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McDowell and Merleau-Ponty on the Cartesian Picture of the Mind

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Introduction

Recently a number of authors have appealed to the early works of Merleau-Ponty in a critique of the picture of perception presented by McDowell. This debate has been focused on McDowell's claim that conceptual capacities are essentially involved in our perceptual experiences.¹ In this paper I wish to draw attention to what I consider an additional potentially fruitful meeting point between the philosophies of Merleau-Ponty and McDowell, namely their critique of a certain Cartesian picture of the mind. My aim is to demonstrate how both authors regard a certain conception of nature rather than some independent epistemological project as the background assumption which gives the Cartesian picture its attraction. Furthermore I want to bring out how they share a general conception of the nature of the problem generated by this background assumption. They both regard the problem as a transcendental problem as opposed to a merely epistemological problem. The problem is transcendental in the sense that it is a problem concerning the very possibility of empirical content rather than simply a problem about the possibility of knowledge. These formulations owe more to McDowell than to Merleau-Ponty, but I shall argue that they do indeed capture an outlook shared by both thinkers

When I highlight the similarities between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty this is not because I believe that there are no substantial differences. On the contrary, I highlight similarities because I believe it to be crucial for further exploration of the disagreements that we recognize this background of shared concerns. It is exactly the presence of such shared concerns that makes the comparison of the two philosophers's respective accounts a promising approach to the problems in question.

1. The Fully Cartesian Picture of the Mind

Merleau-Ponty characterizes the Cartesian conception of the mind as one that demarcates the mind as an area of being where the distinction between appearance and reality finds no foothold (PP, p. 340, p. 387, p. 432).² This is what McDowell calls the fully Cartesian picture of the mind, where the mind is conceived as 'a realm of reality in which sameness and differences are exhaustively determined by how things seem to the subject' (McDowell 1998a, p. 249). The strongest version of the Cartesian picture is characterized by a commitment to what I shall call the Transparency Thesis:

The Transparency Thesis: Any conscious experience is immediately given to the subject in a way that makes all intrinsic features of the experience available to be known in a non-inferentially and infallible way.

¹ See the forthcoming collection of essays on the McDowell-Dreyfus debate (Scheer 2012). Earlier critics of McDowell inspired by Merleau-Ponty include: Kelly (2001), Taylor (2004) and Wrathall (2004). Authors who suggest a more reconciliatory approach include Elpidorou 2008, Dwyer 2008 and Berendzen 2010.

² All references to Merleau-Ponty's *Phénoménologie de la perception* (1945) are indicated with "PP".

The traditional name for the special way intrinsic features of experiences are, according to the Transparency Thesis, available to the subject undergoing the experience is “introspection”. I take it to be an expression of the Transparency Thesis when Merleau-Ponty writes that according to the Cartesian view nothing can be in consciousness without it being known in an absolute way and that everything that is known in this way belongs to consciousness (PP, p. 387). Everything that belongs to the experience qua experience is knowable in an infallible way via introspection and everything that is known via introspection belongs to the experience as such.

The Transparency Thesis can be regarded as a certain interpretation of what according to McDowell is one of Descartes’s genuine contributions to philosophy, namely the idea that the way things appear to a subject constitutes a realm of facts and furthermore facts to which the subject has a certain privileged access (McDowell 1998a, p, 242). The idea of such a region of facts constituted by how things appear to us does not yet constitute the fully Cartesian picture of the mind. To reach the fully Cartesian picture we need to add the further thesis that what belongs intrinsically to our conscious mind cannot exceed that which is available in such an introspective and possibly infallible fashion.

The fully Cartesian picture of the mind doesn’t necessarily involve a commitment to the above strong version of the transparency thesis which lays claim to infallible knowledge. A weaker version of the transparency thesis could be formulated as follows: Any feature of an experience that belongs intrinsically to the experience is immediately, i.e. non-inferentially accessible to the subject of the experience, and this special access is available independently of any access to the outer world. This would still be a version of the fully Cartesian picture of the mind because the introspective accessibility is regarded as the defining feature of everything that belongs intrinsically to the mental. As we shall see McDowell explicitly argues that it is not the strong transparency thesis which is the main problem with Cartesianism and I shall argue that Merleau-Ponty’s arguments also have a broader target. First, however, I wish to make clear how acceptance of the Transparency Thesis easily leads to the Cartesian predicament traditionally thought of as a skeptical problem about the possibility of knowledge.

