

A myth to kill a myth?

On McDowell's interpretation of Sellars' *Empiricism and the philosophy of mind*

As is well known, in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (henceforth *EPM*) Sellars introduces two myths: the Myth of the Given and the myth of Jones. The former is a deeply rooted epistemological picture, while the latter is a thought experiment in the philosophy of mind. In the *incipit* of the last paragraph of *EPM* (§ 63) Sellars tells us in generic and metaphoric terms that the myth of Jones is an important ingredient in his overall argument against epistemological foundationalism: "I have used a myth to kill a myth – the Myth of the Given". According to McDowell (2009a; 2009b; 2010), in *EPM* (especially in Sellars' account of non-inferential knowledge) the myth of Jones has a more specific purpose, namely, to complete the account of experience that Sellars needs to argue against traditional empiricism (that is, one of the most widespread forms of the Myth of the Given): on McDowell's view the myth of Jones should explain how to conceive of non-inferentially knowable experiences as containing propositional claims (*EPM* §§ 16, 60). In this paper I argue that the myth of Jones does not succeed in providing such an account, especially on McDowell's own terms: assuming McDowell's (2010) epistemological distinction between inferential and non-inferential knowledge, it turns out that in Sellars' thought experiment perceptual experiences can contain propositional claims only at the price of being known inferentially rather than non-inferentially. Therefore, as I argue, McDowell's Sellars is not successful in the rejection of traditional empiricism, for his anti-foundationalist argument is not in accordance with his own requirements. It is worth noting, however, that I wish to distinguish McDowell's Sellars from the "authentic" Wilfrid Sellars. My ultimate goal is to refute neither McDowell's own theoretical views on perception (insofar as they differ from McDowell's interpretation of Sellars) nor Sellars' argument in *EPM* against the Myth of the Given, but rather McDowell's interpretation of Sellars' attack on traditional empiricism.

I. Traditional empiricism

In *EPM* one of the forms taken by the Myth of the Given, abstractly formulated, is

the idea that there is, indeed *must be*, a structure of particular matter of fact such

that ... each fact can not only be non-inferentially known to be the case, but presupposes no other knowledge either of particular matter of fact, or of general truths; and (...) such that the non-inferential knowledge of facts belonging to this structure constitutes the ultimate court of appeals for all factual claims – particular and general – about the world (§ 32).

Sellars' main goal in *EPM* is to argue that such a given structure cannot exist, for at least two of its features are incompatible with one another: being known (though non-inferentially), on the one hand, and being epistemically independent¹, on the other hand. The Myth of the Given, Sellars claims (*EPM* § 38), typically characterizes *traditional empiricism*, a view (properly speaking, a cluster of views) according to which empirical knowledge has an ultimate foundation. Consider an *observation report* such as (1).

(1) This is green.

One's uttering sentence (1) expresses one's non-inferential knowledge *that that is green*. According to traditional empiricism, such knowledge presupposes no knowledge of other matter of fact, whether particular or general. In part VIII of *EPM* (viz. in §§ 32-38) Sellars rejects this conception of observation reports.

A second, less abstract form of traditional empiricism is the idea that *looks-statements* such as (2) are reports of *given appearances*, and consequently "come before" all other statements expressing knowledge (including observation reports such as (1)) both conceptually and in the order of explanation.

(2) This looks green to me.

Sellars writes that "while this idea has (...) been the most widespread form of the Myth, it is far from constituting its essence" (*EPM* § 10). He provides an account of looks-statements such as (2) in part III of *EPM* (viz. in §§ 10-20).

In what follows I will reconstruct John McDowell's authoritative interpretation of Sellars' attack on the above mentioned empiricist forms of the Myth of the Given, and I will argue that McDowell's interpretation of Sellars' argument is not successful against traditional empiricism. I think that McDowell's exegesis can be better understood if compared to an equally authoritative but alternative reading of Sellars on non-inferential knowledge, namely, Robert Brandom's (though I do not wish to suggest that McDowell's

¹ See deVries and Triplett (2000) for more details on such a notion.

interpretation is a mere *response* to Brandom). Thus, I will describe and compare McDowell's and Brandom's interpretations of Sellars' account of non-inferential knowledge (expressed by statements such as (1) and (2)). I will not, however, be concerned with the overall debate between McDowell and Brandom on perception, which is basically centred on the questions whether perception is a social phenomenon and how perceived states of affairs can rationally constrain empirical thought². Rather, I wish to use the comparison to argue that McDowell's Sellars does not successfully challenge traditional empiricism.

My argument will run as follows. Preliminarily, I will briefly reconstruct Brandom's attribution of a "*two-ply account*" of non-inferential knowledge to Sellars (section II). Then I will discuss two main reasons why McDowell disagrees with Brandom's exegesis. First, Brandom's Sellars is an anti-empiricist *tout court*, while McDowell's Sellars is a non-traditional empiricist, for he aims to replace traditional empiricism with a *reformed empiricism* (where *experience* still has the role of yielding non-inferential knowledge) (section III). Secondly, Brandom's Sellars completes his argument against the Myth of the Given in the first part of *EPM* (before Ryleans and the genius Jones come on the scene), whereas McDowell's Sellars' argument against traditional empiricism depends on the claim that non-inferentially known perceptual experiences have propositional content, a claim which in turn relies on the myth of Jones (section IV). I will subsequently focus on McDowell's view, according to which Brandom's attribution of a 'two-ply' account of non-inferential knowledge to Sellars is not only wrong about Sellars but also deeply implausible in itself (section V). Then I will provide an exegesis of the *dénouement* of the myth of Jones that will turn out to be more sympathetic to Brandom's interpretation than to McDowell's (section VI), and I will argue that Sellars' thought experiment, considered as an argument in narrative form, is a bad argument by McDowell's own standards (as I reconstruct them in section V). I will conclude that since, by McDowell's own standards, the myth of Jones does not "kill" the (empiricist forms of the) Myth of the Given, McDowell's Sellars does not succeed in challenging traditional empiricism (section VIII). Let me emphasize, however, that my aim in this paper is just to reject McDowell's interpretation of Sellars' argument against the Myth of the Given, but I do not wish to argue that Sellars' argument, however construed, is a failure. Thus, in the concluding section I will make this clearer by pointing out some differences between McDowell's Sellars and (what I take to be) the authentic Wilfrid Sellars (section IX).

² See, for example, Macbeth (forthcoming). Rosenberg (2004a) also addresses all three authors discussed in this paper on the very subject of non-inferential knowledge. Rosenberg argues that Sellars' strong epistemic internalism is preferable in its essentials to both Brandom's and McDowell's alternatives. Rosenberg, however, just touches upon the myth of Jones but doesn't focus on it. As far as I can see, the significance of the myth of Jones for the McDowell-Brandom debate has become clear only in more recent times (see, especially, McDowell 2009a, 2009b, 2010 and Brandom 2010).

