falling into idealism, without slighting the independence of reality.”103

McDowell: “This image of openness to reality is at our disposal because how we place the reality that makes its impression on a subject in experience. Although reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere. “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.”104

According to the traditional empiricist picture, there is, assumed throughout, and indeed motivating the explanatory paradigm, a ‘gap’ between mind and world. It is precisely the task of sensory experience to close that supposed gap. However, rather than provide an unmediated ‘openness to’, or a ‘directness with’, external reality, experience in the traditional picture provides us with evidence of such a reality. Experience, understood as evidentiary, thus provides an intermediary ‘object’ of thought. Experience does not provide us, either in sensory perception, or in thought, with unmediated contact with external reality. The gap is

103 McDowell, Mind and World, p. 34.
supposedly closed rather with a mediating object. Such a picture consequently gives rise to persuasive sceptical concerns. Rather than successfully closing the gap between thought and the world, and opening us to external reality, traditional empiricism simply cut us off from the world entirely. Traditional empiricism thus makes thought with content, and answerability to the world, entirely impossible.

In *Mind and World*, McDowell maintains that there is no gap between thought and the world. McDowell refuses the traditional empiricist paradigm which assumed the gap at the outset, posited a role for receptivity without spontaneity, and so ultimately offered nothing but the incoherence of the Myth of the Given. However, that is not because his account is put forward to show us how, figuratively as it were, to close the gap. Rather McDowell’s preferred therapeutic account never allows such an opening of a gap in the first place.

As McDowell sees it, by positing propositional content in experience itself, we dissolve the apparent gap between mind and world from the very beginning, so that there are no such misplaced obligations to once again attempt to re-close it. As will be discussed, that gap does not even get an opening precisely because the thinkable world as fact, and external reality as that which is visibly perceived, are both accounted for in McDowell’s picture of the unboundedness of the conceptual. In this way, just as he prevents a gap opening between mind and world (understood as what is the case), he at the same time averts a problematic idealism which fails to recognise the independence of external reality (understood as the realm of objects) from the exercise of thought.

McDowell’s account of ‘the world as fact’ connects with his account of ‘appearings’ (which was discussed in Chapter 1). As discussed, the content of ‘appearings’ was understood as the content of experience (sensory impression) itself. Importantly,
‘appearings’ were precisely not aligned with beliefs - they could entitle a ‘taking to be so’ without yet being a ‘taking to be so’.

So ‘appearings’ provided a kind of epistemic intermediary, things could appear to one to be thus and so, but McDowell did not wish to equate that with believing that things are thus and so. This opened the possibility then that the content of experience could misrepresent, it could mislead one as to the true nature of ‘how things are’. That however, was the extent of the epistemic intermediary aspect of appearing. When things appeared to be thus and so, and that actually was how things are, there was no disparity, no gap, between the appearance and the reality.

It is at this point that we can see the union of the content of ‘appearings’ – the content of experience - with ‘perceptible facts’. If the appearing does not mislead, if it is veridical, then the content of that appearing, constitutes a perceptible fact. An ‘ostensible seeing’ is an actual seeing precisely where its content is a perceptible fact. The content of experience, if true, and the facts are therefore one and the same, according to McDowell’s ‘no gap’ picture. (I will return to a discussion of the shared sense between thought and facts later on in the discussion). Just as the content of experience is distinctly bound to the sensory impressions of experience, so too are perceptible facts, as McDowell conceives them.

This brings into consideration the notion of ‘external reality’ (the realm of objects) as providing external constraint upon thought, and therefore the constraint informing ‘perceptible facts’.

5. Ordinary Objects of Perception and no Sideways On Perspective

McDowell: “We find ourselves always already engaging with the world in conceptual activity within such a dynamic system. Any understanding of this condition that it makes sense to hope for must be from within the system. It cannot be a matter of picturing the system’s adjustments to the world from sideways
on: that is, with the system circumscribed within the boundary, and the world outside it. That is exactly
the shape our picture must not take.”

McDowell does, of course, in his discussion of Sellars, concern himself with illuminating
a kind of transcendental account in respect to external constraint and the ‘objective purport’ of
intuitional content and judgment – that is, an account aimed at ensuring that the propositional
content of intuition, and thus judgment, is in fact bound to its purported subject matter, viz.,
the external object.

In Sellars’s picture – utilising his own reading of Kant – for thought to be about objective
reality, for thought to have objective purport, requires that the conceptual actualisations of
experience are ‘guided from without’, that is, by ‘sheer receptivity’. While the contents of
perception ‘make claims’ in experience, there is a transcendental concern, according to
Sellars, that those ‘claims’ may lack external constraint: hence those conceptual
representations must be transcendentally guided by ‘sheer receptivity’.

So, according to Sellars’s reading of Kant there are two appeals to sensibility. The first is
as intuitions (as they figure in the Clue), in which sensibility is shaped by the Understanding.
And secondly, there is also the transcendental role of sensibility, in which sensibility,
functioning independently of the Understanding, ‘guides’ the Understanding in the respective
conceptual shaping.

This is because, according to Sellars, the objects which are present to sensory
consciousness are not real. They are a mere ‘manifest image’ of reality. As mere appearances,
the ordinary objects of perception are therefore insufficient to meet the demands of external
constraint from an external reality – external reality conceived of as the ‘scientific image’ of

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105 McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 34.

the world. So, in Sellars’s picture, there obtains a reality external to our cognitive activity, a reality which must obtain if we are to make sense of empirical cognition, directed towards an independent objective reality. Hence external constraint functions outside of the operations of the Understanding.

This account, according to McDowell, would then require an impossible sideways on viewpoint of how our empirical concepts, and thoughts, are related to the objects as they are situated in external reality. McDowell, unlike Sellars, precisely does not come to associate external reality with the transcendental, nor does he posit a role for sheer receptivity, something which he sees as, somewhat ironically in Sellars, a version of the Myth of the Given. McDowell supposes that we must reject Kant’s transcendental story and ‘restrict ourselves to the standpoint of experience itself’. 107

However, claims McDowell, we do in fact find in Kant an account in which ‘reality is not located outside a boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere’. 108 This reality, the reality which can provide the necessary external constraint upon thought, consists in the ordinary objects of perception, objects which, unlike Sellers’s transcendental constraint without the Understanding, McDowell maintains to be within the bounds of our conceptual capacities.

So it is important to McDowell’s picture that external constraint is performed by the ordinary objects of perception themselves, those objects which are visually present in intuition. In this way is the very visual subject matter of the conceptual actualisation within experience externally constraining thought. The content cannot be understood, or actualised in the way McDowell stipulates, without the relation to the ostensible object of sight. Objects are visually in view as actualisations of conceptual capacities, those actualisations that occur in

sensory consciousness. And the concepts which figure in corresponding perceptual judgment are dependent upon those objects as they are visibly present in intuition.

6. External Reality: Conceptual Content

**McDowell:** “We seem to need rational constraints on thinking and judging, from a reality external to them, if we are to make sense of them as bearing on a reality outside of thought at all.”\(^{109}\)

**McDowell:** “When we try to acknowledge the need for external rational constraint, we can find ourselves supposing there must be relations of ultimate grounding that reach outside the conceptual realm altogether. That idea is the Myth of the Given, and of course the conception I have described makes no concession to it.”\(^{110}\)

McDowell’s acknowledgement of an ‘external reality’ which rationally and externally constrains thought ought to be understood as complementing his notion (discussed in the previous Chapter) of how it is that the non-conceptual object figures in rational relations with perceptual thought. In that context of rational entitlement, it was explained how McDowell’s positing of conceptual content in experience itself should not be construed as denying a rational role for the non-conceptual to play in relation to empirical thought (as Travis’s Condition would suppose). And so in the same way, ‘external reality’ – ‘perceptible reality’ – as the domain of the non-conceptual should not be taken as excluded from participating in verdictive relations with empirical thought.

A notion which is however excluded from McDowell’s picture is that ‘external reality’, constituted by those non-conceptual objects of perception, can participate in such rational relations without, or outside of, conceptual capacities. The picture of intelligibility which McDowell specifically wishes to break with is that ‘external reality’ constitutes the (sole) domain of the objective – in respect to verdictive answerability. A picture which supposes that


\(^{110}\) Ibid, p. 25.
the non-conceptual object is that relatum which, in itself and outside conceptual capacities, can normatively determine the correctness of perceptual judgment. That, for McDowell, would be to fall into the Myth of the Given.

As McDowell’s account would have it, capacities that belong to reason, to our rationality, must be drawn upon in the subject’s being so related to the non-conceptual object. The perceptible ‘external reality’ does not exert rational constraint upon our thought, nor can we be thus ‘open to reality’, without the passively actualised conceptual content of experience. So, in order for ‘external reality’ to rationally bear upon thought, it must do so via the passively actualised content of intuition. And so, alternatively conceived, that which fundamentally determines the truth of our perceptual thoughts is, for McDowell, ‘perceptible facts’.

7. Conceptual and Non-Conceptual – The Interrelationship between the Two Layouts: Layout of Reality and Layout of The World

McDowell: “But that things are thus and so is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are. Thus the idea of conceptually structured operations of receptivity puts us into a position to speak of experience as openness to the layout of reality. Experience enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks” 111

McDowell: “ […] Travis suggests that my condition, which as I have explained he conflates with the Condition, commits me to something akin to that conflation of two conceptions of layouts […] If someone sees that there is a red cube in front of her, that there is a red cube in front of her is, as I understand things, a direct articulation of (some of) the content of her visual experience, not, as in the conception Travis foists on me, an object of her experiential awareness. That there is a red cube in front of her is not something she sees in anything like the sense in which she sees the red cube.” 112

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112 McDowell, ‘Reply to Travis’, p. 264.
McDowell’s picture of empirical thought and answerability has two respective ‘layouts’ operating. The first is what we may call the ‘layout of the world’, the conceptual layout, which is understood as the world of fact – everything that is the case – and so its aspects are constituted by propositional contents. The complementing layout is the ‘layout of reality’. It is the non-conceptual layout, and its aspects are constituted by non-conceptual objects. Both such layouts are understood as rationally informing perceptual thought.

However, whilst the non-conceptual ‘layout of reality’ does indeed provide external constraint upon empirical thinking, it does not provide such external constraint outside of the conceptual content of experience. So understood, the ‘layout of (external) reality’ can only come to rationally inform perceptual thought via the layout that it complements, the ‘layout of the world’. In other words, the ‘layout of reality’ can only come to exert a rational influence upon empirical thought via perceptible facts.

So, whilst McDowell is adamant that his picture be seen as not conflating the two notions of ‘layout’, there are, according to his account, significant associations operating between the two layouts. Both layouts, in a sense, operate together, so that rational external constraint is provided for in empirical thought. While we certainly must be careful so as not to conflate the two respective layouts, and thus the object and content distinction, it is, however, essential to McDowell’s account that the two layouts are seen as operating in unison in the context of external constraint upon thought. Openness to one is ensured only by openness to aspects of the other.

In order to avoid unnecessary confusion between the two layouts, it is necessary to come to terms with the palpable metaphors and literal aspects of McDowell’s account. This involves providing an account of McDowell’s ‘perceptible facts’.

McDowell: “The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experience, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility.” 113

McDowell: “It would indeed slight the independence of reality if we equated facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities – acts of thinking – or represented facts as reflections of such things; or if we equated perceptible facts in particular with states or occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in sensibility – experiences – or represented them as reflections of such things. But it is not idealistic, as that would be, to say that perceptible facts are essentially capable of impressing themselves on perceivers in states or occurrences of the latter sort; and that facts in general are essentially capable of being embraced in thoughts in exercises of spontaneity, occurrences of the former sort” 114

McDowell: “On my conception, to enjoy an experience in which all goes well is simply to have a fact available to one, so that it can be normatively behind a judgment one might make” 115

To begin with, McDowell’s *Mind and World* account certainly does not make the distinction between external reality and perceptible/manifest facts as explicit as it perhaps ought to. Much confusion potentially surrounds McDowell’s notion of ‘perceptible facts’. It is precisely in this context that it is essential to maintain the distinction between the two layouts, the layout of the world of facts and the layout of the external reality of objects.

A fact, or that such and such is the case, ought not to be conceived as true propositional content in a sense removed from the object that it refers to, as if ‘facts’ and ‘objects’ were ontologically separable. The idea of a ‘perceptible fact’ – the perceiving aspect – is a means of reinforcing the incorporation of the very object in the thinkable contents of experience. We see that such and such is the case. So the contents of our thoughts, in such cases, are not

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114 Ibid, p. 28.

merely a cognitive achievement; the empirical contents are also bound to a visual achievement.

The non-conceptual object is not a fact, nor does it itself constitute a state of affairs. However the object as perceived can come to inform the facts and the thoughts which are directed towards it. Indeed the visible object so featuring is precisely what makes the content of an intuition a ‘perceptible fact’. Whilst we do not see the content of intuition, nor the content of thought, the object that is literally visible in having something in view does come to rationally inform, and can be exploited to make explicit, the content of our empirical thought. In this way, in coming to think in the sensory in conceptually shaped intuition, we at the same time enjoy ‘perceptible facts’.

As discussed above, ‘external reality’, according to McDowell’s account, can in fact rationally constrain empirical thought; however, it can only provide such constraint via the conceptual content of experience. That passively actualised content of experience can also constitute what McDowell calls ‘perceptible facts’. The content of experience, a purported ‘perceptible fact’, is indeed such a fact, on the provision that the object that it is purportedly about is related to the content of experience precisely in the right way. That is, the object is there in the subject’s surroundings and is how the content purports it to be. So, McDowell’s notion of external reality (as object) is in a sense, subsumed by, or a constituent feature of, his notion of perceptible facts.

9. ‘Impress’?

That McDowell supposes that facts ‘impress’ themselves upon us, upon our sensibility, is perhaps McDowell at his most metaphorical. The idea that in perception objects (not content) ‘impress’ themselves upon sensibility is, to be sure, already metaphorical. Unproblematically so, as in ordinary everyday language, objects are certainly said to ‘impress’ upon us in the
visual context. However the notion that facts, conceived as conceptual content, ‘impress’

themselves upon sensibility goes above and beyond the ordinary conceptions of the

intelligibility of ‘impress’. The use of such metaphors by McDowell does indeed contribute

much to the idealistic confusion surrounding his account of perceptible facts.

So given that objects unproblematically impress themselves upon us in experience, the

idea that facts ‘impress’ themselves upon us should not lead us to conclude that facts, like

objects, obtain in the layout of external reality. McDowell’s use of the term ‘impress’ in this

context can mean nothing other than a further metaphorical amplification of the notion that in

experience, conceptual content is given, and the given content is bound to receptivity – indeed

to sensibility.

So to maintain, as McDowell does, that the content of experience is a ‘perceptible fact’,

and that facts ‘impress’ themselves upon sensibility, does not mean that we literally see the

manifest/perceptible facts.116 ‘Perceptible facts’ are not literally in our surroundings, situated

in the domain of objects. We do not enter a causal relationship with facts, like we do the

objects of sight. In (veridical) perception we literally see the objects in our surroundings and

have experiences that take the facts about aspects of visual objects as their contents. This

leads us then to the notion of ‘openness to reality’.

As discussed, the image of ‘openness to reality’ is intended to capture the notion that in

perception we literally perceive, via the operations of receptivity, a reality which obtains

independently from our activity of thinking, viz., the realm of the non-conceptual. However,

even though it maintains such independence, as McDowell would have it, this external reality

which we literally perceive is not independent from the content of thought. Visible reality, the

visible ‘layout of reality’, presented to mind via the sensory, can itself come to feature in the

116 This is not to deny that seeing a ‘perceptible fact’ includes a literal aspect, viz., we literally see the objects immediately in view,

and such a seeing is necessary for a fact to count as a ‘perceptible fact’.

determination of the content of thought. So external reality, as the realm of objects, stands independent from our exercise of thinking; however, it is not situated outside of an outer boundary to what is thinkable. It comes to figure in our thinking via McDowell’s notion of perceptible or manifest facts. So, in the context of rational external constraint upon thought, we are open to reality, the reality of objects that are independent of our thinking about them, because we are open to such facts in perception. The ‘openness’ aspect of the phrasing is a metaphor meant to capture the notion that we are involuntarily given conceptual content in experience.

To reiterate, we do not literally see perceptible or manifest facts, as we literally see the objects of external reality. That would conflate the object and content of perception. Such facts manifest themselves only with the requisite conceptual articulation – be it in the context of thought or in overt speech. Hence the contents of such facts are expressible, they are not the literal object of external reality. And yet perceptible or manifest facts are only available to cognition if one is actually perceptually related to the literal objects of sight via receptivity. Understood in this way, being ‘open to facts’, also constitutes being ‘open to reality’. The literal perception of reality, the objects in our surroundings, is incorporated within McDowell’s notion of being ‘open to manifest facts’ in experience. The use of ‘openness’ illuminates the inseparable association between the two layouts – the layout of reality and the layout of the world as fact – and thus the object / content relationship in experience as McDowell understands it.

As mentioned, if all goes well, the content of experience and the content of judgment may well amount to a fact and so constitute an aspect of the world – as McDowell says: ‘when one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case’. McDowell maintains, however, that it

\[117\] McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 27.
would ‘slight the independence of reality’,\(^{118}\) if we were to equate facts with such exercises of thinking or sensible impressions.

Facts, for McDowell, have an independence which obtains beyond the mere particular exercise of thought, or how things may be impressed upon us and represented as so in passive experience. McDowell’s notion of facts which ‘obtain anyway’ therefore ought to understood as a reaction to an unacceptable idealism – a reaction that insists upon the independence of facts, as they relate to perceptual thought.

And yet the ‘reality’ McDowell is referring to above, the one potentially ‘slighted’, is indeed the non-conceptual realm of objects. Which, as discussed, is to be distinguished from the layout of perceptible facts. So McDowell is somewhat equivocal in his expressions in this context. That is, when insisting upon the ‘independence of reality’ – a reality which ‘impresses’ itself upon us in experience – McDowell does not speak of the independence of ‘objects’, rather, he speaks of the independence of ‘facts’. Such equivocalness, without a doubt, facilities certain idealist interpretations of McDowell, viz., that facts constitute the literal objects of sight.

For McDowell, in fact, independence obtains at the level of both object, in respect to external reality, and also content, in respect to facts. That is to say, the layout of both the world and external reality obtains independently from how it is represented to be in intuition, empirical thought, or overtly said to be. We can dissolve such potentially problematic equivocations, as mentioned above, by an analysis of how independent external reality itself comes to inform, externally constrain, propositional facts themselves. So that the independence of perceptible facts is accounted for (in part) in virtue of the fact that literally

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\(^{118}\) McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 28.
visible external reality is independent from our thinking – and so perceptible facts ‘obtain anyway’ because the literal objects of perception obtain anyway, outside of our thinking.

Certainly, the independence of objects goes some way in accounting for the idea that facts ‘obtain anyway’. However, this does not provide the entire account of that independence. And for this we must return to the notion of ‘how things are’, defined as ‘how things can truly be said to be’, and the content and normativity provided by social norms.

10. Independence of Facts as the Content of Social Norms

McDowell: “I have been talking in terms of thought subjecting itself to the authority of objects. And the suggestion I want to consider is about how to understand this concession of authority to objects. The concession is dictated by the norms that constitute the content of concepts, empirical concepts in particular. Those norms are what give determinate shape to the ways in which we take it to be correct to let our thinking be controlled by its subject matter. So – the proposal goes – we need to inquire into the source of the normative authority of concepts. And now, first, the self-determination idea requires that we take those norms to be laws we make for ourselves. And, second, we cannot spell out that image in terms of single individuals giving themselves the law. We can understand the authoritativeness of conceptual norms only as instituted by communal activity” 119

McDowell: “The norms that constitute the content of empirical concepts are determinations, responsive to the specifics of the world as it presents itself to us, of norms that are internal to thinking as such. So the external constraint I have been talking about, constraint by objects, is authorised from within the practice of thinking, by norms that are constitutive of the practice […] Fundamental norms for thinking cannot be seen as instituted by thinkers; as soon as one is a thinker, one is already subject to such norms.” 120

Objectivity in empirical thought, that is, thought that is answerable to the empirical world, is for McDowell not simply dictated by the non-conceptual object. Rather, the very function of verdictive answerability can be seen as dependent upon the content of social

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120 Ibid, p. 105.
norms. Social norms that not only make empirical thought possible in the first place, but which are constitutive of the very practice of thought itself.

This in essence comprises an aspect to empirical thought which could be labelled the ‘self-determined objectivity’ of empirical thinking. This similarly ensures the independence of facts from a particular exercise of thought, and yet it does not put the source of objectivity out of reason’s reach. Rather, and as will be discussed, this self-determined objectivity is a very constituent of rationality itself, such that truth itself, as it relates to verdictive answerability, is determined by the social practices which themselves make thought possible in the first place.

That McDowell associates ‘how things are’ with ‘how things can be truly sayable to be’ is only given its full significance in the context of the content of social norms. The wider picture of facts ‘obtaining anyway’ incorporates these more self-determined aspects of empirical thought, located at the level of the communal and social aspects of language and practices. While coming to define the rational self-determining capacities of all language users, the content of such social norms is also inherent in the very idea of objectivity in thought.

Of course, we are not answerable to the world of empirical facts, and then somehow answerable to something else, something further removed, like the content of social norms. Rather, as McDowell would have it, in making ourselves answerable to the world, to manifest facts, we are at the same time making ourselves answerable to the content of social norms.

In fact, as McDowell would have it, the very authority of objects over our thinking is to be understood as made possible by the content of social norms. Such norms dictate the content of our concepts – content which is understood as the manifestation of a rational response to those non-conceptual objects. And so with empirical thought understood as having a content constituted by such social norms, thought is unavoidably answerable to those
very norms. To exploit such content in thought is indeed to make oneself answerable for the correctness of the use of the relevant concepts, according to the social norms.

Because the content of social norms is inherent in the very practice of thinking, and in the content of thought itself, such normative practices are therefore operative in shaping the content of facts themselves. There is no understanding how things can be truly said to be – states of affairs – without such norms informing exactly what it is that is being asserted in the first place.

Social norms therefore provide an inherent aspect to the objectivity of thought – an aspect of the normative constraint upon empirical thought. Such practices can inform the truth or falsity of a propositional thought, because those practices determine whether or not the content of a thought can indeed be reckoned to constitute things as they are truly said to be.

Social norms thus inform all of the subject’s background practices and the very possibility of any rational relation whatsoever to any object of perception. One is not answerable to one’s own purported norms, inherently private to the individual. The truth or falsity of the content of experience, and empirical thought, thus ought to be understood as making oneself answerable to the content of those social practices. With the passive actualisation of the content of experience, and the factual content it may provide, we thus immediately and unavoidably make ourselves answerable to those self-legislated laws of normativity.

