A Comparison of Davidson's and McDowell's Accounts of Perceptual Beliefs

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to compare Donald Davidson's and John McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs. In *Mind and World*, McDowell provides an account of the justification of beliefs about the external world that is sharply contrasted with Davidson's coherence theory. In a response to McDowell, Davidson states that he does not understand this contrast, for he believes that the differences between McDowell's and his own account are not very noticeable. Davidson explains that in his view the disagreement seems to be centered around what is caused by perceptual experience in their accounts of perceptual beliefs. In McDowell's account, rather than causing a belief directly, as is the case in Davidson's account, perceptual experience causes a propositional attitude and one can decide to convert this propositional attitude into a belief.

In this thesis, I want to go further still, arguing that the differences between Davidson's and McDowell's accounts are greater than Davidson supposes. By providing an overview of the similarities and differences of Davidson's and McDowell's accounts, I show that Davidson and McDowell disagree about more than merely about what is caused by perceptual experience, since both accounts require very different kinds of theories to defend their views on the justification of perceptual beliefs. This thesis elaborates on how those theories are embedded in a larger philosophical discussion about the connection between philosophical accounts and causal naturalistic theories of perception. When shortcomings in McDowell's account are revealed, I argue that Davidson could have made much stronger claims about the differences between McDowell's and his own account. My argument for this conclusion is developed in three steps: (1) I explain that Davidson, unlike McDowell, does not reject causal naturalistic explanations of perception completely, (2) I argue that empirical science and philosophy should cooperate, and (3) I argue that McDowell's account is incompatible with scientific knowledge on the basis of Tyler Burge's objections to McDowell's disjunctivism.

Keywords: Donald Davidson, John McDowell, justification of perceptual beliefs, *Mind and World*, naturalism, scheme and content

Contents

Introduction

Can perceptual experience justify our beliefs about the external world? And if so, how? These seemingly simple questions are actually complex philosophical ones, since answering them requires solving problems within different fields of philosophy, such as epistemology, metaphysics and the philosophy of mind. Moreover, many philosophers disagree about what the answers to these questions must be. In *Mind and World*, John McDowell attempts to provide answers by "[proposing] an account, in a diagnostic spirit, of some characteristic anxieties of modern philosophy – anxieties that centre […] on the relation between mind and world."[1] The book sets out to explain "the way concepts mediate the relation between mind and world" and describes how our beliefs about the external world can be justified by perceptual experience.[2] Donald Davidson, on the other hand, rejects the idea that perceptual experience can justify our beliefs about the external world, as he believes that only other beliefs can play a justificatory role.[3]

Although McDowell argues against Davidson in *Mind and World,* he emphasizes in the preface that his account of perceptual beliefs does not differ greatly from the account that Davidson proposes:

> Someone who read these lectures superficially might suppose Donald Davidson figures in them, after the first page or so, as an enemy. I hope it is clear to less superficial readers, even from the texts of the lectures themselves, that I single out Davidson's work for criticism as a mark of respect. I define my stance against his by way of a contrast that it would be easy to relegate to the edges of the picture, with massive agreement in the centre. For my purposes in the lectures, I play up the contrast.[4]

However, in a reply to McDowell, Davidson states that he does not understand the contrast that McDowell describes:

> How does McDowell's account differ? It is not altogether clear what the answer is. I assume, perhaps wrongly, that he does not believe that intensional properties are realized in the world except in thinking creatures. If so, it does not make sense to characterize aspects of inanimate nature as harbouring thoughts: what takes place in thinking creatures must, with the exception of the speech of others, be caused by events not intelligibly described as realized propositional entities. McDowell talks of our "taking in" facts, but it is entirely mysterious what this means unless it means that the way the world is causes us to entertain thoughts. This is the point at which our disagreement, at least as I understand it,

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[1] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), xi.
[2] Ibid., 3.
[3] Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson,* ed. Ernest Lepore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 310.
[4] McDowell, *Mind and World*, viii.

emerges. McDowell holds that what is caused is not a belief, but a propositional attitude for which we have no word. We then decide whether or not to transform this neutral attitude into a belief.

If this is a fair way of describing the difference between my account of perceptual beliefs and McDowell's, then the difference is not as striking as he makes it seem. But it is hard to evaluate the difference, since he gives no explanation of why features of the world cause the propositional attitude they do, nor of why an attitude which has no subjective probability whatever can provide a reason for a positive belief. He also seems committed to epistemic intermediaries, the propositional contents we "take in", between the world and our opinions about the world.[5]

Since, at least according to Davidson, it is not very clear what the difference is between McDowell's account and his own account, I want to provide some clarity on this topic in this thesis. Although many philosophers have written about Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs, a clear overview of both their views and an understanding of the similarities and differences between them is lacking. By providing such an overview, I hope to contribute to the epistemological discussion that has taken place throughout the history of philosophy, during which many philosophers have attempted to answer whether and how knowledge about the external world is possible. The purpose of this thesis is threefold: (1) to show that the differences between Davidson's and McDowell's accounts are greater than Davidson supposes, (2) to explain these differences in the light of Davidson's and McDowell's different conceptions of nature, and (3) to argue that Davidson could have used these differences to highlight the shortcomings of McDowell's account of perceptual beliefs.

This thesis has the following structure. The first four chapters are concerned with the first aim of my thesis. To examine the similarities and differences between Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs, I compare their accounts by elaborating on three different topics. In chapter 1, I discuss the underlying philosophical problems that give rise to the disagreement between McDowell and Davidson and compare their responses to those problems. Chapter 2 compares how our beliefs about the external world can be justified according to Davidson and McDowell. In chapter 3, I compare the distinct roles Davidson and McDowell ascribe to perceptual experience. In chapter 4, I summarize the similarities and differences that I found in the previous chapters to demonstrate that the differences are greater than Davidson supposes. Chapter 5 is concerned with the second aim of this thesis. In this chapter, I argue that the disagreement between Davidson and McDowell can be explained in the light of Davidson's and McDowell's different conceptions of nature. In chapter 6, I deal with the third aim of this thesis, arguing that, in his response to McDowell, Davidson could have used their differences to criticize McDowell's account. Finally, I conclude that Davidson could have made stronger claims about the differences between him and McDowell and about the shortcomings of McDowell's account.

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[5] Donald Davidson, "Reply to John McDowell," in *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson: Library of Living Philosophers XXVII*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 107.

1. Scheme and Content

As mentioned in the introduction, I will compare Davidson's and McDowell's account of perceptual beliefs by discussing the similarities and differences between them on the basis of three different topics. In this first chapter, I describe the underlying philosophical problems that give rise to the disagreement between McDowell and Davidson and compare McDowell's and Davidson's responses to those problems.

