

Julius Caesar and George Berkeley Play Leapfrog

1. Some twenty years ago I voiced reservations about John McDowell's embrace of a spatial metaphor, whereby we should expand our idea of the 'space' occupied by the mind, locating its boundaries far outside the skin, way into the world.¹ I thought at the time that the spatial metaphor was a flourish McDowell had been betrayed into, particularly by some of the terminology of his dispute with Dummett over 'manifestation'. But over the years it began to be clear that it was more than that, being one of several metaphors that figure centrally in his extensive and influential meditations on the relationship between ourselves and our world. Indeed, the best thumbnail description of his aim would be to show that the world is not 'blankly external' to the mind, and this description uses the metaphor. So the reservation went unheeded, and years later the metaphor and its cousins occupied large parts of *Mind and World*, which is the principal text which I shall consider, although they liberally sprinkle other writings as well. I shall use this opportunity to try to sensitize others to my reasons for discomfort.

My discomfort equally concerns the metaphor of the two spaces, the space of reasons and the space of causes, or as McDowell prefers to put it, the contrast between the space of reasons and the 'realm of law'.

Why should one worry about these two metaphors? I think we should acknowledge immediately that they do some sterling work in McDowell's criticism of others. Quine, for instance, makes the same mistake that, according to T.H. Green, Locke and Hume made, of conflating data in the sense of brute causal impingements from without, and data in the sense of basic reasons for beliefs.² This can be put by saying that

¹ Simon Blackburn, 'Knowledge, Truth and Reliability' Henrietta Hertz lecture to the British Academy, 1984, esp. footnote . Reprinted in *Essays in Quasi-Realism*, Oxford: Oxford University press 1993, esp. pp. 43-4.

² T. H. Green, Introduction to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, by David Hume, ed. Green & Grose, Longman's 1874.

he confuses denizens in the space of reason with those in the space of causes. Davidson makes the mistake of avoiding pure coherentism only by a global assurance that (from without) you will be seen as possessing mostly true beliefs, although God knows what their content will be. This is no substitute for wanting beliefs known true by local attention to the way of the world. Rorty jettisons too much of what makes the space of reasons what it is, giving us only a substitute that, because of its avoidance of representation and truth, is essentially mindless. These criticisms are compelling, and what is right about them can be indicated in part by use of the metaphor.

Yet there is danger at hand, because a metaphor can pave the way for inferences, inviting us to frame problems one way rather than another. A metaphor can blind us to possibilities, including the possibilities that give us philosophical control of an area. For that matter a metaphor can also make it easy to demonize those who do not see the subject in quite the same way. And I believe the spatial metaphors put us in peril of framing issues in a misleading and ultimately unsustainable way, a way that disappears with a more complete emancipation from a false view of the mind. So, as I read it, while much of *Mind and World* is written in terms of these metaphors, including its positive theses, they fit badly with what is best in the book. They show that McDowell is not as free of the presuppositions of an old and discredited philosophy of mind as his own animadversions on that philosophy would lead the innocent to believe.

I believe that this accounts for the sense some readers must surely have, that somehow in the course of the work, rather large rabbits are pulled out of a rather small hat. For then, not wanting to devalue the hat, seduced by the metaphors and perhaps by the almost sacerdotal progress of McDowell's persuasive prose, the unwary reader sees no option but to confess that it must indeed hold these rabbits.

The best parts I am referring to, as well as the criticisms of other major players already mentioned, are the Austinian or Strawsonian parts, seeking to substitute a better theory of perception and its objects for anything modeled on old-fashioned sense datum theory. The rabbits include the metaphysical inflation, railing against the bald and shallow metaphysics of the scientific world view. They include the dismissal of the standpoint of the 'cosmic exile' or 'sideways views' from which we attempt to understand ourselves as parts of a natural world. They include the doctrine that when we

evaluate things we simply display a sensitivity to the values things have. And above all, perhaps, they include the doctrine of ‘disjunctivitis’, or the denial of a highest common psychological factor between cases where we perceive things rightly and cases where we do not.

So what we have, I shall argue, is an admirable adherence to modern views about perception, made to deliver ambitious results, but only via allegiance to a way of framing the issues that are undermined in part by those views themselves, properly understood.

1. Early in *Mind and World* we are introduced to the Sellarsian concept of the space of reasons, and made to face up to the idea that only conceptual items, things within that space, are capable of justifying or being justified. The idea of the Given is the enemy, and

The idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought. But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities. The attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do.

McDowell goes on to elaborate:

What we wanted was a reassurance that when we use our concepts in judgement, our freedom—our spontaneity in the exercise of our understanding—is constrained from outside thought, and constrained in a way that we can appeal to in displaying the judgements as justified. But when we make out that the space of reasons is more extensive than the conceptual sphere, so that it can incorporate extra conceptual impingements from the world, the result is a picture in which constraint from outside is exerted at the outer boundary of the expanded space of reasons, in what we are committed to depicting as a brute impact from the exterior.

