

# Recognition and Judgment:

McDowell, Travis, and Kant on Perceptual Experience

by

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## Declaration of Authorship

I Samuel Laurence Matthews hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

In *Mind and World*, John McDowell argues for a picture of perceptual experience that sees experience as both richly contentful and propositionally structured. His thought is that by picturing our conceptual capacities as passively drawn into operation we can do justice to the independence of the world while also being able to account for the rational role of perceptual experience. Recently, however, this account has come under attack by Charles Travis, who has suggested that this conceptualist picture involves both an appeal to an illegitimate notion of looks and a confusion of facts and things, leaving us unable to understand how the world is able to bear on thought. Indeed, Travis's critique has led McDowell to rewrite much of his original account, dropping both the claim that perceptual experience is propositionally contentful and the claim that it contains everything that it allows the subject to know non-inferentially.

This thesis argues that McDowell is wrong to make these concessions to Travis, and instead argues in favour of a richly contentful picture of perceptual experience. In particular, it is argued that perceptual experience should be seen as constituted by rational capacities for recognition. This helps to mitigate Travis's concern, since for a conceptual capacity to be realised in perceptual experience on this account simply is for some particular to be (ostensibly) recognised as falling under a generality. In fact, by drawing on Kant's account of the threefold synthesis in the first version of the Deduction, it will be shown that recognition in terms of empirical concepts is a condition of the possibility of perceptual experience. It is only because we are able to recognise an object as in some sense 'the same' over time that any visual awareness is possible, and this recognition is only possible in terms of concepts.

The second half of the thesis will then defend this account against potential objections. Chief among these is the so-called 'bootstrap problem', namely the apparent paradox that emerges from holding that empirical concepts are necessary for and yet originate from perceptual experience. It

will be argued that this problem can be solved by reference to what Andrea Kern calls ‘acts of learning’, where a subject is able to obtain their initial conceptual capacities via a relation to another subject who already has command of the capacities in question.

The final chapter will then respond to two external ‘phenomenological’ objections: the argument from fineness of grain and Dreyfus’s suggestion that conceptualists like McDowell ignore the phenomenology of ‘absorbed coping’. Dreyfus bases his account on a reading of Heidegger in a way that could seem to set the latter’s picture in opposition to the account offered in this thesis. Instead, it will be suggested that, to the extent that they both take empirical meaning to be a priori, McDowell and Heidegger are in agreement. The difference is that Heidegger is not interested in giving us a therapeutic account of how the world is able to bear rationally on thought, but rather in asking after the conditions of such meaningful presence. Nonetheless, it will be argued that the account of rational capacities put forward by this thesis can be helpful in answering this transcendental question. Our self-conscious awareness of the fallibility of our recognitional capacities is that which produces the logical gap between recognition and judgment. It will be suggested that it is this gap that Heidegger calls *die Lichtung* or ‘the clearing’.

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## Introduction

The question that this thesis is attempting to answer is what Charles Travis refers to as the ‘fundamental question of perception’, namely “how can perceptual experience make the world bear (rationally) for the perceiver on what he is to think or do” (Travis 2013, 3)? How we go about answering this question will depend on what we interpret it as asking. A straightforward answer might be thought to involve a description of the way our visual system functions. If we focus on visual perception, a satisfactory answer along these lines might be something like this: ‘The world is able to bear on what we are to think because the rods and cones at the back of our eyes are responsive to the light that reflects off of the objects that surround us. Via the optic nerve, these cells are able to send information to the brain, which is where the neural phenomenon that we refer to as thought occurs’. Such a physical account is clearly part of the story about how perception is able to bear on what we are to think and do. If we did not have these physical, biological structures (or at least some equivalent) perception would not be possible at all.

This, however, is not the kind of account that will be given here. That there are material conditions for perception to be possible is taken for granted. The issue is rather how the objects that we are made aware of in our perceptual experience – thanks in part to our physiological make up – are able to bear *rationaly* on what we are to think and do. That is, the objects that surround us are not only something that we are *physically* responsive to, in the way a piece of iron is to water, but things that can provide us with reasons for belief or action. My seeing a cardinal at the end of the garden is not only something that I have a physical connection with via the reflection of photons, but something that I can refer to when asked to justify my belief, for example, that there are cardinals in the area (‘Why do you think *that?*’ ‘Well I saw one earlier; it was sitting on the fence’). Perceiving the cardinal, in other words, gives me reason to think that it is *right* to believe that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden – that other people in the same position would be correct in

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*judging* things to be this way. It is this normative role of perceptual experience that Travis's fundamental question seeks to address.

Of course, it is clearly not enough for it to merely seem to me that that something is the case for it actually to be right to believe a proposition. If the cardinal at the end of the garden turns out to be a carefully disguised budgie rather than a real cardinal, then it is not right to hold that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden, regardless of how things appear. If the world is going to bear on what we are to think and do, the relevant standard for the normativity involved in perceptual judgment is how things are. As McDowell writes, the intentionality of belief and judgment turns on this fact:

To make sense of the idea of a mental state's or episode's being directed toward the world, in the way in which... a belief or judgment is, we need to put the state or episode in a normative context. A belief or judgment to the effect that things are thus and so... must be a posture or stance that is *correctly* or *incorrectly* adopted according to whether things are indeed thus and so.

(McDowell 1996, xi)

Judgment must be 'answerable to the world' in this way if we are to make sense of it being about anything at all. If perception is to provide us with reasons for belief, then it must be able to put us in contact with the way the world is. It is for this reason that, as Rödl suggests, "there is no philosophy of human perception that is not epistemology" (2007, 163n). Perception must enable us to know, if there is to be a positive answer to Travis's question.

## 2. Conceptualism

The suggestion that this thesis aims to defend is that in order for it to enable us to know, perceptual experience must be conceptually structured. This idea, although present in some form or other throughout the history of philosophy, is most famously argued for in contemporary literature by McDowell in *Mind and World* (1996). The argument is essentially that in order for what we

perceive to rationally bear on what we are to think and do, perceptual experience itself must show up in a form – i.e. as manifesting a content – that a subject can refer to as a justification for her belief. Only conceptually structured, propositional contents are able to play this role, as only they can entail something, and so transfer positive epistemic status on to other beliefs that we may hold. This much McDowell holds in common with Sellars (1997), Davidson (1986), and Rorty (1979), among others. The distinctive feature of McDowell’s account, however, is that this content is ‘always already’ *passively* at play in perceptual experience. To perceive, in other words, is to have one’s conceptual capacities passively drawn into operation. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant refers to this process as the *schematism* of our conceptual capacities; in what follows I will refer to it as a process of *recognition*, i.e. a product of our rational capacity to recognise things in the environment before us. As we will see, unlike the account given by Rorty, where external impacts on our senses generate a *belief* in the subject, on this model no judgment has yet been made on the contents that we are presented with.

Thus, for perception to provide us with reasons for belief, rather than merely generating the beliefs themselves, there must be an intentional distance between the moment of perception and the moment of judgment. This need not be a temporal gap, as if upon seeing the cardinal I must first weigh the evidence before issuing a judgment. Clearly not: when I see the cardinal (assuming I take myself to be in fairly standard conditions) my judging and my perceptual recognition need not come apart – I know that what I am faced with is a cardinal. The acknowledgement of the truth of the content of what I recognise accompanies the recognition. The point is, however, that the two elements, the ground (my passively recognising that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden) and the judgment (my assenting to the content and so accepting that my recognitional capacity has functioned correctly) are logically distinct. In other words, although they need not be, they *can* be at odds with each other. For example, if I know my neighbour likes placing decoy birds around the neighbourhood, the fact that I appear to recognise a cardinal at the end of the garden may not be Sam Matthews

enough for me to assent to the truth of that content. So although what I am ostensibly perceiving appears to be a cardinal, I suspend judgment until I can get closer (or until it flies off). Equally I can reject the content outright, as I do in the case of Müller-Lyer illusion. I may seem to *recognise* one line as being longer than the other, but I certainly do not *believe* it to be the case.

It will be argued that if there were no gap between recognition and judgment in this way, between the passive and active moments of our relationship to the world, then such rational responsiveness would not be possible. Indeed, it is this spontaneous acceptance or rejection of perceptual grounds that makes us accountable for what we believe, in a way that makes normative evaluation make sense. If I state that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden, that statement not only has a truth value according to the way the world is, but it is also something that I am held responsible for. If there is no cardinal to be found, I will be held to have judged wrongly. I *could* have done better, investigated further, held off making the judgment until I had got a bit closer. It is incumbent on the subject to recognise when things are not as they appear to be. It is this characteristic that distinguishes what Sellars calls the logical space of reasons from the law-bound space of natural science, where such responsibility has no role to play. For instance, there is no sense in which an electron acts *correctly* in triggering a certain set of neurones, it simply (re)acts as it does. That is not to say that there are not material conditions for our capacity for rational thought – for instance it seems clear that having a sufficiently complex brain is such a condition (certainly humans without brains are not going to be able to think). The point is rather that the law-bound mode of description of natural science cannot capture what makes our rational capacities *rational* – how they can be applied correctly or incorrectly, and so how one thing can *justify* another.

### 3. Relationalism

In a series of essays Charles Travis has advanced two influential objections to this conceptualist picture. The first of these suggests that the conceptualist is using an illegitimate notion of looks when speaking of perceptual experience having content. Travis distinguishes here between visual looks and thinkable looks, and suggests that neither are able to play the dual role that is required of them (i.e. being both passive and representational). The suggestion in the first case is that while visual looks are able to capture the passivity that is required, they are not able to provide a vehicle for representational content, as they underdetermine the number of ways that things could be said to be. Thinkable looks, by contrast, are able to capture the representational content of the perceptual experience that the conceptualist account needs, but they are not able to capture the passivity required, since they already express a judgment on the part of the subject. Thus, the argument is that there is no way to account for visual perception in a way that captures both conditions simultaneously, and so perceptual experience must be without representational content.

As stated, Travis's argument appears to beg the question against the conceptualist position. As we saw above, the argument is that in order to make sense of the idea of perceptual experience providing reasons for belief, we need to explain how the subject can come to reject the way things appear such that we can make sense of the spontaneity of belief formation. That is, we need a way of elucidating the subject's self-consciousness of the fallibility of her perceptual capacity. It seems that without a gap between recognition and judgment, the subject would be forced to accept whatever it is she recognises, which would not only make nonsense of the idea of perception being able to provide justification for what we believe, but would mischaracterise the nature of belief (i.e. a proposition that is freely accepted by the subject as right to hold). Against this, Travis's argument that there is no available notion of looks seems to miss the point, failing to consider that there could be any such distinction between the two moments.

As we will see, part of the reason for this is that Travis thinks that he has strong ontological grounds for rejecting the idea that concepts could be at play in perceptual experience. This second objection focuses on the fact that conceptual generalities are not something out there in the world, but rather that which worldly particulars fall under. To say that perceptual experience is conceptually structured, on his view, is to make a category mistake – it is to put generalities where only particulars will fit. Instead Travis thinks that we should characterise perception as a contentless relationship to the environment. On this account the only way to account for recognition is *as* judgment, as a bringing of a historical particular under a generality. The intentional distance between recognition (the passive drawing into operation of our conceptual capacities in perceptual experience) and judgment (the acknowledgement or rejection of the truth of that content), that seemed to be essential to understanding the perceptual relation as rational, vanishes.

The problem is that this still does not explain Travis's failure to see the possibility of a distinction between recognition and judgment. The conceptualist position, at least as presented here, does not entail taking the *concept* of cardinal as the object of perception, but rather the object of my perceptual experience is the cardinal itself, the historical particular I recognise as falling under the generality in the environment before me. A passive capacity for recognition, distinct from judgment proper, does not infringe on the metaphysical distinction between generalities and particulars. As will be shown, the root of the confusion here is a divergence in how rationality is understood in each case. For Travis, rationality is pictured in what Boyle calls an *additive* way (2016, 527). That is, it is something that is 'added on top' of the more basic functions and forms of awareness that we share with non-rational animals. Since perception is one of these forms of awareness, anything conceptual must be over and above this mere responsiveness to our environment. On the account I am advocating here, by contrast, rationality is *transformative*: rational perception is different in kind to non-rational perception. That is, recognition, on this account, is not only something that perception *enables* as per Travis's account, but is *constitutive* of that experience itself. Perception



moments of my perceptual experience of it. This contrasts with the analytic unity of concept subordination in judgment, for example, where each element of what is united is independent of every other element. That is, the concept ‘cardinal’ unities our familiar cardinal with all other cardinals to the extent that they all fall under the same concept. But our cardinal would still fall under the concept of cardinal even if he was the only one left (it would still make sense to say that what I am looking at is in fact a cardinal). He is in that sense independent of the other elements of the analytic unity.

As it will turn out, it is the former synthetic mode of the use of concepts that makes the latter, analytic use possible. The suggestion will be that it is only because objects are synthetically unified in recognition in this way that there are, as Longuenesse puts it, “empirical objects representable as substitutional instances for the [variable] ‘x’ in the logical forms of our judgments” (1998, 396). Take the following judgment: To everything  $x$ , to which the concept ‘male cardinal’ belongs, belongs also the property of redness.<sup>1</sup> For this to even make sense, we have to have an understanding of what it means for something to be *an x*, some particular empirical object or other, as a potential object of empirical experience. But the awareness of any particular object depends upon the threefold synthesis. In other words, perception *must* be constituted by a rational capacity of recognition if judgment about the world is going to be possible.

## 5. Perceptual Minimalism

The third chapter will show that there are two possible ways to account for this process of recognition. The first way – the one that this thesis wants to defend – can be called a ‘content-rich’ approach to perceptual experience. In *Mind and World* McDowell puts this idea in terms of the

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<sup>1</sup> i.e. ‘All male cardinals are red’. The specific form of the judgment given here can be ignored (as can the question of analyticity) since the point is dependent only on the idea of concepts having an extension. The form here, which is Kant’s formulation, serves only to make the point explicit.

content of perceptual experience containing everything that it allows the subject to know non-inferentially. That is, if the subject knows a cardinal when she sees one (i.e. she has the capacity to recognise cardinals), and what she sees is in fact a cardinal, then part of the content of that experience can be expressed by a proposition such as ‘There’s a cardinal’. On this account, the perceptual experience of the subject, as a rational animal, is constituted by what the subject is able to recognise.

The second way is a ‘content-poor’ approach, which could be thought of as perceptual minimalism. The idea here is that perceptual experience for rational subjects is not constituted by what we are able to recognise, but rather what we see *of* what we are able to recognise. That is, what I *see* when I see the cardinal is, for example, a ‘red object of a certain shape and size’. This base level of contents is what supposedly constitutes perceptual experience proper. Although the position that I am defending takes its starting point from McDowell’s account in *Mind and World*, McDowell himself in more recent essays comes to think that answering Travis’s criticisms requires moving to this sort of perceptual minimalist picture. He now argues that what we are presented with in perceptual experience are ‘merely categorically unified’ intuitional contents, that are nonetheless conceptual as they are discursive ‘*in potentia*’. This new stance roughly lines up with a position in Kant scholarship that I will call ‘categorical minimalism’ (see e.g. Griffith 2010, Connolly 2014), where the suggestion is that on Kant’s account only the categories are necessary for perception as such, and that empirical concepts are applied only after this initial conceptualisation, or schematism.

As will become apparent, however, the problem with this kind of categorical minimalist account is that it is impossible to identify an independent base layer of content in what we perceive. Although similar arguments can be found for any supposedly foundational layer of perceptual content, below I will focus mainly on McDowell’s example of colour to make the point, drawing on Cassirer’s account of the relative nature of colour constancy in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.

As we will see, the key problem is that just what colour we recognise an object as manifesting will



depend in part on what object it is we (ostensibly) recognise. Kant makes a similar point when he suggests that the schema *produces* the image (1996, A142/B181). What we see *of* what we see is dependent on the latter part of the formulation (i.e. on what we recognise (or appear to)) – there is no independent visual image to be found.

The categories cannot do the necessary work here either, for how the categories are schematised in perceptual experience will depend in part on just what is recognised in the perceived environment. For instance, whether we think that the branch is shaking *because* of the cardinal landing on it, or that the decoy cardinal is moving *because* the branch is blowing in the wind, will depend in part on whether we recognise it as a real bird or decoy. The schematisation of the category of causality does not select between these options, it simply says that – as per Kant’s second analogy – that “all changes occur according to the law of the connection of cause and effect” (ibid, B232), but just what is connected and how it cannot say.

## 6. Avoiding the Bootstrap Problem

A rich picture of perceptual content, however, leaves us with what I will call the ‘bootstrap problem’. For if empirical concepts are a condition of the possibility for perceptual experience, and yet new empirical concepts can only be obtained by means of that very same experience, then how do things get off the ground in the first place? As Wolff writes in *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity*: “it would appear that empirical concepts are ingredients in the very mental activity (unification of consciousness) whereby they first become possible. They both provide and depend upon consciousness” (Wolff 1963, 117-118; also cited in Allison 1968, 180n). There seems to be a paradox here, and one that Allison argues is ‘devastating’ for the account that I am advocating (ibid, 180n).

There seem to be two options: we either give up the claim that empirical concepts are necessary for perceptual experience, or the claim that all empirical concepts must be obtained on the basis of such experience. In a series of essays Ginsborg has suggested that we should take the former route (e.g. 1997; 2006b; 2006c). Instead of seeing perceptual experience as constituted by rational capacities for recognition, she suggests that we see it in terms of the psychological activity of the imagination. Concepts are then formed through our taking this activity to be ‘primitively normative’. As we will see, however, the difficulty with this approach is that it misses the main point of Kant’s argument in the A Deduction, by failing to explain how it is that the subject is able to recognise this psychological activity as in some way ‘the same’ over time. For if the subject herself lacks any conceptual capacities, there does not seem to be anything ‘in terms of which’ she can recognise *this* bit of psychological activity as resembling the one that came before.

Instead, this thesis will argue that we take the second route and reject the idea that our initial conceptual capacities must be drawn from perceptual experience. This could seem to imply that we need a set of innate conceptual capacities; however the suggestion here will be that our initial conceptual capacities arise through a rational transformation of the dispositions that we acquire as children to conform to a shared linguistic practice. Since these dispositions are acquired prior to the emergence of perceptual experience proper, it is possible to hold onto the claim that empirical concepts are necessary for perceptual experience while avoiding the paradox.

## 7. Avoiding the Accusation of Conceptual Reductionism

However, even if this solution to the bootstrap problem is accepted, the conceptualist picture I am defending may still appear to be reductive, at best restricted to particular moments of perceptual experience rather than constitutive of it. Such accusations of reductionism can be put into two broad groups that will be the topic of the final chapter. The first group argue that we are aware of far *more*

content in perceptual experience than a conceptualist reading can allow for; that we risk reducing the infinite complexity of the particular to simplistic general terms. An obvious proponent of this sort of criticism is Nietzsche in ‘On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense’, where he suggests that concepts are unavoidably distorting of the actual flux of experience. As he writes:

As a ‘rational’ being, [the perceiver] places his behaviour under the control of abstractions. He will no longer tolerate being carried away by sudden impressions, by intuitions. First he universalises all these impressions into less colourful, cooler concepts, so that he can entrust the guidance of his life and conduct to them. Everything which distinguishes man from the animals depends upon this ability to volatilise perceptual metaphors in a schema, and thus to dissolve an image into a concept.

(2006, 146)

But this gets things exactly the wrong way around: the schema *produces* the image. It is only because we recognise things that there is an image to be had. The idea of a schema distorting the flux of experience implies that there is something already there to be (mis)shaped – and as Kant’s threefold synthesis shows, that suggestion makes no sense.

Nonetheless, we are still left with the question of how to account for the complexity of what we see. Indeed, there is something fairly intuitive about the idea that the actual experience of the cardinal transcends the content of the proposition ‘There’s a cardinal’. It will be suggested that this concern stems from a picture of the operation of conceptual capacities that is itself reductive, viewing concepts as merely disjunctive classifications rather than as complex interrelated functions, where each alteration in an aspect of the perceived environment potentially has ramifications for every other. On the account being advocated here “every beat strikes a thousand connections,” as Cassirer puts it (1957, 203). It is precisely this complexity that allows for spontaneous configurations of sense, enabling the emergence of new insight.

The second group, by contrast, argue that we are (generally) aware of far *less* content in perceptual experience than a conceptualist reading would suggest. In the contemporary debate, the most ardent proponent of this sort of view is Dreyfus. He suggests, following what he takes to be Heidegger’s position, that for the majority of the time we are merely pragmatically coping with the

environment and not reflectively aware of what we are doing until things go wrong. On this account the conceptualist position is reductive as it tries to assimilate all perceptual experience to what is in fact only a partial and derivative element of our everyday experience.

I will show that this criticism is wrong on two counts. Firstly, it works on a picture of judgment that is essentially detached and contemplative, but as was mentioned above, that is not the picture being advocated here. Secondly, it mischaracterises Heidegger's position as 'non-conceptualist' when Heidegger is clear that "we do not say what we see, we see what one says about the matter" (1985, 56). Perception, as he says, is inherently determinate, we are always taking things *as* things. When things go wrong we do not suddenly awake from a pragmatic slumber, surprised to be faced with concrete objects that were previously mere potentialities for action, but rather made aware of what was the case all along (i.e. the break down of tools functions as a phenomenological reduction for Heidegger).

In fact, I will suggest that the 'intentional distance' or gap between recognition and judgment is precisely what Heidegger is referring to when he talks about 'the clearing' (*die Lichtung*). Indeed, the word captures the dual sense of a gap between the moments (in the sense of a clearing among the trees) as well as the way in which it is the space between the two that makes the experience of an image possible in the first place (as per its root, *Licht*). As we have seen, it is this gap that makes a rational relation to the objects that surround us possible, makes possible our experience of them *as* something or other. The 'intentional distance' that we started with, in other words, will be shown to be what Heidegger refers to as the origin of the intelligibility of being – that which makes possible our experience of the presence of things.

## 1. Does Perceptual Experience have Content?

### McDowell, Travis, and the Grounds of Judgment

In *Mind and World* McDowell diagnoses what he calls an ‘intolerable oscillation’ between two philosophically unsatisfactory positions: On the one hand a foundationalism that posits a perceptual given that is unable to play the foundational role assigned to it, and on the other a coherentism that sees no role for experience in our justificatory practices whatsoever, bringing into question the degree to which we can see our beliefs as about anything at all. In order to bring an end to this constant shifting between these two positions, McDowell proposes that we see our conceptual capacities as passively drawn into operation in perceptual experience. His thought is that this can do justice to the independence of the world (since just what conceptual capacities are passively drawn into operation is not up to us) while still being able to explain how it is that the world can provide us with reasons for belief and action (since experience has a conceptual structure).

Recently this account has come under attack from Charles Travis, who argues that McDowell’s picture fails to respect the distinction between concepts and the historical particulars that fall under them. By making concepts constitutive of perceptual experience, Travis thinks that McDowell prevents it from playing a role in explaining how it is that the world is able to bear on what we are to think and do. Instead, he suggests that perception is a contentless relation to the environment, which enables the recognition of objects as falling under a particular generality.

This chapter will argue that, in order to respond to Travis’s critique and better serve McDowell’s therapeutic ambitions, we should reformulate his picture of ‘conceptual capacities being passively drawn into operation’ in terms of rational capacities for recognition. This shift in terminology has two key functions. Firstly, it makes clear that when McDowell talks about perceptual experience having a conceptual structure, he is not suggesting that the objects of perceptual experience are concepts. Rather, all he is arguing is that perceptual experience (at least

for rational animals such as ourselves) is constituted by a capacity to recognise objects in the environment as falling under a particular concept. Secondly, by appropriating Travis's terminology – he calls recognition the 'fundamental relation' to which all conceptual relations can be reduced – speaking in terms of capacities for recognition makes the points of comparison with Travis's own position much clearer. In particular, it will emerge that the fundamental difference between the two positions is that for Travis recognition and judgment do not come apart, while for McDowell there is always the possibility of rejecting the way that we ostensibly recognise things as being.

The following chapter will be split into five sections. The first will focus on the motivation for McDowell's account in *Mind and World* and discuss its therapeutic ambitions. The particular focus will be Rorty's account of the untenability of the two central tenets of analytic philosophy: the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths and the distinction between scheme and content. It is Rorty's response to the failure of the second of these that drives McDowell's account in *Mind and World*, and it is his resulting coherentist picture that is the focus of section two. Rorty argues that since the only available account of perceptual experience is one described exclusively in law-bound terms, we should stop expecting it to provide a justificatory restraint on thought. It is the recalcitrance of this expectation, however, that drives the oscillation that McDowell identifies. Section three will then look at the therapeutic account given in *Mind and World*, where conceptual capacities are held to be passively at play in perceptual experience. This allows McDowell to combine the independence of the world (the source of the desire for a perceptual given) with the thought that only something of propositional form can stand as a justification for belief (the chief insight of the coherentist picture).

Section four will then present Travis's two main criticisms of McDowell's conceptualist account. The first of these is a phenomenological objection, that focuses on the question of whether there is an account of perceptual 'looks' that can play both the passive and representational roles that McDowell requires of it. Travis argues that we are stuck either with a picture of visual looks

that is undetermined with respect to the way things can be said to be, or a picture of thinkable looks that cannot be separated from judgment, neither of which are able to fulfil both roles at once. The second of Travis's criticisms is the ontological objection that was mentioned above; namely that by suggesting that experience is conceptually structured, McDowell makes it impossible to understand how a world made up of historical particulars is able to bear on thought. The fifth section will then address these concerns by recasting McDowell's account in *Mind and World* in terms of rational capacities for recognition as suggested above. This helps avoid the idealist picture that seems to be implied by McDowell's description of conceptual capacities being passively pulled into operation as 'shapings of sensory consciousness', and so better achieves his therapeutic aim.

## 1. An Intolerable Oscillation

In *Mind and World*, McDowell argues that it is only if concepts are already at play in experience that we will be able to answer what Travis later calls the 'fundamental question of perception', namely how it is that the world is able to bear rationally on what we are to think and do. Although this could sound like an ambitious project of philosophical system building along the lines of Kant's *Critique* (indeed McDowell cites Kant frequently in *Mind and World*), McDowell's aims are far more modest. What he wants to do is present a 'therapeutic' account that can show a way out of what he calls a 'philosophical malaise': an intolerable oscillation in the literature between foundationalism and holism. His approach can be seen as an example of Wittgensteinian quietism, where the aim is not to create a philosophical system to compete with alternative accounts, "the kind of move that would bring with it an obligation to try to convince everyone of its truth" (McDowell 1997, 181), but rather show us a way of looking at the problem such that it no longer seems pressing – "[t]o show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" as Wittgenstein puts it (2009, §309; also approvingly quoted by McDowell in *op cit.*). Only in this way can the account be

therapeutic: to present a constructive account would validate the idea that there was a genuine question to answer.

The malaise that McDowell identifies in part emerges from the response to the critique of analytic philosophy given by Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979).<sup>2</sup> Rorty suggests that two of the central tenets of the analytic school's picture of philosophy as epistemology have been shown to be incoherent, with the result that "[t]he analytic movement in philosophy (like any movement in any discipline) [can be said to have] worked out the dialectical consequences of a set of assumptions, and now has little more to do" (Rorty 1979, 173). The first of these tenets is the supposed distinction between analytic and synthetic truths, or propositions that are true in virtue of meaning alone and so necessary (e.g. 'all bachelors are unmarried') and those that are true because of the way the world is and so contingent (e.g. 'Paul is a bachelor'). This distinction allowed philosophers to picture themselves as having a distinct methodology – the analysis of concepts – that made available a particular kind of truth (viz. necessary propositions). The problem with this distinction, as Quine argues in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (1963), is that there is no way of making it that does not already presuppose that we can make sense of what we mean by analytic (i.e. true in virtue of meaning alone). Quine shows that the only grounds for the distinction that we have available appear to be the contingent fact of contemporary usage or mere stipulation, but in either case the idea that there is a special kind of necessary truth to be found vanishes, with the result that philosophy is deprived of one of its vocations. Conceptual truths become – like the formulas of natural science – just another contingent set of beliefs that may need to be revised under the right circumstances.

The second distinction is between conceptual scheme and empirical 'content', and it is Rorty's response to the rejection of this picture that is the focus of McDowell's account in *Mind and*

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<sup>2</sup> McDowell says in the preface to *Mind and World* that the account he gives "is an attempt to get under control my usual excited reading of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*" (1996, ix).



*World*.<sup>3</sup> One way of thinking of this division is in terms of the contribution to knowledge that is made by the world and the contribution that is made by us. As Quine suggests, it seems “obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extra-linguistic fact” (1963, 36). If we take the statement ‘there is a cardinal at the end of the garden’ as an example, it seems clear that the truth of that statement in part depends on what the words mean (what counts as a cardinal) and in part on whether the state of affairs actually obtains (whether there is an instance of something so counting). It is thus easy to think of language as the merely ‘subjective’ element and the extra-linguistic fact as a separable ‘objective’ component. For while it seems there can be a plurality of conceptual schemes that divide up the world in numerous ways, just *what* is being so organised seems to be shared between schemes nonetheless. The only alternative appears to be that the world itself was altered by the conceptual scheme that is doing the organising, a suggestion that seems to flout the independence of the world and so lead directly to a subjective idealism (and so scepticism about our claims to know the external world). Thus the aim within some parts of analytic philosophy (most famously with Carnap and the logical positivists) was to identify this independent, worldly element (that which is being organised by our conceptual capacities) and separate it from our own contribution (the organising) in order to discover the foundation for knowledge, the ultimate court of appeal for our claims to know.

If there is such an element to be found, it must be something that the subject is both *passive* towards (if it is to properly register the independence of the world) and something purely *receptive* (if we are going to be able separate it from the organising). What we appear to need, in other words, is something *given* to us. Part of the problem here is that even such objective sounding concepts as

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<sup>3</sup>Although the rejection of the analytic synthetic distinction forms a somewhat separate strand in Rorty’s account, McDowell suggests that Quine’s argument is dependent on his accepting the distinction between conceptual scheme and perceptual given. What Quine wants to show is that there is no such thing as analytic truths where these are understood as constitutive elements of a conceptual scheme set over and against the empirical data of the senses. McDowell’s thought is that if we reject this dualism “we can [perhaps] rehabilitate the idea of statements that are true in virtue of meaning” (1996, 157). Once analytic truths are liberated from the metaphysical burden of being constitutive of a particular scheme, there is nothing to stop us from understanding the idea as a matter of convention (see Grice & Strawson 1956, 152-3). It is thus Rorty’s response to the loss of this second distinction that is the chief concern of *Mind and World*.

‘shape’ and ‘object’ appear to be on the subjective side of the divide (a way of organising rather than what is organised), so it seems that whatever is so given must be something even more fundamental than this.<sup>4</sup> Since our relation to the world is made possible by our sensory faculties, one of the most obvious candidates for this role is so-called ‘sense data’. The idea here is that perceptual experience is able to provide us with a base layer of content that is produced by the impacts of the external world on our sensible faculties. So for example, the suggestion would be that the reflection of the photons off the cardinal at the end of the garden into my retinas produces within me a bit of sense data that can then form the basis for a judgment about the way things are (e.g. when I recognise it to be red and cardinal shaped). This sort of data would form a non-inferential foundation for knowledge, the purely objective element in our justificatory practices that would be able to resist the fall into subjective idealism and scepticism.

It is clear how such an account maintains the independence of the world, not only because we have no choice over what data is produced, but because they are independent of our conceptual capacities (they are a direct product of impacts on our sensible faculties and so prior to any synthetic activity of the mind). As Rorty suggests, the problem here is instead articulating how such data are to fulfil the justificatory role they need to if they are to explain how the world can bear on thought, an argument most famously made within analytic philosophy by Wilfrid Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. The issue is that, as DeVries suggests, “[i]f there were items of immediate and independent knowledge that were unable to support other knowledge, they would be epistemic dead ends of no real significance in our broader empirical knowledge” (2005, 99). Yet the only sort of thing that can transfer positive epistemic status to (i.e. justify) other beliefs about the world in this way is something with conceptual content, i.e. a *proposition*. Only something of this form can entail anything else (whether deductively or inductively), and so stand as the ground for a judgment. That there is a cardinal at the end of the garden entails that there is a

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<sup>4</sup> On this point see Berkeley’s criticism of Locke’s primary/secondary distinction in *Principles* (1996, §9-15).  
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bird at the end of the garden. A non-conceptual, sensed 'x' entails nothing, and so cannot explain how the world bears on thought (see Sellars 1997, §3).

One way around this is to say that this data from outside the scope of our conceptual capacities is nonetheless subsequently *conceptualised* by them, thus explaining how it is that they can provide a non-inferential foundation for our beliefs. In *Mind and World* McDowell suggests that Evans attempts something along these lines. On Evans' account the elements of the given

serve as input to the concept-exercising and reasoning system. Judgments are then based upon (reliably caused by) these internal states; when this is the case we can speak of the information being 'accessible' to the subject, and, indeed, of the existence of conscious experience. The informational states which a subject acquires through perception are non-conceptual, or non-conceptualised. Judgments based upon such states necessarily involve conceptualisation.

(Evans 1982, 227)

The idea here is fairly clear. Although it is true that the non-conceptual contents of perception are not something directly accessible to the subject, they become so after a process of conceptualisation. In that sense the conceptual contents of the beliefs so formed can be said to be based upon (or caused by) the non-conceptual contents of perceptual experience.

The problem with such an approach is that it thus fails to provide the *subject* with justification for the beliefs that are generated by this process of conceptualisation. The 'judgments' are merely generated in a dispositional way in the subject's mind (as indicated by Evan's 'reliably caused by'). But if that is the case, then the subject herself will have no access to the grounds for her belief (be they the non-conceptual given or the triggered mechanism). The best she will be able to say is that the belief that there was a cardinal at the end of the garden was involuntarily *produced* in her when she looked out of the window. But that is not to provide a justification for why she believes it – why it is something *right* to believe, why others *should* judge the same way. As Davidson writes, "there is no sense in saying a disposition is in error - one cannot fail to 'follow' a disposition" (2000, 71). To describe a disposition is no different to describing any other law bound physical system: it can be no more correct or in error than a stone is by being warmed by the sun.

There is no ‘ought’ to be found in such a description and so citing it as a reason for why it is *right* to believe whatever belief it generates makes no sense: “the best [such impingements] can yield is that we cannot be blamed for believing whatever they leave us to believe, not that we are justified in believing it” (McDowell 1996, 13).<sup>5</sup>

As McDowell writes, our “rational perceptual capacity is a capacity not only to know certain kinds of thing about the environment, but... *to know that is how one knows it*” (2011, 41). The fact that this awareness must have a conceptual form constitutes the fundamental problem with any notion of the given: there does not seem to be any way of giving an account of it that allows it to play its justificatory role, rendering it incapable of explaining how perceptual experience can make the world bear rationally on what we are to think and do. The idea of a law bound, justificatory given, in other words, is a myth.

## 2. Coherentism

If we accept a fairly standard description of the world as a law bound space of which we and our sense organs are merely a part, a consequence of this critique of the given appears to be that perceptual experience is simply unable to play any justificatory role in our epistemic practices at all. There is simply no way for such a law bound interaction to supply us with anything that can form the basis for a judgment (i.e. *reasons* for belief) – a conclusion that Rorty embraces. Brandom sums up the situation in the following passage:

Once beliefs have been causally occasioned in us, they can stand in evidential and other rational relations to one another. But notions of authority and responsibility don’t get a grip until we are already in the conceptual space opened up by the applicability of a vocabulary. Our relations to our environment are... purely causal ones, not relations of being responsible

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<sup>5</sup> It is thus hard to see how on this account that any beliefs so generated can even fit the definition of belief, (i.e. as a proposition that the subject holds as *right* to believe). Beliefs here are seen as ‘merely’ held, but this fails to distinguish them from other propositional attitudes.

for the correctness of our claims to how things really are, or how things really are having authority over the correctness of our beliefs.

(2000, xiv)

Since the world is incapable of providing rational constraint on what we are to think, we seem to be forced into a coherentist position: the best we can strive for is the greatest degree of coherence between those beliefs (some of which are dispositionally caused by impacts on our sensory faculties), rather than hoping to prove that those beliefs correspond to the way the world is. As Davidson says “we can’t get outside our skins to find out the cause of the internal happenings of which we are aware” (1986, 312). When combined with Quine’s attack on the distinction between necessary and contingent propositions, Rorty suggests that this leaves us with a situation where “justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice,” a position he refers to as ‘epistemological behaviourism’ (1979, 170). Rather than having an external standard against which to measure our claims to know, justification becomes “what our peers will, *ceteris paribus*, let us get away with saying” (ibid, 176). Thus epistemology becomes a description of human behaviour (of our contingent practices of reason giving) rather than a search for epistemic foundations or necessary truths

Although this may seem an unhappy conclusion for the analytic philosophers invested in the traditional epistemological project (see e.g. the contemporary reviews of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*: Kim 1980; Hacking 1980), Rorty argues that we should see this as a progressive development, freeing us from an external authority in much the same way that the enlightenment freed us from the authority of the church (2002). From this perspective, any account that attempts to maintain a role for the independence of the world “looks like regression to the Platonist idea that we have responsibilities not only to our fellow humans, but to something non-human” (ibid). Objectivity simply takes over where religion left off – a mythical final court of appeal that attempts to establish one set of practices as the only valid way to understand the world. Freed from this constraint, we no longer need to be concerned with the degree to which our epistemic practices are

‘accurate to’ or ‘mirror’ the way the world is independently of those practices, and instead are able to focus on the practices themselves, on the building of consensus in what Brandom calls ‘the game of giving and asking for reasons’ (1994, *passim*). Rather than talking about epistemic achievement in terms of ‘correspondence’ or ‘objective truth’ we can instead aim for “a rhetoric of social solidarity, a rhetoric which romanticises the pursuit of inter-subjective, unforced agreement among larger and larger groups of interlocutors” (Rorty 1995, 299).

Much like McDowell, Rorty views this account as ‘therapeutic’ to the extent that it is “designed to make the reader question his own motives for philosophising” rather than building a constructive account that needs defending against competing positions (1979, 5-6). The pragmatist take on therapy that Rorty is offering, however, is of a different kind to that offered by McDowell. Rather than attempting to accommodate the desire for a non-inferential foundation for knowledge, Rorty wants to show that the desire itself is based on a historical confusion between explanation (i.e. a description of the law bound systems that make perception possible) and justification (i.e. what we cite to defend our beliefs). This mistake, one that emerges most clearly with Locke but is then passed down to subsequent generations, is what convinces generations of philosophers that certain epistemic states stand in a privileged relation to the world, (i.e. those that are caused by law bound impingements) (*ibid*, 182). Rorty’s thought is that once we are presented with this genealogical account that exposes our philosophical worries as the result of this error, the fact that Quine’s and Sellars’ arguments show the search for epistemic foundations to be untenable will seem less like an intellectual crisis – one that questions the very possibility of our having knowledge – and more like a historical curiosity. He takes this presentation of the contingency of the desire for epistemic foundations to warrant a dismissive approach to the ‘common-sense intuitions’ it appeals to. As he writes, the fact that the pragmatist account of justification seems counterintuitive is irrelevant: “so much the worse for your old intuitions; start working up some new ones” (1997, 177). That perceptual experience is unable to make the world bear rationally on what we are to

think and do is not something that should leave us feeling disconnected from the world, but rather something that reveals that thinking of our relation to it in terms of confrontation and restraint mischaracterises it from the beginning.

It is this dismissal of the assumed need for the world to provide some restraint on what we are to think and do that McDowell finds problematic from a therapeutic perspective. The issue, he thinks, is that while Rorty's account shows that no solution to the problem is possible when it is cast in traditional terms (and shows why those traditional terms came to seem like a sensible solution to the problem) such a position leaves the philosophical worries that generate the desire for the given in place. We want to think that a claim like there being a cardinal at the end of the garden has "a warrant, a justifiedness, that consists not in one's being able to get away with it among certain conversational partners" but rather in simply perceiving how things are (McDowell 2000, 117). It is very difficult to think of this as merely the result of a historical confusion, even if the way that analytic philosophers have approached it has been mistaken for that reason. The problem, in other words, is that the apparent philosophical validity of the account Rorty presents does not seem convincing when made to push back against the common sense conviction that perception puts us in contact with the way the world is. Yet this is precisely what a therapeutic account is supposed to give us, framing the issue such that a reader can "break off philosophising when [she] want[s] to" as Wittgenstein says, to present things in a way "that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring itself in question" (1986, §133).