II. Brandom's Sellars

According to Brandom (2002: 349-53), in *EPM* Sellars provides a two-ply account of observation reports such as (1); such an account gives the sufficient conditions of non-inferential knowledge. For example, if one utters sentence (1) in the presence of a green object, then one's (true) utterance expresses non-inferential knowledge if the following two conditions are fulfilled. On the one hand, one's utterance is one's (*behavioural*) *reliable response* to the stimulus given by the occurrence of the green object, in virtue of one's *Reliable Differential Responsive Disposition* (henceforth RDRD). On the other hand, one is able to *justify* one's statement, in virtue of one's capacity of participating in an inferentially-articulated deontic practice. The former capacity (the RDRD) might be shared by a parrot or even by a conveniently built artifact, while the latter capacity (that is, the capacity of taking up a position in the game of giving and asking for reasons) is an exclusive prerogative of the human species or, at least, of beings endowed with a language.

Moreover, Brandom's Sellars applies, *mutatis mutandis*, the two-ply account of observation reports such as (1) to looks-statements such as (2). Asserting the latter, Brandom (2002: 356) claims, "is doing two things: first, it is evincing the same usually reliable differential responsive disposition that in other circumstances results in the claim that something *is* green. But second, it is *withholding* the endorsement of the claim that something is green. In other words, it is doing something that agrees with an ordinary non-inferential report of green things on the first component of Sellars' two-ply account of observation reports – sharing an RDRD – but disagrees with it on the second component, withholding endorsement instead of undertaking the commitment".

To sum up, Brandom's exegesis is based on the following claim:

B(i): In *EPM* Sellars provides a two-ply account of observation reports such as (1) and of looks-statements such as (2): asserting both (1) and (2) requires RDRD + inferential capacity. In (1), however, such a capacity is exercised by undertaking the commitment, while in (2) it is exercised by withholding endorsement.

Furthermore, Brandom (1997: 167-8) regards Sellars' two-ply account of non-inferential knowledge as *sufficient* to achieve "one of the major tasks of the whole essay", that is, "to dismantle empiricism" (namely, the idea that empirical knowledge has an

ultimate foundation). For the occurrence of the second factor of the two-ply account (that is, the *inferential* capacity to take part in the game of giving and asking for reasons, a capacity that Brandom conceives of as itself not having a foundational structure) implies that one's non-inferential knowledge of something cannot be epistemically independent. It is worth noting that according to Brandom such an anti-empiricist task is already accomplished at § 45 of *EPM*, three paragraphs *before* Sellars talks about our mythical Rylean ancestors and the genius Jones. Thus, Brandom's second exegetical claim is the following:

B(ii): Sellars (successfully) argues against the empiricist forms of the Myth of the Given in the first half of *EPM*. Such an argument is based on the two-ply account of observation reports and looks-statements.

III. McDowell's Sellars: the role of experience

McDowell rejects B(i). First of all, he rejects Brandom's interpretation of Sellars' view on observation reports such as (1). According to McDowell (2009a: 225-6), Brandom's exegesis forgets that Sellars considers seeing that-things-are-so-and-so as a form of (perceptual) *experience*. Unlike Brandom (1997: 131-2), who regards the occurrence of the term "empiricism" in the title of Sellars' essay as somewhat misleading, McDowell (2009a: 221; 2009b: 6) emphasizes that Sellars does not intend to dispense with empiricism *tout court*, but only to dispense with *traditional* empiricism, as characterized by the Cartesian Myth of the Given. According to McDowell's Sellars, what one knows non-inferentially (typically by perception) is, after all, something one encounters in experience; it is a bit of reality, whose sensible presence one is perceptually aware of. Against the Myth of the Given, McDowell's Sellars shows that seeing that-things-are-so-and-so is not an epistemically independent experience, but nonetheless, *pace* Brandom, he thinks that it is a piece of *experience*, that is, in McDowell's terms, a shaping of "sensory consciousness" (2009a: 225)³.

If one followed Brandom, McDowell argues (2009a: 225), one would think that involvement of sensory consciousness in our acquisition of perceptual knowledge has nothing essential to do with the very idea of perceptual knowledge; rather, it is at best a contingent detail about the mechanism by which, in some cases, RDRDs operate when

³ For a different criticism of Brandom's interpretation of Sellars' account of looks-statements, see deVries and Coates (2009), section III.

certain physical objects occur. In a way, sensory consciousness would be like neuro-physiological details, which are causally relevant but not (so far) *constitutive* of the very concept of perceptual knowledge. McDowell doesn't think that the idea of a piece of knowledge based on RDRDs (such that there is no conceptual role left for sensory awareness) is inconsistent. Rather, he thinks that such an idea does not convey what Sellars means by "perceptual knowledge", expressed by observation reports such as (1) (let alone by looks-statements such as (2))⁴.

McDowell focuses on *EPM* § 38, where Sellars makes it clear what he rejects in traditional empiricism, a philosophical view that considers *experience* as the epistemically independent ground of all knowledge:

If I reject the framework of traditional empiricism, it is not because I want to say that empirical knowledge has *no* foundation. For to put it this way is to suggest that it is really 'empirical knowledge so-called', and to put it in a box with rumors and hoaxes. There is clearly *some* point to the picture of human knowledge as resting on a level of propositions – observation reports – which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them.

Commenting these words, McDowell argues that Sellars' point against traditional empiricism is not that perceptual knowledge is not grounded in experience, but rather that perceptual experience is neither self-justified nor epistemically independent. In fact, according to Sellars (as interpreted by McDowell) "it is experience that yields the knowledge expressed in observation reports" such as (1) (McDowell 2009a: 223). Assuming this interpretation of the role of experience in Sellars' account of non-inferential knowledge, McDowell reconstructs traditional empiricism (=TE) along the following lines:

(TE) *One's non-inferential knowledge of one's own perceptual experiences is epistemically independent.*

Accordingly, McDowell's Sellars' Argument against TE (henceforth, ATE) is the following:

(ATE) *One non-inferentially knows one's own perceptual experiences, which have propositional content. But one's knowledge of something that has propositional content cannot be epistemically independent. Hence, one's non-inferential*

⁴ See McDowell (2010: 129-130).

knowledge of one's own perceptual experiences cannot be epistemically independent, that is, TE is false.

Thus, McDowell's Sellars answers the question "Does empirical knowledge has foundation?" with a *qualified* "yes", an answer that differs from both the traditional empiricist's *unqualified* "yes" and Brandom's Sellars' straightforward "no". In other words, McDowell's Sellars aims to replace traditional empiricism with a sort of *reformed empiricism*. According to McDowell (2009a: 223), however, both this replacement and ATE require a more detailed picture of experience, "explaining how it can yield non-inferential knowledge, but only in a way that presupposes other knowledge of matters of fact – in contrast with the presupposition-free knowledge-yielding powers that experience is credited with by traditional empiricism". The required picture, McDowell claims, "is just what Sellars offers (...) in part III" of *EPM*, when he accounts for looks-statements such as (2) (2009a: 223; 2010: 131). Moreover, *contra* Brandom, McDowell emphasizes that Sellars regards such statements as *reports*, that is, speech acts that report something. In *EPM* § 15 Sellars reckons that

there certainly seems to be something to the idea that the sentence 'This looks green to me now' has a reporting role. Indeed, it would seem to be essentially a report. But if so, *what* does it report, if not a minimal objective fact, and if what it reports is not to be analyzed in terms of sense data?

