

## McDowell, Pain, and Subjectivism<sup>1</sup>

NB. This is a **draft only**. Final version forthcoming in **Philosophical Topics**, Spring 2009.

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**Abstract:** It can seem natural to say both that, when in pain, we undergo experiences representing pains, and that the pains represented are dependent on being thus represented. Here I focus on McDowell's neglected version of this view, developed as part of his general approach to mind and world. As well as registering worries about whether he can accommodate animal pain and the location of pains, I suggest that McDowell's view may be viciously circular, and I object that his subjectivist conception of the subject-matter of pain experiences means that they cannot have the presentational, rationalising, and classificatory character McDowell thinks they have.

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“When in pain, we are sensorily aware of pains.” That can seem an utterly natural idea. In the 1980s and 90s, John McDowell elaborated a version of it, which can be summarised as follows. When in pain, one's experience presents a pain to one *as* a pain; the pain is dependent on being thus represented; experiences representing pains are concept-involving, classificatory episodes, and are thus equipped not merely to cause, but to rationalise the judgements they prompt, e.g. that oneself is in pain.<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, McDowell's defence of this view has been largely ignored, despite his importance and the attention much of his work has attracted. This is a shame, not only because of how tempting—and significant—is the idea that we are sensorily aware of pains, but also because of the interesting connections between McDowell's distinctive elaboration of it and his broader view of experience and thought, as set out in *Mind and World* especially. Not before time, then, I think we should engage seriously with McDowell's view of pain. Hence the present paper.<sup>3</sup>

A central aim of mine is to get McDowell's view into focus. His own exposition is both dispersed amongst various writings and demanding, not least because of his extensive use of such McDowellian language as “the space of concepts” and “the realm of law”, phrases which often can be profitably cashed out in other terms. Hence I devote a good deal of the paper—its first half—to exegesis, unpacking McDowell's view and setting it within the context both of his wider outlook in *Mind and World* and of other views of experience and sensations. In §5, and for the rest of the paper, I turn to evaluation. Ultimately, I suggest that McDowell's view fails, but for interesting reasons—concerning, for instance, circularity (§6) and, centrally, his attempt to combine a subjectivist view of what pain experiences

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<sup>1</sup> For comments and discussion, I am extremely grateful to Carol Bain, George Bain, Bill Brewer, Bill Child, Ron Chrisley, Fabian Dorsch, Adrian Haddock, Mark Johnston, Fiona Macpherson, Michael Morris, Alan Thomas, and audiences at the 2007 McDowell workshop, “Having the World in View”, hosted by the University of Kent, and at the Centre for Research in Cognitive Science (COGS) at the University of Sussex.

<sup>2</sup> See McDowell's 1989, 1991, and 1994 (especially lectures 1 and 2).

<sup>3</sup> McDowell's view at least of perceptual experiences is changing somewhat, although he still regards them as having conceptual (albeit non-propositional) content. This paper focuses not on his emerging view, but on the account he sets out in his 1989, 1991, and 1994, since he models his conception of pain experiences on that account. So even when I speak of McDowell and his views in the present-tense, I am referring to the views expressed in those writings.

represent with a conception of them as presentational, rationalising, and classificatory (§§7-9). If McDowell is to retain that conception, I suggest, he needs instead a view on which what is represented when we are in pain is not pains but something objective.

### I. Sense-Data and the Inner-Object Conception

The sense-datum view of visual experience provides a useful starting point, for it is almost universally rejected yet in certain ways resembles the view I am attributing to McDowell. Why should we take his view any more seriously?

According to one version of the sense datum view, its looking to you as though there is a red cube in front of you, for example, consists in there being a red\* cuboid\* sense-datum to which you are related by inner awareness, where a sense-datum is an awareness-dependent item. Here “red\*” and “cuboid\*” are supposed to express sense-datum properties analogous to being red and being cuboid, while inner awareness is supposed to be a relation of sensory awareness akin to perceptual awareness but relating us to awareness-dependent objects. The view, then, is that its looking to you as though there is an external object with given properties consists in your having non-perceptual but sensory awareness of a sense-datum whose properties are analogous to those the external object looks to have.

Why is this almost universally rejected? One worry is that it renders empirical knowledge of the external world impossible. Another concern—and a source of this epistemological worry<sup>4</sup>—centres on the widespread idea that visual experiences have representational content. The sense-datum approach won’t do as an alternative to that idea if, as many think, the idea is indispensable; but nor will it do as an *account* of such content—an account claiming, for example, that one’s experience representing *that* there is a red cube in front of oneself consists in one’s being aware of a sense-datum that is red\* and cuboid\*, or perhaps in one’s inner awareness *representing* a sense-datum as red\* and cuboid\*. The latter account is better than the former, but it still won’t do, not least because it is unclear how representing a sense-datum as being one way could amount to representing an external object as being another. Perhaps it would help if sense-data suitably *resembled* external objects, or if we could explain how a subject *ought* to take his sense-data; but it is doubtful we can make sense of either idea.

Given these difficulties, it is tempting to be dismissive of the following view of pain:

#### **Inner-object account of being in pain**

S’s being in pain (or undergoing a “pain experience”, as I shall put it) consists in there existing a pain of which S has inner awareness, where pains are dependent on the episodes of awareness whose objects they are.

To some, it is obvious that the sense-datum and inner-object views stand or fall together. But, actually, the inner-object view is much more commonsensical than the sense-datum view; indeed it can seem to be more a piece of folk psychology than philosophical theory. Consider our ordinary talk. As well as speaking of being *in* pain, we speak of *feeling pains*. It can also seem that we speak as if pains consist in

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<sup>4</sup> See §2 below.

being represented. Certainly, many of us would balk at the idea that, although it seemed to someone as though he felt a pain, what he felt was not a pain but an itch or even nothing at all. Crucially, moreover, pain experiences lack the epistemological role of visual experiences, hence the inner-object view is no threat to our knowledge of the external world. Nor need it invoke the idea of mediated representation or such property analogies as the sense-datum theorist proposes between being cuboid and being cuboid\*. So the inner-object view looks considerably less objectionable than the sense-datum view.

Given this, we should not be too shocked that McDowell opposes sense-data but embraces a version of the inner-object view, a version—as we shall see in §4—intended to improve on traditional “givenist” variants. Now, to appreciate McDowell’s refinements, and his version’s motivations and details, we must get in focus his conception of perceptual experience. For while the inner-object view certainly bears certain similarities to the sense-datum view (notwithstanding the differences we’ve identified), McDowell models his version on a very different conception of perceptual experience.

## 2. McDowell on Outer Experience

McDowell aspires to think about pain (or, as he puts it, “inner sense” generally) in parallel with perceptual experience (“outer sense”) to “the fullest extent possible” (1994: 22). This section sets out his conception of perceptual experience.<sup>5</sup>

McDowell’s view of perceptual experience is driven by what I call his “normative empiricism”:<sup>6</sup>

### Normative empiricism

Subjects can think about the external world (have thoughts which the world makes true or false) only because it *rationaly constrains* their thinking in the sense that their reasons for some of their judgments about it are themselves world-involving impressions; again, only because world-involving impressions themselves directly rationalise some of their judgements, in particular judgements endorsing those experiences’ contents (e.g. that that is a red cube).<sup>7</sup>

It will be useful to bring out three aspects of this view. First, implicit in it is the idea that experiences are, as I shall put it, “presentational”. They present the world to their subjects as being a certain way.<sup>8</sup> This goes beyond saying they have content. Desires have content but are not presentational. The point rather concerns what you might regard as the “force” of experiences. While they are not judgements—endorsements of content—they are in a certain sense reality-claiming. They present the world as being a certain way to their subjects, thereby inviting their subjects to endorse their content, to judge that that way is indeed how the world is.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See note 3 above.

<sup>6</sup> I eschew McDowell’s term, “minimal empiricism” (1994: xii) partly because of its tendentiousness, but also because normative empiricism might—even though I think McDowell would endorse it—go beyond what he wants to include under the label “minimal empiricism”.

<sup>7</sup> See McDowell 1994: lecture 1 and passim. Sometimes McDowell (e.g. 1994: xii, xvii) obscures the distinction between explanandum and explanans by expressing both in terms of the “answerability” of thought to the world. What gets obscured is the distinction between the idea that thoughts stand in normative relations to the world in the sense that the world can make them correct or incorrect, and the idea that the world, by impressing itself on subjects in experience, rationalises our thinkings.