Indeed, it is this recalcitrant demand for some sort of receptivity in our picture of the relation between mind and world that McDowell suggests encourages a movement back to an account that aims to find the mythical 'given' that Sellars has shown to be unobtainable. For without such restraint from the outside it can seem that we are left, as McDowell puts it, "spinning in a void," trapped in a conceptual web of our own making, and so at risk of falling into the (inter-)subjective idealism that the analytic movement sought to overcome (1996, 66). So while Rorty may be right

that the given is an epistemological dead end, the fact that his account does not attempt to accommodate the demand for friction between mind and world simply encourages those philosophers troubled by the problem to redouble their efforts to find a foundation for knowledge. This generates what McDowell calls ‘an intolerable oscillation’ between a coherentism that puts the stress on the need for justification to have a conceptual form (at the expense of the idea of the world’s bearing on thought) and a foundationalism that emphasises the need for the world to be independent (at the expense of failing to explain how what we thus receive in perceptual experience can provide reasons for believing anything). Both positions are thus unsatisfactory for opposite reasons, causing a constant shifting from one to the other.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. Conceptualism

In *Mind and World* McDowell seeks to offer an alternative picture that can bring an end to this oscillation by showing how the world can bear on what we are to think and do without appealing to the given. The aim, in other words, is to achieve Rorty’s goal of “unmask[ing] as illusory the seeming compulsoriness of mainstream epistemology,” but to do so in a way that can do justice to the intuition that perception puts the world in view (McDowell 2000, 110). The challenge is to find a way for perception to i) provide us with reasons for belief, such that the constraint it provides can be rational, while also ii) maintaining the independence of the world, such that we can make sense of it being the world’s bearing on thought.

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<sup>6</sup> In his essay ‘Is Truth a Goal of Enquiry?’ Rorty argues “that pragmatism should not claim to be a commonsensical philosophy” and so should not appeal “to intuition as final arbiter,” since the content of ‘common sense’ will be influenced by the realist metaphysics that pragmatism is supposed to overcome (1995, 299). This might be fine as a defence of pragmatism (although see McDowell 1996, 154ff); however, it recasts it as a competitor theory rather than a piece of philosophical therapy, leaving the desire for the given in place. McDowell’s suggestion is that we can keep most of the insights of the pragmatist account while ‘exorcising’ this desire, thus better accomplishing Rorty’s goal of overcoming traditional philosophy (2000, 120).



As we saw above, the benefit of the given is that it is able to give an account of the *passivity* of perception that can do justice to the idea of the world providing a rational constraint on what we are to think and do. The worry is that once we lose hold of that “we lose our right to think of moves within the [logical space of reasons] as content-involving. So we stop being able to picture it as the space of concepts. Everything goes dark in the interior as we picture it” (McDowell 1995, 889). Without that connection to something independent of thought, it is hard to make sense of our beliefs being about anything at all. The problem is that characterising the given as something purely *receptive*, as external to the logical space of reasons (and so external to that of which we are ‘spontaneously’, i.e. directly and self-consciously, aware), makes it unable to play its justificatory role. In other words, what we need is a picture of perceptual experience that combines the passivity of the given with the spontaneous self-awareness of the space of concepts.

McDowell’s solution this problem is to argue that our conceptual capacities are passively drawn into operation in perpetual experience:

Conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the *sui generis* logical space of reasons, can be operative not only in judgments – results of a subject’s actively making up her mind about something – but already in the transactions in nature that are constituted by the world’s impacts on the receptive capacities of a suitable subject; that is, one that possesses the relevant concepts. Impressions can be cases of its perceptually appearing—being apparent—to a subject that things are thus and so. In receiving impressions, a subject can be open to the way things manifestly are.

(McDowell 1996, xx)

The idea here is that by having conceptual capacities always already at play ‘in the transactions in nature’ we can account for both the independence of the world – since we are not in control of what particular conceptual capacities are drawn into operation – as well as the ‘epistemic efficaciousness’ of what we perceive – since what we perceive has a conceptual form and so is something that we can cite as reasons for belief (as grounds for judgment). For example, when I look into the garden and see the cardinal sitting on the fence, all of these concepts are already at play in the experience itself: that there is a cardinal sitting on the fence is the content of the experience (at least part of it).



subsumed under it” (1996, A138/B176). For a subject to be able to judge an empirical object as, say, circular (i.e. as falling under the concept of circle), the object must already show up as circular such that it would make sense to judge the appearance as falling under the concept. If perceptual objects did not show up *as* something or other in this way (i.e. according to some concept or other), judgment would be *blind*, it would merely generate beliefs in the subject, and so not really be judgment at all. It would thus leave us in the coherentist position of being unable to give an explanation of how the world can bear rationally on what we are to think.<sup>7</sup>

Another way of thinking of this point is in terms of the *spontaneity* of belief formation, since the very idea of a proposition being ‘generated’ in the subject by some external source beyond the reach of reason mischaracterises what it is to believe something. To hold a proposition as true is not to be forced to believe it by the impact of some external element on neural machinery, but to freely (i.e. spontaneously) judge it to be so, to *accept* the given grounds as a sufficient explanation for its being the case. As Rödl writes, “the concept of belief depends on [such] belief explanation: someone falls under this concept only if she figures in explanations of this form” (2007, 103). We are aware of a belief *as* a belief precisely because we have reasons for its being true, reasons that we can use to defend it when challenged, and it is this characteristic that distinguishes it from other propositional attitudes (e.g. ‘imagining’, ‘hoping’, ‘doubting’ etc.).<sup>8</sup>

An explanation of a belief that makes no reference to this characteristic fails to account for the inherently first person nature of belief. To suggest, for instance, that my belief that there is a cardinal is at the end of the garden is constituted by a disposition to state as much when presented

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<sup>7</sup> Kant accounts for this necessary homogeneity in terms of the ‘schematism’ of concepts in perceptual experience – his term for the passive drawing into operation of our conceptual capacities. That both terms denote the same thing can be seen from the fact that the role that both processes play is largely the same. There is a debate, however, over whether Kant thinks that empirical concepts can be schematised, or whether this process is reserved exclusively for the Categories. This issue will be addressed in much more detail in chapter three, where I will argue not only that Kant sees empirical concepts as being schematised in experience, but that they are a transcendental condition for the possibility of any experience whatsoever.

<sup>8</sup> Of course the having of such reasons does not guarantee the truth of the belief, but the point is that they are at least aimed at this norm. As Kern writes, “the fact that we take a belief back as soon as we realise that it is not true proves precisely that beliefs are, as such, aimed at truth” (2011, 216).

with a certain set of stimuli – to attempt to account for the belief ‘from sideways on’ as McDowell puts it (2000, 118) – is simply not to give an explanation of a belief. It explains a certain set of physical reactions, but fails to account for a belief *as* a belief (as a proposition that the *subject* takes to be right to hold). What McDowell’s account allows us to do, in other words, is properly account for the spontaneity of the subject’s recognition of the authority of what it is she sees. Since the content of the perceptual experience is passive and so can be rejected if the subject sees fit (if the circumstances demand it) the subject is able to recognise any judgment or action she makes on the basis of that content as *her* judgment or action.

Perception on this account is thus an example of what Andrea Kern, following Aristotle, calls a ‘rational capacity’. Unlike a disposition, “a rational capacity has a specific mode of actualisation – namely a self-conscious actualisation” (2017, 197). A subject that performs an act that is explained by such a capacity is self-consciously aware of the act as an instance of the realisation of the capacity and so able to cite it as a justification for her belief. Thus, as Rödl writes, “[w]hen someone says, ‘I believe that p because I perceive it’, it makes no sense to repeat the question and ask, ‘How do you know that you perceive it?’ For, she already said how she knows this: she perceives that p. This is how she knows that she perceives it” (2007, 144). In other words, forming a belief based on something perceived – to assent to the content of what is recognised as a genuine case of an exercise of that capacity – forms a complete explanation for that belief. Far from perceptual experience being unable to play a justificatory role in our epistemic practices, perceiving something is the form of justification *par excellence*, the point at which our claims to know are able to come to rest.

Of course part of the difficulty here is that things can go wrong: what appeared to be a cardinal at first glance may on inspection turn out to be a decoy, hologram, or summer tanager. This would seem to imply that the ‘non-inferential grounds’ that perception is able to provide are *fallible*, at best “inconclusive warrants for claims about the environment” (McDowell 2009b, 228). But if we

can never be in a position to know conclusively that what we are faced with is in fact a cardinal, then “this seems incompatible with supposing we ever, strictly speaking, know anything about our objective surroundings” (ibid, 228). If this is the case, then, contrary to what was said above, the best we could say in any case is that we *seemed* to be faced with a cardinal, that it *looked* to us, all things considered, that there was a cardinal at the end of the garden. But that is not to know that what we are faced with is in fact a cardinal. Perceptual experience might give us inductive grounds for believing what it leads us to believe, but it is not enough by itself to establish the truth of its apparent content (or so the argument goes). This model of perceptual experience thus seems to lead us back to a position that would vindicate Rorty’s suggestion that perceptual experience is unable to provide grounds for knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

However, the error here is to see the particular act of perception as fallible rather than the capacity itself. For although my *capacity* to recognise cardinals sometimes goes wrong, e.g. when I inaccurately ‘perceive’ a summer tanager as a cardinal, in cases where everything functions as it should, the grounds that I have are truth-guaranteeing (and so infallible). For a situation in which I actually perceive a cardinal as a cardinal is by definition a state that makes me aware of the way things are. Such a capacity is thus defined by its positive instances: only these latter are true cases of perception. Apparent acts of perception therefore form a disjunct between genuine cases of perception, that is, “objective states of affairs making themselves manifest to subjects” and deficient, merely apparent cases “in which it is as if an objective state of affairs is making itself manifest to a subject, although that is not how things are” (ibid, 231). Thus although the subject cannot be certain which case obtains in any particular situation – since her perceptual capacities are fallible and so things will not always be as they appear to be – in cases where the subject stands on

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, we could weaken the account of justification necessary for knowledge here and say that such inconclusive warrants are enough to establish that a subject knows about her environment. The problem with such an approach, as Kern points out, is that it turns every claim to knowledge into a ‘self-contradictory act’ whereby somebody who claims to ‘know that p’ on the basis of perceptual experience ends up asserting both that “p is true” and “For all I know, p may be false” (2017, 93).

the good side of the disjunct (when her perceptual experience is a genuine act of perception), then what the subject perceives in the environment before her is able to form a non-inferential, truth guaranteeing ground for her claims to know. As McDowell writes, “[t]he acknowledgement of fallibility cannot detract from the excellence of an epistemic position, with regard to the obtaining of an objective state of affairs, that consists in having the state of affairs present itself to one in one’s perceptual experience” (ibid, 232).<sup>10</sup>

By presenting perceptual experience in terms of concepts being passively drawn into operation, McDowell is thus able to capture the independence of the world that went missing in Rorty’s coherentist account, without falling prey to the myth of the given. Perception on this account simply *is* a case of recognising objects in the environment before us as instances of particular concepts (or groups of concepts). Yet such conceptual awareness is passive, drawn into operation by ‘the world’s impacts on the receptive capacities of a suitable subject’ as McDowell puts it above. This passivity is what enables us to account for the logical gap between perceiving and judging – what I have called an intentional distance – and thus to properly characterise the relation to our environment as rational, where we are aware of, and so can freely accept, the authority of what we see as a reason for belief (rather than Rorty’s picture where perceptual beliefs are merely generated in the subject). This thus achieves the therapeutic goal of overcoming the oscillation by showing us a way of achieving the benefits of the given – allowing the world to bear on what we are to think and do – while respecting the fact that only something of conceptual form can stand as a ground for judgment.

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<sup>10</sup> It could be asked how we can be sure that there are *ever* any cases of the good disjunct. If there were no way of proving this, then it might seem that we are no better placed to overcome the sceptical worry of the previous paragraph. In ‘Disjunctivism as Material for a Transcendental Argument’ McDowell responds to this concern by using Sellars’ suggestion that there is an asymmetry between ‘looking’ and ‘being’, such that we can only understand the former once we grasp the latter, e.g. we can only grasp what it is for something to merely *look* red if we first grasp what it is for something to *be* red (2009b, 230). For to say something (merely) looks red is to say that it looks how something that actually is red would look under appropriate circumstances. But this implies that we must have at least some cases of the good disjunct, some cases in which things not only look, but actually are the way that they appear to be. In other words the good disjunct is a condition of the possibility of the bad one (this is all that is meant by the suggestion that a capacity is defined by its positive instances).

#### 4. Travis's Critique

The main achievement of McDowell's position in *Mind and World* is thus to show us how the 'fundamental question of perception' need not concern us; that there is no great difficulty in seeing how the world can bear on what we can think and do, so long as we see that perceptual experience is itself a case of our conceptual capacities in operation. Yet the therapeutic efficacy of this account is contingent upon us finding the idea of perceptual experience being conceptually structured unproblematic. Although many commentators have sought to show that this is not the case, most often arguing that concepts fail to do justice to the complexity or particularity of experience,<sup>11</sup> only Charles Travis's objections have succeeded in getting McDowell to make major changes to the picture he presents in *Mind and World*. Although I ultimately argue that these changes are ill-founded (see chapter three), the fact that McDowell feels compelled to offer them at least indicates the apparent seriousness of Travis's critique.

Although they stretch across several different papers,<sup>12</sup> Travis's arguments against McDowell's position consists of two main lines of attack. The first of these is what I will call the 'phenomenological objection', a concern that Travis raises in his essay 'The Silences of the Senses' (2013, chapter one). Essentially Travis's argument is that the idea of representational content – i.e. things appearing a certain way – is incompatible with the passivity of perception. The second line of attack is an 'ontological objection' to the idea that perception can be conceptually structured, where Travis suggests that McDowell's account allows concepts rather than things to become the objects of perceptual experience, cutting us off from the world in precisely the way that McDowell was trying to avoid. As we will see, this second objection forms the core of Travis's critique and is the main point of discussion in all the other essays in his exchange with McDowell.

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter five for a defence of conceptualism against this kind of objection.

<sup>12</sup> Chiefly 'The Silences of the Senses', 'Reasons Reach', and 'Unlocking the Outer World', all of which are collected in *Perception* (2013), and more recently 'The Move, the Divide, the Myth, and its Dogma' (2018).

The first objection runs as follows. Say we see a cardinal at the end of the garden. Things might not actually be as they appear – the bird may turn out to be a decoy, summer tanager, or hallucination – but on McDowell’s account there is still a certain way that things appear to be, a way that is at least partially capturable in a proposition (e.g. that there’s a cardinal at the end of the garden).<sup>13</sup> If things actually are as they appear to be – if this is a genuine case of our capacity to recognise cardinals – then the content of the experience opens us to the way the world is, such that it is able to stand as a non-inferential, truth-guaranteeing ground for our belief. Travis calls this kind of representing ‘allorepresentation’, where our perceptual experience “represent[s] things *as* a certain way, *with* a certain force” (2013, 26). The difficulty with characterising perceptual experience in such terms, Travis thinks, is that it is hard to cash out the relevant notion of appearances or ‘looks’. For the conceptualist needs a notion of looks that is not only determinately *contentful*, such that it can stand as a justification for our beliefs, but *passive*, such that we are rationally independent of the way things appear to be. As we saw above, this judgmental passivity towards what we recognise is necessary not only so that we are properly able to register the independence of the world, but so that we can properly account for the self-conscious spontaneity of belief formation (i.e. our awareness and free acceptance of our grounds for judgment). Essentially, Travis’s argument is that there is no notion of looks that is able to play this dual role, and so we are unable to make sense of the logical gap between perception and judgment on the conceptualist account: either looks are *visual*, but in that case unable to determine content, or they are *thinkable*, but in that case imply judgment (ibid, 34).

Visual looks, on Travis’s account, refer to the ‘objective appearance’ of things, the specifically visual properties of the objects in our environment. In the case of the cardinal, this would likely be its red colouring, black mask, and bird like shape. Thus, to say that it looks like

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<sup>13</sup> I say ‘partially capturable’ to indicate that there would presumably be a great number of different ways to capture the content of the experience (e.g. ‘there’s a red bird’, ‘there’s a bird on the fence’ etc.), not to indicate that there is some aspect of perceptual experience that is not capturable in this way.





“not instanced in the world simply in objects, or scenes, looking as they do, being such as to form the visual images they would. They are rather what is to be made of things by a thinker relevantly *au fait* with the world, and knowing enough of what to make of what he is thus aware of” (ibid, 40). The core problem for the conceptualist here, according to Travis, is that these looks are thus the *result* of perceptual judgment rather than its ground. They are not that ‘by which’ things are recognised as falling under a certain concept, rather they are the *result* of that act of recognition. For Travis, then, ‘thinkable looks’ do not have the passivity that is required for the conceptualist account:

For it to look to one [in this thinkable sense] as if X *is* for one is to take it that X; for one’s mind to be made up. It is not to keep the option of accepting, or rejecting, ‘at face value’, that things are that way. Nor is it to be in a condition that may *evolve* into judgment. It *is* to judge.... Where I see the pig to be before me, my mind is made up. Nothing remains (on that score) for me to take at face value or not. The world has already drawn credence from me. To see that such-and-such is so is to take it to be so.

(Travis 2013, 45-46)

If *this* is what McDowell meant by looks – where its looking to a subject like there is a cardinal at the end of the garden amounts to a *judgment* that that is the case – then we would seem to be back to a coherentist picture where the world simply generates beliefs in the subject rather than providing reasons for belief.<sup>14</sup>

More importantly, however, Travis argues that modelling perceptual experience on ‘thinkable looks’ in this way seems to get the *ontology* of the perceptual relation wrong, leaving us without a direct connection to the objects of our environment, and it is this that forms the second strand of his argument against conceptualism. Essentially, his thought is that any account of perceptual experience that suggests that concepts are ‘always already at play’ cannot be giving an account of how the world can bear on what we are to think, since the world is made up of non-conceptual

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<sup>14</sup> Several other commentators make a similar point. Stroud, for instance, argues that “tracing the justification back only to what I have called the experience of [e.g.] seeing that it is raining would trace it back only to something that still involves judgment or belief about the independent world. To see that *p* is to judge that *p*” (2002, 84). Similarly, Glüer argues that “McDowell has given no persuasive reason for demanding reasons that are not beliefs, a demand, moreover, that McDowell himself does not succeed in meeting; his perceptions turn out to be beliefs in disguise” (2004, 211). See also Ginsborg (2006a, 287ff.).

historical particulars, not conceptual generalities. Such particulars are not the sort of thing that convey conceptual meaning all by themselves, they are rather what *instances* the concepts that we have,<sup>15</sup> so “there precisely *must* be rational relations between the conceptual (what satisfies the condition) and something *else* if we are to make sense of experience bearing on what one is to think” (2013, 123).

In ‘Reason’s Reach’ Travis makes this point by saying that *that* something is the case is not part of the ‘layout of reality’:

If seeing that were seeing an item visible as meat is, one could say: ‘Sid saw that there was meat on the rug, though clueless as to what it was he saw’, ‘Sid saw that there was meat on the rug, but mistook it for that the Lexus was in the garage’.... Such things make no sense. Reason to be wary of the idea that ‘perceptual intake’ is, per se, conceptually structured in so much as McDowell’s weak sense.

(ibid, 127)

‘That there is a cardinal at the end of the garden’ is not the sort of thing that reflects light or makes sound, nor is it the sort of thing that might perch on the fence. Only the cardinal itself does that. Propositions and concepts are thus not the sort of things that can be the *objects* of perceptual experience; only the historical particulars of our environment can play that role. ‘That there is a cardinal at the end of the garden’ is therefore not something on which the truth of any perceptual judgment turns (Travis 2018, 41). What makes a perceptual judgment true is not any *representation* of things being a certain way, but rather things being an instance of how they are represented as being.

Thus, according to Travis, if the world is going to be the thing doing the bearing on thought, then it is a metaphysical necessity for perception to put us in contact with the non-conceptual. If all perception could put us in contact with were conceptual contents then, Travis suggests, “the best

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<sup>15</sup> There is however a distinction between such historical particulars and things being so as such, Travis suggests, since the latter is a general way things could be, and is thus conceptual (ibid, 125). For example, its being so that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden forms an extendible range of cases that would make the corresponding conceptual representation true (ibid). The historical fact of a particular cardinal being at the end of the garden, on the other hand, does not admit of instancing and so is non-conceptual (or historical) in a full-blooded sense.

course might be to throw up one's hands: after all, one might conclude, perception simply cannot do what [we] started by supposing it could" (2018, 40). What we need, in other words, is an account of perception that puts us in contact with particular things, not general concepts. Travis's thought is that McDowell's account can only do the latter. Thus, far from answering the concern the foundationalist has with Rorty's position, Travis thinks that McDowell's picture once again leaves us 'spinning in the void', without a satisfying account of how it is the world is able to bear on what we are to think and do.

In order to achieve this unmediated contact with the objects of our environment, Travis proposes that we characterise perception as a contentless *relation* between our sensory faculties and the objects themselves. Content only enters the scene when we *recognise* what we are anyway perceptually related to as falling under a particular generality. Travis calls this capacity to recognise the historical particulars before us as instances of concepts is "the fundamental relation to which all relations within the conceptual can be reduced" (2013, 247). The world is able to bear on what we are to think and do on this picture precisely because it is what admits of instancing in this way, not because it shows up in propositional form. To see the cardinal at the end of the garden is thus simply to be directly related to it (*qua* historical particular) by our sensory faculties. If we are well placed and have the relevant concept we may also recognise *that* what we are looking at is a cardinal, that it instances the relevant concept, but we would still 'see' it anyway – to the extent that we would be perceptually related to it – even if we had no conceptual capacities at all. Thus, conceptual capacities "come into the picture only with our operations in thought on what perception has anyway provided" (ibid, 241).

## 5. Perception as a Rational Capacity for Recognition

According to Travis, the chief problem with McDowell's account is thus that he takes concepts rather than things to be the objects of perceptual experience.<sup>16</sup> This seems to prevent us from understanding how it is that the world is able to bear on what we are to think and do as it puts generalities where only particulars will go. If this was the position that McDowell was arguing for it would be hard to deny this conclusion, but is this really the case? McDowell certainly agrees with Travis that "[i]t would... slight the independence of reality if we equated facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities—acts of thinking—or represented facts as reflections of such things" (1996, 28). Indeed, the whole point behind the idea that conceptual capacities are *passively* pulled into operation is to maintain the independence of reality, with "[t]he constraint [coming] from outside thinking, but not from outside what is thinkable" (ibid, 28). Contrary to Travis's account, concepts on McDowell's account are the *means* by which I am made aware of the objects of perception, rather than the objects of perception themselves (see e.g. McDowell 2018, 35).

Yet part of the reason it can be hard to see what McDowell means by this is that he fails to give an account of what it means for conceptual capacities to be 'passively drawn into operation'. When he does expand on the metaphor, such as in the Woodbridge lectures, he talks of "conceptual *shapings* of sensory consciousness" (2009a, 34; emphasis altered). It is tempting to read such expressions as describing a constructive pseudo-psychological account where "things being as they are [is] all chaos, transformed for us by something else into, for example, a pig snuffling beneath an oak" (Travis 2013, 20). That is, if we take this image literally it could seem that the 'cardinal' at the end of the garden is in some sense a product of the understanding, which organises the given sensory data into a feathery red shape. The object of our perceptual experience would then be the

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<sup>16</sup> At least on the account given in 'Reason's Reach' (2013). In latter essays Travis acknowledges that this is not the picture that McDowell means to advocate, but argues that in that case the posited 'contents' are superfluous (see 2018, 40-41). This point will be addressed in more detail below.

product of this unifying function and so not really an external object at all. It is hard to see how such a picture could avoid a subjective idealism, leaving us once again ‘spinning in the void’.

Despite the fact that such a picture is contrary to McDowell’s intentions, given that his aim is to provide a therapeutic account of perceptual experience, conceptual ‘shaping’ is an unfortunate turn of phrase. Indeed, even the image of conceptual capacities being ‘passively drawn into operation’ could seem to imply something like this depending on how the image of ‘drawing into operation’ is understood. Yet if the philosophical therapy is to be effective, the aim must be to present the issue in a such a way that it no longer seems pressing. Characterising the idea of perceptual experience being conceptually structured in terms of a conceptual ‘shaping’ of sensibility seems to produce the opposite response, of which Travis’s account is a product.

To this end, I want to suggest that we recast McDowell’s picture of conceptual capacities being passively drawn into operation by the world in terms of *rational capacities for recognition*. On this account, perceptual experience is constituted by whatever it is we are able to recognise in the environment before us. To see the cardinal in the garden *is* to recognise the object before me as an instance of the kind of thing it is (and no doubt many other things besides), and thus allows me to cite my recognition of it as the reason for my belief. In other words, my (particular) recognition of the cardinal is non-inferentially justified by reference to my (general) capacity for recognising cardinals (‘How do you know there are cardinals around here?’ ‘I know it because I *saw* one in the garden’). Thus, when things go well, what we are made aware of in perceptual experience is simply the way things are. Seeing the cardinal is not a case of seeing a proxy (like sense data) or an indirect conceptual representation of a cardinal. Rather, what is recognised as something or other is *the object itself*.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This is not to imply that justificatory relations extend outside of the conceptual – what justifies is still the (conceptual) *capacity* to recognise things being as they are, not the mere presence of the object. Of course, whether the particular act is a true exercise of the capacity and so actually able to justify my belief will depend on how the world is, but the point is that the thing by itself – i.e. merely in virtue of its presence in the environment – does not justify anything.

What this helps clarify is that when McDowell talks about ‘conceptual capacities being passively drawn into operation’ he is not suggesting that these realisations of our conceptual capacities then become the objects of perceptual experience, but rather that they make possible the recognition of objects and events in our environment as something or other. To perceive an object ‘by means of concepts’ is thus not to ‘shape experience’ or anything so metaphysically problematic, but simply to (passively) recognise it as an instance of some concept (or set of concepts). This is very similar – and in some respects identical – to Travis’s own picture of recognition, where what is recognised as falling under a certain generality are simply those objects that are perceptually available in the environment before us.

Indeed, we can even follow Travis in saying that just how things are recognised as being will be down to the ‘expertise’ of the individual whose experience it is: “Barking, to one who can tell when it is threatening, a snout to one who can tell when it is a pig’s, does bear, when he hears, or sees, it, on what he is to think,” but if I lack the capacity to recognise those things in that way, then they will not so bear (2013, 129; see also Gascoigne & Thornton 2013, 5ff). Such capacities can be as parochial or specific as necessary: not just a bark, but the bark of *my* dog; not just a snout, but the snout of a peccary. There is no *predetermined* way for the environment to be conceptually articulated, just how it is recognised as being will depend on the capacities of the individual perceiving it. This does not mean that there are *no* wrong ways to recognise things as being – if it is not my dog I hear but my neighbour’s, then I am wrong to believe that it is my dog barking (perhaps I should listen more carefully next time) – but just that conceptual capacities do not ‘structure the world’ in *that* sense. Things would still be as they are even if they are not recognised as being that way (i.e. even if there were no one there to do the recognising).

So far nothing Travis would disagree with. However, this reformulation of McDowell’s account also brings into greater focus the main point of divergence between the two pictures. For McDowell, recognition is *passive*, something that *can* form the ground of a judgment, but need not.





capable of acting [e.g. fire] and what is capable of being affected [e.g. wood] meet up in the way appropriate to the capacity in question [e.g. the capacity to burn], it is necessary for the one to act and for the other to be affected [i.e. for the fire to burn the wood],” no such necessity is present in the case of rational capacities (2016, 1048a). In the rational case conditions can be perfectly favourable and yet the capacity (e.g. recognition) will still not be fully realised (e.g. in judgment – viz. the self-conscious acknowledgement that the act is a genuine case of recognition). In Aristotle’s terms “non-rational capacities are such that one is productive of one thing,” while “rational capacities are productive of contrary ones” (ibid, 1048a). In the case of the wood, we can explain its burning (*ceteris paribus*) by reference to its combustibility – its capacity to burn. In the case of a rational capacity, however, we can refer to it to explain two contrary kinds of cases, even when conditions are optimal. For I may point to my capacity to recognise cardinals both in a case where I recognise that what I am seeing is a genuine realisation of that capacity, and in a case where I think that my neighbour may have been playing tricks with decoys (even though he has not).<sup>18</sup>

What explains this difference is that rational capacities are *self consciously held*, where the subject is aware of the capacity’s fallibility. Such capacities are thus those “whose paradigmatic exercise consists in an act that manifests a decision about what would be *right* to do according to the relevant capacity under the prevailing circumstances” (Kern 2017, 175; emphasis added). To have a rational capacity, in other words, is to be responsive to the norm that they represent and thus recognising that in certain circumstances things may go wrong. Part of what it means to have the capacity to recognise cardinals is to know what a *good* case of an exercise of the capacity would be, and so withhold judgment in what appear to be unfavourable circumstances for its realisation. In

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<sup>18</sup> We can also explain the wood’s not burning by reference to its capacity to burn, but only by specifying the conditions that prevent it from being realised (e.g. by being too damp). In this sense the privative cases are explained only derivatively by the capacity. There is what Kern calls an “asymmetrical structure of explanation” (2017, 171). This holds for rational capacities as well – for example when it is too foggy outside to see that the postman is walking up the driveway. The point being made in this section however does not turn on these cases. Rather, the issue is that even in a situation where conditions are in fact favourable to the realisation of the capacity, the rational capacity is still not thereby fully realised. There is some extra feature in the rational case that accounts for its realisation in particular cases that distinguishes it from a non-rational disposition.

this sense, my self-conscious possession of the capacity can explain both why I act in some cases and refrain in others, even when external conditions suggest the capacity should otherwise be realised (or not).

Aristotle characterises this acting in the light of the self-conscious awareness of the norm of the capacity as a “deliberate choice” (ibid, 1048a). The point here, however, is not that there must be some moment of *explicit* deliberation or ‘free choice’ – a *temporal* gap – before perceptual judgment is issued or withheld. Such a picture would clearly not be in keeping with the phenomenology of perceptual experience. If I recognise the bird at the end of the garden as an instance of a cardinal, my judgment that that is the case – that there really is a cardinal at the end of the garden – need not come apart from the act of recognition itself. The point is merely that there *can be* acts of recognition (or apparent recognition) that are not accompanied with such an act of judgment when circumstances are (or appear to be) less than favourable (see McDowell 1996, 125). To make a perceptual judgment, in other words, is to judge that *this* act of my capacity for recognition is in keeping with the norm.<sup>19</sup>

The problem with Travis’s model is that, because there is no distinction between recognition and judgment, it is hard to see in that case how the subject can understand their perceptual beliefs as anything other than *triggered*, leaving us with a bad picture of belief generation. For unless the subject is able to ‘self assess’ or *judge* the particular act of recognition in the light of the fallibility of her capacity – that in *these* conditions her capacity may fail – then there does not seem to be any

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<sup>19</sup> This also goes some way in addressing Travis’s complaint that McDowell ‘personifies’ the activity of the understanding in his account of the passive pulling into operation of our conceptual capacities – “exercised somehow, but not by us” (2018, 37). Travis’s objection is that the positing of such an entity is redundant as it either a) presents the subject with something that they were already in a position to recognise by themselves, or b) presents the subject with something that they are not able to recognise, but then would be presenting them with something that “it is in no position to assure me of” (i.e. if I was not in the position to know what a case of recognising a cardinal would be it is unclear what status ‘the Understanding’ telling me that that is what I am faced with could have) (2018, 57). But the idea that conceptual capacities are passively drawn into operation is not supposed to externalise recognition in this way. What does the recognising when I see the cardinal at the end of the garden is still *me* (after all it is *my* capacity). The point is rather that I know that my capacity to recognise cardinals is fallible and so I do not always take things at face value. In other words, the passivity of the capacity merely marks my self-conscious awareness of my fallibility, not the handing over of recognition to some mysterious entity working behind the scenes.

space for the subject's self-conscious awareness of the normative status of what she is led to believe (i.e. that it is something that it is *right* to believe). We seem to be left with mere "exculpations where we wanted justification" as McDowell suggests (1996, 13). But if that is the case, then such an account would mean (as Travis puts it) 'throwing up one's hands and concluding that perception simply cannot do what this essay started by supposing it could'.

Of course, Travis would not see things this way; he wants to say that such acts of recognition are *based on* a prior 'visual awareness' of the scene that "perception has anyway provided" (2013, 241). However, it is difficult to see precisely what Travis think perception is providing here. Awareness of *what*? Say we see the cardinal at the end of the garden: what is it that perception provides us with prior to recognition? It cannot be *that* there is a cardinal at the end of the garden – that is on the conceptual side of the divide. Nor can it be merely individuated objects, since what is counted as an object will depend on how the scene is broken up by our recognitional capacities (e.g. are the cardinal and fence one object or two? The concepts here have decided the answer, but it is not clear what it would mean to answer that question outside of them).<sup>20</sup> A mere relation to the environment does not seem to be the kind of thing to provide awareness by itself. It might be a condition for the possibility *of* perceptual awareness (indeed, that much seems obvious), but outside of the recognition of the things it thus relates us to *as* something or other (minimally: an object – although see chapter 3), it seems to make little sense to talk about awareness at all.<sup>21</sup>

Travis occasionally writes as if this question can be settled by empirical psychology, that visual awareness is afforded by whatever processes are involved in the physical processing of that which we receive from the environment (photons, sound waves etc.):

Visual processing so works in us that we are visually sensitive to colours, colour boundaries, edges, depth, various particular kinds of motion, and so on. When the instancing of a way for things to be is recognisable by such features, we are, so far as that goes, well placed to do the recognising (when processing goes well). The rest... is up to thought.

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<sup>20</sup> On this point see Boyle's account at the start of 'Sortalism and Perceptual Content' (unpublished a, 2).

<sup>21</sup> This will be argued for in more detail in the following chapter.

None of this is problematic in itself. Clearly, the physical make up of our visual systems explains why it is that we are responsive to light, for example. But my visual system is not something that I can cite as a *justification* for my belief that what I see is a cardinal ('Why do you believe *that*? 'Oh, well, you see, I have a visual system that is responsive to certain wavelengths of light...'). Maybe Travis thinks that is ultimately *all* I can do, but then it is once again time to 'throw up one's hands': such a 'justification' does not cite the subject's perceptual experience as the reason for belief, but rather a scientific description of the way our visual system functions. As McDowell writes "[w]hat goes on in arriving at one's picture of the world is not the stimulation one's sensory receptors... but how things appear to one, which belongs in a quite different conception of experience" (1996, 135).

Nonetheless, this account does still seem to leave us with the other problem for 'thinkable looks' that Travis mentioned above – viz. that appearances in this sense are not suitable to function as the *vehicle* of perceptual content (as that 'by which' things are recognised as being a certain way), rather they *are* that content, and so cannot be constitutive of perceptual awareness proper (see 2013, 42). The problem for the picture advocated here, in other words, is that by saying that perceptual experience for rational animals simply is recognising things as being a certain way, we seem to miss out a key part of the equation, namely just what it is about the objects that is being recognised. Indeed, given that perceptual experience here is *identified* with what we are able to recognise in the scene before us, the account given here seems to rule out as impossible the idea that there could be something 'by which' one recognises things as being a certain way in perceptual experience. In this picture what grounds the act of recognition is the capacity, not some prior element of perceptual experience. Of course, the capacity will require the presence of certain objective visual properties for its realisation, but these are not something the subject herself will be

aware of prior to the act of recognition.<sup>22</sup> After all, she becomes aware of the objective visual properties of objects by *recognising* them – they do not simply present themselves context-free in some pre-conceptual visual awareness (the next chapter will expand on just what this means). Such properties are thus unable to play the role of that ‘by which’ the subject recognises things as being a certain way.

The question is whether this problem actually poses the difficulty that Travis thinks it does. Given that recognition is a self-conscious capacity where the subject is aware of the way she recognises things as being merely by virtue of the realisation of the capacity in question, it is unclear what rational role such a ‘by which’ could be playing. Indeed, in an unpublished paper titled ‘Are the Senses Silent?’, McDowell argues that “it seems just wrong to suppose knowing how one’s experience represents things as being would have to be based on something by which one could recognise one’s experience as having the kind of content it has” (unpublished, see 46:00). To demonstrate, he suggests that we compare the perceptual case to the case of thought. If one is struck by a thought – McDowell gives the example of a case in which I am struck by the thought ‘I’ve forgotten to take my medication’ – there need be nothing ‘by which’ I recognise what it is I am thinking. For although we often talk of thoughts in terms of an inner monologue (whatever that amounts to), it is not as if I recognise what I am thinking by virtue of ‘hearing’ what I am thinking. Rather, I know what I am thinking simply in virtue of thinking it. McDowell’s suggestion is that there is no reason to think that the same thing does not apply to perceptual experience. Just as there is nothing ‘by which’ one thinks a thought (one just thinks it), there need be nothing ‘by which’ one recognises something perceptually (one just recognises it).

Nonetheless, Thornton has suggested that the image of being struck by a thought cannot do the work that McDowell needs it to do as a parallel to perception (forthcoming, §8.4). Unlike the

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<sup>22</sup> Chapter three below will show that just what properties these are taken to be will depend partially on what they are recognised as properties of.

case of McDowell's purported perceptual contents, to be struck by a thought simply *is* to make a judgment, not merely form the ground for one. McDowell's example above seems to be an instance of precisely this phenomenon. To be struck by the thought that 'I have forgotten to take my medication' simply *is* to make the judgment that I have in fact forgotten to take my medication. There is no space for this thought merely to suggest a ground for a further judgment. Even on the more charitable reading that Thornton gives, where the thought that one is struck by is immediately disavowed for moral reasons – such as the thought that “if one murdered one's parents one might inherit their money” (ibid, §8.4) – still seems to be a case of judgment (i.e. the later disavowal does not detract from the status of the thought as a judgment). Thus, according to Thornton, “there does not seem to be the conceptual space for something thought-like but not auto-representation [i.e. judgment]” (ibid, §8.4).

The main problem with this response is that it seems to assume that the parallel is supposed to be 'total' in the sense that it has to capture not only the way in which there is nothing 'by which' one thinks a thought, but also the passivity involved in perception. But there does not seem to be anything to stop us from saying that the parallel is only one dimensional. Thinking is like recognition in one way (i.e. there is nothing 'by which' one thinks or recognises something; one just thinks or recognises it), but it is unlike it in another (i.e. thought always amounts to judgment, while recognition does not).<sup>23</sup> McDowell's point is not that we should model perception on thought wholesale, but rather simply that thought provides us with a readily available model of an intentional state that is contentful without there being anything 'by which' we are made aware of that content. Our awareness is part and parcel of us having the content in the first place.

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<sup>23</sup> Or so Thornton argues. However, it is not clear that this is true. It seems possible to consider something without forming an opinion on the truth of the content of the thought. I can, for instance, think about the arguments in favour of utilitarianism while not endorsing any of them (maybe I am not ready to make my mind up just yet), or think about a speculative account of the origin of the universe without being in a position to make a judgment either way (perhaps because I lack the relevant expertise or perhaps because it is impossible to know if the account is correct). It is true that these are less clearly examples of being struck by a thought, but it is easy to turn them into cases of such, e.g. while watching the news it might 'strike me' why people might be in favour of utilitarianism. Regardless, whether such cases form counterexamples or not need not bear on the point McDowell is making.

## 6. Conclusion

In his most recent essay in the exchange, ‘The Move, The Divide, The Myth, and it’s Dogma’, Travis sums up his reading of McDowell’s position as follows:

McDowell thinks that... feats of recognition perception somehow allows us are things we could not do on our own; unless our experience were invested with a certain sort of [conceptual] aid to so doing. We could not recognise, e.g., by looking, that Sid is eating a chilidog; that here before us is such a case. For doing so unassisted would be making (or hosting) a move in conceptual space which, for him, is just not there to be made. (2018, 36)

Hopefully the foregoing makes clear that this characterisation is false. Concepts are not in play in perceptual experience in order to *aid* recognition, as if we could not recognise anything unless concepts were already at play (such that what we are recognising are the concepts themselves). Rather perceptual experience is *constituted* by such (conceptual) acts of recognition, where what we recognise simply are the objects of our environment. What we judge when we make a perceptual judgment is the veracity of that act of recognition in the light of the norm of the capacity. The recognition, however, stops nowhere short of the object itself. Thus, contrary to Travis’s suggestion, we *can* recognise ‘just by looking’ that Sid is eating a chilidog – indeed, that is precisely the picture being advocated here.

The divergence rather centres around the status of those acts of recognition. For Travis they amount to judgment; for McDowell they do not. As we saw, the challenge for Travis is that, in order to characterise the relationship to what we recognise as rational, we seem to need some awareness of the ground of our judgment that can allow us to cite it as a justification for our belief. For McDowell, the recognitional capacity itself is the ground of the judgment. Since the capacity is conceptual and self-conscious there is no question here of the subject lacking awareness of the ground of her belief. In contrast, Travis posits a pre-conceptual visual awareness on which our acts of recognition are based. The next chapter will use Kant’s account of the threefold synthesis to

show why no such awareness is possible. Visual awareness – or perceptual experience – for rational animals must be described in conceptual terms, and more specifically, in terms of rational capacities for recognition.



