

# MCDOWELL'S ACCOUNT OF PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

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## 1. Introduction

John McDowell's account of perceptual knowledge is arguably one of the most innovative presently available. However, one risk that often accompanies being innovative is that it is sometimes difficult to see how one's ideas relate to more traditional lines of thought. In this paper I attempt go some way towards remedying this problem. I will argue that McDowell's account of perceptual knowledge may be interpreted as an attempt to preserve the epistemic internalist intuition that what it means for one's belief to be justified is that one is in a position to present reasons for one's beliefs and the epistemic externalist intuition that there must be a constitutive relationship between what makes one's belief justified and what makes one's belief true. To this end, I will be attempting to make explicit, motivate and clarify, what I take to be four central pillars of McDowell's epistemological project: (1) epistemic internalism, (2) content externalism, (3) singular-thought disjunctivism and (4) justificatory dogmatism.

By perceptual knowledge I mean knowledge that is based on perceptual experience in the following sense: if a subject *S* knows that there is some external object *O*, then her belief that *O* exists is based on a perceptual experience of *O*.<sup>1</sup> For simplicity, my discussion will be limited to the case of vision, but presumably what follows may be generalised with respect to the other sensory modalities. In §2-§5, I explain the four McDowellian doctrines listed above and show how they combine to provide an original account of perceptual knowledge. In §6 I respond to the objection that two of the above theses—namely, McDowellian *E*-internalism and McDowellian *C*-externalism—are inconsistent with each other.<sup>2</sup> I argue that on McDowell's understanding of object-dependent singular thought, this objection fails. In §7 I conclude by responding to what I take to be the main putative objection to McDowell's account and consider some of the further implications of his framework for a general theory of perceptual knowledge.

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell prefers to talk about seeing facts—i.e., seeing that *O* is *F*—rather than merely seeing objects. However, in this paper I will limit myself to the basic case of seeing an object *O* in order to avoid certain complications that arise once we begin to discuss seeing an object in a certain way—for example, seeing a cricket ball *as red*. Such complex cases require that a subject get things right, not only about the existence of a certain perceptual object, but also about the properties of that object, such as its being red.

<sup>2</sup> Significantly, to the extent that epistemic internalism and content externalism are incompatible, so too are epistemic internalism and justificatory dogmatism since McDowell's claim that the justification of our perceptual beliefs is factive presupposes a content externalist framework. Thus, maintaining the consistency of epistemic internalism and justificatory dogmatism also requires a reconciliation of the former with content externalism. The upshot is that the coherence of McDowell's account depends fundamentally on the consistency of epistemic internalism and content externalism. Defending the consistency of these two McDowellian theses will therefore be one of primary goals of this paper.

## 2. McDowellian Epistemic Internalism

McDowell conceives of justification in terms of the Sellarsian metaphor of 'having the right standing in the space of reasons'.<sup>3</sup>This metaphor embodies a *E*-internalist intuition since it conceives of knowledge in terms of a subject's ability to present reasons for her beliefs, rather than in a causal (or some other extra-rational) connection between a belief and its object. In fact, the logical space of reasons is defined precisely in terms of that which stands in contrast to the logical space of lawful causal interactions. On this score, Wilfrid Sellars asserts:

In characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says' (Sellars [1963] p. 169).

Taking my cue from the above passage, I will be interpreting the expression "space of reasons" as an umbrella term for our reason-giving practices; that which has to do with justifying and being able to justify what we say.

*Space of reasons* =<sup>def</sup> that having to do with our social epistemic practice of reason-giving.

As it stands, the above definition is still vague and in need of further unpacking, but it will do for our present purposes. Central to McDowell's conception of the 'space of reasons' is the claim that all factors relevant to the epistemic standing of a subject's beliefs are subjectively available to her. Thus, McDowell asserts:

[O]ne's epistemic standing on some question cannot intelligibly be constituted, even in part, by matters blankly external to how it is with one subjectively. For how could such matters be other than beyond one's ken? And how could matters beyond one's ken make any difference to one's epistemic standing? (McDowell [1998], p. 390)

I interpret the locution 'how it is with one subjectively', as an umbrella term for the sorts of things that are typically taken to be internally available to one, such as one's thoughts, beliefs, attitudes etc. By McDowell's lights, the circle delineating what is subjectively available to one exhausts that which may serve as a justifier for one's beliefs. When this idea is restated in the argot of possible worlds, we arrive at the following definition of McDowellian *E*-internalism:

*McDowellian E-Internalism:*

For all subjects  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , if  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  and  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  are identical in terms of how things are with them subjectively, then  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are identical in all respects relevant to the justification of their beliefs.

