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FOREWORD

Despite what its title may suggest, this work is patently *not* an attempt to reconcile chemistry and pantheism. Our interest is largely *epistemological*—or, if you will, "semiotic with an eye to normativity", to being *right*. We are concerned primarily with two conflicting ways of ascertaining the objectivity of our representations of the world. "Atomism", in this sense, is the idea that we can evaluate the bearing of our representations upon that domain by piecemeal correspondences; whereas "wholism" is the thesis that such neat little matches cannot be achieved or could be overruled by concerns for internal coherence. Now it is clear that these philosophical acceptations depart in important ways from the usages typically reserved for the terms. The word "atom" still registers to most minds as the hard little nugget of matter shown in grade schools, and "wholism" (with or without the "w") carries in its wake images of mysticism and so-called "alternative medicines". Given our technical concerns over the nature, structure, and norms of objective representation, it is legitimate to ask why we should want to keep employing terms potentially hazardous to our enterprise.

Try as we might, we cannot solely by stipulation rid these terms of their persistent connotations. Regardless, we have chosen to deploy the terms "atomism" and "wholism" (and their cognates) without any significant dilution or qualification. As we see it, the unequivocal context of our discussion should more than suffice to keep the build-up of oblique semantic accretions in check. Upon further reflection, however, we find that connotative departures from strict technical usage—while certainly not encouraged—might not be such a bad feature after all. The adoption of the term "atomism" by twentieth-century philosophers was not innocent. There was (and still is) a palpable desire to make the epistemological project a *scientific* one, and the lay person's understandable confusion that meaning and representation can

be handled with methods vaguely analogous to those of chemistry or physics is arguably not an unwelcome consequence. Similarly, the idea that "wholism" is a doctrine which somehow underwrites flights of fancy is not entirely without basis, as even the most arid variants of the theory have served as engraved invitations for the revival and validation of all sorts of irrational beliefs. Of course, this work remains strictly epistemological in both scope and intent. But we are opposed to atomism and wholism, *connotations included*; and as such, we shall not be too wounded if our bi-directional critique and attendant pursuit of a more satisfactory alternative inadvertently serves to undermine both technocratic and supernatural delusions along with the philosophic stances proper.

The ideas presented in this work are the culmination of some five years of fairly cohesive philosophical reflection and scholarly research—salient moments of which occasionally surfaced in the form of papers read before various learned societies. Early suspicions about the logical and ontological possibility of any form of wholism were declared in a May 2005 exploration titled "Le holisme sémantique à la lumière de l'entendement aristotélicien du temps", delivered at the *Francophone Association for Knowledge* congress in Chicoutimi. Our understanding of Sellars' stance in particular was significantly deepened during a stay with the *Peirce-Wittgenstein Research Group* in the 2003-04 academic year, when an intensive study of sign declensions made us grasp the precise manner in which Sellars takes justification and intelligibility to involve only the most developed state of semiosis (i.e., the argument), thereby relegating all anterior states to virtual ineffability. Some of the views which flowed from this crucial insight would eventually be presented in the summer of 2006 at the *Canadian Philosophical Association*'s annual congress in Toronto, under the title "Sur l'asymétrie de l'indexicalité chez W. Sellars". Among other things, this paper marked our first public foray into the writings of John

McDowell, as we sought to clarify if and how the sort of wholism advocated by Sellars could be distinguished from McDowell's "unbounded" view of the conceptual realm.

Although McDowell's fusion of experience and concepts figured as a praiseworthy counterpoint to Sellars' asymmetry in that critique, we grew increasingly dissatisfied with some of the more sceptical elements nested in the former's philosophy. Our misgivings in this regard were confirmed—and even fostered—when we were later asked by the *Canada Research Chair in the Theory of Knowledge* to produce a preliminary documentary sketch of McDowell's position vis-à-vis the "externalist" trend in philosophy of mind. While McDowellian eclecticism basically ensured that no straightforward answer would come from the assignment, we did essay an account in "McDowell and the Standing Obligation of Rationality" at a two-day international symposium on 'Rationality in Contemporary Epistemology' held under the auspices of the *Canadian Society for Epistemology* in Sherbrooke in September 2006.