## 2. Kant on the Objects of Perception:

### Perceptual Awareness and Judgment

The last chapter argued that any account of perceptual experience that is going to be able to answer the question of how it is that the world can bear rationally on what we are to think and do, is going to have to picture that experience in terms of rational capacities for recognition. The failure to do this results in a bad picture of belief generation that is unable to properly account for the normative status of that belief (i.e. that it is something that the subject thinks that it is right to hold). As shown, Travis suggests that we can avoid this consequence by appealing to a merely visual awareness of the objects in our environment, a form of awareness that, despite lacking content, can still make us aware of potential objects for judgment. In order to show why such merely visual awareness is unable to play this role, this chapter will present an independent argument for conceptualism from the conditions of the possibility of perceptual awareness, drawing on Kant's account of the threefold synthesis in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. The suggestion will be that, contrary to Travis's suggestion, visual awareness itself requires concepts to be at play. In particular, it will be shown that the subject needs to be aware of how each moment of perceptual experience is connected to the next, something that is only possible by means of concepts.

This chapter will be divided into six sections. The first section suggests that an alternative way of looking at the debate between McDowell and Travis is in terms of two different pictures of rationality. On Travis's account rationality is 'additive', it exists in addition to a visual awareness that would have existed anyway. To suggest otherwise, according to Travis, would result in a picture of rationality as a distorting medium, transforming that which we perceive in the sense of a conceptual shaping of sensory consciousness. He attributes such a picture to Pritchard's reading of Kant (1909), and it is this account that is the focus of this section. Pritchard's account helps to distinguish a bad picture of the transformative role of rationality from the one that McDowell Sam Matthews



parts of the synthesis can be at play without the others. This would be problematic since it would suggest that there is a level of perceptual awareness possible without concepts being at play (offering a large concession to the relationalist position). As will be seen below, this runs directly counter to Kant's argument of the *threefold* (rather than three part) synthesis. The final section will then offer an interpretation of the two different kinds of unity at play in Kant's account. In particular, it will aim to make the way in which concepts are utilised in the threefold synthesis clearer, avoiding a picture of mathematical construction or projection that would take us back to the bad idea of a 'conceptual shaping of sensory consciousness'.

### 1. Additive and Transformative Rationality

In the previous chapter it was argued that unless perceptual experience is conceptually structured, we would be unable to explain how it is that perceptual experience is able to stand as a justification for our beliefs. Only something of conceptual form can be cited by a subject as a reason for believing what it is that her perceptual experience leads her to believe. In particular, it was suggested that we should conceive of perceptual experience as constituted by rational capacities for recognition. What this helped to make clear was that, although still constitutive of experience, we need not view such capacities as an intellectual veil standing between us and the historical particulars of our environment. For what is recognised by such capacities are things being as they are in the environment before us. Indeed, the argument was that *without* such a conceptual structure perceptual experience could at best be seen as *generating* beliefs in the subject, a picture which made it impossible to see how perceptual experience could enable the world to bear rationally on thought.

We can call this the rationality argument for conceptualism (Boyle unpublished b, 6). As we saw, *this* argument Travis is not convinced by. On his account, to say that perceptual experience is

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constituted by rational capacities for recognition is to confuse the visual awareness we would anyway enjoy with the perceptual judgments we make about what we see. So even if we accepted that we need not picture a conceptual structure for perceptual experience in terms that would confuse facts with things (i.e. by picturing such structuring in terms of rational capacities for recognition), the conceptualist account would still seem redundant since perceptual judgment can just be of the objects themselves: it need not make any detour through passively-realised recognitional capacities. Such capacities instead constitute acts of perceptual *judgment*, not passive experience — to realise them *is* to judge as Travis says. The *ground* of such judgment is the presence of the object in the environment, a presence that the subject is made conscious of directly in a (pre-conceptual) visual awareness.

From this angle it can seem that the conceptualist is simply presupposing that the ground of perceptual judgment must be conceptual – must be something that “has truth to transmit” as Travis puts it (2018, 39). Indeed, the lack of an argument showing that such direct visual awareness is itself not possible outside of conceptual capacities in operation has led several commentators to suggest that McDowell’s account stems from the thought that perceptual judgment must be modelled on the kind of judgment involving inference, where we infer the truth of the judgment from the truth of the experiential content (see e.g. Stroud 2002; Glüer 2004; also Boyle unpublished b, 22).<sup>24</sup> For this reason McDowell’s protestations that Travis’s account falls prey to the myth of the given – i.e. the argument from the availability of grounds – fall on deaf ears. From Travis’s perspective it can only appear that McDowell’s dogmatism about the form that perceptual judgment must take forces him to *deny* the obvious fact of a non-conceptual visual awareness, rather than the

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<sup>24</sup> We can already see that this mischaracterises the relation between recognition and judgment: what justifies my claim that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden is not this or that bit of experiential content, but rather my capacity for recognising cardinals. In a good case I do not infer from the existence of the proposition somehow ‘floating in front of my eyes’, but rather accept that my recognitional capacity is operating as it should (i.e. it is the general capacity that justifies the particular belief).

other way around (i.e. where the obvious fact of a non-conceptual visual awareness gives us grounds for denying that perceptual judgment must take a pseudo-inferential form).

This divergence reflects is two competing pictures of the role of rationality in perceptual experience. For Travis, our rational capacities are something *additional* to the visual awareness that an individual already enjoys. A subject who lacked such capacities “would still [visually]-see what was there to be seen, what in fact instances the generality in question. She would just fail to recognise its doing so” (2018, 239). Rational capacities thus do not alter the nature of the underlying visual awareness on Travis’s account, but rather merely ‘unlock’ what was already there to be seen. Such capacities, in other words, are only drawn into operation in *response* to what we are already presented with: “[the] operations of such capacities do not enter into the constitution of the relation itself” (McDowell 2018, 24).

On McDowell’s picture, by contrast, conceptual capacities *transform* the nature of perceptual experience of rational subjects, in the sense that they make possible the awareness of objects in our environment in the first place – they do not come into operation in response to what is already presented to them. In other words, the perceptual awareness of rational animals has a distinct form. The outer world is ‘unlocked’ precisely because “the understanding... is in act in our perceptual awareness itself” (ibid, 31). It is only because the understanding is so engaged (in the form of capacities for recognition) that we are able to pick out things in the environment *as things*, as objects of awareness. If I was unable to recognise an object as *an* object then there would be no ‘presenting’ of it, no possibility of a merely ‘visual awareness’ of it, to be had.

Thus, while it can be characterised as the conditions of the possibility of the world bearing rationally on what we are to think and do, another way of seeing the conflict between McDowell and Travis is in terms of the conditions of the possibility of the perceptual *awareness* of something to judge (i.e. of the perceptual objects in our environment). It is because there is a perceived potential for the first to be possible in non-conceptual terms that there is the room for dispute on the

second point. But, as Boyle points out, McDowell does not offer an independent argument for the necessity of conceptual capacities for the visual awareness of objects for judgment, seeing it as a consequence of the ‘rationality argument’ – i.e. ‘the myth of the given’ – rather than something that stands in need of independent justification (unpublished b, 7). However, this is precisely what is required to undermine Travis’s assumption that such pre-conceptual visual awareness is possible. What we need, in other words, is an argument for conceptualism that proves that the perceptual awareness of rational subjects must take a conceptual form (i.e. of things *as* things — as an instance of something or other).

In what follows I will argue that Kant’s *Critique* offers just such an argument in favour of the transformative account of rationality, one that can be taken independently of the rest of his system. A problem with using Kant to defend this kind of account, however, is that he is often read as arguing for a picture of transformation that was described in the last chapter as ‘conceptual shapings of sensory awareness’, which posits that information given to the senses is ‘moulded’ by our conceptual capacities. Indeed, this is precisely the picture of perception that H. A. Pritchard (1909) takes Kant to be presenting – and whose reading Travis follows in ‘Unlocking the Outer World’ (2013, 225-33).

According to Pritchard, Kant’s account of perception starts from the assumption that “that perception is due to the operation of things outside the mind, which act upon our sensibility and thereby produce sensations. On this supposition, what we perceive is not... the thing itself, but a sensation produced by it” (1909, 30; cited by Travis 2013, 227). According to this reading, Kant arrives at this position triggered by a Cartesian worry that “[w]e perceive [things] as they look or appear and, therefore, not as they are,” a fact that “constitutes a fatal obstacle to knowledge in general” (Pritchard 1909, 78). In other words, once we reflect on the fact that there is a distinction between how things look and how things are – e.g. a stick that looks bent in water – we realise that the point generalises: all we are ever acquainted with are appearances so we can never be sure of

any of our claims to know. Once combined with a metaphysical picture of external objects *causing* internal sensations, we are hard pressed to avoid a radical scepticism about the external world. The account of experience in the *Critique* is thus supposed to be an anti-sceptical argument aimed at winning us back the right to call ourselves knowers, starting from the perspective of the Cartesian subject (for a similar reading see Wolff 1963, 105ff).

In order to reclaim a ground for knowledge, Pritchard's Kant suggests we see certain functions of the understanding as 'transforming' or 'unifying' the data of the senses in universal and necessary ways, such that "we see that the things to which [experience] refers are only a special kind of appearance, viz. that which is the same for everyone, and for us at all times" (ibid, 97). The difference between 'looks' and 'is' statements is thus recast as a distinction *within* appearances, rather than between appearances and the thing in itself. That way, the thought is, although we may know nothing of the 'things in themselves', we may at least know of things as they (necessarily) appear to us.

The problem with this kind of 'transformation', however, is that it fails to achieve what it sets out to. For, rather than a new ground for knowledge, we seem to be left with a subjective idealism and an even more entrenched worry about the status of our beliefs. Pritchard sums up the worry in the following passage:

[Kant's] conclusion is that we do not know this object, i.e. the thing in itself, at all. Hence his real position should be stated by saying not that the ordinary view [that the mind conforms to objects] puts the conformity between mind and things in the wrong way, but that we ought not to speak of conformity at all. For the thing in itself being unknowable, our ideas can never be made to conform to it. Kant then only reaches a conclusion which is apparently the reverse of the ordinary view by substituting another object for the thing in itself, viz. the phenomenon or appearance of the thing in itself to us.

(1909, 16)

By substituting appearances for things, we do not win back the world, but rather lose touch with it all together, for to say we know 'only how things appear but not how they are' is not to find a new basis for knowledge, but rather to say that we *do not really know*. This was precisely Travis's point

in the previous chapter: what we perceive had better be *things*, not mere products of the understanding, if the world is going to be the thing doing the bearing on thought.

Indeed, any account that attempts to read Kant's argument in the *Critique* in this way – as starting from sensations and then arguing *out* to the 'empirical world' as a condition of the possibility of our being aware of those sensations in the way we are (i.e. as of objects) – can only result in this conclusion. Such readings are an example of what Ameriks calls a *progressive* transcendental argument (2003, 5). The problem with all such arguments is that the most they can establish is what we must *believe* that what they conclude is the case, not that it actually obtains (Stroud 1968, 256). For the best they can show is that certain operations on the given sense data are necessary for us to think of them as representing objects, not that there actually are objects to be so represented. 'Rational transformation' in this sense is only able to win us the *semblance* of knowledge — a good reason to reject it out of hand as Travis does.

Clearly, then, this is *not* the kind of 'transformation' that McDowell is suggesting when he describes the perceptual experience of rational subjects as having a distinct form. Indeed, the account just outlined is actually still based on an additive picture of rationality, since the 'inner Cartesian representations' are independent of the exercises of our rational capacities.<sup>25</sup> To that extent Pritchard's Kant is far closer to Travis's own account than McDowell's, since both see sensibility as functioning independently of the understanding. The contrast between them is rather on the kind of awareness that the senses offer. For Pritchard's Kant the senses merely produce an awareness of sensation, while for Travis, as Pritchard says, "[i]f there are 'appearances' at all, they are appearances *of* things and not appearances *produced* by them" (1909, 76).

There is another way, however, to read the transcendental argument of the *Critique* that aims not at refuting the sceptic, but at providing the conditions of the possibility of experience that is

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<sup>25</sup> Presumably this is part of the reason that Travis uses Pritchard's account, as it better fits his picture of the role of rational capacities – i.e. as something operating on that which the subject would be aware of anyway – even if it sees these rational capacities operating in a fundamentally problematic way.



already taken to be objective. Here “experience is not defined in terms of private so-called ‘Cartesian’ representations, but rather describes a cognitive situation occurring, roughly speaking, at a level no lower than the core perceptual judgments” (Ameriks 2003, 5). That is, rather than attempting to prove the existence of the external world from ‘inner’ experiences, we accept the general objectivity of the kind of experience that we start out with and then search for the conditions of the possibility of that instead. Ameriks calls this approach ‘regressive’, since it starts from a position of objectivity and then ‘works back’ to show what conditions make it possible. On this reading the task of *Critique* becomes the question of “how... there [are] in general, for us, empirical objects representable as substitutional instances for the [variable] ‘x’ in the logical forms of our judgments” (Longuenesse 1998, 396). (The ‘x’ here simply refers to the symbol that Kant uses to represent ‘historical particulars’ to use Travis’s terminology, e.g. in Kant’s statement of the form of a synthetic judgment: “To everything x, to which the concept of body (a+b) belongs, belongs also attraction (c)” (1992, §36)).

As we will see, approaching the argument of the *Critique* in this way allows us to read Kant as presenting a transcendental argument in favour of the suggestion that recognising objects as an instance of something or other is a condition of the possibility of any awareness of them whatsoever. Thus, far from forming an unnecessary ‘conceptual veil’ between us and the objects of our environment, it will emerge that the ‘transformation’ affected by our rational capacities is that which is necessary for our awareness of objects in the first place. With the possibility of a non-conceptual awareness foreclosed, there will be no space for Travis to claim that recognition can have such awareness as its ground. We will then either be forced to distinguish between recognition and judgment or else accept a bad picture of belief generation where we are unable to capture the self-conscious, normative character of belief.

## 2. Threefold Synthesis and the Coherency of Experience

Starting from this regressive standpoint, we can see Kant's account of perceptual experience as guided by the thought that it is only because we are aware of the objects of intuition as being the kind of thing about which something could be asserted that they can be objects of judgment at all. For instance, it is only if we are aware of that which appears in intuition as the sort of thing that could have something 'categorically' asserted about it that it could be an object for a categorical judgment. Thus, for each of the forms of judgment that Kant identifies he suggests that we find a corresponding 'category', i.e. a "[concept] of an object as such whereby the object's intuition is regarded as determined in terms of one of the logical functions in judging" (ibid, A95/B128).<sup>26</sup> Since these categories cannot be derived from particular empirical judgments about objects, but are rather ways objects must be recognised as being if we are to be aware of them as potential objects of judgment (i.e. if we are to have anything to judge), they are pure and a priori, arising from the from of the understanding alone and so independent of any empirical experience. They thus form the basis of what Kant calls 'Transcendental Logic' – the forms of thought insofar as they relate to the objects of intuition (see ibid, B102/A76-7).

As stated, this presupposes what Travis denies. What we need is an argument to *prove* that such recognition is a condition of the possibility of our being aware of objects for judgment. As we will see, it is just such an argument that Kant provides in the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, where he seeks to prove that the categories not only apply necessarily to intuition but that this applicability is a condition of possibility of any experience (i.e. perceptual awareness of

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<sup>26</sup> Kant lists these forms in the table of the forms of judgment (ibid, A70/B95), stating that they "are completely exhaustive and survey [the understanding's] power entirely" (ibid, A79/B105). Clearly this is an controversial claim, but to avoid digression, this worry will be bracketed for the moment (however see Wolff (2017), Longuenesse (1996, chapter four), and Reich (1992)). The important thing is that, as far as Kant is concerned, these forms of the understanding articulate the basic principles of general logic, i.e. logic stripped of its relation to any particular content. Since these can have no origin other than the understanding itself (we do not, for instance, 'infer' the form of an affirmative judgment on the basis of experience, it is just one of the foundational elements of any judgment whatsoever), Kant suggests that these can be the 'guiding thread' that can lead us to the pure concepts of the understanding.

objects) whatsoever.<sup>27</sup> In particular, the suggestion here is that Kant's account in the A edition version of the Deduction offers an argument in favour of recognition being constitutive of perceptual awareness that is independent of Kant's broader aims in the *Critique*. The benefit of this version, for our purposes, is that Kant is far clearer in how his account relates to empirical perceptual experience.<sup>28</sup>

Kant's basic argument in the A Deduction is that it is only because each *temporal* moment of our perceptual experience is connected to the next in a certain way that we can be presented with objects for judgment. Kant states the outline of this argument at the start of the chapter:

If each singular presentation were entirely foreign to – isolated from as it were – every other presentation and separated from it, then there would never arise anything like cognition; for cognition is a whole consisting of compared and connected presentations. Hence when I ascribe to sense a synopsis there always corresponds a synthesis; and thus receptivity can make cognition possible only when combined with spontaneity.

(ibid, A97)

At a minimal level the argument Kant is making is clear. If there were no recognisable connection between this moment of perceptual experience and the one that follows immediately after (i.e. if each moment was not even recognised as belonging to *my* experience), then it is unclear how

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<sup>27</sup> There is considerable debate as to just what Kant means by experience (for a summary see Ginsborg 2006c). Some commentators regard Kant as oscillating between a picture of experience in empiricist terms as 'the temporal data of the senses' on the one hand, and as judgments made about such data on the other. Beck suggests, for instance, that Kant appears to use 'experience' in both these senses at the very start of the *Critique*; both as a result of the "objects by themselves bring[ing] about presentations" and as a "cognition of objects" (1996, B1; Beck 1978, 40). This chapter will argue that the conclusion of the A Deduction suggests that no such clear division can be made: temporal perceptual awareness takes the form of a recognition of objects in terms of concepts.

<sup>28</sup> This version of the Deduction is often accused of being 'too psychological', since Kant seemingly spends most of the chapter discussing the functioning of 'subjective' psychological mechanisms for our awareness of objects, rather than proving that such awareness corresponds to the way things 'actually are' – a shortcoming that Kant allegedly attempts to fix in the B edition of the *Critique* (see e.g. Strawson 1975, 31-2; Kemp-Smith 2003). However, this worry is dependent on reading Kant's argument 'progressively', from the inner experience of cartesian representations out to the existence of objects. On the 'regressive' reading advocated here, this accusation of psychologism does not really make sense, for the 'subjective' conditions for our being aware of empirical objects of judgment is precisely what is at issue. Indeed, on this reading, the awareness of objectivity and subjectivity emerge as two sides of the same coin. As Heidegger writes, the A edition Deduction is not "'psychological', any more than... the second edition [is] 'logical'... On the contrary, both are transcendental, i.e., they are necessarily 'objective' as well as 'subjective'" (1997, 119). The second edition of the Deduction 'improves upon the first' only in that it makes the transcendental role of the categories clearer, not because the first was too 'subjective'. Indeed, rather than seeing the two Deductions as opposed to each other, it makes more sense to follow Longuenesse's suggestion that the B Deduction follows on from and, to a certain extent, presupposes the account of the A Deduction (1996, 57).

anything could emerge as an object for judgment. Receptivity – a mere relation to the objects of the perceptual environment – is not enough by itself to make judgment possible because it cannot by itself generate the necessary coherence between the *moments* of that experience.

That there must be a minimal level of coherence does not necessarily mean that this synthetic activity must take place in accordance with the categories (or indeed concepts more generally). Kant's argument for this more specific point is made by splitting this synthesis into three interdependent moments: apprehension in intuition, reproduction in imagination, and recognition in the concept. Although the individual titles could suggest otherwise, all of these are moments of the same temporal synthesis performed by what Kant calls the 'imagination' – effectively the understanding in its passive, recognitional mode. Starting from the idea that we could be simply confronted by the objects of perceptual experience by an immediate relation to them in intuition, Kant shows step by step that the recognition of them as potential objects of judgment requires passively recognising them *as* the same object over time by means of concepts.

Thus, Kant starts with the 'synthesis of apprehension in intuition'. Intuition here simply refers to our immediate perceptual relation to objects in space and time, a relation made possible by the receptive faculty of sensibility. Any such relation, Kant says, "contains a manifold" (ibid, A99), that is, it involves multiple, successive moments in the way that my perceptual relation to this table in front of me stretches over multiple instances of my perceptual experience of it.<sup>29</sup> Yet, it seems that in order to recognise this manifold *as* a manifold – i.e. be aware of each moment as part of the same – we must have an awareness of the flow of time in addition to a series of moments of perceptual experience. For if we just experienced one moment after another, never being aware of any connection between them (i.e. not being aware that the previous moment even existed), then we would be faced only with an 'absolute unity' each time. In order for this awareness to be possible

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<sup>29</sup> It also involves an awareness of a community of different objects in space – table here, laptop there – although that aspect of its manifoldness is inessential to the point Kant is making in this section.

the manifold “must first be gone through and gathered together” so that we can recognise each of the moments as part of a broader ‘unity of intuition’ (i.e. as occurring in time) (ibid, A99). This gathering together is the synthesis of apprehension in intuition – something that is not only performed empirically between actual moments of empirical intuition, but purely since “without it we could not have a priori the presentations of either space or time” (ibid, A99). In other words we can know that this synthesis must take place without reference to any particular spatial-temporal empirical experience, since it is a condition of the possibility of being aware of anything in space and time whatsoever.

Kant suggests that this synthesis itself is only possible in conjunction with the synthesis of reproduction in imagination, for it is only insofar as we can ‘reproduce’ the previous sequence of moments in imagination that we could be aware of the present moment as part of that larger manifold (the table now, the table a moment later, and so on). To explain his point, Kant uses the example of drawing a line in thought. If it was the case, he writes, that as I went about thinking the line I forgot the earlier parts of it moment to moment “then there could never arise a whole presentation... not even the purest and most basic presentations of space and time” (ibid, A102). Thus, he concludes, the ability to reproduce (i.e. remember) prior presentations is necessary for the synthesis of apprehension in intuition and so for cognition as such – it is therefore, like the first, a ‘transcendental power of the mind’.

However – and this is the third and final level of mutual dependency – this synthesis of reproduction is itself only possible because of the synthesis of *recognition* in the concept. The idea here is that the ability to reproduce prior presentations relies on being able to identify them as, in some aspect or other, *the same* as the current presentation. As Kant writes, “[w]ithout the consciousness that what we are thinking is the same as what we thought an instant before, all reproduction in the series of presentations would be futile” (ibid, A103). So for instance the apprehension of a line, to stay with Kant’s example, is possible only on the basis of the reproduction

by the imagination of its previous presentations moment to moment, which is possible only to the extent that it is possible to recognise it as the same thing over time by means of a concept. In other words, connecting the earlier moments of the line with the current presentation of it requires the recognition that it is part of the same object, for if the previous moments were simply reproduced without any way of identifiably linking them with the current presentation then the whole process would, as Kant says, be futile – it would be as if no synthesis had taken place at all.<sup>30</sup>

The upshot of this threefold synthesis is that the condition for the possibility of being aware of anything in the manifold of intuition is precisely that objects of intuition must be recognised according to some specific concept, that is, must be recognised *as* something or other. So when we perceive a line drawn on the ground we must be aware of it *as* the same line for the apprehension of it to be possible (at least in that linear form). There is no consciousness outside of this ‘taking as’, outside of this awareness of something *as* something. This awareness might be more or less clear – an object of intuition may show up in a fairly ambiguous form, a silhouette among the trees, for example – but it will nonetheless show up *as* something or other (i.e. according to a specific concept or set of concepts), for this is a condition for the possibility of there being any presentation at all. Thus Kant writes, “[a]ll cognition requires a concept, no matter how imperfect or obscure that concept may be” (ibid, A106).

Thus, it is this synthetic unity itself that makes us aware of an object of intuition, rather than the individual moments of perception. For instance, an object is not just how it appears from a single angle, or in a certain lighting, rather what marks it out as an object is precisely its ‘sameness’ through a variety of conditions. In that sense – and this point will be made more explicitly in the

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<sup>30</sup> There is of course the possibility that *only* the manifold as a whole is supposed to be so synthesised. So rather than this synthesis applying to every object individually, the whole of the manifold of intuition would be synthesised beforehand, forming a ‘base layer’ out of which individual objects could be identified (Longuenesse explores this possibility in 1996, chapter two). Why this is a problematic reading will be addressed in the next chapter; for the moment it is just worth noting that such a reading is *prima facie* at odds with the examples that Kant uses in the Deduction – although it is clear that the manifold as a whole is also supposed to be so synthesised alongside the individual objects (in terms of the I – it appears as *my* experience – as we will see below).

following chapter – we never really see something like the real (or ‘constant’) colour or shape of an object, rather what those terms (e.g. red, triangular) mark out is a kind of functional unity that allows for many different possible realisations – it is in that unity that the object as such really consists. A circular object will look elliptical when perceived from the side, but, thanks to the threefold synthesis, that does not alter the fact that we are able to perceive it as the same circular object over time. Accordingly, our concept of an object in general is “something as such = x,” not something with a determinate content (ibid, A104). The concept of the object, as Kant says “consists solely in the consciousness of this unity of synthesis” (ibid, A103). This mere idea of a synthetic unity of presentations is thus the form of the awareness of an object for judgment.

Kant suggests that it is ‘the transcendental unity of apperception’ that is ultimate ground of this awareness of this synthetic unity. His argument is that there could be no synthetic unity, no awareness of a connection between presentations, and so no objects for judgment, if there were not an awareness of the unity of the consciousness to which the presentations are presented. This is the case as much for empirical objects of intuition as it is for “the purest objective unity, viz., that of the a priori concepts (space and time), [which] is possible only by referring the intuitions to this apperception” (ibid, A107). Kant thus distinguishes this from an empirical consciousness, which he defines as “consciousness of oneself in terms of the determinations of one’s state” (e.g. my consciousness of myself as an embodied being typing on a computer), which could not guarantee the connection between presentations (1996, A107). Yet this awareness of oneself would not be possible if we were not aware of the unity of the threefold synthesis of the manifold according to concepts. That is, to be ‘apperceptive’ is to be aware of the necessary synthetic unity of experience. In that sense the transcendental object, the ‘something as such = x’, is the counterpart to the unity of apperception. Kant sums this up in the following passage:

[T]he original and necessary consciousness of one’s own identity is at the same time a consciousness of an equally necessary unity of the synthesis of all appearances according to concepts – these concepts being rules that not only make these appearances necessarily

reproducible, but that thereby also determine an object for our intuition in these appearances, i.e. determine a concept of something wherein these appearances necessarily cohere.

(ibid, A108)

Our awareness of ourselves in apperception depends on the synthetic unity of the threefold synthesis just as much as that synthetic unity depends on the unity of apperception. In other words, we recognise in a concept not only the unity of the object of intuition, but the unity of the self as well.

Kant's argument is that since transcendental apperception necessarily "precedes all particular experience," this implies that the threefold synthesis must have a pure use that deals only "the a priori combination of the manifold" (ibid, A117n; A118). Since Kant has shown that all such synthesis takes place according to concepts, and the only possible functions for such a priori synthesis must be those that belong to the understanding purely (i.e. they cannot have been derived from experience, since they are the conditions of the possibility of it), the only available candidates for such synthesis are the categories:

The Unity of of apperception [considered] in reference to the synthesis of the imagination is the understanding [i.e. as the source of its synthetic activity]; and the same unity as referred to the transcendental synthesis of imagination is the pure understanding. Hence there are in the understanding pure a priori cognitions that contain the necessary unity of the pure synthesis of imagination in regard to all possible appearances. These cognitions, however, are the categories, i.e. the pure concepts of the understanding.

(ibid, A119)

Since this transcendental apperception is the condition for the possibility of all empirical consciousness and so all cognition, this pure use of the imagination articulates "the pure form of all possible cognition; and hence all objects of possible experience must be presented a priori through this form" (ibid, A118).

The issue here is that all the synthetic activity of the imagination demands is that it is given some rule for pure synthesis is provided, and so, as Allison writes, it appears "the most [he] can claim to have shown at this point is that *some* a priori concepts are required and that the categories identified in [the Metaphysical Deduction] are the most likely.... What he cannot show is that they



are the only *conceivable* candidates” (2015, 252). That is, the argument presupposes that we accept both a) Kant’s derivation of the categories from the forms of judgment and b) the accuracy of his table of such forms. In the first case everything turns on in what sense “the same function that gives unity to the various presentations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various presentations in an intuition” (Kant 1996, A79/B105). The second case requires a demonstration that the table is complete (accounting for all forms) and precise (no duplications) (see Wolff 2017).<sup>31</sup> Yet, regardless of the fate of the categories, Kant’s argument demonstrates that the awareness of an object for judgment requires the recognition of it as something or other over time. There can be no mere ‘visual awareness’ of such objects to which our recognitional capacities are merely added.

### 3. Objective and Subjective Deductions

It is important here to stress the fact that when Kant talks of a threefold synthesis “he is speaking not of three distinct syntheses, but of one synthesis which is analysed into three aspects or momenta” (Allison 1968, 173; see also Griffith 2010, 201ff.). That is, although it can be tempting to think of each of the three moments of synthesis as still being divided among the three sources of cognition (particularly because Kant names the second of these as belonging to the imagination, implying that the others do not), they are actually all products of a single synthesis by the imagination. Indeed, the threefold synthesis that Kant identifies is later simply referred to as ‘*the synthesis of the imagination*’ (1996, A78/B103). For each moment cannot be separated from the

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<sup>31</sup> Both can potentially be solved within the remit of the A edition. In *Kant and the Capacity to Judge* (1996) Longuenesse, for example, contends that the solution to the first is found in the ‘Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection’ where Kant describes the conditions for the formation of concepts (1996, A260/B316). The suggestion is that each of the concepts of reflection actually describe how the shared function operates. For instance, she argues that what connects Quantity of Judgments and the Categories of Quantities is precisely the capacity of the mind to make comparisons, the first concept of reflection, and so on for the other forms (1996, chapter nine). The proof of the preciseness and completeness of the table of Judgments, on the other hand, Wolff claims to find in the so called ‘Metaphysical Deduction’ itself (2017).

other: the first presents intuition all together as a manifold, but can only do this on the basis of the reproduction of prior moments as part of the same object, which in turn is only possible through its ability to be recognised as such by means of a concept. The picture does not establish an order of priority one way or the other, either in favour of intuition or the concept. Rather there is “a circular relation of dependency between intuition and understanding,” as Angelova suggests (2009, 53; also see Bauer 2010, 450). Thus there is only one synthesis here, only one ‘act’ of unification (what Kant will come to call ‘figurative synthesis’ in the B edition).

Some commentators have suggested otherwise. Longuenesse, for instance, presents a picture in some ways closer to the relationalist view, where the third synthesis is (or at least can be) separated from the first two (see 1996, chapter 2; also Hanna 2001, 203; Allias 2009, 396-7). Take, for instance, her description of how the threefold synthesis relates to a sensible given:

When relating to a sensible given, the act of judging relates first of all to the appearance (apparentia), the ‘indeterminate object of a sensible intuition’. But we saw from Kant's exposition of the first two syntheses in the A Deduction that however undetermined the intuition and the object it immediately, ‘blindly’ relates to (i.e., however undetermined by concepts), they are nevertheless products of syntheses of imagination (apprehension and reproduction). The latter will ultimately lead to representations of determined objects (phenomena) only if they are ‘brought under’ the unity of apperception [i.e. by means of a concept].

(1996, 109)

The idea is that these first two levels of synthesis ‘blindly’ present to us an indeterminate base layer of contentless perceptual awareness, out of which we are able to then recognise something or other by means of a concept in the final level of synthesis. She gives the example of something being recognised as a tower from “rectangular shape of various shades of brown standing out on the surrounding horizon”, i.e. the product of the first two levels of synthesis (ibid, 25). If this were the case it would amount to a big concession to Travis’s position to the extent that it would suggest that a perceptual awareness of our surroundings without concepts yet being involved.

Yet this misses Kant’s argument (quoted above) that “[w]ithout the consciousness that what we are thinking is the same as what we thought an instant before, all reproduction in the series of

presentations would be futile” (ibid, A103; emphasis added). There must be something over and above (i.e. more general than) the individual moments that is able to provide the ground for our awareness of the connection between them, namely a ‘function for their synthesis’ – a concept. There is no possibility of the second synthesis operating in the absence of the recognition *that* it is the same object as the moment before, i.e. recognition of it *as* something or other. It is this “one consciousness... [in terms of a concept that] unites in one presentation what is manifold, intuited little by little, and then also reproduced” (ibid, A103). There is no perceptual awareness of objects outside of this synthesis of recognition in terms of concepts.<sup>32</sup>

There are several reasons that this interdependency of each level of synthesis can be overlooked. First, there is debate over the precise status that Kant attributes to the threefold synthesis. In the introduction to the A edition, Kant makes a distinction between the subjective and objective sides of the Deduction (1996, Axvi). The ‘objective’ side he says “refers to the objects of pure understanding and is intended to establish and make comprehensible the objective validity of understanding’s a priori concepts, and precisely because of this pertains to my purposes essentially” (ibid, Axvi). While the ‘subjective’ side “seeks to examine pure understanding itself as regards its possibility and the cognitive powers underlying it in turn, and hence seeks to examine it in a subjective respect... [and thus] does not pertain to [my purposes] essentially” (ibid, Axvi).

The traditional reading of this division is to suggest that the threefold synthesis in Section II is the ‘subjective’ side of the Deduction, so-called because it describes the cognitive powers or syntheses that are constitutive of experience for the empirical subject (ibid, A95-114; see for example Wolff 1963, 80). Since the categories are shown to be necessary for this synthetic activity they are thereby proven to be ‘subjective’ or ‘psychological’ conditions for the constitution of experience for an empirical subject. The task of the Deduction, however, is to establish the

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, it is possible to see this even from the description of the hypothetical product of the first two levels of synthesis that Longuenesse gives above, which itself invokes concepts: a rectangular shape of various shades of brown. As we will see in the next chapter, this has a great deal in common with McDowell’s account of common and proper sensibles in some of his more recent work.

*objective* validity of the categories, i.e. their necessary applicability to objects of experience, rather than merely as necessary conditions for the experience of the subject (ibid, A115-130). This is supposedly attempted in Section III, where Kant shows that the threefold synthesis (and thus the categories) are necessary a priori, and so applicable to objects of intuition as such.

Although this fails to fit the argument that Kant actually presents in the A Deduction – as Kemp-Smith suggests, Section III on this reading would fit better “placed midway between the initial and the final stages of [Section II]” (2003, 239) – it would at least give textual ground for treating the earlier, allegedly empirical, parts of Section II in the piecemeal way that Longuenesse does. As mere descriptions of psychological processes, there would be little reason to assume “that each moment of the ‘threefold synthesis’... is necessarily conditioned by the next” (1996, 51). Indeed, it would make sense of her suggestion that it would be “excessive to suppose that we (empirically) apprehend only if we have already (empirically) reproduced, or reproduce only if we have already (empirically) recognised under a concept” (ibid, 51). Rather than a single synthesis necessarily applied, the empirical threefold synthesis merely indicates a necessary *potential* for what we perceive to be successively brought under each synthesis (the only exception being synthetic knowledge a priori).

Yet we need not view things this way around. As Bauer argues, there are lots of good textual reasons for assuming that the threefold synthesis in Section II is the ‘essential’, objective part of the Deduction, and Section III the ‘inessential’, merely subjective part (2010). Firstly, Kant claims to have established “what we wanted to know,” namely that the “categories... have a priori objective validity,” at the end of Section II not at the end of Section III (1996, A111). This follows on from Kemp-Smith’s suggestion above that on the traditional reading, the final stages of Section II seem to be misplaced. For if it is assumed that the objective Deduction is supposed to “proceed to establish for the a priori elements what in its earlier stages it has determined for empirical consciousness,” then Kant’s use of the transcendental unity of ‘pure’ apperception in Section II seems to come too

soon (Kemp-Smith 2003, 238). We would, therefore, have to attribute to Kant a confusion of just what is supposed to be essential and inessential in the Deduction (or indeed a rushed edit “on the very eve of the publication of the *Critique*” (ibid, 231)). Taking the threefold synthesis to be the objective side of the Deduction, on the other hand, requires no such exegetical extravagance – we can straightforwardly account for the structure of the A Deduction as it is printed.

Second, given that Section III clearly relies on the threefold synthesis, on the traditional interpretation it is difficult to make sense of Kant’s claim in the introduction that only the objective section pertains to his purposes essentially (1996, Axvi; see e.g. Wolff 1963, 80). Indeed, the whole point of the argument from above and the argument from below in Section III is to show that they are both dependent on the threefold synthesis. The argument from above states that the transcendental unity of apperception “presupposes or implies a synthesis”, namely the threefold synthesis of the imagination, which is thus “prior to apperception” (Kant 1996, A118). Since this threefold synthesis is of that which we receive in intuition, we can guarantee that “man’s empirical cognitive power contains necessarily an understanding that refers to all objects of the senses” (ibid, A119) The argument from below, by contrast, is concerned with the way in which the imagination “must beforehand take [sensory] impressions up into its activity” in order to produce an image (ibid, A120). Since this threefold synthesis is only possible insofar as it takes place in reference to a necessary unity of consciousness, we can be sure that “all appearances must without exception enter the mind or be apprehended in such a way that they accord with the unity of apperception” (ibid, A122). In both cases the aim is to establish the interdependency of sensibility and understanding *via* the threefold synthesis: Section III does not supply an independent ground for the ‘objective validity’ of the categories.

But even if it is accepted that Section II and the threefold synthesis is supposed to be the objective side of the Deduction (so called because it establishes how it is that the categories can be known to be applicable to the objects of intuition a priori), it is still unclear why Section III should

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be seen as ‘subjective’. Bauer’s suggestion is that Kant names it as such because it “clarifies... how [the] various cognitive faculties stand together in the subject” by eliminating the empiricist and rationalist alternatives (2010, 454). In this part of the text, Kant’s aim is *therapeutic*: “not to establish a claim, but rather to prevent a misunderstanding” (ibid, 541). Kant’s concern is that his rationalist and empiricist contemporaries will struggle to accept a picture of a necessary fit between the objects of sensibility and the concepts of the understanding. In order to forestall this worry, Kant seeks to prove to each that there is “only a single unity – and thus no fit to explain; that is, the very same function of imagination brings representations to the unity of apperception (considered from the side of thought) and determines the affinity of all possible appearances (from the side of sensibility)” (ibid, 540). The rationalist worry is thus addressed in the argument from above, while the empiricist is addressed in the argument from below.<sup>33</sup>

#### 4. The Unity of the Threefold Synthesis

This exegetical issue, however, is not our primary concern here. If Kant’s argument stands it does so independently of the precise role he attributes to it. The main reason that it can be tempting to take the threefold synthesis as offering three independent syntheses is internal to Kant’s account of this synthesis itself. For by presenting the threefold synthesis only in one direction, from apprehension through to recognition, it can seem as if Kant is suggesting that the threefold synthesis should be seen as the *emergence* of consciousness through successively applied syntheses, culminating in the explicit (i.e. objectively-determined) awareness of the objects of intuition by means of concepts.

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<sup>33</sup> But of course things are not so straightforward. The major interpretative difficulty for this reading is that just before the account of the threefold synthesis in Section II, Kant gives a ‘Preliminary Notice’ where he suggests that Section II is preparatory, while Section III is systematic (1996, A98). If ‘systematic’ is taken to indicate a completion of what is presented in the preparatory section, then this would seem to stand directly opposed to the account just given (Longuenesse gives just such an interpretation at 1996, 44). Bauer suggests that we can avoid this implication if we consider that Kant describes the *Critique* itself as preparatory (e.g. A11/B25; A12/B26; both cited Bauer 2010, 456). Read in this way, we can see the ‘systematic’ Section III as a clearer presentation of the implications of the preparatory section, not their establishing something that has yet to be proven.

This is compounded by the fact that Kant names each of the syntheses after intuition, imagination, and understanding respectively, seeming to suggest that each synthesis is an individual contribution by each of these faculties, rather than a single *productive* synthesis by the imagination. Awareness thus appears to be achieved to varying and increasing degrees at each stage, rather than won by a unified synthesis itself.

Of course, the suggestion is not that the three syntheses are totally independent stages of the argument. Rather, on Longuenesse's reading, Kant's point is to prove that the third synthesis of recognition can necessarily be applied to the product of the first two: "[T]he activities described in the first two steps [are] always already oriented toward this goal [of recognition]" (1996, 51). This, however, does not require us to see each "element in its empirical aspect as necessarily conditioned by the next" (ibid, 51). The implication is that Kant sees this 'necessary conditioning' as a requirement for recognition occurring, not a guarantee that it always does. Indeed, as we saw above, Longuenesse thinks that such a view would be 'excessive', instead suggesting that "among our conscious representations there are some we just apprehend without reproducing them or reproduce without subjecting them to the rules of synthesis that allow them to be reflected under concepts – that is, to be thought" (1996, 66).