McDowell goes on to talk of an “alien force”, the causal impact of the world, operating outside the control of our spontaneity, or reason or judgment. In a well-known footnote, he compares the result of such an impact to that of being deposited somewhere by a tornado, giving us an event that might exculpate us (if, for instance, the question arose of whether we are somewhere we have any right to be), but that cannot be said to justify us, or give us reason for being where we are.

This enables McDowell both to set up a problem and give his solution to it. The problem is to stop the exercise of judgment from being entirely self-contained, disengaged from a reality outside the mind. In this picture it would be the play of what, in Kantian terms, would be concepts without intuitions, or concepts without responsiveness to anything other than themselves, in a self-contained dance of inferences. McDowell fears that Davidson has fallen into the trap of presenting a picture in which our thinking is thus self-contained, or only rescued by the inadequate global subterfuge indicated above, and it is frequently raised as a charge against his colleague Robert Brandom. It is as if a thought only maintains friendly relations with other thoughts, and never with things outside the realm of thought. This would be a version of idealism, and while it may be mischievous to say that it might remind us of Berkeley, it is sufficiently similar to his doctrine that an idea can only resemble (have representational relations with) another idea to explain one part of my title.³ Of course, this is consistent with McDowell’s point that the real problem is not one of epistemology, but is ‘transcendental’, in that what in Berkeley purport to be ideas, or in Davidson purport to be thoughts, in this scenario would fail to be ideas or thoughts at all.

³ More pedantically, the parallel is that Berkeley makes it impossible that an idea should have rational relationships with anything except another idea, just as Davidson makes it impossible that a belief or concept should have rational relations with anything except another belief or concept. The moral of quite popular transcendental arguments, such as that of Putnam’s brain-in-a-vat thought experiment, would be that this means that in the absence of a common-sense world, we could not be the subjects of genuine ideas or concepts at all. With these arguments in place, the idea is not so much one of thought spinning frictionlessly in the void, as of what purports to be thought not really being thought at all. I am indebted to Mark de Silva for conversation on this point.

McDowell, wants to rescue us from the oscillation between this threat of idealism, on the one hand, in which, as he nicely puts it, thought (or, better, fake thought, something that is only the façade of thought) spins frictionlessly in the void, and the lame solution represented by the Myth of the Given on the other hand, whereby impingements from outside the space of reason nevertheless anchor that balloon nicely to the world. His own proposal is what he calls the “unboundedness of the conceptual”. An independent reality does exercise control over our thinking, and this control is rational control. But it can only do this because it is itself in some sense ‘conceptual’. The bad picture is one of an

outer boundary around the sphere of the conceptual, with a reality outside the boundary impinging inward on the system. Any impingements across such an outer boundary could only be causal, and not rational... (p. 34).

Since experience, or what McDowell likes to call receptivity, certainly gives us rational control over what we believe, it is itself to be regarded as a kind of judgment, a judgment that typically discloses how things stand.

Thus begin McDowell’s battles with writers such as Evans and Peacocke, who have found it necessary to notice a ‘non-conceptual’ element within experience. According to McDowell, Evans, for example, falls for the myth of the given, by first acknowledging a non-conceptual element in experience (the kind of modification of consciousness that we might share with animals, for instance), and then trying to see the non-conceptual part as standing in some rational relationship to whatever judgement expresses what we experience.⁴

⁴ There is a scholarly question about whether it is fair to criticize Evans for falling for the Myth of the Given. Sellars's own attack on the myth takes as a premise a distinction between the materials of sense and the inputs to the processes of reason. It presupposes, therefore, that the sensory experiences and the conceptualizations are not the same thing, as indeed he says repeatedly, for instance between sections 25 and 32 of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. We should also remember that Sellars thought there were two mind-body problems. One was understanding how sensory qualities can be in brains, and the other is understanding how thoughts can be in brains. Sellars is not a monist about the contents of

This is a very interesting issue, and has probably prompted most of the reactions to *Mind and World*. But whatever its intrinsic interest, it is not actually central to the theory of mind and world, and by McDowell's own lights we ought to be able to put it to one side. We can see this by thinking for a moment of the Davidsonian coherentist slogan that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief. What strikes us as uncomfortable about that slogan is not the presence or absence of various non-conceptual elements in experience. As McDowell initially and rightly emphasizes, we are made uncomfortable by the absence of rational links to the world. If experience is introduced to allay this discomfort, it had better not figure as just another *belief*. And neither can it figure as just more belief, only tricked out with something else: modifications of experience such as sensations or qualia or the rest. So far as establishing contact with the world goes, these would simply function as decorations, having at best a causal role in making us believe things. Davidson's slogan would still rule. The question of sensation, a component of experience that we may well share with brute animals, is not fundamental. It simply would not matter whether consciousness included such stuff. If it could only function causally, it would be as if we were victims of an incessant succession of belief-inducing injections, we would still be left with idealism or coherentism. It wouldn't matter in the least if the injections also felt one way or another. To sum up, what is missing is not the idea of experience as belief plus an add-on of sensation or feeling or anything non-conceptual, for no add-on would do the work of showing that in experience beliefs are formed in ways, whatever they may be, that make them more likely to be true. It is clear that no phenomenal extra, intrinsic to the experience itself, could do that.

