THE NOTION OF CONCEPTUALIZED EXPERIENCE IN JOHN MCDOWELL'S *MIND AND WORLD*

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Abstract. In this paper I would like to asses critically McDowell's argument to the effect that all experience is conceptualized and explain the role that this thesis plays within his general philosophical project. It has been argued that McDowell's conception of experience leads to idealism. I will demonstrate why this charge could be made and whether it is a charge which McDowell can adequately respond to. The paper will clarify McDowell's conception of conceptualized experience, and evaluate its efficacy for his philosophical aim. In order to accomplish these goals, the paper will contain the following two components: (1) a reconstruction of McDowell's position, and (2) its critical analysis. To reconstruct the position of McDowell, I will try (i) to establish his motives (i.e. avoiding the collapse into the Myth of the Given or coherentism), and (ii) the sources of inspiration for his thought and its and context (the Kantian categories of receptivity and spontaneity; the thought of D. Davidson, W. Sellars, G. Evans and Ch. Peacocke); (iii) and to explain his arguments (i.e. the general idea of the unboundedness of the conceptual, and the arguments against existence of non-conceptual content) and his defence against the charge of idealism. In order to critically analyse his position, I will try to evaluate it in terms of whether his defence against the objections to his proposal, in particular the charge of idealism, is successful.

Thoughts without content are empty;
intuitions without concepts are blind
(Immanuel Kant)

One of the most noticeable features of analytical philosophy in the last three decades is its explicit return to fundamental metaphysical issues,

after a period when these were considered to be meaningless, or simply put aside in favour of other philosophical problems. Among the philosophers who contributed to that „metaphysical turn" are W. V. Quine, N. Goodman, P. F. Strawson, W. F. Sellars and M. Dummett. Perhaps the most recent and arguably the most original return to fundamental philosophical questions is that of John McDowell, the proponent of a new approach to the problem of the mind and world relation.

In his book entitled *Mind and World*, McDowell offers an extremely ambitious and challenging project to reformulate the traditional philosophical frame within which the issue of the relation between mind and world has been considered. In order to determine the proper relation between mind and world, McDowell has focused on the human experience of the external world. To avoid oscillation between the two opposite and dominant theories that try to explain our experience of the world (i.e. the Myth of the Given, on the one hand, and coherentism on the other), he argues that we should describe our experience as conceptualized, using the Kantian categories of *receptivity* and *spontaneity*. According to McDowell there is no gap between mind (thought) and world (experience). Our conceptual capacities (*spontaneity*) are involved in all experience of the external world (*receptivity*). In other words, in ontological terms, we can say that „mind is world-involved". This kind of answer directs us to the philosophical position commonly called idealism (i.e. the claim that the world is wholly mind dependent). However, McDowell definitively rejects labelling his position as idealist.

In this essay I would like to describe critically McDowell's argument to the effect that all experience is conceptualized and explain the role that this thesis plays within his general philosophical project. It has been argued that McDowell's conception of experience leads to idealism. I will demonstrate why this charge could be made, and whether it is a charge which McDowell can adequately respond to.

The essay will clarify McDowell's conception of conceptualized experience and evaluate its efficacy for his philosophical aims. In order to accomplish these goals, the essay will contain the following two components: (1) a reconstruction of McDowell's position, and (2) its critical analysis. To reconstruct the position of McDowell, I will try (i) to establish his motives (i.e. avoiding a collapse into the Myth of the Given or coherentism); (ii) describe the sources of his inspiration and the context of his thought (the Kantian categories: *receptivity* and *spontaneity*; the thought of D. Davidson, W. Sellars, G. Evans and Ch. Peacocke); and (iii) to explain his argu-

ments (i.e. the general idea of *the unboundedness of the conceptual*, and the arguments against the existence of non-conceptual content) and his defence against the charge of idealism. In order to critically analyse his position, I will try to evaluate it in terms of whether his defence against the objections to his proposal, with regard to the charge of idealism, is successful.

I.

The problem of the relation between mind and world is one of the most important themes in contemporary philosophy, and is deeply rooted in the „modern", post-Cartesian tradition.[1] It could be considered in three dimensions, namely: metaphysical, or ontological (i.e. according to the manner of existence of these realms), epistemological (i.e. according to the way of experiencing or knowing the external world by a cognitive subject, or the relation between thoughts or beliefs and the world), and semantic (i.e. according to the relation between thoughts or beliefs and judgements or other forms of linguistic expression). All of these varieties are strictly connected with each other, and it seems almost impossible to think about one of them without some implications for the others.