1.1 The Dualism of Scheme and Content

The problems that give rise to the disagreement between McDowell and Davidson originate from ideas of the 18th-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes between two abilities of the mind. First, there is sensibility, which is the ability to "receive presentations insofar as [our mind's receptivity] is affected in some manner."[6] Second, there is the mind's understanding, which is the ability to "produce presentations ourselves, i.e., our *spontaneity* of cognition."[7] Kant implies that we need our mind's sensibility in order for objects to be perceived by us and we need our mind's understanding to be able to think about those objects.[8] Kant makes the following remark about this idea: "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind."[9] We must interpret "content" here as "intuitions" or sensory intake.[10] In *Mind and World,* McDowell explains that this means that our thoughts have representational content and are not empty as a result of the cooperation between our mind's sensibility, the sensory, and our mind's understanding, the conceptual.[11] He explains this as follows: "Thoughts without content – which would not really be thoughts at all – would be a play of concepts without any connection with intuitions, that is, bits of experiential intake. It is their connection with experiential intake that supplies the content, the substance, that thoughts would otherwise lack."[12]

Davidson thinks that the idea of this interplay is understood in a dualistic manner by empiricists.[13] In "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", Davidson argues that the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content, which is a dualism "of organizing system and something

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[6] Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason," in *Classics of Western Philosophy*, ed. by Steven M. Cahn, 8th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Incorporation, 2012), 1070, B75.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] John McDowell, "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism," in *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson: Library of Living Philosophers XXVII*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1999), 87.
[11] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 4.
McDowell, "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism," 87-88.
[12] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 4.
[13] McDowell, "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism," 88.

waiting to be organized," is the third dogma of empiricism.[14] This dualism implies that our scientific picture of the world consists of the given, unconceptualized empirical input, that stands opposed to the interpretation of the given. The interpretation of the input places what is given within a particular construction of the mind.[15] According to Davidson, this is our picture of the world that consists of the totality of our beliefs.[16] To explain how our judgments and beliefs about the external world can justify our beliefs and how they are answerable to the world as it really is, we need the given, the other side of the dualism.[17] The empiricists believe that the given, the unconceptualized empirical input, provides the content of our empirical beliefs and the evidence we need for the justification of those beliefs.[18]

According to Davidson, this dualism of scheme and content has to be given up, since it cannot be "made intelligible and defensible."[19] The dualism can be seen as part of a foundationalist epistemic project of the empiricists in which they attempt to ground empirical knowledge.[20] These foundationalists think that our judgments and beliefs about the external world can ultimately be justified by pointing to certain perceptual experiences. However, Davidson argues that experience on its own cannot provide a justification for our beliefs. He explains that "nothing non-propositional can have a logical relation with, and so be a rational justification for, something propositional, namely a belief", and since perceptual experiences are physical interactions with the world according to Davidson, it becomes unintelligible how it could play a justificatory role.[21] Instead of the foundationalist account, Davidson proposes an account in which the dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content or "world" is given up. This account is based on his coherence theory of truth and knowledge, that I will further describe in the following chapters, in which beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs.[22] Davidson thinks that by giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not have to give up the world as well. Davidson states we can "reestablish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false."[23]

In *Mind and World,* McDowell discusses comparable problems about the justification of our judgments and beliefs about the external world. He appeals to Kant and explains that Kant equals our mind's understanding to the spontaneity of cognition, which means that there is a limited form of freedom in our use of empirical concepts.[24] This freedom is limited, since in order to ensure that mind

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[14] Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973), 11.

[15] Marie McGinn, "The Third Dogma of Empiricism," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 82 (1981), 89.

[16] Davidson, "Reply to John McDowell," 105.

[17] McDowell, "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism," 89.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 11.

[20] Erik Olsson, "Coherentist Theories of Epistemic Justification," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/justep-coherence/ (accessed on 08-05-2017).

[21] Donald Davidson, "Responses to Barry Stroud, John McDowell, and Tyler Burge," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67, no. 3 (2003), 695.

[22] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 310.

[23] Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 20.

[24] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 5.

and world are connected, it is necessary that there is an external constraint on our empirical thinking if our judgments and beliefs about the external world are to be answerable to the world.[25] A possible solution to this problem is to provide such an external constraint on our empirical thinking by appealing to the given. As is just described, according to foundationalists, the given, unconceptualized empirical input, constitutes the ultimate grounds for justifying our judgments and beliefs about the external world.[26] Similarly to Davidson, McDowell also rejects the appeal to the given as a way of justifying our judgments and beliefs about the external world. McDowell argues that the foundationalist "attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere" has failed.[27] The given is supposed to supply an external constraint on our empirical thinking, but at the same time it is not able to stand in rational relations to our beliefs about the external world. McDowell states that "the dualism reflects the idea that the linkages recognized by reason are the linkages that constitute the organization of schemes, and it places the deliverances of the senses outside schemes."[28] This is incoherent according to McDowell, since, if only elements within the conceptual scheme can stand in rational relations to each other, something outside the conceptual scheme, the unconceptualized empirical input, cannot stand in such a relation.[29] Therefore, the given can only provide exculpations rather than justifications for our judgments and beliefs about the external world.[30]

As just described, Davidson offers an alternative to an appeal to the given. However, McDowell does not want to accept Davidson's proposal either. Davidson only accepts beliefs as justification for other beliefs, since, according to Davidson, we cannot get outside our beliefs.[31] McDowell argues that Davidson's account does not provide the previously mentioned external constraint that we need for our beliefs about the external world to be able to represent the world at all.[32] Therefore, McDowell wants to provide an alternative account in which he can incorporate an external constraint on our empirical thinking by establishing that perceptual experiences can justify our judgments and beliefs about the external world, while at the same time accounting for the way in which perceptual experiences must have propositional content in order to be able to stand in rational relations to our beliefs about the external world.[33]

Not only do Davidson and McDowell offer different solutions to the problems regarding the justification of our beliefs about the external world, Davidson and McDowell both interpret the main problem of the dualism of scheme and content differently. Davidson expresses concerns about the

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[25] Ibid., 5-6.
[26] Ibid., 6.
[27] Ibid., 7.
[28] McDowell, "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism," 89.
[29] Ibid. 89-80.
[30] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 8.
[31] Ibid., 16.
[32] Ibid., 17.
[33] Ibid., 24.

dualism of scheme and content, since he thinks that the dualism of scheme and content leads to skepticism about the external world and can make us doubt whether we are entitled to our world view.[34] For McDowell, on the other hand, the main problem regarding the dualism of scheme and content is that the dualism is incoherent. This problem is grounded in his assumption that the domain of rational interrelatedness is coextensive with the domain of the conceptual.[35] McDowell explains this as follows:

> The world's impacts on the senses are given the task of making it intelligible that moves within a conceptual scheme, taken to be such that considered in themselves they are empty, can nevertheless be adoptions of stands as to how things are. But there can be so much as an appearance that this works only if we can see the world's impacts on the senses as a tribunal, something capable of passing verdicts on moves within a scheme. Only so can we conceive an answerability to the world's impacts on the senses as a mediated answerability to the world itself. But when we distance content from scheme, in a way that reflects the idea that rational interrelatedness is confined to elements in schemes, we ensure that we cannot see experience as a tribunal.[36]

The main difference here is that according to Davidson, we can doubt whether we are entitled to our world view, whereas for McDowell, "it becomes unintelligible that we have a world view at all."[37] Because of this, their projects have different aims as well. Whereas Davidson is concerned with finding a solution for the problem that what our senses are telling us is not sufficient to warrant our world view, McDowell's problem is that the idea that the senses provide testimony at all becomes unintelligible, such that we can question whether we are in touch with reality at all.[38] This results in the following projects' aims. The aim of Davidson's project is to secure the authority of the beliefs that we use as evidence to justify our beliefs about the external world. The aim of McDowell's project, on the other hand, is to provide an answer to the question about how it is possible for there to be empirical knowledge at all and to show that the problems we face in modern philosophy are merely illusions.[39]

1.2 Summary

To summarize, giving up the dualism of scheme and content makes it questionable how our beliefs about the external world are to be justified. Davidson rejects the dualism of scheme and content and he argues that the foundationalist attempt to appeal to the given to justify our empirical judgments and

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[34] McDowell, "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism," 92.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid., 91-92.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 92.
[39] Ibid., 94.
McDowell, *Mind and World*, xi, xiii.

beliefs cannot be defended. Likewise, McDowell also rejects an appeal to the given as a means of justifying our judgments and beliefs about the external world. Davidson offers an alternative account, in which beliefs about the external world can be justified by other beliefs.