<sup>8</sup> See McDowell 1994: 11, 26. Travis (2004: 59) expresses the point, which he rejects, in terms of experiences’ having a “face value”. See also Davies 1992: 23.

<sup>9</sup> One might doubt whether experiences, as against persons, say, are the sorts of things that *could* present the world as being such and such a way to a subject. Although I think this is an interesting worry, I shall set it aside in this paper.

Second, experiences must not merely invite such judgements, nor merely cause them. They must rather be their subjects' *reasons* for judging. They must, as I put it above, *rationalise* judgements endorsing them—where “rationalising” refers not to the providing of a certain (perspectival, normative) kind of explanation, but rather to a relation (like that between desires and actions, for example) which such explanations invoke.

Experiences, finally, must *themselves directly* rationalise judgings, on this picture. It is not enough for experiences to be the objects or causes of episodes that rationalise. An experience does *not* appropriately rationalise a judgement that things are thus and so when that judgement is the inferential upshot of a judgement that the experience has occurred and is of a type correlated with things being thus and so (1994: 144-5, 164-5),<sup>10</sup> or when the experience merely *causes* an episode that in turn rationalises the judgement that things are thus and so (1994: 139-46). Rather, the rational transition must be from the experience itself to the judgement endorsing it; and it must be direct, not mediated by judgements about world-experience correlations.

Such, then, is the role that normative empiricism accords perceptual experiences. But how must such experiences be in order to play that role? As I understand him, McDowell requires the following. First, experiences are and must be passive, unlike judgings, which are intentional actions—“active” episodes, as McDowell puts it, responsible exercises of “freedom” or “spontaneity” (1994: 5, 11, 13). By contrast with judgements, experiences must be episodes which happen *to* us, episodes in which we are “saddled with content” (1994: 10).

Second, experiences must have conceptual content. For McDowell, concept possession is a matter of the possession of a network of capacities for judging on the basis of reasons, which in turn requires an acquired language.<sup>11</sup> These demanding capacities, he thinks, are operative not just in thinking, but also in the undergoing of experiences, hence an experience can be correctly attributed only to a subject who possesses the concepts required to articulate its content (1994: 51, 56-60, 66). McDowell is led to this “conceptualist” view, as I shall call it, by his normative empiricism. For, while experiences are not themselves intentional actions, they can directly rationalise, he thinks, only if their content is not *utterly* beyond the realm of such action, the realm of “responsible freedom” or “rational enquiry” (1994: 53). And he thinks that what gives them a foot-hold in that realm is their involvement of our conceptual capacities. For “responsible freedom” is the hallmark of such capacities. They are, after all, capacities for intentionally judging on the basis of reasons, and their possessors are under a standing obligation to reflect on the rational sensitivities in which they consist and to “refashion” them if necessary (1994: 12-13, 125).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, McDowell, on my reading, thinks experiences can be presentational and rationalising—inviting and being reasons for endorsements of their contents—only because they are world-involving

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<sup>10</sup> McDowell thinks this is the way bodily feelings rationalise judgements about organic ailments (1994: 145). Contrast (at least regarding bodily disorder) the perceptualist view I introduce in §4 below.

<sup>11</sup> See McDowell 1994: 13, 29, 34, 47, 165, 184-6.

<sup>12</sup> See also McDowell 1994: 8, 11, 42, 52.

impressions in the disjunctivist's sense. Call cases of veridical perception “good cases”, cases of hallucination and illusion “bad cases”, and the experiences they respectively involve “good” and “bad” experiences. Disjunctivism, as I shall use the term, takes good and bad experiences to be constitutively different. It denies that a good experience is the effect of the perceived fact such that, if the good experience had been brought about in certain other ways, it would instead have been a bad experience. According to disjunctivism, a good experience rather *consists in* the perceiving of the fact; as McDowell puts it, it is “the fact itself impressing itself on a perceiver” (1994: 112-113).

It is not uncontroversial that this thesis figures in *Mind and World*, but the textual evidence is compelling.<sup>13</sup> A step towards disjunctivism is McDowell's claim that good experiences' contents simply are worldly facts (1994: 24-29). But since the same applies to true judgements, he is clear that something further is needed to underwrite the “image of openness ... appropriate for experience in particular” (1994: 29). What is needed, he appears to think, is a conception of good experiences—the “genuinely subjective states of affairs involved in perception” (1994: 112, 113)—as not “presentiment[s]” (1994: 112), “emissaries” (1994: 143), or indeed anything that could also be had in a bad case (1994: 112-113), but rather as cases of “the fact itself impressing itself on a perceiver” (1994: 112-113)—again, states of affairs “constituted by a subject's letting ... the objective world reveal itself to her” (1994: 112, 143). Of course “impression”-talk is ambiguous between what is impressed and the impressing of it, but McDowell intends the latter. So his idea is not that in perception the world causes in us experiences, but rather that a good experience *is* a fact's impressing itself on us. That is the point of his distancing himself from those who pack “complexity” into the idea that “impressions ... impose rational demands on our empirical thinking” (139)—that is, those who (even if not in these terms) “separate” impressions from “appearings”, where impressions are the “world's impacts on our senses” (1994: 142) and appearings the conceptually contentful experiences that rationalise thought (1994: 141-145). McDowell finds this separation in Wilfrid Sellars, who takes impressions to be the mere causes of appearings (McDowell 1994: 139, 141), and in Donald Davidson, who—even if he wanted to allow that impressions are appearings—is committed to taking the notions of impressions and appearings to be two “radically different modes of conceptualisation” (McDowell 1994: 145).<sup>14</sup> Against Sellars and Davidson, McDowell's point is that the impressing of a fact on a subject is not what *causes* what rationalises. It is itself—and as such—what rationalises.<sup>15</sup>

So I take it that disjunctivism figures in *Mind and World* and that its point is to “underwrite” the “image of openness ... appropriate for experience in particular” (1994: 29)—that is, on my reading, to

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<sup>13</sup> The following is motivated by an objection Adrian Haddock made in correspondence. The crucial parts of McDowell 1994 are lecture 2 (especially 25-29), lecture 6, §3 (111-113), and afterword 1, §5 (137-46).

<sup>14</sup> See also McDowell 1994: 98, 139-40. Appearings, on the conception McDowell attributes to Sellars and makes available to Davidson, look rather like the passive entertainings of content I mention in the next paragraph. Given Davidson says that only beliefs can rationalise beliefs, if he wants to “acknowledge a grounding role for appearings” (McDowell 1994: 140) Davidson will have to take appearings to be a class of beliefs. But McDowell is clear that even if Davidson were, more appropriately, to characterise appearings as something other than beliefs—for example, as passive episodes that do not involve the endorsement of content—he would not have what is needed unless he also conceived them—qua appearings—as the impressings of facts on a subject (McDowell 1994: 140).

<sup>15</sup> For “as such”, see McDowell 1994: 141, 145. For McDowell's articulation of theses at least akin to the disjunctivist view I am here identifying, see McDowell 1982 and 1986.

underwrite the presentational, rationalising role of good experiences.<sup>16</sup> To underwrite this role, after all, McDowell arguably *needs* to advert to more than the passivity and true, conceptual contents of good experiences.<sup>17</sup> Suppose that you bang your head and for a minute cannot stop entertaining the content that snow is white; this episode neither invites nor gives you reason to judge that snow is indeed white. Why so, given the episode is involuntary, conceptually contentful, and true? Because, on my reading of McDowell, it is not the *impressing* of a fact on you.

In passing, it is worth noting Bill Brewer's related account of the rationalising role of experience (1999: ch. 6). For Brewer, the crucial thing is that, when perceiving, you appreciate that perception involves "interrogation" of your environment in the sense that you fix such enabling conditions as the direction of your gaze and then, as it were, let the world determine your experience's demonstrative contents, hence the contents of any judgements endorsing those experiences. Again, you must appreciate that your experiences involve modes of presentation that are available to you—given the enabling conditions—only because of how the world independently is.

So we now have in place a sketch of McDowell's view of perceptual experience. His is, to summarise, a view on which good experiences "inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity" (1994: 24), on which, that is, by being passive and world-involving impressions, on the one hand, and yet implicating their subjects' conceptual capacities, on the other, perceptual experiences are themselves equipped to rationalise directly judgements endorsing their contents, judgements that things are as they are presented as being. Although telegraphic, this sketch will suffice for our purposes. How, though, does any of it bear on pain?