Their normative authority over thought, again what we might call the self-determined objectivity provided by social norms, therefore obtains anyway, that is, independent from a particular subject’s thought. So the authority which those norms have over one’s thinking, McDowell claims, is not a creature of one’s recognition.121 Indeed, the content of social

norms, the authority it so constitutes, is inherent in the very practice of thinking itself. As McDowell maintains, ‘as soon as one is a thinker, one is already subject to such norms’.\footnote{Ibid, p. 105.} So whilst the authority provided by social norms ought to be understood as in a sense self-legislated, the self-legislation occurs in a communal context, and so is instituted and inherited by communal activity.\footnote{Ibid, p. 105.}

So, certainly facts are independent from the exercise of thought. One aspect of this independence is due to the fact that ‘perceptible facts’ pertain to the external reality of literally visible objects in our immediate surroundings. However, that empirical facts obtain anyway can now also be understood via the notion of social norms, norms which are laws we make for ourselves. Such normative laws provide their own contribution to the picture of verdictive answerability and the overall picture of objectivity in McDowell.

11. Different Facts Available

In any particular perceptual context, the world as fact, as it functions as an external constraint upon perceptual thought, is indeed bound to the particular ‘world view’ and conceptual capacities of the individual perceiver. The available facts on offer, in any given intuition, which can be taken up in thought, are restricted to those that the particular perceiver is in fact capable of exercising in conceptual capacities, viz., judgment. If the relevant capacities are not in place, and so do not constitute a conceptual capacity of the subject, then there obtains no ability to take them up in thought, in which case they are not passively actualised in experience. So openness to the world, via the facts given in intuition, is only as extensive as the ‘world view’ in place to actualise it.
Because we are ‘open to the world’ in experience with propositional content, and the world, as stipulated by McDowell is precisely this propositional content, one’s ‘world view’ will determine just how ‘open’ one is to the manifest facts. This variance in respect to objective constraint, as I will discuss later, merely reflects the different capacities for judgment and thus freedom – different capacities for being ‘open to the world’ – which hold between subjects, given their respective ‘world views’.

So characterising the ‘objective’ as propositional thinkables also informs another critical aspect of McDowell’s ‘idealism’. McDowell’s position is idealist in the sense that the objective constraint operating upon the rational entitlement of each respective subject may differ according to the respective conceptual capacities capable of being exercised in judgment. And yet, although there may obtain this conceptual capacity variance at the individual level, this does not threaten the objective footing of ‘the world’. Objectivity as fact obtains anyway, independently of how we take, say or see the facts to be.

12. Unboundedness and Objective Purport

McDowell: “We can formulate the point in a style Wittgenstein would have been uncomfortable with: there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks is what is the case. So since the world is everything that is the case, there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world.” Of course thought can be distanced from the world by being false, but there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought.

With McDowell’s proffered reading of Kant the conceptual realm has no ‘outside’, there is no outer boundary to the conceptual, nor an outer boundary to thought. Perceptual judgment does not have to ‘break outside’ of the conceptual in order to make contact with the particulars, the objects in the surroundings, viz., the layout of external reality.

124 McDowell. Mind and World, p. 27.

125 Ibid, p. 27
McDowell’s account of how there is no such outer boundary to the conceptual is given via the passively actualised content of experience. As discussed, this given content, if true, is also a perceptible fact. So because the world is understood as everything that is the case, and sensory experience has propositional content, McDowell thus maintains that there is no gap between thought and the world.

This however, as I will now discuss, is only one aspect to the ‘no gap’, no ‘outer boundary’, picture of McDowell’s. Once again the point concerns the connection McDowell makes in *Mind and World* between the very content of thought and being answerable to experience.

Even with no gap between thought and what can be the case, there still potentially remain problematic idealist concerns. With no outer boundary to the conceptual, due to the given propositional content of experience, and McDowell’s insistence upon conceiving of the world as everything that is the case, which again is propositional content, together these two notions may nevertheless culminate in a problematic idealism – in which the independent existence of external reality (the realm of objects) is indeed slighted.

This requires further examination of McDowell notion of content, specifically the sense of empirical thought. I’ll begin with a discussion in respect to objective purport, and how empirical thought does not get its bearing upon the world from without, or from sideways on. Its objective purport, its world-directness, is rather a constituent feature of the content itself. And so this quickly brings us to Frege.

**McDowell:** “But in disallowing the question what those conceptual capacities are exercised on, I do not disallow the question what the conceptual content that are passively received in experience bear on, or are about. And the obvious answer, if the question is asked in general form, is: they are about the world, as it
appears or makes itself manifest to the experiencing subject, or at least seems to do so. That ought not to activate a phobia of idealism.”

**McDowell**: “A thought is already to the effect that things are thus-and-so. It does not acquire its bearing on the world when someone affirms it inwardly in judgement or outwardly in assertion. And when we do focus on singular terms, it needs no detail of interpretation to see that for Frege having an object in mind can only be entertaining a thought partly determined by a singular Sinn. There is no need for a further step — advancing from a thought to a truth-value — in order to arrive at a position in which one's mind is directed towards the associated Bedeutung. One's mind is already directed towards the associated Bedeutung just by virtue of entertaining a thought determined by the relevant Sinn. But the point becomes especially vivid with Evans's insight that, consistently with Frege's basic principles, a singular Sinn can actually be object-dependent. Evans's version of Fregean thinking makes it especially clear that a move from Bedeutung to Sinn is not a withdrawal from directedness at extra-mental reality”.

According to McDowell, the passively actualised content of experience – as discussed in the context of ‘appearings’ and ‘perceptible facts’ – is distinctly already bound to the sensory impressions of experience. And yet, McDowell insists that even with such inseparability of receptivity and spontaneity in experience, this ought not to prevent the idea that the passively actualised conceptual content of intuition nevertheless bears upon the world – the world here understood as the external reality of the non-conceptual. Again the point here is to mitigate against a problematic idealism.

With McDowell’s model of judgment and intuitional content, we do not begin with, or assume from the outset, the very content of empirical judgment, and thereafter undertake the task of then ensuring that it is connected with the reality outside of itself. Such an account of objective purport would, in a sense, begin at a juncture too late.

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127 McDowell, ‘Evan’s Frege’, p. 177.
Rather, judgement in McDowell’s model is the endorsement of content which is already, as given, directed towards the world. And so with the necessary endorsement, the content of empirical thought becomes one and the same with the given content of intuition – thus thought itself comes to ‘bear upon’ the world.

McDowell claims that such content is about the world as it appears to the experiencing subject. This should not be confused with the propositional ‘appearings’ which were discussed earlier. Nor should McDowell’s mention of the world as it makes itself manifest be understood as perceptible/manifest facts. The world, as it ‘appears’ to the subject, is the layout of external reality, its aspects constituted by the non-conceptual objects. This is what the propositional ‘appearings’ bear upon – the non-conceptual objects visibly in view via experience.

The content of thought bears upon the objects which are visibly before the experiencing subject. The content of intuition, as passively actualised in receptivity, thus already bears upon the world. It does this as given, no cognitive/intentional activity makes it do so. So we do not start with propositional content that is not world-directed, and move to a stance which subsequently becomes world-directed. The thought does not acquire a bearing upon the world when it is affirmed in judgment.

Now, although McDowell utilises Kant’s ‘Clue’ in the context of rational entitlement and the form of verdictive answerability, for what he sees as the necessary purpose of avoiding of the Myth of the Given, the idea that the content of intuition and judgment is intrinsically world-directed is a notion which McDowell appropriates from Frege’s model of judgment. Specifically, the content of thought, its sense, is, according to McDowell’s reading of Frege, dependent upon the object of reference, as it is visibly in view.
So it is from McDowell’s particular exploitation of the ideas of Frege that we can come to fully appreciate McDowell’s notion of the ‘unboundedness’ of the conceptual sphere. Indeed, McDowell makes it clear in *Mind and World* (and elsewhere) that the conceptual sphere is not to be associated with the predicative but rather with the Fregean realm of sense. So again, as McDowell makes clear in the Introduction to *Mind and World*, we can see how the questions of experience passing verdicts and the possibility of thought are bound together.

13. Content, Facts, Sense and Objects

**McDowell**: “The Sinn expressed in an assertoric utterance is what one says in making the utterance. What one says is, schematically, that things are thus-and-so, and that things are thus-and-so is what is the case, if one's assertion is true. And something that is the case is, in a quite intuitive way of speaking, a state of affairs.”

**McDowell**: “Something that is the case, a fact, is something that can be truly said, or thought, to be the case. A fact is a true thought, in the sense in which a thought is the Sinn expressible by a sentence, perhaps on an occasion.”

McDowell’s picture of objectivity proceeds like so: he closes the gap between (true) judgment and facts, he closes the gap between a (true) thought’s sense and facts, he then in turn closes the gap between sense/facts and the realm of reference and external reality.

As discussed previously, McDowell situates how things are and states of affairs upon the right hand side of Frege’s line, that is, upon the side of sense. This is indeed how his change in the picture of intelligibility takes shape. With this change, facts as propositional contents thereby constitute the relevant aspects of the right hand side layout of the world. This therefore implies that determinate states of affairs, facts, are associated with thinkable

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128 McDowell, ‘Evan’s Frege’, p. 177.

129 Ibid, footnote, p. 177.
contents. So in closing the gap between thought and facts, McDowell also closes a gap between sense and facts.

Thoughts are senses which are expressible by whole sentences. The sense of an utterance, of an overt expression, is what one says with that utterance. What one says is that things are thus-and-so. Now in the context of Wittgenstein’s truism, that very same thing, provided that that which is said is indeed true, can be what is the case, a perceptible fact even. So, in this way the sense of a thought can be the very same thing as that which is the case – or, otherwise conceived, a state of affairs. Therefore, according to McDowell, there is no gap between sense and fact. A fact is simply a true thought.

So closing the gap between (true) thoughts and facts is enabled by closing the gap between facts and the sense of a (true) thought. As McDowell says in the context of his reference to Wittgenstein: there is no gap between what one (truly) says and what is the case. Because content and facts are so aligned, McDowell can claim that meaning stops nowhere short of facts. The point becomes tautological, but it reveals an important aspect to McDowell’s picture. We can see that the story of meaning, thought and fact all go together. Again we can see answerability and the story of content going hand in hand.

Moreover, in McDowell’s picture, because facts and sense can be one and the same, the very object of reference comes to be incorporated into the content of thought as well as perceptible facts. I will now discuss this.

**McDowell**: “What we find in Kant is precisely the picture I have been recommending: a picture in which reality is not located outside a boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere.”

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“McDowell: “If we want to identify the conceptual realm with the realm of thought, the right gloss on “conceptual” is not “predicative” but “belonging to the realm of Fregean sense.””

“McDowell: “Evans's Frege enables a synthesis between acknowledging that contextual relations between subjects and objects matter for determining the contents of thoughts, on the one hand, and giving full weight to the idea that thinking is an exercise of rationality, on the other. This can be seen as a substantial contribution to a project that goes back at least to Kant, and that is beset with difficulties in the intellectual environment of modern philosophy: integrating our rational powers with our natural situatedness in the world.”

As already noted, McDowell’s model of the relationship between judgment and the world (as propositional fact) was such that the world and what was judged to be so were one and the same if the judgment were in fact true. So the first point to be made, and indeed the more obvious point, is that there is no distinct ontology between the world and (true) thought given their common propositional content. To assert no ontological gap in this respect is tautological given that McDowell conceives the world as the totality of propositional facts.

However, while there may be no ‘gap’ in this respect between thought and the world as fact, McDowell’s stipulation of the world (as fact) may then be susceptible to the criticism that, via mere semantics and word play, he has simply displaced the problem of thought and external reality elsewhere, that is, to the relationship between objects and thought.

So if indeed the full significance of McDowell’s purpose in respect to ‘no ontological gap’ were to be left there, that is, merely between facts and intentional thought, its greater, indeed its much deeper significance, would indeed be lost. If facts are to be understood as true propositions about external reality, a reality which obtains outside our own thinking minds, then this may yet again signify a ‘gap’, so to speak, between the content of empirical

131 McDowell, ‘Evan’s Frege’, p. 185
judgment (and facts) and its (non-conceptual) intentional object. So for McDowell to simply posit the world as the totality of facts, does not, in itself, foreclose the possibility of an ‘outer’ boundary to the conceptual – if those facts, as contents of intentional states, remain removed, or ontologically distinct, from their intentional objects.

The objects of external reality, which we literally perceive in perception, certainly exist despite the engagement of our subjective cognitive capacities. This is precisely why they (traditionally and commonsensically at least) constitute the realm of the objective, as the objects which our words and thoughts refer to.

McDowell’s intention in positing no gap between thought and that which is the case is in fact to accommodate for there being no ontological gap between mind and empirical external reality – understood as that which is made up of the very objects of reference. McDowell’s world as fact is not constituted by propositional contents that are ontologically removed from the (non-conceptual) objects they are about. And this is precisely what is required in McDowell’s account of the objective, if his picture is not to be seen as simply shifting the problem of mind and world relations elsewhere. That is to say, he needs a picture in which propositional contents can both bear, and be dependent for their very sense, upon the empirical realm of objects.

This then requires a consideration of the very constitution of the content of perceptible facts and empirical thoughts, in order to appreciate how McDowell’s no gap requirement is not secured from without as it were, but rather via the internal aspects of a proposition’s sense itself. This is indeed where McDowell’s reference to Wittgenstein’s singular demonstrative phrases attain their full significance.
It is at this juncture, therefore, that we can come to appreciate the limits of the predicative. In order to close, or prevent, any such ontological gap, between thought and the world as inhabited by non-conceptual objects, something else is required on McDowell’s part, that is, something which goes beyond the predicative, and which can bind thinkable propositional content to the non-conceptual object itself, in a way which goes beyond mere intentionality (directedness).

It is this additional aspect of thought and thinkable contents which is precisely the reason why McDowell does not come to associate the realm of the conceptual with the realm of the predicative. McDowell rather, associates the realm of the conceptual with the realm of sense. And, according to him, the realm of sense is (ontologically) dependent upon the very objects of Fregean reference.

As McDowell would have it, in order to think the world, the realm of the conceptual must be more extensive than the discursively explicit predicate of a judgement – even though the reach of the conceptual is only made possible provided that there is such predicative content in the first place.

Whilst a distinction can indeed be maintained between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, McDowell’s picture seeks to dissolve a separation between thought and object, as if propositional thought could intelligibly exist and obtain independently of the ontology of objects and how that ontology reveals itself to us, viz., in receptivity. So, when McDowell claims that there is no ‘gap’ between thought and the world, the much deeper point is made by way of McDowell’s account of meaning itself. And this immediately brings into consideration the Fregean notions of sense and reference.
McDowell: “Consider uses of demonstrative expressions that single out objects by exploiting their salient availability to perception. Describing the topic like this brings out how the determinate directedness at objects of the thoughts that can be expressed with the help of such expressions depends on contextual, and partly causal, relations between subjects and objects [...] Demonstrative senses can be fully Fregean senses that, precisely because they are partly constituted by real relations to actual objects, reach all the way to the objects.”  

McDowell: “Again, in connection with 'yesterday' and 'today', and 'here' and 'there', he (Frege) writes: In all such cases the mere wording, as it can be preserved in writing, is not the complete expression of the thought; the knowledge of certain conditions accompanying the utterance, which are used as means of expressing the thought, is needed for us to grasp the thought correctly.”

McDowell: “Such de re modes of presentation would be parts or aspects of content, not vehicles for it; no means of mental representation could determine the content in question by itself, without benefit of context, but that does not establish any good sense in which the content is not fully conceptualised.”

According to McDowell’s reading of Frege, there is no ‘gap’ between meaning, the content of what one thinks, and the object that the thought is intentionally about – what the thought bears upon. McDowell’s take on meaning, (interchangeable with) the content of thought, is such that, that which can be truly said to be the case, is bound, by way of its meaning, to the very objects it is demonstratively about. It is in this way that McDowell supposes that the realm of the conceptual, and hence the realm of thought, is not somehow self-contained or ontologically removed from external reality and the realm of objects.

McDowell, following his take on Frege, secures the very ‘meaning’ of the conceptual contents, the concepts which are actualised in intuition and thought, to those objects of external reality which are visibly afforded to us in perception. In this way the determinate sense of empirical thought is secured by way of the externally situated objects of reference.

133 McDowell, ‘Evan’s Frege’, p.175.
135 Ibid, p 287.
So it is that McDowell claims that it is external reality, as presented to one in receptivity, which provides the ‘final thinkable contents’ of empirical thought.\textsuperscript{136}

The realm of the conceptual extends in this way beyond the mere predicative. This brings into consideration particular ‘contextual’ factors. Just as contextual factors are necessary so as to determine the meaning of an utterance, so also do they put into place the final thinkable contents of the thought itself. Just as McDowell posited ‘samples’ as providing such a role in the case of demonstratives, so as to thwart the possibility of a role for the non-conceptual, McDowell’s ‘minimal empiricism’ can be seen as resting upon a wider, general, application of such contextual factors in informing and determining the sense of an ostensible empirical thought.

McDowell, by way of utilising singular demonstrative terms, sought to intelligibly incorporate the sheer breadth of sensible/sensory features of perception into conceptual capacities. He did this by supposing that the particular sense of those demonstrative expressions was bound to their particular contextual situation, such that the sensible properties themselves came to inform the sense of those words and predicates which can be overtly expressed. McDowell thus uses the same operandi, that is, the contextual factors, in order to accommodate for the very object of perception into his account of meaning, thought and thinkable contents.

In having an object in mind, the thought about it is already partly determined by a singular sense. The singular sense is indeed object dependent. The thought is already directed towards the associated object of reference. And so the world-directedness of thought is not merely a notion which pertains to issues of answerability, it is also relevant to the very sense, the meaning of the intentional stance, as itself dependent upon the objects of reference. So

\textsuperscript{136} McDowell, \textit{Mind and World}, p. 29.
that just as meaning doesn’t stop anywhere short of the fact, meaning is itself dependent upon the external reality that it bears upon.
B. Objectivity in Travis

1. Judgement and ‘Things Being As They Are’

_Travis:_ “Judging is exposure to error (so, too, correctness) decidable solely by things being as they are […] For a given judging, things being as they are may be their being as judged, or, again, their being otherwise […]” 137

_Travis:_ “That truth can depend on how things are in that way — in the way how things are settles whether there is meat on the rug, e.g. — is also part of the unfolding of the concept truth: of what it is and may be. Yet it is not laws of logic which settle that, or when, this is so. Nor do they touch on the relevant relata. Things being such as to make it true to say that there is meat on the rug is not a relation between one conceptual item and another — though, of course, if they are such, then it is so that there is meat on the rug. This is just, once again, the lesson of Frege’s line.

So reason’s reach is not the same as logic’s reach; and could not be if logic is to have any reach at all. The assumption crucial to the idea of a myth is not so justified […]”138

_Travis:_ “But the non-conceptual — things being as they are, or a thing being as it is — can settle our questions what to think only if we can appreciate, grasp, its bearing on what is so.”139

Travis employs the notion of ‘things being as they are’, much like McDowell, to grammatical situate that to which we are normatively answerable in perceptual judgment. Travis, however, in accordance with his rational entitlement picture, posits things being as they are decisively upon the left-hand side of Frege’s line, with non-conceptual objects. Hence, things being as they are becomes associated with the non-conceptual layout of the reality, and not the layout of the world as fact.

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137 Travis, ‘Reason’s Reach’, p. 245.
138 Ibid p. 245
139 Ibid, p. 234.
Travis conceives conceptual representations as only manifesting with judgment, via recognition and as a rational response to the non-conceptual. That which normatively determines the correctness of such representations are precisely the non-conceptual objects. Reason’s reach, in the context of perceptual judgment, necessarily extends outside of itself and to the non-conceptual, and so beyond the internal logical relations of propositional contents.

So, while the function of experience may facilitate the normative determination of the judgment, that function operates via a mere bringing into view of the non-conceptual object. Travis has that which is visibly in view as what normatively determines the correctness of judgment: it can pass verdicts as it is visually present – in the form of the sensible alone, outside of the conceptual domain. It does not pass verdicts as something in propositional form, and nor do the verdict-dictating objects ‘speak to us’. In this way Travis situates things being as they are as constituting the realm of the objective, with the verdict-dictating non-conceptual objects immediately in view in perception.

Propositional thought is thus answerable, according to Travis, to that which obtains outside thinkable content. So there is in fact a boundary to the conceptual in Travis’s picture, and beyond that boundary, lies a space for objectivity in empirical thought. Travis thinks that in providing for a picture of perception, for sensibility, in which it is a mere having in view, he has at the same time provided for ‘objectivity’ in thought – as that which is (silently) brought into view by perception.

However, as will be discussed, Travis’s placing of the objective in perceptual judgment beyond the boundary of the conceptual is perhaps not as obviously problematic as McDowell would suppose. Indeed, there is a mutual interdependence between the subjective and the objective, so that each can come to function as they do. Indeed, things being as they are can
settle a question for oneself in respect to what to think, only if the relevant conceptual
capacity is in place, so that one can appreciate its bearing upon thought. Such mutual
interdependence is a characteristic which will be explored in the following discussion, and
furthermore in Chapter 3 in respect to self-determining capacities.

2. Frege’s Line: and Recognition

To reiterate material already discussed in Chapter 1, the Fregean division between the
conceptual and the non-conceptual is not itself an issue in dispute between Travis and
McDowell. Nor is there disagreement between distinguishing propositional content, as being
general in form, and the non-conceptual object of perception, as an instance of the conceptual.
However, Travis and McDowell do differ as to which side of Frege’s line provides the
normative ‘verdicts’ for perceptual judgments.

As discussed, McDowell supposes, on the pain of the Myth of the Given, that only
conceptual content can intelligibly provide such ‘verdicts’, i.e. the truth status of a perceptual
judgement is determined by conceptual content, perceptible facts, which for him are situated
upon the right hand side of Frege’s line – the side of sense.

By contrast, Travis maintains that only the non-conceptual can perform the verdictive
role. The particular instance, situated upon the left-hand side of Frege’s line, provides the
normative verdicts upon perceptual judgment. This is due to Travis’s account of the
conceptual and recognition in such cases. Conceptual actualisation with propositional content
is manifest only in an exercise of recognition, and recognising a certain instance, as an
instance of a kind, is necessarily to judge something to be the case. To draw upon capacities
for recognition, and so to judge something to be thus and so, is to expose oneself to error.
Since to judge is to ‘commit’ oneself to a state of affairs, to things being a certain way.
So, for Travis, it is only with the recognition of instancing relations, and the notion of commitment, that questions of truth and falsity emerge. The recognition of such instancing relations is also representative of the objective-subjective dynamics in perceptual thought.

As discussed, the propositional content of perceptual judgment necessarily extends beyond itself – due to the instancing relation. This again is part of Travis’s account of reason’s reach extending beyond the conceptual. It extends outside of itself in the sense in which empirical thought is necessarily intentionally about, or directed towards, the object of perception. Because propositional content always extends beyond itself, and manifests itself in the first place only with the recognition of that which it purports to reach to, propositional content itself cannot give the required verdictive answerability that judgment so requires.

Given that the conceptual is only engaged with recognitional capacities, and the content is understood as general in form, Travis supposes that only something which lacks such generality, that which is recognised as an instance of a kind, and which is beyond the powers of the mind to shape and determine, can assume the mantle of the objective. Verdictive answerability is hence situated, not only beyond the subjective committed propositional attitude of the perceiver, but beyond propositional content per se. There is no role whatsoever for the perceptible facts of McDowell.