However, McDowell does not want to accept this solution by Davidson. According to McDowell, Davidson's account lacks external constraints on our empirical beliefs that we need for our beliefs about the external world to be able to represent the world at all. That is why McDowell offers an alternative account in which these external constraints on our empirical thinking are present. I will elaborate on the contents of both Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs in the following chapters. Moreover, I explained that Davidson and McDowell also differ in their interpretation of the main problem of the dualism of scheme and content. For Davidson, it is doubtful whether we are entitled to our world view, whereas for McDowell, the intelligibility of having a world view at all is at stake. That is why Davidson needs to secure the authority of the beliefs that we use as evidence to justify our perceptual beliefs and McDowell needs to show that the problem of possibly having no world view at all is illusory.

2. The Justification of Perceptual Beliefs

After elaborating on the problems that give rise to the disagreement between Davidson and McDowell, in this second chapter, I compare their explanations about how our judgments and beliefs about the external world are to be justified. In this comparison, I focus mainly on Davidson's "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" and on McDowell's *Mind and World.*

2.1 Davidson's Account of the Justification of Perceptual Belief

As I explained before, in his account of perceptual beliefs, Davidson argues that we must not fall into the myth of the given, meaning that we cannot appeal to perceptual experience to justify our judgments or beliefs about the external world. Based on his distinction between mental events and physical events, that I will come back to in chapter 5, Davidson distinguishes between perceptual experiences (which are physical interactions with the world according to Davidson) and perceptual beliefs (which are mental states).[40] Based on this distinction, Davidson claims that perceptual experiences are extra-conceptual impacts on our mind's sensibility. Therefore, we must consider perceptual experiences to be outside the space of reasons, a domain constituted by normative relations, and is it the case that "experience cannot count as a reason for holding a belief."[41] But then how is knowledge about the external world possible? For Davidson, there seems to be no other option available but to maintain that beliefs about the external world can only be justified by other beliefs.[42]

This idea that beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs grounds Davidson's coherence theory of truth and knowledge.[43] The account Davidson provides in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", explains, according to Davidson, that empirical knowledge is possible in the following way: "If coherence is a test of truth, there is a direct connection with epistemology, for we have reason to believe many of our beliefs cohere with many others, and in that case we have reason to believe many of our beliefs are true. When the beliefs are true, then the primary conditions for knowledge would seem to be satisfied."[44] Davidson's reasons for positing his theory of truth and knowledge as a coherence theory are his rejection of the dualism of scheme and content, his rejection

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[40] Davidson, "Responses to Barry Stroud, John McDowell, and Tyler Burge," 695.

[41] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 14.

[42] *Comment:* Davidson defines 'beliefs' as "states of people with intentions, desires, sense organs; they are states that are caused by, and cause, events inside and outside the bodies of their entertainers."
Source: Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 308.

[43] *Comment:* Davidson's theory is not a standard coherence theory of truth, as he does not define truth in terms of coherence, but on the basis of a Tarski-style truth theory. Furthermore, Davidson explains that his coherence theory is not incompatible with correspondence theories of truth, since he argues that "coherence yields correspondence." I will, however, not elaborate on this now, since it falls outside the scope of this thesis. For more information on this topic, I refer to Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 307 and Jeff Malpas, "Donald Davidson: 4.4 Realism, Anti-Realism and Theories of Truth," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/davidson/ (accessed on 05-06-2017).

[44] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 307.

of the epistemological foundationalist attempts to ground beliefs by an appeal to the given (in perceptual experience), and also his commitment to the idea that we must understand the character of the mind holistically.[45]

At this point, Davidson still needs to explain how his account can ensure that our beliefs about the external world are justified, because coherence does not necessarily imply that our beliefs about the external world are true. It is possible to imagine a coherent world view that is false.[46] However, according to Davidson, we do not have to worry about such skeptical ideas, since he argues that beliefs are veridical in nature. Davidson explains that "what is needed to answer the skeptic is to show that someone with a (more or less) coherent set of beliefs has reason to suppose his beliefs are not mistaken in the main."[47] Next, he argues that we do not need evidence that proves that most of our beliefs are true, since a reason for supposing that most of our beliefs are true is sufficient. Davidson can establish this by connecting belief with interpretation. According to Davidson, "it is in the nature of interpretation that an interpreter must find her subjects mostly right about the world with which she can observe them causally interacting."[48] In his argument against skepticism, Davidson uses the notion of an omniscient interpreter, someone "who is omniscient about the world, and about what does and would cause a speaker to assent to any sentence in his (potentially unlimited) repertoire."[49] Although the omniscient interpreter has complete knowledge of the world, he does not have complete knowledge of the meaning of speaker's sentences nor of his or her beliefs.[50] By means of the method of radical interpretation, the omniscient interpreter attributes those meanings to the speaker's sentences and in doing so also beliefs.[51] This omniscient interpreter argument goes as follows: one must find another speaker largely in agreement with oneself in order to be able to interpret the other correctly. Thus, if it is possible to be correctly interpreted by an omniscient interpreter, an interpreter with complete knowledge of the world, one's beliefs must mostly be true. In this way, Davidson defeats the skeptic, since it is impossible to be mistaken in the main if one could be interpreted correctly by an omniscient interpreter.[52]

2.2 McDowell's Account of the Justification of Perceptual Belief

Now I have explained how beliefs about the external world can be justified according to Davidson, I can move on to McDowell's account. In *Mind and World,* McDowell wants to show that we are not

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[45] Malpas, "Donald Davidson: 4.4 Realism, Anti-Realism and Theories of Truth."
[46] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 309.
[47] Ibid., 314.
[48] McDowell, *Mind and World,* 16.
[49] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 317.
[50] Ernie Lepore and Kirk Ludwig, *Donald Davidson: Meaning, Truth, Language, and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 323.
[51] Ibid., 323-324.
[52] Ibid., 323.
Comment: Davidson's omniscient interpreter argument has proved to be controversal. However, I will not eloborate on the controverse, since it is not within the scope of this thesis.

forced to choose among either an appeal to the given or an account such as Davidson's in which beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs. His aim is not to provide a solution to the previously described problems regarding the justification of perceptual beliefs, but to dissolve those problems completely.[53]

As is explained in chapter 1, McDowell rejects an appeal to the given as a means of justifying our empirical beliefs, since the given, as something outside the conceptual sphere, is not able to stand in rational relations to our beliefs about the external world. I explained that Davidson provides an alternative to an appeal to the given based on his coherence theory of truth and knowledge. McDowell thinks that Davidson is right to acknowledge that only something with conceptual content can count as a reason for having a belief.[54] For perceptual experiences to be able to justify judgments and beliefs about the external world, perceptual experiences and beliefs must involve the same kind of content.[55] However, he points out that Davidson's conclusion is unsatisfactory. According to McDowell, Davidson does not only reject an appeal to the given, but immediately denies that experience plays any justificatory role for our empirical judgments and beliefs. What is unsatisfactory about this picture, according to McDowell, is that there is no rational constraint from outside to secure that our judgments and beliefs about the external world have any bearing on reality at all, and this worry was a reason for finding an appeal to the given attractive in the first place.[56]

That is why McDowell needs to show that there is a third option available, besides an appeal to the given and Davidson's coherence theory, in which the need for an external constraint is met and in which something with conceptual content can play the justificatory role for our perceptual beliefs. This introduction of a third available option can be seen in the light of McDowell's diagnostic approach. Similarly to Wittgenstein, McDowell rejects the idea that the task of philosophy is to provide constructive theories.[57] Instead of an attempt at explaining phenomena, McDowell's philosophy is concerned with a description of the justification of perceptual beliefs and "providing a cure" for "anxieties that centre on the relation between mind and world."[58]

McDowell argues that the third option he introduces can provide such a cure for these anxieties: we must view experiences as "impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content."[59] In this way, spontaneity (conceptual capacities belong to the faculty of spontaneity) and receptivity can be combined in perceptual experience. Experiences are thus distinguished from beliefs in another way

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[53] McDowell, *Mind and World,* xi.
[54] John McDowell, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception," in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 137.
[55] José Bermúdez and Arnon Cahen, "Nonconceptual Mental Content," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/content-nonconceptual (accessed on 04-07-2017).
[56] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 14.
[57] Ibid., 93.
[58] Ibid., xi.
[59] Ibid., 46.

than in Davidson's account: as products of receptivity, unlike beliefs, they do not solely belong to the faculty of spontaneity. In this way, McDowell's account meets the need for an external constraint and makes it possible for perceptual experience to play a justificatory role for our perceptual beliefs.[60]

2.3 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to compare Davidson's and McDowell's explanations about how our judgments and beliefs about the external world are to be justified. Davidson states that beliefs cannot be justified by perceptual experience, since perceptual experience is unconceptualized and only something with conceptual content can count as a reason for having a belief. Therefore, beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs. I explained that to argue for that thesis, Davidson uses a coherence theory of truth and knowledge in which an additional account of an omniscient interpreter is used to explain how our beliefs can be veridical in nature.