2. McDowell on the Argument from Illusion

McDowell highlights how certain epistemic versions of the so called arguments from illusion and from hallucination become close to irresistible once the fully Cartesian picture is combined with a further thesis which I shall call the Indistinguishability Thesis (McDowell 1998a, pp. 240-241; 1998b, p. 382, p. 386).

The Indistinguishability Thesis: For any genuine, veridical experience of a real, mind-independent object there is a possible experience which would be, from the subject’s point of view, indistinguishable from the actual experience, but which would fail to present the subject with an opportunity to know the things the genuine experience makes available, either because this possible experience would be a case of a sensory illusion or because it would be a case of a perceptual hallucination.³

³ I shall use the term “genuine experience” to make a contrast with illusory and hallucinatory experiences. I take the notion of a genuine experience to be neutral between a disjunctivist and a non-disjunctivist conception of experience. If one denies that an experience could intrinsically be a world-revealing experience, one can still operate with the notion of a genuine experience as a notion that covers for instance the kind of experiences implicated in an actual seeing of something.

The argument from illusion starts with the basic observation that sometimes we are placed in a situation where the seen object (I shall stick to vision as my example throughout), say a red cube, appears differently from the way it actually is, say as pink, and that in such cases we may, as we undergo the experience, not be able to distinguish it from one in which we actually would be seeing a pink cube. The argument from hallucination adds that it is even possible that it could visually seem to us that we perceive a red cube under circumstances where no real object is present to us. If we combine the possibility of illusions and hallucinations with the Transparency Thesis, it immediately follows that it cannot be intrinsic to the experience involved in my seeing a red cube that there is in fact a red cube visually present to me. I'm obviously not infallible when it comes to knowing whether I'm actually seeing or whether it merely seems to me that I'm seeing. This is what the possibility of illusions and hallucinations illustrates. Therefore it cannot be a part of what belongs to the experience qua experience that it reveals a real, existing object to us. Had such a revelatory relation to the real object been an intrinsic feature of the experience qua experience, then we should have been able to know infallibly about each instance of a seeing that it is a seeing, since the mind is, *ex hypothesi*, utterly self-disclosing. Any relation to the cube itself must therefore be entirely external to my subjective experience.

In so far as we accept the epistemic, internalist intuition that if something is to be a part of my justification for a judgement then that something cannot be entirely external to my subjectivity (McDowell 1998b, p. 374, p. 390), it now follows that the justificatory potential of an experience which is involved in a case of seeing cannot exceed the potential which would be possessed by an indistinguishable experience which merely seems to be a genuine perception. We have reached what McDowell calls the highest common factor model (McDowell 1998b, p. 386, p. 388). On this view how any genuine perception can factor in our epistemic accounting is determined by the highest epistemic value it can share with an illusory or even a hallucinatory experience. This places us in the familiar Cartesian predicament. In order to entitle ourselves to any observational judgement we have to come up with a justification that starts with something less than truth-entailing reasons such as "I see that there is a red cube in front of me". The highest common factor view rules out the legitimacy of such factive reasons. Our experientially given starting point is thought of as something which could be available even in a case where there is no object to be perceived, namely as the fact that it seems to us that there is an object in front of us.

In the next section I present the way McDowell tries to block the argument from illusion via his so called disjunctive conception of experience.

3. McDowell's Disjunctive Conception of Experience

McDowell's disjunctive conception of perceptual appearances is an attempt to show that one can accept the Cartesian idea that the way things appear to a subject constitutes a realm of facts to which the subject has a certain privileged access, and furthermore accept the Indistinguishability Thesis, without thereby being forced to accept the highest common factor view. Instead of regarding the retreat to appearances as a retreat to a realm of facts that is self-disclosed and self-enclosed, perceptual appearances are to be understood disjunctively. Whenever we have a case of a perceptual appearance, such an appearance is either constituted by a worldly object making itself manifest to the subject, or it is a mere appearance, i.e. an illusion or a hallucination. Here is how McDowell formulates his disjunctivism:

"Short of the fully Cartesian picture, the infallibly knowable fact – it seeming to one that things are thus and so – can be taken disjunctively, as constituted either by the fact

that things are manifestly thus and so or by the fact that that merely seems to be the case.” (McDowell 1998a, p. 242)

We can formulate disjunctivism as the following general thesis:

The disjunctive account of perceptual appearances (“disjunctivism”): Whenever you have a perceptual appearance as of an object, then this experience is qua experience, i.e. solely by virtue of features that belong intrinsically to the experience, either a case of a genuine experience actually presenting you with real features of an existing object or it is a mere seeming to undergo such a genuine experience, i.e. it is an illusion or a hallucination.