Lest this make it appear as if we criticized wholistic theories exclusively, we should note that our qualms with atomism and radical noninferentialism were laid out, for example, in a paper on "Concepts: Where Fodor Went Wrong", presented at the *Cognitio 2006* conference 'Beyond the Brain: Embodied, Situated, and Distributed Cognition' in Montreal. In the same vein, our identification and disparagement of atomism's "laser" metaphor was announced at the annual meeting of the *Francophone Association for Knowledge*, Montreal, May 2006; in a paper on "La proportionnalité inverse de l'intension et de l'extension : un élargissement de la critique de Marc-Wogau". The negative views advanced therein eventually gave rise to our "constrictive" conception, selected technical aspects of which were presented a year later at the same organization's 75th congress in Trois-Rivières, with "Pour 'dé-matérialiser' l'argument conjonctif fregéen".

Though the positive ideas, interpretations, and critical assessments put forth in this work are entirely our own, several people have contributed, sometimes indirectly, to the success of our endeavour. We should thus like to extend our deeply felt thanks to François Latraverse, professor of philosophy at UQAM, for welcoming us to the doctoral program as well as his Peirce-Wittgenstein Research Group; Martin Lefèbvre, Concordia University Research Chair in Film Studies and professor at the Mel Hoppenheim School of Cinema, for not only providing us with an in-depth knowledge of semiotics we shall forever cherish, but also for searing into our memory an exemplary model of academic professionalism; Eric Guindon, philosophy student at McGill University, for putting us onto McDowell in the first place (even if it took persistent goading); and Claude Panaccio, professor of philosophy at UQAM and Canada Research Chair in the Theory of Knowledge, for his ever-courteous manner and for giving us an incentive to study McDowell's corpus at a time when all we had read was *Mind and World.*

Special gratitude goes to our thesis supervisor, Serge Robert, professor of philosophy at UQAM, for sharing with us his extensive knowledge in logic and epistemology and for manifesting an intellectual open-mindedness and fairness of judgement which is as excellent as it is rare.

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RÉSUMÉ

Selon John McDowell, l'atomisme et le holisme sont chacun incapables de porter fruit. Plutôt que d'osciller futilement entre ces deux pôles, il croit que nous devrions repenser notre façon de concevoir la relation liant l'esprit et le monde. Inspiré par certains passages de Kant, il nous invite donc à reconsidérer l'expérience de telle sorte qu'on y admette d'entrée de jeu l'exercice d'une liberté distinctement humaine—l'étendue de l'esprit devenant ainsi dénuée de toute contrainte externe.

À notre avis, McDowell a plus de succès lorsqu'il dépeint le va-et-vient entre l'atomisme et le holisme que lorsqu'il propose une façon d'échapper à ce mouvement. Nous croyons que la fusion qu'il cherche à développer ne tient pas la route dans la mesure où, d'un point de vue naturaliste, il y a bel et bien lieu de distinguer la réceptivité empirique et la spontaneité conceptuelle. À l'encontre de McDowell, nous soutenons qu'il n'y a oscillation entre ces facultés que si l'on endosse une inférence allant du statut non-atomique des représentations au holisme, saut inductif qui repose sur une approche spéculative que nous rejetons.

Le premier chapitre cherche à démontrer comment les théories holistes de filière quinéenne se fondent sur des présupposés spéculatifs et comment les éléments plus louables de la philosophie de McDowell à cet égard sont rendus impuissants par son assentiment à la critique que fait W. Sellars du "mythe du Donné". Le second chapitre reconstruit méticuleusement l'argument fort complexe qu'étale McDowell dans *Mind and World*, pour ensuite critiquer sa suggestion que la culture et l'éducation induisent chez l'être humain une attitude critique pouvant remplacer la friction produite par l'expérience. Le troisième chapitre soutient que la thèse de Sellars voulant que l'expérience peut causer mais non justifier nos représentations détruirait non seulement la connaissance empirique mais aussi la capacité de tirer des inférences. Enfin, le quatrième chapitre présente une nouvelle vision "constrictive" qui, par l'entremise des notions de coercition et de complexité, reconnait que la représentation du monde met en jeu une échelle plus large que l'atome mais plus petite que le tout.