### 3. McDowell on Inner Experience

McDowell's conception of perceptual experience bears on the pain case by way of the following parallel:

To give impressions of "inner sense" the right role in justifying judgements, we need to conceive them, like impressions of "outer sense", as themselves already possessing conceptual content; to supply the necessary limit to the freedom of spontaneity, we need to insist that they are indeed impressions, products of receptivity ... [again] passive occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation ... [W]e should connect "inner experience" with conceptual capacities, so as to think about "inner sense" in parallel with "outer sense" to the fullest extent that is possible. (1994: 21-22)

I take it sensation experiences are amongst impressions of "inner sense", and perceptual experiences are impressions of "outer sense". Hence the idea seems to be that, just as thought about the external world

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<sup>16</sup> What McDowell appeals to immediately after mentioning the need to underwrite "the image of openness" is "the distinctive passivity of experience" (1994: 29). Why, then, do I claim he thinks "openness" requires not just passivity, but a disjunctivist conception of good experiences? Not only because something else is needed, as I go on to suggest in the text, but because later in *Mind and World* McDowell clearly links his notion of "openness"—or, again, his notion of experiences as "transparent" "glimpses of reality", as against "opaque" "intermediaries"—with the disjunctivist conception I am attributing to him. See, for example, McDowell 1994: 111-113, 142-5. As I am assuming, moreover, the idea of "openness" for McDowell does seem to include the idea of the presentational and rationalising character of experience. Conceptions on which experiences involve openness to the world are contrasted by McDowell with conceptions on which they are "intermediaries", and the effect of conceiving them as intermediaries, we're told, would be that we could not make sense of their "*purporting to tell us anything*, whether truthfully or not" (1994: 144, my emphasis). Similarly, Davidson's view, which ends up construing experiences as "opaque" in McDowell's sense (1994: 145), is said to generate a coherentism which is "genuinely *unconstrained*" (1994: 144, my emphasis). See also McDowell 1994: 141-2.

<sup>17</sup> Brewer recognises this at his 1999 (185). My point is that McDowell *does* advert to more.

requires the direct rationalisation of certain perceptual judgements by perceptual experiences, so too our thought about our own sensations requires the direct rationalisation of certain sensation judgements by sensation experiences. And, in both cases, the idea goes, this requires the relevant experiences to be conceptually contentful.

But what do pain experiences represent? In terms of “item recognised and what it is recognised to be”, McDowell claims, “what I feel is a pain” (1989: 286). Again, drawing a distinction between what I shall call “the person-concept”, *being in pain*, and the “sensation-concept”, *being a pain*, he insists it is “overkill” to think that only the person-concept figures in the relevant contents (1989: 284, n. 8). Rather, someone in pain is “encountering a particular” (1989: 284), where the relevant particular is not a person or a body part, but rather “the sensation itself”, “the pain” (1989: 284), which is “an object ... of concept-involving awareness” (1989: 283), an “object of reference” (1989: 286), “experienced as instantiating the concept” (1989: 284). So just as perceptual experiences conceptually represent external objects and their properties, pain experiences conceptually represent pains as pains.

But there is an important difference: unlike perceptual experiences, pain experiences constitute their objects. In this consists the “interiority” of inner sense (1991: 311-313). Again, a pain, McDowell says, “has no status except as what is experienced as instantiating the concept” (1989: 284). Although they are “objects of experience”, “there for our subjectivity in an inner world” (1994: 119), pains “do not exist independently of ... awareness” (1994: 120); they are “really nothing over and above the awareness itself” (1994: 120). Call this “McDowell’s subjectivism”.<sup>18</sup>

This, then, is McDowell’s version of the inner-object view. To better appreciate its refinements and significance, let us now set it within a broader context.

#### 4. The Dialectical Landscape

What alternatives are there to McDowell’s view? Consider first what pain experiences represent. McDowell’s inner-object account says they represent pains. One alternative is the no-content view. It says that pain experiences lack representational content altogether, that they are episodes of blank phenomenology. This has been endorsed by McGinn (1982: 8), O’Shaughnessy (1980: 169-70), Rorty (1980: 22), and Searle (1992: 84).<sup>19</sup> Another alternative, which is the rival on which I principally focus in this paper, is perceptualism. Rather than *modelling* pain experiences on perceptual experiences, perceptualists say that pain experiences *are* perceptual experiences, specifically somatosensory or proprioceptive experiences which represent body parts as having some objective, non-mental property, e.g. being disordered or undergoing nociceptor activity. Perceptualists include Armstrong (1962, 1968), Dretske (1995, 1999), Lycan (1996), Pitcher (1970), Tye (1995), and myself (2003, 2007).

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<sup>18</sup> “We are required to conceive the relevant episodes in streams of consciousness as involving the experienced applicability of concepts” (McDowell 1989: 293). “That [the inner world] is inner consists in their being nothing to its states of affairs except the instantiation in consciousness of the relevant concepts; the instances of the concepts, unlike instances of the concepts of the outer, have no being independently of the fact that the concepts they instantiate figure in the content of consciousness” (McDowell 1991: 311). See also McDowell 1994: 38.

<sup>19</sup> See also Davidson’s worry that a definition of the mental in terms of intentionality would omit pains (Davidson 1970: 211).

Consider now McDowell's view of the relationship between pain experience and certain judgements. Alternatives to it can be thought of as reactions to the following reconstruction of his argument for pain conceptualism:

#### **Argument for Pain Conceptualism**

1. Some thinkers make "ip-judgements", i.e. immediate pain judgements, again, judgements about their own current pain, such as those expressed by such present-tense sentences as "I am in pain", "I feel a pain", "This is a pain", or "I have a pain in my toe".
2. Ip-judgements are possible only if some are directly rationalised by pain experiences.
3. *Therefore*, some ip-judgements are directly rationalised by pain experiences.
4. Only experiences with conceptual content can directly rationalise judgements.
5. *Therefore*, pain experiences have conceptual content.

Opposing McDowell's view that ip-judgements are directly rationalised by conceptually contentful pain experiences, there are what I shall call "ip-givenism", "ip-coherentism", and "ip-expressivism". Ip-givenism says that ip-judgements are directly rationalised by pain experiences that *lack* conceptual content; ip-coherentism that they are merely *caused* by such experiences; and ip-expressivism that there are no such judgements. In terms of the argument above, ip-expressivists and ip-coherentists both reject (3). Ip-expressivists reject it because they deny (1), modelling utterances of "I feel a pain" and the rest on such non-verbal manifestations of pain as grimacing; ip-coherentists reject it because they treat the argument as a *reductio* of (2), since they think it is obvious that pain experiences lack conceptual content, hence that it is too demanding to require that they do more than *cause* ip-judgements. Ip-givenists, by contrast, *accept* (3) and instead take the argument to be a *reductio* of (4), since, for them, pain experiences lack conceptual content and yet must rationalise ip-judgements anyway.

These conceptions of pain-judgement relations must be conjoined with views as to what if anything pain experiences represent, e.g. the no-content view, perceptualism, or the inner-object view. Combined with the last of these, notice, ip-coherentism and ip-givenism become inner versions of the two conceptions of outer thought which *Mind and World* is centrally concerned to reject: Davidsonian coherentism and the Myth of the Given.

In the pain case, it is the inner givenist who most concerns McDowell. Why is this? One reason is that McDowell identifies inner givenism as a target of Wittgenstein's private language argument.<sup>20</sup> McDowell welcomes Wittgenstein's anti-givenism, of course, but thinks his ip-expressivist tendencies reveal a failure to appreciate fully the possibility of retaining a non-givenist, conceptualist version of the inner-object view (McDowell 1994: 22).<sup>21</sup> Another reason inner givenism figures so centrally is that McDowell takes it to be highly seductive, even more so than outer givenism. For it can be tempting to gloss the idea of awareness-dependence in terms of pains having awareness built into them, as it were, in which case it can seem as though awareness of a pain is secured merely by dint of a pain's existence, in

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<sup>20</sup> See McDowell 1989, 1991 (309-10), 1994 (18-21).

<sup>21</sup> See also McDowell 1989: 283-4.

which case exercises of conceptual capacities can seem “an optional extra, dispensable without disrupting the status of the episode as an experience” (1989: 285).<sup>22</sup>

We might, in passing, note that another reason for the seductiveness is arguably that if the objects of pain experiences are awareness-dependent, the idea that such experiences involve conceptual classification is problematic. So this might be a good reason for Wittgenstein not to endorse McDowell’s non-givenist inner-object view. I return to this theme in §§7-9.