McDowell attempts to offer a new approach to the problem and focuses his attention primarily on the human experience of the external world. As he declares, his overall topic of interest in *Mind and World* concerns „the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and world" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 1). So, the starting point of his considerations is strictly epistemological and semantic. However, as we see later, it also has important ontological consequences. Additionally, McDowell's reformulation of the problem is motivated by the unsatisfactory (as he claims) state of the dominant positions that try to explain the relation between mind (thought) and world (experience). Namely, on the one hand, the position labelled by W. Sellars (1956/1997) as the Myth of the Given (which McDowell ascribes to G. Evans ([1982]), and presumably to Ch. Peacocke (1993)), and on the other, the position of coherentism (which McDowell ascribes to D. Davidson (1984)).

[1] Descartes' dualism of substance: mind and body, has placed this problematic directly in the centre of many discussions in modern philosophy. He explicitly faced the problem of the relation (adequacy and interaction) between mind and world (Descartes 1641/1984).

According to the Myth of the Given (which, in fact, represents some sort of foundationalism) there is a „given", founding element in the human experience of the external world, i.e. a kind of *non-conceptual* content of experience that plays the role of the ultimate foundation for the empirical or observational beliefs of the cognizer. Its rival, coherentism, in the version presented by Davidson (1984; 1986), denies any such non-conceptual contents, and describes the grounds of our beliefs just in terms of other beliefs: experience does not justify beliefs because „nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief" (Davidson 1986, p. 310). In other words, following the Davidsonian (1984, pp. 183-198) categories of „conceptual scheme" and empirical „content", we can state these positions as follows. The foundationalist Myth of the Given emphasises the role of the empirical, non-conceptual content in our experience of the external world (trying to avoid the *regressus ad infinitum* involved in justifying our beliefs in the external world; here, non-conceptual content plays the role of an unsupported-supporter for these beliefs). Whereas coherentism determines this experience, primarily, in relation to the conceptual scheme that is constituted by our beliefs, arguing that justification (as a proper relation for beliefs) needs rational, not causal constraint (in virtue of the intrinsically rational character of beliefs) (Davidson 1984, p.189).

In effect, according to McDowell, we are faced with the irresolvable dilemma of either admitting that there is some „mythical" (not recognizable thus non-epistemic), founding non-conceptual element in our experience or lapsing into coherentism, which closes us in our set of beliefs and is vulnerable to the threat of idealism (by emphasising just the mental side of our cognition and cutting connections with objective, non-mental reality). On both these grounds, it is very difficult to explain the relation between mind and world (both in the epistemological and in the ontological sense).

McDowell tries to avoid the „oscillation" between these two approaches and offers a reformulation of the problem in a different framework.[2] Namely, McDowell appeals to Kantian categories such as: (i) concepts and intuitions, (ii) spontaneity and receptivity, and (iii) understanding and sensi-

[2] McDowell aims to dissolve the problem, not resolve it. This modest, „therapeutic" approach to philosophical issues is labelled, in a Wittgensteinian spirit, as „Quietism" (McDowell (1987/1998); (1997/1998); (1994/2003), pp. 93, 142, 147, 176, 183-84). In this approach „constructive philosophy" is replaced by an 'exorcism' of the philosophical anxieties that gave birth to the problem in the first place" (Friedman 1996/2002, p. 28).

bility.[3] These opposing categories, corresponding to the domains of mind (thought) and world (experience), must be integrated in every human cognitive act (McDowell 1994/2003, pp. 2-3). In other words, all experience must be conceptualized. To express this claim, McDowell evokes the Kantian slogan: „Intuitions without concepts are blind; thoughts without content are empty" (McDowell 1994/2003, pp. 1-2). Human conceptual capacities (spontaneity) are involved in every experience of the external world (receptivity).

The notion of conceptualized experience, as McDowell argues, helps him to retain the advantages both of the Myth of the Given and of coherentism, and simultaneously to escape the unsatisfying consequences of each. In other words, by reformulating the problem itself, he tries to avoid the irresolvable dilemma between them. McDowell's arguments in favour of his proposal could be described as follows.