Such a reading thus takes Kant as presenting a version of 'state nonconceptualism' where the inner perceptual states of the subject are nonconceptual in the sense of being unarticulated, although they are conceptualisable in principle (at least by a subject equipped with the requisite conceptual capacities) (Connolly 2014, 334; see Heck 2000, 484-5 for the origin of the classification). In the end, what guarantees the conceptualisability of each level of perceptual awareness is that "each of the empirically distinguished moments (empirical intuition, reproductive representation of imagination, concept) depends upon the 'numerical identity of self-consciousness' and thereby on the categories" as "the very functions at work in [this] numerically identical act of synthesis" (Longuenesse 1996, 56; 52). On this reading, our consciousness of the unity of

apperception is not something that itself requires the recognition of an object *as* an object (i.e. the *recognition* of what is perceived as falling under the categories), but rather is something available at each level of synthesis as an independent act that grounds the other syntheses. This independent act is the threefold synthesis thought purely (i.e. merely in regard to the forms of space and time); it is this that Longuenesse takes Kant to be arguing for in Section III's arguments from above and below (ibid, 44).<sup>34</sup>

That this is a problematic way of reading the threefold synthesis can be seen from Longuenesse's treatment of the Analogies. Her suggestion is that, in this section of the *Critique*, Kant wants to establish that experience in the restricted sense of 'discursive' or propositional knowledge "presupposes experience in a further sense: experience as synthesis in accordance with a priori (relational) categories" (1996, 324). Her thought is that perception can provide us with grounds for discursive judgment only after the mere succession of appearances given to us in apprehension is recognised as united in terms of the categories, by means of 'an a priori rule of synthesis'.<sup>35</sup>

To take the example of the First Analogy, the suggestion is that Kant sees the category of substance as a rule for deriving an objective succession from the merely subjective succession of appearances given to us by the 'synthesis of apprehension'. This derivation is necessary on this view because, unlike "the succession of our representations, [...] the simultaneity and succession in states of things are not directly perceived" (ibid, 335). As Longuenesse explains:

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<sup>34</sup> Longuenesse suggests that this helps to explain Kant's referring to the synthesis of the imagination as 'reproductive' in his account of the threefold synthesis (Kant 1996, A102), but as a 'productive' synthesis elsewhere (e.g. ibid, A118), a distinction that could "otherwise seem like an inconsistency in Kant's terminology" (Longuenesse 1996, 44n). That is, she suggests that while reproductive synthesis refers to all synthesis of the imagination as such, the productive attribute is reserved for the pure *version* of this synthesis, i.e. when part of the pure threefold synthesis. The problem here is that the productive synthesis is not simply a 'version' of the second *element* of the threefold synthesis – it is the threefold synthesis itself, which contains within it a reproductive element. There is, in other words, a difference in *kind* between the reproductive and productive syntheses of the imagination, not merely a distinction in content.

<sup>35</sup> Longuenesse's Kant thus has three perceptual elements to Travis and McDowell's two: she shares non-conceptual awareness with Travis, conceptual awareness with McDowell, and judgment with both. As we will see, the difficulty lies in the attempt to move from the first of these to the second, which parallels Travis's difficulty in moving directly from the first to the third.



Kant... observe[s] that in the synthesis of our apprehension, the perceptions are always successive... Only by relating these successive perceptions to a supposedly permanent object do we distinguish the case in which the succession is merely subjective (as in the case of [seeing parts of a house successively as one walks around it], in which the determinations successively apprehended are objectively simultaneous, and the succession is only that of the subjective act of quantitative synthesis of a figure in space) from the case in which the succession is objective ([e.g.] the alteration of [a] piece of wax [exposed to the heat of the fire]).

(1996, 336)

In order to observe a mere succession of perceptual states given to us in apprehension as more than just that, we must *interpret* that which it presents us with according to a rule. The category of substance is that rule – it distinguishes just which bits of that which we successively receive in apprehension should be unified in terms of a objective substance and which are mere affections of the subject.<sup>36</sup>

As Rödl suggests, Longuenesse therefore sees Kant as starting from the empiricist assumption that a succession of perceptions is given solely by apprehension, i.e. “that I perceive one thing after the other simply in virtue of perceiving one thing after the other; as if a sequence of conscious perceptions were as such a consciousness of their sequence” (2012, 124). But this misses Kant’s key argument in the First Analogy that distinguishes his position from Hume’s – namely that what is given in intuition must *already* be articulated (i.e. recognised) in terms of a permanent substance and changing state for it to be located in a temporal sequence at all. Indeed, far from suggesting that we cannot directly perceive ‘the simultaneity and succession in states of things’, Kant’s suggestion is that the awareness of *any* temporal relations has such direct perception of things in time as a condition of its possibility:

All appearances are in time; and solely in time, as substrate, can either *simultaneity* or *succession* be presented... Now time itself cannot be perceived. Hence the substrate which presents time as such, and in which all variation or simultaneity can in apprehension be perceived through the appearances’ relation to it, *must be found [i.e. recognised] in the*

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<sup>36</sup> The task of the Analogies is thus read as performing the same task as the subjective Deduction on the traditional reading insofar as it “is mainly interested in the conditions generative of experience, and finds its natural point of departure in the problem by what processes a unified experience is constructed out of a succession of distinct happenings” (Kemp-Smith 2003, 240).

*objects of perception...* But the substrate of everything real, i.e., of everything belonging to the existence of things, is *substance*. In substance alone, and as determination [i.e. state], can everything belonging to existence be thought. Hence the permanent in relation to which all time relations of appearances can alone be determined is substance [contained] in appearance.

(1996, A182/B225)

Time is not an object of perception, i.e. it is not something that is perceived in the manner of a cardinal. It is rather the order of such perceptions. But if time itself is not an object of perception then how is it that we are aware of things as being in time? Kant's answer is through the recognition of the permanence of those things – that is, by recognising them according to the form of substance and state. If this wax was solid a few moments ago, but liquid now, then what accounts for my awareness of these states as temporally successive is precisely that both are predicated of the same thing: “A substance holds its determinations together across time; its unity vouches for the unity of time. In this way, the substance represents time in the appearance” (Rödl 2012, 120). The point here is thus not that an a priori ‘rule of substance’ must be applied to what is already empirically given in time, but rather for something to be empirically given as in time, it must first be recognised as something or other, i.e. as conforming to the category of substance. Thus, as Kant says, “the permanent is the *substratum* of the empirical presentation of time itself; all time determinations are possible only in this substratum” (1996, A182-3/B226). There is no merely given temporal sequence prior to this act of recognition in terms of the categories and so nothing to apply an a priori rule to (i.e. awareness is always already in conformity to the rule, rather than the rule being applied to an awareness antecedently given).

If even the awareness of temporal succession requires recognising objects according to the form of substance and state, it is clear that recognition cannot come apart from apprehension or reproduction. We must read the threefold synthesis backwards as well as forwards: To apprehend *is* to recognise and reproduce, just as much as to recognise is to reproduce and apprehend. They together form the *single* productive synthesis of the imagination. Recognition is not an optional

element of the threefold synthesis, one that only needs to occur when discursive judgment is on the cards, but a necessary element of any awareness whatsoever. Apprehending something, to be aware of intuition as an instance of the immediate awareness of an object of our environment, is to recognise it as something or other over time by combining this current act (made possible by our relation to the object in intuition) with a previous act of recognition (made possible by the reproduction of our prior act in memory). The threefold synthesis thus has the structure of a capacity, manifesting itself “in an indefinite manifold of acts” (Rödl 2012, 64). This capacity *transforms* perceptual awareness not by ‘conceptual shaping sensory experience’ or by ‘applying an a priori rule to what is anyway (empirically) given’, but merely by enabling those who possess it to be aware of things *as* things, as something about which a judgment can be made.

## 5. Two Kinds of Unity

What Kant’s account of the threefold synthesis shows is that the awareness of an object over time is only possible through a manifold of acts of recognition of it *as* something or other. The threefold synthesis thus unifies in a twofold sense: it serves not only to identify an object as the same object over time through the unification of successive acts of recognition, but to identify it as generically the same as other things. Both of these are necessary for recognition: the first is only possible by *means* of the latter one, since we need to know in terms of what the current act of recognition is the same as the previous one, while the content of the latter unity seems to depend on the possibility of something being recognised as falling under it by means of the former (at least for potential objects of perception).

The first kind of unity – the kind that involves the unification of the manifold of acts of recognition as of the same object – Kant calls synthetic. Longuenesse suggests that we understand this as kind of unity as ‘mathematical’ (1996, 71). This suggestion needs to be handled with some  
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care however. As we have seen, the point is not that we should see the synthetic unity produced by the threefold synthesis as ‘mathematical’ in the sense of *geometric* construction, i.e. as on the model of a carving or a ‘tracing’ (despite Kant using that word in the chapter on schematism). To recognise a dog in terms of that concept is not to apply a *shape* to the data of the senses, but rather to simply recognise what we are related to by means of the senses as an instance of that kind. The reason that *this* process is mathematical is that it involves, as Kant writes of arithmetical concepts, “a presentation encompassing conjointly the successive addition of one item to another (homogenous item)” (Kant 1996, A142/B182; also see *ibid*, B15-6; 2004, 35). That is, to recognise a dog as a dog by means of the threefold synthesis is to connect each successive act of recognition to the next (i.e. as ‘homogenous’ with the previous act as insofar as it is an act of recognising the same thing).

A consciousness of the homogeneity of successive acts of recognition is thus only possible by means of the other kind of unity, since it requires something in terms of which we can be aware of the manifold of acts as homogeneous. Longuenesse calls this “Kant’s discovery of the essential function of discursive thought ([i.e. that] we combine our representations according to the original synthetic unity of apperception by means of analytic unity)” (1996, 77). This latter ‘analytic’, or discursive, unity is the consciousness of an object as ‘unified’ with other objects which fall under the same concept. As Kant writes, “analytic unity of consciousness attaches to all concepts that are, and inasmuch as they are, common [to several presentations]. E.g., in thinking *red* as such, I present a property that can be found (as a characteristic) in something or other, or can be combined with other presentations” (1996, B133n). The model here is *subsumption* – to think of something as red means being conscious of it as a member of the set of all red things.

To the extent that such concepts form a system, the recognition of an object by means of a concept therefore necessitates the simultaneous awareness of it as falling under other ‘partial’ concepts that are contained within it as its characteristic marks (Kant 1992, §7). Using the example of the concept of ‘body’ Kant writes: “Thus when we perceive something external to us, the concept

of body makes necessary the presentation of extension, and with it the presentations of impenetrability, shape, etc.” (1996, A106). The recognition of something as a body cannot come apart from these traits (i.e. we must recognise it in these ways too). To recognise the wall as a body is also to recognise it as something that I cannot walk through. If it turned out that I could walk through the wall I would have two options: I could either rescind my initial judgment that the way I recognised things as being was correct (i.e. that I was faced with a body) or I could alter my concept of body (see Longuenesse 1996, 50). So long as we do not decide to redefine the concept, the recognition of something as a body thus warrants certain analytic judgments that follow from the content of the concept in terms of which it is recognised. If bodies are impenetrable, and the wall is a body, then the wall should also be impenetrable. As Longuenesse writes, “thinking an object under a concept [in this way] provides a reason to predicate of this object the marks that define the concept” (ibid, 50).

Recognition, insofar as it takes place by means of analytic unity, thus shares its form with judgment. This may encourage the equation of the two in the way that Travis suggests; however the relevant distinction here should be seen in terms of what Frege calls ‘force’ rather than content (1979, 198). What we do when we judge is make the claim that (or act as if) the way things appear to us, the way that we have passively recognised them as being, is actually the way things are. Kant puts this point in terms of “bringing given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception” – i.e. presenting them as something necessary (1996, B142). The idea here is that when I make a judgment that, for instance, ‘the cat is under the sofa’, I am not just saying that it seems to me, given the scratching noises, that the cat might be under the sofa (that there might be an object falling under those concepts), rather I am making a universal statement that (I take it) anyone would have to assent to, as indicated by the word ‘is’. Rödl writes, “[a] subject, in judging, represents herself as the judging subject; in judging, she assumes the place of everyone” (2006, 355). This is not to say that I cannot be wrong in making the judgment I do, only that in making a judgment I

must make a claim to objectivity – i.e. claim that the threefold synthesis is indeed a case of recognition. But the point is that this claim is optional, there is no obligation on me to accept that this is really the way things are.

This dependency of syntheses does not only go in one direction, however; the possibility of synthetic unity is what supplies analytic unity with its content. As Kant writes in a footnote to the B Deduction, it is

only by virtue of a possible synthetic unity that I think beforehand can I present the analytic unity. A presentation that is to be thought as common to different presentations is regarded as belonging to presentations that, besides having it, also have something *different* about them. Consequently it must beforehand be thought in synthetic unity with other presentations (even if only possible ones). Only then can I think in it the analytic unity of consciousness that makes the presentation a *conceptus communis*.

(1996, B133n)

Longuenesse suggests that we read this in terms of a picture of concept *formation*: the only way I can present a ‘common concept’ to myself is by reflecting on what is initially presented in a merely “intuitive, continuous, and indistinct” way in perceptual experience (Longuenesse 1996, 73). I see a cardinal, then a postbox, then a Ferrari, and then – following Kant’s three step procedure in the *Logic* – compare, reflect, and then abstract their common property ‘red’ (Kant 1992, 134). Indeed, reading Kant’s suggestion in this way makes sense of his calling the analytic unity *analytic*, since it “results from the analysis of given representations, by means of which a plurality of representations is thought under one and the same concept” (Longuenesse 1996, 86).

The problem with this reading for the account given in this chapter is obvious – to be aware of cardinals, postboxes, and Ferraris as sharing the common property ‘red’, I first need to recognise those things as displaying that property, but that can only happen by means of analytic unity which is precisely what we were supposed to be explaining (Longuenesse has no such problem since she separates the first two stages of the threefold synthesis, but as we have seen this is not a viable

picture of the argument of the A Deduction). There is, in other words, a vicious circularity here if we read Kant's suggestion in terms of concept formation.<sup>37</sup>

However, we need not read the passage in this way. Kant's point can be put in terms of the *content* of analytic unity being provided by the potential for objects of perceptual experience to be recognised as falling under them. What I do when I think of the property 'red' is think of red *objects*, of things that are recognised as falling under the concept (things that will therefore 'also have something different about them'). It is this that accounts for the sense of the concept. To think of a concept under which no object could even potentially be recognised as falling would not be to think of a 'mere analytic unity' but to think nothing at all (i.e. it would be an 'empty concept' in Kant's sense (1996, A51/B76); also see McDowell 1996, 68). Kant's point here, in other words, is not based on a theory of concept *formation*, but rather a theory of *sense*. Understanding a concept as common depends on the awareness of the possibility of things falling under it: "[W]e cannot understand anything except what carries with it, in intuition, something corresponding to our words" (1996, A277/B333; also see *ibid.*, B298).

As it stands this sounds like a form of verificationism.<sup>38</sup> Strawson calls this 'Kant's principle of significance', where "[i]f we want to use a concept in a certain way, but are unable to specify the kind of experience-situation to which the concept used in that way would apply, then we are not really envisioning any legitimate use of that concept at all" (1966, 16). The problems that face such a principle are well known. Even putting aside the status of the principle itself, it is unclear how it would account for the sense of concepts like 'solar system' or 'DNA molecule', for it is not obvious that there is any standpoint from which such things could be objects that we could recognise in the

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<sup>37</sup> Indeed, similar concerns have been used as the basis of a more general critique of the idea of abstraction as the principle of concept formation (see e.g. Lotze 1884, 37ff. and Sigwart 1895, 248ff). This issue will be addressed in more detail in chapter four, where it will be argued that Kant's account of abstraction should not be seen as a principle of concept formation, but rather a making explicit of what was implicit in the concepts already obtained through what Aristotle calls 'acts of learning'.

<sup>38</sup> In 'Corresponding with Reality', Putnam accuses McDowell of verificationism on similar grounds (see 2012, 86).

manner of the threefold synthesis (for these examples see Evans 1982, 99-100). Indeed, even if there were such a standpoint it seems wrong to say that the sense of the concept depends on its being recognisable from such a position (somewhere out in the Kuiper belt say).

As Hanna points out Strawson's 'principle of significance' cannot be *all* there is to Kant's picture of meaning since "the propositional content of every judgment contains a set of a priori logical forms deriving from the pure understanding, as well as a higher-order a priori rational subjective unity deriving from the faculty for apperception or rational self-consciousness" (2017, §3.2). And that is just in the *Analytic*: in the *Dialectic* we find transcendental Ideals of reason that guide inquiry but that do not correspond to any possible experience; and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* we find concepts like 'freedom' and 'the good' which obviously have no perceptual correlate. Clearly there is more to meaning for Kant than just what we are able to recognise perceptually.

Regardless, for our purposes we can bracket these verificationist worries. The focus here is on perceptual awareness, and in this case the concern is precisely with those concepts under which things or events in our environment can be recognised as falling. The sense of *these* concepts depends on the possibility for recognition in the manner of the threefold synthesis, even if other kinds of concepts (or the same concepts in different contexts) do not. To this extent we can read Kant's suggestion here in terms of Evans' 'generality constraint' in the *Varieties of Reference*: "any thought which we can interpret as having the content that *a* is *F* involves the exercise of an ability – knowledge of what it is for something to be *F* – which can be exercised in indefinitely many distinct thoughts, and would be exercised in, for instance, the thought that *b* is *F*" (1982, 103). To know what it is for something to be red, to stay with Kant's example, requires knowing not only what it is for this particular cardinal to be red now, but what it is for any object (of which colours are a logically appropriate predicate) to be red. As Kant suggested above, 'a presentation that is to be



thought as common to different presentations [must thus be] regarded as belonging to presentations that, besides having it, also have something *different* about them’.

A similar point applies to concepts of objects as well, where the grasp of such a concept is seen as consisting in the ability to distinguish an instance of that kind from both all other objects and other instances of that same kind (ibid, 108). That is, to understand the concept of ‘cardinal’ a subject must understand what it would be for an object to be *a* cardinal, what it is that would distinguish such a thing from all other things. Such a ‘fundamental ground of difference’ “must enter our every conception of a state of affairs involving [an instance of that kind]. For there is no thought about objects of a certain kind which does not presuppose the idea of one object of that kind, and the idea of one object of that kind must employ a general conception of the ways in which objects of that kind are differentiated from one another and from all other things” (ibid, 108). The sense of a ‘common concept’ of objects consists in the thought of possible instances of the kind, i.e. of objects which – in virtue of possessing a fundamental ground of difference relative to the kind in question – are distinguished from everything else.

What Kant’s argument in the A Deduction shows is that in the case of perceptual objects such ‘differentiating awareness’ is provided by the temporal recognition of an object or event as in some way or other ‘the same’ over time, and so in these cases it makes sense to think of the content of these concepts in terms of a ‘possible synthetic unity that I think beforehand’ as Kant says. But on Evans’ account there is no necessary link between the sense of the concept and our ability to perceive it directly (or reduce it to something that can be so perceived) like there is on the verificationist picture. We can still think meaningfully about solar systems or DNA molecules so long as we can understand them in terms of their fundamental ground of difference. The fact that part of this ground is going to be shared with perceptual objects (i.e. part of what makes ‘the solar system’ the solar system it is, is precisely its spatial position and temporal duration) does not require us to be able to perceive it directly in order for it to be meaningful for us. Of course, the fact that we

can do this in the case of directly perceivable objects gives them a special epistemic role to play, but this is distinct from the sense of the concepts involved.

## 6. Conclusion

Kant's argument in the A Deduction shows that in order to be aware of a perceptual object we must recognise it as something that is in some way the same over time, an awareness that can only take the form of rational capacity for recognition. This, at the very least, must be a condition of any kind of awareness of objects at all. If the subject can truly be said to judge things to be a certain way, at a minimum it seems obvious that she should know which thing it is that she is making a judgment about. In the absence of any concepts in terms of which an object can be recognised as in some way the same as a moment before, Travis's picture of a purely visual awareness is unable to account for this differentiation of perceptual objects. Since he equates recognition with judgment, this can only leave us with a picture of judgment as blind, as merely generating beliefs in the subject.

Yet it remains open just how much must be recognised, for there seems to be the scope for a minimal conceptualism, where what is recognised is conceived purely in terms of the physical properties of things. Indeed, this is just the position that McDowell adopts in some of his most recent work, where he argues that we should understand perception proper as constituted by an impoverished base level of content out of which we are able to recognise instances of higher level concepts (see 2008, 256-274). In the next chapter, however, it will be argued that no such base layer can be identified, since just what categories (or common and proper sensibles) are seen to be at play will depend on the empirical objects that are recognised. That is, it will be argued that *empirical* concepts and not just pure categories are required for perceptual experience to be possible.

### 3.Content-Rich or Content-Poor?:

#### Perceptual Minimalism and Kantian Categories

This chapter will argue for a ‘content-rich’ account of our recognitional capacities, where perceptual experience contains everything that it allows the subject to know non-inferentially. This contrasts with a content-poor approach which argues that only a specific subset of our conceptual capacities are at play in perceptual experience itself. Two instances of this minimalist position will be considered. The first of these is the account McDowell gives in his essay ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, where he rescinds the rich picture of perceptual experience in *Mind and World* in favour of a minimal level of ‘non-discursive’ contents. The second is taken from the contemporary debate surrounding non-conceptual content in Kant, where some commentators have suggested that only the categories need to be at play in order for perceptual experience to be possible.

Both accounts seem to offer an intermediate position between an empiricist picture of perceptual experience as constituted by non-conceptual sensory data and the richly-contentful account advocated in this thesis. On the surface, this might appear an attractive alternative: by keeping the conceptual capacities involved in perception proper to a minimum, they promise to do justice to the empiricist intuition that perceptual experience is primarily a case of our being made aware of the sensory properties of things, while avoiding the non-conceptualist pitfalls outlined in the last two chapters. Despite this initial attractiveness, however, it will be shown that no such independent level of perceptual experience can be identified, since ‘what we see of what we see’ is partially dependent on what it is we take ourselves to be recognising.

The following chapter will be split into four sections. The first two will focus on McDowell’s new position and contrast it to the position that he held in *Mind and World*. The particular focus will be the two central tenets of *Mind and World* that McDowell abandons. The first of these – that experience contains everything that it allows the subject non-inferentially to know – will be the

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focus of section one. Key here will be McDowell's distinction between what we see and what we see *of* what we see. Unlike in *Mind and World*, McDowell now sees only the latter as constitutive of perceptual experience proper. Section two will then look at the second proposition that he decides to relinquish, namely that perceptual experience has propositional content. It will be suggested that by making this concession to Travis, McDowell is unable to explain how perceptual experience is able to make the world bear rationally on what we are to think and do without either rendering his base level of contents superfluous, or else falling prey to a bad picture of belief generation.

The third section will then look at an alternative – purportedly Kantian – way of articulating such a base level of content in terms of the content given to us by the categories. The idea here is that, since the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, we could at least guarantee this level of content. Such a suggestion emerges out of the debate over non-conceptual content in the *Critique*, where it is thought that attributing such a minimal level of content to Kant's position can help in understanding some of the more difficult passages for the conceptualist reading. The problem for this reading of Kant is that while the categories determine the *form* that perceptual experience must take, they do not by themselves determine its *content*. For this latter task empirical concepts are necessary. The final section will then support this conclusion by giving examples of how what we (appear to) recognise can have an impact on what are supposed to form the 'independent base level of contents'. Perceptual minimalism fails because it ignores the potential for interaction between our higher and lower level recognitional capacities.

## 1. Content-Rich or Content-Poor?

The previous chapter showed that perceptual experience for a rational subject has to be conceptually structured if it is going to be able to explain how the world is able to bear on what we are to think and do. For, in order to be able to cite something as a reason for belief, we must be *aware* of it, an

awareness that in the minimal case takes the form of our recognising something as the same thing over time, a process that is only possible in terms of some concept or other. However, there is a question here over just how much content perceptual experience needs to have in order to make sense of such awareness. On the account that McDowell gives in *Mind and World*, a version of which I am defending here, perceptual experience contains everything that it allows a subject to know non-inferentially. So, if we look out into the garden and see the cardinal sitting on the fence, then so long as we have the relevant conceptual capacities for recognition, then what that experience allows us to know non-inferentially is that there is a cardinal sitting on the fence. On such a picture perceptual experience is conceptually *rich* in the sense that the content that it provides is limited only by the recognitional capacities of the subject whose experience it is. Thus, if an art historian has the capacity to recognise a Morandi still life, for example, then that something is an instance of a Morandi still life can potentially be part of the content of what is perceived for her.

Yet the mere fact that experience must be conceptually structured does not seem to entail this rich level of content. Indeed, it may seem that allowing such complex or specific conceptual capacities mischaracterises the content of perceptual experience. For while what we are perceiving might be a cardinal, it might seem to make more sense to characterise the conceptual content of the perceptual experience in terms of what we see *of* that cardinal – its red colouring, black mask, and bird like shape – rather than the specific concept itself.<sup>39</sup> One reason that it can seem this way is that, as Travis suggests, different objects can share the same visual appearance (see chapter one). In such cases, we might want to say that the perceptual experience of the objects is the same (*ceteris paribus*), despite the fact that the objects responsible for those experiences differ. Whether we are

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<sup>39</sup> These visual and spatial concepts are also actualised in the rich account – by a capacity to recognise red, for instance – however, on the minimalist account *only* the latter are actualised.

looking at a decoy or a real cardinal, on this account, the recognitional capacities that are constitutive of the perceptual experience are the same in both cases.

It is this aspect of Travis's critique that McDowell seeks to accommodate in his essay 'Avoiding the Myth of the Given'. The example that McDowell gives is slightly different, presenting a picture of two different observers viewing the same scene instead of looking at the perceptual experience of a single subject perceiving two visually-identical objects:<sup>40</sup>

Consider an experience had... by someone who cannot immediately identify what she sees as a cardinal. Perhaps she does not even have the concept of a cardinal. Her experience might be just like mine in how it makes the bird visually present to her. It is true that in an obvious sense things look different to me and to her. To me what I see looks like (looks to be) a cardinal, and to her it does not. But that is just to say that my experience inclines me, and her similar experience does not incline her, to say it is a cardinal. There is no ground here for insisting that the concept of a cardinal must figure in the content of my experience itself.

(2009a, 259)

We seem to want to say that both observers have the same *visual* experience, despite being able to recognise different things in what they see. What they see is the same object in the same environment, so it does not seem to make sense to characterise content in terms of capacities that they do not both already share.

Accommodating this point, McDowell thinks, means giving up two of the central tenets of *Mind and World*. First, the suggestion that in order "to conceive experiences as actualisations of conceptual capacities, we would need to credit experiences with propositional content, the sort of content judgments have" (ibid, 258). And second, the suggestion "that the content of an experience would need to include everything the experience enables its subject to know non-inferentially" (ibid, 258). This is no minor alteration: giving up these elements fundamentally changes both McDowell's picture of perceptual experience and the way he seeks to avoid the myth of the given. His thought, however, is that by giving up these two claims he can do justice to the

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<sup>40</sup> It seems that there is no real substantive difference in the point being made here, the shift is purely rhetorical. Both Travis and McDowell are arguing that there must be some level of 'visual appearance' independent of our richer conceptual capacities (or conceptual capacities generally in Travis's case) based on essentially phenomenological considerations.

idea of shared perceptual experience, by distinguishing our rich recognitional capacities from a more basic level of non-discursive intuitional contents that accounts for perceptual experience proper. In contrast to the *Mind and World* account according to which we can see that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden (where such content is constitutive of perceptual experience), on this new account what we *really* see is some basic level of purely visual content – what we see *of* what we see (2008, 232)<sup>41</sup> – characterised in terms of the common and proper sensibles, e.g. a non-discursive ‘small-red-object’. We may then recognise the object of this bit of intuitional content as a cardinal, but such rich content is not constitutive of perceptual experience itself.

This appears to be moving towards the picture of a sensory given that McDowell spends most of *Mind and World* trying to avoid. For, as Sellars argues, it is difficult to see how what we perceive can stand as a potential ground for a perceptual judgment if it lacks the propositional form it would take to entail something. McDowell’s reply is to suggest that, despite this base level of content being merely intuitional and non-discursive, it is nonetheless still conceptual since “every aspect of the content of an intuition is present is a form in which it is already suitable to be the content associated with a discursive capacity, if it is not – at least not yet – actually so associated” (ibid, 264). As stated, this suggestion appears ad hoc and stipulative, a mere shift in vocabulary that otherwise concedes everything to the proponents of non-conceptual content. Indeed, it appears rather close – if not identical – to what McDowell calls in *Mind and World* a ‘cheap defeat of the given’: “merely affixing the label ‘conceptual’ to the content of experience, although [we] regard the content of that experience in the very way that... opponents express by saying that it is not conceptual” (ibid, 46). On such an account, as Hanna writes, “it becomes almost impossibly difficult to tell... what distinguishes between a [non-discursive] conceptual content and a

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that such a description makes a lot less sense outside of vision. If I hear a cough, for example, what do I hear *of* what I hear? It seems an impossible question to answer without referring to sense data, i.e. what I hear of the cough is a certain pattern of sound waves, which is clearly not the picture McDowell is aiming for. Perhaps our auditory senses are thus richly contentful in a way that our visual senses are not, but it would seem odd for sight to have a lesser status than hearing.

nonconceptual content” (2005, 250; also see Connolly 2014, 320).<sup>42</sup> The central lesson of the myth is that any account of perceptual experience that is going to be able to explain how the world is able to bear rationally on what we are to think and do, is going to have to explain how it is that the subject is aware of what she sees such that it can stand as a reason for belief. It is unclear *prima facie* how something non-discursive can play this role and seems clear that mere stipulation that intuitional content is conceptual will not be enough to establish the point.

McDowell occasionally cites Kant’s suggestion that “the same function that gives unity to the various presentations *in a judgment* also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various presentations *in intuition*” (1996, B104-5; cited McDowell 2009a, 260), as if this lends his position some support. Yet this equivalence is something that Kant takes the whole Transcendental Deduction to establish; it is not something he takes for granted. If McDowell wanted to appropriate the argument of the *Critique* then this might have some argumentative force, but he is clear that he does not want to be restricted by Kant’s account, instead suggesting that “the idea that forms of intuitional unity correspond to forms of propositional unity can be separated from the details of how Kant elaborates it” (2009a, 261). But in that case it seems to be incumbent on McDowell to provide some sort of Transcendental Deduction to prove that his propositional forms actually are applicable to his new non-discursive intuitional contents, i.e. Kant’s question *quid juris*. This is not only something that McDowell does not provide – indeed is in principle unable to provide since he does not specify forms of intuition (see Rödl 2008) – but is a project that would be directly opposed to the Wittgensteinian, therapeutic ambitions of his earlier work in *Mind and World*.

Instead, it seems that McDowell’s point is that Kant’s picture can be helpful in elucidating, rather than justifying, the sort of account that he is advocating. That is, McDowell seems to think

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<sup>42</sup> Indeed, that this is a problem can be seen from the fact that Hanna’s description of his own non-conceptualist reading of Kant sounds suspiciously similar to McDowell’s new account: “The existence of [non-discursive] proto-cognitions is perfectly consistent with the existence of empirical cognitions in the full or judgmental sense, since, according to Kant’s doctrine of the three syntheses of apprehension, reproduction, and recognition, empirical cognitions in the full or judgmental sense are *always discursive generative transformations of proto-cognitions*” (2001, 203; emphasis added).



that Kant's mention of 'the same function' being at work in judgment and intuition is supposed to indicate that intuitional contents are necessarily always propositionally articulable but not always so articulated. McDowell's *justification* for his new position, by contrast, makes no claim to the Kantian framework. In this regard he stays far closer to the account of *Mind and World*, aiming to play off the demand for perceptual experience to be conceptually structured against the phenomenological demand for a base level of content. His suggestion seems to be that, since perceptual experience must be (i) characterised in terms of conceptual capacities being passively pulled into operation if we are to avoid the myth, and yet must also be (ii) constituted by some basic level of intuitional content if we are to do justice to the idea of the observers sharing the same perceptual experience, then (iii) such intuitional contents must themselves be conceptually structured. This, however, puts a lot of weight on the intuitive appeal of the idea of the shared experience of the other requiring us to think in terms of a base level of content.

## 2. Propositional Content

Yet even if we temporarily grant this argument for the 'conceptuality' of intuitional content, it is still unclear how such content is supposed to provide the subject with reasons for belief. A picture of conceptual intuitions does not thereby make sense of how they can justify our beliefs about the world, if they lack the propositional structure to entail anything. For this reason, it could be tempting not to abandon the propositional aspect of *Mind and World* at all, viewing such 'intuitional' content as not only conceptually-structured, but propositionally so (e.g. 'there's a red object'). Nothing in the argument above seems to rule out such a move, and it would appear to answer the phenomenological worry. But McDowell is clear that this is not the picture he wants (ibid, 260). Indeed, he now argues along with Travis that "[i]f experiences have propositional content, it is hard to deny that experiencing is taking things to be so" (ibid 269). Instead, he wants

us to picture intuitional content as “a different kind of thing that entitles us to take things to be so” (ibid). The question is what kind of thing this is and how it is able to play this role.

The only alternative position that McDowell considers is from Sellars’ *Science and Metaphysics*, where Sellars presents such intuitional contents in terms of demonstrative ‘this-suches’ (1968, 5).<sup>43</sup> The perceptual experience of the cardinal, on this view, would have the content of something along the lines of ‘this-red-object’. Such contents are not able to stand by themselves as reasons for belief, but rather represent the potential subject and predicate terms of perceptual judgment. In this sense such contents “are essentially incomplete,” unable to play a role in our epistemic practices “unless [we know] how to complete them to form such representations as ‘This cube is a die’” (ibid, 6). Such a position would go some way in explaining how we are able to use what we receive in intuition as a justification for what we believe since the content it provides is “essentially fragmentary discursive content” waiting to be completed via an explicit judgment or assertion (McDowell 2009a, 270).<sup>44</sup> This, however, is not the sort of picture that McDowell is advocating. Rather, on his new account “intuitional content is not discursive content at all,” and instead of being fragmentary, “[h]aving something in view, say a red cube, can be complete in itself” (ibid, 270). He calls them merely ‘categorically unified’ (see ibid, 263), a characterisation that we will return to below.

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<sup>43</sup> Or at least the kind that are the product of the productive imagination. Sellars distinguishes between two senses of intuition in Kant, the kind under discussion here (determinate objects of perceptual awareness) and intuition as ‘sheer receptivity’, where it is pictured as non-conceptual sensory intake that guides the schematism of our conceptual capacities ‘from without’ (1968, 16).

<sup>44</sup> Even this seems to prevent us from properly explaining how perceptual experience enables the world to bear rationally on what we are to think and do, since these *this-suches* do not entail anything on their own. By the time we get to something that does – namely the explicit propositions of judgment or assertion – judgment has already taken place. As a result, we appear to lack the intentional distance between the two moments, and so are hard pressed to avoid a picture of belief generation (and thus the failure of experience to play a justificatory role). In other words, it is unclear what rational role intuition is supposed to be playing here other than perhaps to explain what Sellars takes to be the phenomenology of perceptual experience. It is probably better to read Sellars argument in this part of *Science and Metaphysics* as a genetic account of how we come to make perceptual judgments – part of “the *how* of our experience and cognition” as DeVries puts it (2011, 61) – rather than an attempt to make good on the claim that such fragmentary discursive contents can play a justificatory role in our epistemic practices.



it threatens to leave us with a bad picture of perceptual belief generation and so a negative answer to the fundamental question of perception. A consideration of the second way that McDowell says that intuition enables judgment makes this more explicit. In this case, he suggests, “knowledgeable judgment enabled by an intuition has content that goes beyond the content of the intuition” (ibid, 266). Here, the idea is that when we have the relevant conceptual capacities, we are able to know non-inferentially more than we can strictly speaking see, e.g. recognising what is presented to us as a mere red object in intuition as an instance of a cardinal. What justifies my knowledge that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden is thus not intuition but rather my recognitional capacity: “It is not that I infer that what I see is a cardinal from the way it looks, as when I identify a bird’s species by comparing what I see with a photograph in a field guide. I can immediately recognise cardinals if the viewing conditions are good enough” (ibid, 258-9). This may sound similar to the picture of recognitional capacities advocated in chapter one, but, crucially, recognition here is not logically distinct from judgment. To recognise a cardinal on McDowell’s account here simply *is to judge* that what one is faced with is in fact a cardinal. But in that case the belief is merely generated, for at no point was it open to the subject to believe otherwise.

As Doyon writes, the problem is that “by asserting that empirical intuitions are *unarticulated*, McDowell... cannot explain how the passage from an empirical intuition to empirical judgment is achieved while preserving the identity of content between the passive and active modes of actualisation” (2015, 74). In order to explain this passage between perception and judgment, and so avoid a bad picture of belief generation, McDowell must either accept that the content of intuition is propositional (thus dropping the requirement that it is non-discursive) or that ‘carving’/recognition can happen passively in a way that does not amount to judgment (thus rendering intuitions superfluous). The second option is essentially identical to the picture advocated here, since, in the absence of a substantive notion of intuitional content, the distinction between mere ‘carving’ and full-blooded recognition no longer has any basis. This results in a rich picture of perceptual

experience constituted by whatever it is that the subject is able to recognise in her environment. The first option, by contrast, seems to leave open a possible role for minimal perceptual content, albeit in a propositionally-structured form. This would still allow the rejection of the second tenet of *Mind and World* (the idea that perceptual experience contains whatever it allows the subject non-inferentially to know) and potentially a way to do justice to McDowell's phenomenological concerns.

### 3. Categorical Conceptualism

Before looking at this second option, however, we still face a difficulty in deciding just what gets to count as 'minimal conceptual content'. McDowell characterises such minimal contents in terms of the common and proper sensibles, namely those physical features that can be sensed by multiple senses (e.g. space occupancy) and those that are exclusive to a particular sense (colour, pitch). Yet this does not get us very far, since it is not clear what specific concepts of this kind are able to count as common and proper sensibles. McDowell uses the example of 'red', suggesting that colour terms should be taken as the paradigm example of proper sensibles, but colour terms can be incredibly specific. 'Ultramarine blue', for example, refers to a very particular shade of brilliant blue. Now I certainly would not know if the object before me manifested that shade, but I know that my artist friend would. This would suggest that such a conceptual capacity is on the recognition side of the divide rather than the content of intuition. The question, then, is how we draw the line between the two kinds of cases. To go the other way, some remote tribes are known to (at least historically) to only have colour concepts for red, white, and black (Deutscher 2010, 61). Does that mean that we draw the line there? Or is that too restrictive? However we answer it seems they are not going to be fit for purpose, if the aim is to describe a common level perceptual experience that accounts for our recognising different things in what we are perceptually related to.

One potential solution to this issue is suggested by McDowell's description of intuition as merely *categorically* unified (2009a, 263; 2009b, 318). For if we were able to transcendently guarantee a set of concepts as necessary for experience as per the Kantian categories, then we could account for the supposed universality of the base level of content in terms of the synthetic propositions 'emanating a priori' from their schematism in experience. A version of this picture is often attributed to Kant himself, most recently in the contemporary debate on non-conceptualism in the *Critique*, where defenders of a conceptualist reading have used this picture of a minimal level of conceptual content based on the categories to account for those passages of Kant's writing that are hard to square with a strict conceptualism.<sup>45</sup> Particularly relevant for our concerns here is the conceptualist attempt to overcome what Hanna calls Kant's 'phenomenological proofs' for non-conceptual content (Hanna 2005, 260; also 2001, §4.2). These mostly revolve around situations where perceptual experience continues to occur in the absence of a specific empirical concept, much like McDowell's cardinal example above. Such examples "[pump] our philosophical insight by appealing to introspectively or intersubjectively given self-evident facts about conscious

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<sup>45</sup> The interpretive difficulty lies in the fact that Kant's account in the Transcendental Aesthetic and introductory parts of the *Critique* stresses the independence of the sensibility and understanding – Kant's "two stems of human cognition" (1996, A15/B29) – while the Transcendental Deduction and the sections that immediately follow, stress the role of the imagination and the apparent mediation of sensibility by the understanding. Thus, as Hanna argues, Kant's account seemingly "covertly sponsors both conceptualism and nonconceptualism" (2005, 251). For the conceptualist, the challenge is to explain away (e.g.) Kant's suggestion that "[sensibility] alone supplies us with intuitions" (ibid, A19/B33). Typically, the conceptualist response here is 'revisionist', arguing that Kant revises the 'independent' status of intuition in the light of the argument of the Deduction (e.g. Pippin 2005, 34; Ginsborg 2008, 66; Griffith 2010, 199; Bauer 2012, 226). For the non-conceptualist, by contrast, the challenge is to explain away the Deduction's insistence (e.g.) that "[the unity of an intuition] is none other than the unity that... the category prescribes" and that "implies a synthesis of the manifold" (1996, B144-5n; B155). One way to do this would be to undermine the idea that the synthetic activity of the imagination is to be seen as necessarily guided by the understanding. Hanna (2001, 203; 2005, 249) and Allias (2009, 396-7), for example – like Longuenesse in the previous chapter – argue that the first two syntheses of the threefold synthesis of the A-Deduction are separable from the 'synthesis of recognition in a concept' thus providing intuition with its own non-conceptual form of sensible, spatio-temporal unity (a reading that the previous chapter argued overlooks the mutual dependence of the three moments). The main problem, however, with arguing that intuition is independent in this sense is that "it [becomes] difficult to fathom how Kant can be taken to have established a synthetic a priori connection between concepts, more precisely, the categories, and intuitions" (Schulting 2016a, 232; see also Ginsborg 2008, 70). If intuition is seen as a pre-existing manifold to which the categories are only subsequently applied, then it seems that such application can only be a posteriori and so cannot establish the necessity that Kant needs in order to guarantee the applicability of the categories (and so overcome Hume's scepticism about reason).

cognitions” (2001, 260). Once again, much seems to turn on explaining (or explaining away) the phenomenology of perceptual experience.