McDowell expresses a final, elusive target by speaking of pains as “chunks of the ‘in itself’” (1991: 308), denizens of an inner world that is “brutely alien to concepts” (1991: 307), a world which affords “a lived refutation of [German] idealism” (1991: 307), a falsification of “the idea that world and thought are made for one another” (1991: 307). This “inner noumenalism”, as I shall call it, appears to be a curious version of transcendental idealism on which there is a noumenal realm entirely constituted by pains and other sensations. McDowell’s preoccupation with inner noumenalism can seem eccentric, since it is unclear anyone self-consciously endorses the view. But I take it McDowell’s quarry includes inadvertent noumenalists—that is, anyone who denies the world of sensations is the way McDowell argues any representable world must be. He thinks, as we have seen, that to be representable a world must constrain thought by figuring in the contents of world-involving, judgement-rationalising impressions. And to so figure, he further thinks, the world must comprise what we might call “Fregean facts”, i.e. facts composed of Fregean senses, “thinkables that are the case”, as he puts it (1994: 179).<sup>23</sup> So I take it McDowell counts as noumenalist any view denying that pains are constituents of such facts.

McDowell does not clearly distinguish inner noumenalism and inner givenism. One reason may be that he thinks the two views will strike their adherents as mutually supportive. For, according to one line of thought, if pains are not constituents of Fregean facts, then any awareness of them must not be concept-involving (1991: 310); and, according to another, those believing in such non-concept-involving awareness might think it discloses pains otherwise than under modes of presentation, hence that it reveals that these objects are not—in themselves, as it were—constituents of Fregean facts (1989: 287). But another thing blurring the distinction between the two views is an ambiguity that is worth noticing in McDowell’s phrase, “the space of concepts”.<sup>24</sup> For while inner givenism locates pain *experiences* outside that “space” in the sense that they don’t involve exercises of conceptual capacities, inner noumenalism locates pains as *objects* of experience outside that “space” in the quite different sense that they are “brutely alien to concepts” (1991: 307).

Let us complete this sketch of the dialectical landscape by descending from these rarefied heights to register a point more pertinent for our purposes, concerning perceptualism. It is important in what follows to appreciate how much of McDowell’s picture perceptualists can accept. They can, for example,

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<sup>22</sup> See also McDowell 1994: 21.

<sup>23</sup> See also McDowell 1994 (26-29, 104-7, 179-80) and 1989 (287-88).

<sup>24</sup> McDowell would concede the ambiguity, I take it, given his acknowledgement of “the ambiguity in phrases like ‘outside the sphere of thought’” (1994: 39, 28). The ambiguity also explains how McDowell can (i) insist on an “equation between the space of concepts and the space of reasons” (1994: 125), (ii) contrast the space of reasons with the realm of law (1994: 97), and yet (iii) insist that the space of concepts is “unbounded” (1994: lecture 2).

accept conceptualism. This is often missed. Perceptualists, after all, tend not to be conceptualists, e.g. Tye, Dretske, and Lycan (who must instead opt for ip-expressivism, ip-coherentism, or ip-givenism). But my own attempts elsewhere to motivate and defend perceptualism have been formulated precisely so as to be neutral regarding conceptualism (Bain 2003, 2007). And I want to maintain that neutrality here. For while pain conceptualism certainly faces stiff challenges, I doubt that combining it with perceptualism generates fatal difficulties it can otherwise escape.

Matters might seem otherwise. For one thing, while all pain conceptualists must say something about pain in animals and pre-lingual children (see §5), those who also embrace perceptualism must further say something about the many adult humans who lack what is after all the rather arcane concept, *nociceptor activity*. For another thing, it is tempting to take the judgement that one has a pain in one's toe, or that one's toe hurts, simply to *endorse* the content of one's pain experience, in which case that content *cannot* be merely that one's toe is undergoing nociceptor activity. Still, I think conceptualist perceptualists can meet these challenges. They can say, for instance, that those lacking the concept *nociceptor activity* might still represent such activity under such demonstrative concepts as *that activity*; or that pain experiences represent a condition less arcane but no less objective than nociceptor activity, e.g. bodily disorder. As for the threatened mismatch between pain experiences and judgements endorsing them, this can be denied by claiming that "I have a pain in my toe" and "My toe hurts" *self-ascribe* rather than *endorse* the pain experiences on which they're based, and that pain experiences are instead endorsed by such judgements as "There is something wrong with my toe" and "That process[nociceptor activity] is occurring in my toe".<sup>25</sup>

So, again, perceptualists can accept McDowell's argument above, concerning the direct rationalisation of ip-judgements, judgements which I have recommended they take to be self-ascriptions of pain experiences. They can claim, furthermore, that pain experiences also directly rationalise judgements endorsing them, judgements amongst which I have recommended they include "My foot is disordered" or "My foot is undergoing *that process*[nociceptor activity]". They can, moreover, say that pain experiences stand in such rationalising relations in virtue of their conceptual content. So, while McDowell's picture is not obligatory for perceptualists, a great deal of it is available to them. Indeed I shall presently suggest that they can accept some of his central tenets rather more easily than he himself can. For amongst the good reasons for favouring perceptualism over the inner-object view is that it is exceedingly difficult to make sense of the presentational, rationalising, and classificatory character of pain experiences *unless* we take their subject-matter to be objective.

On this critical note, then, let us turn to the evaluation of McDowell's view.

## 5. Animal and Location Problems

In some detail, we have now set out McDowell's inner-object view: its content, its motivations, and its context. In this section, I start my evaluation of it by touching on a couple of concerns, before turning in

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<sup>25</sup> I say more about these responses in my 2003.

the remaining sections to explore two further critical themes in §§6-9. I think, to anticipate, that McDowell's view faces serious difficulties in light of which even those wanting to retain his core commitments should prefer perceptualism.

One obvious worry is that, as a pain conceptualist, McDowell must be unable to acknowledge pain in pre-lingual infants and non-human animals (hereafter, just "animals"). There is a parallel worry concerning *perceptual* sentience in animals, of course, but McDowell has an account of that. The concern is that, whatever its merits, the account lacks an analogue in the pain case.

What McDowell says in the perceptual case is that, although animals lack our perceptual *awareness* of an outer world, they enjoy perceptual *sentience*, or "proto-subjectivity", which he fleshes out in terms of their being sensitive to an "environment", an environment comprising "problems and opportunities" (1994: 115, 119). In the pain case too his first point is that animals lack what we have: they lack an "inner world". Hence we must not think, he says, that "what *this pain* really is must be the pain I would ... have felt, in consequence of this wound, even if I had never learned to talk" (1989: 294). But, as in the perceptual case, McDowell softens the denial, happily allowing that "is in pain" applies univocally to animals and us (1989: 294, n. 24; 1994: 120). The question is whether this concession can be substantiated—whether it can be grounded in, for example, something akin to the proto-subjectivity story. The answer remains unclear. For he thinks talk of an "[i]nner environment" does not make sense, hence that the proto-subjectivity story cannot work in the pain case (1994: 120); yet he offers no alternative.

One might wonder why McDowell does not instead extend the proto-subjectivity account by claiming that an animal's body somehow figures in its *outer* environment. At least one reason he doesn't, I take it, is that this will seem to offer animals inadequate compensation, as it were, by the lights of a view like his on which what *we* are aware of is an "inner world". So, regarding the degree to which McDowell is able to illuminate animal sentience, there remains an unsatisfying asymmetry between the pain and perceptual cases. Whether or not this is fatal, it points up a virtue of perceptualism. For, if the pain case *is* a perceptual case, then any story about animal sentience adequate in the perceptual case should be adequate in the pain case specifically.

A second challenge is to explain how McDowell's view accommodates the location of pains. We tend not merely to be *in* pain, after all, but to have pains in bodily locations, e.g. our feet. One point here is phenomenological: when in pain, we are aware not only of pains, but of the body parts in which we say we have pains. Hence, unlike perceptualists, who invoke only outer sense, McDowell owes us a story about the *integration* of outer sense (by which we are aware of our bodies) with inner sense (by which he thinks we are aware of pains). He also owes us an explanation of *what it is for* a pain to be had in, say, a foot. Given that for him pains are "nothing over and above the awareness itself" (1994: 120), the trick will be to avoid saying that having a pain in a foot consists in the foot's undergoing an episode of awareness, an experience, as if the foot itself might be a subject of consciousness. Notice that perceptualism again appears virtuous in this context. For perceptualists can say, attractively, that having a

pain in a foot rather consists in one's somatosensorily perceiving the foot as disordered (Bain 2007). McDowell, by contrast, offers no account. He might, I suppose, say that it consists in one's experiencing a pain *as being a pain in the foot*. But notice this *invokes* the explanandum, the idea of a pain being in a foot; hence arguably the suggestion is viciously circular.