Similarly to Davidson, McDowell also believes that only something with conceptual content can count as a reason for having a belief. However, McDowell disagrees with Davidson that that condition excludes perceptual experience from playing a justificatory role for our beliefs. Perceptual experience can have conceptual content, according to McDowell. In this way, he combines receptivity with spontaneity. Moreover, I explained that McDowell's account of conceptualized perceptual experience can be seen in the light of his diagnostic approach to dissolve philosophical problems. To conclude, Davidson and McDowell need very different accounts to ground their theses about how beliefs about the external world are to be justified. I will elaborate on this point in chapter 5.

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[60] Ibid., 24-25.

3. The Role of Perceptual Experience

Because of the different explanations about how our beliefs about the external world are to be justified, the role of perceptual experience in the accounts of Davidson and McDowell differ as well. That is why, in this third chapter, I compare the role of perceptual experience in both accounts.

3.1 The Role of Perceptual Experience in Davidson's Account

The ascription of a justificatory role to perceptual experience is an attractive move in order to connect the world to our beliefs about the world. Davidson, however, thinks that such a move is not possible. First of all, for Davidson, experiences are unconceptualized physical interactions with the world. Such interactions cannot play a justificatory role according to Davidson. He explains that "nothing non-propositional can have a logical relation with, and so be a rational justification for, something propositional, namely a belief", and since perceptual experience is non-propositional in Davidson's account, perceptual experiences cannot themselves be reasons.[61] Moreover, Davidson argues that the belief that one is seeing green grass, cannot be justified by the experience of seeing green grass itself, but only by one's belief that one is having that experience.[62] Thus, Davidson argues that such a justification depends on the awareness of those experiences, which is nothing more than another belief.[63]

The role that is left for perceptual experiences is only a causal one.[64] According to Davidson, this causal role is enough to gain empirical knowledge, since perceptual experience often causes us to have true beliefs about the external world. In the most cases, we perceive what is the case.[65] That is because the belief that such-and-such is the case is caused by such-and-such being the case.[66] Davidson explains that "in such standard cases of perception there are no epistemic intermediaries: I look and I believe."[67] Davidson explains that "it is because the meanings of many of the sentences I use to report such occasions were ostensively learned that I am normally justified in forming the beliefs; it is this externalist feature of perceptual beliefs that tends to make them self-certifying."[68]

3.2 The Role of Perceptual Experience in McDowell's Account

Whereas Davidson thinks that experiences are unconceptualized physical interactions with the world, McDowell thinks that our experiences have conceptual content, but are simultaneously impressions

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[61] Davidson, "Responses to Barry Stroud, John McDowell, and Tyler Burge," 695.
[62] Simon Evnine, *Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1991), 139.
[63] Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 311.
[64] Evnine, *Donald Davidson*, 139.
[65] Davidson, "Responses to Barry Stroud, John McDowell, and Tyler Burge," 695.
[66] John McDowell, "Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective," in *The Engaged Intellect* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 158.
[67] Davidson, "Responses to Barry Stroud, John McDowell, and Tyler Burge," 695.
[68] Ibid.

made by the independent world on our senses.[69] In that way, as mentioned before, McDowell combines receptivity and spontaneity to meet the need for an external constraint and to make it possible for perceptual experience to play a justificatory role for our beliefs about the external world. Furthermore, contrary to Davidson, McDowell thinks that what is caused by experience is not a belief, "but a propositional attitude for which we have no word."[70]

How can we be sure that experience can justify our beliefs about the external world? McDowell explains that "in experiences one can take in how things are", which means that experience provides access to facts about how things are independently of our thinking.[71] McDowell uses the following remark of Wittgenstein to elaborate on his thoughts about the relation between mind and world: "Thought must be something unique. When we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: *this – is – so*."[72] Similarly, McDowell argues that "there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case. When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case."[73] Thus in our experience, there is openness to the world, meaning that in perceptual experience we can stand in direct contact with the world itself.[74] In this way, the world is not outside the sphere of the conceptual, and therefore, the conceptual content of a perceptual experience can be something that is the case.[75]

3.3 Summary

The aim of this chapter was to compare the role that perceptual experience plays in the accounts of Davidson and McDowell. The main difference is that perceptual experience plays only a causal role in Davidson's account whereas it plays a justificatory role in McDowell's. Davidson does not worry that a causal role is not sufficient to ensure that our beliefs about the external world are answerable to the world itself, since he believes that our beliefs are veridical in nature. McDowell, on the other hand, does not think that a causal role is enough to answer skeptical questions about whether the world really is as our world view holds it to be.[76] To ensure that our thoughts about the world are answerable to the world, McDowell thinks perceptual experience must play a justificatory role. And since McDowell believes that there is conceptualized experience, experience can be a reason for holding a belief.

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[69] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 46.
[70] Davidson, "Reply to John McDowell," 107.
[71] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 25.
[72] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 44.
[73] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 27.
[74] Ibid., 111.
[75] McDowell, "Conceptual Capacities in Perception," in *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, 142.
[76] McDowell, *Mind and World,* 17.

4. A Comparison of Davidson's and McDowell's Accounts

In the previous chapters I compared Davidson's and McDowell's accounts in three ways: first, I compared Davidson's and McDowell's responses with respect to the underlying philosophical problems that give rise to their disagreement; second, I compared what counts as a justifier of perceptual beliefs in their accounts; and third, I compared the role perception plays in their accounts. The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the similarities and differences that I found in order to examine whether Davidson was right to say that the differences between McDowell's and his own account are "not as striking as [McDowell] makes it seem."[77]

4.1 Similarities in Davidson's and McDowell's Accounts

In my comparison of Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs, I did not find many similarities. I did find that the accounts of perceptual beliefs that Davidson and McDowell offer can both be understood as a response to the dualism of scheme and content. Furthermore, both Davidson and McDowell reject the idea that we can appeal to the given, as unconceptualized empirical input, to justify empirical judgments and beliefs, since only something with conceptual content can count as a reason for having a belief.

4.2 Differences in Davidson's and McDowell's Accounts

In my comparison of Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs, I did find many differences. To start with, Davidson's and McDowell's projects differ in their aims. I explained that Davidson questions whether we are entitled to our world view, whereas McDowell worries that the intelligibility of having a world view at all is at stake. The aim of Davidson's project is thus to secure the authority of the beliefs that we use as evidence to justify our beliefs about the external world. McDowell's project's aim, on the other hand, is to provide an answer to the question about how it is possible for there to be empirical knowledge at all and to show that the problems we face in modern epistemology are merely illusions.