Mots clés : Atomisme, holisme, représentation, John McDowell

ABSTRACT

According to John McDowell, the atomist and wholist programs that have alternately vied for dominance in epistemology have revealed themselves incapable of bearing out their promise. Rather than oscillate between these two poles, McDowell believes we should dramatically rethink our most fundamental conceptions of mind and world. Loosely inspired by Kant's thesis that "thoughts without content are empty" and "intuitions without concepts are blind", he asks us to reconsider experiential episodes in a way that allows for the irreducible contribution of a distinctly human brand of freedom—the domain of mind thus being pictured as an unbounded expanse devoid of any worldly frontier.

In our assessment, McDowell is more convincing in portraying the seesaw between atomism and wholism than he is in elaborating a tenable dismount from it. While we sympathize with his aim, we argue that the fusion he advocates is not tenable, insofar as there is a legitimate basis for distinguishing the mind's receptivity to the world from its spontaneity. In an effort to present an overarching theory of representation which resolves this tension without deserting either notion, we argue that the oscillation depicted by McDowell is spawned by an unwarranted inference going from the non-atomic character of representation all the way to wholism. Even if supplementary contents play a role in the normative evaluation of given representations, we hold that there is no basis to conclude that this commits us to upholding the whole as a standard, unless by recourse to a speculative approach we repudiate.

The first chapter sets down what we believe are the legitimate grounds whence the establishment of a third way between atomism and wholism should proceed. Our chief concern is to show how wholistic theories of Quinean descent rest on speculative assumptions which effectively beg the question against atomistic accounts. Although McDowell adopts a mixed attitude in this regard, we argue that the more laudable (non-speculative) elements of his philosophy are rendered powerless by his acquiescence to W. Sellars' rejection of the "myth of the Given".

Provisionally setting aside critical appraisal of this Sellarsian constraint, the second chapter examines McDowell's positive-theoretic proposal in detail. By a series of argumentative linkages, we attempt to reconstruct the structure of his ambitious and difficult book *Mind and World.* Having laid down the rationale underpinning McDowell's improbable suggestion that the notional distinction between the experiential and the conceptual should be dissipated, we criticize what we see as its main faults. The bulk of our critical attention is directed at the idea that culturally-instilled scepticism can supply a friction supplanting worldly receptivity.

Returning to the issues set aside at the close of the first chapter, the third chapter seeks to undermine the most binding constraint adopted by McDowell, namely Sellars' argument that experiential impacts can at best causally generate representations within the mind, not justify them. Taking this technical claim at face value, we examine its epistemological repercussions. Our conclusion is that this asymmetry thesis effectively sunders inferential knowledge and that as a result, there simply could not be a "space of reasons" left for the wholist to exploit if it were true.

The final chapter presents an alternative vision which we believe manages to harmoniously recognize the distinct contributions of both receptivity and spontaneity in the mind's representation of the world. Profiting from the intricate discussions of the previous chapters, we develop a "constrictive" stance whose scale is greater than the atom but smaller than the whole. By conjugating the notions of coercion and complexity, we argue that there is a way to recognize that the mind has considerable interpretative leeway in the manner it depicts the world while also admitting that this license cannot overrule the worldly domain in question.

Keywords: Atomism, wholism, representation, John McDowell

INTRODUCTION

> If the *receptivity* of our mind, its power of receiving representations in so far as it is in any wise affected, is to be entitled sensibility, then the mind's power of producing representations from itself, the *spontaneity* of knowledge, should be called the understanding. Our nature is so constituted that our *intuition* can never be other than sensible; that is, it contains only the mode in which we are affected by objects. The faculty, on the other hand, which enables us to *think* the objects of sensible intuition is the understanding. To neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other.
>
> Immanuel Kant
> *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787)

It is something of an oversimplification to say that a person knows more than what is present before her. But the question is altogether more complex when one considers what role, if any, those collateral representations play in the apprehension of a given worldly object (broadly understood). On the one hand, one could argue that what is present before us accounts for its own intelligibility and meaning. Indeed, what else could do a better job of revealing what a thing is than that thing itself? On the other hand, the case could be made that the presence before us is far too brute to have any intelligibility, and that it is at best a catalyst making us delve into a vast reserve of interrelated representations which can extend far beyond the object in question.