According to McDowell, Sellars' answer to this question simply is: "a (perceptual) *experience*". For example, consider *EPM* § 16':

When I say 'X looks green to me now' I am *reporting* the fact that my experience is, so to speak, intrinsically, *as an experience*, indistinguishable from a veridical one of seeing that X is green.

To sum up, against B(i) McDowell sets up the following claim:

McD(i): Sellars' account of observation reports such as (1) and of looks-statements such as (2) is not (based on) Brandom's two-ply account. For Sellars' reformed empiricism agrees with traditional empiricism at least on this: after all, such statements are grounded⁵ on perceptual *experiences* (though according to Sellars' non-traditional empiricism such experiences are propositionally contentful and

⁵ See section IX below for more details on the notion of a ground.

consequently cannot be epistemically independent).

IV. McDowell's Sellars: the promissory note and the myth of Jones

According to McDowell, even in the eyes of Sellars the first part of *EPM* (let alone §§ 10-20 and §§ 32-38) is not sufficient to support either the conclusion of ATE or his reformed empiricism. That's why McDowell rejects B(ii). He acknowledges, with Brandom, that according to Sellars – whatever the phrase “knowing that-p non-inferentially” means – non-inferential pieces of knowledge are not epistemically independent and self-justified. But McDowell emphasizes, *contra* Brandom, what Sellars makes it clear in *EPM* § 16: strictly speaking, it is not entirely clear either *what it means* that perceptual experiences contain propositional claims, or *whether it is possible* that one non-inferentially knows one's propositionally contentful perceptual experiences. That's why Sellars must endorse a *promissory note*. He confesses (*EPM* § 16):

I realize that by speaking of experiences as containing propositional claims, I may seem to be knocking at closed doors. I ask the reader to bear with me, however, as the justification of this way of talking is one of my major aims. If I am permitted to issue this verbal currency now, I hope to put it on the gold standard before concluding the argument.

According to McDowell, Sellars delivers on the promissory note in *EPM* § 60, that is, at the end of the first phase of the myth of Jones (2009a: 223)⁶, the piece of “anthropological science fiction” (*EPM* § 48) that Sellars builds up in the second part of *EPM* (namely, §§ 48-63) to show that one can avoid the Myth of the Given while still claiming that mental events (such as thoughts and sensory impressions⁷) should be conceived of as inner episodes that are knowable non-inferentially. Sellars' thought experiment can be summarized as follows:

- (a) Imagine human ancestors who think, act, have a language and communicate but lack our concept of a thought (as an inner episode). Since they master a behaviouristic psychology (namely, they have an episodic concept of thought, that

⁶ Strictly speaking, § 60 is the beginning of the second part of the myth of Jones, that is, the part concerning sensory impressions (as inner objects). Yet, the point is that, before taking sensations into account, Sellars reminds the reader that the philosophical promissory note endorsed in § 16 has been finally delivered on.

⁷ Though Sellars in *EPM* deals with both thoughts and *sensory impressions*, for this paper's concern I shall just focus on the case of thoughts.

is, thoughts as utterances, as well as a dispositional concept of thought, that is, thoughts as dispositions to utter something), call them “Ryleans”.

- (b) Ryleans are equipped with both the resources of semantic discourse (for example, they know how to make semantic assertions of the form “... in L means ---”) and the resources of theoretical discourse (that is, they can postulate theoretical entities in order to explain observational phenomena).
- (c) There is a genius in the community, call him “Jones”, who finds it mysterious that people appear to act intelligently not only while speaking but even when silent. Jones explains the mystery by postulating unobservable entities, call them “thoughts”, which are conceived on the model of verbal episodes (for example, both have semantic properties) and, in certain circumstances, can generate intelligent behaviour (verbal or silent).
- (d) Jones teaches his compatriots the theory of thoughts, so that they learn to interpret other people's and their own behaviour in terms of the theoretical concept of thought.
- (e) Our Rylean ancestors are then trained reliably to report the occurrences of their own thoughts, without the need to observe overt behaviour any more (so that they eventually acquire the same mentalistic concept of thought as we have)⁸.

Now, according to McDowell (2010: 131) only at the end of (the first part of) the myth of Jones (that is, in *EPM* § 60) Sellars delivers on the promissory note he endorsed in *EPM* § 16. There Sellars reminds us

that among the inner episodes which belong to the framework of thoughts will be perceptions, that is to say, seeing that the table is brown, hearing that the piano is out of tune, etc. Until Jones introduced this framework, the only concepts our fictitious ancestors had of perceptual episodes were those of overt verbal reports, made, for example, in the context of looking at an object in standard conditions. Seeing that something is the case is an inner episode in the Jonesean theory which has as its model reporting on looking that something is the case. It will be remembered from an earlier section that just as when I say that Dick reported that the table is green, I commit myself to the truth of what he reported, so to say of Dick that he saw that the table is green is, in part, to ascribe to Dick the idea ‘this table is green’ and to endorse this idea. The reader might refer back to Sections 16 ff. for an elaboration of this point.

⁸ Here two different issues are intertwined: the *semantic* issue concerned with the Ryleans’ acquiring and mastering a concept of thought and the *epistemological* issue concerned with their right to claim knowledge of thoughts. In the myth of Jones, however, our Rylean ancestors acquire the same concept of thought as we have only when (after training and conditioning) they become able to know their own thoughts non-inferentially.

To better understand Sellars' referring back to § 16, it is worth noting that one's non-inferential knowledge of one's perceptual experience that-p is expressed not only by observation reports such as (1) (where the role of experience is somewhat concealed) or by looks-statements such as (2) (where one might be tempted to conceive experiences as mere appearances), but also by *first person perceptual statements* such as (3) (which commit the speaker to the truth of "this is green").

(3) I see that this is green.

Sentence (3) has two readings, one dispositional and one episodic,⁹ which are connected as follows: to see that-p (in the dispositional sense) amounts to having the disposition to have seeing-episodes that-p. Now, Sellars regards an episodic seeing that-p (for example, my now seeing that this is green) as a paradigmatic case of perceptual experience, and perceptual knowledge of such episodic experiences, expressed by statements such as (3), as a paradigmatic case of non-inferential knowledge.