If non-conceptual content is not thought of in this way, because the idea of genuine content is played up beyond anything recognizable as mere sensation, then it has a very narrow path to find, being neither phenomenologically self-standing as sensations and qualia might be, nor articulable by the agent as the reason for a belief (since that

consciousness. In his own attack on the myth Sellars was primarily concerned to deny that sensations can play the role of empiricist foundations for belief, so the question is whether Evans thinks that they do.

would make it conceptual again). It is indeed hard to see what it could be, and for the purpose of this paper I am happy to let McDowell's rejection of it stand (I am not here bothered by the problem of animal thought). It is, of course, an entirely different matter whether an episode of perceiving something, say for a definite duration, is to be assimilated to a different event, such as believing something for the same duration. Sidelining the word 'content' does not mean sidelining perceptual events, nor dismissing everything that is distinctive about perception, distinguishing it from the simple arrivals and departures of beliefs.⁵

2. Should we then avoid extending 'the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere?' I think it is too unclear what this means for us to judge. Let us consider an everyday observation. Mary has come to believe that there is butter in the fridge. How? Suppose that she saw it. She went and looked, and there was the butter. What justifies her belief? Most obviously, *that* she saw it. Here we can agree with Strawson, Evans, and nearly all contemporary philosophers, that her doing so is necessarily but a tiny exercise of a vast set of dispositions. Mary has learned to interpret what she sees. She has learned how far she can see. She has some practiced confidence (she gets butter right) and surrounding modesties (she cannot tell contraband butter from legitimate butter, or Jersey from Guernsey, just at sight). She knows in the same way how to find out if there is butter in the fridge, a car in the garage, or a cat in the garden, and she knows that if there was butter in the fridge a few minutes ago and nobody in the room, then it is probably there now, that if it can be seen from one angle it can be seen from others, that it has a life of its own when she departs, and she can tell if other things are in the fridge and if the butter is in other places, and so on and so on.

So when we say that Mary is justified because the butter was there and she saw it, are we taking justificatory relations 'outside the conceptual sphere'? We are taking them as far as the butter and the fridge. Mary is certainly justified, and by that plenipotent

⁵ To take just one instance: the arrivals and departures of experience command attention in the way that arrivals and departures of beliefs need not. The enjoyment of experiences is episodic whereas the having of a belief is not.

way of earning the title, namely that she got the right result, and did so by exercising an activity exactly adapted to getting the right result, and that she knew to be so adapted. She would not be displaying confidence about the butter had she not gone and looked; she does not find herself in the grip of strange and inexplicable beliefs on such matters, and she gets things right markedly more often when she does go and look. We might say that Mary is abundantly justified, leaving it open how much of this abundance she could jettison while still being justified.

McDowell's does not of course deny any of the common-sense thoughts about observation. Indeed, it is part of his project to establish them. But he thinks he can only do so by firmly placing the facts about butter, cars and cats 'within' the conceptual sphere. More precisely, it is the very things that Mary knows—that the butter is in the fridge and so on—that are to be enfolded in the sphere or space of concepts. So in turn the question now becomes where we know what is referred to by such clauses, and hence what it means to think of their referents as being in some space or another.

One might hazard that it is a fact that is referred to, and McDowell often describes himself as insisting that the mind reaches as far as facts. And we can say that it is the fact that butter is in the fridge, together with the other things I have mentioned, that justifies Mary. But facts are queer referents, queer enough not even to be regarded as referents by many philosophers (including Strawson). They are not spatial entities. If they were, as Wittgenstein remarked, they could move around, but they cannot. Some of their queerness as referents comes out if we consider again the central sentence of the first quotation from McDowell that I gave: "But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities". That the butter is in the fridge is a potential exercise of conceptual capacities? Surely not. That the butter is in the fridge might be, for instance, a reasonable matter for gratitude or source of amazement, but it is not a potential exercise of a conceptual capacity for which one is then grateful or at which one is amazed. That the butter is in the fridge may put us at risk of getting fatter. But it is not the exercise of a conceptual capacity that puts us at such risk.

So do we recoil to the allegedly sole alternative, so that ‘that the butter is in the fridge’ becomes tornado-like, brute, alien, merely a provider of ‘impacts from the exterior’? Not if we refuse to work in terms of the spatial metaphor. There are of course a number of things that make this language inappropriate to Mary. One is that her activities as an observer – her goings and lookings – are intelligently directed. She knows what she is doing, and what she is doing is exactly what is needed to discover what she wants to know. Mary is in control, precisely unlike someone deposited here and there by tornadoes. Like Julius Caesar, she comes, she sees, and she conquers. What she conquers is her ignorance of where the butter is, or of what is in the fridge.

A related thing to say is that when we describe Mary, we are not confined to listing the onset of her beliefs, as we might be if we were making the diary of the mental life of a delusive paranoid. This is one thing that is jarring about Davidson’s slogan. It makes it sound as though a sufficient list of her beliefs, made independently of any concern with how they were formed, would tell us everything we need to know about Mary’s status as a reasonable person. But this is quite wrong. We applaud Mary as reasonable only because we know, as she does, not only that beliefs were formed, but why they were formed.