Quantitatively, these seemingly straightforward answers involve very different epistemic scales. In the first case, only those areas concerned by a given object are solicited. Knowledge and representation, in this view, is a piece by piece affair. The task at hand may require one to go further—but in principle, one can stop here. In the second view, a given prompting always involves more representational content

than what is there—in principle, one can never stop at a neatly circumscribed area. One might have to summon the whole of one's epistemic heritage in order to render a thing fully intelligible. Qualitatively, the first of these options involves attributing a more passive task to the apprehending mind. For if our knowledge of an object is a private duet involving no other representations—and one is not merely dreaming or fantasizing—then surely it is reasonable to assume that it is the object which leads the dance and that its apprehension comes by way of our *receptivity* to it. In the other view, the knowing subject has much more leeway in her apprehending role, taking the clue put before her and actively placing it within a total framework of prior representations. Seen in this light, our encounters with the world allow for a certain *spontaneity*.

As John McDowell emphasizes in his seminal *Mind and World* ([1994] 2002), what makes the situation so difficult—and by the same token, so potentially fruitful—is that these sharply diverging construals both have a great deal going for them.

> [T]he topography of the conceptual sphere is constituted by rational relations. [...] In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom.
>
> But if our freedom in empirical thinking is total, in particular if it is not constrained from outside the conceptual sphere, that can seem to threaten the very possibility that judgements of experience might be grounded in a way that relates them to a reality external to thought. And surely there must be such grounding if experience is to be a source of knowledge, and more generally, if the bearing of empirical judgements on reality is to be intelligibly in place in our picture at all. (*Ibid.*, p. 5)

Indeed, it seems sober to recognize that our knowledge of the world involves, in some respect, autonomous correspondences with those things represented, and that the forceful nature of these contacts limits the kind of creativity we can marshal. Yet we must also concede that we do have great leeway in conducting and making sense of our experiential encounters with the world, and that this interpretative margin can and often does involve much more than what seems germane to a given

object. As McDowell astutely remarks, « [f]ully developed, of course, such a combination would amount to an antinomy: experience both must [...] and cannot [...] stand in judgement over our attempts to make up our minds about how things are » (*Ibid.*, p. xii-xiii).

Given the seemingly irreconcilable natures at hand, it seems we can never fully settle on one side. But as if that weren't enough, McDowell argues that the more rigorously we endeavour to alleviate the fundamental tension, the more we are likely to fall prey to the "philosophical anxiety" that the mind may have no way to confirm its bearing upon something other than itself. Thus, according to McDowell, philosophy is bound to go back and forth between the two unsatisfactory options of atomism and wholism—to "oscillate" between epistemological theories of receptivity and spontaneity.

The diachronic trajectory of recent philosophic discourse provides us with a vivid illustration of this movement. The atomic ostensions pivotal to the successful working of empiricist theories of meaning were soon confronted with profound difficulties. In this regard, we can cite Quine ([1960] 1999) and Sellars' ([1956] 1963) respective critiques of the inconsistencies of the generic atomistic framework and their parallel promotions of wholistic takes on language and representation. The dialectic movement in these cases has gone from the atom to the whole. Yet as the wholistic alternatives put forth in response to the failings of atomism have not borne out their promise, they have increasingly become the object of scrutiny and criticism. Although it is somewhat early to tell in a definitive way, one can arguably discern the beginnings of a concerted return to the option of atom. This renewal with a notion once deemed invalid, McDowell claims, could not be otherwise:

> Davidson recoils from the Myth of the Given all the way to denying experience any justificatory role, and the coherentist upshot is a version of the conception of spontaneity as frictionless, the very thing that makes the idea of the Given attractive. This is just one of the movements in the oscillation that I have spoken of. There is nothing to prevent it from triggering the familiar recoil in its turn. ([1994] 2002, p. 14)
>
> .....
>
> To one who finds such imagery both appropriate and worrying, the idea of the Given can give the appearance of reinstating thought's bearing on reality. And at this point in the dialectic, it is no good pointing out that the appearance is illusory, that the idea of the Given does not fulfil its apparent promise [...]. The effect is simply to bring out that neither of the two positions that we are being asked to choose between is satisfying. (*Ibid.*, p. 15-16)

What beckons us, then, if we are to put an end to the futile oscillation between the atom and the whole, is to search for a tenable *third* way: « A genuine escape would require that we avoid the Myth of the Given without renouncing the claim that experience is a rational constraint on thinking » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 18).