3. Perception, Non-conceptual Objects, and Verdicts

Travis’s notion of the ‘silence of the senses’ supposes that the role, or the function of experience, is merely to bring the immediate surroundings into view. Perception provides us visual acquaintance with the non-conceptual. This is the only function required of experience.

As Travis would have it, it is not the function of experience itself to recognise or ‘commit’ oneself, nor is it to expose oneself to error, as drawing upon recognition necessarily
does. The task of perception is merely to bring into view the non-conceptual objects in our surroundings. Perception thus cannot misrepresent states of affairs, rather, this is something which only perceptual judgment can do. In merely perceiving objects, no questions of truth are applicable. Questions of truth are only applicable to conceptual representation. The objects which we perceive – and to which our judgments are answerable – are simply there. Perception reveals how things are by affording us visual acquaintance with them, thus making them available for recognition. As Travis sees things, that which is brought into view by perception, the particular instances of conceptual representation, are also what provide the ‘verdicts’ upon the relevant perceptual judgements.

So in the context of recognition and the instancing relation, perception of the non-conceptual facilitates such verdicts, simply by having the non-conceptual object in view, that is, the particular object towards which a perceptual judgment is intentionally directed. The object itself supplies those verdicts, from outside the realm of the conceptual and thinkable content. In this way do the surroundings hold sway upon thought.

So in the same way that Travis extends the space of reasons to those non-conceptual objects which stand outside the conceptual, Travis has made a cognitively significant space for that which is not amenable to questions of veracity. The non-conceptual instances, as outside the error prone exercises of conceptual capacities, thus assume the position of ‘objectivity’ in Travis’s picture. The objective is that which is immediately in view in perception. The visible objects of sight, as they are, in themselves outside of conceptual representation, assume the epistemic status of the objective.
4. Social Aspects of Verdictive Answerability

Travis: “Thought’s social nature means: I think things to be some given way only where some extendible range of thinkers would agree (and agree with me) sufficiently as to what would count as things being that way; only where, so to speak, there is a (potential) community of agreement (or of agreers) [...]”

McDowell maintained that answerability to objects was to be understood via the content of social norms. This is what I called the self-determined objectivity which was operable in verdictive answerability. As a background capacity, the content of such norms was understood as a (communal) rational response to the world which presented itself through experience. Conceptual content constituted by these norms was the actualised content of experience, and if on occasion true, it was the very content to which judgment was verdictively answerable, and the content which would be endorsed in judgment.

Now, according to Travis’s picture of perception, only with recognition, and the actualisation of conceptual capacities in judgment, in respect to the particular instance in view, can one enter the realm of the normative, and only thus does verdictive answerability become applicable. However, the complete story of verdictive answerability is not limited merely to the non-conceptual object as it obtains outside of propositional thought. Indeed, more can be said in respect to how the non-conceptual comes to bear upon perceptual thought – and specifically, in respect to the social norms which feature so prominently in McDowell’s picture of answerability.

So it is necessary to illuminate the connection between an instance of a kind, located on the left-hand side of Frege’s line, with a community’s capacity to determine the sense of that

140 Travis, ‘Thought’s Social Nature’ p. 4.
which would count as an instance of a kind. What emerges, in Travis’s account, is that to have a conceptual capacity is to have a sense as to what would count as an instance of a way for things to be. It is that sense which also comes to characterise a community. And it is also that sense which makes possible the capacity for empirical judgment which aims at truth.

In judgment, conceptual capacities are drawn upon in recognising and committing to that which is visibly in view as an instance of a kind, that is, as belonging to a certain range of cases. To purportedly recognise an instance, as a way for things to be, is not only to commit oneself to how things are, in respect to the particular instance in view, but it is at the same time, by way of the use of concepts, to submit oneself to the correct use of those concepts. So that upon that recognition one enters a normative space.

However, it is a normative space which is not limited to propositional content – to how things are represented to be. It incorporates and extends to the instance, which stands independently from the content brought about via recognition, and it does this via the shared ‘sense’ of a community. This notion therefore complements Travis’s extension of the space of reasons to the non-conceptual object, situated outside of his posited realm of the conceptual.

Now, according to Travis, that which is within our self-determining power to determine, what our minds can shape and influence, is the articulation of the non-conceptual. What we articulate in perceptual judgment is a ‘way for things to be’. And yet, in so articulating the non-conceptual via recognition, the correct use of those concepts in judgment is not individually self-determined. Indeed, those concepts have content, and a reach to a particular range of cases, which is determined outside of one’s self, and outside of how they are applied in a particular contextual setting to an immediate object of perception.
Travis maintains that ‘a way for things to be’ is only possible where a community of thinkers can agree as to what would count as things being that way. With the community defined as sharing an ability to think the thing in question. So conceptual capacities are acquired in a communal setting, they depend upon shared practices, and in order to intelligibly align conceptual content – the ways in which we speak – with the world – the way things are – conceptual capacities depend upon a shared sense of agreement on how the two sides of the sensible and non-sensible (non-conceptual and conceptual) are rationally bound.

So, the social nature of propositional thought, as something which is intrinsically general and sharable, is also complemented by the fact that that which counts as a particular instance of such a thought is a matter determined by social practices also. To recognise something as an instance of a kind is to immediately engage a conceptual capacity, whose correctness of use is determined by an (actual or hypothetical) collective group who share a sense as to whether the particular purported instance would indeed qualify as counting as such.\textsuperscript{141}

So, via this notion of sense, and community, we can see that, in Travis’s picture, by drawing upon recognitional capacities in judgment, both sides of the instancing relation become normatively significant in determining the truth of a particular perceptual judgment. Both the articulation of a way for things to be and the way things are in themselves.

\textsuperscript{141} Travis, ‘Thoughts Social Nature’, p. 2.
C. Later McDowell

1. McDowell’s Revised Account of Intuition and Objectivity

McDowell’s new account of conceptual experience is one which yet again attempts to navigate a course in between Davidson and Travis. In spirit with Davidson, McDowell, so as to avoid the Myth of the Given, works with a notion of rational entitlement according to which ‘reason’s reach extends no further than conceptual capacities can take it’. And under pressure from Travis, he offers an account of intuitional content that more perspicuously captures the idea that intuition is a having in view of the object.

However, there are some interesting anomalies in McDowell’s revised picture of experience and objectivity. Whilst rational entitlement stems from the object presented via intuitional content, and so gives external constraint upon thought, that content itself is not that to which we are verdictively answerable.

So, where McDowell’s picture of verdictive answerability was such that experience could intelligibly pass verdicts upon thought because it (1) incorporated the object of perception and (2) encompassed content constituted by social norms, his picture is now such that there is a break between verdictive answerability and external constraint upon thought.

The content of intuition provides the external constraint upon thought, and is the content from which rational entitlement stems in the two kinds of rational entitlement; however, the content itself does not in itself provide for verdictive answerability. Indeed, the conceptual content constituted by social norms, that in the Mind and World paradigm allowed for
answerability to objects under those norms, now only enters the picture at the level of judgment and recognition.

2. Experience, Recognition and Answerability

While McDowell draws closer to Travis’s notion of recognition with perception as a mere ‘bringing into view’, he remains steadfast in his commitment to avoiding the Myth of the Given. Indeed, avoiding the Myth of the Given is no less a requirement of McDowell’s picture of ‘objectivity’ in empirical thought, than it is in the rational entitlement picture. While it may be that McDowell no longer supposes that experience has propositional content, experience nevertheless remains conceptual, with distinctively intuitional content posited as the new means of avoiding the Myth.

The upshot of this, however, is that, all things considered, even with such intuitional content, McDowell requires no less than a picture of the objective in which verdictive relations obtain only between propositional contents. Nothing in McDowell’s revised account would imply that perceptual judgment is no longer ultimately answerable to how things are – which, on McDowell’s account, is the world as propositional fact, with facts having contents constituted by social norms. So perceptual judgment is determined true on account of how things can be truly said to be, and not merely the given content of intuition.

Now Travis’s model of recognition posits a relation between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, which in turn demarcates the divide between the objective and the subjective. McDowell, for his part, can accommodate Travis’s instancing relation. Yet McDowell remains adamant, in order to avoid the Myth of the Given, in the context of answerability, that the non-conceptual, situated outside the conceptual, cannot dictate verdicts upon thought.
As a consequence, McDowell’s model of experience and recognition does not give the non-conceptual object the role of normatively determining perceptual judgment, as does Travis’s model. So, while rational entitlement stems from intuitional content, which brings into view the non-conceptual object of perception, thought nevertheless remains answerable to propositional facts, which precisely do not constitute the content of experience itself. These are facts that intuition puts us in a position to recognise, given suitable expertise.

So, in the context of recognition and the instancing relation, we are verdictively answerable to the factual propositional content which is actualised in recognising an instancing relation, and not to the non-conceptual instance recognised, as Travis would have it. Of course, in this way are we also answerable to the non-conceptual object, but only via the conceptual, propositional content which involves concepts drawn upon in recognition. And we are not verdictively answerable to the non-discursive intuitional content, outside of the propositional content.

3. ‘Experience and Revelation

McDowell: “[...] I think experience directly reveals things to be as they are believed to be in perceptual beliefs, or at least seems to do that. But it is hard to make that cohere with supposing experiences have the same kind of content as beliefs”\(^{142}\)

McDowell: “It would be right to say I am unlike this other person in that I see that the bird is a cardinal; my experience reveals to me that it is a cardinal. But that is no problem for what I am proposing. Such locutions — ‘I see that ...’, ‘My experience reveals to me that ...’ — accept, in their ‘that ...’ clauses, specifications of things one’s experience puts one in a position to know noninferentially. That can include knowledge that experience makes available by bringing something into view for someone who has a suitable recognitional capacity.”\(^{143}\)

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In the context of clarifying his revised account of rational entitlement McDowell claims that experience *reveals* things to be the way they would be judged to be in judgments. That experience is revelatory in this way is relevant to both kinds of rational entitlement, both that which involves the drawing upon recognitional capacities and the ‘carving out’ of aspects of intuition.

In respect to McDowell’s revised account which involves recognition, the non-conceptual object – which does not as of yet draw upon the recognitional capacities of the perceiver – is merely ‘visually present’. We can see this in respect to the two subjects who are afforded the very same visual experience, yet who differ in respect to certain conceptual capacities. As McDowell claims in the context of the cardinal example: experiences may indeed be much the same in that the bird is in a sense ‘visually present’ to both. However, in the case of the subject with the relevant conceptual capacity, which involves drawing upon capacities of recognition, that the particular instance in view falls under, experience (directly) reveals to the subject that the thing in view is a cardinal.

In the context of this notion of revelation, McDowell’s revised rational entitlement picture, offers an account of experience, just like Travis, as a merely having in view; and in respect to experience as (directly) revealing, a merely having in view of the particular (recognised) instance. Importantly, however, as McDowell would have it, such revelation occurs via intuitional content. It is only by way of the given intuitional content that experience (given suitable expertise) can so *reveal* particular non-conceptual objects of perception to be instances of a certain kind. So it is only through the content of intuition that the non-conceptual instance – that which is immediately revealed in experience – can come to have the rational significance that it does.
Furthermore, and what remains an important distinction between Travis’s account and McDowell’s revised account, is that how things are, according to McDowell, is not (as Travis would have it) associated with the particular instance directly in view (something on the left hand side of Frege’s line). McDowell refuses to allow the non-conceptual objects, as so revealed via intuitional content, to assume the objective role of how things are.

Travis maintains that the instancing-relation of recognition brings into being a verdictive relationship between thought and the non-conceptual object. McDowell’s picture, in contrast, supposes that drawing upon recognitional capacities, only facilitates an entry, so to speak, into a normative domain wherein the relevant contents of social norms and that which can truly be said to be the case normatively determine the veracity of the purported judgment. So, even with McDowell’s account of recognitional entitlement, we remain answerable to factual propositional content, rather than the non-conceptual instance which stands revealed.

Whilst the relevant object, recognised in a perceptual judgment as an instance of a kind, does indeed have a rational significance which makes possible experience as revelatory, the object does not then acquire the verdict-dictating status that it does in Travis’s picture. The object, as revealed in experience, only has its rational significance as it is incorporated in the propositional content. So that, that which is revealed itself only enters into the space of reasons as incorporated within the specification of that which is claimed to be true in relation to it.

In sum, McDowell accommodates for Travis’s insistence that perception is a mere having in view, however, he maintains that experience only reveals via his posited notion of intuitional content, and that the non-conceptual object which is directly revealed in experience to be the instance of a kind is not that to which we stand in verdictive relations. Despite the
changes in McDowell’s picture of experience and perceptual judgement – an outcome of certain pressures from Travis – the notion of how things are, as that to which we are verdictively answerable, remains bound to true propositional contents viz., to facts.

4. Forgotten Aspects

With the change in McDowell’s account of intuitional content, some significant aspects of focus in Mind and World, and the associated vocabulary, go missing. No longer is there reference to ‘perceptible facts’, nor to experience as passing ‘verdicts’ upon thought. In Avoiding the Myth of the Given, McDowell only refers to the Myth in the context of the necessity for conceptual content in respect to rational entitlement, he does not refer explicitly to ‘the world as fact’ nor to answerability to experience – notions which lent intelligibility to his navigating a path through the Myth and Davidson’s unconstrained Coherentism, invoking conceptual content bound to receptivity.

Of course the picture of entitlement is bound to the picture of objectivity. Changes in the former unavoidably alter the picture of the latter. With the introduction of intuitional content and the two notions of rational entitlement, recognition and ‘carving out’, rational relations between judgement and the world as the content of experience do not figure as such in the revised story. Indeed, the disparity in respect to the content of judgment and facts as true propositional content, and the given content of intuition – despite McDowell insisting upon their common conceptual status – is one which creates incongruities in the picture of objectivity, as McDowell conceived it in Mind and World. So that strictly speaking, we are not verdictively answerable to the content of experience.
5. Verdicts

In *Mind and World*, McDowell supposed that experience could intelligibly pass verdicts upon empirical thought, because the content of experience was propositional. In so binding the world and verdictive answerability to that which could be truly said, it was therefore not such a difficult task to suppose that the content of experience, as the world, could pass such verdicts upon reflective judgement. The content of experience was that things are thus and so, and if the experience was veridical, that content was factual – it revealed how things are by way of its truth purporting content.

That discursive content, in veridical cases, was understood as factual and itself the furthermost limit of objectivity – because the facts themselves incorporated external reality. How things are was associated with how things can truly said to be, and being discursive in kind, ‘verdicts’ came to be utilised as an appropriate metaphor – given that the content of experience in a sense ‘spoke’ to you and ‘told’ you how things are,\(^\text{144}\) according to such conceptual capacities as were in place in your case.

In the new picture however, the metaphor of experience as passing verdicts is strictly speaking, no longer relevant. This is because, as has been previously discussed, intuitional content, to be right in letter, is strictly speaking, as the given, non-discursive content. As a consequence, McDowell’s metaphor of experience as passing verdicts is really no longer adequate to capture the function of intuition as he would now have it.

Even if we grant McDowell the intelligibility of ‘putting together’ discursive significances in thought, he himself acknowledges that those significances are not separately

\(^{144}\) McDowell says: “I do not picture objects as speaking to us in the world’s own language. Objects speak to us, in the metaphor that fits the position I am urging, only because we have learned a human language [...] the point is that objects come into view for us only in actualisations of conceptual capacities that are ours.” - McDowell, ‘The Logical Form of an Intuition’, in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, p. 43.
thinkable. They obtain their significances only in the context of featuring predicatively in a whole propositional content. Moreover, with thought and sense understood as bound to the whole propositional unit, questions of answerability and truth aptness are similarly only applicable at the level of whole propositional contents. They do not arise at a sub-propositional level. So in this way we can see that, even with the content of intuition ‘carved out’ and associated with discursive expressions, the content of intuition itself is not that which can pass verdicts upon empirical thought, nor can it be that to which we are answerable.

As will be shown, intuitional content no doubt figures in the picture of answerability; however, we are not answerable to it, outside of discursive articulation, and its ‘association’ with propositional units.

6. Intelligibility of Normativity

McDowell’s picture of normativity in *Mind and World* was such that experience and judgement were normatively related because the content of experience was of the same kind as that of judgment, with the contents becoming one and the same with the respective endorsement. Experience could thus intelligibly participate in such normative relations with thought because receptivity was inextricably bound to conceptual content.

It made sense to intelligibly extend normative relationships to experience itself because receptivity was afforded a space in which it was configured with the content provided by social norms. McDowell’s Sellarsian empiricism had one’s ‘world view’ as implicated in experience itself, and as discussed, this included the actualisation of content enabled by norms and practices belonging to a community of language users. The picture of normativity was thus assisted in its intelligibility via these social norms – indeed, normative relations were understood as the rational relations between contents constituted by social norms.
McDowell’s move was to incorporate into receptivity content which those norms provided, so as to integrate the very object of thought – that which provided external constraint – into the normative picture. In this way the concepts were intelligibly bound to their subject matter, and the use of those concepts was normatively determined by their purported subject matter. Again, the questions of empirical content and answerability were bound together.

As discussed, McDowell does of course insist upon a notion of ‘answerability’ in which we are answerable to the objects of perception. We are answerable to the objects because we experience the objects via sensory intuition, and in intuition, the objects as perceived, passively actualise our conceptual capacities. The object is intelligibly authoritative in empirical thought, because the object, as it can figure in cognition, does so via propositional content. So the authority of objects is bound to the conceptual content of experience.

In McDowell’s picture, the social norms of thought make possible that very content of intuition. Objects have authority over empirical thought because the norms which constitute the content of concepts dictate that authoritative position. This is how empirical thought is intelligibly informed by the subject matter of experience. The source of the normative authority of concepts is understood as those norms which specify the content of those very concepts. Such norms specify what counts as a reason for what, i.e. what content can serve as a reason for what. So, when McDowell speaks of the concepts which are passively actualised in experience, those concepts are given the content which they have by those norms. In this way the norms of thought are intelligibly implicated in the very content of experience, and hence, answerability to the objects of perception is implicated in that content.

These norms are determinative of the content of concepts and are internally constitutive of the practice of thinking. As McDowell says, to be a thinker is to be subject to such norms. To draw upon and exercise the content of those norms, norms which are constitutive of
thought, is to make oneself immediately answerable to their appropriate exercise (correctness is determined by the norms – it is internal to them). As discussed, to be answerable in thought is to be answerable to such norms. So we are answerable to the objects of perception, as that which externally constrains thought, because the authority of that constraint is made possible from within the practice of thinking, because the norms are constitutive of the practice of thought.\textsuperscript{145}

Whilst the object is externally constraining (upon judgement), the norms of thought are not externally constraining with respect to thinkable content; they rather, are inherent to thought and thinkable content itself. Those norms which are implicated in the passively actualized content of experience thus determine the correctness of perceptual judgment, not as an external aspect to thinkable content, but rather, they serve as an internal authority which informs both the very possibility of thought and the correctness of use of concepts.

This chimes well with the idea of there being no boundary to the conceptual and to thought in McDowell’s picture. Thus we can see how McDowell’s picture of objectivity is very much integrated with social norms. The bounds of thought are commensurable with the social norms internal to thinkable content. Those norms make the content of experience possible in the first place.

Answerability, although to objects themselves, is nevertheless answerability to communal norms. The capacity to recognise the requirements of reason is acquired by initiation into communal practices. The authority of the norms is not individually self-instituted. So we get in McDowell a notion of objectivity, in which that which can truly be said to be the case, in the context of those norms of thought, is also necessarily a communal activity.

\textsuperscript{145} McDowell, ‘Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint’, p.105.
So, in McDowell’s *Mind and World* account, we were presented with two aspects to the picture of objectivity in thought – that is, to verdictive answerability, viz., the self-determined objectivity provided by the content of social norms, and also, the object of perception itself. As will be discussed, with the shift in McDowell’s account of intuitional content, we can now see a separation of sorts between these two aspects of verdictive answerability, that is, as they come to figure in McDowell’s picture of intuition and perceptual judgment.

Intuition as a mere having in view of the object does not involve the content constituted by social norms. Only with discursive articulation, and recognition, do we now get such propositional content. So there is a ‘fracturing’ of sorts in McDowell’s new picture. McDowell’s picture of objectivity in perceptual thought is left with the counterintuitive position that we are no longer verdictively answerable to the content of experience itself.

7. The Fracturing of Objectivity

McDowell’s *Mind and World* picture of objectivity centred around the idea of answerability to the content of experience, content which was made available by communal practices and social norms, inherent to thought. Now, however, propositional content (standing as a reason and in normative relations with judgement) is removed from intuition itself. The manifestation of discursive content is now displaced to the function of the exercise of judgement, according to the two respective rational entitlement pictures put forward by McDowell. The exclusion of propositional content thereby entails the removal of content constituted by the social norms of thought from intuition itself – and hence the relevance of answerability to those norms at the level of intuitional content.

So the way in which I wish to further explore this ‘fracturing’ of McDowell’s picture of objectivity is by exploiting a distinction between the norms of thought, as providing the
content of thought, as dictated by communal practice – and sensory intuition, which in McDowell’s revised account, is understood as a mere having in view, lacking in discursive content. This in effect marks a break between that which provides ‘external constraint’ (and rational entitlement), now conceived as the object as it is present in intuition, and McDowell’s picture of verdictive answerability.

With this distinction between the exercise of concepts in judgment, and intuition as providing the requisite non-discursive acquaintance with what those concepts are about, McDowell’s revised picture is one such that the content of intuition whereby an object in our surroundings comes to be directly in view is not that to which we are verdictively answerable to. Rather, we remain answerable to facts about those objects made available by the social norms posited in the *Mind and World* paradigm – facts that ‘go beyond’ the content of experience as given. This is despite the fact that the acquaintance with objects which perception supplies us with is nevertheless a necessary constituent of the revised normative picture involving articulation and recognition.

8. *New Picture of Answerability: Answerability Only With the Discursive*

In *Mind and World*, McDowell assumed that, in perception, the content of experience gave propositional content, yet without endorsement. And yet the manifold of content given was nevertheless subject to determinations of truth or falsity. As discussed, that is because that which was given was meaningful content, a sense. Still, however, the given thinkable content of experience in no way committed one to a state of affairs, a factual assertion of how things are.

Now, Davidson claimed that the problem with propositional content in experience was that it supposed that content could obtain which had no ‘subjective probability’ – a
propositional attitude for which we have no word (a neutral attitude). And in a similar vein of
thought, Travis himself, made much of the fact that for propositional content to be subject to
truth or falsity, required commitment, so that only commitments are right or wrong.

So McDowell’s *Mind and World* paradigm either fell into the trap of asserting a kind of
incoherent unendorsed uncommitted propositional attitude, or it agreed that experience with
propositional content was in fact a ‘taking to be’, i.e. it was something that committed one to
something. McDowell in fact took the latter course. In *Avoiding the Myth of the Given*,
McDowell readily admits that if experience has such propositional content, it is hard to deny
that experiencing is a taking things to be so.

