

Introduction

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Perhaps no book written in the past decade or so has generated more interest amongst professional philosophers than John McDowell's Mind and World. It has been and continues to be the subject of innumerable seminars, symposia, conferences, and research papers, not just in English but in several languages. It has become – in conjunction with McDowell's other writings -- a key reference point in contemporary debates in epistemology, philosophy of mind, and meta-ethics. It has featured prominently in recent reassessments of Kant's legacy for philosophy. And it has stimulated renewed discussion, amongst philosophers in both Anglo-Saxon and European traditions, of the fundamental predicament of modern philosophy itself. Small wonder that Mind and World is already widely regarded as a classic.

My primary goal in compiling this collection of essays has been to enable readers to reach an informed, balanced judgement on the nature and extent of McDowell's achievement. I have sought to do this by bringing together high quality readings of McDowell from a variety of philosophical perspectives, and by including a response from McDowell to these readings. While some of the articles deal exclusively with Mind and World, most cast their net more widely, either by addressing points that have arisen in the critical reception of McDowell's work, or by engaging with important material written by McDowell both before and after the publication of Mind and World. The two previously published critical notices of Mind and World included here (Crispin Wright's 'Human Nature?' and Michael Friedman's 'Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition') had a particularly strong impact on the reception of McDowell's book, as the references to them by some of the other contributors testify. Crispin Wright has also written a 'Postscript' to

'Human Nature?' especially for this volume. Among the other commissioned essays, those by the late Gregory McCulloch and Axel Honneth deal as much with McDowell's previous writings in philosophy of mind and meta-ethics as they do with Mind and World, and Robert Pippin's piece considers McDowell's post-Mind and World writings on Kant and Sellars. The essays by Robert Brandom, Charles Taylor and Hilary Putnam, while previously unpublished, were already written by the time I started collecting contributions. My good fortune in being able to include them has helped me realize a secondary goal in undertaking this project. For I have been driven by the conviction that a volume such as this presents an opportunity not only for advancing our understanding of McDowell's work, but also for showing how a conversation is possible, amongst leading representatives of diverse philosophical traditions, about a subject-matter of deep concern to all.

I have divided the essays into five parts. The three essays that make up the first part thematise Mind and World's location in the philosophical tradition, in particular its relation to Kant and post-Kantian idealism. Richard J. Bernstein reflects on the original way in which Mind and World follows through a Hegelian strategy for building on Kant's insights, a strategy – Bernstein points out -- that is pursued in different forms by the American pragmatists, notably C. S. Peirce. The conceptual issues Bernstein draws attention to are explored more fully in later chapters. Michael Friedman's article adopts a more critical perspective on the way McDowell situates himself in relation to the modern philosophical tradition. Friedman begins by challenging McDowell's interpretation of Kant, especially Kant's crucial distinction between sensibility and the understanding. He then outlines a genealogy of late twentieth-century analytic philosophy that leads back from Davidson -- whose work provides the immediate background for Mind and World -- to Quine, logical positivism, and from there to the Kantianism of the Marburg School. In

view of this historical recontextualization, Friedman questions whether Mind and World really represents an advance on the position developed by Davidson -- indeed, he suspects that the version of 'absolute idealism' McDowell sketches there amounts to a regression. The contrast with Robert Pippin's paper could not be more striking. While, like Friedman, Pippin is ultimately unconvinced by McDowell's alternative to Davidsonian coherentism, the source of Pippin's dissatisfaction is that McDowell is not 'idealist' enough. The thrust of Pippin's argument is that McDowell's well-motivated idealism is spoiled by an adventitious desire to 're-enchant nature'. The misplaced notion that nature requires an even partial re-enchantment embroils McDowell in difficulties -- so Pippin argues -- that Hegel, to his credit, managed to avoid. Pippin thus urges a radicalization (rather than a domestication) of the Hegelian spirit informing McDowell's work.