Guiding McDowell like a beacon in this quest are Kant's twin theses that « Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind » (Kant, [1787] 1965, B75; *cf.* McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 3-4). In an attempt to heed that admonition and transcend the seesaw, McDowell's *Mind and World* sets itself the task of « reshaping our philosophical imagination, our sense of the space of intellectual possibilities » (Williams, 1996, p. 411). At the scale of the atom, McDowell invites us to rethink the world's experiential impingement upon man the rational animal as somehow imbued with an irreducible element of conceptual content and freedom from the very start. As a result, at the scale of the whole, he recommends that we no longer picture the conceptual sphere as "bounded" by anything beyond itself.

While McDowell's proposals are rich in suggestive power, we find it difficult to see how—short of a more robust account—the antithetical amalgam of "receptive spontaneity" at the heart of his proposals could be made tenable. McDowell has clearly struggled over how best to describe this crucial philosophic idea, and we

recognize the earnestness of his undertaking. Yet by our lights, McDowell's proposed outlook makes no concrete theoretical difference. We are at a complete loss to see how, if spontaneity and receptivity are not even "notionally separable" (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 9), one could have any grievance with either the option of receptive atomism or spontaneous wholism. For instance, why should it be troublesome that some reductionist philosophers strive to capture the mind solely in terms of its receptive faculties (*Ibid.*, p. 73)? Conversely, why can't the world's order be totally captured in a spontaneity-only idiom—as someone like Davidson does when he insists that by fully embracing wholism, we effectively throw relativism "by the board" ([1984] 2001, p. 198)? To have a legitimate complaint against either of these projects (and ontologies), one must notionally separate receptivity from spontaneity—a move which McDowell's professed fusion prevents him from doing.

Our overarching goal in this work is thus to put forth an alternative solution to McDowell's problem. In sum, we endeavour to show that the oscillation depicted in *Mind and World* is triggered by an unwarranted inference from the non-atomic character of representation to wholism. *Granting that supplementary contents play a role in the normative assessment of representations, we hold that there is no sufficient basis to conclude that these necessarily extend to the conceptual whole.* As a result, we argue that the recoil away from atomism which sets the seesaw in motion should be "absorbed" from the start, in order to develop a more viable theoretical model which is non-atomic yet non-wholistic. As Robert Brandom remarks, although McDowell's project is « heavily diagnostic and lightly therapeutic, but not at all theoretical [...] the therapeutic dimension of the enterprise of *Mind and World* involves commitment to there being at least *some* satisfactory way of extending the things he has said [...] » (2002, p. 104). While our amendment is avowedly less spectacular than McDowell's, we think it nevertheless satisfies

what we see as the legitimate desiderata set down by the atom-versus-whole problem; namely, making allowances for the interplay of our representations without allowing internal coherence to become the sole criterion for evaluating their epistemological warrant.

Before we embark on our argumentative journey, we should like to make some important comments. The first is a disclaimer of sorts. We want to make it clear from the outset that although we borrow certain thinkers and themes from what has come to be called "analytic" philosophy, we are not thereby endorsing that tradition or its concerns. It would be sheer arrogance to presume that because one addresses a rival theory, one necessarily embraces that theory's canonic frame of reference (methodological assumptions, idiomatic conventions, and so on). Analysis and synthesis are movements of *equal* merit, and we refuse to further promote the all-too-prevalent dogma which considers the fracturing of issues into minutiae to be the hallmark of philosophic profundity and clarity. As Frege himself put it: « It is just as important to ignore distinctions that do not touch the heart of the matter, as to make distinctions which concern essentials. But what is essential depends on one's purpose » (1997, p. 331). In other words, Monet was able to see things Ingres couldn't because he squinted his eyes.