In McDowell’s revised rational entitlement picture, with the articulation of intuitional
content into propositional content, and recognition with propositional content, you get
endorsement for free, so to speak. So it is not the role of judgment merely to endorse a given
content of intuition, endorsement and judgement come with discursive articulation, and with
the recognition of that which is visibly in view. Commitment comes with thinkable
propositional content in one’s rational response to intuition (sensory impressions).

With the discursive articulation of the intuitional given, or in recognition, one is therefore
immediately making oneself ‘answerable’ to social norms. Answerability is an intrinsic aspect
to the use of concepts and their content, and hence the utilisation of those norms which are
engaged in discursively articulating that given in intuition, or in recognising something on the
basis of that given in intuition.

Before any such engagement of norms, as intrinsic to thought itself, intuition in itself,
does not, however, purport anything to be true or false. It does not commit oneself, in the way

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146 Travis, ‘Unlocking the Outer World’, p. 18.
of a judgment. There is no discursive conceptual content, no involvement of norms, which are to be determined as correctly or incorrectly applied. Intuition as a merely bringing into view means that as such, there is nothing to think, nothing thought, and nothing which is purported to be the case. As lacking truth or falsity in this way, there is in fact nothing to be shared – nothing which is itself in a communicable form – and nothing which is communal in nature. In respect to the empirical world, only that content which can be true or false is something which is communal, and accordingly has a distinct social quality. The content of intuition does, however, provide the necessary ‘external constraint’ upon thought.

9. External Constraint

McDowell, in *Mind and World*, made much of the fact that empirical thought required ‘external constraint’, constraint which was understood as a function of receptivity. Nevertheless, the form in which that constraint operated upon empirical judgment was conceptual, propositional content. As I discussed, this then gave a dimension to external constraint which was not only receptive in character, but also constituted by social norms. Now, of course, external constraint was primarily concerned about incorporating receptivity into the entitlement picture, the motivation was the same as avoiding the Myth; however, in deference to the requirements of the intelligibly normative, that external constraint had to operate via the given propositional content. In a sense, receptivity as external constraint was reconciled with the social norms of normativity. They both operated in one and the same given content of experience.

However, McDowell’s requirement for external constraint only required the rational integration of receptivity into the picture of entitlement. The fact that the basic unit of conceptual content was propositional was a (seeming) necessity coming from normativity –
Davidson’s amended dictum. Importantly, it was not a pressure emanating from the external
constraint aspect.

In McDowell’s new picture, however, the social norms which once made possible the
intelligibility of incorporating external constraint within normativity are such that they do not
figure in the given content itself, but rather, merely in the actualisation of discursive
conceptual content in the process of judgment. Whilst the intuitional content can figure in that
process, as external constraint, questions in respect to the correctness of the application of
those norms only arise at the level of judgment.

So now at the level of the passively actualised content of receptivity, the aspect of
normativity is such that the given content does in a sense determine the judgments which are
to be made, but that does not coincide with determining their normative status as true of false.
Verdictive answerability has thus expanded beyond the given content of experience, beyond
the function of external constraint.

So normative constraint upon judgment, rather than external constraint, is not a story
which can simply appeal to the actualised content of experience. The story of normative
constraint upon judgement extends to the content of norms which obtain outside the content
actualised in intuition itself. Of course those norms were accommodated for in *Mind and
World* by the content of intuition itself. Now those norms are accounted for outside the
external constraint of receptivity. The world view of the subject is something which informs
the judgment, and it informs it outside of the function of intuitional content. So receptivity,
operating as a normative constraint upon thought, is much diminished in McDowell’s new
account.
Normative constraint, as verdictive answerability upon empirical thought, is something which necessarily exceeds the ‘external constraint’ function as provided by the content of experience. The actualized content of intuition, bound to receptivity, is surpassed by that which can truly be said to be the case. In this way the normative constraint upon judgment and the external constraint upon judgment are not functionally commensurable, that is, they are not acting as one and the same function. We can see this as an aspect of McDowell’s change of models, under pressure from Travis.

10. *External Constraint by Intuition as not Constraint by the Facts*

McDowell’s shift from propositional content to intuitional content also implies that perceptible facts are no longer operating as the means via which external constraint applies to perceptual judgement, at least not as external constraint is given. This is because the perceptible facts, as with judgement, come to figure in the account only with discursive articulation or recognition. Facts are not the given content of experience. So external constraint upon judgement there may be, in the form of intuitional content, but, as such, that unarticulated constraint is not constraint by the facts.

Where receptivity was once inseparable from the propositional content of intuition, content which was no less than a fact, receptivity now in itself has less than factual content. Hence normative constraint upon judgment necessarily extends beyond the (intuitional) content given by mere receptivity, despite its remaining within the realm of the conceptual.
11. Shift to a Focus upon the Object

**McDowell**: “Intuitions as I have explained them directly bring objects into view through bringing their perceptible properties into view. Intuitions do that precisely by having the kind of content they have.”

**McDowell**: “The entitlement derives from the presence to one of the object itself, not from a premise for an inference, at one’s disposal by being the content of one’s experience.”

McDowell remarks that his new picture is one in which rational entitlement stems from the object and its properties. Indeed he is eager to note that there is very much a shift of emphasis in this respect, compared to his *Mind and World* paradigm. It was not that the object of perception did not feature in the earlier account; rather, what McDowell has now moved away from is how that object entitled, viz., by way of propositional content.

Now of course, as discussed, Travis himself has a picture in which rational entitlement stems from the non-conceptual object itself, and to that object we are answerable in our judgments. So, in both respective pictures of objectivity, the object was intended to provide external constraint upon thought, and so was normatively bear upon it. For Travis it did this outside of propositional content, whereas for McDowell it did this within the passively actualised content of experience.

In order to avoid the Myth of the Given, McDowell insisted upon the fact that the object only functioned as external constraint via verdict-dictating content situated upon the side of Fregean sense. As McDowell saw it, those, such as Travis, who espoused a notion of rational entitlement and answerability which went beyond propositional content, and thus the content of social norms, inevitably fall foul of the Myth of the Given.

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Now I have remarked on the problems faced by McDowell in investing experience with propositional content. So, in his revised account, McDowell breaks down the function of external constraint, as the intuited object in view, and normativity, as that to which we are verdictively answerable. In this way, he situates rational entitlement outside propositional content, and acquires external constraint upon judgment from the object in view via distinctively intuitional content, without at the same time falling foul of the Myth.

So, the visible object is accommodated for in, McDowell’s revised account, as externally constraining via intuitional content – a non-discursive content to which we are not verdictively answerable, as such. The object externally constrains and it may figure in entitlement. However, in order to become answerable to a verdict-dictating content that incorporates the object as it is visibly present, we must rationally exercise conceptual capacities so as to enter a normative space constituted by social norms. So, the anomaly which presents itself, on the new account, is that we are thus not answerable to experience itself, but rather, we are verdictively answerable to that propositional content which constitutes that which can be truly said about that which is visibly present in experience.
Conclusion

In *Mind and World* McDowell aligned two problems in respect to the theme of ‘objectivity’ in empirical thinking. The first was how a model of perceptual judgment and experience must be conceived so that we can in fact be intelligibly answerable to the empirical world. This focused into an issue concerning how it is that object-directed experience can come to pass ‘verdicts’ upon the truth or falsity of judgement. The second concern pertained to ensuring that such perceptual thought had content in the first place – part of which was making certain that thought had as its subject matter the objects of the empirical world itself. So the story of answerability was bound to the story of content, which collectively we can refer to as the problems of objectivity in empirical thought.

Now, according to McDowell, experience, conceived of as a ‘bare sensory’ impression, makes it entirely impossible how to conceive that experience can intelligibly act as a ‘tribunal’ upon thought, or how we could be answerable to it or the world. Such a lack of intelligibility besets the Myth of the Given. And, whilst Davidson offered the right model (in spirit) for rational entitlement, according to McDowell, Davidson’s ‘Coherentism’ spurns the perfectly legitimate motivation of being answerable to the empirical world, the realm of objects, via experience.

McDowell therefore comes to offer his models of experience as conceptually shaped: a conception of experience such that it can in fact provide for the necessary answerability to the empirical world and pass verdicts upon perceptual judgment. So McDowell hoped to maintain rational external constraint (a concern which motivated the Myth) while remaining within the proper structure of rational intelligibility provided by an extension of Davidson’s own rational entitlement picture. Experience could thus pass verdicts upon thought, because the literally visible objects, in a sense, ‘spoke to you’ via propositional experience. Indeed, this was how
the Myth of the Given could be avoided, whilst appealing to sensory experience for rational entitlement.

So, accompanying McDowell’s account of propositional experience, as discussed, was a decisive shift in respect to the particular ‘layout’ which could in fact intelligibly pass verdicts upon thought. According to McDowell, the layout which settles issues of truth in relation to perceptual judgements is the ‘layout of the world’ as fact – the realm of sense – and precisely not the non-conceptual objects themselves which pertain to the ‘layout of external reality’. This account, of course, included rational relations and answerability to the non-conceptual object; however, this occurred via verdict-dictating propositional content. In this way, the notion of ‘how things are’ became aligned with the notion of ‘how things can be truly said to be’. So that verdictive answerability became a function of (so to speak) ‘perceptible facts’, which could also constitute the very content of experience itself.

As discussed, two primary aspects thereby come to inform McDowell’s picture of verdictive answerability, and the world as fact – as it comes to normatively constrain perceptual judgment: the non-conceptual object and the content of social norms. Indeed, it is via the content of such social norms, according to McDowell, that we are to understand our being answerable to objects. So, in Mind and World, McDowell essentially combined the function of external constraint with the propositional content (facts) which normatively determined the truth or falsity of empirical judgment. It was in the service of this union of function – external constraint and verdictive answerability – that McDowell’s models of experience as intelligibly conceptually shaped, so as to overcome the incoherence of the Myth of the Given.

As discussed, Travis’s account of recognition and the function of perception as a merely having in view contributes to the breakdown, the ‘fracturing’, between these two functions of
external constraint and verdictive answerability, as they come to figure in McDowell’s revised account of experience.

As was the case in the context of rational entitlement, Travis refuses McDowell’s notion of the Myth of the Given at the very outset. He in turn posits a rational relationship between the conceptual and the non-conceptual such that in respect to verdictive answerability: the non-conceptual object itself comes to normatively determine the truth or falsity of propositional perceptual judgment. Indeed, Travis supposes that he offers a rich enough account of what it is to have a conceptual capacity – aspects of which create a mutual interdependent function between the conceptual and the non-conceptual – so that any supposed ‘incoherence’ of objects normatively determining the truth status of a thought simply recedes, along with concern about the supposed Myth.

According to Travis, the non-conceptual object can (intelligibly) normatively dictate the truth-status of an empirical judgment, because indeed part of having the relevant conceptual capacity in the first place – the ability to make the judgement with the content that it has – requires one to be able to identify those instances which would count as that judgment being true. Travis’s notion of ‘sense’ (‘counts as’) is presented as a notion which, so to speak, traverses the conceptual and non-conceptual divide (Frege’s line), bringing the latter (the objective) within the reach of the former (the subjective), and so into a verdictive relation with it.

Just as McDowell combines the two concerns of answerability and ensuring the content of thought, Travis’s notion of ‘sense’ can be viewed as performing a similar task. Indeed the notion of ‘sense’ is offered as being fundamental to identifying the very thought in the first
place – so that empirical thought is not conceived of as a mere ‘cognitive prosthetic’ in respect to mind and world relations.

Travis’s notion of ‘sense’, as something which is shared within a community, also marks out a social dimension to having a conceptual capacity in the first place. However, where McDowell posits the concept-constituting content of social norms as that by which we are to understand answerability to the non-conceptual object – so that a persistent self-determined aspect continues to inform our rational relations with external reality within the content of propositional experience – Travis’s notion of ‘sense’ is, rather, merely a social and self-determined facilitator of sorts, such that the non-conceptual object, as it stands immediately before one in perception, can come to be that which we are verdictively answerable to in our judgments.

As discussed, Travis thus attempts to place things being as they are – understood as constituted by non-conceptual objects – as those items to which we stand in verdictive relations. So that ‘things being as they are’ (seen as pertaining to the left hand side of Frege’s line) is a characterisation quite distinct from ‘how things can truly be said to be’ (seen as pertaining to the right hand side of Frege’s line). And yet these two aspects, both of which are necessary for perceptual judgement, are bound together in rational relations, in his picture, via his notion of our exercising in recognition our sense of what counts as an instance of what.

According to McDowell’s revised account of experience, one which is informed by Travis’s notion of recognition, the ‘bounds’ of propositional content, so to speak, are no longer what they once were: propositional content no longer constitutes the given content of intuition itself. The unboundedness of the conceptual in this respect is performed rather by intuitional content, itself divested of discursive content and fully constituted ‘perceptible
facts’. This change, once again, creates interesting anomalies in McDowell’s account of the objective in empirical thought.

McDowell, in *Mind and World*, supposed that experience *must* constitute a verdict-dictating tribunal – mediating the way our thinking is answerable to objects in our surroundings. And yet it was declared at the outset that a non-conceptual conception of experience – as a ‘bare sensory’ impression – made it entirely unintelligible how experience *could* function as a tribunal, how it could pass verdicts upon thought. And so it was that, as a remedy, McDowell came to offer models of intelligibility for a stipulated conception of intuition in which it takes propositional facts – aspects of the layout of the world – as its content.

And yet, in McDowell’s revised account of intuitional content, intuional content as such is not in a form suitable to act as a tribunal and pass verdicts on thought. Whilst intuional content *mediates* our rational relations with external reality, it is, however, no better at functioning as a tribunal and dictating verdicts itself than ‘bare sensory’ experience, or, for that matter, Travis’s ‘silent’ having in view.

In McDowell’s new picture, intuional content, via which an object is visibly present to us in experience, can come to rationally entitle perceptual judgment, and yet we are not verdictively answerable to that passively given content of experience itself. One of the central and guiding ideas in *Mind and World* appears to fall by the wayside with the new stipulation of conceptual intuition.

What seemingly remains in place, however, is that we remain standing in verdictive relations to that which can be truly said to be the case, and so to facts. This then presents the anomaly in McDowell’s account of objectivity: McDowell’s revised account of experience
suggests that we are no longer answerable to the content of experience itself, but rather to that content (arrived at by articulation or recognition) which constitutes that which can be truly said to be the case about that which is directly in view via the unarticulated intuitional content. So intuitional content merely provides the rational starting point, as it were, the external constraint dimension of verdictive answerability, from which one can then access facts about objects directly in view, and in so doing, draw upon content-constituting social norms.

With the apparent breakdown between the function of the content of intuition – via which the object is directly in view (external constraint) – and verdictive answerability – which enters the frame only with discursive content – McDowell’s new picture, at least in the case of straight-out recognition\(^{149}\), does in a sense, come to acquire the separation in respect to the functions of perception and judgment, that Travis insists upon between the object (as it rationally informs thought outside of propositional content) and the propositional representation of it in corresponding perceptual judgment. And yet, unlike Travis, the object as it is in itself does not normatively determine the correctness of a judgment, nor does it itself independently of the conceptual content of perception, figure in one’s rational entitlement to perceptual judgments about it.

So, while McDowell may insist upon a rational entitlement picture that ‘stems’ (via intuitional content) from the object as it is visibly present in experience, this does in fact only provide only one side, so to speak, of the revised picture of verdictive answerability.

A subject, in the end, is only fully entitled to a perceptual judgment they make about an object directly in view if the content of that judgment (arrived at from what is given in experience by articulation or recognition) is a fact about that object: something that can be

\(^{149}\) That is, recognition without any associated articulation of intuitional content
truly said about it. And this fact, which marks the judgment out as correctly made, in either case, ‘goes beyond’ what is given in experience.

In McDowell’s *Mind and World* picture, verdictive answerability was informed by both the object in view and the content of social norms. Now there is a ‘fracturing’ such that external constraint is provided for by the object via the content of experience itself, and answerability, as sanctioned by content-constituting social norms, only becomes relevant given conceptual judgement arrived at by articulation or recognition. The function of experience is now no longer to pass verdicts. Rather, the function of experience is to provide rational external constraint upon thought – which is, of course, a necessary aspect of verdictive answerability, but in itself insufficient for experience to qualify as a tribunal for our judgments about the empirical world.

Pressure from Travis certainly contributes to the dissolution of McDowell’s ability to claim that the content of experience has verdictive authority over thought. However McDowell, differentiating himself from Travis, remains committed to associating how things are with how things are truly sayable to be. McDowell’s *idealism* in this respect – such that the world (as fact) which provides verdicts upon perceptual judgement has the very same form as that of judgment – remains in place. This holds despite McDowell’s accommodation, in his revised account, of Travis’s notion of recognition and of experience as a merely bringing into view.

It is with this idealism remaining in place that McDowell in turn loses his ability to claim that we stand in verdictive relations to the content of experience itself. McDowell may well claim that Travis ‘rides roughshod’ over a grammatical point in treating things being as they are as items on the left hand side of Frege’s line to which we stand in verdictive relations. Yet
McDowell’s revised account of experience means that experience loses some of the critical features that defined its significance in *Mind and World* – features which motivated the change to conceiving of experience as conceptual in the first place.
Chapter 3: Self-Determination

A. Self-Determination in Mind and World

1. Idealism and Common Sense

McDowell: “Any idealism with a chance of being credible must aspire to being such that, if thought through, it stands revealed as fully cohering with the realism of common sense. Kant, for instance, has that aspiration for his transcendental idealism. This shows in his claim that it coincides with empirical realism. However, because of the way he treats the forms of our sensibility, he fails to entitle himself to that claim. In his picture, the world as we experience it seems, in respect of its apparent spatial and temporal organisation, to be a mere reflection of self-standing features of our subjectivity. So the aim at a coincidence with realism fails.” 150

In Mind and World McDowell seeks to change the mode of discourse in respect to experience to a normative one, and so avoid what he sees as the pitfalls of the Myth of the Given. In doing so, it is essential that his notion of experience, as propositional, should be seen as an intelligible normative counterpart to ‘common sense’.

Mind and World’s notion of experience as passively actualising a manifold of propositional content – so as to accommodate an intelligible mode of normativity and an amended version of Davidson’s dictum – is not intended to exclude the ordinary-everyday ‘common sense’ notion of experience, according to which, in perception, we literally and directly perceive objects – indeed, the perception of them is constitutive of the very idea of what it is to perceive. So in essence, McDowell’s picture of experience with propositional content must be able to accommodate the visible objects of perception – the objects which in a common sense understanding externally obtain independently of our exercise of conceptual capacities, that is, our empirical thinking.

McDowell explicitly asserts that his ‘minimal empiricism’, which can be said to constitute his own particular form of ‘idealism’, is intended to cohere with a kind of ‘common sense realism’. So what is entailed in reconciling, or ameliorating any perceived conflict between, a minimal empiricism on one hand, in which propositional contents are ultimate in normative justification, with a kind of common sense object realism, comprised of such common sense notions as those mentioned above?

As already discussed, McDowell is critical of Davidson’s ‘Coherentism’ because it leaves empirical thought without rational external constraint. Davidson’s space of reasons, as McDowell sees it, is problematically confined to beliefs. Indeed Davidson’s ‘blindspot’ overlooks the possibility that experience itself can provide reasons for thought. This is where McDowell’s amended dictum is intended to provide external constraint upon thought while remaining within the rational bounds provided by Davidson’s insight into rationality, viz., that reasons-relations hold only between conceptual items. It is at this very juncture that we can situate a central aspect of McDowell’s ‘idealism’ – the notion of the ‘unboundedness’ of the conceptual, which accompanies the extension of the space of reasons to, and a conceptualised picture, of experience itself.

McDowell’s extending the space of reason in the way that he does – extending Davidson’s dictum – immediately brings into consideration Kantian intuition. As discussed, McDowell hopes to gain traction in respect to his higher-order concerns, namely avoiding the Myth of the Given, via a conceptualist reading of Kantian intuition, specifically, a functional role for spontaneity in intuition itself. Now although McDowell offers such a conceptualist take on Kantian intuition, it is essential to his project that it can intelligibly distinguish itself from that of Kant’s, when the need arises. Foremost of importance, is avoiding Kant’s problematic form of idealism.
McDowell writes:

“In my Mind and World, I argue that the conceptual content of a perceptual experience can be, and if all goes well is, something that is the case, an element in the world. We can see experience as directly taking in part of the world, because the world, understood as everything that is the case, is not outside the sphere of the conceptual. I remark that this can seem to be “a sort of idealism, in the sense in which to call a position ‘idealism’ is to protest that it does not genuinely acknowledge how reality is independent of our thinking” (pg 26). But I work to dislodge such an appearance.” \(^\text{151}\)

McDowell’s picture is idealist in the sense that that which is ultimate in the rational entitlement picture is conceptual content, content which is intelligibly self-determined. This complements his notion that there is no outer boundary to the conceptual. In this way, that upon which empirical judgment is grounded is itself not outside thinkable content. Furthermore, the content which rationally entitles is dependent upon the subject’s own conceptual capacities. That which can feature in and ground empirical thought extends no further than one’s capacity to think it. So the bounds of normative external constraint (as content), in any given perceptual judgment, coincide with the bounds of thought, and thus the conceptual capacities that the perceiving subject finds himself with at that particular moment in time. To move beyond those conceptual capacities in the story of rational entitlement is to fall into the Myth of the Given. In this way also we can see McDowell’s idealism as bound to the idea that the logical space of reasons is commensurate with the space of the conceptual.

While McDowell’s idealism indeed has such self-determining characteristics, as will be discussed in further detail, his idealism nonetheless provides rational external constraint upon thought – external constraint which, on a certain understanding, he finds lacking in Kant’s

own idealist account of sensible intuition. So that while experience provides self-determined propositional content, such content may also constitute perceptible facts, and thus an aspect of the layout of the world.

In this Chapter I wish to explore McDowell’s idealism via the self-determining capacities which inform that conceptual content. However, given that receptivity is just as much an aspect of the passive actualisation of the content, I first wish to address the necessity of accommodating for the visible object of perception. This is to address and accommodate for the notion of ‘object as external constraint’, and similarly, the common sense notion of the visible object. Of course, it is not the object as it is outside the conceptual which rationally entitles, but rather the object via the given passively actualised content. The common sense object must be accommodated for in that very given content. So the common sense notion of the visible object must be accommodated for in McDowell’s idealism.

McDowell comments:

“Reworked on these lines, a Kantian conception of intuitions combines subjective self-determination with objective constraint, and now in a way that does not require us to qualify the sense in which what exercises the constraint is objective reality. On these lines we can begin to make sense, in the context of empirical cognition, of Hegelian talk about a liberation from the opposition of consciousness. The objects of intuition are now conceived as fully objective even in respect to their spatial and temporal organization. But their otherness to consciousness, at any rate perceptual consciousness, is aufgehoben; not abolished, but situated in a larger story so that it no longer seems to threaten the self-determining rationality of the subject.”