Moreover, I explained that what counts as a justifier of perceptual beliefs and the role of perceptual experience differ in their accounts. In Davidson's account, beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs and perceptual experience plays only a causal role, whereas in McDowell's account, conceptualized perceptual experience can count as a justifier for perceptual beliefs. I also briefly mentioned that both Davidson and McDowell seem to need very different kinds of theories to argue for their respective claims that beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs and that conceptualized perceptual experience can justify empirical beliefs. On the one hand, Davidson uses a coherence theory of truth and knowledge to argue that only beliefs can justify other beliefs. On the other hand,

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[77] Davidson, "Reply to John McDowell," 107.

McDowell thinks that his diagnostic method can dissolve the problems concerning the justification of perceptual beliefs. He argues that if we assume that perceptual experience is already conceptualized, the need for an external constraint is met, and therefore, there are no problems for experience playing a justificatory role.

4.3 The Disagreement Reconsidered

Davidson claims that the differences between McDowell's and his own account are "not as striking as [McDowell] makes it seem."[78] As I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Davidson thinks that the greatest difference lies in the manner in which McDowell thinks that perceptual experience causes a propositional attitude, which one can decide to convert into a belief, instead of causing a belief directly.[79] According to Davidson, it is difficult to evaluate this difference, since McDowell does not explain how this would work exactly.[80] Although Davidson seems to suppose that the disagreement between McDowell and him is only a matter of a small detail and therefore not very problematic, I think McDowell's lack of a clear explanation is a fair critique on his account. Moreover, as this overview demonstrates, Davidson and McDowell disagree about more than only about what is caused by perceptual experience. In the next chapter, I will elaborate on how these differences are embedded in a larger philosophical discussion about the right conception of nature and the relation between philosophy and causal naturalistic theories about reality.

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[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.

5. Conceptions of Nature and Naturalism

After showing that there are more differences than Davidson described in his response to McDowell, I now argue that we can understand the disagreement between Davidson and McDowell in the light of their conceptions of nature and their metaphilosophical differences about the proper relation between philosophy and causal naturalistic theories about reality.

5.1 Conceptions of Nature

By claiming that perceptual experience is conceptualized, McDowell's account of perceptual beliefs seems to be able to solve Davidson's problem of the lack of an external constraint on our empirical beliefs. If this is such an easy solution to the problem, it might seem mysterious why Davidson himself did not consider the option that conceptualized perceptual experience can justify our perceptual beliefs. The reason is that in contemporary philosophy, it is often assumed that spontaneity and receptivity cannot be combined. For example, receptivity and spontaneity are often distinguished when we humans compare ourselves to animals. It is a suggestive picture that humans and dumb animals share perceptual receptivity to our environments, while on top of that humans have something entirely different: "freedom that empowers us to take charge of our active thinking", which McDowell equals to spontaneity.[81]

The idea that spontaneity and receptivity cannot be combined is a result of the prevailing conception of nature in contemporary philosophy. In this conception of nature, the natural world has its place in the realm of law, the domain of causal-nomological connections that can be described in the vocabulary of the natural sciences, that is contrasted with the space of reasons, the domain constituted by normative relations.[82] The two logical spaces are placed opposed to each other in such a way that it seems as if the content of concepts that belong to the one space cannot be made intelligible in terms of concepts that belong to the other space.[83] As a result, there is an incommensurability between passive receptivity (that belongs to the realm of law) and the spontaneity of our understanding (that belongs to the space of reasons), that makes it difficult to find a place for concepts related to spontaneity, such as intentionality and normativity, that belong to the space of reasons, in an account of perceptual beliefs in which perceptual experience is viewed as a natural process.[84]

One possible move to overcome this divide is the eliminativist approach, in which it is assumed that there is no such thing as spontaneity and that all talk of spontaneity must be eliminated.[85]

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[81] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 70.
[82] John McDowell, "Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind," in *The Engaged Intellect* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 257.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Crispin Wright, "Human Nature," in *Reading McDowell: On Mind and World,* ed. Nicholas H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 140.
[85] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 73.

Another option is the reductive approach of the bald naturalists. McDowell explains that "according to this approach, we can reconstruct the structure of the space of reasons out of conceptual materials that already belong in a natural-scientific depiction of nature."[86] That means that the vocabulary of spontaneity can be redescribed in natural scientific language and thus can be placed in the realm of law.[87] However, both Davidson and McDowell disagree with the eliminativist and the bald naturalist approaches. The problem that Davidson and McDowell thus face is to find a manner in which to account for the fact that perception is a natural process without reducing or eliminating concepts related to spontaneity.

5.2 Davidson's Relation to Naturalistic Theories of Perception

How does Davidson's account relate to naturalistic theories of perception? To start with, Davidson agrees with the prevailing conception of nature that the natural has its place in the realm of law. However, Davidson disagrees with bald naturalists, for he believes that the justification of our beliefs cannot be given by causal naturalistic explanations. Davidson has several reasons for not accepting a reductionist approach. First, Davidson thinks that talk of propositional attitudes is only understandable in the framework of the space of reasons.[88] Moreover, he claims that spontaneity related talk is needed to make radical interpretation possible. There are normative principles that guide the interpretation of utterances and behavior of other people in terms of beliefs and desires that we attribute to them in order to understand and justify them.[89] Since Davidson thinks that normativity only has a place in the space of reasons, the account of the justification of perceptual beliefs cannot be reduced to physical terms that have their place in the realm of law.[90] Davidson explains this as follows:

> When we attribute a belief, a desire, a goal, an intention or a meaning to an agent, we necessarily operate within a system of concepts in part determined by the structure of beliefs and desires of the agent himself. Short of changing the subject, we cannot escape this feature of the psychological; but this feature has no counterpart in the world of physics.[91]

Davidson's second reason for rejecting a reductionist approach is described in Michael Dummett's "Realism". He explains that Davidson seems to think that we have no means to identify for each physical or mental statement which statement from the other vocabulary corresponds to it, although it

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Wright, "Human Nature," 143.
[88] McDowell, "Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind," 259.
[89] Evnine, *Donald Davidson*, 11.
[90] McDowell, *Mind and World,* 74.
[91] Donald Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy," *Philosophy of Psychology: Contemporary Readings*, ed. José Luis Bermúdez (New York: Routledge, 2006), 23.

is the case that "for any statement A of the given class, there must be a statement B of the reductive class in the truth of which the truth of A consists."[92]

In chapter 2, I already mentioned that I would elaborate on Davidson's distinction between mental events and physical events that enables Davidson to distinguish between perceptual experiences and perceptual beliefs. I explain how Davidson's rejection of reduction can be understood in the light of his distinction between mental and physical events. Unlike physical events, mental events are anomalous according to Davidson.[93] Davidson defines 'anomaly' as "failure to fall under a law".[94] Thus, since mental events are not governed by scientific laws, unlike physical events, they cannot be given physical explanations.[95]

At the same time, Davidson is a materialist who thinks that mental events are identical to physical events.[96] This suggests that there is a contradiction between his adherence to the freedom of mental events, including beliefs and perceivings, that "resist capture in the nomological net of physical theory", that Davidson wants to save, and his materialism according to which natural necessity determines the causal role that these mental events play.[97] However, there is no real contradiction according to Davidson. On Davidson's view, there is a difference between the events themselves and how we describe and refer to those events. Events are mental or physical only if they are described using respectively mental or physical terms.[98] The fact that we cannot reduce descriptions of mental events to physical terms "does not mean there are any events that are in themselves undetermined or unpredictable; it is only events as described in the vocabulary of thought and action that resist incorporation into a closed deterministic system. These same events, described in appropriate physical terms, are as amenable to prediction and explanation as any."[99] The reason is that causality exists as a relation between individual events, according to Davidson, independently of which vocabulary is used to describe those events.[100] Laws, on the other hand, "are linguistic; and so events can instantiate laws, and hence be explained or predicted in the light of laws, only as these events are described in one or another way."[101] Thus, "when events are related as cause and effect, they have descriptions that instantiate a law."[102] On the other hand, descriptions in mental terms do not instantiate laws. Furthermore, to explain how mental events relate to physical events, Davidson uses the notion of supervenience which means that "there cannot be two events alike in all physical respects but differing

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[92] Michael Dummett, "Realism," *Synthese* 52, no. 1 (1982), 73-74.