The key point of his argumentation concerns the freedom of spontaneity, i.e. human understanding or conceptual capacities (on the side of the mind) and the simultaneous external constraint expressed by receptivity (on the side of the world, revealed in or provided by experience) (McDowell 1994/2003, pp. 10-13). The understanding is free to *rationally* examine and revise all elements of its perceptual experience. That is, the human cognizer can change or correct her beliefs concerning the external world. On the other hand, in order to confirm the cognizer's strong conviction about the source of the empirical „content" of her beliefs (as it seems to be from the external world), there needs to be a rational constraint in the form of perceptual experience (coming from the external world). This expresses exactly the two intuitions of coherentism and the Myth of the Given. In opposition to coherentism, and in accordance with the theory of the „Given", the activity of spontaneity (conceptual capacities) cannot be completely unconstrained. In this case spontaneity could „degenerate into moves in a self-contained game" or „a frictionless spinning in a void" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 5). But, in opposition to the Myth of the Given, and following Davidsonian coherentism, the relation between experience and thought

[3] Following G. Bird, it is worth noting (from a historical perspective) that „the swing which McDowell marks between the Mythical Given and extreme coherentism matches Kant's explicit picture of an endless oscillation between dogmatism and scepticism, or between Lockean realism and a Berkeleyan idealism. Kant's dissatisfaction with the tradition as he saw it at the end of the eighteen century is essentially the same dissatisfaction which McDowell responds to in the twentieth …" (Bird 1996, pp. 221-222).

has to be regarded as a *rational* one – as genuine „relations such as implication or probabilification" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 7), or, in other words, as the relation of justification.

However, McDowell makes an important correction to the latter claim, in comparison to Davidson. According to Davidson,

> „the relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. When then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in *this* sense are the basis or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified" (Davidson 1986, p. 311).

This is an unsatisfying position for McDowell: „Davidson's picture depicts our empirical thinking as engaged in with no rational constraint, but only causal influence, from outside" (McDowell 1994/2003, p.14). In consequence, it „makes the idea of the Given attractive" because of the threat of „spontaneity as frictionless" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 14). However, the idea of the „Given" is useless, because such an element, itself non-conceptual, can only be *causal*, and for this reason cannot justify our beliefs, but only „exculpate" them. To avoid all of the above harmful consequences, McDowell proposes to treat sense experience (or causal input from the external world) as already conceptual content (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 9). „*That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of experience, but if the subject of the experience is not misled, that very same thing, *that things are thus and so*, is also a perceptible fact, an aspect of the perceptible world" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 26). External input in the form of experience is an expression of human receptivity and allows us to judge that the world is thus and so (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 10-11).

Furthermore, McDowell strongly emphasises the role of the „space of reasons" using the term coined by W. Sellars (1957/1997, p. 76)[4] that contains primarily the conceptual capacities of understanding (spontaneity), but also conceptualized perceptual experience (receptivity); stating, „that perception must be able to give us reasons for, that is, to justify, our beliefs about the world: and, (…) no state that does not have conceptual content

[4] Sellars expressed this idea as follows: „In characterizing an episode or 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 1956/1997, p. 76).

can be a reason for a belief" (Heck 2000, p. 483). McDowell (1994/2003, p. 6) writes:

> Empirical justifications depend on rational relations, relations within the space of reasons. The putatively reassuring idea is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingements on the conceptual realm from outside. So the space of reasons is made out to be more extensive than the space of concepts.

Only within the „space of reasons" can the rational justification of our beliefs be provided. Moreover, it enables us to obtain a *rational*, not *causal*, constraint on our spontaneity, by receptivity, in virtue of the conceptualized content of experience. „Experience can intelligibly stand in rational relation to our exercises of the freedom that is implicit in the idea of spontaneity" and „can satisfy the need for an external control on our freedom in empirical thinking" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 24). All the edification of this proposal rests, thus, on the notion of conceptualized experience.

II.

The conception of conceptualized experience (as a proper account of the relation between the mind and the world) directs us to the charge of idealism. Idealism is usually characterized as the view „that mind is the most basic reality and the physical world exists only as an appearance to or expression of mind, or as somehow mental in its inner essence" (Sprigge 1998, p. 1). It can take either the form of (i) an epistemological thesis about the bounds of our knowledge – i.e. that what we recognize is wholly dependent on our minds or that our cognition of the world is entirely constituted by mind, or (ii) an ontological claim concerning the manner of existence of the external, physical world – i.e. that the external world does not exist independently of mind(s). In another formulation, we can say that „a philosopher is an idealist if and only if he believes that the physical world exists *either* (1) only as an object for mind, *or* (2) only as a content of mind, *or* (3) only as something itself somehow mental in its true character, a disjunction we shall sum up as the thesis that the physical is derivative from mind" (Sprigge 1998, p. 2). To summarize, in each of these cases the external world is slighted in favour of the mind.