Here is a good place at which to turn to another point at which McDowell's inner-object view is threatened by circularity.

## 6. Circularity Problems

Expressing what I called his subjectivism, McDowell says pains "do not exist independently of ... awareness" (1994: 120); again, a pain "has no status except as what is experienced as instantiating the concept" (1989: 284). Suppose we take this point as follows:

**(P)** Being a pain =<sub>def</sub> being experienced as being a pain.

This is a philosophical account of being a pain, on whose left- and right-hand sides "being a pain" is used univocally. Hence it is circular in the same way as the following dispositionalist account of colour:

**(R)** Being red =<sub>def</sub> being disposed to be experienced as being red.<sup>26</sup>

Now, (R)'s circularity is often claimed to be vicious. The charge is much contested, but if it is right, then surely (P) too is viciously circular. Indeed, given that (P) makes being a pain more directly experience-dependent than (R) makes being red, (P)'s circularity might be problematic even if (R)'s is not.

Let's start with (R). Convicting (R) of vicious circularity is not straightforward. For some, that "being red" occurs on both (R)'s sides renders it unilluminating, for it makes its explanans stand in just the same need of illumination as its explanandum. But dispositionalists reply that, while the circularity certainly means that (R) is non-reductive, (R) might yet be informative, telling us that redness is a sensory disposition, for instance.<sup>27</sup> Opponents counter that it can be informative only if it specifies *which* type of experience redness is a disposition to cause. True, dispositionalists can reply, but why think it cannot, given that "experienced as being red" would—even if (R) were true—still enjoy determinate reference on the theorist's lips, at least assuming that "experienced as" and "being red" would?<sup>28</sup> The opponent might argue that, actually, "being red" would *not*. However, that argument needs to be made and, if sound, it—and not the consequent failure to specify an experience type—would be (R)'s basic problem. Another worry about specifying the experience type is that dispositionalism entails that (R)'s explanans is substitutable for every occurrence of "being red", making the account impossible to complete: "being red = being disposed to be experienced as being disposed to be experienced as ...". But, while this might be fatal to certain verbal definitions of "being red", dispositionalists should say that (R) is an account only

<sup>26</sup> For simplicity, I am bracketing the required references to normal perceivers and normal circumstances.

<sup>27</sup> McDowell (1985), for instance, takes the non-reductive character of his dispositionalism about colour to be a virtue. See also Boghossian and Velleman 1989: 87.

<sup>28</sup> Another strategy (although far from unproblematic) would be to fix the reference of "experiences of red", interpreted non-compositionally, via something like "experiences of the phenomenal type I am undergoing now", but then to hold that the type to which reference is thus fixed is experiences *representing* redness.

of the *referent* of “being red”, i.e. the property itself. Hence they need claim neither that (R)’s two sides are synonymous nor, therefore, that its explanans is substitutable for “red” in “experienced as red”, which is after all an intensional context.<sup>29</sup> They might anyway try to eschew “red” altogether on (R)’s right-hand side, saying instead that the relevant experiences represent either “that colour” (pointing to something red) or “the colour of pillar boxes”.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, (R)’s opponents might try to shore up one or other of these objections concerning explanatory illumination, specification of experience types, and substitutivity. But they might alternatively frame their criticisms in terms of the target property itself. One such objection to (R) begins with the idea that properties, perhaps modelled on predicates, have a *structure* which it is the job of accounts like (R) to disclose. Then the worry is that (R) presents being red as containing itself as a proper part, something neither a predicate nor a property can do. A second, related objection takes accounts like (R) to be, or to entail, claims about ontological dependence, the relation obtaining between a smile and the person smiling, for example, or a set and its members. Hence we might say that just as the relational property *kissing Jane* depends on both the relation kissing and the individual Jane, so the relational property *being disposed to be experienced as being red* depends on both the relation *being disposed to be experienced as* and the property *being red*. The problem is that, if being red is identical to that relational property, then *being red* depends on itself, which is incoherent.<sup>31</sup>

But, at this juncture, some dispositionalists will avail themselves of a reformulation:

**(R2)** Something’s being red consists in its being disposed to be experienced as red.

This, they will say, is an account of what it is for redness to be *instantiated*, not an account of the structure of the property, nor an account entailing that something depends on itself. For suppose a given tomato instantiates redness. According to (R2), its doing so depends on its being disposed to be experienced as red. But that disposition depends not on that instantiation of redness (nor, perhaps, on *any* instantiation of redness), but rather on redness itself. Thus Colin McGinn claims that “there is no vicious circularity in explaining the instantiation of [a property F] in objects by reference to mental states in the identification of which the property [F] requires to be mentioned”, since “presupposing the existence of the property is not the same as presupposing its instantiation” (1989: 14); and he stresses elsewhere that redness occurs in the specification of experiences of red “only qua represented, not qua instantiated” (1996: 550).<sup>32</sup>

This is a good point at which to return at last to (P). For suppose that (P) is reformulated in line with (R2); and suppose—what I think is far from clear—that McGinn point can indeed save (R2). Even so, pain subjectivism might be in trouble. To see this, consider a closer parallel in the colour case:

**(R3)** Something’s being red consists in its being experienced as being red.

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<sup>29</sup> At points, Boghossian and Velleman appear to miss this point, as when they say that, according to dispositionalism, “an experience can represent its object as red only by representing it as disposed to produce visual experiences that represent it as red” (1989: 88).

<sup>30</sup> This would work better for determinate hues than for determinable colours.

<sup>31</sup> These two formulations of the problem owe a lot to Mark Johnston (2001a, 2001b). Boghossian and Velleman (1989, 1991) sometimes put the point similarly (1989: 88; 1991: 134, n.6). But it is unclear why they insist that an ostensibly parallel account of *courage* escapes their objection (1989: 87-88).

<sup>32</sup> See also Wright 1992 (120-23, 132-5).

Having dropped the reference to a disposition, (R3) is obviously false *whether or not* it is viciously circular. But is it *also* viciously circular? Well, consider again a red tomato and suppose it is being experienced as red by exactly one subject. According to (R3), the tomato's instantiation of redness depends on that particular experience of it as red. So surely there is a vicious circle *if* that experience in turn depends on that instantiation. But does it? Well, on certain accounts it does. Certain disjunctivists, for instance, will take the experience of the tomato as red to be constitutively dependent on both that very tomato and that very instantiation of redness. And there is a closely related worry about (R3): if that very instance of redness depends on the subject's being aware of it, then, when the subject is aware of it, the perceptual relation becomes its own object, which is at least not obviously coherent. Back in the pain case, there are parallel worries: a pain experience cannot make its object a pain while at the same time depending for its content on its object being a pain; and a pain experience, we may also fear, cannot have itself as its object.

So is pain subjectivism undermined? Threats worth taking seriously have emerged. But I shall not put it more strongly than that. For the threats depend on questions I cannot take further: the nature of philosophical accounts of properties and their instantiation; the degree to which pain experiences are to be modelled on visual experiences; and how visual experiences should be conceived in the first place. Rather than pursue these matters, I want instead to turn to a final set of difficulties for McDowell.<sup>33</sup>

## 7. Spontaneity and Other Minds Problems

Notwithstanding the differences I emphasised in §2 between the inner-object and sense-datum views, I think they share a weakness. Since visual sense-data are introduced to account for visual hallucination and illusion, sense-datum theorists must, on pain of regress, rule out the possibility of sense-data hallucinations and illusions. They must hold that awareness of sense-data is (to the extent that it is representational at all) doubly infallible, having objects and being veridical necessarily. The way to make sense of this is to say that sense-data are representation-dependent, just as (for the different reason of doing justice to their "interiority") McDowell says pains are. Pains, he thinks, "do not exist independently of ... awareness" (1994: 120). Rather, each pain experience represents a pain that is dependent on that episode of representation, so when you undergo a pain-representing experience, that experience ensures, first, that there is something you are experiencing and, second, that it is a pain. In that sense, your experience is self-verifying. It is this idea that worries me.