The issue brings to mind a very pertinent comment once made by Ayn Rand to a fellow philosopher (in Berliner, 1997 p. 520-521). There are over three hundred different sects of Christianity, each of which sees itself as espousing the true interpretation of the scriptures. However, if one wishes to challenge the broad contention that faith can be a source of knowledge and values, then it is not incumbent upon one to familiarize oneself with all of the doctrinal rivalries that separate the various schools. In fact, this would be a considerable hindrance to argument; the never-ending calls for distinctions effectively diverting attention away from the challenged party's core commitments. Rand is therefore right to insist that to avoid such a quagmire, the premises addressed must be as *basic* as the

disagreement is *deep* (*Ibid.*). Likewise, the specialist in atomist or wholist theories will leave this text very disappointed if she comes to it expecting a detailed comparative study of those positions' many variants (this, incidentally, is the motive behind our use of an additional "w" to designate the latter cluster of views). Unless otherwise stated, *our default setting will be the search for generalisations about representation in its broadest sense.* That is not to say that we will not split hairs every now and again. But the establishment of such subtleties, if and when it will be called for, will be subservient to the issues we are addressing, not necessarily those that have found currency in accepted scholarship, past or present.

Now the philosopher's job would probably be much easier (and more dull) if every position was either entirely wrong or entirely correct. However, as things stand, most of the correct theories available on the market contain in them a great deal that is incorrect, just as predominantly incorrect stances enclose their fair share of correct theses. This is not to say that appraisal of a given philosophic position is to be forever postponed or qualified. It does mean though, that in passing judgement, we should not shy away from case by case admixtures of disavowal and praise. Adhering to this precept is all the more important when one elects to employ authorship as a means of demarcating an object of study, as one is thereby encumbered with tenets often related only by the accidents of biography or the frivolities of preference.

This brings us to the second caveat we want to register: to put the matter succinctly, *the present dissertation should not be read as a treatise on John Henry McDowell or "his thought"*. Rather, we are concerned in this work with a general schema involving part / whole and passive / active distinctions—and the need for us to reconcile them in explicit theorizing. These issues, nested as they are in our cognitive situation *qua* rational animals, transcend any single exposition. That McDowell's *Mind and World* brings some latent theoretical tensions to the fore (with great skill) is a contribution we rightly acknowledge. Granted, there are many

aspects of his philosophy which, we opine, are simply mistaken. Yet if we have chosen to address McDowell's work, it is in large measure a mark of intellectual respect. Specifically, we are deeply sympathetic to his programmatic desire to bridge the chasm which has been dug (time and time again) between mind and world. In that respect, we consider him a philosophical ally. What's more, as a publicly-accessible common ground, his work provides us with a division of communicative labour, allowing us to begin our investigation *in media res*. Nevertheless, McDowell's book remains a *sign*; and as such, it is not an end but a *means*—a surrogate vehicle which stands for something *more* than itself.

We are thus confronted on the meta-theoretical front with the same tension addressed on the object-language front; namely, whether a given representation can bear on its object by itself or whether it is inevitably bound to a wholistic web. As our topic is a fundamental one, there is no refuge from the issues it raises. Such a queer methodological predicament should come as no surprise: pronouncements on matters of knowledge and representation are no small moves, and commit us to wearing our conclusions on our sleeves (indeed, one would be well-advised to question the relevance of a philosophical investigation which comes to a set of conclusions by way of assumptions wholly inconsistent with those discoveries). The methodological question then, is whether a reading of *Mind and World* commits us to a hermeneutic greater than that work—and if so, how far the intertextual linkages extend and to what degree "spontaneity" is at our disposal in the selection of those linkages.

It would be disastrous for us to claim attainment of a viable third way between the atom and the whole, all the while acquiescing to one of these poles. A strict, dogmatic reading of a single source is thus no friend to our enterprise—nor are endless exegetic digressions. We can therefore augment our concern for a corpus-transcending object with the following criterion, which we want to make clear from the start: *we will consider primarily those intertextual references which bleed*

outwards *from* Mind and World, *and will by and large disregard those which could be made* inwardly *from the body of commentary now coating that core.* In keeping with our desire to eschew speculation (*cf.* sect. 1.2), the mere existence of a further sign will not suffice to entitle its interpretation. The boundary ensuing from such a policy will thus lie somewhere between singularity and totality. One will find more than just *Mind and World* in the bibliography—yet one should not expect an exhaustive survey of all related literature.