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<sup>3</sup> See: McDowell [1995].

McDowell contrasts his particular brand of *E*-internalism with what he refers to as “full-blown” *E*-externalism.<sup>4</sup> Within the McDowellian framework, full-blown *E*-externalism amounts to the rejection of ‘how things are with one subjectively’ or ‘the space of reasons’ as the locus of epistemic justification:

According to a full-blown externalist approach, knowledge has nothing to do with positions in the space of reasons: knowledge is a state of the knower linked to the state of affairs known in such a way that the knower’s being in that state is a reliable indicator that the state of affairs obtains. (McDowell [1995], p. 882).

McDowell shares the intuition, more prevalent among *E*-externalist than *E*-internalist, that there must be a constitutive relationship between a belief’s justification and its truth. Traditional *E*-externalism, insofar as it is concerned with justification at all, attempts to preserve the idea of a constitutive connection between justification and truth by dispensing with the notion of justification as reason-giving.<sup>5</sup> This is where McDowell’s *E*-internalist pedigree is most apparent since he wants to hold on to the idea of justification as reason-giving. McDowell views the failure of traditional *E*-internalism to provide a constitutive connection between justification and truth as an upshot, not to its commitment to the notion of justification as reason-giving, but as a side-effect of a certain conception of mental content—namely, ‘the idea of the inner realm as self-standing, with everything within it arranged as it is independently of external circumstances’ (McDowell [1986] p. 152). I will refer to McDowell’s diagnosis of the source of traditional *E*-internalism’s failure as the *interiorised conception*.

I take the interiorised conception to represent a marriage of *E*-internalism and *C*-internalism. Jessica Brown [2004] defines *C*-internalism as the view that a subject’s mental states are individuated wholly by her internal states, such as her brain states. On this view, the environment may cause a subject to be in a certain type of inner state and hence a certain mental state, but the environment is inessential to her being in that type of mental state. Once she is in the relevant type of brain state, she will also have the relevant mental state, regardless of what factors (i.e., the state of the world, the actions of a neuroscientist, or Cartesian demon) are responsible for her being in the particular type of brain state.<sup>6</sup> The upshot of *C*-internalism is that a subject’s thought contents may be caused, but are in no way constituted by her environment. *C*-internalism is essentially a theory about mental content and how they are individuated; not an epistemological thesis. However, once it is combined with *E*-internalism, a lacuna is introduced between our beliefs and what makes them true. Admittedly, the advocate of the interiorised

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<sup>4</sup> The qualification “full-blown” is important since McDowell’s approach has certain *E*-externalist features—namely, a commitment to there being a constitutive connection between justification and truth.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I have in mind *E*-externalist approaches such as justification reliabilism which, though concerned with justification, construes justification in terms that are independent of the subject’s subjective makeup and therefore unavailable to the subject in the game of giving reasons.

<sup>6</sup> I owe the above description of *C*-internalism to Brown [2004], thought (following Tyler Burge) she opts for the label anti-individualism.

conception need not deny that our beliefs are causally influenced by the external world. However, the mere fact that a subject's thoughts are caused by objects in the external world, does not mean that her thoughts *represent* or are *about* those objects. Thus, on the interiorised conception, it remains un-established that a subject's thoughts are really *about* the world at all.

### 3. McDowellian Content Externalism

McDowell rejects the interiorised conception and favours a C-externalist account, according to which a subject's thought contents are not simply caused, but are partly constituted by objects in her environment. To wit, McDowell posits:

If we let there be quasi-Russellian singular propositions about, say, ordinary perceptible objects among the contents of inner space, we can no longer be regarding inner space as a locus of configurations which are self-standing, not beholden to external conditions; and there is now no question of a gulf, which it might be the task of philosophy to try to bridge, or declare unbridgeable, between the realm of subjectivity and the world of ordinary objects. We can make this vivid by saying, in a Russellian vein, that objects themselves can *figure in* thoughts which are among the contents of the mind. (McDowell [1986] p. 146)