McDowell’s positing of discursive propositional content as that which rationally entitles, and of the world as everything that is the case, should not be taken to be displacing the visible

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152 In Chapter 2 I addressed McDowell Idealism in respect to the world as everything that is the case

objects of empirical thought to a place outside his normative picture. McDowell maintains that in visual perception we experience, we directly perceive, objects and their properties. (Albeit this is an emphasis which comes later on in his philosophy, but something nonetheless always available to him, that is, in his *Mind and World* paradigm.) This aspect is crucial to an idealism which is intended to lead to realism, if properly thought out.\(^{154}\)

But, of course, that is not to say that the common sense object of perception will play the same common sense role in the normative picture. As McDowell sees it, a picture of perception and perceptual judgment in which *content* rationally entitles is the only picture which can be ultimately reconciled with common sense – without such content McDowell claims, one is left with nothing but the Myth of the Given.

Without distinguishing between object and content, McDowell’s idealism could hardly be said to be reconciled with the commonsensical. Indeed, on McDowell’s account, we do not experience the world as if with subtitles, or in propositional form. Our means of experiencing the world and reality is via the sensory-visual. We externally see the objects in our surroundings. However, the contents of our experience, and our judgments about those objects which are visibly present, are expressed as propositions. The two notions of object and content are (intended at least as) complementary. Such a complementary understanding of content and object in perception allows for a model of experience as having propositional content, which does not subvert ordinary notions of the visual perception of objects.

The models that McDowell finds so useful in explicating his account of experience as a conceptually shaped occurrence, the ‘discursive’ models discussed previously, give expression to the very kind of philosophy McDowell sees himself engaged in: the therapeutic kind. This is set out in the introduction to *Mind and World*, where he speaks of a philosophy which is

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‘diagnostic in spirit’. With diagnoses and therapy in mind, McDowell’s minimal empiricism does not offer a reconfiguration of the intentional object that the discursive is related to in perception, as in the ‘traditional’ forms of empiricism. Such pictures do in fact slight the common sense notion of the visible object.

Just as Wittgenstein analogises a ‘picture’ as holding us captive, McDowell speaks of ‘illusions gripping us’, which in turn involve ‘misplaced obligations’. According to McDowell, only by positing passively actualised conceptual content in intuition itself can there be thought with content at all. Only then can we lay claim to the common sense: that we visually perceive objects, we can think of them and we are answerable to them in our judgments. These, for McDowell, are the common sense notions of thought and the empirical world which philosophical paradigms hitherto, such as Davidson’s, and those which espouse the Myth of the Given, have made a ‘mystery’ about.

So as McDowell would have it, dismounting from the oscillating see-saw which he identifies in Mind and World, requires coming to terms with the relationship between external constraint and self-determining capacities, as they function in perceptual judgment. It is only by positing such a satisfactory dynamic that we can indeed lay claim to common sense, and ensure that the content and answerability of our thought is connected with the empirical world. According to McDowell, it is only in virtue of positing the actualisation of self-determining capacities in experience itself that this can be achieved. In this way, McDowell’s purported idealism is intended to lead to a kind of common sense realism.

155 McDowell, Mind and World, p. xi.
2. Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint

**McDowell:** “If a conception expressible in such terms is to fit subjective engagement with objective reality, the free self realisation of the concept had better itself embody a responsiveness to constraints that are in some sense external. Rather than disappear from the scene, the external constraint that figures in a more ordinary conception of objectivity must be incorporated within what we are supposed to be shown how to conceive as self-determination.”  

**McDowell:** “Nevertheless, reflection about the temptation to appeal to givenness in connection with acquiring knowledge through experience is a good context in which to begin to think through the prospects for combining an idealistic affirmation of self-determination with making room for an idea of external constraint.”

On either side of McDowell’s ‘interminable oscillation’, the functions of external constraint and self-determination are conceived as two independent functions which are intended to inform and make possible empirical judgment. The independence of function is reflected in a dualistically conceived receptivity and spontaneity – on one side the sensory, and upon the other, conceptual judgment. Receptivity is stipulated as the sensory means by which the objective empirical world is presented or impressed in perception – beyond our cognitive powers to determine, this is the domain of external constraint. Conceptual or discursive representation therefore provides the intellectual or cognitive means by which that ‘objective’ sensible impression can come to feature in rational representational thought.

As McDowell sees it, it is just such a separation between external constraint and self-determination which makes one liable to be caught up in the ‘interminable oscillation’ he purports to have identified in *Mind and World*. Indeed, as McDowell would have it, the fundamental problem with positing such a dualism between receptivity as external constraint,

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156 McDowell, ‘Self-Determining Subjectivity and External Constraint’, p. 93.

157 Ibid. p. 91.
and conceptual capacities as self-determined judgment, manifests itself in the rational entitlement picture – the space of reasons. Whichever side of the dualism one ultimately comes down on in grounding one’s empirical judgment one inevitably faces palpable difficulties. On the side of external constraint there is the Myth of the Given, and on the side of self-determination, a potential frictionless ‘spinning in the void’ (or Kantian idealism).

McDowell’s project in effect involves therapeutically dissolving the dualism between external constraint as receptivity and self-determination as the realm of judgment. Indeed, McDowell’s picture of experience and judgment encompasses positing external constraint within the function of something recognisably self-determining itself. Again McDowell aims to do this via his notion of a passively actualised content that is given in intuition.

McDowell’s notion of intuitional content involves a unification of sorts between the two seemingly irreconcilable notions of understanding cognitive phenomena – and again, understood such that functions of receptivity and spontaneity are not even notionally separable. So McDowell’s picture can purport to maintain that the problematic gap between external constraint and self-determination which sustains the oscillation is now closed with his notion of conceptual experience and its passively actualised propositional content.

For McDowell, this occurs by way of positing his own notion of how external constraint comes to function in thought, and his own, at least in emphases, notion of self-determination – both of which are understood as operating within conceptual content. So external constraint, and the relevant aspect of self-determination, are intelligibly configured so that they are jointly manifest in the given content of experience.

In this way, McDowell appropriates what he sees as the positive insights of the traditional conceptions of receptivity, viz., that there must be external constraint upon thought; however,
in order to avoid the Myth of the Given that constraint is seen as provided through conceptual content. And McDowell correspondingly posits a ‘secondary’ aspect of self-determining capacities which is itself also involved in that same very content (an aspect other than the exercise of those capacities in judgment). So both receptivity and spontaneity inform the possibility of that conceptual content actualised in experience.

In McDowell’s model, judgment, as the paradigmatic form of self-determination, does not stand in a verdictive relation to the externally constraining object of perception. Perceptual judgment, indeed, stands instead in a verdictive relation to the object-dependent passively actualised content of intuition. It is precisely such a content – that is given passively in intuition – in which McDowell posits ‘secondary’ self-determining functions.

3. Freedom Within the Discursive

**McDowell:** “The space of concepts is at least a part of what Wilfred Sellars calls “the space of reasons”. When Kant describes the understanding as a faculty of spontaneity, that reflects his view of the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it. In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom.” 158

**McDowell:** “But if our freedom in empirical thinking is total, in particular if it is not constrained from outside the conceptual sphere, that can seem to threaten the very possibility that judgements of experience might be grounded in a way that relates them to a reality external to thought.” 159

Self-determination as it is relevant in the context of perceptual judgement is (distinctly) freedom with respect to the actualisation of propositional content. As will be discussed, self-determination is therefore bound to an ability to judge things to be thus and so. Similarly is it constitutive of taking something as a reason – to take something be thus and so. For

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159 Ibid. p. 5.
McDowell, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom. The capacity for freedom is thus bound to (discursive) rationality – understood as a capacity to be responsive to reasons.

In the Kantian mould, McDowell’s paradigmatic kind of freedom is that which is manifest in judging. Judging is freely responsible cognitive activity, a ‘making up one’s mind about how things are’.\textsuperscript{160} It involves a rational reflective position in which the truth of a propositional content is ascertained and determined to be the case.

In \textit{Mind and World} the propositional content in consideration in judgment is that which is passively given in experience. Thus, judgment is characterised as an endorsement of, or a refusal to endorse, the propositional given. In perceptual judgment one decides whether or not to judge that things are how experience represents them to be;\textsuperscript{161} one accepts or rejects the appearance – the given face value (as the given propositional content).

So McDowell’s model of perceptual judgment is the approval or disapproval of those actualised concepts already given in experience. The conceptual capacities which belong to spontaneity are already operative in receptivity – judgment does not work upon something independently supplied by receptivity. Freedom in the context of judgment, thus lies, not in the categorisation or abstraction of that given purely by receptivity, but rather, in the capacity to determine the correctness of concepts which are already passively applied in intuition.

\textsuperscript{160} McDowell, ‘Experiencing the World’, p.251.

\textsuperscript{161} McDowell, \textit{Mind and World}, p. 11.
4. Kant and Sellars

McDowell: “Exploiting Sellars and Kant, I have put in place the outline of a picture that promises to combine finding a place even in empirical cognition for the self-determining rationality of the cognitive subject - the spontaneity of the understanding – with acknowledging a sense in which empirical cognition is constrained by objects themselves, presenting themselves to consciousness in intuition.”

McDowell’s model of intelligibility in respect to freedom and judgment is one which incorporates aspects from both Kant and Sellars. So it is in accordance with this that I will structure my discussion of McDowell’s second gloss on self-determination. Starting with Kant and his ‘Clue’, McDowell supposes that intuitions have a content and a logical togetherness the very same as judgment. McDowell, in turn, is critical of Kant’s idealism, and in turn distinguishes between the passive and the active exercise of conceptual capacities. Then in respect to Sellars, McDowell posits that one’s world view is implicated in the passively actualised content of intuition itself, and so it is via the self-determining capacities which inform one’s world view that McDowell supposes we ought to characterise the function of spontaneity and self-determination in experience.

(i) Kantian Idealism

McDowell: “It is a mistake to think Kant’s “Clue” implies that the unity of an intuition is itself brought about by free cognitive activity. Judging, one of the exemplifiers of the sorts of unity the ‘clue’ concerns, is free cognitive activity, but enjoying intuitions, the other field for those sorts of unity, is not. The point is just that the sorts of unity that unite intuitions are the same as the sorts of unity that unite judgments. It must be intelligible that the representational capacities that are involuntarily drawn into operation in intuitions are susceptible of joint actualization with that kind of unity, and that is secured by their being capacities that can also be freely exercised in judging. This suffices to put in place the kinship Kant insists on between the objective purport of intuitions and the objective purport of judgments. He does not need to

suggest that the forming of intuitions is itself an exercise of freedom, let alone one that takes place behind our backs.”

Whilst McDowell utilises ‘The Clue’ so that intuition itself is modelled upon propositional judgment, McDowell is (one of many) critical of Kant’s perceived idealism. Of particular focus in this discussion, however, is not so much the subjective form of sensibility in Kant, viz., space and time, but rather the idealism in Kant in respect to the content of intuition: the perceived problematic idealism which takes its shape in the context of rational entitlement and normative answerability.

McDowell’s criticisms of Kantian intuition are bound to the involvement of the Understanding in sensible intuition – specifically the discursive character of intuitional content. Now the particular form of idealism McDowell finds problematic pertains not so much to the (discursive/propositional) content per se, but rather, to the way in which that propositional content is actualised in intuition. The problem lies, not with that which can be taken as a reason (discursive/propositional content), but rather with how it comes to be that that discursive content becomes actualised. This relates to the particular characterisation of the self-determining capacities of the Understanding. So, it is by way of distinguishing the way in which the Understanding is involved in the actualising of propositional content in intuition that McDowell distinguishes his ‘minimal empiricist’ idealism from Kant’s problematic idealism.

The problematic idealism that McDowell finds in Kant is that intuitional content involves the active exercise of the Understanding. Although ‘The Clue’ provides the discursive model by which to understand intuitional content as propositional, if the intelligibility of intuition and its content is constrained too strictly within the Kantian model of judgment, intuitional

content can in turn be assigned too many of the qualities of judgment. Specifically, again as McDowell reads Kant, the propositional content of intuition, on the problematic understanding, involves the active exercise of the Understanding. Conceptual capacities in experience are thus engaged in the same way as they would be in the exercise of a judgment.

For judgement to take up and rationally reflect upon a propositional content actualised in intuition – which the Understanding has already ‘put together’ in an analogous way to the exercise of judgment itself – would thereby entail that empirical thought, as Kant must necessarily conceive it, could not reach beyond that content which the Understanding has not already itself actively exercised and put together. The involvement of the Understanding in this way – exercising its conceptual capacities in intuition itself – has the problematic upshot that the content of experience, and that which can have rational and cognitive significance, is something of the perceivever’s own subjective (although unconscious) putting together.

In effect, this puts the world, objective reality, and the objects of common sense perception beyond the intentional and cognitive capacities of perceptual thought – and so outside that which is knowable. So, while McDowell’s Kant posits intuitional content as actualising conceptual capacities, and so intelligibly cohabits, with judgement, the logical space of reasons, the active exercise of the Understanding, leaves Kant’s picture problematically ‘idealistic’.

As will be discussed, according to McDowell, the key to disengaging from Kant’s problematic idealism requires distinguishing between the two aspects of self-determination which characterise our conceptual capacities as linguistic creatures. The freedom involved in judgment, as the active exercise of the Understanding, is precisely not the kind of freedom to be exploited in attributing conceptual content to intuition itself.
5. McDowell’s Involuntary Actualisation of Self-Determining Capacities

McDowell: “Capacities of the sort one wants to see as freely exercised, in what one wants to be entitled to see as judgement, are also actualised in sensory consciousness; these actualisations in sensory consciousness are occurrences of a kind that can be understood, partly by virtue of the involvement in them of capacities that are also freely exercised in judgement, as cases of having objective reality directly in view. This way, we enable ourselves to make sense of a consciousness that is capable of both being intuitionally in touch with objective reality and making judgements about it. We make sense of a consciousness as having each of those capacities only because we see it as also having the other.”

McDowell: “Once one has determined such things as the direction of one’s gaze, it is not under one’s control how one’s experience purports to reveal things to be [...] But perceptual experience can bring facts into plain view. And when that is the appropriate thing to say, it would be absurd to talk of deciding what to think, as if one exercised an option. One does not choose to accept that things are the way one’s experience plainly reveals that they are.”

McDowell: “One does not sacrifice one’s freedom if one acquiesces in the authority of what one recognises as compelling reasons. Recognising reasons as compelling is itself an exercise of one’s capacities for rational self-determination.”

Now I have already discussed how McDowell proposes to amend Davidson’s dictum and thereby extend the space of reasons to experience itself. McDowell’s notion of the passively actualised content of experience is posited so as to overcome Davidson’s ‘blind spot’. As has also been discussed previously, McDowell makes use of Kant’s ‘Clue’, so that both intuitions and judgments share a logical unity and propositional content. This is intended to provide an intelligible structure to McDowell’s normative picture in which intuitional content is within the space of reasons and in a form such that it itself can be taken up and endorsed in the exercise of a judgment.


166 Ibid p. 139.
However, important distinctions must be made in respect to how it is that those capacities are drawn upon—distinctions which can avoid Kant’s idealism. The first place I wish to begin, then, is distinguishing the content of intuition and the content of judgment via their ‘voluntary’ representational actualisation, or lack thereof. Something which McDowell supposes Kant himself failed to do.

So McDowell takes his own point of departure from Kant’s notion that intuitional content itself is an exercise of the Understanding. McDowell insists that the content of intuition is involuntarily given, and so is not an act or exercise of the Understanding. The way in which McDowell’s picture improves upon the problematic picture of Kant is by positing a new means of intelligibly comprehending intuitional content as discursive—one premised upon intelligibly distinguishing between the ‘active’ exercise, and the ‘passive’ actualisation of propositional content. McDowell thus posits passively actualised propositional content in intuition in order to avoid Kant’s discursive idealism.

In this way conceptual capacities can figure in intuition, yet without the active exercise of the Understanding that would prevent an openness to the empirical world—or rational acknowledgement of the external reality beyond the function of the active exercise of conceptual capacities. Of principle concern to McDowell is that the propositional content of intuition is given. The given content of intuition can provide the external constraint upon judgment, which is precisely that which went missing in Kant. This constraint upon thought at the same time ‘opens the world’, the world as fact, to the perceiving subject.

McDowell’s overarching concern, is to avoid the Myth of the Given, that is, a picture of sensory receptivity which does not involve the function of spontaneity. So McDowell’s notion of a given content, involves receptivity, just as it does spontaneity. One way, therefore, in
which we can understand the *givenness* of the content of experience, certainly in the context of voluntariness, is in relation to its sensory mode of actualisation – something which is furthermost from one’s doxastic control. The given intuitional content, as extending the space of reasons, is a passive actualisation of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness itself.

McDowell’s positing of self-determining capacities in experience itself is of such significance because it is bound to the reason-providing function of sensory intuition itself. And yet it is only via McDowell’s second gloss on self-determination that we can come to understand that which can be taken as a reason in sensory intuition itself as intelligibly self-determined, while at the same time given (and not an instance of the free cognitive activity of the Understanding.)

So, in McDowell’s picture, the space of freedom comes to inhabit that very space against which freedom is conventionally juxtaposed, viz., the space of sensory impressions. This is a feature of McDowell’s Sellarsian empiricism which stands in opposition to the form of a traditional empiricism which assumes a dualism between the conceptual and the sensory.

6. Community of Language Users and World View

**McDowell:** “Sellars rejects the immediacy that traditional empiricism attributes to the knowledge yielded by perception, and replaces it with a mediation by acquired conceptual capacities and world knowledge, knowledge that must be already in place for the perceptual knowledge that is in one sense fundamental to be so much as available to us”167

**McDowell:** “This shifts the weight to the second of those two glosses on the invocation of freedom. In the thick of experience, the conceptual capacities we currently have are drawn into operation in a way that is not up to us. But for them to be intelligibly conceptual capacities in the relevant sense, capacities that belong to the spontaneity of the understanding, it must be that in having them drawn into operation we

find ourselves answerable to the authority of norms for thought that constitute the content of the capacities. And this subjection to authority comes within the scope of the self-determination idea. So, though our experience at any time is determined, outside our control, by concepts we find ourselves with at the time, we have a responsibility over time to ensure our acquiescence in the concepts we find ourselves with is not a matter of subjecting ourselves to an alien authority, exercised by dogma or tradition”. 168

McDowell: “The norms that constitute the content of empirical concepts are determinations, responsive to the specifics of the world as it presents itself to us, of norms that are internal to thinking as such. So the external constraint I have been talking about, constraint by objects, is authorised from within the practice of thinking, by norms that are constitutive of the practice”. 169

McDowell’s secondary invocation of freedom in intuition is one that is intended to complement, and not displace, his Kantian, and more paradigmatic, notion of freedom in judgment. In fact the capacities which are drawn upon in conceptual intuition are the same as those drawn upon in judgment. And, as McDowell would have it, such a secondary invocation of self-determination in intuition itself is necessary for there to be empirical judgment at all – at least in the terms he conceives of judgment in *Mind and World*. 170

This second aspect of self-determining capacities is situated within the actualised content of intuition, and so comes to characterise the extended space of reasons and the normative source of the authority of those reasons. McDowell seeks to give an account of how such self-determining capacities are implicated in the given reason for judgment that intuition provides; of how such capacities are implicated on the receptive side of rational entitlement.

Two respective notions inform McDowell’s account of how the secondary aspect of self-determination is involved in the passively actualised content of experience. The first is the self-determination which obtains at the level of the communal, and the acquisition of

language in a social context. The second concerns one’s ability to revise one’s conceptual capacities and one’s world view as an individual agent. I will address the social aspect of thought to begin with, and then I shall address the revision of one’s world view and thereby one’s rational relations with the external world.

(i) Community of Language Users

McDowell: “And now, first, the self-determination idea requires that we take those norms to be laws we make for ourselves. And, second, we cannot spell out that image in terms of single individuals giving themselves the law. We can understand the authoritativeness of conceptual norms only as instituted by communal activity”. 170

According to McDowell, we are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents by being initiated into a natural language. Language also, McDowell claims, serves as a repository for a tradition, a tradition in respect to what is a reason for what.171 So in the same way we are initiated into language, we are introduced into the layout of the space of reasons. And although it is possible to revise and reflect upon that space of reasons, one needs to be initiated into a tradition as it stands.

This is important in the context of external constraint and extending the space of reasons so as to incorporate objects themselves. McDowell supposes that we are to intelligibly understand the authoritative position of objects in our thinking via the content of social norms – norms which we have in an intelligible sense self-determined, as a tradition is understood as self-determined. Indeed, McDowell insists that it is only with our introduction into language, and its space of reasons, that objects come to ‘speak to us’ – in the form of propositional content within intuition that provides rational external constraint upon our empirical thoughts.


Objects thus speak to us in our own language, our own inherited tradition, and not rather, in the world’s own language, whatever that may be. In this way our rational relations with objects are mediated by self-determining aspects intrinsic to the acquisition and use of a natural language.

What then comes into focus with so aligning initiation into a community of language users with being immersed into a space of reasons is that that which can stand as a reason for a judgment does so in a form no less than that which can be intelligibly understood as content constituted by social norms – content which is determined by a community of language users.

Understanding the space of reasons as a social space, which is inclusive of experience, is also a means of evading charges of scepticism, such as attach to forms of traditional empiricism, and which Davidson is so critical of. McDowell’s given content of experience – given in a form which is thinkable and which comes to rationally entitle – is content which is distinctly social in nature. Indeed the content is of cognitive significance only insofar as that content fits into an on-going conception of a communal space of reasons.

According to McDowell’s picture, just as we share a communal space of reasons with a community of language users, we share a capacity to judge something to be thus and so – and thereby do we share a capacity for taking up in judgment the passively actualised content of experience as a reason. So the content understood as a given reason, which is constituted as it is by social norms, is also something which is shared – or sharable – in a linguistic community so to speak. The content is in such a form that it is recognisably a reason for others.

So rational and cognitive significances, in the form of propositional content, are distinctly social in their nature. This is just one aspect of McDowell’s notion of intuition involving
intelligible and recognisable conceptual capacities. If the conceptual space of experience, and hence the extended space of reasons, is understood as only having its sense as something distinctly and intrinsically private and first personal, then this would indeed amount to mere lip service to the conceptual capacities in play. However, by emphasising the social nature of thought, and thus the passively actualised given, we can avoid those sceptical concerns of traditional empiricism – and accommodate for, in experience itself, a communal and self-determined realm which is externally constrained by a reality outside of thought itself.

(ii) World View

McDowell: “[...] the intentionality, the objective purport, of perceptual experience in general – whether potentially knowledge yielding or not – depends, in that logical dimension, on having the world in view, in a sense which goes beyond the glimpses of the here and now. It would not be intelligible that the relevant episodes present themselves as glimpses of the here and now apart from their being related to a wider world view in the logical dimension Sellars adds.” 172

McDowell: “Active empirical thinking takes place under a standing obligation to reflect about the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that govern it. There must be a standing willingness to refashion concepts and conceptions if that is what reflections recommends.” 173

McDowell: “In “outer experience”, a subject is passively saddled with conceptual contents, drawing into operation capacities seamlessly integrated into a conceptual repertoire that she employs in the continuing activity of adjusting her world view, so as to enable it to pass a scrutiny of its rational credentials.” 174

We can characterise one’s ‘world view’ as referring compendiously to the conceptual capacities that a particular subject finds themselves with at any particular point in time – the world view makes up this background of conceptual capacities. One’s world view constitutes the possible conceptual capacities which can be exercised in empirical thinking – one’s

174 McDowell, Mind and World, p. 32.
capacity to judge something about the empirical world to be the case. The freedom evident in exercising one’s conceptual capacities in judgment, and one’s responsiveness to reasons, is thus informed and made possible by one’s world view.