It is evident then that McDowell's position, assuming the entirely conceptual character of our experiencing of the external world, is vulnerable to

the threat of idealism. This point of possible criticism is quite common in different commentaries on *Mind and World* (see, for instance, (Dodd 2000, pp. 161-63); (Friedman 1996/2002, pp. 34-35; (Thornton 2004, pp. 233-45); (Willaschek 2000, pp. 35-40); (Williams 1996, p. 106); (Wright 1996/2002, p. 147)). Moreover, two classics of idealism in Western philosophy are evoked in his considerations, namely Kant (evoked by McDowell himself in his appealing to the Kantian conceptual framework) and Berkeley. The latter, although not mentioned explicitly, seems to be particularly relevant to McDowell's proposal: his famous thesis *esse est percipi* represents one version of the conceptualization of experience in the form of empirical idealism (Putnam 2002, p. 182). Additionally, both for McDowell and for Berkeley, the starting point in characterizing the relation between mind and world is the determination of human experience (Berkeley 1710/1998, pp. 89-102); (McDowell 1994/2003, pp. 1-23). In the later part of this essay, I will examine the possibility that McDowell's proposal, based on the notion of conceptualized experience, has an idealistic character. And, occasionally, I will try to show the possible similarities and differences (if any) in the analogous (at least in the above respects) positions of Kant and Berkeley.

McDowell is aware of the possible charge of idealism. Substantiating his thesis on the conceptualized character of experience (in Lecture II of *Mind and World*) by arguing that the realm of the conceptual („the space of reasons") is „unbounded", he offers a kind of defence against this accusation.

McDowell tries to determine the consequences of his reformulating the problem of the relation between mind and world in terms of conceptualized experience. He notes that the external world „is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 26). Moreover, on such grounds the „space of reasons" should be described as „unbounded" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 44). In other words, „facts in general are essentially capable of being embraced in thought" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 28): „there is nothing outside" the conceptual (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 44). In these statements McDowell is motivated to demonstrate the difference between his position and the „confinement imagery" of Davidsonian coherentism: Davidson emphasised the internal, rational character of the justification of our beliefs about the external world, but meanwhile he accepted the causal, external – in some sense non-conceptual – boundaries of this rational sphere, although they had no role (being only causal) in the justification of our beliefs. Only coherence of a belief with a background of former beliefs guaranteed its justification. „It also

suggests that we are cognitively omnipotent and thereby threatens to undermine our common sense confidence in the mind-independence of reality: it certainly seems that a world *essentially* within the reach of our thinking cannot be independent of our mental capacities" (Willaschek, 2000, p. 35).

Following Willaschek (2000, pp. 35-36)[5], we can reconstruct the three following arguments of McDowell in order to defend his position against the charge of idealism:

(1) McDowell makes a distinction between „thought" as the *act* of thinking and „thought" as the *content* of thinking, describing the *content* as *thinkable*. The key point here is that „the constraint comes from outside *thinking* [as an act – P. Sz.], but not from outside what is *thinkable*" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 28). In other words, as rightly noted by Willaschek: „that the conceptual sphere is unbounded does not mean that the world consists of, or depends on, *actual* employments of concepts or acts of thinking, nor does it mean that the world itself is conceptually structured, if this is to say that there are conceptual capacities that somehow belong not to human beings, but to the world itself" (Willaschek 2000, p. 35); (McDowell 1998, p. 470). This seems to mean then that the world is intrinsically accessible („graspable") to human minds. The world is mind-involved: everything in the world is virtually *thinkable*, i.e. it is a possible content of thought. McDowell (1994/2003, p. 28) expresses this argument in the following way:

> „The constraint does not need to be from outside *thinkable contents*. It would indeed slight the independence of reality if we equated facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities – acts of thinking – or represented facts as reflections of such things; or if we equated perceptible facts in particular with states or occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in sensibility – experiences – or represented them as reflections of such things. But it does seem not idealistic, as that would be, to say that perceptible facts are essentially capable of impressing themselves on perceivers in states or occurrences of the latter sort".