The good philosopher is like the ship-captain who, upon being handed the fruits of some explorer's hard-earned progress at mapping the coastline of a new world, gathers his crew and hurries to his vessel with virgin sheets of paper in hand, anxious to build upon his predecessor's achievements. The bad philosopher is like the sedentary courtier who puts the map under a glass frame, hangs it on a wall behind a velvet rope and chides anybody who returns from their own ventures with a better (hence *different*) rendering as not having understood the original intent of the work.

CHAPTER I

FRAMING THE PROBLEM, FORECASTING AN ANSWER

> A part of the very complicated trick of the Chinese rings consists in taking two solid rings linked together, talking about them as though they were separate—taking it for granted, as it were—then pretending to put them together, and handing them immediately to the spectator that he may see that they are solid. The art of this consists in raising, at first, the strong suspicion that one is broken.
>
> Charles Sanders Peirce
> "Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed For Man" (1868)

1.1 Introduction

In *Mind and World*, John McDowell portrays philosophy as trapped in a dialectic knot of sorts. We begin by searching for some stable part onto which we can anchor discourse and judge the merit of our beliefs. At first glance, the receptivity of punctate experiences seems to fit the bill. However, upon further scrutiny, this option reveals itself far too brute to render an intelligible verdict. We find that we must make 'this is such and such' the ground floor of thought if we are to appeal to the 'this' of receptivity in a way that can be epistemologically relevant. Yet this alternative ends up according conceptual content such a dominant role that it « makes it hard to see how experience *could* function as a tribunal, delivering verdicts on our thinking » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. xii). For by the time conceptual content arrives to help read receptivity's cryptic utterances, suspicion has set in that this proctor might in fact be the one pronouncing epistemic judgement. McDowell

thus argues that neither of these options provides a satisfactory home for thought, which seeks friction from beyond itself yet grasps that such friction will only be epistemically relevant "inside" the web of its representations.

> The more we play up the connection between reason and freedom, the more we risk losing our grip on how exercises of concepts can constitute warranted judgements about the world. What we wanted to conceive as exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game. And that deprives us of the very idea that they are exercises of concepts. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 5)

Our goal in this chapter will be to lay bare the main philosophic arguments which give rise to McDowell's oscillation. In sum, what sets that seesaw in motion is an attack on atomism by wholists like Willard Quine, Donald Davidson, and Wilfrid Sellars. Of these three thinkers, we will make the case that only the technical arguments of the third merit serious attention. Key to our dismissal of Quine and Davidson will be the demonstration that the general "radical translation" setting whence their wholistic arguments proceed rests on a set of tacit sceptical assumptions which in effect beg the question against the very possibility of a receptive contact. As such, we will maintain that a precondition to truly attempting to untie (or sever?) McDowell's Gordian knot is an epistemology "enchanted" enough to give the mind its aetiologic due yet naturalized enough to muzzle the scepticism bequeathed (alongside science) by modernity—lest the knot's entanglements self-perpetuate in proportion to speculative prowess.

Unfortunately, we will further see how McDowell manifests a certain morbid fascination with the speculative arguments he proposes to "dissolve", and how that harmful sympathy should in principle be ruled out by his call to renew with a pre-modern world-view. As a case study in McDowell's mixed allegiances, we will examine the conflict between his Wittgenstein-inspired "openness to the world" stance—which has all the trappings of receptivity—and his *ad hoc* insistence that we must perpetually reflect about the warrant of our beliefs regardless of whether or not

those beliefs have hitherto availed themselves successful. Understanding the rationale behind this tension will then lead us to address Sellars' sophisticated argument against the allegedly "mythical" Given. The chapter will conclude by provisionally assuming Sellars' conclusions about the "asymmetrical" structure of representation to be correct, that we may proceed with an examination of McDowell's response to them in the next.