The butter is firmly within the realm of law, and that the butter is in the fridge might be so as well (if we were worried about both butter and fridges being human artifacts we could change the example). Things like butter have a chemical constitution, shape, size, weight and mass and behave in predictable ways. That is why we can see them. The butter impinges on Mary, and if she is a typical fridge-gazer, it will generate an impact from the exterior, from outside her boundaries, in fact from about three or four feet away from her. But then many things “within” the realm of law seem to be understood by us, and so in some sense at any rate fall “within” the sphere of our concepts. Otherwise we could not talk about them.

Minimalists about truth and facts will deny that ‘that the butter is in the fridge’ has a referent at all. Others think it does. Some will hold that it refers to a proposition, others that sometimes it splits into a demonstrative, and the production of a saying which

is then demonstrated.⁶ Others again, including Davidson, celebrate the notorious slingshot argument, as showing that all facts collapse into one. I can afford to remain agnostic about that. All I am denying is that any referent we may devise for it is an appropriate candidate for spatial imagery. Indeed, if we were to adopt McDowell's spatial imagery, we might say that Mary's receptivity is within the sphere of her spontaneity, meaning that the way she makes observations is something over which she exercises rational control. But then we might equally find ourselves saying that her spontaneity is within the sphere of her receptivity, meaning that the way she thinks about things is responsive to what she observes. Perhaps we want to be able to say both these things, but the metaphor of spaces and spheres then gets in the way. It leaves us with the uncomfortable image of my title. One moment Julius Caesar – our information-gathering techniques and activities exercised in the realm of law – is on top; the next moment George Berkeley – the fact that all this is understood by us, and can be made to appear to be just one more element in our system of beliefs – gains the ascendance, and so it goes on.⁷

The problem here is that McDowell does not succeed in cementing the idea of an observation firmly into the idea of *activities* within the world, *techniques* of discovery and manipulation which are possible to us only as situated within the same spatial and causal world as the things which concern us, the realm of law.

Nothing we have said about Mary takes what she saw outside the realm of law. But neither do they take Mary. Mary's belief that butter is in the fridge is certainly one on which she can exercise reason. At the limit, if she has excellent reason for doubting that such a thing could be, she will doubt the evidence of her senses. But without the dualistic metaphors (realm of spontaneity versus realm of law; space of reasons versus space of

⁶ Donald Davidson, 'On Saying That', *Synthese*, 1968, reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 2001.

⁷ There is an echo here of the 'just more theory' debate between David Lewis (here representing the Julius Caesar tendency) and Hilary Putnam. See Hilary Putnam, 'Models and Reality' in his *Realism and Reason*: Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 1 – 26; David Lewis 'Putnam's Paradox', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 62, 1984, 221 – 36; Barry Taylor, 'Just More Theory', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 1991, 152 – 166.

causes) this should not worry us. Philosophers enamoured of the scientific world view never denied that Mary would be complex, able to juggle observations against memory or testimony or other ancillary evidences. The baldest of scientific metaphysics will accommodate Mary, or, if it will not, it will be because of some other way in which intentionality escapes the realm of law, and that other way is not yet on the table.

3. The butter caused Mary's belief. Had it not been there, reflecting light or doing other buttery things, Mary would not have formed her confidence that it was there. We know of this causal relationship, which is why we can use it to effect changes in Mary's belief. If we know she will be worried about having butter over Christmas, we can reassure her best by putting the butter where she will lay eyes on it.

I do not want to charge McDowell with ignoring such platitudes, although I believe that some have taken the oneness of mind and world to exclude any conceptual linkage between causation and observation.⁸ But it is fair to worry whether causation is entirely central to McDowell's thinking. Could the notion of spontaneity take its leading role if it were? There is nothing spontaneous in any ordinary sense about Mary's coming into awareness of the butter, however many conceptual abilities are in play as she does so. But for ancillary evidence that causation may need to make its voice heard more loudly, I should like to turn briefly to a different work.

In his paper 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule Following' McDowell introduces his interpretation of the rule-following considerations.⁹ In particular he discusses their significance for the issue of objectivity in moral philosophy, by quoting what he ringingly endorses as a marvelous passage from Stanley Cavell:

We learn and teach words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing insures that this projection will take place (in particular, not the grasping of universals nor the grasping of books of rules), just as nothing

⁸ Paul Snowdon, 'The Objects of Perceptual Appearance' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 1990, 121 – 150.

⁹ John McDowell, 'Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following' in Holtzman S. & Leich, C., eds. *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule*, London: Routledge, 1981.

insures that we will make, and understand, the same projections. That on the whole we do is a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, senses of humour and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation – all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls “forms of life”. Human speech and activity, sanity and community, rest upon nothing more, but nothing less, than this. It is a vision as simple as it is difficult, and as difficult as it is (and because it is) terrifying.¹⁰

It is I think a little surprising to find this passage as an icon for a philosophy so hostile to attempts to gain ‘sideways-on’ views of ourselves. In this passage Cavell manages to tell us rather a lot from what might seem to be an external or sideways-on standpoint on our language and thought. He tells us both what language does ‘rest upon’, and what it does not. Perhaps this is not in the relevant sense to be thought of as taking up sideways-on viewpoint. But that merely raises the question of what then is to be tarred with that particular brush.