What the disjunctive account makes apparent is that there is no valid inference from the Indistinguishability Thesis and the idea of a realm of facts concerning how things seem to one, to the conclusion that our perceptually given epistemic starting point is limited to that which is also available in the case of an illusion or a hallucination. It is true that the inference can go through if we add the Transparency Thesis. However, the *possibility* of an epistemic retreat to appearances available both in cases of illusions and in cases of actually seeing, doesn’t in itself establish the *necessity* of reestablishing our contact with the world from an in principle world-impooverished experience.

It is at this point that McDowell presents his diagnosis of the deeper commitments which motivate the Transparency Thesis. According to McDowell part of the attraction of the Transparency Thesis stems from the idea that the relation between mind and world must be susceptible to the kind of explanations provided by natural science (McDowell 1998a, p. 243, 1998b, p. 391). If we accept the view that the natural world can be exhaustibly explained by natural scientific means, i.e. what McDowell calls scientistic naturalism, and furthermore accept that causal interaction between mind and world is possible, then it is natural to think that the mind must be a self-standing realm of reality. This is so because natural scientific explanations are characterized by a conception of the items to be explained as standing in merely causal relations to one another and such causal relations are thought of as external to the items placed in such relations. Once this “objectifying mode of conceiving reality” (McDowell 1998b, p. 393) is extended to the mind, the otherwise innocent Cartesian idea of an inner realm of facts about appearances becomes the idea of a realm of facts that exhausts the reality of the mental.

4. McDowell’s Negative Transcendental Argument

For McDowell the problem with the highest common factor view is not just that it embarrasses us epistemologically. What is at stake is not just whether we can have knowledge about the world but, as McDowell puts it, the very idea of “subjectivity as a mode of being in the world” (McDowell 1998a, p. 242). This is where we find what I shall refer to as McDowell’s negative transcendental argument. He argues that that unless we can make sense of what he takes, I think rightly, to be a completely natural and intuitive idea of perceptual experience, namely as at its best making aspects of objective reality immediately present to us (McDowell 2010, p. 245), we will fail to make sense of experiences so much as seeming to make reality present to us (McDowell 1996, p. 112, n. 2, 1998a, p. 243, 1998b, p. 389, 1998c, pp. 409-410, 2009, p. 230). McDowell doesn’t spell out the argument in much detail, but the basic idea is the following: If we are to make sense of the idea of an experience as merely seeming to be a seeing, we need an intelligible conception of what it is the experience merely appears to be. Here is how McDowell formulates the basic idea:

“Experiences in which it merely looks to one as if things are thus and so are experiences that misleadingly present themselves as belonging to that epistemically distinguished class. So we need the idea of experiences that belong to the epistemically distinguished class if we are to comprehend the idea that experiences have objective purport. If one acknowledges that experiences have objective purport, one cannot consistently refuse to make sense of the idea of experiences in which objective facts are directly available to perception.” (McDowell 2009, p. 230)

With this negative transcendental claim McDowell claims to have pinpointed the often unrecognized radical character of modern skepticism which since Descartes has occupied philosophers. The Cartesian picture not only makes empirical knowledge unattainable, it undermines the very idea perceptual appearances, because it cannot make sense of the possibility of direct, perceptual confrontation with how things are. With his disjunctive account McDowell claims to have provided a way out of this Cartesian predicament.

What I want to do in the remaining sections of this paper is to reconstruct some of Merleau-Ponty’s arguments against the fully Cartesian picture of the mind, in order to demonstrate that not only does Merleau-Ponty share McDowell’s diagnosis concerning the role of scientific naturalism, he also provides his own version of the negative transcendental argument.

5. Merleau-Ponty’s Dilemma

I propose that we reconstruct Merleau-Ponty’s critique of the fully Cartesian picture in terms of a dilemma. The dilemma starts with the following disjunction: Either it is intrinsic to a genuine perception (*vrai perception*, PP, p. 341) qua experience that it is a truth-revealing experience (*perception vrai*, PP, p. 341, p. 387) or it is not.⁴ It is when this disjunction is combined with the Transparency Thesis that the dilemma Merleau-Ponty spells out arises (PP, pp. 340-344, pp. 386-397). The first horn of the dilemma is a consequence of the acceptance of the idea that genuine perception is intrinsically world-revealing and this option is taken by what Merleau-Ponty sometimes refers to as rationalism or intellectualism. It amounts to disjunctivism on Cartesian terms. The second horn is chosen when one denies the disjunctive conception of appearances but maintains the Transparency Thesis. This second option leads directly to the highest common factor view, and it is this view that Merleau-Ponty discusses under the heading of empiricism or skepticism (PP, pp. 341-342).