Now we are in a better position to understand why McDowell believes that in *EPM* the myth of Jones is an essential ingredient in the rejection of TE¹⁰, the foundationalist view according to which one's non-inferential knowledge of one's own perceptual experiences is epistemically independent. To this end we have to recall that, for McDowell, Sellars' goal (as a non-traditional or reformed empiricist) is to give an account of perceptual statements such as (3) as statements that express one's non-inferential knowledge of one's own propositionally contentful perceptual experiences¹¹. More precisely, for McDowell, Sellars' point against TE is that, since such perceptual experiences *contain propositional claims*, non-inferential knowledge of one's own perceptual experiences cannot be epistemically independent (for, generally speaking, it is impossible to have knowledge of something propositionally contentful independently of any other knowledge). Thus, in McDowell's view it is an essential ingredient of Sellars' attack on TE to clarify and justify how it is possible that perceptual experiences contain propositional claims. Hence the promissory-notish character of § 16. Now, according to McDowell, Sellars regards the myth of Jones as delivering on the promissory note endorsed in *EPM* § 16. What is the evidence for McDowell's interpretation? First, the

⁹See, for example, Sellars (1969: 104) and also Rosenberg (2004b; 2007: 176-7). On McDowell's attitude toward pre-Jonesean Ryleans, see section VIII below.

¹⁰ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

¹¹ According to McDowell, such an account, as Sellars' referring back (in *EPM* § 60) to § 16 seems to suggest, also applies to the conception of experience required by the analysis of looks-statements such as (2).

reference to § 16 in § 60 of *EPM*. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the fact that in *EPM* only the myth of Jones gives an account of statements such as (3) (where the verb “to see” is interpreted in its episodic sense, as opposed to its dispositional sense) by showing how to conceive of perceptual experiences as containing propositional claims. The basic idea is that verbal episodes are endowed with semantic properties. In particular, they are propositionally contentful. As is well known, Sellars has a story to tell about propositional contentfulness of *verbal* or linguistic episodes (as opposed to inner episodes)¹². In the myth of Jones, however, he considers the semantic properties of verbal episodes as something that requires no further explanation, that is, as a sort of “unexplained explainer”. Then Sellars tells us that the genius Jones introduces the *theoretical* concept of a thought on the model of verbal episodes (see stage (c) of my reconstruction above). In particular, Jonesean thoughts have in common with their model the (semantic) property of containing propositional claims. Moreover, Jonesean thoughts include perceptual experiences as a special case. Last, but not least, the former Ryleans' knowledge of their episodic thoughts (including perceptual experiences) is non-inferential, for they are trained directly to know their own thoughts (see stages (d) and (e) of my reconstruction above)¹³. Ultimately, that's why McDowell believes that the myth of Jones is an essential ingredient in the rejection of the Myth of the Given: Sellars' own myth shows how *non-inferentially known* experiences (as special cases of thoughts) can *contain propositional claims*; but nothing propositionally structured can be epistemically independent; hence, our non-inferentially known experiences cannot be epistemically independent either, so that TE must be false.

To sum up, against B(ii) McDowell puts forward the following claim:

McD(ii): in the first half of *EPM* Sellars' account of looks-statements such as (2), let alone his account of observation reports such as (1), is not sufficient to support either the conclusion of ATE or Sellars' reformed empiricism. For only in *EPM* § 60, at the end of the first phase of the myth of Jones (that is, the part concerning thoughts, including perceptual experiences) Sellars delivers on the promissory note endorsed in *EPM* § 16 (by accounting for first-person perceptual statements such as (3)).

¹² See, for example, *EPM* §§ 30-31, but also Sellars (1953; 1954; 1969; 1974). On this issue see also Tripodi (2011).

¹³ See also *EPM* § 38.

V. McDowell on chicken-sexers

According to McDowell, besides exegetical errors B(i) and B(ii) Brandom also makes a *philosophical* error; for Brandom not only ascribes the two-ply account of observation reports and looks-statements to Sellars, but he subscribes to it. By the same token, McDowell not only criticizes Brandom's attributing the two-ply account of perception to Sellars, but he thinks that such an account is based on serious conceptual misunderstandings.

McDowell (2010: 129) considers “the chicken-sexers of epistemological folklore. The chicks they pronounce to be male, getting it right with sufficient frequency for their pronouncements to count as knowledgeable, do not look, or smell, or in any other sensory modality appear any different to them from the chicks they knowledgeably pronounce to be female”. Such people, confronted with a chick, find themselves inclined to say “male” or “female”. But they account for the inclination only “from outside”, for example, as the result of an acquired disposition to respond to the presence of chicks with such utterances. McDowell (2010: 140) contrasts a chicken-sexer with a person who knows that something is green by seeing that it is. *Prima facie*, such a person has an inclination reliably to respond to the presence of green objects. And her inclination is intelligible to her in a similar way as a chicken-sexer's inclinations are intelligible to him: they both know that they have acquired some differential dispositions reliably to respond to the presence of certain things. The chicken-sexer, however, has only “external” reasons to follow his inclinations, while the person who sees that something is green have also “internal” reasons, namely, the thing's being green: she is aware of that, for the green thing is sensibly present to her.

Strictly speaking, the chicken-sexers of epistemological folklore do not exist. For example, Pylyshyn (1999: 358-9) has shown that the real chicken-sexers, as much as the experts in other fields, quickly make inferences from observational features of which they are a little aware. Moreover, one does not become a chicken-sexer by drill or conditioning, but rather by being given examples and explicit instructions. McDowell, however, is just making a conceptual point. Accordingly, it does not matter whether his description of the chicken-sexers “is true of any actual capacity to sort chicks into male and female; it is enough that it could be true” (2010: 129).

McDowell's ultimate point is the following: the person who sees something green is in a position to have *observational* knowledge, whereas the chicken-sexers' knowledge isn't non-inferential, let alone observational. On Brandom's two-ply view, however, the

chicken sexers' knowledge is a paradigmatic case of non-inferential knowledge. According to McDowell (2010: 141), this undermines Brandom's view. Brandom distinguishes inferential from non-inferential knowledge according to whether or not a knower reaches a bit of knowledge by inference. According to McDowell (2010: 141), however, such a definition is just *psychologically* significant, whereas it should be *epistemologically* significant. In McDowell's words, the distinction "should concern the character of a state credentials, not the process by which it was arrived at" (2010: 141).

Consequently, McDowell (2010: 141) provides an alternative definition: "knowledge is inferential if the only way to vindicate its status as knowledge is to invoke the goodness of an inference to what is known from something independently within the knower's epistemic reach" (for example, one's reason for that something is that one sees it). According to McDowell, the chicken-sexers' don't infer their claims about chicks from their acquired tendencies to make them. So their claims are non-inferential in Brandom's psychological sense. Yet, they are inferential in the epistemological sense. By the same token, if Brandom's two-ply account of non-inferential knowledge were true, knowledge expressed by observation reports such as (1) or by first-person perceptual statements such as (3) would be epistemologically inferential. According to McDowell, this provides a sort of *reduction ad absurdum* of Brandom's view, for knowledge expressed by statements such as (1) or (3) is a paradigmatic case of (epistemologically) non-inferential knowledge. On the one hand, a RDRD gives no justification (hence, no knowledge) at all; at best, it is psychologically direct. On the other hand, the inferential capacity of giving and asking for reasons is not direct at all (either epistemologically or psychologically)¹⁴.