The claim that 'objects themselves can figure in our thoughts' can be unpacked via an appeal to the notion of relational properties. Some property  $\pi$  is relational *iff* its possession by some object,  $\alpha$ , requires the existence of some other object,  $\beta$ , to which  $\alpha$  stands in a certain relation. For example, if  $\alpha$  is smaller than  $\beta$ , then  $\alpha$ 's property of being smaller than  $\beta$  is relational since its possession requires the existence of the contrasting (and in this case larger) object,  $\beta$ . By contrast, a non-relational or intrinsic property is one that can be possessed independently of the existence of other objects or events. An example of a non-relational property is water being chemically instantiated by H<sub>2</sub>O.

On the interiorized conception, a subject's thought contents are wholly individuated by her intrinsic properties. Thus any two subjects that are identical in all their intrinsic properties also have the same thought contents. We may also conceive of the distinction between McDowell's C-externalism and the interiorized conception in terms of supervenience. Formally, X-group properties supervene on Y-group properties *iff* for all objects  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ ,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  cannot differ in their X-group properties without also differing in their Y-group properties. According to the interiorised conception, thought content supervenes solely on intrinsic properties<sup>7</sup>. Thus, we arrive at:

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<sup>7</sup> There are numerous difficulties associated with the attempt to define an 'intrinsic property'. (See: Langton and Lewis [1998]). My use of 'intrinsic' here is purely a matter of convenience, but presumably these ideas can all be expressed without any appeal to the distinction between intrinsic and relational properties. However, if it were to turn out that the interiorised conception could not be articulated without appeal to the notion of intrinsic properties, then any difficulties confronting attempts to define intrinsic properties would only further impugn the interiorised conception that McDowell attacks.

*The Interiorised Conception:*

For all subjects  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , if  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  and  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  are identical in the intrinsic properties on which their thoughts supervene, then  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are identical in all respects relevant to the justification of their beliefs.

By contrast, McDowellian C-externalism maintains that the contents of a subject's thoughts are partly individuated by objects in her environment.<sup>8</sup> Hence, two subjects,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ , could be identical in all their intrinsic physical properties, and yet have different thought contents.<sup>9</sup> Thus, McDowellian C-externalism minimally entails the following claim:

*McDowellian C-externalism:*

There are subjects  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , such that  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  and  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  have the same intrinsic properties but differ in the content of their thoughts.

The classic defence of C-externalism involves Twin-Earth arguments of the kind first suggested by Hilary Putnam [1975a, 1975b, 1975c] and later by Tyler Burge [1979, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1988]. Putnam invites us to imagine a subject,  $S_1$ , living in the actual world,  $W_1$ , who has had regular causal contact with water (i.e.,  $H_2O$ ), but is ignorant of its chemical constitution.  $S_1$  encounters a lake and has a thought that she expresses with the utterance, 'water is wet'. Let us call the mental property of being a thought with this content ' $\kappa$ '. We may therefore say that  $S_1$ 's thought has  $\kappa$ . In the counterfactual world,  $W_2$ ,  $S_1$ 's psychophysical duplicate,  $S_2$ , also has a thought which she expresses with the utterance, 'water is wet'. However, on  $W_2$  there is no  $H_2O$  but some qualitatively identical substance XYZ. According to Putnam, the semantic content of the word 'water' that figures in  $S_1$ 's utterance is different from that which figures in  $S_2$ 's utterance. Burge, building on Putnam's Twin-Earth example, argues that the subjects plausibly have different thoughts, since in  $S_1$ 's thought has  $\kappa$ , while  $S_2$ 's thought does not.<sup>10</sup> Since variation in socio-environmental factors can make for variation in thought contents without variation in the intrinsic physical properties of the subject, it follows that a subject's thought contents fail to supervene on the her intrinsic physical properties. Thus, we arrive at C-externalism; the thesis that subjects may have the same intrinsic properties but differ in the content of their thoughts.

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<sup>8</sup> For examples of C-externalism that emphasize the object-dependence of singular thought see: Evans [1982]; Peacocke [1983]; and Campbell [1994].