It seems to worry McDowell too, as when he paraphrases what he calls a "highly instructive worry" of P.F. Strawson's: "given that objects of this kind of experience are not independent of our awareness of them ... what secures it that the experiences have the complexity of structure that they must have to be even minimally concept involving?" (1989: 284). In the present section, I identify McDowell's worries and how he assuages them; in the next, I argue that mine are different and less tractable.

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<sup>33</sup> Notice the problems pressed in this section against dispositionalism or (R) concern circularity, not experience-dependence. Nothing has been said to threaten the idea that a body part's hurting consists in its being perceived as disordered (see Bain 2007), for example, or that a circle's being blurred (for me) consists in its being represented (by me) in a visual experience whose spatial content is relatively imprecise (see Bain 2003).

There are, I suggest, two related worries that McDowell's discussion addresses. The first, which I shall call "the spontaneity problem", centres on his attempt to make sense of how conceptual capacities—capacities for active judgement—could be involved in passive experience of any sort. This is intelligible, McDowell argues, just in case the capacities are operative not *only* in experience but *also* in thinking, in particular thinking which provides "a good fit for the idea of spontaneity" (1994: 11). But there is an asymmetry between the perceptual and pain cases: perceptual judgements provide a good fit for the idea of spontaneity but ip-judgements don't. That is the spontaneity problem. Again, while a thinker can sensibly deliberate whether or not to endorse the content of a perceptual experience, e.g. that there is a red cube on the table, the inner-object view leaves no scope for such deliberation regarding one's own pain experience. As soon as you consider whether to endorse your pain experience—whether it is indeed a pain you feel—its self-verifying character *obliges* you to do so. So the pain case appears to lack the context of deliberative judgement required for the relevant conceptual capacities to have, as McDowell puts it, the necessary integration "into spontaneity at large" (1994: 37).

In effect, McDowell responds to the spontaneity problem with the following requirement:

**Third-Person Requirement**

Possessors of pain concepts must be able not only to apply them to oneself, but also to apply them to others.<sup>34</sup> (1991: 311)

The spontaneity problem is overcome, the idea goes, provided the capacities operative in pain experiences are exercised not only in ip-judgements but also in third-person judgements such as that Fred is in pain, for such judgements provide a better "fit for the idea of spontaneity" since we *can* sensibly deliberate about whether, for instance, Fred really is in pain. So, whereas the involvement of colour and shape concepts in visual experience is partly vindicated by the possibility of deliberating whether to apply them on the basis of such visual experiences,<sup>35</sup> the involvement of pain concepts in pain experiences is rather vindicated by those experiences' not being the only basis for their application (1994: 37-38).

Strawson, incidentally, also imposes the third-person requirement, but on the basis of considerations of generality, not spontaneity. His idea is that a thought can have a subject-predicate structure, *a is F*, only if the capacities one exercises in thinking it are distinct from each other, so only if the capacity in which grasp of F-ness consists is a capacity to think of the F-ness not only of *a*, but also of things other than *a* (1959: 99).<sup>36</sup> The upshot is that one can think that oneself is in pain only if one can think that others are. McDowell sometimes puts his point in these terms too, as when he requires that "the subject ... understand her being in pain as a particular case of a general type of state of affairs" (1994: 37), and worries with Strawson whether pain experiences have the "subject/predicate structure" they must have "to be even minimally concept-involving" (1989: 284).

<sup>34</sup> I presently address the question whether this requirement concerns the person-concept, *being in pain*, the sensation-concept, *being a pain*, or both, and (in note 39 below) I ask whether McDowell provides adequate grounds for applying it to the sensation-concept.

<sup>35</sup> "Partly" because McDowell demands deeper "integration" than this. Possessing colour concepts, for example, requires possession of such concepts as the visible surface of an object, he thinks, possession of which in turn requires more than the capacity to make and withhold perceptual judgements. See McDowell 1994: lecture 2.

<sup>36</sup> This way of putting the point owes much to Evans (1982: 100-105).

However motivated, the third-person requirement leads to the second worry McDowell addresses, namely that his subjectivism says just what the third-person requirement denies: that possession of pain concepts is entirely constituted by the ability to self-apply them on the basis of pain experiences. In effect, McDowell's reply seems to be that this misconstrues subjectivism, which is a thesis not about what constitutes the possession of pain concepts, but about what constitutes pains. Thanks to the third-person requirement, the *idea* of one's being in pain has "an independence from [one's] awareness of it", McDowell says, even if one's being in pain does not (1994: 38).<sup>37</sup>

Note in passing McDowell's curious silence, when treating these difficulties, regarding the distinction he elsewhere emphasises between the person-concept, *being in pain*, and the sensation-concept, *being a pain*. How, one might worry, can the latter concept, which McDowell thinks is operative in pain experiences, be vindicated by third-person misapplications of the former concept? I doubt there is a serious difficulty here. For one thing, McDowell could construe the person-concept as *feeling a pain*, hence as *containing* the sensation-concept, which one might consequently misapply if, for example, one judged correctly that Fred is feeling something but incorrectly that he is feeling a pain.<sup>38</sup> For another thing, past-tense misapplications of the sensation-concept might also be invoked, as when one judges incorrectly that the sensation one felt at noon was a pain.<sup>39</sup>

So I have no serious complaints about McDowell's treatment of the spontaneity and other minds problems—*except* that he neglects other serious and less tractable worries, as I shall now argue.

## 8. Rationalisation, Presentation, and Classification Problems

My worries differ from McDowell's. His, I suggest, seem to centre on the idea that subjectivism renders the possession of the concepts involved in pain experiences unintelligible. As we have seen, he appreciates that a picture of a thinker putatively responding to his pain experiences with self-applications of pain concepts is insufficient to count as the depiction of the possession of a concept; hence he enriches that picture by requiring pain concepts to be applied third-personally. The worries I want to press, by contrast, concern not the *possession* of pain concepts, but—at a first approximation—their *operation* in pain experiences. In short, even granting possession of the concepts, I doubt whether experiences that constitute their own subject-matter could have the presentational, rationalising, or classificatory character that McDowell thinks they have.

There are various twentieth-century echoes of my concerns. Armstrong claims that "subject and object" must be "distinct existences" and denies a mental state can be aware of itself "any more than a

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<sup>37</sup> See also McDowell 1994: 120.

<sup>38</sup> In his 1989 (286, especially n. 10), McDowell does appear to equate the concepts *being in pain* and *feeling a pain*.

<sup>39</sup> Still, we might question whether McDowell's spontaneity and generality considerations could successfully ground the application of the third-person requirement to the sensation-concept, *being a pain*. Suppose a subject possesses that concept but not the person-concept, *being in pain*. Suppose the subject experiences pains as pains, judges of more than one pain that it is a pain, and judges of past sensations (sometimes incorrectly) that they were pains. This subject appears to meet McDowell's requirements concerning spontaneity and generality. (Admittedly, McDowell thinks inner experience requires outer experience (1994: 33) and that outer experience requires self-consciousness (1994: 99-104), hence, given the generality constraint, that subjects of inner experience must be capable of other-ascribing perceptual experiences. But this is not yet to say they must be capable of other-ascribing *pain* experiences.)

man can eat himself up” (1968: 324).<sup>40</sup> For Sartre, “to be conscious *of* something is to be confronted with a concrete and full presence which is not consciousness”.<sup>41</sup> Strawson, in the passage McDowell paraphrases, claims “[t]here can be no experience at all which does not involve the recognition of particular items *as* being of such and such a general kind”, hence “it must be possible, even in the most fleeting and purely subjective of impressions, to distinguish a component of recognition ... which is not simply identical with, or wholly absorbed by, the particular item which is recognised” (1966: 100). And Wittgenstein famously insists on a distinction between its *seeming* right to apply a sign and its *being* right: if one would like to say “whatever is going to seem right to me is right,” he urges, “that only means that here we can’t talk about ‘right’” (1958: §258).

My first worry is whether “McDowellian pain experiences”—that is, pain experiences of which McDowell’s account is true—could, by his own lights, directly rationalise judgements endorsing them. Brewer, we saw in §2, thinks perceptual experiences are capable of directly rationalising such judgements by virtue of having their demonstrative contents determined—once the subject fixes the enabling conditions—by how the world independently is. But, if this is what is required for *any* experience to rationalise directly its endorsement, then McDowellian pain experiences surely cannot do so, for there is nothing in the pain case as McDowell conceives it akin to the fixing of enabling conditions or the objective determination of demonstrative contents. Turning to McDowell’s own conditions on rational constraint, I attributed to him in §2 the thought that good perceptual experiences directly rationalise their endorsement by virtue of being impressions in the disjunctivist’s sense, episodes of facts impressing themselves on subjects’ sensibilities. But that does nothing to alleviate our worry. For McDowellian pain experiences are surely *not* impressions in that sense.