The most directly problematic of these examples is Kant’s account of the ‘savage’ in the *Jäsche Logic*, who – despite being a rational subject – lacks the concept of house:

In every cognition we must distinguish *matter*, i.e., the object, and form, i.e., *the way in which* we cognise the object. If a savage sees a house from a distance, for example, with whose use he is not acquainted, he admittedly has before him in his representation the very same object as someone else who is acquainted with it determinately as a dwelling established for men. But as to form, this cognition of one and the same object is different in the two. With the one it is *mere intuition*, with the other it is *intuition* and *concept* at the same time.

(1992, 544-5)

Barring the question of the relationship between the *Logic* and the *Critique*, it is clear how such a statement is *prima facie* problematic for a conceptualist reading of Kant’s position, since it seems to be suggesting that intuitions can provide us with ‘cognition’ in the absence of concepts. The ‘savage’ still *sees* the house despite lacking the concept itself. Such examples, Ginsborg suggests, appeal to our intuitions about the “primitive character of perception relative to thought and judgment” (2008, 71). A strong conceptualism seems to get the relation between concepts and perception the wrong way around. For clearly I do not need the concept of a house in order to perceive what is there before me – it is not as if there is an empty space in my perceptual field – I still see the house, even if I do not see it *as* a house. Indeed, this seems quite a common occurrence in our everyday lives, occurring whenever we encounter something new for the first time (a tablet computer say, or a new model of car). As Hanna suggests, “[i]nsofar as I very frequently perceive things that I do not know how to conceptualise, I am no doubt a rational ‘savage’ many times daily” (2005, 262). Indeed, on what is traditionally taken to be Kant’s picture of concept formation – where empirical concepts are formed through a process of comparison, reflection and abstraction (see 1992, §6) – it seems a condition of the possibility of my having such a concept that I am first able to perceive the object in question so that I can abstract its general characteristics. It is thus

tempting, as Ginsborg says, “to view sensibility... as responsible for perceptions whose content can be entertained by us without any grasp of concepts” (2008, 68).

Yet things are not quite so straightforward for the nonconceptualist picture, as such examples do not rule out that other conceptual capacities could be at play.<sup>46</sup> As Connolly argues, while it is true that I can perceive an apple while lacking the concept ‘apple’, it does not follow that the perceptual experience itself is therefore possible in the absence of any antecedent concepts at all:

[The] mistake is the assumption that just because one can see an apple without possessing the concept of an apple, one can see an apple without possessing any concepts. In other words, [the nonconceptualist] assumes that seeing that it is an apple would be a conceptualisation of a nonconceptual state, and not a reconceptualisation of a previously conceptual state. However, if you see that it is an apple now, but previously saw that it is an object, your new perceptual state would be a reconceptualisation of a previously conceptual state.

(Connolly 2014, 322)

In other words, a strong conceptualism does not require that a *specific* empirical concept is known in order for objects of that kind to be perceived (although such a concept would be required for it to be recognised as an instance of that concept), just that *some* empirical concepts are needed in order for perceptual experience to be possible (here ‘object’, ‘red’, ‘spherical’ etc.).

It is thus open to the conceptualist interpreter of Kant to claim that the example of the ‘savage’ does not undermine the necessity of conceptual capacities for perceptual experience. It does however require explanation: if not to affirm the independence of (allegedly) non-conceptual intuitional contents from our conceptual capacities, then just what is Kant getting at here? The clue is in the first sentence of the quotation, that in every cognition we must distinguish between *matter* (the object/referent) and *form* (the way in which we cognise the object, its mode of presentation). What Kant is stressing is the *relational* nature of intuition: the way in which – despite the lacking the concept ‘house’ – the ‘savage’s’ perceptual experience still *relates* him to the same object (the

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<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Kant presumably must not rule out such a possibility if the ‘savage’ in question is going to be classifiable as rational. Hanna thus calls this an example of “*local* very strong nonconceptuality” to distinguish from the ‘global’ non-conceptuality of a non-rational animal (2005, 262).



house itself). But then why does he say the relation here is *merely* intuitional? As we saw in the previous chapter, concepts for Kant can be used in one of two different ways: to either unify synthetically (in recognition) or to unify analytically (in judgment). In the context of the *Logic* it seems clear that Kant is using ‘concept’ in this quotation in the second of these two senses, in terms of an explicit judgment (i.e. that there is a house in the distance). So when he says that for the ‘savage’ the form of the cognition is merely intuitional, he need not be seen as denying that some concepts are at play *synthetically* in intuition by means of recognition, but merely that the object is not explicitly represented as falling under the specific concept ‘house’ in judgment.

This seems to be confirmed by Kant’s distinction in the same section of the *Logic* between intellectual (or conceptual) and sensible distinctness. While the first kind of distinctness rests on the “*analysis* of the concept in regard to the manifold that lies contained within it” – i.e. knowing the characteristic ‘marks’ or properties that an object must have in order to fall under that concept – the second, “consists in the consciousness of the manifold in intuition” (1992, 546; emphasis added). Of such sensible distinctness, he gives the example of looking at the night’s sky:

I see the Milky Way as a whitish streak, for example; the light rays from the individual stars located in it must necessarily have entered my eye. But the representation of this was merely clear, and it becomes distinct only through the telescope, because then I glimpse the individual stars contained in the Milky Way.

(ibid, 546)

Despite being merely ‘intuitional’, Kant’s perceptual experience here is still clearly an instance of conceptual capacities in operation, an instance of his recognising that the collection of objects above him is the Milky Way (albeit in an indistinct way since he is unable to see the individual objects that make it up). Similarly, looking through the telescope he still recognises the star *as* a star. The point is rather that the distinctness involved here is different to the ‘intellectual’ distinctness of judgment, where the star would be explicitly represented as falling under the concept. In the same way, the ‘savage’ would still see the house *as* something or other in an indistinct way (i.e. it would be passively recognised as something), but it would be without

‘conceptual’ distinctness in the sense that Kant is using that term here, as it would not be explicitly represented as falling under a concept in a judgment.

Nothing, therefore, about the savage example requires us to give up a strong conceptualism, either as a philosophical position or as a reading of Kant. Nonetheless, the temptation on the conceptualist side has been to explain the content of the ‘savage’s’ perceptual experience in terms of intuitions that are ‘merely categorically unified’, in a way that parallels McDowell’s response to his similar phenomenological worry above. The thought is that, by picturing the contents of perceptual experience in terms of merely what is provided for by the categories, they can do justice to both Kant’s argument for the necessity of conceptual synthesis while also going some way in accommodating the phenomenological point that the non-conceptualist trades on. On such a picture, following the propositions put forth by Kant in the Axioms of Intuition and the Analogies of Experience, we could see this base level of content in terms of casually related (ibid, A189/B232) substances enduring through time (ibid, A182/B224) that have extensive magnitudes (ibid, A162/B202) and that “can be perceived in space as simultaneous with each other” (ibid, A211/B256). We could guarantee the ‘savage’ would thus see the house at the very least as an extended object, enduring through time, casually related to the things that surround it.<sup>47</sup>

Griffith, for instance, argues that we know on the basis of what Kant says about the ‘savage’ that perceptual synthesis is not always “governed by an empirical synthesis,” but that since we know from the Deduction that perception requires *some* synthesis, there must at least be a synthesis in terms of the categories (2010, 204). Thus, he argues, “in perception, the particular will be represented as having features common to all spatiotemporal objects, e.g. appearing as a distinct

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<sup>47</sup> Even outside of this contemporary debate, this is quite a common way of interpreting Kant’s account of perceptual experience. Pippin, for example, argues that in the Deduction Kant “wants to claim that conforming to the intuitional constraints of sensibility itself requires a minimal conceptualization” (Pippin 1989, 30). While Sellars writes that “Kant’s thesis, like the Aristotelian, clearly requires the existence of perceptual this-suches which are limited in their content to what is ‘perceptible’ in a very tough sense of this term (the ‘proper sensibles’). It requires the existence of completely determinate ‘basic’ perceptual this-suches” (1968, 7).

figure extended in space at a particular location” (ibid, 215). This is, of course, almost identical to McDowell’s new position, as we saw above, although this time with the minimal level of content seemingly guaranteed by the transcendental necessity of the categories. Indeed, Griffith is clear that he sees such minimal content as playing the same passive role that McDowell does, allowing us to avoid a picture of belief generation:

Importantly, it is not that in empirical perception we think or judge that the particular is thus and such a height or thus and such a distance from myself, rather, in perception, what is represented has the appearance it does in virtue of having its manifold be synthesised according to a category; an appearance which can be (but is not yet) measured, judged, or quantified.

(ibid, 215)

The passive synthesis or schematisation of the categories is thus supposed to form an independent layer of perceptual experience that can be used as the ground of subsequent judgment (although he does not rule out that such synthesis *could* be governed by an empirical concept).

Similarly, Connolly argues that while phenomenological proofs like the ‘savage’ count against strong conceptualism and a rich perceptual content, they do not speak against a weak conceptualism and a minimal perceptual content characterised in terms of the categories. Indeed, Connolly’s position is stronger than Griffith’s, for according to Connolly, the application of empirical concepts is always a *judgment* made on the basis of the prior schematisation of appearance by the categories:

Our empirical concepts classify appearances posterior to appearances. When you look at a house and form the judgment that the object is a house, for instance, you employ your empirical concepts of an object and a house. All this is consistent with the traditional view. But what Kant’s view adds is that this conceptualization is actually a reconceptualization, not of another belief..., but of your appearance. The house appears to you only after the appearance is structured by the categories.

(2014, 332)

Here the application of empirical concepts is modelled on inference, where, on the basis of certain spatial and temporal properties, I am able to infer that what I see is an instance of a particular. The problem with this stronger ‘inferential’ position is that it seems to mischaracterise the

phenomenology of perceptual experience. For typically in perceptual experience – at least in all but the most uncertain of circumstances – we do not consciously infer on the basis of certain visual properties that an object is an instance of a certain kind; if we have the requisite conceptual capacity, we simply recognise it as an instance of the kind of thing it is. Heidegger makes this point when talking about the perceptual experience of the lectern in one of his lectures. It is not as if upon walking into the class room “I first of all see intersecting brown surfaces, which then reveal themselves to me as a box, then as a desk, then as an academic lecturing desk, a lectern, so that I attach lectern-hood to the box like a label... I see the lectern in one fell swoop” (Heidegger 2008, 56-7). Connolly’s position would be less jarring if the whole point of restricting the conceptual content of perceptual experience – i.e. of advocating weak conceptualism over strong – was not itself made to accommodate a phenomenological point (i.e. the perceptual experience of the ‘savage’ and similar examples). As it stands, Connolly is led to distort our everyday experience of perceptual experience in order to accommodate the phenomenology of what is clearly quite an extreme (and hypothetical) situation.

Leaving aside this phenomenological problem, the main issue with ‘categorical conceptualism’ is that the categories are incapable, in principle, of articulating perceptual experience in the way that the account requires. For while it is true that for Kant the categories articulate the ‘concept of an object in general’ (i.e. the form that something must have in order to be an object for thought), they are nonetheless completely indeterminate when it comes to the objects of empirical intuition. This point is made most clearly in the A Deduction when Kant talks about this necessary unity in terms of the ‘transcendental object’, the mere idea of the unity of an object in terms of which our empirical intuitions are united (“something as such = x”) (1996, A104). As he explains:

The pure concept of this transcendental object (which is actually always the same, = x in all our cognitions) *is what is able to provide all our empirical concepts in general with reference to an object*, i.e. with objective reality. *Now this cannot contain any determinate*

*intuition whatever*, and hence presumably pertains to nothing but that unity that must be encountered in any manifold of cognition insofar as this manifold has reference to an object. This reference, however, is nothing but the necessary unity of consciousness, and hence also of the synthesis of the manifold brought about through the mind's concerted function of combining this manifold in one presentation.

(1996, A109; emphasis added)

The necessary unity that the categories provide is what allows our *empirical concepts* to make reference to an object, but this unity itself cannot determine intuition by itself. That is to say, although the fact that the categories articulate the *form* that any object of intuition must have – such that any empirical object must conform to this unity (i.e. be determined in terms of the categories) – they are not, in the absence of an empirical concept, able to determine the particular way in which the content of that experience should be articulated (see Guyer 1990b, 229).

This is clear from the structure of the threefold synthesis that we saw in the previous chapter. The first two syntheses (apprehension and reproduction) are dependent upon my being able to recognise *this* particular object as the same as the moment before. Yet picking one object out of the environment in this way requires empirical concepts to be at play, i.e. a rule by which we are able to identify perceptually an object not only as an instance of a kind, but as the same instance over time. What the categories express is simply the necessary unity that such a rule must display. Kant explains this using the example of a triangle:

[W]hen we think of a triangle as an object, we do so by being conscious of the assembly of three straight lines according to the rule whereby such an intuition can always be exhibited. Now this unity of the rule determines all that is manifold, and limits it to conditions that make possible the unity of apperception. And the concept of this unity is the presentation of the object = x, i.e. the object that I think through the mentioned predicates of a triangle.

(1996, A105)

It is the subject's capacity to recognise triangles that allows this particular object to be recognised as an instance of the concept, not the prior articulation of the manifold by the categories. For while the categories that guarantee that any unification of the manifold in terms of such a rule must have certain formal characteristics (extended, causally-related etc.), it is only because such empirical concepts are at play that we are able to recognise the object's *particular* extension and substantiality

– as something that stands out against the background environment – and so its causal relations to other objects. In other words, the problem for the categorical conceptualists is that “the necessary causal structure of our sensibility is entirely general in nature, leaving the specific causes of events undetermined” (Bauer 2012, 231). Kant’s aim in the Deduction is thus not to imply that perceptual experience requires no empirical concepts at all, but rather to show that whatever empirical concepts are at play will pick out – or ‘unify’ – objects in a way that makes them potential objects for thought and judgment.

This point is also confirmed in the chapter on schematism where Kant points out that both pure *and* empirical concepts are schematised (i.e. passively pulled into operation) in perceptual experience.<sup>48</sup> He points out, for instance, that in order for me to judge that the object in front of me is an instance of the concept dog “my imagination [must be able to] trace [*verzeichnen* (pre-figure)] the shape of such a four-footed animal in a general way, i.e., without being limited to any single and particular shape offered to me by experience” (ibid, A140/B180). The mere image of a particular dog would never be able to be the ground of a judgment that what one is faced with is a dog, since it is too particular (i.e. from this angle in this lighting) and could never match the universality of the concept. What forms the ground of our judgment that something is a dog is our recognition of it as such (at least in a veridical case). If only the categories were at play in perceptual experience, no such perceptual judgment would be possible – the best we could do is infer from this base level of content in the problematic way that Connolly suggests.

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<sup>48</sup> Makreel has questioned whether Kant means empirical concepts to have schemata at all, arguing that “[t]he schema of a pure sensible concept, such as of a figure in space, is not to be confused with an image of an empirical concept” (1990, 30-3). Kant, however, is clear that empirical concepts have schemata. He writes, for instance, that “an object of experience or an image thereof [is never] adequate to the empirical concept; rather, that concept always refers directly to the schema of the imagination, this schema being a rule for determining our intuition in accordance with such and such a general concept [e.g.]...the concept dog” (1996, A141/B180). A likely reason for Makreel’s error here is Vaihinger’s suggested substitution in the *Akademie* edition of ‘reproductive’ for ‘productive’ in Kant’s statement that the “the [empirical] image is... a product of the productive imagination” (ibid, A141/B181; see Pluhar’s translators note). However, as Pluhar writes, this substitution is not present in the original text and obscures the way that “the productive imagination... also has an empirical use” (ibid, A141/B181n).

Indeed, Kant's argument is not only that such empirical schematism is possible, but that it is a condition of possibility of there being a visual image in perceptual experience:

The image is a product of the productive imagination's empirical ability. A schema of sensible concepts (such as the concepts of figures in space) is a product and, as it were, a monogram of the pure a priori imagination through which, and according to which, images become possible in the first place. But the images must always be connected with the concept only by means of the schema that they designate; in themselves the images are never completely congruent with the concept.

(ibid, A142/B181)

Images are always images *of* something or other. A mass of chromatic sensation is no more an image than static noise is a sentence. So interpreting an appearance as the 'visual image' of an actual triangle requires that concept to already be at play. We already need to recognise (i.e. schematise) something as a triangle for us to interpret its particular appearance, i.e. from this angle at this time etc., as an image *of* a triangle.

This, however, is not the case with the categories, which according to Kant are unable to produce an image at all: "A schema of a pure concept of understanding... is something that one cannot bring to any image whatsoever. Such a schema is, rather, only the pure synthesis conforming to a rule, expressed by the category, of unity according to concepts as such" (ibid). This was the source of the problem that Hume highlighted in the *Enquiry*, namely that there is no rational ground for applying metaphysical concepts like 'causality' and 'substance' to appearances, since there is nothing directly corresponding to them in our perceptual experience (e.g. 2007, 69). Kant's problem then, having shown (against Hume) that the synthesis and application of such metaphysical conceptual capacities is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience, is to explain how it is that we are able to judge in terms of them, i.e. to answer the question of what in perceptual experience is able to act as the ground for our judgment that things are, say, causally related.

Kant's suggestion is that time, as the form of inner sense, plays this role – being both homogenous with appearance and being based on an a priori rule – with the schematism of the categories made possible in terms of "a priori *time determinations* according to rules" (1996, A145/ Sam Matthews

B184). Thus, the schema of substance becomes the “permanence of the real in time,” causality “the manifold’s succession,” etc. (ibid, A144-5/B183). Yet this synthesis in terms of time determinations does not by itself produce any image, it rather demarcates the form of recognition as such, by articulating the ways in which each moment of recognition can be connected to the next. The mere temporal connection of one moment to the next is not itself *of* anything, however, and so cannot be constitutive (by itself) of perceptual experience.<sup>49</sup>

Connolly anticipates this objection – i.e. “that the operation of a priori concepts in perception requires the operation of certain empirical concepts” (2012, 324) – and suggests that he can accommodate the point so long as he makes ‘two restrictions’:

First, the empirical concepts allowed must be restricted to a single token concept: the concept of an object. Second, the concept of an object needs to be deployed multiple times. We can allow that the category of plurality requires the deployment of empirical concepts, as long as we hold that it is the same empirical concept (the concept of an object) that we deploy multiple times: once for the chimney, and again for the roof, and a third time for the door, and so on.

(ibid)

Such a response seems unsatisfactory. Firstly, such a basic concept would leave undetermined how we can pick out these *particular* bits of the house as objects – separating the chimney from the roof, for instance, seems to require empirical concepts beyond just ‘object’. Secondly, it is not clear that the concept of an object *can be* an empirical concept for Kant. Rather, as we have seen in the account of the ‘transcendental object’ above, it articulates the necessary unity of the manifold in terms of which the recognition of something *as* something is made possible. But it was precisely

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<sup>49</sup> Indeed, this point is made throughout the Principles. For instance, in the Axioms Kant states that the principle maintains that “appearances can be apprehended only through the assembly of what is homogenous and the consciousness of the synthetic unity of this manifold (this manifold homogenous [sic])” (ibid, B202). Yet recognition of something as homogenous is precisely what requires empirical concepts. This is made even more explicitly in the case of the Anticipations where Kant writes that “there is something in appearances that is never cognised a priori and that hence amounts to the proper difference between empirical and a priori cognition: viz., sensation (as the matter of perception)” (ibid, A167/B209). Thus, when he states that the principle of the Analogies of Experience is that “[e]xperience is possible only through the presentation of a necessary connection of perceptions” (Kant 1996, A176/B218), it is clear that just what ‘necessary connections’ these are will depend on the empirical content of those perceptions. As Kant writes the Analogies thus have “the peculiarity *that they do not consider appearances and the synthesis of their empirical intuition, but consider merely [the appearances’] existence [in general] and their relation to each other in regard to that existence*” (ibid, A178/B220; emphasis added).



this that the strong conceptualist account says requires empirical concepts. Thirdly, if it is such an empirical concept (i.e. and so distinct from Kant's 'transcendental object') – perhaps closer to the concept of body (Kant 1996, A106) – then the restriction seems entirely ad hoc and we seem to be back in McDowell's position of being unable to give a justification for why certain concepts and not others get to qualify as a base layer of content.

Much like McDowell, Connolly seems to imply that this restriction is required to account for the phenomenological point that the non-conceptualists make. He argues that "[w]hile they have shown that according to Kant, we can see a chimney without seeing it as a chimney, they have not shown that he permits that we can see a chimney without seeing it as an object" (2012, 325). But once we have allowed that empirical concepts are necessary for perceptual experience there are no grounds for making such a restriction. All that the point requires is that the subject must have some empirical concepts such that they can identify that there is something or other over there. But just what these concepts are is an empirical matter. For while it may emerge – say as a result of historical or psychological enquiry – that certain empirical concepts are in fact taken as basic in all times and places, it is still the case that we have no grounds for establishing just what concepts they will be prior to experience.<sup>50</sup>

#### 4. Perceptual Relativity

Of course, even if there are no transcendental grounds for establishing a base level of content, it is still open to proponents of such a view to simply stipulate a base level of propositionally-structured content. Perhaps it is thought that the phenomenology of the imagined shared perceptual experience simply demands that there is such a base level – McDowell's 'what we see *of* what we see' – even if we are unable in every instance to cash out what exactly that content is. The problem with this

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<sup>50</sup> See e.g. Spelke's 'Principles of Object Perception' (1990) for an example of such an empirical study.

position – besides its arbitrariness – is that the phenomenological and psychological evidence points to the fact that contents at the level of the common and proper sensibles are not independent of our recognitional capacities. What we recognise as object as has the potential to change these supposedly independent perceptual contents.

The phenomenon of colour constancy makes this point clearly. For any given object there is an apparent colour and constant colour. Apparent colour refers to the way, say, a piece of paper appears grey in the shade of the office, but appears bright white when it is taken outside. Constant colour refers to what we would call the ‘real colour’ of the object. That is, we do not think that the paper ‘really’ changes colour as we take it outside, it just manifests the apparent colour that an object that shade of white would, if put into bright sunlight.<sup>51</sup> Colour constancy refers to this ability to attribute a permanent colour to an object despite its changing appearance. This in itself is not a problem for an account that sees the minimal content of perceptual experience as objective. Part of what it means for the cardinal to appear in terms of the proper sensible ‘red’ is for it to look a variety of ways in a variety of conditions. That is, it is a colour that *belongs* to the object, not just the contingent way it appears to the subject in that moment (at least if that is what McDowell means then it is unclear how such proper sensibles could be seen as placing the world in view).

The issue is that the constant colour that we attribute to an object will depend in part upon what object it appears to us to be – upon what Cassirer calls its ‘point of reference’. As he writes:

If the thing that bears a certain colour is taken as this point of reference [e.g. a red cardinal], the recognition and representation may be said to follow the guidance of the thing. A constant colour is imputed as a permanent attribute to the constant object – and all colour phenomena [i.e. apparent colour] have only the one meaning and the one function of representing this attribute for us, of serving as a sign for it. Accordingly we disregard the change in lighting effects and regard only the permanent colour of the object. But as soon as

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<sup>51</sup> In this sense constant colour is not, strictly speaking, something seen; it describes a function that has many possible apparent manifestations depending on background conditions. No apparent colour is the ‘true’ colour of the object any more than one point on a parabolic curve could be said to describe the ‘true’ value of the function. The picture being advocated here can be seen as an instance of colour relationalism: “[T]he thesis that yellow is not an intrinsic property of bananas and lemons but actually a relation that involves the fruit, the seer, and the ambient conditions” (Chirimuuta 2015, 6).

this purpose and point of view are changed, the total face of the colour phenomenon changes with them.

(1957, 138)

We can imagine a situation like this in the case of the cardinal. Say I live in an area where albino cardinals are the norm due to some selection mechanism favouring them (perhaps they blend in better with the snow) such that I am unaware that normal red cardinals even exist. In such circumstances it is conceivable that when a red cardinal lands in my garden it appears to me to be a white cardinal in odd lighting conditions (my neighbour playing his usual tricks in order to fool the local philosophers). Yet to a visitor from Chicago, it just looks (rightly) like a red cardinal.

There are even more extreme examples in the case of colour. One of the most impressive of these is the so-called Land effect, where a picture composed purely of different shades of one hue of colour will be recognised as displaying a variety of different colours depending on the objects that it depicts. For example, a picture of a bunch of bananas that is composed purely of different shades of blue-purple will still appear yellow, even though the image itself does not contain any of that colour. The recognition of the object as a banana overrides the supposedly independent base level of content despite the fact that when viewed in isolation – i.e. when the context of it being an image of a bunch of bananas is removed – the colour of the image is clearly blue-purple. The point of such examples is that the perception of colour is not an isolated element in perceptual experience, but rather “part of an overall best interpretation of the scene” (Chirimuuta 2015, 83).

Such examples are not limited to colour phenomena. Cassirer’s example of such a shift in point of reference is of walking down a forest path and having what initially had the appearance of white split lime in the shade of the tree, reveal itself to be in fact grey-brown earth lit up by sunlight shining through the gaps in the canopy above. Here we can see that the way that the object is recognised – as lime or as light – “drives the purely optical phenomenon into very definite channels. In one case the optical phenomenon is used as a representation of a thing-attribute context, in the other as a representation of a causal context: in the one case it symbolises a substantial reality (the Sam Matthews

reality of the spot), in another a light reflection as a momentary effect” (1957, 138). Here not only the perceived colour shifts based on the object ostensibly recognised, but the categorical content itself changes as well (i.e. the content at the level of common sensibles).<sup>52</sup> Indeed, as Chirimuuta shows, such spatial contents are so intimately related to colour contents that it is not feasible to see them as making independent contributions to perceptual experience (2015, 70).

Further examples can be found in the phenomenon of ‘optical inversion’ where “[o]ne and the same optical complex can be transformed now into this, now into that spatial object, can be ‘seen’ as this or as another object” (1957, 158). Although two dimensional examples of this phenomena (such as Wittgenstein’s duck-rabbit) do not involve such shifts in categorical content, the three dimensional versions invariably do (e.g. the hollow face illusion), since the ostensible potential causal relations of such objects are dependent on the particular space they are recognised as occupying. Here again, as Cassirer writes, “it is confirmed that a change in sight changes the perceptive content, that every shift in viewpoint transforms the pure phenomenal facticity of the thing seen” (ibid, 158)

The details in each case are irrelevant of course: the point is that, insofar as we are talking of ‘what we see of what we see’ standing as a ground for a subject’s judgment (i.e. something they could refer to in order to justify their belief *that* something is the case), they cannot come apart from our recognitional capacities. In other words, each level of perceptual experience should be seen as interrelated with every other level. There is no aspect of perceptual experience that can be transcendently guaranteed as common between two observers, no independent level ‘out of which’ objects are recognised as something or other (‘carved’ as McDowell puts it). ‘Visual looks’ are always relative to a ‘point of reference’ (i.e. what is recognised) rather than something that stands before us context-free – a situation that Cassirer describes as the ‘symbolic pregnancy’ of

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<sup>52</sup> It is worth noting that such examples would count against Kant on the categorical minimalist interpretation, since they show that categories alone do not determine categorical content. This is not an issue for the account I am advocating, since how the categories are schematised will depend on the way in which objects are recognised in the environment.

perceptual experience (1957, 202). Whatever answer there is going to be to the phenomenological problem of ‘shared perceptual experience’, it is not going to be solved by positing a constitutive base layer of contents.

It can be tempting to use this relativity of perceptual content as a basis for undermining the idea that the world is everything that is the case. That is, it can seem that if the content of perceptual experience is relative to our ‘factual’ situation – i.e. the capacities we have, the contextual information we are aware of, our pragmatic concerns etc. – the world must exceed any particular way of categorising it. Indeed, Wrathall makes precisely this argument when discussing the path example above:<sup>53</sup>

Such experiences call into question the idea that there is an objective, stable, determinate perceptual world. If we suppose that there is an indefinite number of meanings to which we could be attuned, and we recognise that different attunements will result in different experiences of the perceptual field, then we will have to conclude that there is no final, objective fact of the matter about what is given to us in perception.... This means that the world must be something more than all that is the case; it must be rather a setting: ‘the world is not a sum of things which might always be called into question, but the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are taken’.

(Wrathall 2010, 69)

The key problem here is that the argument makes a leap from the idea that there is no fact of the matter when it comes to what Wrathall calls the ‘perceptual world’, i.e. the content of perceptual *experience*, to the idea that the same applies to the world as such. But no such move is warranted. The fact that I see spilt lime while my companion sees light on the earth does not change the fact that I am wrong if I accept things as being the way they appear to me. So while there is no fact of the matter about what is ‘given in perceptual experience’, in the sense that we cannot assume a base level of content, there is a fact of the matter when it comes to the way the world is. It is not as if the world itself is relative to what I am able to recognise (if it were, we would be back spinning in the

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<sup>53</sup> The example that Wrathall cites is taken from Merleau-Ponty (2012, 310), but it is almost identical to the example that Cassirer gives in the *Philosophy of the Symbolic Forms* that was cited above. Indeed, this is no coincidence since, as Matherne (2014) argues, Cassirer was a key source for the *Phenomenology of Perception*.

void). The relevant normative standard is still what is the case, whether I am equipped to recognise it as being that way or not.

Even if we restrict ourselves to non-deceptive cases, the fact that there is a potentially infinite number of ways that we could recognise things as being still does not require giving up the idea that the world is what is the case. For we can accommodate this quite easily by saying that all that is the case always outstrips our recognitional capacities. Again, this does not mean that the *content* of perceptual experience exceeds what we are able to recognise, rather the point is that there is always more in any environment that we *could* recognise – that is there to be seen if we only had the capacity in question (or were not so distracted, had the relevant contextual information etc.).

## 5. Conclusion

In his essay ‘Kant and Nonconceptual Content’, Hanna suggests that the weakness of the conceptualist reading of Kant is that it cannot account for the phenomenal character of objects in space and time “because the purely logico-rational features of cognitive content, as purely logical and rational in character, are of course thereby also non-phenomenal in character” (2005, 280). As we have seen, the drive towards perceptual minimalism seems in many cases an attempt to overcome this apparent phenomenal lack as we have seen. Such accounts talk about our richer conceptual capacities ‘shaping’, ‘tracing’, and ‘carving’ the lower level, or indeed the lower level itself ‘shaping’ some even more basic sensory content, such that our perceptual awareness is, in some sense, constituted by a literal synthesis of this more basic layer into a sort of topological map of the environment. The general picture is one of what DeVries describes as a ‘sensory clay’, albeit one that is conceptually formed – a base level of sensory material that is supposed to account for the phenomenal character of perceptual experience (2011, §29).

I think that it is clear that, far from a weakness, the great strength of the recognitional account is precisely its transparency with regard to the phenomenal contents of perceptual experience. What is being temporally synthesised is not some phenomenal data received by the senses that forms part of the content of that experience, but rather our *recognition* of the object that our senses puts us in contact with *as* something or other. That is, the threefold synthesis connects *this* moment of recognition to the next. It does not need to shape or carve bits of sensibility in a quasi-psychology of perceptual experience. What we are looking for is an answer to the question of how it is that what we perceive can provide us with grounds for belief, not to give an account of visual processing. That task is one for the empirical sciences and will turn on the sensory and neurological machinery of the kind of rational animal in question.

Nonetheless, we seem to be faced with a problem here. For if this chapter is right in suggesting that the passive operation of empirical conceptual capacities is a condition of the possibility of perceptual experience, then we seem to be unable to explain how it is that perceptual experience can get off the ground in the first place (what this thesis will call ‘the bootstrap problem’). The next chapter will attempt to address both of these issues.

#### 4. The Bootstrap Problem:

##### The Origin of Empirical Concepts

This chapter will address what will be called ‘the bootstrap problem’, namely how it is that we can come to have empirical conceptual capacities if they originate from the very same experience that they make possible. The great advantage of the minimalist accounts that were discussed in the previous chapter is that, if we can guarantee a base level of content – be that in terms of common and proper sensibles or the schematisation of pure concepts – then we can easily explain the origin of empirical concepts in terms of a process of abstraction from that base layer. However, the last chapter showed that the identification of such a level was not possible. The pure concepts only describe the *form* of the recognition of an object of perceptual experience and not its content, while common and proper sensibles could not be isolated from the richer conceptual content that they were supposed to provide a ground for.

In the absence of such a base level of content we therefore need to find an alternative solution to the origin of empirical concepts if we are to avoid a paradox. The obvious place to start with this, given that this issue arises from a reading of the A Deduction, is via Kant’s discussion of the topic. As we will see, however, neither his discussion of the origin of empirical concepts in the *Logic* nor in the *Critique of Judgment* are able to help solve the bootstrap problem, since both accounts presuppose some level of empirical content. This seems to leave us with two options: we either give up the claim that empirical concepts are necessary for perceptual experience, or the claim that all empirical concepts are drawn from such experience. The first approach is taken by Ginsborg, who argues that we should see empirical concept formation as the result of the psychological activity of the imagination that is understood as primitively normative. The problem with this approach is that it involves separating the activity of the imagination from our recognitional capacities in a way that was ruled out in chapter two. Instead, it will be suggested that we take the second option and reject Sam Matthews



the idea that we need see all empirical concepts as originating from perceptual experience as such. Although this might seem to imply innate concepts, the account given here will suggest that we see rational capacities as emerging from non-rational dispositions obtained prior to the formation of perceptual experience proper.

The chapter will be split in to six sections. The first section will define the bootstrap problem itself and look at Kant's account of empirical concept formation in terms of abstraction. It will be suggested that abstraction fails to solve the bootstrap problem as it presupposes empirical content thorough the subject's need to identify the objects to be compared. The second section will then look at Kant's account of reflective judgment in the *Critique of Judgment* which also seems to promise to offer an account of the origin of empirical concepts. It quickly becomes clear, however, that reflective judgment is not proposed as a solution to the bootstrap problem as such, but is instead an account of concept formation once things are already off the ground.

Nonetheless, Ginsborg suggests that Kant's account of aesthetic judgment can serve as a model for the process of empirical concept formation despite being a form of reflective judgment, and it is her account that will be the focus of sections three and four. Essentially, Ginsborg's argument is that the only way to solve the bootstrap problem is to posit a level of pre-conceptual awareness made possible by the synthetic activity of the imagination. The idea is that this activity can then form the basis of our empirical conceptual capacities through our taking it to be 'exemplary' of a specific rule. It will be suggested that there are two key problems with this approach. First, by picturing the activity of the imagination in terms of a shaping of sensory consciousness, the account makes it difficult to see how we can understand the world bearing on thought. Second, it will be suggested that an awareness of the psychological activity of the imagination itself presupposes empirical concepts.

The fifth section will then present an alternative solution to the bootstrap problem by suggesting that we should see the process of concept acquisition in terms of acts of learning.

Initially these take the form of a process of mimicry where a child acquires dispositions that mimic fully-fledged rational capacities, before being transformed into rational capacities through the subject's taking a critical attitude towards them (i.e. through the recognition that such capacities manifest a norm). In this way, instead of being drawn from perceptual experience as such, our initial conceptual capacities can be seen as emerging from the dispositions conform with a shared practice that we acquire before that experience has emerged. The final section will then defend this account against a worry about supernaturalism via a discussion of McDowell's account of *Bildung*.

## 1. The Bootstrap Problem

The last chapter suggested that it was not possible to identify a base level of content in perceptual experience. The most we could say in an 'a priori' manner about empirical perceptual experience is that it must take the form of the recognition of something *as* something, but the actual content of such awareness in a given situation is not something that can be determined beforehand. In particular, it was suggested that pure concepts of the understanding would not be able to provide us with such a base layer of contents. Such concepts merely provide us with the concept of an object in general, i.e. the *form* of the recognition of an object of perceptual experience, Kant's 'something as such = x'. Just *what* is recognised – the contents of perceptual experience – depends on the empirical concepts that the subject has at her disposal.

Indeed, as we saw in chapter two, in the absence of empirical concepts the threefold synthesis would not be possible, since we would lack that in terms of which the reproduction of previous moments of recognition could be united. To have the perceptual experience of an object *as* an object requires recognising it as the same object that we were confronted with a moment before (i.e. as a substance). This can only happen in terms of some concept or set of concepts, that is, in terms of a general representation that unites the present moment of recognition with all those that preceded it

as in some sense ‘the same’. Being aware of a bit of wax as a single object, one that was once solid but now liquid, is not something that is merely given in experience, but requires knowing the kind of thing that wax is: something that will melt when hot, that continues to exist in its liquid state, something separate from the wooden container in which it sits. The mere form of an object in general cannot make such distinctions by itself. Just what gets to count as *an* object, in other words, is not something a priori concepts can articulate by themselves. In order for a subject to be aware of a potential, determinate object of judgment, empirical concepts must be at play: they are a *necessary* element of perceptual experience. If there were no empirical concepts at play there would be no perceptual experience, no awareness of things as things.

So long as we start from what Ameriks characterises as the regressive starting point – namely ‘at a level no lower than the core perceptual judgments’ – and then ask after the conditions of the possibility of such judgments, then the fact that empirical concepts form such a condition will not strike us as necessarily problematic (see chapter two). Such a starting point is, as it were, *static*. It starts from a position where empirical concepts are already at play and so taken for granted in the explanation that follows. Nonetheless, once we start thinking *genetically*, in terms of the origin of such empirical concepts, we seem to be unable to make sense of their possibility. For if empirical concepts, *qua* empirical, must have their origin in experience, and yet are a condition of the possibility of that experience, we seem to be left with a paradox (we seem to need to ‘pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps’ as it were).

In *Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity*, Wolff gives a clear explanation of this ‘bootstrap’ problem for Kant’s account. As he writes,

Kant appears to be caught in the assertion that something can be the cause of itself. He claims that the unity of consciousness, and thereby consciousness itself, is possible only through the application to the given manifold of the pure concept of an object = x. But this pure concept, as it has no content itself, must work by means of an empirical concept, such as ‘body’. Now empirical concepts are formed, according to Kant, by abstracting certain common characteristics from experience and putting them together into a class notion. This can only be done after I am conscious, presumably. So it would appear that empirical concepts are

ingredients in the very mental activity (unification of consciousness) whereby they first become possible. *They both precede and depend upon consciousness.*

(Wolff 1963, 118: emphasis added)

Allison calls this problem ‘devastating’ for the account being advocated here (1968, 180n). For if it is true that empirical concepts can only be formed ‘by abstracting certain common characteristics from experience and putting them together into a class notion’, and that experience itself depends on the application of such concepts, then this does indeed seem to require that empirical concepts are in some sense *causa sui*, for they seem to depend on themselves for their own existence – they make possible the experience from which they are abstracted. But of course this is no explanation whatsoever, for if the concept is already at play in experience then it cannot have its origin in such abstraction.

Indeed, this issue is apparent in Kant’s own account of empirical concept formation in the

*Logic*:

To make concepts out of representations one must thus be able to *compare*, to *reflect*, and to *abstract*, for these three logical operations of the understanding are the essential and universal conditions for generation of every concept whatsoever. I see, e.g., a spruce, a willow, and a linden. By first comparing these objects with one another I note that they are different from one another in regard to the trunk, the branches, the leaves, etc.; but next I reflect on that which they have in common among themselves, trunk, branches, and leaves themselves, and I abstract from the quantity, the figure, etc., of these; thus I acquire a concept of a tree.

(Kant 1992, §6)

The circularity here is threefold. Firstly, the account clearly relies on our being aware of determinate perceptual objects. If we were not already aware of the spruce, willow, and linden *as* things, it is unclear what sense could be made of ‘comparison’ (for what would we be comparing?). As we saw in the first chapter, this awareness requires empirical concepts to be already in play, and so is going to be unable to explain the origin of such capacities.