<sup>9</sup> Alternative versions of C-externalism include Natural Kind C-externalism, according to which a subject's thought contents are individuated partly by the natural kinds in her environment (see: Putnam [1975b, 1975c] and Kripke [1980]) and Social C-externalism, according to which a subject's thought contents are partly individuated by the practice of her linguistic community (see: Burge [1979, 1986]).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. McGinn [1977].

#### 4. McDowellian Singular-thought Disjunctivism

McDowell is perhaps most famous (or is that infamous?) for his commitment to disjunctivism.<sup>11</sup> The standard formulation of McDowell's disjunctivism is in terms of appearances:

[T]he essentially disjunctive conception of appearances...can allow what is given to experience in the two sorts of case to be the same in so far as it is an appearance that things are thus and so; that leaves it open that whereas in one kind of case what is given to experience is a mere appearance, in the other it is the fact itself made manifest. (McDowell [1998a], p. 389).

However, an equally important, though typically less discussed aspect of McDowell's disjunctive conception is its application to singular thought:

There is a parallel contrast between two ways of conceiving singular thought: first, the idea that if one seems to be thinking about an ordinary external object in a way that depends on, say, its appearing to be perceptually present to one, the situation in one's inner world is either that one is entertaining an object-dependent proposition or that it merely appears that that is so. (McDowell [1986], p. 156).

We may gain a fuller appreciation of singular thought disjunctivism by contrasting McDowell's object-dependent picture of reference with Russell's Theory of Descriptions. According to the latter, thought connects with the object it is about via a description.<sup>12</sup> On this view, the singular component of a thought consists in a description, the  $\phi$ , where the object referred to is the object that uniquely fits the description  $\phi$ . McDowell summarises the upshot of such a picture:

The point of the alternative logical form proposed by the Theory of Descriptions is to ensure that the proposition that...a sentence is held to express is one available to be expressed in any case, whether or not there is something answering to the description. (McDowell [1986], p. 137).

According to McDowell's conception of object-dependent thought, one's thoughts connect with their objects not via a description but more directly in virtue of the relation in which one stands to those objects. On this view, a singular thought is not equivalent to a description that remains constant whatever the state of the world. Rather, the content of a singular thought is individuated partly by the object it is about. Thus, if one were counterfactually related to a different object, one would think a different thought. For example, suppose S is looking at a cricket ball,  $\alpha$ , and thinks the perceptual demonstrative thought 'that is a ball'. In the counterfactual situation in which S sees a

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<sup>11</sup> For the traditional formulations of disjunctivism see J. M. Hinton [1973] and Paul Snowdon [1990].

<sup>12</sup> See: Russell [1905].

different (but phenomenologically indistinguishable) cricket ball,  $\beta$ , she would have a different thought.

Now consider a Twin Earth example where, instead of merely different objects, in one of the worlds there is no object at all. For example, suppose that while  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  is seeing and thinking about an actual ball,  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  is merely hallucinating a ball. On the descriptive account,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are having the same thought, the only difference between the two being the external fact that  $S_2$ 's thought lacks a reference. However, according to McDowell's object-dependent conception of singular thought, while  $S_1$  is having a singular thought,  $S_2$  fails to think any determinate thought at all. Like  $S_1$ , she thinks she is seeing a ball and having the demonstrative thought 'that is a ball', but she is neither seeing the ball nor having the demonstrative thought she takes herself to have. In short, she suffers an illusion of thought.<sup>13</sup> This of course does not mean that there is nothing going on in the subject's mind. Images, words and various subsidiary thoughts with genuine content may be taking place. But what is missing is a genuine singular thought with the content 'that is a ball'. Thus, we arrive at McDowell's singular-thought disjunctivism:

*McDowellian S-disjunctivism*

For any subject  $S$ , if it seems to  $S$  as if she is having the singular thought, that is an  $O$ , either the external object,  $O$ , figures in the content of her thought or she is suffering an illusion of thought.