But before we return to that, while we are worrying about causation there is a different problem. Consider the things upon which language is here said to rest: routes of interest and feeling, senses of humour and so on. All of the things Cavell cites are reasonably called aspects of human nature. Cavell simply ignores any aspects of the world apart from human nature. He might have mentioned the properties and powers of things, or the existence of causal laws or substances or space or time. For one would have thought at the very least that our language rests upon the surroundings in which we find ourselves and live our lives, just as firmly as it rests upon us ourselves. But natural kinds are absent, and with them causal powers and the influence of those powers. The “realm of law” is just not invited.

This omission is not just an accident or an oversight. For the vision that Cavell talks of at the climax of his account is ‘terrifying’ *only* because of the absence of the world. Suppose instead Cavell had said that we teach and learn words in connection with kinds of things; people catch on to which kinds of things these are; nothing logically

¹⁰ Stanley Cavell, *Must we Mean What we Say?*, New York: Charles Scribner, 1969. p. 52.

guarantees that they will, but our shared natures make it very likely that we will, and human speech and activity rest on nothing more nor less than that, together of course with our senses of humour and the rest. There is no vertiginous vision, and nothing terrifying there. The vertigo we are invited to suffer (and the thrill of suffering it) depend entirely on the absence of anything to anchor us, and the resulting image of ourselves as either spinning in a void, or at best in a world entirely of our own making. And although it is incidental to this paper I myself doubt if this purely anthropocentric emphasis is faithful to Wittgenstein. On p. 230 of the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein says "...Our interest certainly includes the correspondence between concepts and very general facts of nature". I do not hear Wittgenstein intending anything vertiginous.

But Cavell's neglect is explicable. He will not seem to have neglected anything important when Berkeley is on top. The things Julius Caesar stands for—placing ourselves, manipulating things, exploiting what we know of the ways things work—are not denied. They are just assimilated to other conceptual exercises, such as the making of inferences, or the popping of new ideas into the mind. Hence, they do not deserve separate mention.

This becomes important when we remember that Strawson, McDowell and practically all philosophers for the last half century have emphasized both the non-inferential nature of observation and the range of things we can properly be said to observe. Things do not come to us as raw stimuli tagged in some empiricist language: what Quine himself called the fancifully fanciless medium of unvarnished news. Instead, an observation is more like the first thought that comes into our head. It is this that enables McDowell to bring into the *geisteswissenschaften* the equivalent of the collapse of the observation-theory distinction in the *naturwissenschaften*. The well-trained natural scientist, at home with his instruments, sees the nebula, the mitochondria, or the electrical field. The human being, with a second-nature properly developed, sees or hears the meaning of another's words, the intention of their action, or the villainy or innocence of their demeanour. In neither case is there any conscious inference, so in each case we can talk unblushingly of observation.

If we put together the Berkeleian turn represented by Cavell, and Strawson's generosity, the way is open to our deeming ourselves to observe more or less what we

like: the past, the future, norms, forces, counterfactual truths, the meaning of the Constitution or Picasso's intentions, and if we are so minded, the grace of God or impending doom.

4. I said that Mary knew why she came to believe that there was butter in the fridge, and so do we. Possibly, neither Mary nor we made any conscious inference, although of course it is also possible that we did. But why would that be an interesting question? Observation is a source of authority, but it makes little difference to Mary's authority whether she had to make an inference, or whether a training and a habituation meant that the first thought that came into her head already gave her its conclusion. Her inference, had she needed to make one, might have been unwarranted. But then her training and habituation might have warped her mind as well. Indeed we might have thought that Cavell himself, as well as boycotting reality, goes out of his way to invite a certain pessimism about the credentials of observation. At any rate virtually all the features of human nature that he cites are very clearly empirically variable. On the face of it they would be of more service to a Kuhn or a Foucault than to the project of recovering an Aristotelian innocence. If we are denied a sideways look at ourselves, the result, in cases of ideology and ethics, would be not so much confidence that our particular *bildung* has resulted in an unbounded openness of world to mind, as fear that it has trapped us so firmly within our paradigms or our *episteme* that we no longer recognize our prison as a confinement. If we are deaf to the threat of skepticism or relativism at this point, it will not so much seem like an exercise of Aristotelian innocence or magnificence, as an exercise of, well, deafness.¹¹

If we put agency and causation back in the centre of the picture, we can say some more things than this. We can in principle discover which of Mary's subconscious or subdoxastic systems was involved with the observation she made, and we can talk of the links between the ways such systems work, and the truth or falsity that Mary enunciates. Suppose, for instance, Mary hears the sarcasm in someone's voice. We can ask what

¹¹ This is where we can feel the attractions of Rorty's attempt simply to abandon any notion of representation at all. I do the same in the case of ethics, but not across the board.

caused her so to hear him. We might get the plonking reply that it was the sarcasm (in one terminology, this is called a modest reply, but it is at least as natural to hear it as incipiently self-congratulatory). But we might also get a more informative reply: the contours of his intonation, or the fact that he avoided this word, or stressed that one. And in turn these factors can be expanded or detailed further, and we could build up a picture of Mary's reliability as a detector of sarcasm. We might find, for instance, that in some contexts she is very good, but in others fails to notice sarcasm, or invents it where it does not exist. She might be good amongst her peers, but get thrown completely by the accents of a different class or place.