[93] Evnine, *Donald Davidson*, 7.

[94] Donald Davidson, "Mental Events," in *Mind and Cognition: An Anthology,* 3rd ed., ed. William G. Lycan and Jesse J. Prinz (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 55.

[95] Evnine, *Donald Davidson*, 7.
Donald Davidson, "Mental Events," 58.

[96] Evnine, *Donald Davidson*, 25.

[97] Davidson, "Mental Events," 55.

[98] Ibid., 55-57.

[99] Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy," 23.

[100] Davidson, "Mental Events," 59.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

in some mental respect, or that an object cannot alter in some mental respect without altering in some physical respect."[103]

I want to emphasize that Davidson's account includes an ontological claim. Since Davidson assumes that events can be made intelligible in terms of a mental or physical vocabulary, this implies that "the very things that satisfy the *sui generis* concepts, the concepts whose applicability signals the presence of spontaneity, are already in principle available to an investigation whose concern is the realm of law. The constitutive focus on the two kinds of intelligibility separates two batches of conceptual equipment, but it does not separate their subject matter."[104]

Now I can finally answer how Davidson's account of perceptual beliefs relates to causal naturalistic theories of perception. Since Davidson describes perceptual experiences as unconceptualized physical interactions with the world, and we know that physical events are governed by scientific laws, we can assume that Davidson is not against causal naturalistic theories of perception in his account of perceptual beliefs. The normative elements of an account of perceptual beliefs, however, cannot be given causal naturalistic explanations. Thus, for Davidson, philosophy and empirical science are concerned with two different kinds of intelligibility, but they can both study the same events.

5.3 McDowell's Relation to Naturalistic Theories of Perception

McDowell agrees with Davidson that the idea of spontaneity cannot be reduced in a bald naturalistic manner, meaning that we cannot reduce concepts that are related to spontaneity to concepts that belong to the realm of law.[105] Thus, Davidson and McDowell both acknowledge that talk of propositional attitudes is only understandable in the framework of the space of reasons.[106] However, unlike Davidson, McDowell thinks that the natural world is misunderstood in contemporary philosophy. According to McDowell, we should improve our understanding of what counts as natural.[107] McDowell explains that in pre-modern philosophy, philosophers did not assume that there was a contradiction between the normativity of ideas of justification and the idea of an exercise of natural powers, but the rise of modern science has made this relation problematic.[108]

According to McDowell, the problem can be dissolved when we change our conception of nature by adopting a naturalism "that leaves nature disenchanted."[109] In this picture, it is assumed that our nature is largely second nature. McDowell explains that second nature consists of potentialities we were born with and is also shaped by our upbringing (or *Bildung)* "by being initiated into conceptual

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[103] Ibid.
[104] McDowell, *Mind and World,* 74-75.
[105] Ibid., 74.
[106] McDowell, "Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind," 259.
[107] Wright, "Human Nature," 141.
[108] McDowell, "Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind," 258.
[109] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 85.

capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons."[110] This account is based on an Aristotelian idea according to which human beings are viewed as rational animals, but in which the idea that "rationality operates freely in its own sphere" is also incorporated.[111] By introducing the idea of second nature, McDowell can explain that "the dictates of reason are there anyway" and in this way that they are part of our nature, that can be actualized by a proper upbringing, which makes it second nature.[112]

With this conception of nature, we can suppose that "the structure of the logical space of reasons is *sui generis*, as compared with the structure of the logical space within which natural-scientific description situates things" and simultaneously think that something situated in the logical space of reasons can be natural.[113] "What makes this possible is that we need not identify the dichotomy of logical spaces with a dichotomy between the natural and the normative."[114] By removing the apparent incommensurability between receptivity and spontaneity, McDowell can also explain that experience can have conceptual content and still be natural.[115] Thus, according to McDowell, "we need not equate the very idea of nature with the idea of instantiations of concepts that belong in the logical space – admittedly separate, on this view, from the logical space of reasons – in which the natural-scientific kind of intelligibility is brought to light."[116]

5.4 Davidson's and McDowell's Accounts of Perceptual Beliefs and Naturalism

To briefly summarize, I explained that Davidson is committed to the conception of nature that places the natural in the realm of law, but that he does not want to reduce the talk of spontaneity to natural scientific language, since he thinks that this concerns a kind of intelligibility that cannot be expressed in natural scientific terms. On the contrary, McDowell claims that the natural can also have a place in the space of reasons. He argues for an alternative naturalism in which the notion of second nature is included. These different conceptions of nature and the related attitudes towards naturalistic accounts of perception can be used to explain the differences between Davidson and McDowell.

Because of the modern conception of nature, McDowell's idea that perceptual experience is conceptualized is not available to Davidson. Since Davidson maintains that only beliefs can justify beliefs and that these mental events cannot be given nomological explanations, he does not want to reduce concepts related to spontaneity to natural-scientific terms. McDowell, on the other hand, thinks that his disenchanted naturalism that follows from his conception of nature can dissolve the problems of modern epistemology. In the next chapter, I argue why Davidson should have mentioned this

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[110] Ibid, xx.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid., 91.
[113] Ibid. xx.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., 86.
[116] Ibid., xix.

difference in his response to McDowell about their disagreement, because the difference seems to lead to shortcomings in McDowell's account that are very great compared to their differing thoughts about what is caused by perceptual experience. (According to Davidson, perceptual experience causes perceptual beliefs, whereas according to McDowell, perceptual experience causes a propositional attitude, which one can decide to convert into a belief.)

6. Philosophy and Empirical Science

In this final chapter, I argue that we can reject McDowell's account of perceptual beliefs, because of the shortcomings of McDowell's disenchanted naturalism. My argument consists of three steps: first, I argue that Davidson, unlike McDowell, does not reject causal naturalistic explanations of perception completely; second, I argue why philosophy and empirical science must cooperate; and third, I argue that McDowell's account is incompatible with what is known about perception from empirical science, and that he therefore does not incorporate scientific knowledge in the way he should. Finally, I conclude that Davidson could have made stronger claims in his response to McDowell about the weaknesses of McDowell's account.

6.1 Rejection of Causal Explanations of Perception

In the first step of my argument, I explain that Davidson's and McDowell's different conceptions of nature result in very different relations between their philosophical accounts and empirical science. Davidson's reasons for not accepting the reductive approach of bald naturalists do not automatically commit him to the rejection of causal explanations of perception, since he assumes that events can be described in mental as well as in physical terms. As I described earlier, Davidson thinks that philosophy and empirical science can both study the same events, but concern distinct kinds of intelligibility and describe the events in different vocabularies. However, it is important to Davidson that insights of both types of studies are reconciled. He describes that "one the one hand, human acts are clearly part of the order of nature, causing and being caused by events outside ourselves. On the other hand, there are good arguments against the view that thought, desire and voluntary action can be brought under deterministic laws, as physical phenomena can. An adequate theory of behavior must do justice to both these insights and show how, contrary to appearance, they can be reconciled."[117]

On the contrary, McDowell thinks that his disenchanted naturalism is sufficient to ground his account of perceptual beliefs. He does not think it is necessary to include knowledge of empirical science in his theory, as he rejects the idea that the nature of perception can be described through sciences such as perceptual psychology. That is because McDowell distinguishes between two types of possible accounts of perception. First, there is an account of the individual's perception. Second, there is an account of cognitive psychology, which focusses on the processing of information by the individual's subsystems that make perception possible.[118] According to McDowell, the first account is able to attribute real representational content, whereas the second account is merely metaphorical and does no more than list the causal enabling conditions of perception.[119] That is why he rejects the idea

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[117] Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy," 22.
[118] Tyler Burge, "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology," *Philosophical Topics* 33, no. 1 (2005), 45.
[119] Ibid., 45-46.

that empirical psychology of perception can explain the constitutive elements of an individual's perception.[120]

6.2 Philosophy and Empirical Science

In the second step of my argument, I demonstrate that it does not make sense to talk about perception without including empirical explanations. By means of Tyler Burge's arguments given in "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology" and Alvin Goldmans' description of the cooperation between science and epistemology, I argue that empirical science can contribute to describing the nature of perception and that empirical scientific knowledge is needed to answer fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of perception.