When McDowellian  $S$ -disjunctivism is combined with McDowellian  $E$ -externalism, the upshot is that phenomenologically indistinguishable veridical and hallucinatory visual experiences belong to different epistemic (which is to say, subjective) genera.<sup>14</sup> According to McDowellian  $E$ -internalism, only that which constitutes how things are with one subjectively, such as one's thought contents, is relevant to one's epistemic standing. According to McDowellian  $C$ -internalism, phenomenologically indistinguishable veridical and hallucinatory visual experiences constitute different subjective states. In a case where one attempts to have an object-dependent singular thought with the content 'that is an  $O$ ', but fails to do so because the relevant object,  $O$ , is missing, one fails to have a singular thought with the particular content one takes oneself to have. As such, one *eo ipso* fails to have the reason one takes oneself to have for believing there is an  $O$ . This is because one's reasons for believing there is an  $O$  is constituted solely by one's mental contents, and in the case when the relevant content is missing, there is nothing in one's subjective makeup to provide one

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<sup>13</sup> See: Evans [1982], Boghossian [1997], and McDowell [1998b].

<sup>14</sup> Once these two theses are combined, there may appear to be a difficulty with McDowell's attempt to equate a subject's thought contents with that which is subjectively available. If the content of one's thoughts is dependent on external objects (about which one may be mistaken) then one may also be mistaken about one's thought contents. This may seem to preclude a subject having subjective access to her object-dependent thoughts. However, this only follows if we equate subjective access with infallible access; a thesis which post-Freudian psychology as well as recent work in cognitive science has shown to be highly implausible. I articulate and respond to another version of this worry in §7.

with justification for the corresponding belief. Thus, instances in which one is entertaining a genuine singular thought have an epistemic property that is lacking in cases where one is suffering an illusion of thought. McDowell's disjunctive conception of object-dependent singular thought therefore translates into an epistemic disjunction—between thought contents, which may constitute justifying reasons, and failed attempts at entertaining certain thought contents, which may not.

## 5. McDowellian Justificatory Dogmatism

If one has the perceptual belief that there is a ball before one and one is asked why one believes there is a ball, the most natural answer would be that one sees the ball. If this is right, then seeing the ball is one's reason or justification for believing that there is a ball. According to Snowdon, what makes a belief that there is a ball distinctly perceptual is that perceiving a ball puts one in a position to have demonstrative thoughts about the ball in question. Restated in McDowellian terms, we may say that seeing a ball puts one in a position to have object-dependent singular thoughts about the ball. On this view, one only counts as seeing a ball if one is in a position to have object-dependent thoughts about the ball. Since having an object-dependent thought about a ball requires the existence of an actual ball, seeing a ball also requires that there is a ball. In brief, seeing is a success term. Along these lines, Alan Millar notes that '[t]here is a success element to seeing, or at least to seeing conceived in a very familiar way. If I see a cat, under this conception, then a cat must be there before me' (Millar [forthcoming]). To put the matter in McDowell's own words: 'Seeing that  $p$  constitutes falsehood-excluding justification for believing that  $p$ ' (McDowell [2002], p. 97). Thus, we arrive at McDowellian justificatory dogmatism<sup>15</sup>:

*McDowellian J-dogmatism:*

For any subject  $S$ , if  $S$  has perceptual knowledge that there is an  $O$ , then  $S$ 's justification for believing that there is an  $O$  entails that there is an  $O$ .

The above ideas can all be summarised by saying that seeing is factive.<sup>16</sup> One way we may unpack the factivity of seeing is in terms of a *relational conception of perceptual experience*.<sup>17</sup> On this view, when a subject sees that there is an  $O$ —for instance, that there is a ball—she is having an experience that is essentially relational in that it would not be

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<sup>15</sup> In employing the word 'dogmatism', I here allude to McDowell's tongue in cheek reply to Robert Brandom's essay, 'Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons': 'What I urge in my paper is precisely that justification adequate to reveal a state as one of knowing must be incompatible with falsehood and can be had. "Dogmatism"...is precisely what I defend.' (McDowell [2002], p. 98). This should not be confused with the dogmatism of James Pryor.

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Williamson expresses a similar intuition when he observes that 'we do not usually envisage beliefs about one's own sensations as based on evidence insufficient for their truth.' (Williamson [2000], p. 615).

<sup>17</sup> An alternative way of unpacking the factivity of seeing is in terms of Millar's perceptual recognitional abilities. See: Millar [2007].

that very experience unless there is the ball in question. If S were to have a hallucination of a ball, she would *eo ipso* be having a different type of experience. This does not mean that there could not be a hallucinatory experience of a ball that was phenomenologically indistinguishable from an authentic perceptual experience implicating a ball. However, phenomenologically indistinguishable experiences in which it appears to a subject that there is a ball before her may be described disjunctively:

*Experience Disjunctivism:*

For any subject S, if it appears to S that there is an external object O, either she is having an essentially relational experience implicating O, or she is having a different type of experience.