Secondly, reflection on and recognition of the common characteristics of the objects compared requires the subject already to have at least those conceptual capacities (e.g. trunk, leaves, branches). For unless the subject has at least some such concepts in terms of which the objects can

be recognised as similar, reflection would be futile; there would be nothing in terms of which such a relation could be established. Perhaps this could account for the formation of *some* concepts once things are off the ground. The fact that a subject already has concepts for ‘trunk’, ‘leaves’, and ‘branches’, could potentially allow her to obtain the concept for tree in the manner that seems to be suggested by Kant (although see the next paragraph), however, at a certain point the subject will already have to have empirical concepts in terms of which the reflection on similarity can take place, and so once again the process shows itself unable to account for the origin of empirical concepts.

Thirdly, the selection of just these objects seems to presuppose a tacit understanding of them as already in some way similar. As Sigwart argues:

[T]he process [of abstraction] presupposes that the series of objects to be compared is already in some way determined, and a tacit assumption is made of some motive by reason of which we group together just these objects, and seek their common elements. If we are guided by any motive, and not by mere caprice, it must be found ultimately in the fact that the objects are from the first recognised as similar, because containing certain elements common to all; that is, a general [concept] is already there, by means of which these objects are selected from amongst all others.

(1895, 248; cited Heis 2007, 137n)

For example, in forming the concept ‘tree’, we select a certain set of trees (or set of species of trees) in order to reflect on their common characteristics. But why the comparison of just these objects unless we already know they are trees (e.g. why not include birds or television sets in our comparison)? And why abstract away certain other characteristics they have in common (e.g. ‘covered in lichen’, ‘exists prior to the current moment’)? As Nietzsche suggests, “[i]f someone hides something behind a bush, looks for it in the same place and then finds it there, his seeking and finding is nothing much to boast about” (1999, 147). Yet this is exactly how things appear to stand when we go to form a concept in abstraction. Our selection of objects presupposes an understanding of what we are looking for and so is going to be unable to explain the origin of such concepts.

Given that the possession of conceptual capacities is presupposed at each level of this account, this could once again encourage a rejection of the idea that empirical concepts are a necessary element of perceptual experience in favour of categorical minimalism. For if all empirical concepts are formed by this threefold process of abstraction, then it could seem that there simply *must be* some base level of perceptual content that forms the ground of this process (see e.g. Longuenesse 1998, 196; Allison 1968, 180n). We saw the issue with trying to articulate such a base layer in the previous chapter, and, as Ginsborg suggests, such a minimal level of perceptual content would be particularly redundant here, for “[e]ven if we allow that there could be a synthesis of the empirical manifold according to pure concepts alone... it is hard to see how it could put us in a position, either to form empirical concepts, or to recognise the appropriateness of this or that empirical concept on any given occasion” (1997, 56-7; see also 2006c, 67).

Indeed, categorical minimalism seems to fail to provide a solution to any of the three problems listed above. Say that we are presented with some set of mere ‘substance phenomena’ – to borrow Allison’s term (1968, 180n) – on the categorical minimalist account. In order to answer the first issue, the categories would have to be able to determine by themselves where one such substance ends and another one begins. Yet, as we have seen, in the absence of empirical concepts, it is not clear how this could be possible. To solve the second they would have to be able to articulate some ‘characteristic features’ which serve to distinguish the selected objects from all others, but, by definition, any features that the objects display would apply to all possible objects of experience (i.e. as causally related, extended etc.). Finally, it seems that other than the ‘concept of an object of possible experience’ – Kant’s something = x – it is unclear how we could select a relevant group of objects without presupposing empirical conceptual capacities. Perhaps we could restrict ourselves to a comparison of the things that are presently before us, but again it is unclear how such a restriction would help us move in the direction of concepts that are even remotely cognitively valuable. Thus, if this threefold process of comparison, reflection, and abstraction really is the only picture of

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concept formation that Kant has available, then we seem to need to presuppose empirical concepts in a way that renders his account viciously circular.

In order to avoid this conclusion, Pippin suggests that we should question if this is really how Kant views the origin of empirical concepts (1982, 113). He suggests as an alternative that “the process described [above] seems more like our making much clearer to ourselves a concept we already have than to be a genuine derivation. As such, this reflective procedure would be helpful in ‘arriving at’ as general a concept of tree as we can isolate, but would not account for the origin of the concept itself” (ibid, 113). Indeed, this seems to fit better with Kant’s suggestion that “in terms of *content* no concepts can originate analytically,” but are instead given content by the possibility of the ‘synthesis of the manifold’ in recognition (ibid, A77/B103; see chapter two). Thus, on this reading “in spite of the way such comparison, reflection, and abstraction help in organising and ordering the knowledge we *already have*, it remains true that ‘every analysis presupposes a synthesis’” and so will be unable to provide a solution to the bootstrap problem (Pippin 1982, 114).

One way to read this suggestion is in terms of making explicit the norm or standard that the conceptual capacity represents – to determine just what it is, for instance, that makes it right to say that an oak is a tree, but a sunflower is not. Clearly, in order to be said to be in possession of the capacity, an understanding of the norm or standard of the capacity is necessary (see chapter one), but this may not extend to a full awareness of the conditions of class membership – as Kant suggests “[synthetic] cognition [i.e. recognition] may still be crude and confused at first and hence may require analysis” (1996, A77-8/B103). It is perhaps a consciousness of these conditions of class membership that the threefold process of comparison, reflection, and abstraction is supposed to provide us with. For although Kant says that ‘these three logical operations of the understanding are the essential and universal conditions for generation of every concept whatsoever’, it could simply be that the *possibility* of the application of these logical operations is necessary for the generation of a concept. Certainly, it is difficult to see how a set of perceptual objects for which Sam Matthews

comparison, reflection, and abstraction is not possible could be something for which we could have a general concept. As in the previous chapter then, we seem to be left with a contrast between analytic and sensible distinctness, between an explicit awareness of the discursive content of a concept (i.e. its characteristic marks) and the ability to utilise the same concept in recognition.

Whether or not this is the picture that Kant is advocating, such a reading only saves Kant's account of *abstraction* from circularity, it does not solve the bootstrap problem as such. For we still need an account of the origin of the empirical concepts for which comparison, reflection and abstraction provide a clarification. Indeed, the bootstrap problem is far more general than the Kantian focus so far may imply. *Any* account of perceptual experience that sees empirical concepts as a condition of the possibility of that experience will face the same issue. For, as Kern points out, the issue is with making something that can only be obtained through the use of a capacity a condition of the possibility of the possession of that very capacity (2017, 262). There seems to be an insurmountable circularity that is not restricted merely to a reading of Kant's picture of empirical concept formation in terms of abstraction.<sup>54</sup>

## 2. Reflective Judgment in the Third Critique

It might be thought that a solution to this problem can be found in Kant's account of reflective judgment in the third *Critique*. At first glance, Kant seems to suggest that he will provide such a solution to the bootstrap problem when he distinguishes between determinative and reflective judgment in the introduction to that work:

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<sup>54</sup> In many ways this is almost identical to the so-called 'Paradox of Learning' where it is similarly argued that concept acquisition is impossible as it requires the subject to already have the concept to be acquired (see Fodor, 1975, 95; Fodor 2008, 139). The difference in the case of the Bootstrap Problem is that this issue is specifically applied in the context of an argument that says that perceptual awareness itself is only possible on the basis of such capacities. This restriction both makes the Bootstrap Problem more narrow, in the sense that is not aimed at the question of learning once things are off the ground, and more intractable, in that it shuts down one possible answer in the form of an appeal to a pre-conceptual form of awareness.



Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is determinative... But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this power is merely reflective.

(1987, 179)

Determinative judgment is ‘merely subsumptive’, and as such its form is not particularly problematic. This is the kind of judgment that occurs when we judge something to be the case on the basis of the actualisation of a capacity for recognition. If I take my apparent recognition that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden to be a genuine case of that capacity, then I judge that the particular so recognised falls under that concept. Here the generalities are, as Kant says, ‘given’ – a determinative judgment utilises conceptual capacities that we already have and thus cannot account for their origin.

In reflective judgment, by contrast, a particular is given for which we currently have no concept. The question is whether or not framing the process of abstraction as a kind of judgment takes us beyond the account that Kant presented us with in the *Logic*. One of the clearest differences between the two accounts is that in the *Critique of Judgment*, rather than merely describing the process of abstraction, Kant asks after the conditions of its possibility. His suggestion is that this capacity rests on an a priori principle: “The principle by which we reflect on given objects of nature is this: that for all natural things concepts can be found that are determined empirically. This means that we can always presuppose nature’s products to have a form that is possible in terms of universal laws which we can cognise” (Kant 1987, 211-212\*).<sup>55</sup> Kant’s thought here is that it is only on the basis of this assumption that an attempt to find a concept for a particular can make sense:

How could we hope that comparing perceptions would allow us to arrive at empirical concepts of what different natural forms have in common, if nature, because of the great variety in its empirical laws, had made these forms (as is surely conceivable) exceedingly heterogeneous, so heterogeneous that comparing [them], so as to discover among them an

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<sup>55</sup> The asterisk denotes a page in the so-called ‘First Introduction’ of the *Critique of Judgment* that Kant decided was ‘overlong’ (see Guyer (1990b, 230fn) and Pluhar (1987, xxix) for more on the history of this chapter).

accordance and a hierarchy of species and genera, would be completely – or almost completely – futile?

(ibid, 212-213\*).

For the act of comparison, reflection, and abstraction to be a rational act – an act for which we can provide a justification – we must assume ahead of time that such an act is actually possible. If nature presented itself to us in a way that was not amenable to such an act then “all our reflection would be performed merely haphazardly and blindly, and hence without our having a basis for expecting that this [reflection] is in agreement with nature” (ibid, 212\*). Kant puts this assumption in terms of “the principle of a purposive arrangement of nature in a system,” in the sense that we must assume that nature is in some sense organised ‘for us’ (ibid, 213-4\*).

As it stands, this idea raises more questions than it answers, yet even without going into more detail, it is immediately apparent that any such description of the conditions of the possibility of the process of abstraction is incapable of addressing the bootstrap problem. For even if we assume, as Kant says, that ‘the arrangement of nature is purposive’, this does nothing to solve the problem of how we *initially* acquire those empirical concepts that make perceptual experience of nature possible in the first place, even if such an assumption might aid or be essential for the creation of new concepts once things are up and running. Indeed, Kant’s distinction between the two different kinds of judgment helps to clarify the issue with abstraction, viz. that judgments of reflection that result in the creation of new concepts presuppose determinative judgments. As Kant writes, “[in order to cognise,] our understanding must wait until the subsumption of the empirical intuition under the concept [i.e. in recognition] provides this determination for the power of judgment” (ibid, 407). It is only because we have (ostensibly) *recognised* the particulars of our environment as falling under certain concepts that we are aware of objects that we could reflect on in the first place, and only because we have *judged* these acts of recognition to be genuine cases of the capacity that it

makes sense to reflect on the characteristics of the objects we are thus made aware of in order to form a new concept.<sup>56</sup> Comparison, reflection, and abstraction always come too late.

However, not all reflective judgments result in the creation of new concepts, and it is the cases where reflection fails to do provide us with a determinate concept that are the primary focus of the *Critique of Judgment*. As Longuenesse suggests, aesthetic and teleological judgment are distinguished because in them the “the effort of the activity of [reflective] judgment to form concepts *fails*” and conceptual determination is shown to be impossible (1998, 164). In the former case this occurs because an object is judged to be beautiful not on the basis of the recognition of a property ‘beauty’ that inheres in the object (see Kant 1987, 290), but rather as a result of a ‘disinterested’ (i.e. non-desirous) feeling of pleasure that results from the ‘free-play’ of the

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<sup>56</sup> The reverse is also true to an extent: determinative judgments involve a reflective element, insofar as we are responsive to the norm that the capacity represents. Part of what makes an act of recognition rational is that we are responsive to the possibility that the way we recognise things as being may not be how things actually are. In doing so we reflect on the norm of the capacity and compare the present case to how the capacity *should* function. This differs, however, from reflective judgment proper to the extent that the reflection here is not (yet) aimed at finding a concept – the whole point is that in recognition the concept is given and it is just that which is in question. Longuenesse offers a contrasting view (1998, 163-5). Her suggestion is that for Kant every determinative judgment is also a reflective one, to the extent that each moment of perception presents us with bare particulars for which we must find a concept. The reason that this seems necessary on her account is that, as we saw in chapter two, she separates the first two moments of the A Deduction’s threefold synthesis from the third, allowing for such non- or proto-conceptual awareness. Once this possibility is shown to be untenable, it becomes clear that reflective judgment can only apply to objects that are already conceptually determined in some way or other, and so there is no reason to think that reflective judgment occurs in every case of determinative judgment, even if the latter involves ‘reflection’ on the norm that the capacity represents as outlined above.

imagination harmonising with the understanding (ibid, 217).<sup>57</sup> As a result, instead of determinate concepts, Kant says that a work of art is understood in terms of an aesthetic *idea*: “a presentation of the imagination which prompts much thought, but to which no determinate thought whatsoever, i.e., no [determinate] concept, can be adequate, so that no language can express it completely and allow us to grasp it” (ibid, 314).

Similarly in the case of a teleological judgment, the idea of an end is not something directly recognisable as part of the object, but instead is posited as a regulative idea in order to make sense of the phenomenon in question (ibid, 405). We can see this quite clearly in the case of organisms and their parts, which Kant says we make sense of in terms of a ‘natural purpose’, namely something that is “both cause and effect of itself” (ibid, 371; emphasis removed). For example, we think of the leaves of a tree as existing not only as an effect of the tree, but as something which makes possible the sustaining of the existence of the tree itself. As Kant puts it, “just as each part exists only *as a result* of all the rest, so we also think of each part as existing *for the sake* of the

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<sup>57</sup> Just what this free-play amounts to is an issue of significant debate, one that runs parallel to many of the issues that have been addressed in earlier chapters. In his essay ‘The Harmony of the Faculties Revisited’, Guyer helpfully distinguishes three broad approaches taken in the literature to interpreting what Kant means here (2006). The first of these he calls ‘precognitive’ (ibid, 165). On this kind of interpretation, the free-play of the imagination either occurs in the absence of any concepts whatsoever (e.g. Bell 1987, 229; Ginsborg 1997, 70) or merely with the categories at play (e.g. Makkreel 1990, 46-7). Clearly neither of these approaches will fit the account given here. Guyer himself advocates a second approach, however, that he calls ‘metacognitive’. On this kind of account, although “[a] beautiful object can always be recognised as an object of some determinate kind, [...] our experience of it always has even more unity and coherence than is required for it to be a member of that kind” (2006, 183). On the surface this could also fit with a conceptualist account since he is clear that all perceptual experience necessarily involves empirical concepts (ibid, 180). The problem, however, is making sense of the idea of something having ‘more unity than is required’ in a way that does not result in a problematic picture of that conceptual activity as a ‘conceptual shaping’ of sensory data as we saw in chapter two.

The final kind of interpretation that Guyer distinguishes – one that best fits the account of perceptual experience developed in this thesis – is what he calls ‘multi-cognitive’, where the free play is interpreted as “a play among alternative cognitions or conceptualisations of the object” (ibid, 183). The idea here is that although the awareness of a work of art must involve empirical concepts, it is complex enough to provide the imagination with multiple possibilities for the passive realisation of our recognitional capacities. Guyer suggests that the chief weakness of this approach is that “it is not clear why [such] an experience... should be pleasing” (ibid, 177). As he suggests, flitting back and forth between different interpretations is not necessarily pleasurable, and can in fact be quite unnerving. However, I think the pleasure here can be seen as coming from the fact of making sense of the object at all. That is, the pleasure comes from the moment of understanding the object, given its complexity, in a particular way such that everything seems to suddenly fall into place. Bell, despite falling into the precognitive group, describes something like this experience in ‘The Art of Judgment’ (see 1987, 236). Defending this interpretation however goes beyond the scope of this thesis.

others and of the whole” (ibid, 373). This purpose however, i.e. of the tree’s sustaining itself, is not something that is present directly in the tree itself but is rather an idea posited in order to make sense of the organism (and its parts) *as* an organism. As Bowie writes, we can see the connection between the two kinds of ‘merely’ reflective judgment here to the extent that “[n]atural products *appear* to contain an ‘idea’ which makes them take the form they do, in the way an artist can realise an idea by making a work of art” (2003, 27). In both cases perceptual *recognition* in terms of concepts is going to be insufficient to capture the phenomenon in question (i.e. since there is nothing ‘in the object’ to recognise as such).

### 3. Aesthetic Judgment and Primitive Normativity

Given that Kant’s chief claim about aesthetic and teleological judgment is therefore that they fail to result in the formation of determinate concepts suitable for use in recognition, it may seem that such judgments are unlikely to aid us in a solution to the bootstrap problem. In both cases empirical concepts are still presupposed. For even if the *aesthetic* value of an object is unable to be captured by any particular concept, our awareness of it as an object still requires concepts to be at play. As Kant writes, “[e]very art presupposes rules, which serve as a foundation on which a product, if it is to be called artistic, is thought of as possible in the first place” (1987, 307). Similarly, for a subject to make a judgment about the purposiveness of an organism, the organism itself must first be recognised as something or other if the judgment is to make sense (i.e. for the judgment to be understood as being about something or other). Despite this characteristic, however, Ginsborg has suggested that Kant’s picture of aesthetic judgment is in fact able to provide just such a solution to the bootstrap problem, to the extent that it is able to make us aware of what she characterises as the normatively primitive status of the synthetic activity of the imagination (see especially 1997; 2006b; 2006c).

The problem for Kant, as we have seen, is that “[o]n the one hand, his view of concepts as rules for synthesis seems to commit him to the claim that empirical concepts precede the activity of synthesis; on the other hand, his view that synthesis is a precondition of conscious perceptual experience seems to commit him to the claim that empirical concepts depend on synthesis” (1997, 39; also see 2006b, 38; 2006c, 80). The temptation here, according to Ginsborg, is simply to drop the requirement that the activity of the imagination is guided by rules at all, and instead to see it as a natural psychological activity which occurs blindly (i.e. without the application of self consciously held conceptual capacities) (ibid, 53). As she writes, “[b]ecause this interpretation does not require that concepts precede the synthesis of imagination, it has the advantage of allowing us to appeal to the synthesis of imagination in accounting for the acquisition of concepts” (ibid, 54). The problem, however, is that picturing the process in this way makes it impossible to see it as *objective*, i.e. as operating as things should rather than merely as they happen to. In the absence of any rules governing the activity, if my imagination ‘synthesises’ my perception of the cardinal such that it appears to be a blackbird, there is no sense in which ‘it’ has done anything wrong. This would make it difficult to see how perceptual experience would be able to stand as justification for our beliefs, since we would be lacking any normative standard by which we could say that how we were perceiving things now is how things *ought* to be perceived, i.e. that my imaginative activity has done something *right* in representing things to be this way rather than some other.

In order to overcome this difficulty, Ginsborg suggests that we should see the synthetic activity of the imagination as *exemplary* of rules, rather than as guided by them or as lacking them all together. Her thought is that when something exemplifies a rule in this sense, the rule that it represents need not be seen as preceding the practice. This is especially clear in the case of the use of a natural language like English, which is “subject to rules which are not imposed externally but rather determined by the very activity they govern” (ibid, 64). The only place we can find an answer to the question of how English should be spoken is by observing how it is actually used. The rules

of language use were not first set down and then followed, but instead are internal to the practice. In this way the practice *sets the standard* of correct usage and so is normative in a primitive sense.<sup>58</sup>

Her suggestion is thus that we treat the otherwise merely psychological activity of the imagination as exemplary of rules in just this way:

What our imagination in fact does in the perception of a given object may be regarded as setting the standard for what our imagination ought to do in the perception of that object and others of its kind. Thus we can think of imagination as subject to standards, and hence as rule-governed, without requiring that these standards be grasped prior to the exercise of imagination which is subject to them.

(ibid, 64)

The picture of rationality here is thus purely additive. Excluding material variation, perceptual awareness operates exactly as it does in a non-rational animal. “[T]he only difference is that, unlike an animal, [a rational subject] carries out the [psychological] activity with the awareness of its appropriateness to the circumstances” (2013, 141). The idea is that this enables us to avoid the bootstrap problem since the ‘blind’ activity of the imagination is taken to be exemplary of the rules that it presents to us through that activity. Indeed, Ginsborg goes as far as to cite this as the ground of our entitlement to think of the activity of the imagination in this way, suggesting that “it is required as a condition of the very possibility of empirical concepts” (1997, 66; cf also 2006b, 59fn).

This could make it seem like empirical concepts are something that each subject must hit on individually rather than as something obtained as part of a linguistic practice. For it is the activity of *my* imagination that I take as exemplary and that allows me to form the concept of a tree. Indeed, it is just this subjective starting point that allows the account to avoid the bootstrap problem – an appeal to an *awareness* of already existing conventions would mean that empirical concepts have already been presupposed. But then why settle on the word ‘tree’ for just this kind of phenomenon?

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<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting however that Ginsborg distinguishes this ‘primitive’ sense in which something is said to be exemplary, from a ‘derivative’ sense where an object or action is said to meet some antecedently defined standard. To say that something is as it ought to be, on this basis, is to say that it meets the standard as specified by the rule. If cardinals are red and the one at the end of the garden meets this standard, then the bird ‘is as it ought to be’ in this derivative sense.

Indeed, divorcing the initial formation of empirical concepts from a communal practice in this way seems to get the order of events in reverse. There seems, for instance, little reason that the mere ‘psychological activity’ of the imagination would make a distinction between a tree and a shrub prior to the subject’s exposure to such a practice.

This implication can be avoided however by drawing on Ginsborg’s notion of training from her account of rule following. Just as in her picture of perceptual experience, Ginsborg wants to articulate a middle position between a mere causal account where the meanings of our terms are accounted for in the ways we are disposed to react to them (dispositionalism) and an account where conceptual capacities are *sui generis* and so not able to be reduced in this way (non-reductionism). Her thought is that by using the idea of primitive normativity to supplement a purely dispositionalist account, we will be able to hold on to the naturalist intuitions that make the dispositionalist picture attractive (i.e. the thought that meaning must in some way be reducible to phenomena describable in the language of the natural sciences), while also being able to account for the subjective sense of ‘appropriateness’ that distinguishes the actions of a rational subject from that of a non-rational animal or automata (i.e. mere dispositions as a mere law-bound causal description can make no sense of an actions being right or wrong).

Some allegedly instinctive reactions aside – like looking in the direction a hand is pointing – Ginsborg suggests that dispositions to respond in certain ways to particular signs and commands arise through a process of training by other subjects:

[T]he effect of the training is precisely to turn the sound... into something which functions, for the [subject], in the same kind of way that a pointing hand functions for an untrained person. The training exploits the [subject’s] natural predispositions to acquire certain habits of response, and to invest each of his habitual responses with a consciousness of its appropriateness to the item he is responding to, so as to bring about that these items come to be perceived by him as calling for, or pointing to, or indicating the responses he gives. That he regularly responds to [a certain stimulus in a particular way] is, of course, in part a function of how he has been trained. But the role of the training is limited to that of shaping and directing... [his] natural tendencies...

(2011, 178)



After a process of training, where my natural responses are corrected, I come to have a disposition to respond in a certain way in accordance with the practice. What distinguishes my reaction from that of an automata or animal is that I take my dispositions as appropriate to the situation in question. Once the correct dispositions are obtained in this way, however, the subject is able to “regard himself as responding appropriately or correctly to [an] expression... without relying on any conception of him as conforming to a general practice in virtue of which the sign is meaningful” (ibid, 174). Indeed, on her account of rule following “[t]he only intentional content... [taken] for granted is whatever content is involved in the consciousness of normativity as such. All other contents are, so to speak, constructed, by means of this consciousness, out of the raw material of our nonintentionally characterised responsive dispositions” (2011, 172).

Something along these lines seems to apply in the case of perceptual experience. It is not the case that the subject merely arbitrarily stumbles upon the concept ‘tree’, but rather obtains it after a process of ‘training’, e.g. a parent pointing in the direction of a tree and saying the word, and only then comes to take the synthetic activity that their imagination displays in these instances as exemplifying the concept in question. Take, for example, Ginsborg’s description of the formation of an empirical concept:

[I]n the act of perceptual synthesis through which I acquire, say, the concept of a tree, I take my act of imagination not only to exemplify but also to be governed by the concept ‘tree’. It is true that I do not grasp this concept antecedently to my act of synthesis, since it is precisely this act of synthesis which is required if I am to acquire the concept in the first place. But I come to grasp it in the act of synthesis, which means that I take my act of synthesis itself – the very act through which I come to grasp it – to be governed by the concept.

(ibid, 69)

The imagination was already synthesising according to the rule, i.e. *dispositionally* as a naturally occurring psychological process. Yet through training, I not only grasp this activity as exemplary in itself, but as also exemplifying the specific concept ‘tree’, e.g. as something that it would be appropriate to dispositionally respond with the phrase ‘That’s a tree’. In other words, to acquire a perceptual concept on this account is to acquire a disposition to respond to the passive synthetic

activity of the imagination in conformity to a shared practice, where the latter activity is taken by to be *exemplary* by the subject in a way that makes the former response seem *appropriate* (see e.g. 2013, 137).

Although this account of the origin of empirical concepts is not given by Kant himself, Ginsborg suggests that Kant invokes just this kind of experience of subjective necessity in his account of aesthetic judgment. Unlike the necessity involved in theoretical and practical cognition where we judge that something *will* or *ought* to happen, Kant suggests that the necessity of aesthetic judgment “can only be called exemplary, i.e., a necessity of the assent of everyone to a judgment that is regarded as an example of a universal rule that we are unable to state” (Kant 1987, 237; cited Ginsborg 2006b, 58). The difference in the aesthetic case is that I do not take the ‘exemplary’ activity of the imagination as taking place according to a determinate empirical concept, but rather am made aware of the ‘free lawfulness’ of its activity.<sup>59</sup> The content of the awareness is, as it were, *merely* exemplary. What I am aware of “is precisely that I ought to engage in my present mental activity [i.e. that the activity of my imagination is *right*], and hence that I ought to be in that very state of mind” (1997, 71). Aesthetic judgment is thus the ‘pure form’ of such exemplary normativity – in the sense that it involves no appeal to empirical concepts – and so be said to be the transcendental ground of all empirical concept formation.

#### 4. The Problem with Primitive Normativity

Regardless of its accuracy as an interpretation of Kant – as Ginsborg suggests there is little textual evidence for suggesting that this is Kant’s official view on the formation of empirical concepts

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<sup>59</sup> Ginsborg goes as far as to claim that in judging an object to be beautiful “I do not perceive the object as having *any* determinate property” (1997, 70; emphasis added). Taken literally, this goes too far: even the most abstract of paintings or pieces of music has objective features that we can recognise, and must have if we are to be aware of there being an object at all. The point is, rather, that in judging the object to be beautiful I am not thereby made aware of an additional property of the object itself.

(ibid, 66) – the possibility of being able to ground the formation of empirical concepts in the experience of subjective necessity is attractive not only in that it promises to solve the bootstrap problem, but in the way it attempts to unify Kant’s picture of reflective judgment in the *Critique of Judgment* with his account of cognition more broadly.

Nonetheless, the account faces some serious difficulties. In particular, the idea of the ‘psychological activity of the imagination’ – which is taken for granted in Ginsborg’s argument – is based on a reading of the threefold synthesis in the A Deduction that sees the first two syntheses as separable from the third, where the “procedures of imagination... correspond roughly to Kant’s syntheses of ‘apprehension’ and ‘reproduction’” (ibid, 50). This split reading is necessary for Ginsborg’s solution to the bootstrap problem since the imagination must synthesise according to rules independently of the concepts held by the subject whose imagination it is, in order for it to serve as the ground for the subsequent reflective judgment of the activity as exemplifying a particular concept. Such rules must therefore be ‘innate’ to the imagination, in the sense of being natural dispositions for processing sensory data. As Ginsborg writes, on such an account “I construct the image on the immediate prompting of my present sense-impressions, and... these sense-impressions serve as part of the material for the image” (1997, 52). The picture here is thus of a *shaping* of sensory consciousness, where (in the case of vision) the imagination connects bits of coloured data in order to form a visual image – one that we are then able to recognise as exemplary of a particular kind of phenomenon.

This is a necessary assumption for the picture of ‘training’ that was outlined above as well, since it rests on the assumption that the psychological activity of the imagination operates in more or less the same way in every subject. Take the example of the parent training their child to identify trees above. The account assumes that – with regard to the tree at least – the psychological activity of the child matches that of the parent, for only then could the child take the same kind of psychological activity as their parent as exemplary of the phenomenon in question. If instead of a

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psychological shaping of sensibility the account took perceptual experience to be constituted by rational capacities for recognition, then there would be no guarantee of this shared base level of content since – as we saw in the previous chapter – the other recognitional capacities, contextual information, and pragmatic concerns could all potentially impact on the visual and spatial properties that a given object appears to have.

Yet, as we saw in chapter two, such an account of the threefold synthesis is untenable. Firstly, it results in a picture of perceptual experience that leaves us detached from the external world, since what we recognise as ‘exemplary’ is not this or that object, but merely the product of our own synthetic activity. It seems in that case that the best we can say is that this bit of synthetic activity is exemplary ‘for us’ of a specific phenomenon, rather than the object itself, which is posited merely as the hypothetical cause of this activity. In such a case it is not the world that is rationally bearing on thought, but merely the psychological activity of the imagination. In the unified picture of the threefold synthesis advocated in this thesis, by contrast, it is not sense data that is connected by the imagination, but rather acts of recognising objects as falling under concepts. The imagination’s activity is thus necessarily world-involving since the acts of recognition are of things being as they are in the environment.<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, the split account of the threefold synthesis overlooks the fact that perceptual experience requires something in terms of which *the subject* can recognise the object as in some way the same over time. As Kant’s argument in the A Deduction shows, it is not enough simply to

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<sup>60</sup> This world-involving view is not available on Ginsborg’s account unless we are willing to attribute such recognition to the mere psychological activity of the imagination prior to the subject’s awareness of the concept. Two versions of such a picture are available. On the first *all* concepts of perceptual objects, no matter how temporally or culturally specific, would have to be innate to the imagination and at play in perceptual experience. In forming an empirical concept I would then understand the imagination’s act of recognition as exemplifying a specific concept. Such a view is radically implausible and would require, among other things, the imagination of an individual from a remote Amazonian tribe ‘recognising’ a mobile phone dropped from a plane *as* a mobile phone even if the community in question had never encountered such an object before. Alternatively, we could say that the imagination recognises merely in terms of some basic subset of concepts that are innate. This would avoid the implausibility of the previous view, but then we find ourselves in the same position as McDowell in the previous chapter needing to find a way to identify just which concepts these are. Regardless, it is clear that this is not the kind of picture of perceptual synthesis that Ginsborg envisions (see 1997, 52).

stipulate that the subject is aware of the psychological activity of her imagination as representing discrete objects; Ginsborg must explain how it is that the subject can be aware of *this* bit of psychological activity – e.g. the bit that carves out the shape of a tree from the manifold – as in some way ‘the same’ as the moment before. The difficulty here can be seen in her own description of forming the concept tree:

When I acquire a concept on the basis of perceptual experience, on the view suggested, I take features of what my imagination actually does in the perception of an object – its combining and reproducing of representations to form, say, the image of something with leaves, branches, and a trunk – to serve as a rule determining how that, and other such objects, ought to be perceived.

(ibid, 68-9)

The image that the subject is supposedly made aware of is represented to *us* – as readers with fully fledged conceptual capacities about trees – as of something with leaves, branches, and a trunk. This makes it easy to imagine what the potential subject (i.e. pre-conceptual capacities) is faced with, viz. a tree-shaped object persisting from one moment to the next. The problem is that the subject herself has no way of connecting each sequential moment of tree-shaped psychological activity, since she has no concepts in terms of which she can recognise them as in some way ‘the same’. This makes it impossible to understand how she could be said to be aware of anything at all, let alone something of a form that she can take to be exemplary of a certain kind of phenomenon.<sup>61</sup>

## 5. Acts of Learning

This, however, does not help us solve the bootstrap problem. Indeed, the fact that it was not possible to make sense of perceptual experience outside of rational capacities for recognition was precisely

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<sup>61</sup> It is no good to point to an awareness of the psychological activity of the imagination as such either, for the problem simply repeats itself again at this more general level. That is, we would need an account of how it is that the subject is aware of each moment of the psychological activity of her imagination as part of the same temporal manifold that makes up her experience over time. As we saw in chapter two, Kant shows in the Analogies that such a temporal awareness can only occur via the recognition of a permanent substance that endures through time, something that is only possible in terms of empirical concepts.

that thing that generated the difficulty in the first place. The problem emerges precisely because the *subject's* possession of empirical concepts is shown to be a condition of the possibility of the perceptual awareness of objects in the environment, and yet (it seems) such capacities can only be obtained through the very experience they are a condition of the possibility of. Ginsborg's solution involves dropping the first premise – i.e. that the subject's possession of empirical concepts is a condition of the possibility of perceptual experience – and so side stepping the problem in a way that misses the true import of Kant's argument in the A Deduction. Yet, if Ginsborg is right that our having a pre-conceptual form of awareness is a condition of the possibility of our coming to have conceptual capacities, then the issue threatens to be insurmountable (1997, 66).

Instead, it will be suggested that we should reject the second premise, the idea that all empirical concepts must be obtained through the subject's own perceptual experience. Lacking any other potential source, this might seem to imply that some such capacities must be innate (see e.g. Fodor 1975, 95-7). Although perhaps implausible at first glance, such a picture has some attractions when framed in the right way. For instance, to suggest that certain empirical conceptual capacities are passed down as the result of evolution seems to fit with a scientific naturalism, where the aim is to explain our rational capacities in law bound terms. On this account, what would explain my having an innate capacity to recognise snakes, say, would be some evolutionary fact about our past (e.g. that the ability to recognise snakes was advantageous for our ancestors survival). In such a case we need not appeal to a pre-conceptual form of awareness in order to explain our possession of empirical concepts and so can save the first premise by rejecting the second.

As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the issues with an account that posits a base level of concepts is that we need a principled way of selecting just what concepts these are. The evolutionary account suggests a solution to this issue however, since we can just point to evolutionary pressures in order to make the selection. The more challenging problem for this sort of account is that it overlooks the importance of the subject recognising the authority of their own

capacity. As Kern writes, “a capacity for knowledge is not simply one whose exercises consist in acts that fall under the concept of that capacity from some perspective or other. A capacity for knowledge is one whose exercises fall under the concept of this capacity from the perspective of the subject whose capacity it is” (Kern 2017, 252). It is not enough that we have a built in capacity to respond to certain perceptual stimuli in a predetermined way, we must recognise our doing so as something that it is *correct* to do if we are to understand our capacities as rational, i.e. as able to provide us with non-inferential justification for belief and action. This is what was right in Ginsborg’s account: in positive cases I need to be able to understand the exercise of my recognitional capacity as exemplary, as presenting things as they ought to be presented (i.e. objectively).<sup>62</sup>

The problem with this account is that the mere fact that we have evolved to have a certain dispositional response to certain stimuli is not enough to explain why it is that the subject takes her capacity as exemplary in this way, because the form of explanation it employs is external to the capacity. The fact that our ancestors evolved a disposition to avoid snakes does not lend any justificatory support to the epistemic authority of any particular instance of the realisation of that capacity. This is not to deny that evolutionary pressures are in large part responsible for the kind of objects that we are able to recognise: things that reflect light, things that move, sounds above 20Hz, etc. Indeed, we need not even deny that such pressures provide us with specific ‘innate’

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<sup>62</sup> The difficulties here are similar to those that Kant raises about the idea of divinely implanted ‘subjective predispositions’ being responsible for the agreement of the categories and experience (Kant 1996, B167-168; see Kern 2017, 253). Such an account, Kant says, might seem to be a middle course between seeing the agreement in terms of the categories making experience possible (the account that Kant argues for) and experience making the categories possible (the account of the ‘transcendental realist’ or empiricist) (1996, B167). In the case of empirical concepts we cannot see any specific subset as themselves necessary for perceptual experience, even if empirical concepts as such are, and that seems to leave us with the second option, namely that we know the empirical concepts to be objectively valid because they were drawn from experience. In this context, Kant’s proposed ‘middle way’ could appear to be the only other available option if we are to reject the second premise of the bootstrap problem. The issue with such a picture, Kant suggests, is that the subject herself would not recognise the authority of her capacity, for “[I] could say only that I am so equipped that I cannot think this presentation otherwise than as [in terms of this concept]” (1996, B168). But, as Kant says, this is no justification at all for since “one could not quarrel with anyone about something that rests merely on the way in which his [self as] subject is organised” (ibid, B168).

dispositions, e.g. to avoid snakes. But the point is that these details are not enough to explain the emergence of *rational* capacities rather than mere dispositions. What we need to explain the emergence of rational capacities is an account of how capacities for recognition can be recognised by the *subject* as providing the justification for the acts that fall under them.

Instead of innate concepts, what we need is an account that, while not grounding our initial concept formation on a pre-conceptual form of awareness, still shows how it is that I am able to come to understand the epistemic authority of my own capacity. Once things are off the ground this process of coming to accept the epistemic authority of my own capacity for recognition is easy to explain through the concept of *practice*. Say I take it upon myself to learn to recognise the call of a specific bird. At first the distinction between the different calls may not be distinct at all for me and I may accidentally mix up the calls (I think I hear a sparrow, but it is a wren at the end of the garden). At this point I am not going to put much stock in my recognitional capacity. After some practice at comparing the calls, however, I learn to pick out the call of the sparrow without any hesitation. Of course I recognise that in certain circumstances my capacity is hindered – when a similar migratory species is present in the summer, say – but so long as those circumstances do not obtain, once I reach this level of competency I can be confident in my capacity to recognise a sparrow’s call. In such a case I need not refer to anything else other than my capacity in order to justify my claim to know that what I am hearing is a sparrow.<sup>63</sup>

The acquiring of a recognitional capacity via practice is easy to account for in the above case because all sorts of other recognitional capacities have been presupposed. I am able to recognise, for instance, birds, bird calls, pitch, rhythm, causal relationships, and ambient noise, and so on, so that in acquiring the capacity I am utilising capacities I already had, albeit in a more complex and fine-grained way. The reason that the bootstrap problem – the *initial* case of concept acquisition – is

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<sup>63</sup> The idea of acquisition through practice is thus, as Kern says, “intrinsically linked” to the idea of a rational capacity (2017, 262). It is only because practice gives me the chance to test and improve the efficacy of my capacity in the light of a presupposed norm that I can come to recognise its epistemic authority.



so much more challenging to account for is that there are no other rational capacities to draw on. Indeed, we cannot even appeal to a fully-fledged idea of subjectivity, since as Kant shows in the A Deduction, an awareness of the self presupposes an awareness of objects (not least because, as we have seen, an awareness of time – what Kant calls inner sense – requires the recognition of permanent substances). This is what Ginsborg’s posited ‘psychological activity of the imagination’ is supposed to provide for. For if it were legitimate to posit such a level of pre-conceptual awareness, then empirical concept acquisition could be as easy to account for as my capacity to recognise the call of a sparrow.

The question is thus how we are to explain the possibility of practice – i.e. that through which I come to recognise the epistemic authority of my capacity – if the subject cannot draw on their own capacities of recognition. Kern suggests that we can solve this problem by expanding our picture to include another subject who is a competent user of the capacity in question. As she writes:

[W]hen a subject is about to acquire a capacity for perceptual knowledge through practice, she performs acts of perceptual knowledge whose accord with the capacity for perceptual knowledge cannot be explained through a capacity that is available to the learning subject independently of the other subject’s exemplary exercises of that capacity. Rather, a learning subject performs acts of perceptual knowledge whose accord with a capacity for perceptual knowledge is explained through a capacity that is available to her only through the exemplary acts of the competent subject.

(2017, 266-7)

This is very similar then to Ginsborg’s notion of training above. The difference is that on this account we are not positing any level of perceptual experience shared by the learning ‘subject’ and teacher. Say a child mimics her mother saying to her ‘Look a *tree!*’ by repeating the word ‘Tree!’. On this account we need not attribute any recognitional capacities (and so no perceptual experience) to the child as such, her direct relation to the tree and her mothers capacity need only be characterised dispositionally. *Indirectly*, however, we can explain the child’s response as an

imperfect exercise of the capacity, since the goal of the child's activity is to mimic the capacity of her mother's (whether the child realises that or not) (ibid, 266).<sup>64</sup>

In this account, rather than merely taking already occurring psychological activity to be exemplary, "a subject gradually comes to possess a capacity of the relevant sort precisely by repeatedly performing acts that agree with the capacity in this mediated manner" (ibid, 261). We can sketch the process as follows. Initially the child's response is dispositional, consisting of mere reactions to various stimuli in mimicry of her parent (she need not realise that this is what she is doing, it is enough that she is biologically disposed to do so). Her disposition is sanctioned or rewarded depending on how well it accords with the norm of the capacity she is mimicking. Eventually, however, the child begins to recognise that she is able to judge the efficacy of the disposition herself such that she recognises situations in which their disposition (to treat something as a tree, say) is likely to be mistaken. It is at this point, where the child begins to distinguish good from bad exercises of their own disposition (i.e. where they begin to understand the capacity as representing a norm), that a true self-conscious, rational capacity begins to emerge.<sup>65</sup> For it is then that she is able to understand her response to the presence of an object "to be an instance of the same capacity that she represents her mother's perceptual judgment to be an instance of" (e.g. for recognising trees) (ibid, 266).