If she possesses more than a rudimentary self-consciousness, Mary will herself be able to conduct this thinking, and test her own diagnosis of sarcasm. Children manage to learn that not everybody who sounds slightly different is mocking them. Of course, as we measure ourselves, we also use our own judgments, but that is quite in order, provided that there is enough independent confirmation or disconfirmation of what we spontaneously judged to give us a handle on the nature of our spontaneous judgment and its reliability.

This independence, of course, can only be granted up to a certain point. Mary, or people observing her, can come upon the question of whether such-and-such an intonation is a reliable sign of sarcasm, but they cannot answer it independently of *any* use of *some* indication of sarcasm. There are currently suggestions that microscopic muscular changes around the eyes betoken dishonesty, and that while only gifted human observers are sensitive to these cues, machines could be developed that register them much more reliably. Well and good, but we need (and of course, have) less subtle manifestations of dishonesty against which to calibrate the gifted observers, or the machines.

Quine and Rorty have said things like this:

An observation sentence is one which all speakers of the language give the same verdict when given the same concurrent stimulation. To put the point negatively, an observation

sentence is one that is not sensitive to differences in past experience within the speech community.¹²

An observation is, in effect, what enough other people will accept as an authoritative first thought to pop into your head in one circumstance or another. McDowell is right to guard against the democratic air of this. There is such a thing as the development of sensitivity, or the trained observer or *phronimos* who may indeed observe things that other people cannot. But once we bring causation back into the picture, we see that the authority of the trained observer is not, as it were, self-standing. His or her credentials are established, and in difficult cases, either in science or in human life, there are procedures for querying them, and procedures for self-checking that an intelligent agent can use. These procedures take us back to less theoretical or less ambitious conceptions of what made the agent give the verdict they did, and the links between the situation described in those terms, and the situation as interpreted in the original terms.

It is possible then to distinguish two different cases. Sometimes, but not always, the procedures can start from asking what was actually seen or heard in stripped down terms, less ambitious terms than the subject first used. We have the lawyer's injunction to "just stick to the facts". Some cases always fit such a request. The first thought in the subject's head may have been 'impending rain', but we can request an answer to what was observed that sticks to the present. 'That it is going to rain' can be seen or felt, but only because something else is seen or felt. This in no way implies that the thought that it is about to rain is the conclusion of an inference: our natural belief formation can be more automatic, and just as rational as anything deserving the name of inference. Ethical observation also conforms to this model. In Harman's famous example, in one sense the first thought in the spectators minds may have been 'what a dreadful thing to do', but there is a stripped down report that they are also able to give: 'first they caught the cat, then they got the gasoline...'. Furthermore, spectators who were genuinely unable to give that second report would be highly suspect as moralists. It is not a signal of good moralists that they find the thought that something was a dreadful thing to do popping

¹² W. V. Quine, 'Epistemology Naturalised', p. 86 <check>

into their heads without their having anything to say about why (there are fascinating contrasts here with aesthetics, arising from the strong justificatory demands that good moralizing has to meet). In fact, a sufficient inability to retreat will disqualify the subject from being properly regarded as a moralist at all. In McDowell's own phrase, he will just begin to seem to be somebody who on occasion sounds off.

In other cases however the subject may have nowhere to which to retreat, while the interlocutor does. The subject just heard the melody or the sarcasm or saw the benevolence or the beauty, and asked by the lawyer to stick to exactly what was seen or heard, is at a loss. It does not follow that the interlocutor has nowhere to which to retreat. He or she can discover what else it was about the situation that prompted the subject's verdict, just as the artist may know what shapes and shadings to create to prompt the seeing of the drawing as a picture of a sneer or a smile, or the investigator might discover what the conjuror did in order that the audience saw him produce an egg from his ear.

Finally there are cases of what we might call bare receptivity. Here, neither the subject nor any investigator can retreat to a stripped down story. Suppose, for instance, the subject saw a straight black line on a white page. Faced with the demand to tell exactly what he saw, there is unlikely to be anything further he can say. And in an ordinary case there is unlikely to be anything else an investigator can say either: there is no story of the kind 'this is how it was done' except that it was done by a straight black line on a white page. Of course, there will be further things to know about the retina and the optic nerve and the visual cortex. But these form no part of normal self-reflective practice. They are not used in everyday procedures. It does not follow that they should be banished from philosophy, of course, and the theory of secondary qualities hinges very importantly on knowing just how they get in. But for the present purpose what is telling, and what surely motivated traditional philosophy of science and traditional moral and mental epistemology alike at this point, is that even if we are we are receptive to quarks, duties and other minds, we are surely not barely receptive to them.