It is true—and perhaps telling—that McDowell *calls* pain experiences “impressions” (1994: 21-22). But surely McDowellian pain experiences are impressions only in the etiolated sense that they are passive. They lack the world-mind direction of determination to be impressions in the robust, disjunctivist sense which McDowell invokes to underwrite the rationalising character of experience. Passivity, recall, is not enough. An involuntary entertaining of the content that snow is white, produced by a bump to the head, is passive but not apt to rationalise directly its own endorsement. So, again, the worry is that McDowellian pain experiences are not impressions in the required sense.

One way of elaborating this worry is to say that if pain experiences are not impressions in the full-blooded sense, then they are not only incapable of directly rationalising their endorsement; they are incapable of even *inviting* it. Again, if not impressions, they cannot so much as purport to present a world; they lack any presentational force. And if they cannot so much as invite their endorsement, a fortiori they cannot directly rationalise it.

Admittedly, the simple idea that only impressions can be presentational is too strong. For hallucinatory experiences are arguably presentational yet not impressions in the full-blooded sense. But

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<sup>40</sup> See also Armstrong 1968 (100-115, especially 107, and chapter 15) and 1962 (78-80).

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in McCulloch 1994: 104. Despite this claim, Sartre apparently thinks that colours and some other properties are, to some degree, mind-dependent; see McCulloch 1994: 111-13.

the notion of an impression might yet figure in an account of the force even of hallucinatory experiences. Disjunctivists, for example, might understand the presentational force of an hallucination of a pink elephant by adverting to the idea that, when undergoing that episode, it is for the subject *as if* a pink elephant were impressing itself on his sensibility. So it is not implausible that the full-blooded notion of an impression is essential to understanding the presentational force of experiences. And if it is, then it looks as though McDowellian pain experiences cannot have that force, in which case they surely cannot exert rational constraint, as McDowell thinks they do.

It might be replied that my objection mistakes McDowell's intentions. For his view, the reply goes, is only that pain experiences have content, not that they are presentational. On this interpretation, despite their content, pain experiences are idle; they lack any reality-claim force; they are constituents of one's inner world but not episodes disclosing or presenting it. Hence they might rationalise their *self-ascription*, the interpretation goes, but they do not rationalise their *endorsement*.

One response is that this reply renders unavailable one very attractive account of the self-ascription of experiences. The account, Gareth Evans', explains a subject's self-ascription of a perceptual experience in terms of her affixing "it seems to me" to the content of the judgement she *would* make if she lacked extraneous information—which, notice, is precisely the judgement which would *endorse* the experience's content (1982: 227-8). Arguably, then, this account can be applied to experiences of a given type only if subjects really do endorse some experiences of that type—hence, given McDowell's normative empiricism, only if certain such experiences rationalise such endorsements and hence are full-blooded impressions. So, again, if one says that pain experiences are non-presentational, or are not such as to rationalise their endorsement, one cannot apply to them this account of their self-ascription.

But one might at this juncture point out that McDowell anyway has another account of self-ascription for the pain case. When in pain, he thinks, "the object of this awareness is really nothing over and above the awareness itself" (1994: 120). Arguably, then, his view is that, presenting themselves as they do, pain experiences rationalise their self-ascription *by* rationalising their endorsement. Now, I agree that this is McDowell's view. But notice it involves just the idea which I am claiming sits uneasily with his subjectivism: that pain experiences both invite and rationalise their endorsement, that they present—not merely figure in—their subject's inner world. And there is other evidence that this is the McDowellian picture. His aspiration, after all, is to think of inner sense in parallel with outer sense "to the fullest extent ... possible" (1994: 22), which includes carrying over to the inner case the story about rational constraint or "the necessary limit to the freedom of spontaneity" (1994: 21). He speaks of sensations being "there for our subjectivity in an inner world" (1994: 119), moreover, and parses the content of pain experiences "in terms of item recognized and expression of what it is recognized to be" (1989: 286). Hence I think my rationalisation objection is appropriately targeted.

Does that objection sink McDowell's inner-object view? Perhaps not conclusively. He might reply that perceptual and pain experiences directly rationalise their endorsements in virtue of different things: perceptual experiences in virtue of having their contents determined by the objective world, pain

experiences in virtue of their determining their own subject-matter, their subject's inner world. I think this reply fails to speak to my worry about pain experiences' *presentational* role, that—in short—their determining their subject-matter does not sit happily with their also presenting it. But pressing this point further requires a full investigation of the conditions of the presentational and rationalising character of experience, which here I set aside in order to turn to my final objection to self-verification.

That final objection centres on the very idea of classification. McDowell, of course, thinks that perceptual and pain experiences are classificatory, that they involve, as Strawson puts it, “the recognition of particular items *as* being of such and such a general kind” (1966: 100). But can this be true of self-verifying pain experiences?

To suggest it cannot, an obvious place to start is Wittgenstein's is-right/seems-right distinction. But, in fact, Wittgenstein's formulation can look too narrow for our purposes, for he talks about signs rather than concepts, and even if that talk can be suitably transposed, his point can seem to concern only judgements, not experiences. When David Pears, for example, motivates Wittgenstein's requirement, he adverts to what McDowell calls “spontaneity”, emphasising that applying a predicate is, like marksmanship, an intentional action which one can *try* to do or *aim* at doing correctly (Pears 1987: 55; 1988: 333).<sup>42</sup> So interpreted, Wittgenstein's point becomes less useful for us, since it bears on experience indirectly at best, as a condition on the possession of the concepts experience involves.

But surely we can motivate an is-right/seems-right requirement not only by advertng, like Pears, to the notion of intentional action, but also by advertng, like Strawson, to the notion of classification or recognition.<sup>43</sup> And, so motivated, the requirement surely does apply to experiences, and directly so, provided we assume with McDowell and Strawson that experiences involve classification, indeed the operation of conceptual capacities.<sup>44</sup> The idea, roughly, is that experiences can *correctly* classify things as being of some given kind only if they can also *incorrectly* classify things as being of that kind; and that, since no McDowellian pain experiences are illusory, they flout the requirement.

McDowell will presumably reply that, while the possible misapplication of pain concepts is indeed required, this requirement is met by their misapplication in third-person and past-tense pain *judgements*. Hence we needn't also require their possible misapplication in pain *experiences*. But this appeal to judgements surely misses the point. Perhaps it is adequate in relation to the worries McDowell entertains, worries about whether there is enough in his picture to make intelligible the *possession* of a pain concept. But it does not speak to my concern whether, even granted the concept's possession, that concept can be thought to be *operative* even in experiences that are self-verifying.

Tellingly, McDowell concedes that pain experiences are only a “*limiting case* of the model of object and designation” (1989: 284) and that “the idea of encountering a particular lacks [in the pain case] an

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<sup>42</sup> See also Wright 1986: 257.

<sup>43</sup> This is not to say that Strawson would approve of the following elaboration and use of the point.

<sup>44</sup> For simplicity, I shall follow McDowell in speaking of classification and the operation of conceptual capacities interchangeably. But notice that if a pain subjectivist denies that pain experiences are conceptually contentful but insists they are nonetheless presentational, rationalising, and classificatory, he is still vulnerable to my objections.

independent robustness that we can credit it with in other applications” (1989: 284).<sup>45</sup> These remarks might seem to speak to my concerns. But surely, in the end, they do not. They at best label the difficulties I have been identifying; they do not resolve them.

So there are serious doubts whether McDowell’s subjectivism allows him to say that pain experiences are presentational, directly rationalising, or classificatory. Now, I cannot, of course, *prove* the intuitions I have exploited in making these doubts pressing. But in the next and final section I respond to an obvious source of disquiet: namely, that my objections must be too strong, since they rule out clearly unproblematic cases. In doing so, my strategy is rather McDowellian: not compelling acceptance of my requirements, but removing obstacles to their acceptance.