Thus, the reason we can drop the second proposition of the bootstrap problem is that the material for the formation of the subject's initial conceptual capacities does not come from

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<sup>64</sup> Kern initially says that the learner must understand the activity of the teacher in terms of the capacity being learned (2017, 261), but then later says that this awareness is only necessary when the subject is on the verge of acquiring the capacity (ibid, 266). It may be that she only means to attribute the former explanation to subjects who already have some level of recognitional capacities, or alternatively to suggest that the child must act toward the mother *as if* her activity is exemplary (rather than in terms of a self-consciously held attitude). Regardless, it seems implausible to attribute the former level of self-conscious awareness to the child at this stage.

<sup>65</sup> In some ways, then, this is the exact opposite of Ginsborg's position in the sense that on this account gaining the capacity occurs in the moment that the potential subject realises that the disposition is *not* always exemplary, rather than in the moment that we recognise that it is (as per Ginsborg's account). To this extent, McDowell is wrong to dismiss "[t]raditional epistemology[']s accord[ing] a deep significance to the fact that perception is fallible," for there is a deep significance here, just not for the sceptical reasons that traditional epistemology would have us believe (1996, 112).

perceptual experience, but rather from a store of non-rational dispositions that the potential subject obtains long before any fully-fledged subjectivity emerges. As McDowell says in a slightly different context, the non-rational dispositions to follow certain rules that we acquire as children serve as “a substratum on which the capacity for concept-carried awareness is constructed” (1998, 283).<sup>66</sup> Ginsborg’s mistake, in other words, is to think that we need something to subjectively *ground* the initial formation of concepts rather than merely provide the ‘causal antecedents’ of such capacities (see McDowell 1998, 283). She is correct that we must see the initial stages of the development of our rational capacities as based on something non-rational, but wrong in thinking that we must understand this non-rational element as something that persists once the capacity has been formed. That is, unlike the additive account that Ginsborg advocates, where the psychological activity of the imagination forms the content of the conceptual capacity, on this account, once the subject is able to judge the efficacy of their capacity in relation to a norm, then their response is no longer dispositional but rather transformed into a rational capacity for recognition (in the sense outlined in chapter two).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> McDowell’s aim in the cited essay (‘One Strand in the Private Language Argument’) is stated in terms of *defending* pre- or non-conceptual forms of awareness in infants and animals, against Rorty’s suggestion that this is “a [mere] courtesy extended [to] potential or imagined speakers of our language” (1987, 190), arguing that “[i]f we refrain from this overkill, there is room for a project of making the process of initiation into the space of reasons intelligible” (McDowell 1998, 283). At first glance this might seem to place his account with Ginsborg, however he is clear that he does not see such ‘awareness’ as persisting “into a life of concept-involving awareness” (ibid, 283). His point is merely that speaking in terms of such awareness – as the above account tacitly does by referring to the child ‘mimicking her mother’ – can help make sense of the transition from this kind of dispositional ‘awareness’ to the fully-fledged rational awareness that we enjoy.

<sup>67</sup> In ‘Kant and the Problem of Experience’, Ginsborg considers a position very similar to this but rejects it on the grounds that it “leaves us with the mystery of how the transition between the [dispositional and conceptual] stages is accomplished (2006c, 85). The difficulty, she thinks, is that on a fully conceptualist picture the only way we can recognise the ‘appropriateness’ (i.e. epistemic authority) of our conceptual capacities is if they are open to reflective criticism in terms of other concepts, but since these are absent at the dispositional stage, then there appears to be no clear bridge between the two. Although there is some truth to this conclusion – the transition between stages is by no means obvious – the criticism itself overlooks the role of the teacher. The child is not only evaluating her responses by her own lights, but in the light of the corresponding response of the adult. In other words, the child not only has a disposition to acquire patterns of response according to “an innate standard of similarity” (Quine 1969, 123; cited Ginsborg 2006c, 83), but also an innate disposition to *conform* to the pattern of response of those who she mimics. Sometimes the first conflicts with the second – i.e. when the child is corrected by her parent – but she gradually comes to make this kind of evaluative judgement herself. This presumably *will* take the form of her coming to recognise the ways in which her various capacities are related, as Ginsborg suggests, but we need not see the transition here in terms of an unbridgeable gap between the purely dispositional and fully conceptual. “Light dawns gradually over the whole,” as Wittgenstein says (1969, §141; also see Wiggins 1997, 418).

## 6. Rational Transformation and Naturalism

The fact that an additive picture like Ginsborg's can seem natural is primarily due to the assumed primacy of the perceptual image in our own perceptual experience. This leads us to think of the perceptual experience of animals and infants in these terms, which can make it difficult to accept that no content carries over from these earlier, pre-conceptual stages in our own development. However, as we have seen, it is only through the recognition of the fallibility of our capacities that the idea of a distinct 'visual image' – of the kind that Ginsborg takes to be primary – makes sense *as* an image. For in order to recognise such a thing, we need to understand not only the idea of it being *of* something or other (as argued above), but the idea of something appearing a way that is not. The perceptual image is, as it were, the index of error. It concretely represents to us the fallibility of our recognitional capacities in the sense that it is what we point to when things go wrong. If the light fools me and I think I see a cardinal when really it was a dove, it is the idea of the visual image I use to explain the failure of my capacity ('It *looked* like a red bird to me, but really it was white'). Its epistemological relevance is purely negative (in the sense that when things are as they appear to be there is no need to refer to the idea of the perceptual image) and parasitic on our rational capacities for recognition (since images are always images of something or other).

This self-consciousness of the fallibility of our capacities cannot be characterised in dispositional terms, for on such an account there is no space for the recognition of the possibility of error. If a dog is trained to have a disposition to bark at the postman and the postman appears, it will bark (*ceteris paribus*). It is not an open possibility for the dog to question how things appear to it. It just *acts* on a given stimulus or it does not, as it is disposed to do. Of course, things can go wrong and the dog may mistakenly bark at its owner, but it need not – and cannot – offer a *reason* for its so acting (either to itself or to others). In such a case the idea of a perceptual image, distinct from a mere perceptual relation to the environment has no role to play. The perceptual image matters when

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justification does, so the perceptual image emerges *alongside* our rational capacities for recognition.<sup>68</sup>

Perhaps it is tempting at this point to suggest that perspective is enough to grant an awareness of a perceptual image. For we need not recognise the fallibility of our capacities in order to be responsive to the fact that objects have a different appearance when viewed different angles, and it could seem that this is enough to credit the possessor of such a non-rational capacity with an awareness of a visual image. Indeed, presumably an infant or animal who is credited with a disposition to respond to the presence of trees in some way would be unlikely to be credited with such a capacity if they only responded to such a stimulus from a certain angle. But the point is that in such cases the image has no role to play (i.e. as that which we point to in order to explain our error). The idea of the image only emerges when capacities move beyond a mere responsiveness to features of the environment and a concern with justification emerges. As McDowell writes, “it would be hopeless to claim that sensations [in the sense of a visual image] are there for a mere animal in the way problems and opportunities thrown up by the environment are there for it” (1996, 120). The ‘mere animal’ *reacts* to the presence of the tree as an obstacle, say, and is able to do so dynamically as it moves past it and as its sensory impressions of it change, but this is no reason to credit it with an awareness of a ‘perceptual image’ distinct from its disposition to react. The dog sees the tree and avoids it, there is no need to say it sees an *image* of one and avoids that. Rather such dynamic responsiveness is just what its disposition to avoid trees consists in.

Dispositions are thus *blind* in a double sense: both in that such things occur outside of any rational control – an animal with a disposition to respond in accordance with a particular stimulus cannot but respond in the way it is disposed to (again, *ceteris paribus*) – but also in that they do not require crediting the object or organism in question with an awareness of a perceptual image *as an*

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<sup>68</sup> We could put this metaphorically by saying that it is such capacities ‘let the light in’ in the sense that they first make possible the perceptual image, i.e. that it is only with such capacities that vision, properly speaking, is granted. In the final section of the next chapter it will be argued that it is just this that Heidegger means by his concept of *Lichtung*, with its dual sense of clearing and lighting.

image. This could appear to cast animals as mere Cartesian automata in the way that it seems to deny that there is anything that it is like to be that animal. But as McDowell suggests, “[t]his is not to imply that features of the environment are nothing to the perceiving animal. On the contrary, they can be problems or opportunities for it... The point is that we must distinguish that from saying that the animal conceives the features *as* problems or opportunities” (1996, 116). The aim is not to show that the animal lacks any sentience at all, but rather to show that there is a distinct form to the kind of sentience it has. This form can be incredibly complex in the way it manifests itself – many animals are far more adaptive and responsive to changes in their environment than we are – but it is not something that manifests itself in terms of an awareness of things *as* things, and it is only in an animal with this kind of conceptual awareness that the idea of the perceptual image makes sense. As McDowell suggests, “if this seems like a denial of the subjectivity of cats and infants, that depends on missing the point that nothing is... given to us either. Our subjectivity is not a matter of this kind of thing plus the conceptual garb...” (1998, 295). The point, in other words, is that there is nothing ‘given’ to us prior to the realisation of recognitional capacities that we *could* deny animals (or infants) even in principle.

One problem with this account, however, is that it can make the emergence of rational capacities out of dispositions appear mysterious. One of the benefits of Ginsborg’s account is that it is at least partially reductive since both the psychological activity of the imagination and our dispositional responses to it can be – at least in principle – unproblematically captured in the language of natural science (see 2006c, 92-3).<sup>69</sup> That is, both are phenomena that can be understood in terms of nomological relationships that hold between the subject and her environment. Yet, as we

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<sup>69</sup> The key exception to this is the idea of ‘appropriateness’ which is added to our dispositions in order to make them understandable as normative actions. This exception, however, puts into question whether Ginsborg’s account really is any more attractive from a reductive naturalist standpoint. As Miller points out, her account seems to “[threaten] to collapse into either full-blown non-reductionism or reductive dispositionalism” (2019, 73). Ginsborg seems forced to choose between having ‘appropriateness’ *explain* the actions of rational subjects – and so introduce an element that is unable to be accounted for in law bound terms (in which case it is not obviously a reductive improvement on a fully *sui generis* account of rational capacities) – or cast it as a mere subjective effect that is not causally efficacious at all (in which case it is not an obvious improvement on a purely dispositional account).

have seen, rational capacities are distinctive precisely in that they are not law-bound in this way. As McDowell writes, “being at home in the space of reasons involves not just a collection of propensities to shift one’s psychological stance in repose to this or that, but the standing potential for a reflective stance at which the question arises whether one ought to find this or that persuasive” (1996, 125). Being able to offer my recognitional capacity as a reason for belief requires me to recognise my capacity as representing a norm that I take to be fulfilled at the time at which I offer it as a reason for my belief. This is not possible if I think of my recognitional capacities dispositionally, since I could not but form the belief that it offers me. In other words it is *because* rational capacities are not law-bound that they are able to function as reasons for belief or action.

The problem is that if we equate the natural world with the realm of law, then this ‘rational freedom’ can look supernatural, granting us a freedom contrary to the laws of physics (see *ibid*, 78). Indeed, this identification of the realm of law and the natural world can seem inescapable given the success of the natural sciences in describing and explaining the nomological relationships of an ever-increasing number of natural phenomena. As Sellars famously writes, it can seem “that in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not” (1997, §42). If this is the case, then it would appear that the only way that we can make our conceptual capacities understandable as a part of nature is to reduce them somehow to relations within the realm of law. But as we have seen, this would amount to denying that they can provide reasons for belief or action. So if we do not want to “opt out of this area of philosophy altogether,” we need to explain how the rational freedom we are granted by the transformation of dispositions into rational capacities can fit into our conception of nature (McDowell 1996, 67).

McDowell suggests that the way to see our way out of this is simply to deny this identification of nature with the realm of law (*ibid*, 109). Rather than a supernatural imposition on a law-bound nature, we can see the transformation of our pre-conceptual dispositions into rational

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capacities as a case of the realisation of the potential that we have as the kind of animal we are. In *Mind and World* McDowell describes this process of rational transformation in terms of *Bildung*, or cultural upbringing, through which we are initiated into a shared linguistic practice. As he writes:

Human beings are not [born into the space of reasons]: they are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity. This transformation risks looking mysterious. But we can take it in our stride if, in our conception of the *Bildung* that is a central element in the normal maturation of human beings, we give pride of place to the learning of language.

(1996, 125)

Although rational capacities cannot be captured in terms of nomological relationships, they are nonetheless still *natural*, since, as Kant says, “we too belong to nature in the broadest sense” (Kant 1987, 375).

One way of thinking of this is in terms of the need for a different kind of vocabulary in order to describe this distinctive feature of human beings. This can be seen more clearly in certain kinds of cultural phenomena. For instance, Wellmer gives the example of two different descriptions of Picasso’s *Guernica* (2009, 213). On the first kind of description we describe the artistic and historical properties of the image: the distorted figures, the symbolism, the Spanish Civil War, the cubist movement, etc. On the second kind of description we describe the physical properties of the material object: the dimensions and weight of the canvas, the lead content of the paint used, the age of the materials. Both interpretations are necessary for a full description of the object in that they both capture something unique that cannot be explained in the vocabulary of the other. As Wellmer writes:

The painting as an object of art criticism as well as of the cultural sciences could not exist without its ‘embodiment’ in a material substratum which is a possible object of natural science. However, as an object of natural science it loses all those properties which make it a work of art; or, to put it another way, to make it an object of natural scientific research means to ignore all those properties which are constitutive of its being a work of art.

(ibid, 214)

The ‘cultural’ description is not a mysterious or quaint hold over from a pre-scientific era. Rather it captures just what is distinctive about the work *as* a work of art. It explains why, for instance, the



painting is considered more important than some other paintings that use similar materials, a distinction that simply vanishes if we focus solely on a quantificational or nomological description of it as a material object.

The same point applies to human beings themselves. As Wellmer writes, “[a]ctions, intentions, [and] meanings... demand a vocabulary for their description which cannot have a place in a science aiming at the discovery of nomological relationships in the world of material processes” (2009, 215). An account of human beings that fails to describe us at least partially in these terms would not be able to capture just what is distinctive about the kind of beings we are. The mistake is thinking that this description is in some sense unnatural, when it simply captures a different aspect of our animal selves. Just as with the work of art, this is obviously not to deny that we are physically embodied beings and that there is an important story to be told about the law-bound processes that make our rational capacities possible; the point is that this is not the only story that matters.

## 7. Conclusion

The bootstrap problem threatened to ‘devastate’ the conceptualist account of perceptual experience that has been advocated in this thesis. For it seems impossible to understand how empirical concepts can be characterised as a condition of the possibility of perceptual experience if they also have to be drawn from that very same experience. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that any pre-conceptual form of perceptual experience that might have otherwise served to solve the problem was ruled out in chapter two. The benefit of the account advocated here is that it does not rely on any such form of pre-conceptual experience, instead finding the ‘causal antecedents’ of our initial conceptual capacities in the dispositions we acquire as children. This solves the bootstrap problem by denying the second premise. Rather than forming our recognitional capacities on the basis of

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perceptual experience, they are formed on the basis of a gradual critical reflection on our own dispositions.

This solves the major internal difficulty with the strongly conceptualist account advocated in this thesis. In the final chapter, two external critiques will be considered, both of which suggest that the phenomenology of perceptual experience speaks against a conceptualist account. The first of these suggests that the conceptualist account attributes too little content to perceptual experience, since what we see is too fine-grained to be described adequately in terms of concepts. It will be suggested that this critique results from a bad picture of concepts that models them after substances that serve as exemplars rather than in terms of rules that describe a function. On the latter model there need not be any aspect of the particular that is lost on its being recognised as falling under a particular concept. The second external critique, by contrast, suggests the reverse, i.e. that the conceptualist attributes too much content to our everyday dealings with the world. In this case it will be suggested that this worry results from a misunderstanding of the relationship between recognition and judgment.

## 5. Are Concepts Reductive?

### Fineness of Grain and Mindless Coping

This final chapter will address two of the most common objections to conceptualism. Both are based on the phenomenology of perceptual experience, but they arrive at opposite conclusions. The first of these is the so-called ‘argument from fineness of grain’. The suggestion is that a conceptualist position ends up ascribing far *too little* content to perceptual experience since it is too complex and detailed to be adequately captured by our conceptual capacities. If this is true, then it would seem to give us independent grounds for ascribing a non-conceptual content to perceptual experience. The second argument, by contrast, suggests that conceptualism attributes far *too much* content to much of our perceptual experience. The thought is that, although conceptualism might be a perfectly fine description for when we are theoretically observing the things around us, much of our pragmatic dealing with the world is in fact ‘mindless’ and so does not involve our conceptual capacities.

The chapter will be split into five sections. The first will present the phenomenological case for attributing a nonconceptual content to perceptual experience and link it to the abstractive picture of concept formation described at the start of the previous chapter. The second will use McDowell’s account of demonstratives to show how the particularity of experience can be accounted for in conceptualist terms. One key issue is that, by suggesting that demonstrative concepts are in some sense already at play in perceptual experience itself, we seem to upset the most obvious explanatory model of demonstratives as something grounded in experience rather than constitutive of it. It will be suggested that what this objection overlooks the fact that the realisation of a demonstrative conceptual capacity is part of what it is to recognise something as falling under a particular concept in perceptual experience. Rather than being a mere disjunctive classification, a capacity for

recognition also involves an awareness of the object as falling under the concept in a certain *way*, at a certain place in the series that the concept describes.

The last three sections will then focus on the phenomenology of absorbed coping. The main proponent of this kind of objection is Dreyfus, via his reading of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and it is his account that is the focus of the first section. Essentially his suggestion is that the capacity for distanced deliberation that conceptual capacities grant us takes us ‘out of the flow’ and leaves us disconnected from our activities. Section four will then suggest that this objection relies on a misunderstanding of the nature of conceptual capacities. Distanced reflection should be seen as a ‘standing capacity’ rather than a necessary part of the exercise of such capacities. Indeed, it will be further argued that seeing our conceptual capacities as involved in our pragmatic dealings with things better fits the phenomenology of absorbed coping. Although Dreyfus’s reading would seem to set the conceptualist picture in opposition to the phenomenological tradition, the final section will argue that Heidegger himself should be seen as a conceptualist.

## 1. Fineness of Grain

So far, this thesis has addressed problems that arise for conceptualism internal to the question of how it is that perceptual experience enables the world to bear rationally on what we are to think and do. That is, rather than starting with an assumption about the nature of perceptual experience as such, the argument has presupposed that perceptual experience is able to play this epistemological role and then looked for the conditions of the possibility of its doing so. As we have seen, the picture that emerges is one of perceptual experience constituted by conceptual capacities for recognition, but this conclusion is a result of that ‘regressive’ transcendental starting point rather than a starting assumption itself. A crucial test for this picture is, therefore, how well it matches our phenomenological intuitions about perceptual experience that arise external to the transcendental

problematic. For if the account results in a distortion or mischaracterisation of certain ‘common sense’ attributes of experience, then that would seem to give us independent grounds for either rejecting it outright, or at least reducing its scope.

One of the most common objections on such grounds is the argument from the fineness of grain of perceptual experience, where it is suggested that the content of experience is too detailed or complex to be described adequately in conceptual terms (see e.g. Evans 1982, Heck 2000, Peacocke 1998, Boyle unpublished b). This kind of account focuses on the apparent lack of concepts for much of the content of our experience. Heck gives a representative description of the thought:

Before me now, for example, are arranged various objects with various shapes and colours, of which, it might seem, I have no concept. My desk exhibits a whole host of shades of brown, for which I have no names. The speakers to the sides of my computer are not quite flat, but have curved faces; I could not begin to describe their shape in anything like adequate terms. The leaves on the trees outside my window are fluttering back and forth, randomly, as it seems to me, as the wind passes over them. Yet my experience of these things represents them far more precisely than that, far more distinctively, it would seem, than any characterisation I could hope to formulate, for myself or for others, in terms of the concepts I presently possess. The problem is not lack of time, but lack of descriptive resources, that is, lack of the appropriate concepts.

(2000, 489-90)

There is so much rich – or particular – sensory detail in perceptual experience that it seems impossible to think that all that detail can be captured by concepts that are inherently general. Saying that the content of the experience of the desk, for instance, is partially captured by the proposition ‘that desk is brown’, seems anaemic when compared to the actual perceptual experience of it. Not only does it overlook the shades of brown that Heck mentions but a seemingly infinite array of other features – shadows, scratches, wood grain, shape etc. – that may have many features in their turn that are similarly ignored, presumably all the way down to the very smallest speck of dust that I am able to see with the naked eye, itself with a shape, shadow etc.

The thought, therefore, is that we cannot possibly characterise perceptual experience as constituted by conceptual capacities “unless those concepts are assumed to be endlessly fine-grained; and does this make sense? Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many

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colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate?” (Evans 1982, 229). Clearly, the implied answer to this question is no: we do not have enough colour concepts to describe adequately the full content of even the most minimalistic of perceptual experiences. Any concept of colour or shape we have appears to be far too broad, allow for far too great of a range of phenomena, for it to adequately capture the minute differences that are commonplace in our perceptual experience. It can seem that we *must* picture the content of perceptual experience as nonconceptual if we are to do justice to the phenomenology of that experience.

Indeed, if we understand concepts as arising solely from the process of abstraction that was outlined at the start of the previous chapter, then it can seem that concepts are not only too few, but unable in principle to capture the particularity of experience.<sup>70</sup> For if the method by which we arrive at new concepts is by comparing individuals, reflecting on their shared ‘essential’ properties, and then abstracting away the rest, then it seems that, by definition, concepts are going to be poorer in content than what they compare. As Nietzsche writes in ‘On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense’:

[E]ach word immediately becomes a concept, not by virtue of the fact that it is intended to serve as a memory (say) of the unique, utterly individualised, primary experience to which it owes its existence, but because at the same time it must fit countless other, more or less similar cases, i.e. cases which, strictly speaking, are never equivalent, and thus nothing other than nonequivalent cases. Every concept comes into being by making equivalent that which is non-equivalent. Just as it is certain that no leaf is ever exactly the same as any other leaf, it is equally certain that the concept ‘leaf’ is formed by dropping these individual differences arbitrarily, by forgetting those features which differentiate one thing from another [...].  
(1999, 145)

If this picture of concepts is the only one available to us, then describing perceptual experience as constituted by capacities for recognition would leave us incapable of comprehending the particular,

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<sup>70</sup> These two possibilities correspond roughly to so-called ‘state’ and ‘content’ nonconceptualism (see Heck 2000, 484-5; also Speaks 2005, 359-60). The first suggests that, although we can be in a perceptual state for which we have no concept, perception nonetheless still shares the same conceptual form as thought. On this picture perception is thus non-conceptual in the sense of being a concept-*independent* state “as opposed to a... concept-dependent, state [like belief]” (Heck 2000, 485). The idea here is that the content of the subject’s experience could still be described as having the content ‘cardinal’, say, despite her lacking that concept. This kind of position is thus directly opposed to the conclusion of the argument of the A Deduction that suggested that perceptual awareness requires something in terms of which the *subject* is able to recognise the object as the same over time. The second kind of reading, by contrast, more straightforwardly takes the non-conceptual contents of perceptual experience to have an entirely different form to the conceptual content of belief and judgment.

locking us into Nietzsche's "land of... ghostly schemata and abstractions" (ibid, 152). No amount of passivity in the way we picture those capacities would then be able to prevent the feeling that we were merely making "moves in a self-contained game" (McDowell 1996, 5).

## 2. Demonstratives

In *Mind and World*, McDowell suggests one way that we might attempt to account for this particularity conceptually by drawing on the notion of demonstrative concepts (1996, §3.5). Say I see the cardinal at the end of the garden. Since I already have the concepts of colour and shade, McDowell's thought is that I can linguistically express the particular shade of the colour of the cardinal by using a demonstrative phrase like 'That shade of red'. The redness of the cardinal itself serves as a sample of the colour that the demonstrative refers to, enabling us to linguistically characterise perceptual experience in a way that is just as fine-grained as the experience itself. The same trick works for other kinds of phenomena as well (e.g. 'that shape', 'that pitch', 'that pattern', 'that melody', etc.). Our lack of specific conceptual capacities need not push us in the direction of accepting non-conceptual content, since we can always utilise our demonstrative conceptual capacities whenever they are required.

Of course, if such demonstrative concepts were only available to us in the presence of the object in question, then it would be questionable to what extent it could be considered a genuine conceptual capacity. For it could appear that, as Boyle argues, "[t]he idea that my perceptual experience presents the object as having an utterly specific colour, namely one designated by the phrase 'that shade of colour', spuriously represents this potential for classification as if it were itself a maximally specific classification," when in fact it merely indicates where "we would need to look in order to make the classification" (unpublished b, 12-13). For this reason, McDowell suggests that "[w]e can ensure that what we have in view is genuinely recognisable as a conceptual capacity

[only] if we insist that the very same capacity to embrace a colour in mind can in principle persist beyond the duration of the experience itself” (1996, 57). Since we can use demonstrative concepts in this way (e.g. ‘This shirt is the same shade of red as that cardinal’), we can be sure that they are a genuine species of conceptual capacity.

Nonetheless, it is still not immediately apparent how this is supposed to work. As Heck argues, it appears that McDowell fails to leave enough distance between the experience that supposedly grounds the demonstrative concept (by providing it with a sample) and the capacity to recognise things in terms of the concept:

Demonstrative concepts of the sort he discusses are ones I have only *because* I am presently enjoying (or have recently enjoyed) an experience of a certain kind: Or again, what *explains* my having these concepts is my having (had) an experience with a certain sort of content. But, if that is right, it is hard to see how these demonstrative concepts could be part of the content of my experience. Suppose we say, with McDowell, that my having certain demonstrative concepts is partially constitutive of the world’s appearing to me in a particular way. How then can my having that concept be explained by my having such an experience? There would not seem to be sufficient distance between my having the experience and my possessing the concept for the former to *explain* the latter.

(2000, 492)

The objection is fairly straightforward: if the function of a demonstrative concept is to pick out a particular feature of what we see, then the concept is evidently dependent on us already having the perceptual experience of what it is that it picks out and so cannot itself be constitutive of the experience. Yet since the argument from the fineness of grain supposedly shows that our broader conceptual capacities are unable to capture the complex particularity of experience, whatever it is that demonstratives are picking out cannot be something that we are made aware of via our broader conceptual capacities either. Therefore, although demonstrative concepts may help give conceptual expression to features of our perceptual experience, that experience itself cannot be conceptual if we are to account for its fineness of grain.

The only other option would appear to be, as Heck writes, to deny “the causal (or explanatory) intuitions upon which [the previous argument] rests” and argue that, rather than being



based on our experience, demonstrative concepts are already part of experience themselves (ibid, 492-3). Yet if demonstrative concepts are taken as free-standing, independent capacities for recognition like any other, this can be difficult to understand, as it can appear that we have to pre-emptively create, or already have a store of, all those demonstrative concepts ahead of time in order to be able to recognise objects as falling under them. The intuitive appeal of seeing our demonstrative concepts as being based on experience already had is that their origin is easy to account for. With this missing we seem to be owed an account of how it is possible for such concepts to be formed (ibid, 493).

What this objection misses, however, is that having a ‘demonstrative conceptual capacity’ is part of what it is to have a more general capacity for recognition. To recognise something as falling under the concept red is not to only recognise it as falling within the set of all red things, but to recognise it as falling under the concept in a particular way (i.e. within that set in a particular position). That is, I never just recognise something as generically red, but rather as a particular shade of the spectrum that that concept marks out. Cassirer puts this in terms of concepts being not merely being disjunctive classifications that things either are or not (though they are that too), but functions that organise objects “into comprehensive totalities, into distinct groups and series” (1957, 115). Using demonstratives to refer to particular instances of properties merely indicates that we recognise them as having a determinate place within that series (as having a certain hue and shade say). So to say that perceptual objects are ‘always already recognised as falling under a demonstrative concept’ is thus merely part and parcel of having a recognitional capacity, rather than something distinct from them that stands in need of independent explanation.

This picture of concepts as functions that describe series or *ordered* sets rather than merely disjunctive classifications also helps mitigate Nietzsche’s concern about the reductive quality of concepts when seen as a result of a process of abstraction. By drawing on the idea of a function we can see concepts not only as sets of things that are grouped according to a common element, but as

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a “series in which between each member and the succeeding member there prevails a certain degree of difference” (Cassirer 1953, 16). Concepts in this sense follow a ‘law of arrangement’ marking out all possible variations in advance (ibid, 19). Each of Nietzsche’s misshapen leaves, for instance, are in a certain way already described by the concept ‘leaf’; to recognise something as a leaf on such a picture is to recognise it as a way that a leaf ‘could so appear’, to borrow a phrase of Heidegger’s (1997, 67).

Cassirer suggests that it is this picture of concepts as functions that underlies the process of abstraction itself (1953, 17). As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the problems with accounting for concept formation in terms of the process of abstraction was that it was unable to account for the selection of the objects that were to form the basis of the comparison. For instance, our selection of an oak, a linden, and a birch rather than some other group of objects for comparison seemed to presuppose that we already recognise them as trees, i.e. that we understand them as connected as an analytic unity in Kant’s sense according to the concept that we were supposedly forming. In other words, the process of abstraction “tacitly thinks [the particulars it compares] in the form of an ordered manifold from the first. The concept, however, is not deduced thereby, but presupposed; for when we ascribe to a manifold an order and connection of elements, we have already presupposed the concept, if not in its complete form, yet in its fundamental function” (ibid, 17).

Cassirer is thus able to expand upon Pippin’s suggestion that abstraction is better seen as a process of clarification of concepts that we already have, rather than as accounting for the origin of the concepts we have (see previous chapter). As he writes, “[t]he unity of the conceptual content can thus be ‘abstracted’ out of the particular elements of its extension only in the sense that it is in connection with them that we become conscious of the specific rule, according to which they are related; but not in the sense that we construct this rule out of them through either bare summation or neglect of parts” (ibid, 17). Through conceptual analysis, in other words, we can discover the form

of the rule that underlies our capacity for recognition. But rather than attempting to discover merely a list of properties that the object must display in order to be considered an instance of the kind, we can also think of this process as an attempt to discover the possible *transformations* that an object can undergo while still be considered to be an instance of the kind. However, our appeal to our capacity in justifying a claim to know need not make any claim to an explicit knowledge of any such rule beyond a demonstrative pointing out of our taking something to have a definitive place in that series (that this kind of thing ‘could so appear’).

One of the benefits of this picture is that it can make better sense of the interconnected character of our recognitional capacities. As McDowell suggests, understanding the idea of something like a colour “includes, for instance, the concept of visible surfaces of objects and the concept of suitable conditions for telling what colour something is by looking at it” (1996, 12). Considerations of lighting, shadow, texture and the like, are part of what a capacity for recognising something as coloured entails. A picture of concepts in terms of functions allows us to understand these background conditions as variables *internal* to the concept – as part of what it is for something to be coloured – as opposed to merely being additional concepts under which anything coloured must fall. Yet as Verene writes, “[i]n principle each variable in a given series can also serve as a law of arrangement of a series of its own, and the law of arrangement of the originally given series can have the status of a variable in another order” (Verene 2011, 10). Each of the variables that forms part of the background of the concept of something’s being coloured, for instance, is also the ground for a further capacity for recognition. As Cassirer suggests, it is this interrelation of our conceptual capacities that “produces the diversity and cohesion, the richness, the continuity, and constancy, of consciousness” (Cassirer 1957, 202).

### 3. Absorbed Coping

The previous sections have shown that we are actually able to account for the fineness of grain of the phenomenology of perceptual experience in terms of capacities for recognition. In a series of essays responding to McDowell's work, however, Dreyfus has suggested that conceptualism is unable to account for an even more fundamental phenomenological phenomenon, what he calls 'mindless absorbed coping' (2007a, 353). His suggestion is that in much of our everyday dealing with the world rationality is not at play, only coming into play when things go wrong or we explicitly stop and reflect on what we are doing. His worry is thus with the *pervasiveness* of rationality in the kind of transformative picture that this thesis has been defending. This is the direct opposite of the 'fineness of grain' argument, suggesting that conceptualism attributes far *too much* conceptual content to perceptual experience, rather than too little.

Dreyfus takes this to be the same point that Heidegger makes when describing the phenomenology of interacting with objects as tools rather than as mere material objects. According to Heidegger's account in *Being and Time*, in taking an object as a tool we understand the object in terms of its practical assignments relative to some particular end, a mode of meaningful presence that he calls 'readiness to hand' [*Zuhandenheit*] (1962, H69). Heidegger's most famous example of this is of using a hammer, where instead of concerning ourselves with the physical or visual properties it has as a material object, we understand it primarily in terms of what it is *for*:

[i]n such [practical] dealings an entity... is not grasped thematically as an occurring thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer's character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable. In dealings such as this, where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the 'in-order-to' which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time[.]

(ibid, H69)

In grasping the hammer *as* a hammer we may understand it primarily in terms of its in-order-to-hammer-nails (e.g. relative to the end of building a shelter to protect ourselves from the rain). The

hammer is not understood as a tool independently in the way a merely observed object would be, but rather in relation to a ‘totality of involvements’ (ibid, H94). For instance, the hammer can only be understood as the tool that it is because there are things that need to be hammered, which itself can only be understood because there are things that need to be built and so on.

Crucially, however, this kind of practical understanding of objects is all in the doing (it is only derivatively an object of philosophical reflection). Grasping the hammer *as* a hammer in this way is not a case of first thinking to oneself ‘there’s a hammer! I need that in order to hammer these nails’ and then acting on the thought, but rather a case of grabbing the hammer and starting to hammer with it. Heidegger puts this in terms of our ‘pressing into possibilities’ afforded by the tools and the environment in which we find ourselves (ibid, H145; also see Dreyfus 1995, 187ff). Instead of an explicit *deliberation* on the part of the subject about what to do, the subject simply acts on the practical possibilities for action as they are given, in accordance with a specific end.

Dreyfus thinks that the conceptualist is unable to account for this kind of practical dealing with objects. On his account, by “tak[ing] as basic how in our perceiving, thinking, and acting we take up a distanced relation to an independent reality,” the conceptualist is forced to distort the phenomena of absorbed coping (2013, 21). When I open a door, for instance, I am not explicitly aware of the exact shape of the door handle, or even that what I am doing is a case of grasping a door handle – I simply go through the door, without any distanced reflection being required. Rather than rationality being pervasive throughout our activity, Dreyfus wants to insist that we are “only part time rational animals” (ibid, 354). Conceptual capacities only come on the scene when something goes wrong or we are forced to contemplate the objects that surround us in terms of substances with distinct properties (e.g. in scientific or philosophical reflection), otherwise “in their direct dealing with affordances, adults, infants, and animals respond alike” (2005, 12). On this picture, rationality is not only ‘additive’ in the sense of being alongside or on top of other more basic capacities, but also in the sense that it is often not on the scene at all. As Dreyfus writes, Sam Matthews

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“[w]hat makes us special, then, isn’t that, unlike animals, we can respond directly to the conceptual structure of our environment; it’s that, unlike animals, we can transform our [otherwise] unthinking nonconceptual engagement, and thereby encounter new, thinkable, structures” (2005, 18).

Indeed, Dreyfus argues that the subject’s utilisation of conceptual capacities can actually hamper performance and prevent the subject from being able to deal with the situation effectively. The clearest example that Dreyfus offers of this phenomenon is an American Baseball player Chuck Knoblauch’s losing his ability to throw to first base due to his over intellectualising the activity, i.e. his thinking in descriptive terms about the actions that he needed to perform:

As second baseman for the New York Yankees, Knoblauch was so successful he was voted best infielder of the year, but one day, rather than simply fielding a hit and throwing the ball to first base, it seems he stepped back and took up a ‘free, distanced orientation’ towards the ball and how he was throwing it – to the mechanics of it, as he put it. After that, he couldn’t recover his former absorption and often – though not always – threw the ball to first base erratically... [I]n some replays of such easy throws one could actually see Knoblauch looking with puzzlement at his hand trying to figure out the mechanics of throwing the ball.  
(2007a, 354)

Dreyfus sees this ‘transformation’ of Knoblauch from expert to novice as a case of the conceptualist thesis in action. By thinking in distanced, ‘conceptual’ terms about the mechanics of the throw instead of just throwing the ball instinctively, Knoblauch is taken out of the flow of absorbed coping and is unable to act at the expert level required. It thus seems that “the enemy of expertise is thought” (ibid, 354). Conceptual thought might be fine when someone is *learning* how to do something – put your left foot here, reach back like this etc. – but once the skill is acquired, it is no longer necessary.

Dreyfus even goes as far as to claim that the subject disappears in such activity: “When one is bodily absorbed in responding to solicitations [e.g. for-hammering] there is no thinking subject and there are no features to be thought” (2007a, 358). Instead, “there are only attractive and repulsive forces drawing appropriate activity out of an active body” (2007b, 374). When one is ‘in the flow’, as Dreyfus puts it, absorption is total. There is no subjective experience as such: the body takes the

place of the subject and merely reacts to the way things are. Dreyfus cites Merleau-Ponty's account of the experience of the football player in *The Structure of Behaviour* in support:

For the player in action the football field is not an 'object'... It is pervaded with lines of force (the 'yard lines'; those which demarcate the 'penalty area') and articulated in sectors (for example, the 'openings' between the adversaries) which call for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if the player were unaware of it. The field itself is not given to him, but present as the immanent term of his practical intentions; the player becomes one with it and feels the direction of the 'goal', for example, just as immediately as the vertical and the horizontal planes of his own body. At this moment consciousness is nothing other than the dialectic of milieu and action.

(1963, 168-9; cited Dreyfus 2013, 17)

Although this reference to consciousness could seem to reintroduce the supposedly absent subjectivity, according to Dreyfus, "[a]ll consciousness means in this minimum sense is being drawn to act... one does not have to be aware that one is being so drawn. Consciousness is simply our direct responsiveness to a shifting field of forces" (2013, 37n). The aim is thus to describe what it is like to be merely *dispositionally* responsive to the features of the environment. The reason that this is so difficult on Dreyfus's account – that the phenomenon appears to "vanish[]" when we try to think it" (ibid, 16) – is that in the very act of describing such coping we must employ concepts that are absent from the experience itself.

Describing coping in such terms, however, could seem to place it in the realm of law in a way that strips it of any intentional content at all. Indeed, the way that McDowell sets up the two opposing 'logical spaces' in *Mind and World*, seems to invite such an approach as the only available option. However, Dreyfus suggests that McDowell's focus on overcoming the 'Myth of the Given' – the idea that the given is able to play a justificatory role in our epistemic practices – blinds him to the possibility a third kind of logical space, namely that of the "meaningful normative forces" that attract and repulse us in absorbed coping (2013, 26). Such coping in other words "has a kind of intentional content; it just isn't conceptual content. A 'bare Given' and the 'thinkable' are not our only alternatives. We must accept the possibility that our ground-level coping opens up the world by opening us to a meaningful Given – a Given that is *nonconceptual* but not *bare*" (2005, 11-12).

Once this space has been recognised we can be free to deny the pervasiveness of rationality – and so respect the phenomenology of absorbed coping – without falling prey to the myth.

#### 4. Perceptual Concepts in Action

Dreyfus's objection to conceptualism poses a particular problem for the account advocated in this thesis. For in denying subjectivity to absorbed coping he evades the regressive transcendental argument presented in chapter two by placing much of our everyday activity outside of the scope of perceptual experience proper. It is thus open for him to argue that, although the threefold synthesis of recognition may very well be necessary for perceptual awareness as such (i.e. of things *as* things), in 'mindless' absorbed coping perception simply does not share this form: instead of making us aware of things *as* things, it relates us directly to possibilities for action. Indeed, Dreyfus says something along these lines about McDowell's account:

McDowell's account of the *necessity* of conceptuality to make possible our mind-to-world relation seems to me convincing. My objection to his view is that he assumes that his account of our concept-based, minded, rational relation to the totality of facts is the whole story as to how we, in general, relate to the world. I don't question McDowell's transcendental '*must*', but I do question his *überhaupt*.

(2013, 23)

The account of the threefold synthesis is effective against Travis's position as he starts from the assumption that perception grants us a visual awareness of things independently of our conceptual capacities, but Dreyfus simply denies that awareness is what perception grants in our absorbed coping. Thus if he is right about the phenomenology, it could question, if not the status of the argument of the A Deduction, certainly its scope.