McDowell appropriates from Sellars, according to his dynamic form of empiricism, the idea that one’s world view is implicated in a fully conceptualised notion of experience itself. So, in accordance with McDowell’s own Sellarsian empiricism, one’s world view is operative not merely in judgment, but it is also implicated in the intuitional content itself. It is precisely in the context of the world view, as so implicated in intuition, that McDowell comes to situate his second aspect of self-determination, which is a constituent aspect of the propositional given itself.

Judging, says McDowell, is the paradigmatic mode of actualisation of conceptual capacities. In accordance with a Sellarsian empiricism, to be able to judge that things are thus and so, requires capacities which go beyond the glimpses of the ‘here and now’. Judgment thus draws upon conceptual capacities which are constituents of the background of (rational) capacities of a language user.

Because of McDowell’s picture of perceptual judgment as endorsement of the passively actualised content of intuition – that world view which Sellars speaks of must also be implicated in intuition, as it is in judgment. As already discussed, it is a feature of Kant’s ‘Clue’ that the same logical togetherness and propositional content bind intuition and judgment. So McDowell’s Sellarsian empiricism has any particular subject’s world view as itself implicated in the passively actualised content of intuition.

As mentioned above, the manifold propositional content passively actualised in intuition is co-extensive with the capacity for a corresponding judgment. Hence, one’s world view is
implicated in intuition only in so far as one’s ability to judge. However, one’s ‘world view’, as it is implicated in the passively actualised content of intuition, isn’t implicated as a free exercise of one’s conceptual capacities, as if one in intuition voluntarily drew upon a select few capacities from a reservoir of conceptual capacities. Intuitional content rather – to forestall Kantian idealism – is given.

One’s world view, as implicated in the propositional content of experience itself, can also be seen as self-determined because of the possibility for the reflective review and revision of the conceptual capacities available for passive actualisation in experience. So the content of intuition is not merely self-determined because of the constitutive social norms dimension, it is also intelligibly self-determined because one has the ability to revise this background theoretical structure. Indeed, McDowell claims that we are under an ongoing obligation – have the responsibility as rational agents – to continually revise and improve our rational engagement with the world through reconsideration and revision of the commitments that make up our world view.

These, then, are the two dimensions of what McDowell sees as the secondary aspect of self-determining capacities implicated in the passively given propositional content of experience itself. It is via positing these notions that he hopes to situate an acceptable idealism, which avoids the Myth of the Given, while also avoiding the problematic form of idealism he finds in Kant.
B. Travis and Self-Determination

The object and content distinction which comes to characterise the divide between Travis and McDowell in the rational entitlement picture is also one which comes to critically inform and shape how each philosopher supposes self-determining capacities to be implicated in experience and perceptual judgement.

As discussed, Travis’s account of perception situates the non-conceptual object in a verdictive relationship with perceptual thought. Because of Travis’s preference for such a configuration of the conceptual and the non-conceptual, in which the non-conceptual has a determinate cognitive significance in the space of reasons yet outside the space of the conceptual, this in turn engenders some significant differences between his own respective account of the self-determining capacities involved in thought, and rational entitlement, compared to that of McDowell’s picture.

At a broader level of the picture, Travis has no use for a Kantian picture of thought itself, nor, for that matter, the Kantian-like idealism of McDowell, viz., that conceptual capacities are involved in experience itself. According to Travis, Kant’s ‘Clue’ can only lead towards a ‘bad picture of perception’ – one which ultimately prevents an awareness of the outer world.

While Travis does acknowledge the differences in the problems which concern Kant and McDowell respectively, and thus how each accordingly puts the ‘Clue’ to use, McDowell no less than Kant has a (Kantian-like) picture of perception and judgment which, according to Travis, does nothing but ‘cut us off from the world entirely’. So, for Travis, no idealism of

175 Travis, ‘Unlocking the Outer World’, p. 25.
any kind will do in answering the fundamental question of perception – viz., how it makes the
world bear for the perceiver on what to think.176

With no concern for McDowell’s unacceptable problematic of sensibility without the
involvement of conceptual capacities – McDowell’s version of the Myth of the Given – Travis
adheres to his own Fregean model of perception. His Fregean model of perceptual judgment
posits a functioning dualism between the sensory and the intellectual, and so prohibits
conceptual content from epistemically interceding between perceptual thought and having the
object of perception directly in view.

So, at least as Travis would assess the situation, the pictures of self-determination which
hold respectively between him and McDowell may be further distinguished by which model
of thought is proffered, one which stems from Kant, or that of Frege’s. The most important
aspect being, that self-determining capacities, just like conceptual content, are in no way
implicated in experience itself. What becomes apparent is that, according to Travis and his
Fregean model of thought, there are points of irreconcilable conflict between the Fregean
model and a Kantian-like model of thought, the latter of which supposes the ‘putting
together’ of concepts, separate thinkable parts, in the exercise of judgement.

Travis, via Frege, supposes that there is only the model of perceptual judgement which
involves recognition. Contra McDowell’s first kind of rational entitlement, there is no task of
‘putting significances together’ in thought. Indeed, Travis’s account would suppose that the
incoherence of such a task, as one which evidently falls into the ‘building block’ model of
thought, spells the end of McDowell’s conceptual account of experience177.

177 I discuss these issues, in relation to McDowell, later in this Chapter and in Chapter 1
In the sections that follow I discuss Travis’s own position on perception, judgment, modes of self-determination, and external constraint.

1. Space of Reasons and Space of Freedom: the Instancing Relation

Travis: “I now remark: the mind can only shape what is in its power to shape. It can only guarantee the shape of what it is in its sole power to shape. What would thus be in its power?”

Travis: “Our minds cannot change the non-conceptual — what there is for the conceptual to reach to — excepting that part of it which just is their being as they are. This, in essence, is what Frege’s side of his coin says. But they can furnish our ways of articulating the non-conceptual. How we carve up the way things are into particular ways for things to be may depend on the means thus supplied. The way our minds work can thus matter to what bits of the conceptual we have, or can get in mind — what there is within our grasp with reach to the non-conceptual. This is Wittgenstein’s reverse side of Frege’s coin. Minds can do this working jointly, forming a community of thinkers. Following Wittgenstein’s unfolding of Frege’s core ideas, I have just argued that there is no other way for them to do so.”

Travis: “But the non-conceptual—things being as they are, or a thing being as it is—can settle our questions what to think only if we can appreciate, grasp, its bearing on what is so.”

To begin with, as in McDowell’s case, the self-determining capacities which are in focus in the discussion of Travis are operative in the context of rational entitlement and so in taking something as a reason. And Travis, much like McDowell, aligns the domain of self-determining capacities with the domain of the conceptual. So that, in a slogan (to borrow from McDowell) – the domain of the conceptual is the domain of freedom.

However, because Travis extends reason’s reach to the non-conceptual object, so that the space of reasons extends to the non-conceptual objects posited as standing in verdictive

178 Travis, ‘Unlocking the Outer World’. p.3.
180 Travis, ‘Reason’s Reach’, p. 234.
relations to perceptual thought, such an account consequently shifts all self-determining capacities to the exercise of judgment. So that, quite intentionally, the space of reasons is precisely not aligned with the space of freedom. Travis’s space of reasons extends beyond both the space of the conceptual and the space of freedom, given that the last items which are taken to be reason-providing are non-conceptual objects, objects which are most certainly beyond our minds power to shape.

In Travis’s picture, therefore, that which is taken as a reason, and that which stands in a verdictive relationship to thought, in no way in itself involves self-determining capacities. Freedom remains bound to conceptual capacities, yet the bounds of reason extend beyond conceptual content. Self-determining capacities all belong upon the conceptual response side – and precisely end where that propositional content extends beyond itself to the non-conceptual.

And yet, in Travis's picture, because the space of freedom, which is so bound to the conceptual, extends to the non-conceptual in such a way, self-determining capacities (sense, expertise and recognition) are in fact rationally bound to external constraint. So, much like in McDowell’s story, the two functions cannot be understood as operating without the other in place. While there is a dualism of sorts, the ‘gap’ is perhaps not as glaringly problematic as McDowell would have us believe.

2. Self-Determination and Articulating the Non-Conceptual

Travis posits rational relations as holding between conceptual contents and non-conceptual objects, doing so through a Fregean paradigm of generalities and instances. This in turns implies that the self-determining aspects of conceptual capacities are situated entirely upon the response side of judgment – judgment understood as a rational response to
the non-conceptual object as visibly in view, not mere endorsement of the given as in McDowell.

For Travis, in the context of perceptual judgment, it is the function of perception merely to bring into view the object of visual awareness and thought – providing no epistemic intermediaries whatsoever. To perceive is not to invest experience with any value or content – no conceptual capacities are yet engaged. For experience and its sensible objects to in any way become rationally relevant to the conceptual, we must draw upon our capacity for recognition – a capacity which is precisely not yet drawn upon in perception itself.

Our perceptual judgments are not made true by anything self-determined by us as rational thinkers – that is, in the context of a particular judgment aimed at particular object in the immediate surroundings. Rather, our perceptual judgments are made true by precisely that which is not up to us to self-determine – viz., things directly in view being as they are. Reason’s reach necessarily extends beyond propositional content – it extends outside of itself – to take as its object the verdict-dictating non-conceptual object immediately in view.

That said, according to Travis, that which is in fact within our self-determining power to determine, what our minds can shape and influence, is the articulation of the non-conceptual. As I will discuss, the self-determination involved in articulating the non-conceptual manifests itself in empirical thought – in judgment, with recognition and expertise.

However, in Travis’s picture there are also aspects to the self-determining picture which go beyond the immediate exercise of a perceptual judgment – self-determining capacities which inform the background capacities which enable the very possibility of that particular judgment. And, as with McDowell, these capacities to determine the articulation of the non-conceptual are best understood via a notion of ‘community’. 
Indeed, conceptual capacities, as Travis would have it, are acquired in a communal setting. They depend upon shared practices, and in order to intelligibly align conceptual content – the ways in which we speak – with the world – the way things are – conceptual capacities also depend upon a shared sense of agreement as to how the two sides of the sensible and non-sensible are rationally bound.

3. Thought’s Social Nature: ‘Counts as’ and Sense

Travis ultimately puts many of the social aspects of thought and self-determination to use primarily for understanding how we can entertain a thought when that which is in mind, so to speak, is not visibly present before one. (This yet again connects with Travis’s account of the connection between the conceptual and the non-conceptual).

What emerges in Travis’s discussion is that to have a conceptual capacity is to have a sense as to what would be an instance of a particular kind. It is that sense which also comes to characterise a community. And it is also that sense which makes possible the capacity for empirical judgment which aims at truth.

So a conceptual capacity for Travis is not merely the ability to produce discursive representations in judgment. With that manifest conceptual ability in judgment comes a capacity which extends beyond the propositional form and content, the ability to recognise a visible object in the realm of the non-conceptual. In other words, an ability to grasp how the non-conceptual bears on what it is that one ought to think. This is a capacity the exercise of which characterises and enables the rational relationship between our minds and the non-conceptual.
It is in the context of this notion of sense that I propose we can come to situate, in Travis, the McDowellian secondary aspect to self-determining capacities, as outlined above. The self-determining capacities in play are intimately linked to the non-conceptual, so that the rational relation between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, indeed the very possibility and dependence of the former upon the later, is further reinforced.

Travis writes:

“Thought’s social nature means: I think things to be some given way only where some extendible range of thinkers would agree (and agree with me) sufficiently as to what would count as things being that way; only where, so to speak, there is a (potential) community of agreement (or of agreers).”\(^{181}\)

Travis maintains that ‘a way for things to be’ is only possible where a community of thinkers can agree as to what would count as things being that way – with the community defined as thinkers sharing an ability to think the thing in question. So to think something is to belong to a range of thinkers – a community of thinkers – who are in agreement in respect to that which would count, and what would not count, as something being so.

However, it’s not that agreement must have already taken place, as that would leave no place for the novel. Agreement comes rather in an agreement in sense. Agreement as what would count as an instance of a kind is what it is to share a sense in relation to the conceptual. Moreover, that which would be agreed to as counting as an instance of a way for things to be can be expanded. So, to speak of a community in ‘agreement’ is not to speak of majority consent. Rather, it is to speak of there being such a thing as that which someone with the sense in question – a member of the community – would find.

\(^{181}\) Travis, ‘Thought’s Social Nature’ p. 4.
So, suppose that one is an outsider to a particular community, simply meaning one does not know the meaning (use) of a particular way of talking about something. In order to determine what it is that a community has in mind, when speaking of a way for things to be, one has to look at that which they would recognise as a case of counting as things being that way. One has to in a sense identify (or carve out) those items, or aspects, on the side of the non-conceptual, in order to identify that which the community has in mind when they speak of a way for things to be. So really, finding out the meaning of a way for things to be involves being able to identify what would make true that particular way of speaking.

This aspect of thought also ties into what has already been said about the general form which is intrinsic to the conceptual. The particular case, available in view in perception, the non-conceptual object, falls under something general. Thought, in Travis’s picture, contains something which reaches beyond the particular case. Thought represents the particular case as a certain way. The thought reaches to a range of cases. So a way for things to be shares a thought’s generality. On the other hand, the particular case in question lacks such generality. The particular case is bound to the way things are, as opposed to a way for things to be. Whereas a way for things to be has reach, the way things are has no such reach. The particular is precisely what the conceptual, the general, reaches to.

What is ours to determine is that which reaches to the non-conceptual – the shared sense of a way for things to be. We can determine, as a community – we can carve up – the way things are into ways for things to be. The latter involves self-determining capacities, the former not.

So, for Travis, it is the social aspect of thought which makes possible the extension of the space of reasons to the non-conceptual. However, that communally determined
aspect precisely recedes into the background at the point when propositional content reaches to the non-conceptual. The social dimension of thought and self-determining capacities make that reach possible, for a community in agreement; however, the non-conceptual, as the objective, the way things are, stands independently of that self-determination. Hence, the space of reasons, whilst made possible by belonging to a community in agreement, extends beyond the determination of it or one’s own mind.

4. Judgment, Expertise, and Self-Determination

Travis: “One can tell how given barking, or grunting, bears on what is so. Its so bearing lies within the scope of reason — is a rational relation to what is so — insofar as it actually settles questions, or provides evidence, or etc. Barking, to one who can tell when it is threatening, a snout to one who can tell when it is a pig’s, does bear, when he hears, or sees, it, on what he is to think. Where one so skilled takes it to be the bark of a dog about to bite, that the dog will bite just is what it is rational for him to think. He can think no other; nor should he. Such is one thing rationality is like.”\(^{182}\)

Travis: “Correspondingly, if, knowing a peccary when you see one, you now say of the beast before you, ‘That’s a peccary’, you have (though it sounds grandiose) exercised expertise. You take it to be a peccary in grasping how its being as it is bears (thus far) on what it is. You grasp — can tell — how it does bear. That is what expertise here is. You thus take it to bear as it does. The beast’s being as it is thus bears, for you, on what to think — on the right thing to think in this matter. Thus may the non-conceptual bear a rational relation to what one is to think”\(^{183}\)

Having discussed Travis’s account of, what I take to be the equivalent of McDowell’s secondary aspect of self-determining capacities via the notion of sense, and so the background

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182 Charles Travis, ‘Reason’s Reach’, p. 234.
183 Ibid. p. 235.
capacities which inform and make possible perceptual judgments, I now turn to Travis’s account of perceptual judgment.\textsuperscript{184}

As mentioned, Travis’s picture of perceptual judgment is one which is modelled on his take on Frege’s. According to Travis, the function of perception is merely – ‘silently’ – to bring into view one’s immediate surroundings. In turn, those non-conceptual objects which are so brought into view, the visible, can bear verdictively upon empirical thought. Those objects can determine what one ought to think. So, in making a judgment, we precisely do not rationally reflect upon and thereafter endorse a given propositional content, as in \textit{Mind and World}. Rather the conceptual content of perceptual judgment only manifests itself with a rational response to the non-conceptual in recognition.

To judge (commit oneself to) that which is presented in perception as a way for something to be is a learned capacity, and this has two aspects as it were. Firstly, it is a capacity which comes with visual acquaintance with the non-conceptual. What we also might call experience with the external constraint. Secondly, the learned capacity also depends upon belonging to a community of language users – a community who share in their agreement as to the sense of what counts, in any given case, as instancing a way for things to be.

So, with such visual acquaintance (external constraint) and agreement (self-determination) in place, one could thus be said to have the relevant expertise, – an expertise which allows one to make an appropriate classificatory judgment (commitment) in respect to objects in one’s surroundings. And indeed, Travis speaks of the ability to determine how the non-conceptual bears on the conceptual as a matter of expertise. Expertise is a capacity for making the rational linkages between the visually given non-conceptual object and its bearing

\textsuperscript{184} Of course, the notion of having a sense of what counts as and an instance of that is not something which is denied to McDowell’s own account. It’s just that the appeal to having such a sense is, in Travis’s hands, how he purports to attain rational external constraint upon thought – informed and made possible by self-determining capacities prior to judgment - which is, nonetheless, performed by the non-conceptual object itself outside of conceptual content.
on what is so. This notion of expertise can thus be understood in terms of recognitional capacities. Furthermore, Travis’s notion of expertise is also one of the means available in his account for capturing those distinctively internal aspects of rational capacities that are implicated in making a judgment – internal aspects of the normative picture which, rather than immediately acting as external constraint, manifest in our rational recognitional responses to that which is visibly in view.

In Travis’s picture, once such a sense is acquired, and the relevant expertise in place, then it is not really up to one to decide what to think. So, just as McDowell’s secondary aspect of freedom normatively constrains the exercise of judgment, so too does Travis’s notion of ‘sense’. When one acquires a particular sense, as part of a community, one at the same time acquires, for any particular case of perceptual judgement, rational external constraint upon perceptual judgment. This is very much akin to McDowell’s involuntary actualisation of conceptual capacities. However, rather than the representational content being given in experience, it figures solely as the content of perceptual judgement in recognition. This makes such judgment no less rational however – because the rational relation is between the non-conceptual object as visibly present, and the exercise of one’s conceptual capacities, expressing one’s sense of what counts as an instance of a kind.

Travis asserts that the exercise of recognitional capacities means that perceptual thought is a function of compulsion – ‘he can think no other’. So the involvement and degree of freedom associated with the exercise of the perceiver’s conceptual capacities, in the form of a truth-apt rational response, is necessarily constrained via the sensible. But what is the nature of that constraint, and is it to the point of eliminating self-determining capacities?
Self-determination, in Travis’s account, remains bound to rationality, but rationality upon the response side. The ‘self-determining’ aspect of thought can thus be understood via the representational mode of thought. The judgment is self-determined in that the representation in thought, of the perceived object, is not given. Self-determination is a constituent feature of the form of rational response in judgment to what is otherwise there and as yet unrepresented in what the senses visually afford us. And yet the representation of the sensible, as an expression of one’s shared communal sense of what counts as an instance of what, is externally constrained, in Travis’s picture, because of the verdictive relationship between thought and the sensible.

5. External Constraint

Travis has that which functions as external constraint upon thought as the non-conceptual object. Because of the verdictive relationship between the conceptual and the non-conceptual, such relations do not then reduce to merely causal ones, as in McDowell’s reading of Davidson’s picture. Indeed, if the sensible object merely caused propositional thought, such a relationship would apparently disallow not only the subject’s capacity to rationally determine or respond to that item, but would also slight the intelligibility of one’s exercise of freedom in perceptual judgment. Rather, in Travis’s picture, although the object is situated outside the domain of the conceptual, its relationship with the conceptual is rational. Keeping in mind that Travis refuses what McDowell takes Davidson’s key insight into rationality to be: that reasons-relations hold only between conceptual contents.

Travis, therefore, much like McDowell, has external constraint upon judgment as rational constraint. And also much like McDowell, the rational external constraint only becomes operative once the relevant conceptual capacities are in place. With the relevant
expertise, and so with the relevant recognitional capacities in place, comes rational external constraint upon thought from the non-conceptual.

In McDowell’s picture of self-determination, freedom in judgment was externally constrained by the conceptual content passively actualised in experience. And as discussed, that content of experience was itself to be understood as the product of self-determining capacities (inherited and revised social norms) and the external constraint of the object as it impressed itself upon receptivity.

This provides a point of contrast to Travis. Where McDowell seeks to align the secondary aspect of self-determining capacities to external constraint, by contentful receptivity, Travis rather, by positing external constraint upon thought with simply the object of perception, and so precisely not with conceptual content, thus offers a model in which the function of external constraint is quite deliberately separated from that secondary aspect of self-determination.

Now while the secondary aspect of self-determination – evident in Travis’s Fregean / Wittgenstein model – is rationally implicated in judgment as a committed response to that presented in perception, by way of sense and background practices, there is a functioning dualism between the sensory and the conceptual. The secondary aspect of self-determination does normatively constrain judgment, but it does not do so as external constraint; rather, it does so through a capacity for sense and recognition – what I refer to as internal self-determined constraint. And although those conceptual capacities are intricately linked to external constraint by objects, indeed they are rationally bound to such external constraint, according to Travis’s model, such a dualism – in which the senses (without content themselves) merely give us acquaintance with the sensible – is necessary in order to avoid being ‘cut off from the world’, as Travis supposes McDowell’s form of idealism is.
So, because Travis is intent upon refusing the idealist model which he finds in both Kant and McDowell, he manifestly adopts a more ‘traditional’ picture of self-determination and external constraint. On his account, aspects of self-determination occurs entirely within the exercise of perceptual judgment. So that, accordingly, that which externally constrains judgment is simply the object of perception itself. Verdictive external constraint upon judgment is not discursive representational constraint, as in McDowell’s propositional picture of experience. Hence, external constraint in Travis’s picture is not by the world as fact, but rather the world as object. As he would put it, things being as they are – non-conceptual items on the left hand side of Frege’s line – externally constrain judgment.

6. World View, External Constraint, and Inter-Subjective Variation

Although the world of objects is in some sense visually present to all perceivers, the rational external constraint provided by that world of objects differs according to one’s expertise in recognising one’s surroundings.

With recognitional capacities and expertise so related to the sensible aspect of perception, a variation thus develops between those subjects who have such capacities, and those who do not. While the sensible aspect of perception may in some sense remain constant and uniform between subjects with differing recognitional abilities – i.e. they are visually afforded the very same surroundings – differing expertise and background conceptual capacities implies that there is a distinct disparity in how each of them is rationally related and engaged with the sensible given. It therefore also implies different rational constraints upon thought – constraints that are not merely deferent to the sensible object, as external constraint, but constraints also understood as via the internal aspects of conceptual capacities which are already in place.
We should not however overestimate any gap which obtains between the self-determination of judgment (background practices of recognition) and the constraint of the non-conceptual object. Interestingly, where McDowell bound receptivity and the content of social norms in experience itself, Travis also, in a way, binds the two functions.