The point of these thoughts about observation and judgement is not to reintroduce some version of the idea that anything to which we are not barely receptive is the result of inference, or even to reintroduce an observation/theory distinction. The point is just that in cases where we are not barely receptive to one or another feature of things,

there is available an ordinary ‘sideways-on’ perspective on what we do. It is this sideways-on perspective, a refinement of common-sense, that motivates worries about the enchanted world which McDowell takes to be “disclosed” to us. Of course, the worries will not be felt by anyone secure enough in her own sense of her own receptivity not to raise any questions. The believer feels within herself the working of divine grace, and her confrères think she does too. They never have to raise the question of whether this is the operation of bare receptivity, and neither do we, unless of course we want to understand things better.

Properly read, even Cavell does not have us stop before these thoughts, since he leaves it quite possible that the confidence that we have observed in our own souls the working of divine grace is the function of some other element of our whirl of life: our self-importance or our resentment or imperial will to power, for instance, after which it will be impossible to think of it as a simple openness of mind to world.

5. The spatial metaphor more or less forces the allied doctrine of ‘disjunctivitis’ upon us, and it is a tribute to McDowell’s strength of mind that he has been able to accept it. In its industrial-strength version disjunctivitis is the view that there is nothing fundamental in common, no ‘highest common factor’ between someone whose mind embraces a fact, and someone whose mind does not. One mind has a bit in it (the referent of the that clause, construed as telling of the fact that is ‘within’ the mind) and the other does not. Their minds are unlike, as unlike as a nest with an egg in it and a nest without one. And there is nothing else to say about how they are similar, except in the most general terms: that each satisfies the disjunction of being either genuinely faced with a fact, or not (each either has an egg in it, or is empty). The quietist potential of this doctrine is apparent: either you embrace the facts or you do not, and if you do you owe no explanation—indeed there simply is no explanation—of your doing that starts, as it were, from anywhere psychologically or metaphysically further back.

Disjunctivists might be thought to hold that there is no such thing as false belief. For if there is nothing in common, no highest common factor, between minds perceiving (containing, reaching as far as, disclosed to by) a fact, and failed minds appeared to in such a way that they take the same thing to be a fact when it is not, then how can there be

anything in common between minds believing something to be a fact when it is, and those other failures believing it to be a fact when it is not? For some reason however, and in spite of the general trend to assimilate perception to belief, the doctrine is usually confined to perceptual experience.

If we avoid the spatial metaphor for the mind, will anything motivate disjunctivism? Indeed, can we so much as believe that we *understand* the doctrine, without a fatal distortion of the whole philosophy of mind?

Mary and twin-Mary can equally be told by their experience that there is butter in front of them, when one is faced with butter, and the other only with fool's butter (margarine, perhaps). Third Twin Mary further out in modal space, who is faced with nothing, but is having her optic nerve stimulated by the mad scientist is equally being told by her experience that there is butter in front of her. But according to this version of disjunctivism, there is no more in common between these sisters than between Mary and anyone else who is not faced with butter: a twin facing an elephant, or another sky-diving for instance.

What could motivate this view? Some things certainly will not. The position that experience is intrinsically or fundamentally 'presentational' will not. This is the doctrine that an experience could not be what it is did it not present things to us as being one way or another. But each of these sisters is being told, by her experience, how things stand, and each can absorb what they are told and factor it into their other beliefs and desires.¹³ In other words, each can behave rationally as a result. This is what made it so unappealing to deny that one using a term empty of reference, as one of these three would be doing if she said 'Lo, that butter is rancid' is thereby denied the status of thinking anything, while the other two qualify. In fact this last claim is a pure example of the spatial way of thinking in action: here an empty demonstrative is diagnosed as leaving a hole in a complex called 'content' — a hole in the head, as it were.

¹³ If we are fastidious about the dangers of metaphor, we will worry about the locution of 'being told' something by their experience. All that I want is that this is the understanding of what they are faced with that is all-but-irresistibly borne in upon them by what they see, and we can add for basic cases that they have no retreat to a less demanding conception of what they are faced with.

A second fear that we can discount is that if we admit a commonality between our Marys, we will be ignoring Austin's or Sellars's claim for the priority of 'is' over 'appears'. Not at all, for we can give the veridical case priority in all kinds of ways. Alexander Bain said that a belief was a preparation for action, so we might try the idea that it appearing to one as if there is butter there is a state disposing one to readiness for actions that, given one's desires, would be successful if and only if there is butter in the environment. This kind of suggestion, crude thought it may be, accords with Sellars's priority for it approaches 'appears' only in terms of 'is'. And it is only a suggestion, for there would be many other similar approaches.

Another fear that should be put aside is that unless we embrace disjunctivitis, the old grim problems of Cartesian epistemology will once more overwhelm us.¹⁴ The idea will be that to defeat these problems Mary will need to strip what she is allowed to know down to some subjective core that she shares with her siblings, and enter on the forlorn attempt to regain the whole sphere of empirical knowledge from just such a string of subjective cores. But this is in no way implied by agreeing to what we have said about Mary and her siblings. The world is presented as being a certain way, the same way, to each of them. Two are mistaken. But this does not mean that they are never justified in taking their experience at face value. Nor does it mean that they ever gain anything except confusion by attempting to subject all their experience, en bloc, to a process of Cartesian doubt. We can admit a shared psychological state between a Mary who remembers childhood abuse, and another who is the victim of induced false memory syndrome, without falling into a pit in which memory is regarded as intrinsically untrustworthy, or only otherwise by the grace of God. We can admit shared beliefs between those who believe truly and those who believe falsely without making a single step to thinking that our beliefs together form a set of presences from which we vainly try to infer facts about the world.