As I have said above, in this paper I won't take part in the overall theoretical controversy between Brandom and McDowell. Rather, in the next section I will take Brandom's exegetical side once in a while, namely, I will provide a somewhat Brandomian exegesis of the myth of Jones. Then in section VII I will show that, McDowell's criticism (assuming, for the sake of argument, that it works) doesn't apply only to Brandom's two-ply account of observation, but also to Sellars' two-ply account of non-inferential self-knowledge in the *dénouement* of the myth of Jones (as I reconstruct it in section VI).

¹⁴ McDowell (2010) seems to think that in Brandom's two-ply account there is room for only one kind of justification, that is, *inferential* justification. Perhaps McDowell forgets Brandom's (1994: 176-8) talk of a justification "by default", which seems not to be "inferential" in McDowell's sense.

VI. Where Brandom is right and McDowell goes wrong

Brandom (2002: 524) puts forward a further exegetical claim, according to which the two-ply account of observation reports is the “master idea” of *EPM*, for two further crucial issues of *EPM* rest on it: one's acquisition of empirical concepts (of which, according to Brandom (2002: 359-62), Sellars gives a “rationalistic” account), on the one hand, and the problem of how theoretical concepts can come to have observational uses, on the other hand¹⁵. In what follows, I shall be concerned only with the latter issue, which Sellars deals with in the so-called *dénouement* of the myth of Jones (*EPM* § 59).

Thus, for this paper's concern Brandom's third exegetical claim is the following:

B(iii): Sellars relies on the two-ply account of non-inferential knowledge in, among other places, *EPM* § 59, that is, in accounting for the former Ryleans' acquisition of the capacity to know their own thoughts non-inferentially.

Once again, McDowell rejects Brandom's exegesis. For according to McDowell “the idea that the outputs of some responsive dispositions are constituted as conceptually contentful by inferential articulation is not relevant to any point Sellars has occasion to make in this part [that is, in part III, §§ 10-20]. Or, I believe, anywhere in *EPM*”, including the myth of Jones (2009a: 230; 2010: 136). Thus, McDowell sets up the following claim against B(iii):

McD(iii): Brandom's Sellars' two-ply account does not occur in the myth of Jones (or anywhere in *EPM*).

In what follows, however, I shall show that, as far as the myth of Jones is concerned, McD(iii) is not well-documented (in fact, it is false), while B(iii) is, in broad outline, true. Let me quote *EPM* § 59 extensively (a passage corresponding to stages (d) and (e) of my reconstruction above):

Once our fictitious ancestor, Jones, has developed the theory that overt verbal behavior is the expression of thoughts, and taught his compatriots to make use of the theory in interpreting each other's behavior, it is but a short step to the use of this language in self-description. Thus, when Tom, watching Dick, has behavioral evidence which warrants the use of the sentence (in the language of the theory) ...

¹⁵ See Brandom (2002: 362-4).

"Dick is thinking that-p", Dick, using the same behavioral evidence, can say, in the language of the theory, (...) "I am thinking that-p." And it now turns out – need it have? – that Dick can be trained to give reasonably reliable self-descriptions, using the language of the theory, without having to observe his overt behavior. Jones brings this about, roughly by applauding utterances by Dick of "I am thinking that-p" when the behavioral evidence strongly supports the theoretical statement "Dick is thinking that-p"; and by frowning on utterances of "I am thinking that-p", when the evidence does not support this theoretical statement. Our ancestors begin to speak of the privileged access each of us has to his own thoughts. *What began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role.*

What kind of training is Dick's? According to Sellars (1961b), it consists in "acquiring a tendency (*ceteris paribus*) to respond to his thought that-p by saying 'I am thinking that-p'". The word "respond", here, is being used as a technical term borrowed from the Skinnerian theory of learning: thanks to Jones's applauding (a positive reinforcement) and frowning (a negative reinforcement) to his utterances, Dick becomes conditioned to behave in a certain way¹⁶.

According to the view Sellars gave to Hector-Neri Castañeda in their correspondence (henceforth, Sellars 1961b), however, after training Dick becomes able to non-inferentially know his own thought that-p *if*

(α) Dick becomes conditioned to respond to the occurrence of the thought that-p by uttering "I am thinking that-p"

&

(β) such a "conditioning is itself caught up in a conceptual framework"¹⁷.

Now, Sellars (1961b; 1965) makes it clear that, on closer inspection, claim (α) is false, while claim (β) is too concise. Consider (α). It suggests that we (actual speakers and thinkers) are like one (Dick) who is conditioned to utter "I'm thinking that-p" *whenever* he has the thought that-p. This is clearly plethoric. That's why Sellars introduces a

¹⁶ Strictly speaking, one relatum of the conditioning relation Sellars is talking about is a theoretical entity (i.e. Dick's thought that-p). Moreover, the expression "conditioned response" is (...) most frequently used [by American psychologists in the Skinnerian tradition] in such a way that the overt is conditioned to the overt" (Sellars 1961b). Thus, one might substitute such an expression with the more neutral expression "associative connection", which refers to some similarly contingent and non-rational relation. However, this is mainly a terminological point.

¹⁷ Sellars (1961b) writes: "The important difference between a person who has *merely* been conditioned to respond to his thought that-p by saying 'I have the thought that-p' and a person whose statement 'I have the thought that-p' expresses *direct self-knowledge* is *not* that in the latter case the statement *isn't occurring as a conditioned response*. It is. The difference is that in the latter case the conditioning is itself caught up in a conceptual framework".

modification in the scenario depicted in the *dénouement*, by suggesting that strictly speaking the latter *relatum* of the conditioning connection (the former being Dick's thought that-p) is not the *utterance* "I am thinking that-p", but rather the *meta-thought* · I am thinking that-p · ¹⁸ (henceforth MT).

Notice that when he was a mere Rylean, Dick already *had* thoughts. But only after having learned the theory of thoughts and having been trained by Jones Dick becomes conditioned to respond to the occurrence of his thought that-p by MT, which he can (though he is not compelled to) express by the utterance "I am thinking that-p". Thus, according to Sellars (1961b; 1965) (α) is best replaced with

(α)* Dick is conditioned to respond to the occurrence of his thought that-p by having MT.

Now, consider (β). What does the expression "conceptual framework" refer to there? The inferential resources Dick is equipped with, and thanks to which Dick is able to justify his MT. According to Sellars (1961b; 1965), Dick's epistemic attitudes towards MT are (basically) the following:

(β)* Dick acknowledges that MT asserts the occurrence of his thought that-p, that it might be overtly expressed by the utterance "I am thinking that-p", and that it is a reliable symptom of the occurrence of the thought that-p.