As discussed, according to Travis, to have a conceptual capacity is to have a sense of the non-conceptual. That sense can come to constrain and compel judgment, provided that in perception one is presented with the appropriate instance. Now while the function of external constraint can indeed be attributed to the object in view, that object can only rationally externally constrain in the context of the judgment. And that judgment is made possible by the relevant background capacities – specifically a shared sense of what counts as an instance of what. It is only with these background capacities and a shared sense in place – internal aspects of rational constraint – that we can get the rational external constraint upon judgment.

Where McDowell supposed background capacities were engaged in external constraint itself, Travis rather, situates them entirely upon the side of judgment (and commitment) and internal aspects of rational constraint upon it. So in Travis’s picture of judgment, in contrast to McDowell’s, we do get a shift in emphases from the external, to the internal, in respect to the rational constraint of one’s world view and background capacities upon perceptual judgment.
C. Self-Determination in McDowell’s Revised Account:

In the following discussion, I will explore the breakdown in the function of external constraint and self-determining capacities in McDowell’s new account of intuition and perceptual judgment. I shall also revisit the issue of the ‘putting together of discursive significances’. While McDowell maintains that the conceptual realm remains without bounds, the self-determining capacities which once informed such a picture are no longer available throughout the conceptual realm. So it is difficult for McDowell to maintain that the realm of the conceptual is the realm of freedom, as he once did in the Mind and World paradigm. This is due to a lack of any substantive notions of self-determination applying to intuitional content itself. This yields one of the many similarities which McDowell’s revised account now shares with Travis’s account of self-determination and external constraint, as detailed above: self-determination only enters the picture at the point of our rational responses to what perception brings directly into view.

1. The Passive Actualisation of Conceptual Capacities in Intuition

According to McDowell, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom. Via Davidson’s amended dictum, McDowell extended the space of reasons to sensory experience itself. However, in order to avoid the perceived problematic idealism of Kant, McDowell forewent Kant’s take upon the active involvement of the Understanding in experience, and instead posited his own secondary aspect to self-determination as operative in experience itself – an aspect involving background content-constituting social norms, and the responsibility to rationally update one’s rational engagement with the external world (one’s world view). This enabled McDowell to align the space of reasons with the space of freedom, without falling foul of a problematic idealism. So according to McDowell’s picture, self-determining
capacities and external constraint functioned in unison, and not in a dualistic fashion. The intelligibility of this was thus founded upon treating experience itself as having propositional content.

In McDowell’s new picture, however, the space of the conceptual does not simply coincide with with the realm of freedom. This is because that which is passively actualised in experience, that which is given, is not propositional content. Indeed, as McDowell would have it, experience does not involve discursive content, nor discursive concepts whatsoever. Experience no longer represents as so. And yet McDowell insists upon the fact that experience has conceptual content, intuitional content, so that sensibility is not placed outside the conceptual sphere. Experience is conceptual in virtue of its potential to figure in propositional articulation.

Given that the space of the conceptual is commensurable with the space of reasons in McDowell’s picture, as opposed to Travis’s, the positing of such non-discursive intuitional content in experience warrants an alteration in both such spaces – that is, given how they were framed in the *Mind and World* paradigm – such that they can intelligibly accommodate for McDowell’s new conception of experience.

McDowell’s idealism was partly constituted by the fact that, in the context of the rational entitlement picture, reason’s reach extended only so far as one’s self-determining capacities (as realised in one’s world view) in actual fact allowed for. So that one’s capacity for rational entitlement extended to those propositional reasons which were passively given in experience. Now, of course, this still allowed external constraint from the world of objects to figure in the thinkable content; however such external constraint could only figure as such as incorporated into the self-determined propositional content itself.
With the change in the form of how we are to understand McDowell’s space of reasons and space of the conceptual – now extended to ‘reason-providing’ content, rather than a self-constituted reason itself – McDowell must accordingly change his picture of how self-determining capacities now figure in perceptual judgment. With discursive propositional content now removed all together from experience, the self-determining aspects pertaining to self-determined social norms and one’s world view are no longer a constituent feature of the content of intuition. So we can see that the substantial actualisation of self-determining capacities occurs in rational functions now removed from the function of external constraint itself.

In McDowell’s *Mind and World* picture, he connected conceptual capacities with a possessor’s rationality and responsiveness to reasons. However, while McDowell now posits an amended stipulation of the conceptual, such that a contents mere potential to be exploited and thus feature in propositional content is sufficient for it to qualify as conceptual, the new stipulation of the conceptual is not one which is readily amenable to the self-determining capacities once so evident with his propositional model of experience in *Mind and World*.

With intuitional content re-conceived as it is, such self-determining capacities are not so apparent at all. In fact, there is no intelligible picture offered by McDowell, in which the secondary aspects of self-determining capacities are implicated in experience in anyway whatsoever. So one of the central aspects which informed the idealism which McDowell once offered in his *Mind and World* picture is no longer apparent. Again, there occurs an apparent ‘fracturing’ of sorts – that mirrors the breakdown in McDowell’s picture between external constraint (rational entitlement) and verdictive answerability, as was discussed in the previous Chapter.
Where McDowell once incorporated external constraint within the very function of self-determining capacities within intuition, now such incorporation is not a feature of the given conceptual content of experience. As was discussed earlier in this Chapter, it was essential to McDowell’s picture that external constraint from objects was to be incorporated within an intelligible notion of how to conceive self-determination in intuition. So that external constraint, from objects that exist independently of our thinking about them, was to function as such via conceptual content (propositional content) which was intelligibly self-determined.

With the breakdown in external constraint (rational entitlement) and verdictive answerability (discussed in Chapter 2), so also is there a deconstruction of sorts, between external constraint, via intuitional content, and self-determining capacities. This is a result of conceptual content as constituted by social norms no longer being passively actualised in experience.

Just as McDowell lost his ability to claim that experience passes ‘verdicts’ upon perceptual thought, with the displacement of content constituted by social norms from the content of experience, he similarly loses his ability to claim that experience intelligibly involves self-determined capacities. So that, at least from the perspective of binding the realm of freedom with the space of reasons, by having self-determining capacities involved in experience itself, McDowell has lost most of the intelligibility which informed his experience as conceptual picture.

2. Intuition, Recognition, ‘Carving Out’, and Self-Determination’

In respect to the notion of entitlement which involves recognition, the object as it is immediately in view, via intuitional content, can be seen as providing the necessary external constraint; and the judgment, as a rational response involving recognition, can be seen as the exercise of self-determining capacities. So that yet again, there is no comprehension of one,
without the other. External constraint and self-determination are necessarily bound together. However, this relationship is not given within intuition content, but comes into being with discursive rationality, and drawing upon conceptual capacities, in recognising what intuition brings directly into view.

This can be seen as essentially the very same structure as is to be found in Travis’s account in respect to external constraint and self-determining capacities. Except, of course, that the entitlement is said to stem from the non-conceptual object via intuitional content, rather than simply from the non-conceptual object itself.

Of course it is necessary, according to McDowell, in order to avoid the Myth of the Given, that conceptual capacities are involved in intuitional content itself, and thus one would think capacities of self-determination. However, in respect to the latter, no account of how these might be understood to be involved is offered. So that, as in Travis, in perception, the object stands immediately in view, and it is only at the point that we draw upon our recognitional capacities with respect to it that self-determining capacities enter the picture.

And in respect to the ‘carving out’ entitlement picture, McDowell can be seen as binding external constraint and self-determining capacities within the propositional content that results from unifying ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition into whole discursive content. Unlike in the Mind and World paradigm, external constraint and self-determining capacities do not, however, come already bound within the content of experience. McDowell’s take on rational entitlement in such cases requires a nuanced involvement of discursive rationality. I will return to this issue shortly.

In sum, where McDowell once supposed that both external constraint and self-determination manifested their function in the very same content of experience, now there is a
break such that each is accounted for in different functions: we have external constraint as a non-discursive having in view of the object, with self-determining capacities manifesting in the processes of discursive rationality which follow, as a rational response, thereafter.

3. Secondary Quality Concepts, World View and Intuition

In *Mind and World*, concepts relevant to ‘secondary qualities’ themselves were seen as passively actualised in intuition – concepts which were ‘minimally integrated’ into a ‘world view’\(^{185}\). Now, however, not even those discursive concepts of the common and proper actually figure in intuition itself. Whilst this unburdens intuition of representational content, it also dramatically reflects how it is that a subject’s world view, which was once so heavily implicated in the content of experience, is now excluded from that content.

As McDowell makes clear in the cardinal example, despite differences in recognitional abilities between two perceiving subjects, that which is visually present, immediately in view, is shared by both – with the content of intuition similarly reflecting this correspondence. Differences in conceptual capacities, relating to differences in recognitional ability, are not themselves manifest in the intuitional given, and only come into effect with recognition.

Of course, differences in revisable conceptual capacities may determine how aspects are ‘carved out’ and recognitional capacities are drawn upon. However, this is revision in respect to the exercise of rationality, not in respect to the passively actualised content of intuition. And, indeed, no amount of conceptual/world view revision, it seems, could change the intuitional content of experience.

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\(^{185}\) McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 31.
This then marks a shift in McDowell’s account of self-determination, specifically the secondary aspect of self-determination, such that it is more reflective of Travis’s account of the normative constraints upon judgment, constraints which are best conceived of as internal normative constraints rather than provided by the function of external constraint. The revision of one’s world view and one’s conceptual capacities only manifests itself in one’s rational response to that which is visually in view. In no way does it alter the given passively actualised content of experience itself.

4. The First Entitlement Story

**McDowell:** “To make such an aspect of the content of an intuition into the content associated with a capacity that is discursive in the primary sense, one would need to carve it out, as it were, from the categorically unified but as yet unarticulated content of the intuition by determining it to be the meaning of a linguistic expression, which one thereby sets up as a means for making that content explicit.” 186

**McDowell:** “In discursive dealings with content, one puts significances together. This is particularly clear with discursive performances in the primary sense, whose content is the significance of a combination of meaningful expressions. But even though judging need not be conceived as an act spread out in time, like making a claim, its being discursive involves a counterpart to the way one puts significances together in meaningful speech.” 187

In respect to the first entitlement story, the process of ‘carving out’ aspects provides one of the new means by which the given intuitional content of experience can come to enable a manifold of entitled claims. According to McDowell, intuitional content as the given, is given in a form in which it is suitable to be content ‘associated’ with a discursive activity, provided that it is firstly ‘carved out’. In this way is the content of sensory receptivity


supposed to be intelligibly rationally bound to propositional content, yet not as given, but via ‘association’. What I wish to illuminate in the following discussion is the nature of that ‘association’ relationship – between intuitional content and discursive significances – specifically in respect to the rational and the self-determining capacities which may inform that relationship.

As discussed in Chapter 1, according to McDowell’s picture, the discursive fragments – or the sub-propositional parts of the whole proposition – are rationally related to aspects of intuitional content, with such (unarticulated) intuitional content already involving (newly stipulated) conceptual capacities. So the discursive significances and the whole propositional content is bound to that which, in a sense, is actualised outside the discursively articulated content, and yet that which is outside, nevertheless, involves the function of the Understanding. Again, this is a reflection of McDowell’s Kantian model of the Understanding as involved in intuition as well as in judgment.

With McDowell no longer maintaining the position that experience passively actualises a manifold of propositional content, the picture of perceptual judgment as an ‘endorsement’ of the content given is no longer applicable. As discussed, there is a decisive shift in his picture of judgment, from an ‘endorsement’ of propositional content given, to the ‘carving out’ and association of aspects of intuitional content with discursive significances. So that thinkable discursive content is brought about in perceptual judgment only via the ‘carving out’ of such aspects and the ‘association’ of them with meaningful expressions.

With no longer any given propositional content in experience, reflective rationality does not consider the truth or falsity of purported ‘perceptible facts’, a given thinkable sense. Rational capacities, rather, in order to obtain discursive content, must ‘work up’, so to speak,
from the given intuitional content to the propositional content of thought. As discussed, such a picture of ‘carving out’ and ‘putting significances together’ is intended to allow for an entitlement picture which navigates a course between Davidson’s picture and the Myth of the Given. This picture of ‘carving out’, however, is one which may be susceptible to criticisms of an incoherent model of thought.

5. Travis, Frege, Kant and Models of Thought

Travis claims that the correct model of thought (and experience) is that of Frege’s. According to Travis, this Fregean model of thought stands in opposition to a Kantian picture of judgment – exhibited in ‘The Clue’ – in which a unification of ideas (or in McDowell’s case concepts) takes place, such as would be amenable to a ‘building block’ model of thought. So that in perceptual judgment we start with distinct thinkable concepts and then build up to a whole thought by putting them together.

Travis’s Fregean model of thought claims to place the word ‘true’ to the fore, and then proceeds to thoughts as the things by which truth can come into question at all.188 Travis’s purpose is to discredit the (Kantian) notion that concepts/meaningful expressions obtain independently and are then unified into a whole thinkable in the function of judgement.

Now, while it is that McDowell does indeed draw upon aspects of Kant in respect to the Understanding being involved in intuition itself, his picture in respect to ‘carving out’ aspects of intuitional content and their association with ‘discursive significances’ is one that does not require the unification of concepts as if they obtained independently from the whole. So that McDowell, as I will discuss, can just as well accommodate for the principal aspects of a Fregean picture of thought, albeit with conceptual content obtaining in experience itself. So

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188 Travis, ‘Unlocking the Outer World’, p.1.
then, how is it that we can reconcile, as it were, McDowell’s ‘putting together of discursive
significances’ with Travis’s insistence upon a Fregean model of thought and its whole?

To begin with, McDowell’s notion of the ‘putting together’ of discursive significances is
not used to the supposed Kantian end, as Travis may have it, nor does it, as mentioned in
Chapter 1, posit a different structure to thought itself, as Travis may indeed assume. Despite
how McDowell may outwardly present his account, we can see (most clearly) how his rational
entitlement picture coheres with the fundamental features of the Fregean structure of thought,
by situating McDowell’s notion of the ‘associating’ relationship as itself only occurring in the
context of a whole propositional thought.

Where McDowell’s picture evidently offers a picture of building up to the whole
thinkable content (so as to illuminate the external rational entitlement via conceptual content),
we can just as well start with a Fregean whole propositional content – and then break down
the rational entitlement story into those (explicit) aspects of intuitional content which come to
rationally entitle propositional thought. So, while McDowell’s account may suggest that one
does in fact put parts of the whole thought together, as if one ‘built up to’ to propositional
content – via his model of speech acts – McDowell, as will become apparent, can just as well
assume the same starting point as Travis’s Frege: truth and propositional content. We should
distance the speech analogy from the way in which speech acts are ‘spread out’ in time and
read it as pertaining to the rational underpinnings of whole thoughts.

It is important to note, however, that what immediately follows in this discussion is an
account which attempts to offer a charitable presentation of McDowell’s rational entitlement
picture, one that is more perspicuous than he himself has offered, and one which has taken
into due consideration the potential criticisms of Travis and a ‘building block’ model of thought.

6. ‘Building Blocks’

McDowell states explicitly that the discursive significances, which have been associated with the ‘carved out’ intuitional content, ought not to be taken as separate ‘building blocks’ to thought, as if they were separately thinkable contents, outside of their contribution to the whole sense of the thought. McDowell maintains that one can think the significance of a predicative expression only in the context of a thought in which that content occurs predicatively.\(^{189}\) He thus claims that, whilst the composite elements are not separately thinkable, they are nevertheless to be understood as ‘put together’, in a way modelled upon (as ‘a counterpart’ to) overt meaningful expressions.

However, with this notion of discursive significances being ‘put together’, there is a concern that McDowell’s rational entitlement picture does, in fact, inadvertently fall foul of the problematic ‘building block’ model of thought. Indeed, McDowell does not assist his account by the (chronological) way in which he presents it, by \textit{first} addressing the ‘associating relationship’, and then \textit{secondly} invoking the model of ‘speech’ by which to understand the constituent contents of thought. So that, quite contrary to his explicit intention, a ‘building block’ model of thought does in fact appear to be the model preferred according to how he presents his account.

Indeed, merely by the way that McDowell presents his account, he almost invites a reading of the notion of ‘carved out’ intuitional aspects and their associated discursive significances, as if the association between the two – the discursive fragments and the non-

\(^{189}\) McDowell, ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, p. 263
discursive intuitional aspects – obtained prior to and independently from the whole propositional content (a whole which is to be modelled upon speech acts). So that, despite McDowell’s protestations, if such associations did obtain independently from the thinking of the whole thought in judgment, this would indeed be to fall precisely into the ‘building block’ model of thought. This is exactly the kind of picture that, from McDowell’s standpoint, the first kind of rational entitlement must not take.

As discussed in Chapter 1, a distinction between two aspects of propositional content, that which pertains to meaning, and that which pertains to rational entitlement, is one which I claim is absolutely essential if McDowell’s rational entitlement story is to be successful, at least in respect to its internal coherence. In order for McDowell to avoid the ‘building block’ model, the whole sense of the thought – the togetherness of the internal logical relations of the propositional content necessary for meaning – must in a relevant way precede (the answering of) any questions of the rational entitlement of the propositional content incorporating relevant aspects of intuitional content.

This is not to deny that rational entitlement does indeed ‘stem from’, or is instigated via, intuitional content. However the ‘carved out’ intuitional aspects are only made explicit, and it is only determined which ‘carved out’ aspects come to figure in the rational entitlement, only once a whole propositional content has indeed been formed in the exercise of a judgment. Only in the context of a judgement can it be ascertained how the constituent meaningful expressions of the relevant proposition are ‘associated’ with the intuitional content.

The best starting point in order to fully appreciate McDowell’s account is once again coming to terms with the particular ‘model’ offered by McDowell, the model by which we are to understand the ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition and the associating of them with discursive
significances. As mentioned previously, the models offered are used for the purposes of elucidating intelligibility through certain aspects of relevance. They are not intended as strictly analogous to what they are being applied to. Being aware of the analogous and disanalogous aspects of the model presented – in this case, the speech act model – is of importance because, as will be seen, McDowell otherwise may indeed be taken to fall foul of the ‘building block’ model of thought.

As mentioned above, McDowell claims that one ‘carves out’ an aspect of intuitional content and associates that aspect with a meaningful expression. This is presented as the means by which the content of intuition is made explicit and by which the content of intuition is to feature in the rational entitlement picture. Importantly, however, this ‘association’ is not to be conceived of as the initial step, a step preceding the putting together of discursive significances – as if the ‘association’ occurred previously in time to the judgment itself. Rather, this is merely one of the aspects of the rational entitlement picture – it is not the first step, as it were, which is then followed by the putting together of the separate thinkable parts (as in Travis’s Kant). So chronology in this respect is not McDowell’s concern.

That one puts significances together is, in accordance with the speech model of intelligibility, merely a means provided of illuminating the parts of the thinkable contents which inform the whole. The claim model is best understood by assuming the whole thinkable content at the outset, with the discursive elements which inform that whole having a rational underpinning, which is to be explained via the association with the ‘carved out’ intuitional content.

Making a claim – considered as the linguistic expression of a propositional content – can, on a certain understanding, be thought of as the temporally extended stringing together of
independently existing meaningful linguistic expressions. This is precisely the aspect of the speech model which, for McDowell’s purposes, is *disanalogous* to the rational entitlement picture concerning *thought*. If this point is not made, then McDowell’s rational entitlement picture is bound to fall into a ‘building block’ interpretation.

Of greater importance, the *analogous* aspect to such a model, in relation to the association of aspects of intuitional content with discursive significances, is that, just as an utterance, as the linguistic expression of a propositional whole, is informed by a logical togetherness of concepts, so too is the relevant association.

In the *Mind and World* paradigm, McDowell spoke of the ‘logical togetherness’ of exercising conceptual capacities. The unity was understood as occurring *within* the propositional content – the concepts of ‘red’ and ‘pyramid’, for example, were logically exercised together, so as to jointly inform a meaningful whole sense. In accordance with his revised account, McDowell can maintain that unity and logical togetherness in the context of his ‘carving out’ rational entitlement story, whilst eschewing the idea that the particular concepts exercised are in anyway independent from the whole.

What McDowell’s notion of associating aspects of intuitional content with discursive significances does, rather, is to address rational relations without (outside) that propositional content. The parts, the concepts, which inform the propositional whole and which are logically exercised together, in each case has, as it were, its own rational underpinning, an aspect of the intuitional content, which rationally binds it to the content of sensory receptivity.

If McDowell’s picture is not to fall into the problematic ‘building block’ model of thought, the ‘association’ between the ‘carved out’ intuitional aspects and the discursive significances cannot occur *prior* to the exercise of judgment. Nor can the association between
the intuitional contents and the discursive significances occur independently from judgment as a whole propositional content. The associations only occur in the context of whole propositional judgments. This is not to deny the independence, in a sense, of the intuitional aspects that are to feature in the discursive content. However, because the association only occurs in the context of a whole judgment, the intuitional contents as ‘carved out’, are only made fully explicit within the context of the judgment.

7. Intuitional Content Made ‘Explicit’ via Propositional Content

McDowell claims that the ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition are only made ‘explicit’ via their association with meaningful expressions. This means, given what has been said above, that which particular aspects of intuition actually come to feature in the rational entitlement of any particular perceptual judgment is only determined in the context of, and not prior to, that judgment – despite the aspects (ontologically) obtaining prior to judgment. So that, that which is made explicit from experience is not propositional content; rather, the content which is made explicit is intuitional content via propositional content, with the propositional content of a perceptual judgment the means of expressing that intuitional content. Hence, that intuitional content is not content which can ‘feature’ in reflective rationality, prior to the exercise of judgment, or the logical togetherness of its conceptual parts.

Even so, to reiterate, this is not to say that the ‘carved out’ aspects of intuitional content do not obtain prior to judgment. Indeed this is something which McDowell insists upon. So, in order to explore how such aspects may obtain prior to judgment I shall introduce a notion of the ‘seeing of an aspect (feature) of an object’, which may indeed shed some light upon how aspects of intuition obtain prior to judgment, and thus before they are made explicit. And accordingly, I shall propose a model of self-determining capacities which may necessarily be
involved in the carving out of an intuitional aspect, prior to the paradigmatic exercise of conceptual capacities in a judgment.

8. Attentional Intentionality

McDowell: “[...] one needs to carve out that content from the intuition's unarticulated content before one can put it together with other bits of content in discursive activity. Intuiting does not do this carving out for one.”\(^{190}\)

As discussed, the potential ‘building block’ criticisms of McDowell’s revised account were seen as a concern only in respect to the internal aspects of the propositional content, leaving untouched how that content is related without, that is, to the intuitional content as a ‘carved out’ aspect. However, while the ‘building block’ model can be seen as inapplicable to McDowell’s account, there are nonetheless certain rational considerations which McDowell does not explicitly address, aspects of the total self-determining picture, which raise interesting issues in respect to the intelligibility of his rational entitlement picture.

McDowell may well refuse the model of ‘building blocks’, a point concerning the internal logical relations of the propositional content and their unified composition. However, with his new picture of entitlement, a rational point is made also, one which connects the whole sense, and the concepts figuring in that whole sense, with intuitional aspects that provide rational external constraint upon judgment. So the rational point concerns the external relations in respect to the intuitional content situated outside of the articulated content with sense – the content which is ‘carved out’, and from which the associated thinkable discursive content obtains its rational entitlement.