On the surface Merleau-Ponty’s analysis seems utterly incongruent with that of McDowell. Merleau-Ponty’s Cartesian is committed to the strong transparency thesis, but she is furthermore committed to a disjunctive account of experience since she affirms an epistemologically relevant intrinsic difference between a truth-revealing perception and illusions (PP, p. 340). In contrast McDowell’s portrays the Cartesian Transparency Thesis as going hand in hand with the highest common factor view and opposes the Cartesian picture exactly with a disjunctive account. I think these differences are superficial. If we look more closely at the way Merleau-Ponty spells out the line of thought that leads to Cartesian intellectualism we can recognize how the position comes about as a recoil from the skepticism that the argument from illusion lands us in; a skepticism which is here represented by Merleau-Ponty’s empiricist. The Cartesian intellectualist can be seen as someone who recognizes the fatal consequences of accepting the Transparency Thesis in conjunction with the Indistinguishability Thesis, and who bites the bullet

⁴ In his German translation Rudolf Boehm helpfully notes that “*perception vrai*” here means something like a perception that announces a truth (*eine “Wahres bekundende Wahrnehmung”*) and “*vrai perception*” means a genuine perception (*eine “echte Wahrnehmung”*) (Merleau-Ponty 1966, p. 342).

and denies the possibility of illusions and hallucinations that are subjectively indistinguishable from genuine perceptual experiences. Merleau-Ponty himself sometimes portrays the two horns of the dilemma as a matter of either holding on to the Transparency Thesis or of giving it up (PP, p. 341). Here he works with the assumption that the Transparency Thesis implies the idea that genuine perception differs in essence from illusions and hallucinations (PP, p. 340, p. 387). I think this assumption is simply wrong and that we can relieve Merleau-Ponty from making it while remaining true to the essence of his dilemma. The assumption is wrong exactly because, as we have seen, the highest common factor view is a position that can combine the Transparency Thesis with a denial of disjunctivism.

6. The First Horn of Merleau-Ponty's Dilemma

According to Merleau-Ponty's Cartesian intellectualist what Descartes discovered was consciousness as a region of being where appearance and reality coincide. The intellectualist draws the consequence that the truth or falsity of an experience cannot depend on a relation to some exterior reality, because if it did neither the veridicality nor the deceiving character of any experience would be recognizable from the subject's point of view (PP, p. 387). The intellectualist insists that it must be possible to read off the truth or falsity of an experience from an "intrinsic denominator" (PP, p. 387). Part of the motivation behind this rather odd combination of the transparency thesis and a denial of the highest common factor model is the idea that it must be in principle possible for us to become aware of our genuine perceptions qua genuine perception and of our illusions qua illusions. Without such a possibility any addition of a new experience, possibly from another sense modality, could not serve to either confirm or disconfirm previous experience and empirical knowledge would become impossible (PP, p. 340). What we see here is how the intellectualist realizes that an acceptance of the Indistinguishability Thesis will, given a commitment to the Transparency Thesis, result in a watering down of all apparent perceptual evidence to the epistemic value of mere appearances (*simple appearance*, PP, p. 457).

After presenting the intellectualist's position Merleau-Ponty is quick to point out some unfortunate consequences of its forced marriage between the disjunctive account and the Transparency Thesis. The basic problem is that illusions and hallucinations, as interruptions of the self-transparency of consciousness, are on this account rendered *unthinkable* (PP, p. 55, n. 2, p. 388). An illusion does not present itself as what it is, but on the contrary presents itself as what it is not, namely as a world-disclosing perception (PP, p. 341). But if this is an intrinsic feature of the illusion qua conscious experience and if the mind is utterly transparent to itself, then this feature ought to be immediately accessible to the subject undergoing the illusion and it becomes a serious question how illusions could ever mislead us. This argument is basically an inverse version of the argument of illusion presented above. The argument from illusion assumes the Transparency Thesis, then invokes the possibility of illusions and hallucination, and concludes that the world-disclosing character of a genuine experience cannot be an intrinsic feature of the experience. Merleau-Ponty's argument against intellectualism turns this argument around: the intellectualist's denial of the common factor view in conjunction with her adherence to the Transparency Thesis forces her to deny the possibility of illusions and hallucinations.