Sellars (1961b; 1965) regards conditions (α)* and (β)* as *sufficient* for Dick's direct (that is, non-inferential) knowledge of his thought that-p. The former, (α)*, accounts for the *directness* of Dick's knowledge, while the latter, (β)*, accounts for the *epistemic* nature of Dick's response.

Now, it seems to me that such an account of non-inferential self-knowledge straightforwardly resembles Brandom's Sellars' two-ply account of observation reports. On the one hand, both (α) and (α)* are based on RDRDs (though perhaps only the former is based on a *behavioural* RDRD). On the other hand, both the generic (β) and its explication (β)* ultimately refer to Dick's inferential capacity to position himself in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Therefore McD(iii) is wrong while B(iii) is right.

An analogy discussed by Sellars (1961b) might give rise to the following objection¹⁹. According to Sellars (1961b), Dick's case is analogue to the case of "a blind man who has

¹⁸ For Sellars' use of dot-quotes, see e.g. Sellars (1953), Sellars (1969), Sellars (1974).

¹⁹ I would like to thank an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this point.

learned the language of colored physical objects and the seeing of them”: for example, such a man knows that red (whatever it is) appears darker (whatever that means) than yellow (whatever it is); that yellow is the colour of this lemon while red is the colour of this flag; and other things of the sort. Then he “has his visual apparatus put in order and shortly thereafter is able to see that we have a case in which language, already meaningfully used, acquired a 'reporting role' expressive of direct, non-inferential knowledge which it did not, for that person, have before”: for example, he now looks at this lemon and this flag and has, for the first time, the perceptual experiences of colours, especially of this red and this yellow, of this red being darker than this yellow, and so on and so forth. The point of Sellars' analogy, one might argue, is not that Dick's non-inferential knowledge of his own thoughts has two components, namely, an RDRD and the ability to use the Jonesean conceptual apparatus, but simply that the conditioning leads Dick, who already learnt the Jonesean language of thoughts, to have experiences of his own thoughts. Thus, one might conclude, in either cases the two-ply description does not seem to apply.

Let me briefly reply to this objection. On the one hand I agree, at least *prima facie*, that the two-ply description doesn't apply to the blind man's case. In fact, in this case Sellars is just concerned with the *second* component of a two-ply account of non-inferential knowledge, namely, the inferential ability to master a conceptual framework: the general point of his analogy is to show that, as one (a blind man) cannot learn, properly speaking, to see coloured objects unless one has already acquired the conceptual framework of colour-perception, so one (a Rylean) cannot come, as it were, to have experiences of his own thoughts unless one has already acquired the Jonesean theoretical framework. So far, so good. On the other hand, however, what does it mean that that man “has his visual apparatus put in order”? It seems to me that, if we want to keep the analogy between the blind man's case and the case of Dick, that locution doesn't mean, strictly speaking, that that man acquired the ability *to see* (or to have perceptual experiences of) colours, but rather that he acquired the ability to reliably respond to coloured objects. His ability *to see* (or to have experiences of) colours is rather the further result of the combination of *two* abilities: his just-acquired ability to reliably respond to coloured objects (an RDRD) and his old ability to master the conceptual framework of colour-perception (an inferential capacity). Thus, the two-ply description does seem to apply once again.

In the next section I will show that, assuming McDowell's epistemological definition of “inferential knowledge”, as well as his distinction between epistemologically and psychologically non-inferential pieces of knowledge, and granting – for the sake of the argument – that McDowell's criticism of Brandom's two-ply account of non-inferential

reports is successful, Sellars' two-ply account of non-inferential self-knowledge fails on McDowell's own terms.

VII. The myth of Jones as an invalid argument

The myth of Jones might be conceived of as the following *argument*²⁰. *If one has the epistemic resources that the Ryleans have at stages (a) and (b) of the myth and if it happens to one what happens to the Ryleans at stages (c), (d) and (e), then one has (in sufficiently relevant respects) the same non-inferential knowledge of one's own thoughts as we (actual, non-fictitious people) have.* In what follows, I shall argue that, assuming McDowell's epistemological point of view, such an argument is not valid, for the conclusion does not follow from the two premises. Namely, given the premises, it is false that at the end of the story the former Rylean Dick has (acquired) the same ability to non-inferentially know one's own thoughts as we have. In other words, the myth of Jones doesn't fit with McDowell's epistemological view of non-inferential knowledge. Very briefly, the point is that everything McDowell says about the chicken-sexers is also true of the (former) Ryleans²¹.

More precisely, if one assumes McDowell's view on non-inferential knowledge, one should acknowledge that at the end of the myth the former Ryleans have not become sufficiently like us. Their utterance "I am thinking that-p" (based on the Jonesean theory) and our own utterance "I am thinking that-p" (based on our actual self-knowledge) correspond to different grounds or reasons. The former ultimately expresses inferential knowledge, while the latter expresses non-inferential knowledge (in McDowell's epistemological sense). That's why Sellars' account of self-knowledge in the *dénouement* of the myth of Jones fails *on McDowell's own terms*.

Let me further elaborate on this point. If one asks "What right does Dick have to have his meta-thought?", the answer will refer to the reliability of the conditioned response to thoughts with meta-thoughts, as well as to the justification of the involved theory of mind, that is, the Jonesean theory of thoughts²². On the one hand, Dick knows that his

²⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the myth of Jones as an invalid argument see Tripodi (2011), where I try to show that the myth of Jones doesn't work independently of McDowell's reconstruction. For different kinds of criticism, see Marras (1973a, 1973b, 1977) and Triplett and deVries (2006).

²¹ In his reply to McDowell (2010), Brandom (2010: 323) underlines a similar point. His overall argument, however, is different from mine (according to Brandom, McDowell simply finds the pre-Jonesean scenario unintelligible), and in what follows I won't focus on it.

²² *Prima facie*, this might strike one as non-Sellarsian. For Sellars often insists that in the case of our ordinary non-inferential first-person ascriptions 'the way the thought occurred to us' will be sufficient for the justification of the (occurrence of our) thought. This is true, however, only of statements that *already* have a reporting role. But the question is whether, in the post-Jonesean and post-conditioning scenario of the myth of Jones, the former Ryleans' first-person statements have acquired a reporting role in the same sense. My point in this section is that they have not, at least if we

meta-thought is a reliable symptom of the occurrence of the thought that-p, and more precisely that – given the occurrence of the thought that-p – he has been conditioned to have the meta-thought (that is, he cannot help having it). On the other hand, Dick knows that his own intelligent behavior (not only verbal but even silent) should be explained in Jonesean terms, that is, by attributing certain thoughts to himself. Thus, Dick's justification for his meta-thought ultimately relies on *behavioral evidence*. First, Jones is presented by Sellars (*EPM* § 53) as “an unsung forerunner of the movement in psychology, once revolutionary, now commonplace, known as Behaviourism”, conceived as the following “methodological thesis”:

Methodological Behaviourism (MB): Scientific psychologists are allowed to accept only one kind of evidence, that is, any evidential data consisting of or derived from overt public behaviour.