## 9. Replies

What unproblematic claims might my objections seem to rule out? One such claim arises from what is sometimes called a constitutive account of self-knowledge, on one version of which your judging that you intend to vote, for example, might on a certain occasion *make it the case* that you intend to vote. Some have come at least close to this view in order to explain first-person authority.<sup>46</sup> But I side with the many who reject it,<sup>47</sup> and not only because of worries about an is-right/seems-right requirement. There is, for one thing, a question whether the account can explain our authority over what intentions we *lack*. On this account, moreover, even positive self-ascriptions don’t look knowledgeable if knowledge requires reasons, given that the self-ascriptions in question determine their own truth. I might, furthermore, have an intention to vote which I self-ascribe authoritatively, and on another occasion an intention to vote that I self-ascribe non-authoritatively, yet it can seem unsatisfactory to claim that the former but not the latter intention is constituted by its self-ascription. The constitutive account also seems to get the direction of content-determination wrong. Suppose I know that I intend that I pick up *this* pen[pointing to my pen]. My belief has the content, *I intend that I pick up this pen*, and my intention has the content, *I pick up this pen*. Surely my belief has the underlined part of its content in virtue of being based on my intention; it *inherits* that part of its content. A constitutive view looks committed to putting things the other way around. So, given these problems, and the availability of other accounts of first-person authority, I recommend eschewing the constitutive account.

My opponent might reply that a constitutive account is undeniable in at least the following case: your judging that you are judging *makes it the case* that you are judging. But even this is not absolutely obvious. Certainly, you might judge that snow is white and for that reason further judge that you are judging. But what is unobvious is that you might rather judge that you are judging in circumstances in which your putative judgement is not made true by any other. You might of course have a visual or auditory image of the sentence, “I am judging”; and if, moreover, you uttered that sentence, it might

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<sup>45</sup> See also McDowell 1989 (286) and 1994 (37, 38, 120).

<sup>46</sup> Wright, for example (1989: 250-54; 1991: 142-6; 1998: 26-33, 38-45).

<sup>47</sup> Peacocke (1998) and Martin (1998), for example, who make a number of the following points.

express a proposition. But those points do not settle that you are in such a case judging. And there are reasons for doubt, not least that it is unclear you could have any *reason* for so judging.<sup>48</sup>

But I need not rest anything on these comments about the constitutive account in general or this case in particular. For against any opponent who invokes cases of judgement against me, there is a crucial general defence at least of my presentation and rationalisation objections. Whereas those objections *would* be threatened by examples of self-verifying judgements that nonetheless enjoy the presentational and rationalising character in question, surely *no* judgements enjoy that character. A judgement that *p* does not purport to present the world as some way. It does not invite, let alone directly rationalise, the endorsement of *p*. Rather, it *is* the endorsement of *p*. Concerning judgements as they do, then, the preceding cases strike me as off the mark, at least in relation to the presentation and rationalisation objections.<sup>49</sup>

Performative utterances might seem to be a more relevant case, since they can appear to involve not self-verifying judgements, but self-verifying assertions, and it might be argued that assertions resemble experiences in the relevant respects more closely than judgements do. Promising is a case that might be used against me. If you utter, “I promise to vote”, my opponent might suggest, you assert that you promise to vote and thereby *make it the case* that you promise to vote. Is this not a self-verifying assertion, a self-verifying episode of classifying oneself as promising to vote? Well, some have denied exactly that. J. L. Austin, for example, denies that such utterances as “I promise to vote” express truth-evaluable contents (1962: 6), while Crispin Wright thinks that, although they do, they aren’t assertions of them (1998: 36).<sup>50</sup> Even if they are, moreover, and even if there is a constitutive connection between the assertions and the circumstances asserted to obtain, the connection is surely a conventional matter, which marks an important difference from the pain case.<sup>51</sup> McDowell’s view, after all, is not that it is by dint of some convention that a pain counts as a pain just in case it is experienced as one. It is significant, furthermore, that we can eschew a constitutive account claiming that what it is to promise is to assert that you do.<sup>52</sup> For even if there is such a thing as asserting that you do, you can assert that you do without promising (e.g. when acting), and you can promise without asserting that you do (by, for example, uttering “I *will* vote” in the right circumstances). So, again, there are salient differences between performative utterances and McDowellian pain experiences.

What about perceptual experiences? Might these provide my opponent with examples of unproblematic self-verifying episodes? One putative example arises from a certain disjunctivist view of visual experience on which veridical perceptions are individuated in terms of their content, whose singular and predicative components are demonstrative and depend constitutively on the represented object and property instance. This view might seem to entail that an episode of veridical perception with, say, the

<sup>48</sup> A fuller discussion would look at, inter alia, Burge’s (1988) examples of “cogito-like judgements”.

<sup>49</sup> I might judge that I judge that *p*, judge that such judgements are generally reliable, and for that reason judge that *p*; but this would not be a case of a judgement that *p* *itself directly* rationalising the endorsement of its content.

<sup>50</sup> One motivation for the denial, related to a point I made about the judgement that oneself is judging, would be that we utter “I promise” on the basis of practical not theoretical reasons.

<sup>51</sup> It is interesting in this context that you cannot promise by asserting that you *are promising*.

<sup>52</sup> General accounts of what it is to intend or to judge, framed in the terms of the constitutive account of self-knowledge, can similarly be eschewed.

content, *this pig*[Betty] *is that shade*[pink<sub>6</sub>] (where pink<sub>6</sub> is some determinate shade of pink) could not have been illusory. For any episode not representing either Betty or an instance of pink<sub>6</sub> is not the given episode, the idea goes, and the given episode's singular and predicative contents would not both have been available unless the episode had had Betty, while she was pink<sub>6</sub>, as its object. So this visual experience, my opponent claims, is an episode of experiential classification which could not have gone wrong.

Notice, as before, that my presentation and rationalisation objections remain unthreatened. For the point is not that the Betty perception is, although presentational and rationalising, not an impression. Still, my classification objection can seem more vulnerable. For if we gloss that objection in terms of the idea that an episode can be the turning of a classificatory mechanism only if that mechanism might have gone wrong *in that very episode*, then the Betty experience can indeed seem to be a counterexample.

But, depending as it does on a highly contentious view of visual experience, this is hardly an uncontroversial case of a necessarily veridical experience which I am bound to accommodate. And, anyway, even assuming the view in question, we can question the assumption that the experience's singular and predicative contents would not both have been available unless the episode had had Betty, while she was pink<sub>6</sub>, as its object. McDowell himself invokes demonstrative-predicative modes of presentation, interestingly, but notice that he requires that grasp of them persist beyond the perceptual encounters that make them available (1994: 57). It arguably follows that a moment after an encounter with something else that is pink<sub>6</sub>, one might falsely *judge* of a non-pink<sub>6</sub> Betty that she is that shade[pink<sub>6</sub>].<sup>53</sup> And, if so, we might also allow that one might, in the same circumstances, illusorily *perceive* a non-pink<sub>6</sub> Betty to be that shade[pink<sub>6</sub>].

Whether or not this is right, *any* view of visual experiences must one way or another accommodate the possibility of misperception. So it is hard to see how a visual case could block my classification worry if that worry is expressed simply as the complaint that McDowell's pain case rules out an analogue of visual illusion. And that, in effect, *is* the worry. If McDowell's view were correct, it seems that *no* sensation experiences *ever* misapply the concept allegedly operative in pain experiences. My suggestion is that this conflicts with the idea that such experiences are genuinely classificatory. And at this point it is not enough to reply that the concept is misapplied in third-person or past-tense judgements. For that does nothing to vindicate the concept's operation *in sensation experiences*.

Some opponents might look no further than the bodily sensations to argue that this point is too strong. For it is tempting to say, with Strawson, that we "seem forced to concede" that sensation experiences have objects that "have no existence independently of the awareness of them" (1966: 100-101). Now, if we were forced to concede this, then those wanting to retain McDowell's picture of pain experiences as presentational, rationalising, and classificatory would indeed be in an unenviable position. But, as we have seen, there *is* an alternative, namely—in the pain case—perceptualism.

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<sup>53</sup> McDowell rather focuses on subsequent *past-tense* applications of the demonstrative-predicative concept. See his 1994: 57.

So I conclude that McDowell's picture of pain experiences as presentational, rationalising, and classificatory is better accommodated by perceptualism than by McDowell's version of the inner-object view. McDowell is aware of the perceptualist option but rejects it because he insists there is something *sui generis*, something "inner", about the sensation case. And he is right; there is. But the present paper suggests that we should not capture what it is in terms of the dependence of the objects of awareness on episodes of awareness. How we *should* capture it, compatibly with perceptualism, is a story I tell elsewhere.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See Bain 2003.

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