(2) McDowell (1994/2003, pp. 29-34) argues also that the integration of concepts and empirical content (intuitions) in the experiencing of the external world (in virtue of the cooperation of *spontaneity* and *receptivity*) assumes „openness to the world", i.e. requires an assumption that they are

[5] Willaschek labels (rightly in some sense) these arguments as the three points of characterization of unboundeness – but in fact, in McDowell's aim, they are also an essential part of the defence against the charge of idealism. Thus, in Willaschek's paper they figure in a slightly different character than in this essay.

part of a broader „picture of the world that extends further than our actual or even possible experiences of it" (Willaschek 2000, p. 36). To substantiate this claim, McDowell analyses colours as examples of secondary qualities. If his claim were to be right in the case of such subjective qualities, it would be at least equally right in the case of the other, more objective (i.e. primary) qualities.

> „The object of experience is understood as integrated into a wider reality, in a way that mirrors how the relevant concepts are integrated into the repertoire of spontaneity at large. Even in the case of colour experience, this interpretation allows us to understand an experience as awareness of something independent of the experience itself: something that is held in place by its linkage into wider reality, so that we can make sense of the thought that it would be so even if it were not being experienced to be so" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 32).

(3) Finally, McDowell (1994/2003, pp. 39-40) tries to protect himself against the threat of extreme „anthropocentrism", i.e. „confidence that the world is completely within the reach of our powers of thinking", which leads to idealism. As he argues, there is a „perpetual" obligation for subjects to reflect and revise the holding set of concepts and beliefs in the face of the new evidence of experience. „Ensuring that our empirical concepts and conceptions pass muster is ongoing and arduous work for the understanding". The crucial point of his argument rests on the conviction that „there is no guarantee that the world is completely within the reach of a system of concepts or conceptions as it stands at some particular moment in its historical development". It is possible, then, that there may be some aspects of the world that escape our conceptual capacities or grasping, if we stop scrutinizing our beliefs about the external world.

III.

McDowell's line of argumentation against the charge of idealism seems to be somehow ambiguous. There is some tension between the first argument (on the essential mind-involvedness of the world) and the third one (on the possible aspects of the world beyond the scope of our conceptual capacities). Of course, they could be understood as two-dimensional (non-contradictory) claims. The former regards the *potential* capacities of mind-involvement within any possible cognition of the world, whereas the latter concerns *actual* cognitive access to the world. In this sense, it could be also

comprehended by the second argument. In other words, the tension would be avoided by assuming that the world is intrinsically mind-structured, and we just actualize in our cognition a *possible or virtual access to the world*. However, it still seems to lead to the threat of the idealistic thesis as well, because a *possible cognitive access* to the world rests on the claim that the world is essentially organized in terms of the human mind. We cannot grasp anything that is beyond our minds, so world as (potentially) graspable is still (in some sense) mind-dependent.[6]

In other words, there is no assumption that the external world depends on *actual* human cognitive access to all its elements. But rather that nothing *virtually* (or *potentially*) is out of the scope of human cognitive grasp. That this is true of McDowell's proposal seems to be supported by his arguments (McDowell 1990; 1994/2003, pp. 46-65, pp. 162-174; (1994/1998)) against the non-conceptualist positions of G. Evans (1983) and Ch. Peacocke (1992). They maintained that at least some elements of our experience are not conceptualized: In other words, that we do not have cognitive access to them, even *virtually*, because they are intrinsically not mind-involved.

For the purposes of this essay, it would be helpful to reconstruct the two lines of these arguments. They could be presented as follows:

(1) The non-conceptualist has „to severe the tie between reasons for which a subject thinks as she does and reasons she can give for thinking that way. Reasons that the subject can give, in so far as they are articulable, must be within the space of concepts" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 165). Any articulable reason „must be no less conceptual than what it is a reason for" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 166). In other words, the non-conceptual con-