Secondly, Dick's justification of his meta-thought depends on the theory of conditioning and the Jonesean theory of thought, but both such theories are explicitly built in accord with MB. Accordingly, both theories are merely supported by the observation of other people's and one's own overt behavior.

The point is not, however, that Dick's self-knowledge ultimately has the same kind of grounds as Skinner's theory of conditioning and as Jones's proto-psychological theory of thoughts (namely, evidential data consisting of or derived from overt behavior). For it also has the same kind of grounds as a more sophisticated theory in cognitive psychology. The point is, rather, that *behavioral* grounds are a subclass of *inferential* grounds (in McDowell's epistemological sense). That's why Sellars' two-ply account of non-inferential self-knowledge can be criticized *à la* McDowell. At the beginning the Rylean Dick (taught by Jones) has inferential knowledge of his own thoughts, based on behavioral evidence. Later he becomes conditioned suitably to respond to the occurrence of his thoughts, so that his knowledge of them becomes *psychologically non-inferential*. Nonetheless, in virtue of MB such knowledge relies on behavioral grounds, consequently it is still *epistemologically inferential*. Therefore, McDowell must acknowledge that Dick has not actually become sufficiently like us, even on McDowell's own terms, because our knowledge of our own thoughts, whatever one might say of its psychological status, is

assimilate a statement's having a reporting role with its expressing non-inferential self-knowledge in McDowell's epistemological sense: as I will try to show below, the justification of a former Rylean's own thoughts (even after learning the Jonesean theory and after being conditioned) turns out to be inferential rather than non-inferential (in McDowell's epistemological sense), for it ultimately depends on a theory of thoughts (which postulates thoughts and connects them with behaviour) and a theory of conditioning (which guarantees the reliability of one's meta-thoughts).

definitely non-inferential epistemologically. In fact, according to McDowell our non-inferential self-knowledge is based on non-inferential grounds. For example, what right do I have for claiming that this is red? I am seeing it. Similarly, what right do I have to claim that I am thinking that-p? I am having this thought. On the contrary, Dick claims that he is thinking that-p merely rest on theoretical, inferential grounds, which include behavioural grounds as special cases. Such grounds, however, are deeply different from observational, non-inferential ones. Thus, even by McDowell's own standards the myth of Jones fails. Considered as an argument the myth of Jones is not valid, for it does not succeed in proving its conclusion (that is, that at the end of the fictitious story, in the post-Jonesean and post-conditioning scenario, Dick has become sufficiently *like us*, insofar as the capacity non-inferentially to know one's own thoughts is concerned).

VIII. The failure of McDowell's Sellars' attack on TE

The main consequence of the failure of the myth of Jones in *EPM* is the failure of both McDowell's Sellars' ATE and his reformed empiricism. For a central idea of McDowell's Sellars' ATE is the notion of non-inferentially knowable experiences containing propositional claims. But this idea is ultimately based on the myth of Jones, which (according to McDowell's interpretation) should justify Sellars' endorsing the promissory note in *EPM* § 16.

At first glance, the myth of Jones seems to succeed in justifying such a promissory way of talking. For the notion of perceptual experiences containing propositional claims derives from the genius Jones' attributing by analogy the semantic categories of manifest utterances (that is, the model of the theory) to thoughts (which include perceptual experiences as special cases).

On closer inspection, however, it turns out that, on McDowell's own grounds, the myth of Jones does not show that the theoretical notion of a thought as containing propositional claims can become the very same *non-inferential* notion of thought as we have. Consequently, McDowell's Sellars does not deliver on the promissory note, which required justification of the idea that thoughts (that is, those inner episodes that we know non-inferentially) can contain propositional claims. Thus, McDowell's Sellars' myth does not "kill" the empiricist form of the Myth of the Given, and neither ATE nor McDowell's Sellars' reformed empiricism are justified.

Prima facie, McDowell's error is the following: first, he doesn't realize that in the

dénouement of the myth of Jones Sellars ultimately puts forward a somewhat Brandomian two-ply account of self-knowledge; secondly, and more importantly, he doesn't realize that, insofar as he argues against the attribution of non-inferential knowledge to the chicken-sexers of epistemological folklore, he must contest (rather than endorse) Sellars' own myth, especially its *dénouement* (that is, § 59).

More generally, McDowell reads the myth of Jones as if the *dénouement* did not belong to it. McDowell reminds us that “when Jones starts work, his fellows already have the subjunctive conditional, hence the ability to speak of overt linguistic behaviour with its semantical character” (McDowell 2010: 133). Moreover, McDowell thinks that Sellars cannot fulfil his major aim (that is, to dismantle traditional empiricism) unless he follows “Jones in going decisively beyond those pre-Jonesian resources. Only after the first phase of Jones’s conceptual innovation does Sellars in effect declare that he has discharged his promissory note (§ 60)” (McDowell 2010: 133).

This reading of the myth of Jones has a manifest advantage: it allows McDowell to criticize Brandom's exegesis. But it has also a disadvantage, upon which I have tried to cast some light in this paper, and which I would like to stress a bit further in what follows. On the one hand, McDowell scores a goal against Brandom: Brandom’s two ply account of looks statements is in terms of dispositions (which can be inhibited) to make linguistic claims such as (2); but as McDowell underlines, “this apparatus is all available before Jones’s innovation”. Thus, “in implying that his apparatus suffices for Sellars’ aims in Part III, Brandom precludes himself from properly registering the promissory character Sellars stresses in his moves there” (McDowell 2009a: 227).

On the other hand, however, McDowell misconstrues Jones’ innovation. Such an innovation comes in two steps (rather than only one). The former, which McDowell acknowledges, is a conceptual innovation, that is, the introduction of a conception of inner episodes on the model of linguistic episodes. The latter, which McDowell forgets about, is the training of the former Ryleans (such as Dick) non-inferentially to know their own inner episodes. The first step accounts for our characterizing inner episodes as containing propositional claims. The latter step accounts for the non-inferential character of our knowledge of such episodes. Thus, if McDowell had accurately described the role of the myth of Jones in *EPM*, Sellars would have delivered on the promissory note at most at the end of § 58, rather than, as he actually does, at the beginning of § 60. For § 59 would have had no role to play in delivering on the promissory note endorsed in § 16.

McDowell, however, has misconceived the role of Sellars’ own myth. For *pace* McDowell the *dénouement* seems to be an integral part of the delivering. Indeed, the

promissory talk does concern the notion of non-inferentially knowable experiences containing propositional claims. As I have shown, however, the *dénouement* accounts for the idea that perceptual experiences can contain propositional claims only at the price of making such experiences inferentially rather than non-inferentially knowable (assuming the very epistemological distinction between inferential and non-inferential provided by McDowell).