The disjunctive conception of experiences allows us to preserve the desiderata that perceptual experiences are essentially relational, without denying the possibility of there being phenomenologically indistinguishable illusory experiences.

Significantly, the claim that seeing that there is a ball provides one with a factive reason to believe that there is a ball does not entail that one is only justified when one has a factive reason. Nothing that has been said thus far rules out the possibility that one may have a justified perceptual belief that there is a ball even if one does not see a ball. Thus, McDowell's position does not require that we give up the intuition that one may be (in some sense) justified in believing that there is a ball even if one's belief were mistaken. What McDowell does wish to claim, however, is that the type of justification that factors into perceptual knowledge is of the factive variety:

No doubt some notion of entitlement or justification might have application in [the non-factive] case. It might be rational (doxastically blameless) for the subject—who only seems to see a candle in front of her—to claim that there is a candle in front of her. But this is not the notion of entitlement or justification that should figure in a gloss on the Sellarsian thought that knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons. The right notion for Sellars's point is...a notion for which entitlement and truth do not come apart. (McDowell [2002], p. 99.)

By McDowell's lights, having a mere appearance of a ball may be enough for a subject to count as doxastically blameless. However, it is only when the actual ball figures in the content of an agent's thoughts that she counts as knowing that there is a ball. I will refer to the type of justification that factors into knowledge as *full justification*. According to McDowell, full justification is factive. One upshot of this characterisation of full justification is that a subject that is fully justified is immune to Gettier counterexamples. Since, for a fully justified subject, justification and truth do not come apart, then *a fortiori* such a subject's belief is never accidentally true. I take this to be an attractive feature of McDowell's characterisation of full justification since it allows for a rather simple and straightforward conceptual analysis of knowledge as *fully justified belief*. This bipartite conception of knowledge differs from the traditional justified true belief account in that the truth requirement is incorporated into the notion of full justification. Of course,

McDowell does not endorse a bipartite account of perceptual knowledge since he, like Timothy Williamson and others, sees knowledge as a primitive. Nevertheless, I believe that McDowell's notion of factive justification lends itself to a non-primitivist bipartite conception of knowledge. I take this to be significant since it suggests that McDowell's account may still be useful for those who are unsympathetic towards primitivism regarding knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

## 6. McDowellian *E*-Internalism and *C*-Externalism Reconciled

A distinctive feature of McDowell's account of perceptual knowledge is that it combines the *C*-externalist claim that one's thoughts are partly individuated by objects in one's environment with the *E*-internalist claim that all factors relevant to the justification of one's beliefs are subjectively available to one. But some have insisted that *E*-internalism is inconsistent with *C*-externalism.<sup>19</sup> The reason for this can be seen easily enough when we conceive of *E*-internalism in terms of the interiorised conception. Recall, the interiorised conception (IC) and *C*-externalism (CE) amount to the following claims:

- (IC) For all subjects  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , if  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  and  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  are identical in the intrinsic properties on which their thoughts supervene, then  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are identical in all respects relevant to the justification of their beliefs.
- (CE) There are subjects  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , such that  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  and  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  have the same intrinsic properties but differ in the content of their thoughts.

There is a conflict between (IC) and (CE) since the former requires all subjects who are identical in terms of their intrinsic properties to have the same justificatory properties, while the latter allows subjects with identical intrinsic properties to differ with regards to the justificatory properties of their beliefs. For example, consider two subjects,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ , who are identical in terms of their intrinsic properties, but occupy different external environments,  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , respectively. Suppose  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  both performed the following valid deduction:

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<sup>18</sup> I would class myself among those who are unsympathetic to the primitivist conception of knowledge. My own sense is that the introduction of a primitive into any area of philosophy is best left as a last resort. Moreover, it seems to me that belief must factor into any worthwhile account of knowledge. However, I will not defend these intuitions nor seek to further develop a bipartite account of perceptual knowledge here.