7. The Second Horn of Merleau-Ponty's Dilemma

If we hold on to the Transparency Thesis the alternative is to return to the second horn of the dilemma and accept that qua conscious experience there is no essential difference between genuine perceptions on the one hand and illusions and hallucinations on the other hand (PP, p. 388).

According to Merleau-Ponty the problem with this position is that it now becomes possible that any appearance, independently of how distinct and clear it is, can be a case of a deceiving appearance (PP, p. 341). It is because of this consequence that Merleau-Ponty concludes that we have made *the phenomenon of truth* impossible (PP, p. 341). This can sound as if it is simply the acceptance of the Indistinguishability Thesis which according to Merleau-Ponty creates the problem. I don't think the crucial problem Merleau-Ponty pinpoints is created by such an acceptance alone. Rather, it results from the further assumption that the indistinguishable appearances are mere appearances in the sense of being compatible with the non-existence of the ostensibly perceived object. Here follows my reasons for thinking so.

In the Cogito-chapter as well as in other sections of *Phénoménologie de la perception* Merleau-Ponty presents what can (wrongly, according to him) appear to be the only alternative to Cartesian intellectualism as an empiricist or a naturalistic account of experiences (PP, p. 387, p. 428, p. 454). Empiricism starts with a conception of nature as consisting of items that exist *partes extra partes* and consequently only allows for external or merely causal relations between items in the empirical world (PP, p. 49, p. 87). This "naturalism of science" (PP, p. 68) holds that the only conceivable type of being is the one defined by scientific method and as such it coincides with the position McDowell refers to as scientific naturalism. For the empiricist the natural world is typically conceived as the totality of spatio-temporal events standing in merely causal relations (PP, p. 50). The empiricist conceives of the impression of seeing as a result of the irritation of certain sections of the nervous system and hallucinations are to be explained by irritation of the parts of the brain that are involved in a normal seeing (PP, p. 386). It follows that for the empiricist our apparently immediate awareness of seeing can be no more than a mere impression of seeing, i.e. a passive noticing of a mental event closed upon itself (PP, pp. 430-431). The event is closed upon itself in the same sense that the facts about appearances are self-standing according to the fully Cartesian picture described by McDowell: the occurrence of the event is compatible with the non-existence of the ostensibly seen object. Here we see the motivation for the highest common factor model stemming from an objectivistic outlook also noted by McDowell; a motivation which is not as such dependent on a commitment to the Transparency Thesis (McDowell, 1998a, p. 250). The result is, according to Merleau-Ponty, that our perceptual evidence, what he also refers to as the phenomenon of being or the phenomenon of truth (PP, p. 455, p. 341), is degraded to the level of mere appearance (*simple appearance*, PP, p. 455). What is ruled out is exactly what Merleau-Ponty takes to be the genuine insight of Cartesian intellectualism, namely that the relation between perception and its object consists in more than a merely external relation (PP, p. 428). We should now be able to see how, according to Merleau-Ponty, the crucial problem with the empiricist alternative is not the mere acceptance of the Indistinguishability Thesis, but rather the fact that we have accepted that a hallucination is nothing but a perception without an existing object and that a perception of a real object is simply a veridical hallucination (PP, p. 340). In other words the problem is the highest common factor view.

8. Merleau-Ponty's Diagnosis

The empiricist is portrayed by Merleau-Ponty as someone who holds on to the idea of an infallible knowledge about sense impressions conceived as events closed upon themselves. Such knowledge about impressions always leaves it an open question whether anything in reality corresponds to how things seem to the subject (PP, pp. 431). What should be evident by now is that what according to Merleau-Ponty lies at the root of the problems of empiricism is not the assumption of such infallible knowledge, but rather the idea that perceptual experience is only externally related to the outer world. Like McDowell, Merleau-Ponty traces this conception of the relation between mind and

world back to what they both consider a metaphysical prejudice, namely scientific naturalism. Merleau-Ponty regards such a conception of the empirical world formed in the image of science as the shared background assumption of both intellectualism and empiricism (PP, p. 55). As he repeatedly points out the intellectualist does not challenge the empiricist's idea of nature or being, but simply insists that this idea of nature must be made intelligible by reference to the a priori structures of the mind. In the case of the Cartesian intellectualist this prioritizing of the mind is taken to the extreme, and the dualism of mind and world is overcome by letting the mind swallow up the world (cf. PP, p. 431). I have suggested that we should regard Merleau-Ponty's Cartesian disjunctivist as someone who recoils from the empiricist position to avoid the isolation of the mind from the world. This allows us to make sense of the extreme consequences that the Cartesian intellectualist draws from the Transparency Thesis as a desperate attempt to avoid the empiricist's separation from the world.