The second group of essays deal in different ways with the significance of McDowell's theory of experience for epistemology, broadly conceived. The focus of Barry Stroud's paper is the notion of sense-experience or 'impression' which, in McDowell's account, makes perceptual access to the world intelligible. Without such access the very idea of empirical knowledge is in jeopardy and yet, as Stroud notes, philosophers have had an extraordinarily difficult time making sense of it. Stroud then examines in some detail the justificatory or grounding role played by impressions in McDowell's theory, and he appraises McDowell's success in negotiating the epistemological 'minefield' associated with 'impression' talk. McDowell's concept of perceptual experience is also the central topic of Robert Brandom's paper. Brandom begins with a reconstruction of what exactly is 'empiricist' about McDowell's philosophy -- an empiricism which is not, Brandom points out, incompatible with rationalist elements. He then strives to bring out the distinctive character of McDowell's concept of perceptual experience by contrasting it with two kindred notions, that of non-inferential knowledge

on the one hand, and awareness of secondary qualities on the other. Against this contrast, the subtlety of McDowell's notion, but also its potential weaknesses, begin to emerge. Charles Taylor takes a broader perspective on McDowell's critique of classical epistemology. For Taylor, the epistemology McDowell criticizes incorporates a distinction between the 'inner' and the 'outer' that thinkers such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have decisively undermined by showing that conceptual thought is always already embedded in a 'background' of pre-conceptual ways of living and coping. While sympathetic to McDowell, Taylor is concerned that his model of empirical knowledge is in danger of losing sight of this background, the retrieval of which is crucial for overcoming the very picture of mind and world that in McDowell's own view 'holds us captive'. The chapter concludes with a consideration of how recent foundationalist epistemology distorts attempts at understanding other cultures.

If epistemology must be concerned with the justificatory relations that exist between experience and beliefs, as well as between beliefs themselves, then clearly it is going to merge with philosophy of mind. There are reasons, however, for wanting to keep the two domains of enquiry separate. One such reason, as Gregory McCulloch explains drawing on work published by McDowell prior to Mind and World, is that it helps to keep in view the mind's essential feature – intentionality. McCulloch shares McDowell's conviction that the great flaw in all Cartesian approaches to the mind -- that is, approaches that build in a 'Real Distinction' between mind and body -- is that they make a mystery of how thought is able to be about objects at all. This is quite different from the capacity – naturally brought into question once the 'Real Distinction' is in place – of the mind to know whether the objects that appear to it are external or not. To have one's mind directed at the world is one thing, to be able to justify beliefs about it is another. Because McCulloch takes the intelligibility of content, or thought about the world, to be primarily

a phenomenological matter, he expresses reservations about McDowell's focus on justification in Mind and World. In its place he sketches an account of intentionality called 'phenomenological externalism' that aspires to be more attuned with McDowell's earlier work. Crispin Wright, on the other hand, argues that a much more radical revision of the project undertaken in Mind and World is needed -- if, indeed, it is salvageable at all. Wright gives two basic reasons. First, he draws attention to the violence McDowell's concept of experience seems to do to deeply embedded intuitions about the experience of animals and infants. If experience requires the involvement of conceptual capacities, as McDowell proposes, what are we to make of the apparent experiences of infants and non-human animals, beings in whom those capacities appear absent? This would only be a problem that needs solving, Wright continues, if there were no real alternatives to McDowell's notion of experience. But according to Wright's second line of attack, McDowell's arguments against those alternatives fall short; in Wright's view, they are either unconvincing or, at best, undeveloped. Hilary Putnam's contribution to the volume takes up a different issue raised by McDowell's thesis that perception involves the exercise of conceptual powers: its relation to the 'direct realism' championed by McDowell in the philosophy of mind. Putnam regrets that direct realism plays no explicit role in the argument Mind and World. He then reflects on some of the metaphysical issues that arise once direct realism is brought into the picture, issues that in Putnam's view call for a more serious engagement with functionalist theories than we find in Mind and World.