<sup>19</sup> The claim that *C*-externalism is inconsistent with *E*-internalism, or the so-called 'incompatibility thesis', was first alluded to by Paul Boghossian. However, Boghossian only discusses the incompatibility thesis indirectly, in the context of discussions of authoritative self-knowledge (see: Boghossian [1989] and [1997]). For an explicit defence of the 'incompatibility thesis' see BonJour [1992] pp. 132-136, and Vahid [2003]. For criticisms of the 'incompatibility thesis' see Chase [2001] and Brueckner [2002]. For arguments in support of the claim that McDowell's *C*-externalism, in particular, entails *E*-externalism, see Greco [2004].

- (A) Water is a liquid.
- (B) Water is potable.
- (C) Therefore, water is a potable liquid.

According to (CE), the thoughts expressed by sentences (A)–(C) are different for  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ . This is because  $S_1$ 's thoughts are individuated in terms of water while  $S_2$ 's thoughts are individuated in terms of twater. The distinct pairs of thought that  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  express by (A) and (B) are relevant to the justification of the pair of beliefs they respectively express by (C). Consequently,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  satisfy the antecedent of (IC), since *ex hypothesi* they are identical in terms of their intrinsic properties, but fail to satisfy the consequent—to wit, they differ in some respects relevant to the justification of their beliefs. Thus, if (CE) is true, then (IC) must be false.

There is a strong temptation to assume that this line of argument also impugns McDowellian *E*-internalism, but this temptation should be resisted. Recall, McDowellian *E*-internalism (MI) amounts to the following claim:

- (MI) For all subjects  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  and worlds  $W_1$  and  $W_2$ , if  $S_1$  in  $W_1$  and  $S_2$  in  $W_2$  are identical in terms of how things are with them subjectively, then  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are identical in all respects relevant to the justification of their beliefs.

If we take seriously McDowell's notion of object-dependent thought there is no inconsistency between (MI) and (CE). According to McDowell, how it is with one subjectively is in part constituted by objects in one's environment. For instance, in the Twin Earth examples generated by (CE), the object-dependent thoughts expressed by (A) and (B) in the foregoing deductive inference are different for  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ . Hence, by McDowell's lights,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  fail to satisfy the antecedent of (MI) since  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are *not* identical with regards to how things are with them subjectively. Thus, McDowell can, without contradiction, continue to hold to (MI) while subscribing to (CE).

## 7. Implications and Analysis

I have argued that McDowell's account of perceptual knowledge should be interpreted as an attempt to preserve the *E*-internalist intuition that one's beliefs can only be justified by factors that constitute how things are with one subjectively and the *E*-externalist intuition that there must be a constitutive connection between justification and truth. Moreover, I have argued that the assumption that McDowell's commitment to *C*-externalism is inconsistent with his version of *E*-internalism is unwarranted. However, there may be a worry that McDowell's integration of *E*-internalism and *C*-externalism robs the former of what made the notion of justification valuable in the first place—namely, that justification is transparent to a subject in a way that truth is not.

On this line of thought, what makes the concept of justification valuable, over and above a mere appeal to truth, is that justification is completely transparent; one is

never mistaken about whether or not one's beliefs are justified, even if one may be mistaken about whether or not one's beliefs are true. However, if one's justification is dependent on facts in the external world, as McDowell would have it, then one may be just as mistaken about the justification of a belief as one is about its truth. The upshot is that McDowell's framework only seems to make the epistemic status of a subject even more problematic. On the traditional interiorised conception the subject may be mistaken about the truth of her beliefs, but nevertheless always rest assured in the fact that her beliefs are justified. However, on McDowell's picture even the subject's justification is in open to question. By collapsing the distinction between justification and truth, McDowell's notion of factive justification essentially makes being justified as problematic as having knowledge was on the interiorised model. This is the objection I wish to consider in this final section of my paper.