In the next section I will show how Merleau-Ponty shares McDowell's characterization of the basic problem of the Cartesian picture as a problem concerning the very possibility of intentionality and how Merleau-Ponty presents his own version of McDowell's negative transcendental argument.

9. Merleau-Ponty's Negative Transcendental Argument

That Merleau-Ponty shares McDowell's conception of the nature of the basic problem of the Cartesian picture of the mind is made explicit when he writes as follows:

“To say that, in consciousness, appearance and reality are one, or that they are separate, is to rule out consciousness of anything whatsoever, even as appearance.” (PP, p. 342/Merleau-Ponty 2005, p. 296)

The view that takes appearance and reality to collapse in consciousness is Cartesian intellectualism. The view that is said to separate them is the empiricist position. Both of these will, according to Merleau-Ponty, not only undermine the idea of empirical knowledge but do so by undermining the very idea of consciousness of anything. Even the idea of an appearance of an awareness of something real is undermined.

Merleau-Ponty argues that we can only make sense of our talk about illusions because we have recognized illusions as such and that such recognition in turn could only take place in the name of experiences which at the very same moment attest to their own truth (PP, p. xi) and through which we possess truths (PP, 341). He further claims that the Cartesian thought about a seeing which restricts itself to the claim that it seems to me that I see, implies that we have had the experience of an authentic or actual visual experience in which the certainty of the object was encompassed (PP, p. 430). Why couldn't a skeptic simply respond that just because we need to have had experiences where we indeed took it for granted that they presented us with a real object, this doesn't show that we were entitled to such take such certainty for granted? Let us look closer at Merleau-Ponty's argument here. The basis of this argument is the thought that the withdrawal to claims about appearances is basically a redraw to a merely hypothetical statement, i.e. to a statement about what is possible or probable (PP, p. 430). To state about an actual experience of mine that it appears to me as a seeing of a red cube, is to state that things appear to me just as they would if I would in fact be seeing a red cube in front of me. In other words it is to state that judging from its appearance alone this experience might be a case of seeing. However, in order to be able to meaningfully make such a statement about an actual experience, I must presuppose knowledge about what it would be like if I was actually seeing. The question is now where such knowledge

could come from if not from an actual experience of seeing. The problem is that on the empiricist picture we are supposed to make sense of what McDowell calls the most perspicuous of all phenomenological facts (McDowell, 1998a, p. 243), namely the fact that perception presents itself as presenting me with the world itself, while at the same time claiming that no experience could in reality constitute such a direct presentation of how things are. What we see here is how Merleau-Ponty, like McDowell, makes the negative transcendental claim that we need an intelligible notion of a genuine experience which is in fact as it seems, namely a case of being directly presented with how things are in the world, if we are to make sense of ourselves as undergoing experiences which resemble such world-revealing experiences. Furthermore, like McDowell he claims that the basic failure of the fully Cartesian picture of the mind is that it cannot live up to this transcendental requirement and thereby renders the very idea of perceptual appearances unintelligible.

Concluding Remarks

My purpose in this paper has not been to evaluate the validity of the diagnostic approach shared by McDowell and Merleau-Ponty, nor has it been to evaluate the validity of their respective versions of what I have called the negative transcendental argument. My purpose has been the more limited one of demonstrating the considerable overlap between the philosophical outlooks of the two authors. They both regard the problem generated by the Cartesian picture of the mind as a transcendental problem concerning the very notion of intentionality, and they both trace this problem back to certain background assumption about what can count as part of the natural world. I believe that recognition of these shared concerns is a prerequisite for establishing a further critical dialogue. Some of the more specific questions that come into focus once this background of shared concerns is recognized are the following: Can McDowell's rather brief statements of the negative transcendental argument be reinforced by the more elaborate version found in Merleau-Ponty? Does Merleau-Ponty's explicit recognition of the value of the disjunctive account of the Cartesian intellectualist indicate that he is himself committed to a version of disjunctivism? If so, does Merleau-Ponty follow the Cartesian intellectualist in denying the Indistinguishability Thesis? I shall not attempt to answer these questions here, but I hope to have demonstrated why we have reason to believe that a comparative analysis of McDowell and Merleau-Ponty can cast new light on their respective philosophies as well as on the problems they address.

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