I just explained that McDowell argues that scientific explanations are merely metaphorical and that he rejects the idea that empirical science can be used to describe the nature of perception. Nevertheless, Burge argues that McDowell gives no arguments to defend his claim that psychological explanations are merely metaphorical and that he is wrong to think that empirical psychology can solely provide insight into the causal enabling conditions of perception, since it also provides insight into its fundamental nature.[121] According to Burge, empirical psychology can explain the causal processes as well as "the empirically constitutive elements […] of perceptual states."[122] He explains that the aim of empirical psychology is thus to theorize about perception.[123] That is why, McDowell has no reason "for taking the subject matter of perceptual psychology to be different from its declared subject matter – perception."[124]

Although we have established that empirical science can be used to describe the nature of perception, McDowell still has good reason to reject the bald naturalist approach in which it is assumed that the vocabulary of spontaneity can be redescribed in natural scientific language and be placed in the realm of law, as McDowell thinks that talk of spontaneity is only intelligible within the framework of the space of reasons. Moreover, as I explained, McDowell thinks that philosophy is not concerned with empirical science, since both have very different tasks. That is why he can also disagree with methodological naturalists, according to whom there is no real distinction between philosophy and science: philosophy and science pursue the same goals, can study similar subject matter and can use similar methods.[125] However, I want to argue that these are not sufficient reasons to reject all cooperation between philosophy and empirical science.

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[120] Ibid., 47.
[121] Ibid., 9.
[122] Ibid., 50.
[123] Ibid., 46.
[124] Ibid., 49.
[125] David Papineau, "Naturalism: 2.1 Philosophy and Science," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/naturalism/ (accessed on 20-07-2017).

In "The Sciences and Epistemology", Goldman first claims that we do not need to suppose that the relation between science and philosophy is one of identity, for there are weaker relations that make more sense.[126] Goldman proposes a cooperative relation in which not all, but some of the questions in epistemology can be answered with the help of science.[127] For example, he argues that science is needed to establish which cognitive capacities humans have to determine what kind of epistemic achievements or attainments are possible, including the attainment of justified beliefs and knowledge.[128] To demonstrate this dependence on science, Goldman describes the following scenario:

> An epistemologist sets out to identify the standard that must be met for some epistemic attainment E. She tentatively identifies standard S as appropriate to E, and then turns to the scientists to get information about relevant human capacities. She is told by science—at least by certain scientists—that human cognitive capacities are inadequate to realize standard S. She then has at least three options. One option is a sceptical conclusion: epistemic attainment E is simply not feasible for human beings (or not feasible on a regular basis, perhaps). A second option is to revise her provisional account of the standard for E. Rejecting the threatened skeptical conclusion ("surely it *is* possible for humans to attain E!"), she concludes that S is not the correct standard for E. A third option is to question the initial scientific results. Scientists commonly differ among themselves on the questions within their field. Perhaps other scientists would dispute the claim that human cognitive capacities make S unrealizable by human beings. If this competing scientific story looks better, on reflection, the epistemologist might retain both S as the appropriate standard for E and the antiskeptical conclusion (E is humanly possible). Any of these upshots would certainly be important to epistemology, but they depend upon what science has to offer. Thus, epistemology should proceed *in cooperation* with science.[129]

I agree with Goldman that philosophy and science should cooperate. Questions about how perceptual experiences can justify beliefs about the external world and what kind of role perceptual experiences can play, are philosophical questions, but they cannot be answered without having scientific knowledge about the mechanisms of perception. Before a philosopher can provide an adequate philosophical account of perceptual beliefs, empirical science is needed to determine how human perception works and what our capacities are to attain knowledge by means of perception. To illustrate my point, consider the following example that demonstrates philosophy's dependence on empirical scientific knowledge: if empirical science were to find out that our senses are not as accurate as we might think, this surely must have influence on our idea of the authority of perceptual experience to justify our beliefs about the world. Examples such as these show that we cannot ignore what is known from empirical science in philosophical accounts.

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[126] Alvin I. Goldman, "The Sciences and Epistemology," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 145.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., 146.
[129] Ibid., 146-147.

6.3 Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology

After arguing that philosophy and empirical science must cooperate, I argue in this third step of my argument that McDowell's account lacks such cooperation, because his account of perception is incompatible with what is known about perception from empirical science. To argue for this claim, I use Tyler Burge's objections to McDowell's "armchair constraint on the science of perceptual psychology". [130] According to Burge, McDowell's account in *Mind and World* is incompatible with empirical explanation of perception in two ways.[131]

First, Burge argues that nearly all scientists agree that the proximality principle is one of the basic principles of the scientific study of perception.[132] The proximality principle describes how the formation of perceptual states is causally dependent on solely the proximal input and internal input into the perceptual system. The principle holds that "on any given occasion, given the total antecedent psychological state of the individual and system, the total proximal input together with internal input into the system suffices to produce a given type of perceptual state, assuming no malfunction or interference."[133] The proximal input is usually described in physical terms, thus in scientific language. For example, proximal input can be "arrays of light frequencies striking the retina".[134] Burge explains that the principle "is implicit in causal explanation of the perceptual states that are the principal *explananda* of all reasonably well-developed empirical perceptual theories."[135]

McDowell, however, believes that perceptual experience provides direct contact with reality and is therefore committed to disjunctivism, the view that "there is never any specific perceptual-state kind in common between a perception of one object and a perception of another object (even if the objects are not discriminable to the perceiver through the perception), or between a perception of an object and a perceptual referential illusion that is contextually indiscriminable to the perceiver from the successful perception."[136] This is where the disagreement between Burge and McDowell arises: according to Burge, modern perceptual psychology is committed to the proximality principle, whereas disjunctivism as advocated by McDowell denies that any causal explanation of perceptual state types can be given.[137] Burge explains this as follows: "The science of perceptual psychology explains individuals' perceivings in these cases as involving the same specific kind of perceptual state. Differences among the cases reside in occurrent aspects of these perceptual kinds. The science differentiates between the cases, and helps explain the differences. But the scientific principles that

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[130] Tyler Burge, *Origins of Objectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 189.
[131] Burge, "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology," 25.
[132] Ibid., 27.
[133] Ibid., 22.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid., 2.
Comment: I assume that the reader is familiar with McDowell's disjunctivism. If not, I refer to the articles "Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space" (1986) and "Criteria Defeasibility and Knowledge" (1982) in which McDowell provides arguments in favour of disjunctivism.
[137] Burge, "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology," 24.

describe the laws into which individuals' perceptual states enter focus on a common factor, the ability-general kind. Disjunctivism denies such a common factor."[138]

In a response to Burge, McDowell denies that his position is attacked in "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology".[139] He argues that he defends another version of disjunctivism, since he acknowledges the following disjunct: "An appearance is either a case of things being thus and so in a way that is manifest to the subject or a case of its merely seeming to the subject that that is how things are."[140] Moreover, McDowell does not reject the idea that "there is a state type in common between those disjuncts", as he does believe there is a common state type, "the state of seeming to stand in a specific intentional relation to an object."[141] Burge, on the other hand, argues that McDowell still denies that there is a "common factor at the fundamental level of classification in relevant cases" and argues that this denial "is incompatible with the science."[142]

Second, disjunctivism cannot account for the fallibility of perceptual states and perceptual beliefs.[143] According to disjunctivist theories, the state of seeing a given object, for example a cat, is referentially infallible. This also follows from McDowell's idea that in our experience, there is openness to the world, making it possible that in perceptual experience we stand in direct contact with the world itself.[144] Referential infallibility implies that the state type that one is in after seeing an object, for example a cat, is correct about the existence of that object of perception, which is the cat in this scenario. If there was no cat or if a different object was present, one would not be in the state of seeing the cat. Thus, according to disjunctivism it is not possible for a referentially successful perceptual state type to be unsuccessful and vice versa.[145] Empirical science shows that this view is wrong, since "the same state type could have failed to have a referent."[146] For example, consider life-like hallucinations or optical illusions.