Of course, McDowell is well known as an advocate of realism not just in the philosophy of mind but in moral philosophy too. The essays in part four consider some of the connections between the argument of Mind and World and McDowell's moral realism. A recurrent theme in this context is McDowell's conception of reason. Charles

Larmore is impressed by McDowell's basic realist insight that reasons are there to be found in ethics as much as in science. He agrees with McDowell's thesis that moral knowledge is no less intelligible than any kind of valid normative claim, and he welcomes the idea, advanced by McDowell, that the acquisition and growth of such knowledge is impossible outside of some historical tradition. But far from bringing philosophy peace, Larmore sees this as opening up the further issue of the ontology of reasons, an issue that in Larmore's view can only be dealt with by constructive philosophy. It is McDowell's refusal to join in this endeavor – his 'Wittgensteinian quietism' -- that provides the central target of Larmore's critique. Rüdiger Bubner's essay presents a more up-beat appraisal of McDowell's Wittgensteinianism. For Bubner, this has to be understood in conjunction with McDowell's use of the notions of Bildung and 'second nature' in Mind and World. Bubner's reflections on the historical significance of the term Bildung, and its potential for conflict with the Aristotelian idea of second nature, will be read with particular interest by those not so familiar with the German tradition to which these notions belong. The essay also contains more general remarks on agency and rationality from a hermeneutic perspective. Jay Bernstein begins his chapter by noting what he takes to be a commonality of purpose between McDowell's project in Mind and World and the work of Theodore Adorno: to achieve a 'reconciliation' between reason and nature. But if we compare the two attempts at realizing this goal, Bernstein argues, we are bound to glimpse serious deficiencies in McDowell's approach. Some of these have to do with McDowell's philosophical method, which in Bernstein's view is insufficiently attuned to the disfigurements of modern social reality to be able to reconcile reason and nature properly. Bernstein finds other deficiencies in the details of McDowell's account of the 'space of reasons', which for Bernstein are insensitive to the cognitive but non-conceptual grasp of things we have as subjects of experience. Bernstein argues provocatively that

McDowell remains captive to the rationalized reason he seeks to escape from, and that consequently he is less well-equipped than Adorno for tackling the central tasks of ethics in an age of disenchantment. Axel Honneth deals more directly with McDowell's moral realism. He begins by noting some convergences between McDowell's meta-ethical position and the 'weak naturalism' recently elaborated by Jürgen Habermas. After reconstructing the epistemological background to McDowell's theory, he then explicates the philosophical motivation behind McDowell's central realist tenet – that we have a socialized perceptual access to a world of moral facts. While Honneth is not wholly unsympathetic to this view, he draws attention to the difficulty it seems to have in explaining how the rational resolution of conflicting moral perceptions is possible. For Honneth, morality must have a principle-oriented character that can come into play when everyday moral perceptions lose their authority. This suggests to Honneth, as it does to Habermas, that it is in virtue of the openness and inclusiveness of the procedures of moral argumentation – or in other words, of practical reason -- rather than the attunement of perceptual faculties to the world of moral facts, that the demands of morality become progressively known to us.

McDowell responds to all the essays in the book in the chapter that makes up part five.

I would like to add a couple of brief remarks about the structure of the book as a whole. First, my aim in partitioning the book the way I have is to give a general indication to the reader of the kind of approach, and main focus, of the chapters in each part. But the division should not be taken too rigidly. There is no sharp break between the historical, epistemological, metaphysical and meta-ethical issues raised by McDowell's work, and this continuity is reflected in the essays collected here. Second, it may be worth drawing attention to a certain criss-crossing of themes explored in chapters located in different

parts. For instance, McDowell's relation to the Kantian tradition is examined by Bubner, even though, for other reasons, I have placed his essay in the part entitled 'Towards Ethics'. Robert Pippin's chapter raises issues about McDowell's meta-ethical stance, though, again on other grounds, I have put it in the section headed 'Philosophy after Kant'. To give one more example, the objection that McDowell does not properly accommodate pre-conceptual experience is taken up in various ways by Richard Bernstein, Charles Taylor, Crispin Wright and Jay Bernstein, whose essays span all four parts (it is most explicitly dealt with by McDowell in his response to Wright). Such criss-crossing is a further reflection of the interweaving of topics in Mind and World itself.