Thus, on my view, unless McDowell's Sellars provides an alternative way to deliver on Sellars' promissory note in *EPM*, that is, unless McDowell provides an alternative and persuasive reading of (the *dénouement* of) the myth of Jones, McDowell's Sellars does not succeed in challenging traditional empiricism.

IX. McDowell's Sellars and Wilfrid Sellars

In this paper I don't claim that one cannot vindicate ATE, let alone that foundationalism is true, but only that one cannot vindicate ATE the way McDowell's Sellars tries to do it in *EPM*, that is, via the myth of Jones. According to McDowell, Sellars cannot justify a crucial premise of ATE (namely, the idea that one non-inferentially knows one's own propositionally contentful perceptual experiences) unless he delivers on the promissory note he endorsed in *EPM* § 16 (namely, unless he provides a more detailed picture of experience). McDowell thinks that Sellars delivers on the promissory note in the myth of Jones. But Sellars' own myth fails on McDowell's own grounds. Now, suppose one grants all this. Yet, the fact that the argument based on the myth of Jones fails, at best shows that McDowell's Sellars' view that perception has propositional content is not justified; whereas it does not show that it is *wrong*. Perhaps McDowell or even Sellars in *EPM* can justify that claim in a different way. Generally speaking, the failure of Sellars' thought experiment (at least on McDowell's grounds) puts in question not so much McDowell's own philosophical views (about which I have explicitly said almost nothing in this paper), but rather his interpretation of Sellars' argument against traditional empiricism. By the same token, it is important not to confuse McDowell's Sellars with the real Wilfrid Sellars. In what follows, I will list and highlight some differences between them, in order to make it clearer what is the scope of this paper's main argument.

First of all, Sellars does not think that his main argument in *EPM* is only directed against those who think that foundational knowledge is "subjective" (i.e., it is knowledge of perceptual experience rather than of medium-sized physical objects). Rather, he conceives

of it as directed against "the whole framework of givenness" (*EPM* § 1). Thus, McDowell's Sellars' ATE has a narrower scope than the real Sellars' argument against the Myth of the Given.

Secondly, let us grant that both McDowell and Sellars agree that observation reports such as (1) and first-person perceptual statements such as (3) are somewhat grounded on perceptual experiences (though according to their non-traditional empiricism such experiences cannot be epistemically independent, *qua* propositionally contentful). It is controversial, however, what the problematic expression "grounded on" means here. Such an expression often means the same as "justified by", and that is just what McDowell means. But Sellars' view is more multifaceted. On the one hand, according to him observation reports *express* aspects of perceptual experiences. And, at least *prima facie*, the expressing relation does not seem to be the same as a grounding, justification relation. On the other hand, on his view there is something distinguishable from perceptual experience, namely sense impressions, but perceptual reports are not justified by sense impressions, although in a different sense they are *grounded on* them: such reports express experiences, which are *caused* (but not justified) by such impressions²³.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, both McDowell and Sellars have a notion of epistemologically non-inferentially justified claim, and both of them think that such a notion ought to play a role in understanding our knowledge. But it is highly controversial whether or not Sellars' notion and McDowell's notion are one and the same. On the one hand, it seems that Sellars agrees with McDowell in regarding the inferential/non-inferential divide as an *epistemological* distinction. For example, Sellars (1961a: 121) suggests that though – from an ontological point of view – theoretical entities exist in the same sense as observational entities, from an epistemological point of view a theoretical justification is completely different from an observational one: for example, I believe on inferential grounds that a certain gas will obey the Boyle-Charles law or even that tomorrow the sun will rise, whereas I believe that this is red on non-inferential grounds. (Notice, by the way, that here the ambiguous notion of a ground occurs again). Perhaps one might even think that this view is compatible with McDowell's (2010), according to which theoretical justification is inferential (that is, in order to prove something one has to make inferences from something known independently), while an observational justification is non-inferential (that is, one does not have to invoke the validity of an inference in order to prove something, as his reason is, for example, that one sees that it is so). On the other hand,

²³ See *EPM* §§ 60-3.

however, this is surely not the way Sellars would describe things²⁴. For example, Sellars (1975: §§ 33-35) considers the case where Jones sees there to be a red apple in front of him. According to Sellars, “given that Jones has learned how to use the relevant words in perceptual situations, he is justified in reasoning as follows: I just thought-out-loud 'Lo! Here is a red apple' (no countervailing conditions obtain); so, there is good reason to believe that there is a red apple in front of me” (1975: § 33). Sellars notices that although the justification of the belief that there is a red apple in front of Jones is an inference, it has the peculiar character that its essential premise asserts the occurrence of the very same belief in a specific context. It is this fact that makes the justified claim non-inferential (1975: § 35). It is worth noting, however, that on McDowell's definition Jones' claim would be *inferential*, rather than non-inferential. Therefore, in Sellars' view the class of epistemologically non-inferentially justified claims (in McDowell's sense) seems to be empty. In fact, one might even wonder whether McDowell's notion of an epistemologically non-inferential piece of knowledge is the infamous notion of the Given, that is, whether McDowell ends up trying to squeeze a given back into his system under a different guise. This is controversial too. On the one hand, according to McDowell our non-inferential self-knowledge is based on non-inferential grounds (in his epistemological sense). For example, my right for claiming that this is red is that I see it. Thus, the seeing already contains the claim, and to say that the claim is based on the seeing seems to be the same as saying that the claim within the seeing is self-justified, a given. On the other hand, however, one's epistemologically non-inferential knowledge of something (in McDowell's sense) is not required to be epistemically independent, indefeasible, and able to provide epistemic support for all other knowledge. McDowell's characterization of non-inferential knowledge seems to be compatible with the following ideas: non-inferential knowledge requires the capacity to make inferences (as well as other semantic and epistemic capacities); such non-inferential knowledge is defeasible (for example, based on either theoretical reasons or reliability considerations); such knowledge does not constitute the ultimate court of appeal for all other epistemic claims.

In this paper I cannot answer all such controversial questions exhaustively. I hope, however, that this last section made it sufficiently clear that one cannot easily identify McDowell's interpretation of Sellars and the real Wilfrid Sellars. So that, as I have already said above, this paper's ultimate goal is neither to refute McDowell's own theoretical view on perception, nor Sellars' argument against the Myth of the Given in *EPM*, but rather

²⁴ See, for example, Sellars' criticisms of Chisholm's notion that it can be the case that what justifies my belief that-p is *the fact that-p* in Sellars (1975: § 36).

McDowell's interpretation and use of that notable authority²⁵.

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²⁵ I would like to thank the anonymous referee and, especially, Diego Marconi, for their useful comments and suggestions.

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