However, McDowell argues against Burge's claim that disjunctivism cannot adequately account for fallibility. McDowell writes that Burge is confused, since rather than being concerned with the exercises of fallible capacities, "fallibility is a property that attaches to capacities."[147] McDowell's argument goes as follows:

> My disjunctive approach to experience is a way of expressing this rejection of a faulty inference from
> fallibility. The disjunctive formulation states the point positively: of experiences that seem to reveal to
> one some aspect of how things are in one's environment, some make that aspect of reality perceptually

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[138] Tyler Burge, "Disjunctivism Again," *Philosophical Explorations* 14, no.1 (2011), 43.
[139] John McDowell, "Tyler Burge on Disjunctivism," *Philosophical Explorations* 13, no. 3 (2010), 243-244.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., 252.
[142] Burge, "Disjunctivism Again," 44.
[143] Burge, "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology," 30-31.
[144] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 111.
[145] Burge, "Disjunctivism and Perceptual Psychology," 31.
[146] Ibid.
[147] McDowell, "Tyler Burge on Disjunctivism," 245.

present to one, whereas the others only seem to do that. Making something perceptually present to one goes beyond being merely veridical, the best condition Burge can attribute to exercises of perceptual capacities. Having something perceptually present to one is having an indefeasible warrant for believing that things are a certain way, and it is part of having such a warrant that one is in a position to know that that is one's position. The capacity to get into such positions is fallible. It does not follow that that cannot really be what it is a capacity to do.[148]

McDowell, however, does not provide any supporting arguments for this claim, according to Burge.[149] Moreover, Burge argues that his idea of fallibility, in which the "attribution of fallibility to instances of event instances, or exercises of a capacity, means that it is metaphysically possible for those exercises to be, or to have been, mistaken", is intelligible, contrary to McDowell's claims.[150] According to Burge, attributions of such modal properties to particulars are often used and understood in work on modality.[151] Thus, McDowell's accounts remains incompatible with empirical scientific knowledge.

6.4 Conclusion

Finally, I reach the conclusion that Davidson could have argued that the main difference between him and McDowell is their differing conceptions of nature, since these conceptions have significant implications for their accounts' relation to empirical science. First, I showed that, unlike Davidson, McDowell thinks that causal explanations of perception are merely metaphorical. Second, I argued that McDowell is wrong to think of causal explanations of perception as merely metaphorical, since such explanations contribute to the understanding of the nature of perception and are therefore necessary to answer some philosophical problems. Third, I argued that McDowell's disjunctivist account of perception is incompatible with empirical scientific knowledge.

      Based on the first step of my argument, Davidson could have argued that his conception of nature and his related attitude towards causal naturalistic explanations does not commit him to the rejection of causal naturalistic explanations as McDowell's disenchanted naturalism does. Based on the second step and third step of my argument, Davidson could have showed that this difference leads to shortcomings in McDowell's account, that is, that McDowell is wrong not to include what is known about perception from empirical science, since empirical scientific knowledge is needed to answer philosophical questions about the justification of perceptual beliefs.

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[148] Ibid., 246.
[149] Tyler Burge, "Disjunctivism Again," 53.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to compare Donald Davidson's and John McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs in order to examine whether Davidson, in his response to McDowell, was right to say that the differences between McDowell's and his own account are not as striking as McDowell made it seem in *Mind and World*. My conclusion is that Davidson was wrong: he could have made stronger claims about the differences between him and McDowell and about the shortcomings of McDowell's account. I arrived at this conclusion in the following manner.

First, I compared Davidson's and McDowell's accounts on the basis of three elements: (1) their responses to the underlying philosophical problems that give rise to their disagreement, (2) their ideas on how our beliefs about the external world can be justified, and (3) the role perceptual experience plays in their accounts. In the first chapter, I described how both Davidson and McDowell react on the problems caused by giving up the dualism of scheme and content, which makes it questionable how our beliefs about the external world are to be justified. Both Davidson and McDowell rejected an appeal to the given as a means of justifying perceptual beliefs. However, they both offered very different alternatives to such an appeal.

In the second chapter, I elaborated on those alternative accounts. I compared Davidson's and McDowell's explanations of the justification of perceptual beliefs and what kind of theories both philosophers need to support those explanations. I explained that Davidson claims that beliefs can only be justified by other beliefs, which is based on his coherence theory of truth and knowledge, whereas McDowell thinks that perceptual experience can play a justificatory role if we think of perceptual experience as already conceptualized. With his account, McDowell tries to show that the problems regarding the relation between mind and world in modern philosophy are illusory.

In the third chapter, I compared the role that perceptual experience plays in the accounts of Davidson and McDowell. The main difference that I described is that perceptual experience plays only a causal role in Davidson's account whereas it plays a justificatory role in McDowell's.

In chapter 4, I summarized the similarities and differences that I had discussed in the previous chapters. The overview that I provided in this chapter showed that the differences are greater than Davidson supposed in his response to McDowell.

In chapter 5, I demonstrated that these differences can be explained in the light of Davidson's and McDowell's relation to naturalistic theories of perception. Whereas Davidson is committed to the conception of nature that places the natural in the realm of law, McDowell claims that nature can also have a place in the space of reasons. Furthermore, I explained how these conceptions of nature result in different attitudes towards causal naturalistic theories.

In chapter 6, I argued that Davidson could have made stronger claims about the differences between him and McDowell and about the resulting shortcomings of McDowell's account in three steps. First, I explained that Davidson, unlike McDowell, does not reject causal naturalistic theories of

perception completely. Philosophy and empirical science are concerned with two different kinds of intelligibility according to Davidson, but they can both study the same events. McDowell, on the other hand, denies that empirical science can describe the nature of perception at all. Second, I argued that philosophy needs to cooperate with empirical science, since empirical scientific knowledge can provide valuable insight into certain philosophical issues. Third, I showed that McDowell's account is incompatible with scientific knowledge on the basis of Tyler Burge's objections to McDowell's disjunctivism. To reconsider the disagreement between Davidson and McDowell, I conclude that Davidson could have argued that the main difference between him and McDowell is their conceptions of nature, since these conceptions have significant implications for their accounts' relation to empirical science. In the last chapter, I argued that this difference results in a shortcoming in McDowell's account, namely that he is wrong not to include what is known about perception from empirical science in his account.

By reaching this conclusion, I hope to have contributed to the epistemological discussion about how knowledge of the external world is possible. This thesis took a first step towards providing a simple and clear overview of the differences and similarities between Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs which was unavailable in the literature. The findings of this thesis show that the disagreement between Davidson and McDowell is embedded in complex philosophical discussions and I suggest that the similarities and differences with regard to Davidson's and McDowell's positions in these discussions should be examined further. I think that there are interesting differences between their positions in the philosophy of mind that provide an even better understanding of their disagreement. For example, can the differences between Davidson's and McDowell's accounts of perceptual beliefs be explained by their versions of externalism in the philosophy of mind?

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