But is Dreyfus right about the phenomenology here? There are good reasons to question his picture (at least in part). Let us take Heidegger's example of using the hammer. According to Dreyfus, as we saw, in taking the hammer in this way (i.e. as ready-to-hand) the subject disappears



and we are left with a body merely responding to a normative ‘field of forces’. From an external (and so non-phenomenological) perspective this might seem to describe the phenomenon fairly well. Certainly, if we watch somebody in the flow of hammering they may appear to be ‘running on autopilot’ – to use one of Dreyfus’s favourite examples (see e.g. 2007a, 358) – mindlessly responding to the pragmatic requirements of the situation. Metaphorically speaking, this may be a fine description of the feel of such coping too, for with enough practice I may be able to let my mind wander and barely focus on the task at hand. It is easy to imagine someone performing such a monotonous task saying something like, ‘after a while it was like I wasn’t even there’.

Yet if we reflect on our experience of any such activity, we see that this lack of subjective awareness cannot be literally true. Regardless of how deeply we are absorbed in our hammering activity, it seems that we would still be *aware* of what it is we are doing. For if interrupted in our absorbed activity and asked to explain our actions, it is not as if we would stare blankly at the hammer in our hands and say, ‘oh I’m not sure, everything has been a total blank since I picked up the hammer’. We are far more likely to say something like ‘I’m building a table’ or ‘I’m hammering these nails’. This is not a ‘retrospective’ rationalisation either, as Dreyfus initially suggests (see 2005, 10): I do not survey the debris on the floor – the nails, the sawdust, the hammer – and then through a process of abduction think to myself ‘Ah, I must have been hammering again!’. Rather, the self-conscious awareness of my activity is there all along in the activity itself. If it were not, as Sheehan suggests, “all [our] hammering and nailing and other practical activities could turn out to be quite a mess” (2014, 210).

Indeed, Heidegger makes just this point when he suggests – in apparent anticipation of a dispositional reading of his description of our pragmatic dealings with tools – that “[t]his [pragmatic] activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight [*Sicht*],” namely ‘circumspection’ [*Umsicht*] (1962, H69). The point here is thus not to deny any level of subjectivity at all to the activity in question, but rather to suggest that such awareness has a distinct form. In circumspection, Sam Matthews

Heidegger suggests, “the thing we encounter is uncovered [i.e. recognised] in terms of the end-for-which of its serviceability. It is already posited in meaning – it already makes sense... [W]hat is first of all ‘given’... is the ‘for-writing’, the ‘for-entering-and- exiting’, the ‘for-illuminating’, the ‘for-sitting’” (2010, 121). The objects are still recognised *as* being a certain way, just not in the same way that they are when we take a contemplative or theoretical view of them (see Gascoigne & Thornton 2013, 41).<sup>71</sup>

But then *Umsicht* – as a species of our perceptual awareness of things – is not exempt from the argument of the A Deduction in the way Dreyfus’s account seems to imply. For even if in coping I am not aware of the hammer as a hammer, but rather merely as something ‘for-hammering’, this nonetheless still requires the awareness of it as in some way the same over time. As we saw in chapter two, a mere ‘mindless’ relation to the environment is not able to provide this by itself. Rather, for a subject to be aware of a unitary thing of *any* form, they require a self-conscious recognitional capacity in terms of which each moment of their perceptual relation to the object can be united.<sup>72</sup> Any such capacity, however, insofar as it must allow for an indefinite manifold of acts, is necessarily inherently general – and thus has a conceptual structure. Indeed, this same point

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<sup>71</sup> Dreyfus notes that in this regard “McDowell may have Heidegger on his side” (2007b, 377n), citing Heidegger’s suggestion that a “cognisance of itself... accompanies all Dasein’s [i.e. a rational animal’s] ways of behaving” (1962, H387). Dreyfus claims that in denying subjective awareness to absorbed coping he is “siding with Merleau-Ponty and current neurological models of skilled action... which claim that consciousness is only called into action once the brain has detected something going wrong” (2007b, 377n). Yet it seems that any phenomenological account – not just Heidegger’s – will ultimately rely on some kind of subjective awareness, for it is unclear that it is possible even to make sense of the idea of a phenomenon *as* a phenomenon (as that which shows itself) outside of such awareness. Dreyfus’s allusion to neuroscience does not lend his account any support either, for everything turns on what we mean by consciousness. That one kind of brain activity stops when we stop contemplating our surroundings and start coping with things can only lend the thesis support if we have already decided that whatever it is that stops in such cases must be the brain activity associated with conscious awareness.

<sup>72</sup> Heidegger makes this point himself in his discussion of the schematisation of the form of our understanding of the ready to hand at the end of *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*: “Everything handy is, to be sure, ‘in time’, intratemporal; we can say of it that the handy ‘is now’, ‘was at the time’, or ‘will then be’ available. When we describe the handy as being intratemporal, we are already presupposing that we understand the handy *as* handy, understanding this being in the mode of being of handiness” (1982, 305). Understanding something as ‘intratemporal’ requires something in terms of which we can understand the distinct moments as united; the mere fact that in our pragmatic dealings with objects we see them as possibilities for action – and thus as having their own distinct form – does not alleviate this need for synthesis.

applies to actions as much as affordances, since in order to be aware of what we are doing as an instance of the action it is, we need something in terms of which the movements we are making can be united. Contrary to Dreyfus's suggestion (see 2005, 19) there is no great mystery about the emergence of conceptual capacities out of our absorbed coping skills, for such skills are themselves a species of conceptual capacity.

The reason, of course, that Dreyfus feels compelled to deny that coping involves conceptual capacities is that he assumes rationality is something that is inherently detached from the situation at hand – a case of “[s]elf-conscious reflection and deliberation” (2013, 22). To act ‘rationally’ on this picture is to step back and think explicitly in terms of reasons for belief or action. The picture he takes himself to be opposing, in other words, is one where “we are basically minds distanced from the world, so that the mind has to be related to the world by mental activity [viz. conceptual capacities]” (2013, 36). If this really was the picture of rationality and conceptual capacities that was being advocated here, then Dreyfus's critique would be on point. For it seems clear that in acting we do not always think explicitly in terms of reasons – I just pick up the hammer; I do not think about it before hand. If this were the only account available, then it would appear indisputable – if we are to match the phenomenology – “that concept[ual capacities] must precisely not be always operative” (2013, 23).

Yet, as we saw in chapter one, this is not the picture of conceptual capacities that is being advocated in this thesis. That there is a logical gap between recognition and judgment does not mean that in every exercise of a conceptual capacity there must be an explicit process of deliberation before judgment or action occurs. Just as my judgment that there is a cardinal at the end of the garden need not come apart from the act of recognition itself, picking up a hammer and starting to use it need not come apart from my recognition of it as ‘for-hammering’ either. The point is merely, as McDowell puts it, that there must be a “*standing capacity* for a reflective stance” (1996, 125; emphasis added). As we have seen, having such an ability to stand back from

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(and potentially reject) the way that we ostensibly recognise things as being, is a result of our having a self-conscious understanding our recognitional capacities as representing norms that may or may not be realised on any particular occasion. But, as McDowell says, “that is not to say that the capacity for distance is actualised whenever conceptual capacities are in play. Exactly not: the capacity for distance is not actualised in unreflective perceptual experience or in unreflective intentional agency, but conceptual capacities are operative in both” (2013, 53).<sup>73</sup>

To say that a subject is unreflectively realising a conceptual capacity, however, does not mean that a subject needs even an implicit understanding of *all* (or even a majority) of what would fall under a complete description of the affordance or act in question. In recognising something as for-hammering, for instance, I need not have a clear idea of just what it is about the object that makes it fit for this purpose (e.g. the fact that the weight of the head helps increase the kinetic energy delivered in the blow, the fact that the metal is at least as hard as the nails to be struck etc.). What makes a case of a conceptual capacity in action is merely that I have the capacity to recognise it as for-hammering, such that I could cite that capacity if asked about why I picked up the object in that way (‘Why are you picking *that* up?’ ‘Oh it *looked* like something I could use to hammer these nails’). Similarly, for the act of hammering itself to count as a realisation of a conceptual capacity, I do not need a clear grasp of the minute alterations my hand makes in grasping the handle. Rather I can “leave that determination to [my] ingrained bodily habits,” as McDowell says (2007b, 368). We

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<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, we use this ‘standing capacity’ to question the way that we ostensibly recognise things as being all the time in our pragmatic dealings with things. Take, for instance, the three ways that Heidegger says that tools can fail to be ready-to-hand; viz. obtrusiveness, where the tool we expect to find is missing; obstinacy, where the tool breaks or fails to function as it is supposed to; and conspicuousness, where the tool is not fit for purpose (1962, H74-76). If we think that any of these circumstances obtain, then we need not accept the way that we (pragmatically) recognise things as being. Say I am about to go to open the door, when I remember that I locked it last night (anticipated obstinacy). I stop myself and pick up the keys on the side, only to see that they are too big to fit in the lock (anticipated conspicuousness). I go to get my set from my pocket, only to remember that they are not there but next to my bed (anticipated obtrusiveness). Of course all of this might be wrong – maybe the door was not locked, the keys were the right size, and my set were actually in my pocket – but the point is that I have the standing capacity to reject the ways that I pragmatically recognise things as being (‘for-going-out’, ‘for-unlocking’). Dreyfus’s account, by contrast, does not appear to be able to make any sense of this kind of pragmatic, anticipatory rejection of the way things are (ostensibly) recognised as being. On his picture, a subject is only able to step in and alter the general drift of her pragmatic coping “if the brain, which is comparing current performance with how things went in the past, sends an alarm signal that something is going wrong” (2007b, 374).

need not be able to describe the act in question “otherwise than under specifications like ‘whatever is needed to [hammer nails] efficiently’” (ibid, 368). We saw Kant make just this distinction in chapter three, with his division between the sensible and intellectual use of concepts. In the first case all that matters is that we have the capacity to recognise whatever it is that falls under the concept in question, while in the latter case what is important is the specific determinations or marks that make something a case of the concept in question.

Of course, it is *open* to us to give an analytic description of specific features that characterise the act or affordance in question, even if this is not possible – or even desirable – while we are utilising the practical capacities themselves. Indeed, this was just the problem that Knoblauch faced when he lost his ability to throw in a way compatible with professional baseball (at least on Dreyfus’s description of the situation). For instead of simply exercising his capacity for throwing the ball – in the self-aware way that rational animals do – he became obsessed with the mechanical content of that capacity. As McDowell writes, “Knoblauch exemplifies a specific way in which practical intelligence can lose its grip on activity. That can happen when someone with a skill whose exercises belong to a basic action type tries to bring the limb movements that contribute to doing the thing in question within the scope of [the] intention[...].” (2007b, 367-8). Conceptual analysis is a valuable tool in certain situations. It might help us get clear about the mechanics of a good baseball throw for instance; applied to a training regime, this might be very useful information. But the time to analyse the concept is not while one is playing a game of baseball. The fact that Knoblauch may have begun thinking in these terms while on the field is unfortunate for him, but does not provide grounds for rejecting the idea that concepts are in operation even when things are going well. Indeed, as we have seen, it is only because a subject has such a conceptual capacity that they can be aware of what they are doing while they are doing it (i.e. it is the reason that they do not just respond with ‘Did I do that?’ but rather ‘Throwing the ball, what does it look like?’ when asked what it is they are doing).

## 5. Heidegger's Conceptualism

Given how closely Dreyfus aligns his picture with Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological accounts of our perceptual experience, this criticism might appear to set the recognitional picture advocated in this thesis against these core continental thinkers in a way that would seem to entrench rather than dissolve what Dreyfus calls "the outmoded opposition between analytic and continental philosophy" (2005, 19-20). This is certainly what Dreyfus seems to think when he suggests the way to overcome this divide is for continental and analytic philosophers to "begin the challenging collaborative task of showing how our conceptual capacities grow out of our nonconceptual ones – how the ground floor of pure perception and receptive coping supports the conceptual upper stories of the edifice of knowledge" (2005, 19-20). Since the argument of the last section has been that there is no such question to answer – that our absorbed coping skills are instances of conceptual capacities in operation – this could seem to put in jeopardy the possibility of a reconciliation of the two schools.

Yet there are good reasons for thinking that this is not the case. We have already seen that Heidegger's own account of absorbed coping is compatible with a conceptualist account (at least in the sense outlined in this thesis). As we saw, the fact that Heidegger does not deny awareness to absorbed coping but rather gives such awareness a distinct form with the concept of *Umsicht* or circumspection, brings his account within the scope of the argument of the A Deduction. For the only way that awareness of *any* form is possible is if we have something general in terms of which we can unite a manifold of acts – something that can only be provided by a conceptual capacity. By itself this might imply only that Heidegger's picture is *tacitly* conceptualist, i.e. he falls *prey* to the argument of the A Deduction, rather than it being a position that he actively holds. However, Heidegger's own account is not only compatible with, but can be seen as a species of conceptualism.

Take, for instance, this passage from the lecture course *The History of the Concept of Time* which – other than its distinctively Heideggerian idiolect – could almost have been written by McDowell:

[O]ur comportments are in actual fact pervaded through and through by assertions, that they are always performed in some form of expressness. It is also a matter of fact that our simplest perceptions and constitutive states are already *expressed*, even more, are *interpreted* in a certain way. What is primary and original here? It is not so much that we see the objects and things but rather that we first talk about them. To put it more precisely: *we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what one says about the matter.*

(1985, 56; emphasis added to final sentence)

It is hard to see how this can be taken as anything other than a form of conceptualism. Heidegger even introduces it in a similar way to McDowell, positioning it in opposition to a “mythological account of evidence as psychic feeling or psychic datum” (ibid, 59). Of course, the context is different – Heidegger is not directly interested in the epistemological status of the myth, but rather the phenomenological emptiness of the claim – however the position reached is nonetheless the same. This is no superficial connection either, for conceptualism is at the heart of Heidegger’s account. This is particularly clear in his notion of ‘discourse’, namely the totality of meanings in terms of which we always already understand the world (1962, H162). He suggests that such meaning “must be conceived as the formal-existential [i.e. transcendental] framework of the disclosedness [awareness of things *as* things] which belongs to understanding” (1962, H151). This is just the position that was reached in chapter two: empirical concepts are a necessary condition for the possibility of our perceptual awareness of things *as* things. It is as a phenomenological result of this necessity that “[all] our comportments, lived experiences taken in the broadest sense [i.e. including the ready-to-hand], are through and through expressed experiences; even if they are not uttered in words...” (1985, 48).

As Golob writes, in presenting Heidegger as a conceptualist in this way, we are at risk of “missing what is distinctive about Heidegger’s position – if his position really is so close to [an account like] McDowell’s, then why is the whole baroque apparatus of texts like [*Being and Time*]

necessary?” (2014a, 73). But we need not consider this classification of Heidegger’s position as conceptualist as one of equivalency or usurpation. In fact, presenting Heidegger as a conceptualist in the specific sense outlined in this thesis can help clarify key aspects of his account that can otherwise remain obscured by the ‘baroque apparatus’. The point of such a redescription is not to show that what Heidegger says is *already* contained in a picture like McDowell’s, but to help us understand just what it is that is distinctive about Heidegger’s account in the first place.

Indeed, as Heidegger himself suggests, by suggesting that his main aim was to reveal the phenomenon of absorbed coping, we are at risk of missing the key issue:

I attempted in *Being and Time* to provide a preliminary characterisation of the phenomenon of world by interpreting the way in which we at first and for the most part move about in our everyday world... In and through this initial characterisation of the phenomenon of world the task is to press on and point out the phenomenon of world as a problem. It never occurred to me, however, to try and claim or prove with this interpretation that the essence of man consists in the fact that he know how to handle knives and forks or use the tram.

(1995, 177)

The structure of absorbed coping is supposed to be a guiding thread to help us recognise a more fundamental issue, namely that we find ourselves always already in a meaningful world. As Sheehan argues, Heidegger’s main interest is in articulating the conditions of the possibility of this phenomenon (i.e. meaningful presence as such), rather than asserting the priority of one form of such meaningful presence (2014, *passim*). It is true that Heidegger suggests that explicit propositional judgment is a derivative mode of comportment or intentionality (see 1962, §33), but that qualification is not supposed to suggest that such activity is somehow phenomenologically ‘inferior’. His point is rather that pragmatic coping is in a better position to reveal the phenomenon of ‘world’ than judgment as such.

Heidegger’s worry is that if we take judgment as our model for the way in which we relate to the world, we can overlook the way in which the world already shows up as meaningful. That is, if we take judgment as the *locus* of meaning, as the point as which meaning first emerges, then we risk obscuring the way in which it is based on a prior ‘disclosure’ (or recognition) or things as Sam Matthews



already meaningfully present. Heidegger makes this argument several places (see e.g. 1985, §6; 2010, §§12-3), but the following passage from *Being and Time* provides a fairly succinct summary:

All [explicit] interpretation is grounded on [prior] understanding. That which has been articulated as such in interpretation and sketched out beforehand in the understanding in general as something articulable, is the meaning. In so far as assertion ('judgment') is grounded on understanding and presents us with a derivative form in which an interpretation has been carried out, it too 'has' a meaning. Yet this meaning cannot be defined as something which occurs 'in' a judgment along with the judging itself.

(ibid, H154)

Rather than the moment at which meaning emerges, judgment involves the mere “‘taking of a stand’ (whether by acceptance or rejection)” on something already meaningfully ‘disclosed’ or recognised (ibid, H32). This disclosure of meaning, in other words, is already there in our experience of the world rather than something that emerges through the generation of a belief.

The reason for Heidegger’s focus on the ‘ready to hand’ is that when things break this background of passive recognition “is lit up, not as something never seen before, but as a totality constantly sighted beforehand in circumspection” (ibid, H75). That is, the malfunction of the tool makes the way in which it was passively being recognised explicit. A false judgment, by contrast, does not light up the background of prior recognition in the same way (since by definition I am going to be unaware that it is false). The point of the pragmatic focus, in other words, is to make clear that things are already meaningful, to bring to our attention their prior disclosure. The details of such coping are only of interest to the extent that they bear on this primary concern. Once we have this phenomenon of ‘world’ in view, we are in a position to ask after the conditions of its possibility and ‘trace the river back to its source’ (see 2008, 21).

To this extent, however, nothing that McDowell says in *Mind and World* – or indeed anything that I have argued in this thesis – is in opposition to what Heidegger describes in *Being and Time*. It is a key part of the conceptualist position that the world always already shows up as meaningful, i.e. that our recognitional capacities are *passively* drawn into operation. Of course, Heidegger’s and McDowell’s respective motives in pointing this out are different. McDowell’s focus is on helping us

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to get over an epistemological worry about the world's rationally bearing on thought, a problem that Heidegger is happy to dismiss as the result of a misunderstanding (see 1962, H217). Heidegger, by contrast, is interested in the conditions of the possibility of such meaningful presence, a topic which is not McDowell's focus (perhaps he would see this as a case of not knowing when to stop digging (see e.g. 1998, 249-250)). But to the extent that both are interested in the 'a priori' passivity of meaning, they are on the same page.

Indeed, it is important to recognise the extent to which Heidegger's aim in *Being and Time*, particularly in the first part of division one, is *heuristic*.<sup>74</sup> The aim is to get the reader see the fundamental phenomenon of world – i.e. that meaning always already *is* – in order to put them in a position to think about the conditions of its possibility. Thus, the important part of the text is not the 'baroque terminology', but the phenomenon being pointed to. The terminology is supposed to be *helpful* to the reader in seeing what Heidegger is talking about, not a labyrinth-like structure that is of value in itself.<sup>75</sup> Of course something's being helpful is relative to the audience in question. For a philosophical culture used to Neo-Kantian and phenomenological system building, Heidegger's neologisms and transcendental structures may have offered a way to overcome philosophical prejudices while still being written in a partially familiar style. But if the text becomes a *barrier* to seeing the phenomenon in question then it is not serving its purpose.

But if this is the case – and Heidegger's remark above about 'handling forks and riding the tram' suggests it is – then it is possible that McDowell's quietist, non-system building, account of the same phenomenon (i.e. the passive, a priori quality of meaning), is better placed to serve as a starting point for contemporary readers interested in addressing Heidegger's question of the conditions of the possibility of this phenomenon, than part one of *Being and Time* itself. The irony

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<sup>74</sup> As Weising suggests, phenomenology in general is like this in the sense that the aim is for the reader to confirm in their own experience what the phenomenologist is describing (2014, chapter two).

<sup>75</sup> As Kisiel points out, Heidegger shifts the terminology he uses constantly in the years leading up to the publication of *Being and Time* (1995).

is that in creating the baroque structure he does, Heidegger ends up *covering over* rather than revealing the a priori character of meaning for contemporary readers. In the context of a dominant reductive scientism and neuroscientific accounts of the physiology of our pragmatic dealings with things, absorbed coping becomes a case of ‘mindless’ bodies and brains acting on our behalf (see e.g. Dreyfus 2007b, 374). And so the phenomenon of meaningful presence vanishes, lost in a complex of synapses and nerve endings.<sup>76</sup>

However, once we have this phenomenon firmly in our sights with an account of prior and passive acts of recognition, we are in a good position to ask how such meaningful presence is possible. There is not the space here to answer to this question in anything approaching a satisfying way. However, some direction is provided by the suggestion, in chapter one, that the reason that beliefs are not merely generated in perceptual experience is our self-conscious awareness of the fallibility of our capacities. For it is precisely this self-conscious awareness that generates the logical or intentional distance between recognition and judgment. Heidegger calls our constant awareness of the potential for such a gap *die Lichtung* or ‘the clearing’ (1963, H133). As he writes:

When we talk in an ontically figurative way of the *lumen naturale* in man, we have in mind nothing other than the existential-ontological structure of this entity, that it is in such a way as to be its ‘there’ [in the sense that we are responsible for things being meaningfully present]. To say that it is ‘illuminated’ means that as Being-in-the-world [the human being] is cleared in itself, not through any other entity, but in such a way that it is itself the clearing. Only for an entity which is existentially cleared in this way does that which is present-at-hand become accessible in the light or hidden in the dark.

(ibid, H133)

In the last chapter it was suggested that this metaphor of ‘lighting’ could be taken almost literally: the image was a product of our recognition of the fallibility of our capacities. It is only because we are aware that things might not be as they appear to be that the idea of a perpetual image is

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<sup>76</sup> This is why, in his later work, Heidegger has a particular interest in topics like ‘cybernetics’ and ‘the framework’ or technological understanding of the world, since it threatens to eliminate the possibility of our thinking of meaningful presence as anything other than reactions in the brain (see e.g. ‘The Question Concerning Technology’ and ‘The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking’, both collected in *Basic Writings* (1993). Again, this is not to suggest that such reactions are inessential to such awareness, but rather that the vocabulary they are described in is not going to be able to capture the phenomenon of meaning as such. On this point see the previous chapter, §6.

meaningful. But in that case the reason we experience things as visually ‘lit up’ before us, is precisely because we are aware of our own fallibility; what Heidegger calls the “finitude of temporality” (ibid, H386).

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter has addressed two common ‘external’ critiques that are based on the phenomenology of perceptual experience. Both, if successful, would have threatened to provide independent grounds for at least partially rejecting the conceptualist picture. Yet in each case it has been suggested that we can accommodate the phenomenology they describe within a conceptualist framework. It was argued in the first case that the complexity of perceptual experience can be explained via the use of demonstratives and the picture of concepts as functions that they imply. Rather than seeing concepts merely in terms of disjunctive classifications that an object falls under or not, it was suggested that they link the objects that fall under them in terms of a functional ‘law of arrangement’. It is this feature of our conceptual capacities that demonstratives exploit. This also allowed us to account for the interrelated character of our conceptual capacities, since each concept could potentially operate as a variable within another function.

In the second case it was suggested that, contrary to Dreyfus’s suggestion, the phenomenology of absorbed coping could be captured more effectively when described as a case of conceptual capacities in operation. Rather than being *mindless*, our practical dealings with the world are characterised by a self-conscious awareness of what it is we are doing. Dreyfus’s error resulted from his assumption that “being direct and unreflective... [is] the same as being nonconceptual and nonminded” (Dreyfus 2007a, 355). But we need not see our conceptual capacities in this way. Most of the time recognition and judgment need not come apart: There need only be a standing capacity for a reflective stance where we actively reflect on the rational credentials of what it is we

ostensibly recognise. Indeed, as we saw, Heidegger himself is best understood as a conceptualist since his main interest is not in promoting a picture of human beings as ‘absorbed copers’, but in answering the question of how it is that such conceptual meaning (taking something *as* something) is possible in the first place.

## 6. Conclusion

This concluding chapter will be split into three sections. The first will offer an overview of the thesis as a whole, the second will present its original contributions, and the final section will then offer some potential directions for future research.

### 1. Summary

The central argument of this thesis has been that perceptual experience is constituted by conceptual capacities for recognition. The consequence of this account is that empirical meaning is a priori: things are always perceived as being some determinate way according to some set of empirical concepts. We *see* the reflection of the light on the floor, the rustling in the tree, the cat in the garden; *hear* “the north wind, the woodpecker tapping, the fire crackling” (Heidegger 1962, H163). The key benefit of framing perceptual experience in terms of capacities for recognition is that it makes clear the way in which the objects of such experience are always the things we find in the environment around us. To take the by now familiar example: *what* is recognised as falling under the concept ‘cardinal’ is simply the cardinal itself. There is no conceptual *shaping* of sensory consciousness mediating between the bird and my act of recognition. Rather, when things go well, such a capacity does not stop short of the object itself.

In the first chapter, recognition also served to clarify the relationship between McDowell’s and Travis’s pictures of perceptual experience. By casting McDowell’s account of conceptual capacities being passively being drawn into operation in terms of passive acts of recognition, it was possible to clarify the comparison between his picture and Travis’s account of recognition. The key difference between the two was that, for Travis, recognition implied judgment, while for McDowell, it did not. The difficulty for Travis was that such a picture of recognition rendered the subject

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unaware of the grounds of her perceptual beliefs, with the result that they appear to be merely *generated* in the subject in a law-bound way. It was thus hard to see how the subject could recognise her perceptual beliefs as something that *ought* to be believed, rather than something that she could simply not help believing. On such a model, an appeal to perceptual experience would not be able to stand as a justification for a belief: it would be a mere ‘exculpation’ as McDowell says.

Instead, it was suggested that we should follow McDowell and see recognition as *passive*, such that the subject need not judge that things are the way she ostensibly recognises them as being. This logical gap between recognition and judgment is made possible by the subject’s self-conscious awareness of the fallibility of her recognitional capacities. Such an awareness belongs exclusively to rational capacities, since only they are understood by their possessors as representing a norm. This means that, in a situation where the subject thinks that conditions are not favourable for a realisation of the capacity in question, they can withhold their judgment that things are as the capacity presents them as being. Conversely, if the subject thinks that conditions are favourable, then they can cite their capacity as a reason for their belief. Since she understands herself to have such a capacity and takes conditions to be good, she understands her judgment not only to be something that *she cannot help but believe*, but something that *one ought to believe*. Indeed, in cases where the act of recognition is a genuine exercise of the capacity, then such a judgment is able to stand as a truth-guaranteeing ground for belief, since, by definition, it represents things as they really are.

Chapter two suggested that Travis would be unlikely to accept this reading of his account. Instead of conceiving of his picture of recognition as a rationally groundless process of belief generation, Travis argues that it is based on a pre-conceptual form of visual awareness. The argument of the first chapter can seem to dismiss this possibility out of hand, appearing to assume

that whatever perceptual judgment is based on must have truth to transmit.<sup>77</sup> In order to demonstrate that this was not the case, the chapter used Kant's account of the threefold synthesis in the A version of the Deduction to show that any form of perceptual awareness will have a conceptual form. Essentially, the argument suggests that in order to be aware of an object in perceptual experience, the subject requires something in terms of which she can recognise it as the same over time. Insofar as it must unite a manifold of acts, any such self-consciously held capacity is going to be conceptual.

This reading of the A Deduction constitutes the chief contribution of this thesis. It shows how we can read Kant as providing us with a conceptualist account of perceptual experience that avoids presenting the activity of conceptual capacities in perception as shapings of sensory consciousness. Rather than sense data, what are united (or synthesised) on this reading are the individual acts of recognition themselves, where the objects of such acts are simply those objects that we are perceptually related to in the environment before us. This clearly distinguishes the account of perceptual experience given here clearly from other readings that describe the activity of the productive imagination in terms of functions for synthesis that join bits of intuitional sense data together, such that those bits of data themselves form the material substrate of that awareness. The problem with any such reading is that it results in a picture of conceptual capacities that makes it appear impossible for us to know about the 'external world'.

Nonetheless, as we saw, this argument for the necessity of conceptual capacities for perceptual awareness still left open the possibility that perceptual experience could be constituted by a base level of such capacities. This was the position not only of the 'categorical minimalists' who suggested that perceptual experience was a product of the schematisation of the categories, but McDowell himself in some of his more recent work. Instead of seeing the content of perceptual

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<sup>77</sup> To be clear, this misunderstands the nature of rational capacities: what justifies my forming a belief on the basis of a particular instance of the realisation of my recognitional capacity is that capacity itself (i.e. that I have a general capacity for recognising that kind of thing), not a particular bit of experiential content with 'truth to transmit'.



experience as containing everything that it allows the subject to know non-inferentially, he now suggests that perceptual experience proper is constituted only by ‘non-discursive’ common and proper sensibles. As was shown, it is difficult to underestimate just how drastic of a shift this is in McDowell’s position. Such a change not only upends the whole structure of *Mind and World* (the two premises that McDowell gives up constitute the core thesis of that work), but seems to eliminate its therapeutic appeal. In place of comments about unproblematic openness to reality, we are left with descriptions of discursive carvings of non-discursive intuitions. Instead of showing us the way out of Wittgenstein’s fly bottle, such comments would seem to leave us trapped inside (2009, §309; also see chapter one, §1).

The key concern of chapter three was therefore to demonstrate that McDowell was wrong to make these concessions. As argued, one of the key issues for any version of perceptual minimalism is that there does not seem to be any guaranteed base level of content for us to draw on. McDowell’s suggestion that the base level of contents should be seen in terms of what we see *of* what we see was particularly problematic in this regard. For just what we see *of* what we see will in part depend on what we (ostensibly) recognise as forming the second part of that formulation. Properties like colour and shape are not independent of our richer conceptual capacities. If I incorrectly ‘recognise’ the patch on the path ahead as spilled lime rather than light filtering down from the canopy, then I will see it as shaded white rather than lit up brown as I should. It was thus argued that, instead of independent layers, perceptual experience forms a complex totality of interrelated conceptual capacities, a phenomenon that Cassirer called the ‘symbolic pregnance’ of perceptual experience. As he writes, this fact forms the “true pulse of consciousness, whose secret is precisely that every beat strikes a thousand connections” (1957, 203).

The failure of the categorical minimalist account at the end of chapter three, however, left us with a problem in accounting for the origin of our empirical conceptual capacities. The argument showed that the pure concepts of the understanding are not constitutive of perceptual experience, Sam Matthews 185 of 200 19 September 2019

but rather mark out the *form* of our recognitional capacities. The consequence of this is that empirical concepts are shown to be a necessary part of perceptual experience, rather than something that can be based on a prior ‘pure’ conceptualisation of intuition. It is this circumstance that generates what chapter four called ‘the bootstrap problem’, for placing empirical concepts in a transcendental position seems to result in the paradoxical situation that empirical concepts are a condition of the possibility of the very same experience they are drawn from. We were left with two options: we could either drop the first claim – that empirical conceptual capacities are a condition of the possibility of perceptual experience – or the second – that our initial empirical conceptual capacities are drawn from experience.

Ginsborg took the first path, suggesting that in forming our initial empirical conceptual capacities we take the otherwise merely psychological synthetic activity of the imagination as exemplary. The problem with this kind of approach, however, is that it falls prey to the argument of the A Deduction and is unable to explain how it is that the subject can be aware of her psychological activity as the same over time. As an alternative, it was suggested that we drop the claim that all our empirical capacities are drawn from perceptual experience. Although this might seem to imply that we have an innate set of empirical conceptual capacities (i.e. capacities that could have been otherwise but that we nonetheless have innately by means of a contingent process of evolution or design), instead it was argued that we should see our initial conceptual capacities as emerging from dispositions that we obtain as children by mimicking those with fully-fledged rational capacities. It was suggested that through practice we could gradually come to evaluate our own dispositions in the light of the norm that the capacity represents. This had the double benefit of making it clear how the capacities could rightly be said to be empirical, since they are obtained through exposure to other language users, while also showing how the capacities did not rely on the same experience they were a condition of the possibility of, since the dispositions were formed at a stage of development prior to perceptual experience.

With the main internal obstacle out of the way, the final chapter addressed two external, phenomenological objections. The first argued that perceptual experience was too fine-grained to be captured by conceptual capacities. There is simply too much detail in perceptual experience to be expressed linguistically. McDowell's account of demonstrative concepts gave us a way to avoid these nonconceptual implications, however. His suggestion was that demonstrative concepts like 'this shade' should be seen as partially constitutive of that experience itself. Although this seemed to go against the most obvious explanatory picture of demonstratives, it was argued that recognising things in terms of demonstrative concepts was in fact part of what it is to have a recognitional capacity. Drawing on Cassirer's account of concepts as functions, it was suggested that to recognise something as falling under a concept is not only to recognise it as falling within the set that the concept marks out disjunctively, but to recognise it as falling under the concept in a particular way (i.e. as having a particular position within that set).

The second phenomenological objection, by contrast, made the opposite claim, suggesting that a conceptualist picture attributes too much content to perceptual experience rather than too little. The argument was that the phenomenology of absorbed coping means that concepts are not only absent from our pragmatic dealings with things much of the time, but that they actively disrupt the flow of our activity when they are. The problem with this objection was twofold. First, it failed to capture the phenomenology accurately. The account suggests that our pragmatic coping is *mindless*, but seems clear that even while we are absorbed in our activity we are nonetheless aware of what it is that we are doing. Such awareness, however, insofar as it requires the self-conscious awareness of a unified manifold of acts, can only have a conceptual structure. Second, it misrepresented conceptual capacities as solely reflective and distanced. Although it is true that conceptual capacities grant us the capacity to step back and evaluate the rational credentials of something, this is only a standing capacity. Most of the time recognition and judgment need not come apart.

The final section then argued that, contrary to Dreyfus's suggestion, Heidegger himself is best seen as a conceptualist. His concern is not primarily the phenomenology of absorbed coping, but rather the phenomenon of 'world', namely the a priori quality of empirical meaning. The focus on the ready to hand in *Being and Time* was shown to be primarily a way get us to consider that phenomenon. In this regard, Heidegger's account need not be understood as opposed to the account given in this thesis. Indeed, it was argued that the logical gap between recognition and judgment was at least partially equivalent to what Heidegger calls *die Lichtung* or the clearing, as a condition of the possibility of our awareness of the meaningful presence of things.

## 2. Originality

Although this account takes *Mind and World* as its starting point, it moves beyond that work in three key ways. First, by specifying the kind of conceptual capacities involved in perceptual experience as capacities for *recognition*, it removes any ambiguity as to how we should see these capacities as operating in perceptual experience. To say that our conceptual capacities are passively drawn into operation is only to say that things in the environment in front of us are recognised passively as being a certain way; it is not to say that such capacities passively 'mould', 'shape', or 'carve' that which we receive in sensibility. McDowell does make this point in *Mind and World* when he says that we should see "capacities that belong to spontaneity [as] already operative in receptivity, rather than working on something independently supplied to them by receptivity" (1996, 61). But the fact that in more recent work he appears partially to rescind this claim demonstrates just how nebulous the idea of 'conceptual capacities being passively drawn into operation' threatens to be if we are not clear about the specific form it takes.

Second, the reading of the A Deduction presents a novel defence of the conceptualist thesis, which eliminates its vulnerability to relationalist critique. Rather than relying solely on the 'Myth of

the Given' – where conceptualism is shown to be a condition of the possibility for perceptual experience to play a justificatory role in our epistemic practices – the argument from the A Deduction shows that perceptual awareness itself requires conceptual capacities to be operative. This denies a relationalist appeal to a pre-conceptual visual awareness in order to provide the subject with grounds for their perceptual judgement, thus revealing the relationalist picture to be a case of the myth. If the possibility of a pre-conceptual form of awareness is left open, by contrast, then it can appear that the conceptualist is simply presupposing that the grounds of perceptual judgement must be conceptual in the way that Travis suggests (2018, 39).

Third, the thesis gives an account of and attempts to answer the 'Bootstrap Problem'. This is a fundamental problem for any richly contentful version of conceptualism, but it is at best tangentially addressed in *Mind and World*. Although some commentators take McDowell's account of 'Second Nature' to be his official response to this problem (see especially Ginsborg 2006c), in reality that concept targets a reductive conception of what counts as natural rather than accounting for concept acquisition as such (even if this is the form that Second Nature takes in rational animals). His appeal to the notion of *Bildung* comes closer to offering a reply, but the concept presented in *Mind and World* is in a fairly nascent state and does little to remove the air of paradox that emerges from placing empirical concepts in a transcendental position. The account given here, by contrast, addresses the challenge head on, providing a way to drop the claim that our initial conceptual capacities must be drawn from the very same experience that they make possible.

Beyond *Mind and World*, the account also contributes to Kant scholarship, not only in its reading of the A Deduction, but in arguing against the idea that Kant advocates a form of 'categorical minimalism'. The suggestion that Kant takes the categories as capable of constituting constitutive of perceptual experience in the absence of any other empirical concepts is more or less the received reading for conceptualist accounts of the *Critique* (see for example Wolff 1963, 118ff; Allison 1968, 180ff; Makkreel 1990, 30ff; Griffith 2010, 332ff; Connolly 2014, 332ff). It is clear

from both Wolff's (1963, 118) and Allison's (1968, 180n) account that concern about the bootstrap problem is a key reason behind this, but a worry about being unable to account for the origin of conceptual capacities does not lend the picture any support if the categories are incapable of playing that role. While this thesis is not original in arguing against categorical minimalism (see for example Ginsborg 2006c; Bauer 2012), it is unique both in the way it supports this claim – via the reading of the A Deduction – and in the way that it places empirical concepts in an explicitly transcendental role.

Finally, the thesis also makes a unique claim to the kinship between McDowell's and Heidegger's accounts of perceptual experience. Although it is far from the first account to make such a connection (see especially Dennis 2012; Schear 2013b; Golob 2014a, 30-33), the specific connection it draws between Heidegger's notion of the clearing and the gap between recognition and judgment (produced by the subject's self-conscious awareness of the fallibility of their capacities) is new. Such a conclusion suggests that there are grounds for comprehending a deeper connection between the two thinkers beyond a similarity in the way that they talk about the contents of perceptual experience.

### 3. Future Research

The link with Heidegger that this thesis concludes with offers perhaps the most obvious direction for future research. There are a number of directions that this could take. The first is to identify further, more specific connections between McDowell and Heidegger. For instance, Heidegger's account of attunement potentially offers a way of expanding on the structure of recognition. Although this was discussed in this thesis itself, it seems clear that the way we recognise things as being is not merely arbitrary, but occurs – as Heidegger suggest – according to the specific interests and concerns we have. As I walk down the street, I do not recognise everything that there is to recognise, as most of what there is to see is not relevant to my activity. Thus, although recognitional

capacities are *passive*, they are nonetheless realised according to a specific structure. This kind of feature of our perceptual experience can only emerge phenomenologically, and accounting for it in terms of capacities for recognition has potentially ‘therapeutic’ benefits for those who are resistant to the idea that conceptual capacities can be at play in absorbed coping.

The second way in which the links between McDowell and Heidegger might be developed is through a broader comparison between the respective ways in which they resist a reductive scientism. Both are concerned with giving us a way of placing meaning back into nature and resisting the idea that a nomological description of the world in terms of interacting particles is the only one that matters. In McDowell’s case, this takes the form of a quietist expansion of the idea of something’s being natural, while Heidegger places human existence in an explicitly transcendental or ‘ontologically grounding’ role with regards to the natural sciences (in the sense that it is only because the world is meaningfully present that natural science is possible). There is a question to be asked about just how compatible these two approaches are and to what degree they can be said to complement each other.

Another possible route for further research is via the argument that this thesis finds in the A Deduction. The argument was used here in a primarily ‘outward looking’ way, towards our awareness of things. But the argument applies inwardly as well, towards the empirical understanding that we have of ourselves as in some way the same over time. It is therefore possible that this argument has implications for discussions of agency. For instance, the apparent circularity involved in self-conscious awareness – as explored in Henrich’s essay ‘Fichte’s Original Insight’ (1982) – is very similar in structure to the Bootstrap Problem, in the sense that something is posited which appears to be the condition of the possibility of itself. It is possible that the solution to the Bootstrap Problem presented by this thesis might offer some direction in addressing that issue.

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