\(^{190}\) McDowell, ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, p. 263
A central issue here concerns how the aspects of intuitional content obtain prior to the whole propositional content, prior to their association with discursive significances. This is a concern which transcends, or precedes, the avoidance of the ‘building block’ model of thought. It concerns the processes involved in the ‘carving out’ of aspects prior to their supposed discursive associations.

McDowell claims that one first needs to carve out an intuitional aspect and then associate it with a meaningful expression (and as discussed this occurs in the judgment as a whole). So the aspects of intuitional content, according to what McDowell says, certainly obtain prior to and independently from their discursive association. How then is it that we are to understand that independence of intuitional aspects, specifically in respect to the self-determining capacities which are involved in carving them out prior to discursive association?

One way to potentially understand how such content could intelligibly obtain prior to discursive association is via a notion of ‘attentional intentionality’ – the seeing of a visible aspect, which itself occurs outside of a discursive characterisation and which does not itself constitute a thinkable cognitive episode. Such an episode of directed attention may thus provide a necessary pre-condition which enables perceptual judgment, and appealing to it may be a means by which to understand how a ‘carved out’ intuitional content can obtain prior to discursive association.

Of course, McDowell’s primary concern is in respect to rational entitlement, and so discursive rationality, in the context of making a perceptual judgment. However, his notion of ‘carving out’ intuional aspects does seem to introduce a self-determined intentional act – which I propose can be understood via this notion ‘attentional intentionality’ – that precedes the formation of a whole discursive content itself. So that, applying this idea, we can say the
following: in seeing an aspect (feature) of an object, in a self-determined directed paying of 
visual attention to that aspect (feature), we are to be understood as simultaneously ‘carving 
out’ an aspect of intuitional content.

The term ‘aspect’ can be used in a variety of ways. McDowell’s primary use of the term 
‘aspect’ is in respect to intuitional content and its association with discursive rationality. 
Whereas there is an unproblematic common sense notion of ‘aspect’, which may be usefully 
employed to interpret McDowell’s own account of ‘carved out’ intuitional aspects: this 
pertains to the paying of attention to certain visible features of that which is immediately 
present in experience. So it is the literal seeing of a visible/perceptible feature – aspect – that I 
associate with this notion of ‘attentional intentionality’, with a view to offering an intelligible 
account of how ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition may obtain prior to discursive articulation.

At the outset, certain comparisons between ‘attentional intentionality’ and ‘intuitional 
aspects’ do hold in fact. The seeing of an aspect (feature), a directed paying attention to an 
object, can occur prior to judgment. The seeing of an aspect of an object does not represent 
anything according to it, nor does it purport something to be the case. So it is neither 
thinkable nor does it have a sense. Until a rational articulation in respect to it – a judgment – it 
remains outside of discursive articulation, meaningful significances and inferential judgments, 
in respect to its characterization.

So an aspect of intuitional content can be seen as the content which is demarcated by the 
literal seeing of an aspect (feature) of a visible object in a directed paying of attention to it. 
The visible aspect (feature) ought not to be conflated with the accompanying aspect of 
intuional content; rather, the latter ought to be understood as the aspect of content given in 
intuition which enables us to have some feature of an object literally in view and in focus. So
that the ‘carved out’ aspect of intuitional content is the content of a literal seeing of an aspect (feature) of a visible object.

So attentional intentionality does not itself rationally underpin the perceptual judgment; rather attentional intentionality engages aspects of intuitional content, and the latter in turn rationally underpin the discursive significances of the whole discursive judgment. Whilst the attentional intentionality obtains prior to a judgment, the aspect of intuitional content carved out by it is itself only made fully explicit (in the rational entitlement picture) with the exercise of judgment as a whole – with the discursive significances specifying their respective intuitional content underpinnings.

Again, it ought to be kept in mind that the discursive significances are not associated with the visible aspects of the object itself to which we direct our attention. The discursive significances are associated with the content of the ‘carved out’ aspects of intuition. Again, one must keep an object/content distinction in mind. If the discursive significances were to be associated with the visible features of seen objects, we would fall into the building block model of thought.

The notion of attentional intentionality is introduced merely as a means of understanding the self-determining capacities which seem necessarily to be in play in order for the ‘carved out’ intuitional contents to obtain prior to judgment, prior to their association with discursive significances.

The ‘carving out’ of an aspect would appear to necessarily engage the intentional capacities of the subject. And, as discussed, because the intuitional aspect becomes associated with the discursive, the aspect must obtain somehow, at least initially, independently of the discursive significance. Such an isolating of the intuitional aspect can
thus be said to have introduced a new (in focus at least) self-determining dimension necessary
for perceptual judgment, one which, because it is not yet associated with discursive
significances, is perhaps better characterised as pertaining to those self-determining capacities
at a sub-discursive level, those better associated with attentional intentionality, rather than
reflective rationality.

McDowell, according to his revised account, of course denies that the formation of
(uniﬁed) intuitional content is ‘prediscursive activity’. However, he denies no such
characterisation of the ‘carving out’ of intuitional content. So perhaps we serve McDowell’s
purposes well by characterising this isolating of an intuitional aspect as a pre-discursive
activity – involving self-determining capacities. And while the self-determining capacities
engaged in carving out aspects of intuition do not do not yet exhibit one’s particular world
view, nor involve the applicability of truth or falsity, the exercise of such capacities is
apparently a necessity for generating truth purporting content.

So, in McDowell’s new picture, we appear to have self-determining processes which
occur at a sub-propositional / sub-discursive level. This can be seen as complementing his
extension of sorts of the space of reasons outside of propositional content, to that which is
rationally entitling, yet is not in the form of a reason in itself. So that, prior to judgement, we
utilise sub-discursive self-determining capacities of directed attention, in order for intuitional
content to intelligibly rationally entitle judgment.

And, while the self-determining capacities engaged in ‘carving out’ aspects of intuition
do not themselves attract notions of truth or falsity, the exercises of such capacities is
apparently a necessity for generating truth purporting content, and thus the applicability of
verdictive answerability, that is, in the context of entitlement. The sub-discursive carving out
of aspects is a critical dimension of the very formation of perceptual judgment – which indeed aims at truth.
Conclusion

McDowell’s particular form of idealism takes it shape according to two characteristic features of his account of experience and perceptual judgment. The first, discussed in Chapter 2, is that our perceptual judgments stand in verdictive relations to the world of propositional fact. The second is that the conceptual realm is unbounded, so that sensory experience itself involves the actualisation of our conceptual capacities. These two features combine such that the given content of experience, if all goes well, thereby constitutes a fact of the world. In this way there is ‘no gap’ between thought and the world.

As has been discussed, McDowell presents an account, in *Mind and World*, such that our rational self-determining capacities are implicated in both of these two features of his idealism – answerability to the world and sensory experience – as they come to inform his picture of empirical thought. So the formation of McDowell’s idealism, as has been the focus in this Chapter 3, can be understood by the way it comes to posit the particular involvement of self-determining capacities in the formation of perceptual judgment based on experience – the common content of which constitutes (in veridical cases) a fact of the world.

In respect to answerability and the world as fact, McDowell insists that we are to understand the notion of being answerable to the objects of the empirical world – his idea of rehabilitating objectivity – by way of the concept-constituting content of social norms. These norms are laws which we have made for ourselves – understood as a communal activity – and are intrinsic to the practice and content of thought itself. So this provided one level, so to speak, of how to conceive of self-determining capacities as being involved in perceptual
judgment, and more importantly, in experience itself: they are implicated in such thought via a shared community of social norms that constitute its conceptual content.

Self-determining capacities also come to be implicated in perceptual judgment and the experience on which it is based (which provides a perceiver’s individual ‘openess’ to the world of fact) by way of one’s ability to revise one’s background theoretical world view – and so the concepts which one has available in experiencing and rationally responding to the empirical world.

This ‘secondary gloss’ on self-determining capacities thus comes to complement the paradigmatic form of self-determination, that being the exercise of conceptual capacities in judgment itself. Of special note, those self-determining (communal and individual) capacities which, according to his secondary gloss, come to inform both the given content of experience and the facts to which one is verdictively answerable are to be understood, according to the Mind and World account of experience, by way of its propositional content.

Another feature of McDowell’s idealist, yet purportedly therapeutic philosophy, is that we situate external constraint within our rational self-determining capacities, with such a union of their function occurring in the given propositional content of experience itself. In this way, McDowell sought to provide an account of conceptually shaped experience which could avoid the pitfalls of the Myth of the Given as well as the rationally unconstrained picture of perceptual judgment offered by Davidson.

As McDowell saw it, Davidson’s eschewing of rational external constraint from experience, in effect, made the exercise of self-determining capacities in constructing a world
view entirely impossible, given that he could not ensure the very content of thought in the first place. Moreover, by incorporating rational external constraint in the form of what is passively given in receptivity, McDowell’s idealism – in respect to the positing of the world as fact as that to which we stand in verdictive relations – could counter claims that his idealist picture could not, as so constituted, acknowledge how external reality is independent of our acts of thinking.191

McDowell maintains that our rational (conceptual) capacities are constitutive of the realm of freedom. One of the ways, therefore, that McDowell’s notion of conceptual experience purports to be successful is that it posits self-determining capacities, understood in terms of his secondary gloss, as implicated within sensory experience itself. So that, according to the propositional model of experience in Mind and World, self-determining capacities come to infuse the shaping of sensory consciousness itself, which is traditionally conceived of as definitely beyond the space of freedom or one’s powers of influence and rational self-determination.

In this way, McDowell purported to reconcile, so to speak, a dualistically conceived relationship between the functions of external constraint and self-determination which inform empirical thought. This, of course, complemented his anti-dualistic stance in respect to the intellect and sensory, which was discussed in Chapter 1. Indeed, such a pervasive anti-dualistic stance towards objective-subjective relations – which begins with positing the conceptual content of experience – becomes crucial for McDowell in order to avoid the ‘interminable oscillation’ which he identifies in Mind and World.

With his secondary gloss on self-determining capacities, McDowell also sought to avoid the problematic form of idealism which he finds in Kant. Distancing himself from Kant, he thus came to distinguish the representational content of experience in terms of its involuntary givenness. The actualisation of conceptual capacities in experience came to be understood as involuntarily given, and yet whilst involuntary, experience nevertheless involved self-determining capacities, according to his secondary gloss. In this way, McDowell posited the involuntary involvement of self-determining capacities in the content of experience, which nevertheless, as passively given, enabled one to be open to the independent world of fact, with the requisite external constraint upon perceptual judgment.

Travis presents a model of experience and perceptual judgment according to which no self-determining capacities are implicated in experience itself. Travis, of course – via his notions of expertise, sense, and recognition – does provide an account of certain self-determining aspects which come to inform what is involved in one’s possessing a certain conceptual (classificatory) capacity in relation to perceptual judgment. However, contra McDowell, those self-determining capacities, as Travis sees them, do not occur as bound to the function of external constraint, nor in experience itself. This accords with the role he posits for perception: it merely brings into view those non-conceptual objects to which we can stand in verdictive relations.

McDowell, in Mind and World, associates the idea that ‘it is really not up to us what we perceive’ with the notion that we are given representational content.192 As just noted, he then, differentiating himself from Kant, proceeds to distinguish the given content of experience as that which is involuntarily given, and which we do not ourselves put together – while being

content that nonetheless implicates our self-determining capacities, according to his secondary gloss.

When Travis addresses this issue—what he refers to as ‘compulsion’ in empirical thought—he does this in the context of discussing ‘expertise’, and holds firm to the notion that reasons-relations can hold between non-conceptual objects and conceptual thought. So, rather than conceptual content determining (compelling) perceptual judgment, it is the non-conceptual object itself which rationally compels one’s response in judgment—provided that one has the suitable expertise in place, and so the capacity (shared sense that enables one) to identify a particular instance as belonging to a certain kind.

Indeed, Travis supposes that this is precisely what rationality in perceptual judgment is—rationality is exhibited in the non-conceptual bearing upon what one should think. It is in this way that we see the particular dynamic unfold between external constraints and aspects of our self-determining capacities as they come to inform Travis’s account of perceptual judgment.

So Travis, much like McDowell, does illuminate certain secondary aspects of self-determining capacities which come to inform and normatively constrain the exercise of judgment. However, unlike McDowell, these aspects are understood as internal to the exercise of judgment as a rational response, and are precisely not, as McDowell’s early propositional model would suppose, involved in experience and external constraint itself.

In this way also, to reiterate, Travis does not bind the space of reasons to the realm of the conceptual, or the space of freedom, as McDowell would have it. Because Travis situates the realm of non-conceptual objects as that to which we stand in verdictive relations, the space of
reasons necessarily extends beyond that which is in the mind’s power to shape and self-determine. Our self-determining capacities are not engaged internally to the mere perception of that objective domain itself.

Nevertheless, as Travis presents his account of perceptual judgment, the relationship between external constraint and self-determining capacities is presented such that a mutual interdependence of sorts does indeed obtain between the two functions. So, while Travis may embrace a dualism of a kind between external constraint and self-determining capacities (which are implicated only in one’s rational responses) – a dualism which McDowell is set upon avoiding – such a dualism is not so glaringly problematic, that is, if viewed independently of McDowell’s particular concern about, and conception of, the Myth of the Given.

To return then to McDowell. Under the authority of Kant, McDowell claimed that the space of reasons is the realm of freedom.\textsuperscript{193} By associating the space of reasons, the bounds of the conceptual and the realm of freedom in the way that he did, McDowell ensured (in his \textit{Mind and World} account) that the content which could entitle and thus stand as a reason for perceptual judgment extended only so far as one’s self-determining capacities were implicated.

However, with McDowell’s revised account of intuition, and with the new stipulation of the sense in which its content is conceptual in terms of the mere potential of that content (now less than a fully constituted reason in itself) for discursive articulation in judgment, a central feature of McDowell’s idealism would appear to come under considerable pressure. Surely

\textsuperscript{193} McDowell. \textit{Mind and World}, p. 5.
McDowell now lacks the wherewithal to posit self-determining capacities as implicated in experience itself.

The social norms – laws which we make for ourselves – in terms of whose content we were to understand answerability to the empirical world and, which were implicated in the content of experience itself, no longer find a place in the revised account of intuitional content, as non discursive content that merely enables a bringing into view. And, without discursive content, there is also no way to understand how any revision of one’s world view, could in any way alter what can be given in intuitional content.

McDowell could previously purport to provide a substantial account of self-determining capacities as being implicated in the content of a conceptual shaping of sensory experience itself, in the terms of concept-constituting social norms and one’s background world view. His revised account of experience, however, is such that it can no longer draw upon the same robust models of intelligibility once used to substantiate his stipulation of the conceptual. Nor is McDowell able to draw upon those models (supplied by Sellars and Kant) which gave credence to self-determining capacities being implicated in the shaping of sensory consciousness itself. Intuitional content, as now understood, is without propositional content and without those concepts which are involved in discursive thought, and which in turn allowed for the intelligible implication of self-determining capacities in experience itself.

Experience, reconceived as it is without discursive content, evidently creates an uneasy tension for the idea that the bounds of the conceptual coincide with the realm of freedom. McDowell may insist that the conceptual remains unbounded, according to his new

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194 Of course, whilst self-determining capacities in the form of the content of social norms may still inform the aspects (facts) of world to which we stand in verdictive relations, we do not stand in such relations to the content of experience itself.
stipulation of conceptual content. Intuitional content cannot, however, as it is now to be understood, comfortably accommodate for the idea, central in the *Mind and World* picture of perceptual judgment and experience, that the bounds of freedom extend (suitably understood) to experience itself.

Of course, McDowell’s idealism, as it takes shape according to the revised account of experience, can purport to remain in place, given that we remain verdictively answerable to facts and the unboundedness of the conceptual is ensured via intuitional content. However, now with his new stipulation of the conceptual, these two aspects, as they come to inform empirical thought, no longer occur jointly in experience itself, given that we are no longer (in intuition) given propositional facts. Furthermore, where self-determining capacities once were implicated in both such aspects, now however, the unboundedness of the conceptual in respect to the content of experience in no way involves self-determining capacities.

Consequently, it would appear that the functions of external constraint and self-determining capacities are not as jointly bound as they once were, that is, in the given content of experience itself. McDowell’s two kinds of rational entitlement – ‘carving out’ and recognition – are such that self-determining capacities only enter the picture as a rational response to that which is visibly in view via intuitional content – a relationship between the two (self-determining capacities and our rational responses) which is supported by Travis’s account. McDowell’s notion of involuntarily actualized conceptual capacities that implicate our powers of rational self-determination – which was tied to the function (content) of external constraint – simply recedes with the demise of propositional content within experience itself.
This break between external constraint and self-determining capacities is perhaps most perspicuous in McDowell’s account of that kind of rational entitlement which involves drawing upon recognitional capacities – with the content of its judgment outstripping the potential for discursive articulation given in unarticulated and non-discursive intuition. Such rational entitlement supposedly stems from an object via intuitional content, rather than simply Travis’s non-conceptual object. However, as has been discussed, self-determining capacities are not implicated in the intuitional content itself, and evidently only enter upon the scene when a perceiving subject draws upon their capacity for recognition.

And, in respect to the revised entitlement story that involves the ‘carving out’ of intuitional aspects and their association with discursive significances, self-determining capacities – again not implicated in the non-discursive intuitional content itself – clearly only enter the picture with the ‘carving out’ of aspects of such content as we direct our attention to specific features of an object in view, and the association of such aspects with discursive significances within whole judgments that, in their propositional parts, reflect such ‘carving out’ activity.

This new fractured situation can indeed be seen as resulting from certain pressures provided by Travis’s account of perception and perceptual judgment – and, in particular, the idea that experience is a mere bringing into view which does not itself involve propositional content. While McDowell may continue to resist certain aspects of Travis’s account in relation to verdictive answerability, and the necessity of positing conceptual content in experience so as to avoid the Myth of the Given, what does seem to be beyond dispute is that he now has a separation between the function of external constraint and self-determination, as they come to inform perceptual judgment. In his earlier *Mind and World* account, McDowell tried to refuse
the notion that self-determining capacities are first involved only at the point of our rational response to what is anyway given to us in receptivity. With his newly stipulated notion of the conceptual as it figures in intuition, this would appear to be exactly the kind of model which he now has. The fact that intuitional content is merely discursively conceptualizable means that such a diminished notion of the conceptual prohibits those self-determining capacities from being implicated in experience itself – the very capacities which once provided the key to understanding how his purported therapy for the ‘interminable oscillation’, by way of verdict-dictating conceptually shaped intuition, was to have its effect.
Conclusion: Revisiting the Myth of the Given

McDowell’s commitment to avoiding the Myth of the Given fundamentally informs each of the three crucial aspects of experience and perceptual judgment which have been discussed in the three Chapters of this thesis. Indeed, the entire apparatus of McDowell’s notion of conceptually shaped experience – both in Mind and World and in his essay ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’ – rests upon the premise that sensibility by itself – without passively given conceptual content – cannot make the empirical world available for knowledge. According to McDowell, the stipulation of experience with conceptual content is the only means whereby perceptual judgment can be seen as procuring rational external constraint, without falling foul of the Myth.

The connection between rational relations and conceptual content is an important one. And it is one which, in its detail, comes to reveal the various differences which obtain between McDowell’s and Travis’s respective accounts. As has been discussed, McDowell’s requirement that rational external constraint upon perceptual judgment is to be performed by conceptual content is attributable to his continued adherence to the spirit of what he takes to be Davidson’s central insight into rationality, viz., that ‘reason’s reach extends no further than conceptual capacities can take it’. And while McDowell no longer claims that experience has the same content as judgment (as his amended dictum once had it), and so in this way is drawn closer to Travis’s notion of perception as a mere having in view, McDowell refuses to relinquish the relationship between rational relations and conceptual content (as indeed Travis has done), however that content is now to be understood.

As a result of this, however, McDowell is left with a significantly weakened notion of conceptual content. A content which, as discussed, cannot draw upon his earlier and more robust models of intelligibly conceiving experience as conceptually shaped. To begin with, McDowell’s notion of the space of reasons as extending all the way to sensory impressions themselves is reconfigured such that the content of experience is not something which can itself stand as a self-constituted reason. Whilst entitlement ‘stems’ from that which is given in experience, such non-discursive content cannot itself enter the full panoply of rational relations which characterizes the logical space of reasons (between propositional contents) as McDowell otherwise conceives it. That the content itself cannot justify a claim sits rather anomalously in the overall context of McDowell’s project. McDowell in turn loses certain key
aspects which once substantiated his conceptualist account of experience; such as mere ‘appearings’, ameliorating Davidson’s apparent ‘blind spot’, Kant’s ‘The Clue’ (as investing intuition with representational and thinkable content), and the notion of thinking in the sensory.

In respect to objectivity, whilst in the discussion I do not deny that McDowell continues to treat our perceptual judgments as standing in verdictive relations to propositional facts, viz., the layout of the world, it now turns out that that notion does not itself require that experience be constituted by propositional, conceptual content. Nor does the fact that our perceptual judgments stand in verdictive relations to that which can truly be said to be the case require any longer that we be verdictively answerable to the given content of (veridical) experience itself. Indeed, this is a notion which is no longer available to McDowell’s revised account of experience anyway. Moreover, situating aspects of the world (as fact) as that relata (beyond experience) which (on the right hand side of Frege’s line) normatively determine the truth of perceptual judgments is, on the face of it, a position perfectly consilient with a conception of experience as altogether lacking conceptual content – though for McDowell, of course, concerns about the Myth block embracing any such non-conceptualist picture of experience.

Furthermore, as became clear in the discussion of Travis, we can have self-determining capacities and external constraint bound together in such a way that the exercise of freedom in thought is possible – while such thought is, at the same time, rationally and externally constrained – without requiring that self-determining capacities be implicated within experience itself, conceived as conceptual in content. Indeed, where McDowell once situated his secondary gloss on self-determining capacities as implicated in experience itself, as it is according to his newly revised account, those capacities now come to inform merely the exercise of one’s perceptual judgment, conceived of as a rational response to that which is merely in view. So, as McDowell himself now re-conceives experience, it turns out that the necessity of self-determining capacities being bound to the function of external constraint does not require that experience itself be constituted by conceptual content that implicates these capacities. Indeed, once again, this is a notion which is no longer available to McDowell’s revised account of experience anyway.
McDowell’s insistence that our (perceptual) relationship with the empirical world is one conditioned by our second natures as language users is a penetrating one. However, the question which now remains is whether he really requires conceptual content in experience in order to assert his notion of permeated mindedness. Considering the above discussion, McDowell’s positing of conceptual content in experience is most certainly in serious difficulty. This leaves one with little choice other than to doubt the connection which McDowell insists upon between conceptual content in experience and our rationality. Despite my attempts to give a charitable reading of McDowell’s account – especially in respect to his entitlement notion of ‘carved out aspects’ – his problematic and impoverished new stipulation of conceptual content in experience is one which is arguably even more than ever driven by his concern to avoid the Myth of the Given, as he conceives that Myth. This would seem to suggest that McDowell ought to revisit and reconsider his own particular take on the Myth, and how that take has come to shape his account of experience and perceptual judgment.
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