First, let me say that I believe that this is a bullet that must be bitten. It seems simply undeniable that McDowell's framework implies that a subject may be mistaken with regards to her justificatory status. However, it is not at all clear that we should have ever been motivated to hold otherwise. Specifically, the claim that a subject is never mistaken about her justificatory standing does not seem to match how we usually talk and think about epistemic justification. Consider a subject who is asked why she believes that there is ball in front of her. Assuming that her belief is perceptual in nature, the most natural response would be, "because I see it!" This constitutes her reason for believing that there is a ball before her. Now suppose it was to turn out that she was merely suffering a drug-induced visual hallucination and that there was actually no ball before her. If the subject were made aware of this fact, I believe the most natural response on her part would be to conclude that she did not really see the ball after all. Certainly, it would be odd for her to say that she actually did see the ball but that her seeing the ball is compatible with there being no ball (as the advocate of the interiorised conception would have her say). Given that her justification for believing that there is a ball in front of her is the fact (if it is a fact) that she sees the ball, then in the case when she does not see the ball, she simply lacks the justification she though she had. This, it seems to me, best characterises how we ordinarily talk and think about the justification of our perceptual beliefs. This also coincides with what I take to be Williamson's perfectly good point: 'we do not usually envisage beliefs about one's own sensations as based on evidence insufficient for their truth.' (Williamson [2000], p. 615).

By McDowell's lights, the assumption that the person who suffers from a hallucination of a ball has the same evidence as the person who sees a ball (which follows from the interiorised conception) is little more than a Cartesian philosophical invention. But if the foregoing considerations are correct, then Cartesian assumption does not match how we ordinarily talk and think about such cases. Since a subject who took herself to be in the latter case when she was really in the former is mistaken about her justification, then the claim that a subject may be mistaken about her justification is also part of our pre-theoretical or common sense view. Thus, it is bad philosophy, not common sense, that made the idea that an agent is never mistaken with regards to her justificatory status attractive in the first place. In place of the Cartesian assumption,

McDowell advocates a disjunctive understanding of the types of evidence that features in the two cases; in the hallucination case, a mere appearance of a ball, and in the perceptual case, a fundamentally relational experience implicating the actual ball. Thus, I submit that McDowell and common sense agree that when a subject mistakenly takes herself to see some object *O*, she mistakenly takes herself to have a reason or justification she does not have.

The above considerations constitute a negative argument in defence of McDowell's approach. However, even if we grant that McDowell does not force us to give up any of our ordinary assumptions about the justification of our perceptual beliefs, it may remain unclear (on this picture) what makes talk of justification valuable over and above talk of truth. If, as McDowell's view entails, one may be just as mistaken about one's justification as one is about truth, why not follow the full-blown *E*-externalist and forego all talk of justification altogether. The reason for holding to McDowellian *E*-internalism is that it makes room for our ordinary reason-giving practices in a way that full-blown *E*-externalism does not. On the full-blown *E*-externalist account all talk of reasons are rendered obsolete and replaced by talk of reliability. This flies in the face of our ordinary epistemic practice of asking for and providing reasons. Thus, the full-blown *E*-externalist fails to accommodate a significant part of our social epistemic practice.

Reason-giving plays a number of important social functions that relate to belief formation, assessment and persuasion. It lets others know what we take to be the basis of our beliefs, which helps them assess whether or not they should adopt those beliefs themselves. It provides us with opportunities for belief-adjustment and correction. Often, others may be in a better position to assess whether or not we really have the reasons we take ourselves to have and giving expression to our reasons facilitates their assessment by others. All these important social functions of reason-giving are left unaccounted for on the full-blown *E*-externalist picture. Thus, even if we give up on the idea that a subject is never mistaken about her justificatory status, we still have good reason to prefer the McDowellian framework to the full-blown *E*-externalist account.

## 8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that McDowell offers an account of perceptual knowledge according to which an agent's justificatory standing is determined purely by how things are with her subjectively, but where an agent's subjective state is dependent on the external world. By construing subjective states in object-dependent terms, McDowell's account allows us to: (1) make sense of our thought contents being about the external world in a way that the interiorised conception cannot, and (2) preserve the idea that there is a constitutive connection between justification and truth, thereby vouchsafing a post-Gettier conceptual analysis of knowledge as fully justified belief. The second of these two achievements is not one McDowell himself takes up (since he is committed to a primitivist conception of knowledge) but it is one I am keen to emphasise since I am

attracted to a bipartite conceptual analysis of knowledge. But McDowell's account also implies that we may be mistaken about our thought contents or subjective states, and (*eo ipso*) about the justification of our beliefs. I have argued that in this regard McDowell's account is in keeping with how we ordinarily talk and think about justification. Finally, the present account contrasts with full-blown *E*-externalism in that it preserves the idea of justification as reason-giving and is therefore able to accommodate a wider range of our social epistemic practices.

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