[6] Furthermore, it seems to be problematic to determine the subject of the possible cognitive access to the world. McDowell focuses his consideration on the case of human experience, although sometimes he seems to be inclined to consider the mind-involvedness of the world in principle to any knowing subject. For instance, he considers „Martians" who „have an echo-locating capacity, which figures in the rational basis of their world-view in the same way our senses do in the basis of ours" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 123-124). However, as Willaschek rightly stresses, „if we want to understand how the world can be open to *our* [human – P. Sz.] kind of experience, it does not help to say that, even though there are aspects of reality *we* cannot grasp, there *might* be someone completely different from us who can" (Willaschek 2000, p. 37). It is worth to note that this kind of interpretation of a cognitive subject was present both in the cases of Kant (in his idea of a transcendental subject of any experience) and Berkeley (in his idea of God's infinite mind that perceives the world even if we do not).

tent of (perceptual) experience cannot (rationally) *justify* any belief. It could be at best an efficient cause of human belief, but as inarticulable in rational categories (i.e. non-conceptual), it could not offer any kind of justification (in the rational domain). However, we (as rational agents) should be able (at least in principle) to offer some reasons for our beliefs about the external world.[7]

(2) Possible mental states or beliefs with only non-conceptual content would be „blind". As „blind" they could not be „seeming glimpses" of the external world, because they would not reveal cognitively any aspect of the world to the cognizer (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 54). In other words, the „blindness" of non-conceptual contents would undermine the relation between experience and judgement, because it would not be able „to come under the self-scrutiny of active thinking" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 53). „It is hard to see how we could acknowledge that while refusing to accept that perceptual states or occurrences that lie at one end of the relation involve the capacities of spontaneity in operation" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 52-53).[8]

In general, to accept that there is a non-conceptual content of experience is to commit oneself to some form of the Myth of the Given: accepting an unconceptualized „given" element that in some mysterious way is then conceptualized by mind. However, according to McDowell the only possible explanation of the coherent (rational) relation between the experiential input of the external world and the mind's output in the form of beliefs (or judgements that express the beliefs) rests on the assumption that „spontaneity is already implicated in receptivity". That is, paraphrasing, that experience is wholly conceptualized.

Conclusion

To conclude, McDowell's proposal for the reformulation of the problem of the relation between mind and world in terms of conceptualized experience is threatened by idealism. His defence against this charge seems too ambiguous to be successful. In the face of the above evidence, it is very hard to say that his sustaining the independence of the external world from mind is defensible in terms of the standard concepts of realism and idealism. More-

[7] This line of argument is addressed mainly against the position of Peacocke (1992); see also (1990); (1998); (2001).

[8] This line of argument is directed against the claims of G. Evans (1983).

over, from a historical perspective, it seems to be an analogy to the classical forms of idealism of Kant and Berkeley. The analogy to Kant is obvious. McDowell is engaged in a terminological framework that intrinsically suggests the strict correlation between mind and world, in favour of the former. The way we perceive the world is determined by the empirical input – *phenomena*, and conceptual schemes – transcendental categories of mind. They jointly guarantee the cooperation between *spontaneity* and *receptivity*. However, in fact, the human cognizer is closed in her conceptual framework because things in themselves – *noumena* (represented by *phenomena*) are unknown (as incomprehensible in principle). Thus, the external world is only a picture dictated by the human capability to conceive its appearances (in a mind-ordered way).

Even, if we accept the claim of McDowell (1994/2003, p. 41-44) that his proposal is free from the „dark", „transcendental story" of the Kantian position and it offers only an empirical explanation, it is still extremely close to idealism. This is the case for two reasons. First, it means that we are to accept the appearances in the Kantian sense as the real side of the world. Therefore, it still leaves the status of these as ambiguous at best. Even more, they seem to be just the „shadows of our mental capabilities". Secondly, if we emphasise, following McDowell, the empirical side of his position (in order to avoid the transcendental implications of the Kantian framework), we can paradoxically collapse into a form of the empirical idealism of Berkeley.[9] In the epistemological sense, our picture of the world is determined strictly by the way we experience this world. In consequence, ontologically, we are justified in claiming only that there exists nothing more than *what* is experienced, and this, *how* it is experienced. In short, *esse est percipi*.[10]

[9] Following Sprigge, we can note an interesting relation between Kant and Berkeley in the matter considered: „The distinction [between them – P. Sz.] is somewhat subtle, since both the Berkeleian and Kantian, in effect, regard facts about the physical world as facts about the perceptions we may obtain through sensations or movement in certain directions. However, the Berkeleian inheritance has mainly been to insist on the way in which the physical world cannot be conceived without sensory qualities which can only occur as contents of experience, while the Kantian inheritance has mainly been to insist on the way in which our cognition of the physical world interprets it by concepts which it *brings* to experience rather than *abstracts* from it. In fact, Kant's position is nearer to Berkeley's than he himself allowed" (Sprigge 1998, p. 9).