Such an idea may well sound absurd in the case of beliefs, but it is no more absurd than the fear that the 'highest common factor' must be thought of in terms of the presence of a proxy: mental butter, perhaps something like an extremely thin slice of

¹⁴ This especially grips McDowell on pp. 111–3.

butter or an ‘extremely thin coloured picture’ of ordinary butter.¹⁵ To think that is just to reapply the bad old spatial metaphor. The sisters, we have said, are each in the same state of experiencing the world as having butter before them. This is the highest common factor. There is simply no reason to think of this ‘state’ as reified, a Tractarian configuration in which mind contains some sinister thing which in one of the cases is a fact, but in two of the cases fails to be, and so is nothing of this world but only something ‘in the head’.

In the grip of the spatial metaphor, one might uncritically find oneself heaping scorn on those who reject disjunctivitis. They will be leaving facts blankly external to minds. They will be denying transparency of mind to world. They will be condemned to failure of understanding altogether, to darkness within. But shake off the grip, and all is well. People finding an interesting commonality between Mary and her twins are as commonsensical as those finding an interesting commonality between believing that it is Mary in the room when it is Mary, and believing that it is Mary when it is her indistinguishable twin Mary.

It is interesting that in a discussion of McDowell on this matter, Hilary Putnam in effect interprets this as being McDowell’s own point.¹⁶ According to Putnam, McDowell would of course admit to the highest common factor I talked of (let us call it the highest common *feature*): the fact that each of them is being told by their experience that there is butter in front of them. According to Putnam McDowell’s point is simply to exorcise the tendency to think of this shared feature in terms of the presence of a proxy, a mental object or intermediate thing. He thus sees McDowell as simply following the Jamesian, or Austinian, path of distinguishing sharply between a quality being ‘in’ an experience intentionally (it is how the experience presents things as being) and it being something else, a proxy, described adjectivally. This is not an industrial-strength disjunctivitis, but a pussy-cat disjunctivitis, telling us to avoid thinking of the highest common feature spatially.

¹⁵ This phrase parodying sense-datum theory comes from John Wisdom

¹⁶ Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord Mind, Body, and World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 152.

Often, McDowell's own language is indeed interpretable either way. For example, he identifies the highest common factor conception as:

The idea that even when things go well, cognitively speaking, our subjective position can only be something common between such cases and cases in which things do not go well

But that description of an idea straddles the harmless, indeed essential, things we have said about Mary and her twins, and the harmful spatialization of it that suggests the idea of a proxy. It is indeterminate from this whether McDowell intended a denial of the apparently harmless and essential things, which certainly makes the doctrine of disjunctivitis radical, but also quite unacceptable, or only a denial of something like old-fashioned sense-data, which leave it quite innocuous. My claim is that McDowell does not bring the difference into focus and does not speak unambiguously precisely because of the power of the spatial metaphor in his thought. It means that whenever subjectivity becomes the topic the fear of the mind as retreating 'within' takes over, and then the harmless and essential things to say about delusive perception and false belief get caught up in the panic.

I said above that even taking oneself to understand the doctrine of disjunctivitis already implies a contaminated philosophy of mind, and it may still not be apparent why this is so. Well, what could be meant by saying that those who have experience as of butter being present when it is not, and those who have experience as of butter being present when it is (I almost wrote, those who have the same experience when it is) share no single state of mind? Quite apart from the phantom fears that motivate the doctrine, what can we make of the doctrine itself? It is admitted that Mary and Twin Mary and Third Twin Mary are in indistinguishable states (if the butter flickered into margarine and back, or was miraculously substitute by proximate or distal stimuli of just the right kind, Mary or her twins could not tell). So there are *lots* of descriptions that apply equally to them, such as the one about action derived from Alexander Bain. Their functioning, and their dispositions such as their preparations for agency, are identical, insofar as these are functions of how things appear. So what is not identical?

The only answer is their ‘mental states’ conceived as these would be by a spatially contaminated philosophy of mind (it does not matter how obese this mind has become, for the image is still fatal). These ‘mental states’ are reified states like structures, occupying a region that either contains something or does not. And then it is indeed possible to think that Mary has a real egg in her nest, Twin Mary only a cuckoo’s egg, and Third Twin Mary has nothing there at all. Their inner spaces differ, just because its boundaries now extend so far.

McDowell on Putnam’s interpretation ought, therefore, to be counseling us firmly *against* the blandishments of disjunctivitis. There is nothing to be said for it once the spatial metaphor is abandoned. And McDowell’s embrace of the doctrine undermines any claim to be free of the ghosts of the past. But even if Putnam were right our interpretations would agree about this, that one of the results of *Mind and World*—and it is not a negligible result—should be an even more profound mistrust of the spatial metaphors which alarm me by presenting themselves so much as crucial parts of its argument, and of its solution to the problem of relating world and mind.