[10] It is surprising that McDowell (defending himself against the charge of idealism) also invokes Hegel (1807/1977), and moreover claims that „it is central to Absolute Idealism to

Does this mean that McDowell offers an unavoidably idealistic position? In terms of the above analysis, which rests on his assertions from *Mind and World*, this seems highly probable. However, I would like in the end to show an additional possibility of interpreting McDowell's claim on conceptualized experience by developing some interesting observation of P. Kribbe and H. Putnam.[11] Putnam notes:

> „As I understand it, what McDowell is saying is simply that what is involved in cases of successful perception is nothing other than the taking in of the fact that things are thus and so. On *this* conception, the same proposition – for example, 'that is a blue patch on the wall' – is fit to describe how it is in the world and fit to describe the content of an experience. As Pamela Kribbe put it [in her doctoral dissertation at the University of Nijmegen, Holland – P. Sz.], McDowell's position is a „postmodern Aristotelianism": with respect to at least part of their content, mind and world are 'formally identical'" (Putnam 2002, p. 181).

In *Mind and World*, McDowell, assuming the mind-involvedness of the world, argues, in the words of Thornton, that the sort of thing that „one can think is the sort of thing that can be the case: a fact. But identifying facts and thoughts risks the charge of idealism. Thus McDowell distinguishes thoughts understood as acts of thinking from thoughts as the contents of those acts: the thinkables. Facts are true thinkables" (Thornton 2004, p. 249).[12]

Considering that in further parts of the book, McDowell appeals to Aristotle, proposing such categories as „second nature" or „naturalized

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reject the idea that the conceptual realm has an outer boundary, and we have arrived at a point from which we could start to domesticate the rhetoric of that philosophy. Consider, for instance, this remark of Hegel: 'In thinking, I *am free*, because I am not in an *other*'. This expresses exactly the image I have been using, in which the conceptual is unbounded; there is nothing outside it" (McDowell 1994/2003, p. 44). This quote directs us explicitly to labelling the position of McDowell itself as idealistic, and, furthermore, in the sense of Absolute idealism. But it would be obviously inconsistent with his earlier denial of Kant's transcendental story. The Hegelian „Absolute story" relies on the „Kantian transcendental story". That is a reason why I think that it is rather a heuristic, elucidating quote than any kind of „philosophical confession". McDowell is much closer to the empirical camp of idealism in form of Kant and Berkeley, and this at least for two reasons: (i) he is primarily interested in epistemological questions about the way we experience the external world; and (ii) he aims to offer „therapeutic", not systematic or constructive philosophy in *Mind and World*.

[11] This interpretation is much more risky, but plausible and, at least, heuristically very interesting.

[12] McDowell, elaborates this claim on „thinkables" in accordance with the so-called Wittgensteinian ontology of facts. This is a subject of extensive discussion that focuses mainly on McDowell's version of the identity theory of truth (Dodd 1995, pp. 160-165).

Platonism", we can also try to elucidate the issue of conceptualized experience in the light of the Aristotelian categories. Namely, it could be possible to interpret the „identity" of mind and world (expressed in fact by the thesis on the conceptualization of experience) on analogy with the Aristotelian theory of „form" and „matter". In Aristotelian hylomorphism, we can distinguish general conceptual, recognizable „forms" contained in the material world (individuating „matter"). In virtue of this, humans are able to know things. In other words, humans have cognitive access to the external world, because the world is intellectually structured. On the other hand, this does not presuppose that the external world is dependent on our conceptual capacities. Mind and world are „formally" identical, but „materially" separate. They both play equally important roles. They are ontologically perfectly suited, but are still separable. Ontological „forms" (on the side of the world) correspond to epistemological „concepts" (on the side of the mind).

I think that, in some sense, this analogy could make the proposal of McDowell more comprehensible. It seems to me that they share the same intuitions. However, it is essential to keep in mind that McDowell's proposal follows Kant and is elaborated in a Kantian terminological framework. A possible interpretation in the spirit of Aristotle should then be accomplished in terms of both perspectives. In that case, McDowell's claim about conceptualized experience could be labelled as „post-Kantian Aristotelianism", and in the form suggested above this could protect his proposal from the charge of idealism[13].

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