1.2 A speculative origin: the imaginary native as Cartesian deceiver

1.2.1 A pair of typologies

Aristotle famously said that philosophy begins in wonder. True enough—after all, the very term by which we designate the activity was originally intended to capture a strange new breed of thinkers fascinated with wisdom for its own sake (the oft-repeated adjective "disinterested" is in fact a misnomer). But there are other catalysts as well. Indeed, if philosophy is a form of problem-solving, then the problems can emerge from the reflections of a thinker, the world itself, or admixtures thereof. In the case of McDowell's problem, its origin is an infertile crossbreed of the *speculative* and the *mundane*.

The fact of representation (broadly construed) is so familiar to us as to be largely foreign to reflexive scrutiny. This queer feature has lent this most human of abilities a quite suspect reputation, especially among those incredulous philosophers who have no quarrel doubting common sense. As a result, depending on the literature one peruses, one finds the following postures adopted:

a) One can take as a starting point the fact that we do, by and large, successfully represent objects in the world and then experimentally reproduce or test the mechanisms by which this is achieved.

b) One can take as a starting point the recognition that we do, by and large, successfully represent objects in the world and then inquire as to how this is so ("reverse engineer" how this is the case) in the hopes of explaining and eventually guiding this process.

c) One can take as a starting point the claim that perhaps we can represent worldly objects and then submit that claim to doubt so as to see whether and to what extent it withstands criticism.

Posture (a), which we will call the *scientific* posture, pertains to domains like psychology, the cognitive sciences, or even biology. Posture (b), which we will label *aetiologic*, is an inquiry into causes that pertains to non-sceptical enterprises like philosophy or semiotics. John Deely best explains the distinction between the aims and methods of postures (a) and (b):

> From first to last, philosophy has only a *demonstratio ad intellectum*, an "appeal to intelligibility", whereupon to rest its case. Science is the domain of experiments. The domain of philosophy is intellectual doctrine as irreducible to what can be manifested as decisive in an empirical frame. There are many areas in the development of hypotheses and the elaboration of frameworks for the testing of hypotheses where, to be sure, philosophy and science overlap. But ultimately there is always the difference between *scientia* as what can in some important measure be reduced to a crucial experiment *demonstrando ad sensus*, and *doctrina* as a body of thought sensitive to its own implications and striving for consistency throughout, while achieving explanations (however provisional) at a level beyond what can be empirically circumscribed in unambiguous ways. (2001, p. 491)

It should be noted, however, that we have chosen to speak of "postures" instead of "methods". This is because while (b) and (c) share a common method (one different from the scientific), they have sharply diverging outlooks vis-à-vis the role of material adequacy in the determination of an argument's worth. According to (c), which we will call the *sceptical posture*, the fact that a thing is (or seems) intuitively (or "pre-theoretically") thus-and-so contributes no weight whatsoever in the evaluation of a given hypothesis' merit. In a sense, one could say that while both (b) and (c) agree that a strong case is made for an hypothesis when it resists falsification from the inside, they disagree on what counts as relevant in that "inside"; it is a divergence on where to set the modulus of philosophic inquiry. For the aetiologic posture, the fact that we (as ordinary people or as scientists) observe a certain worldly occurrence most definitely counts as a premise. In contrast, the sceptical

posture construes argument more narrowly, so that anecdotal observations, well-framed empirical reports, and past-fecundity cannot themselves enter into consideration. We can thus say that while the aetiologic posture is sensitive to the overall cogency of its arguments, the sceptical variety deems validity—no matter how counterfactual—to be the sole criterion of a tenet's philosophic merit.

This divergence is most manifest in the respective starting points each posture adopts. For the aetiologic theorist, effective representation is the starting point. Pinning this effect down as a sort of naturalist axiom, it then proceeds to inquire as to its underlying causes (albeit with tools different from the scientist's). For the sceptic posture, a sort of *refined incredulity* is the starting point. Taking this standing policy for granted, it sees effective representation rather as a finishing line to be possibly attained upon survival of its criticisms (whether a sincere desire to attain that end can be made consonant with such a policy is an interesting question we shall set aside). Typical of the speculative enterprise's gait is its readiness to depart from the mundane. As we shall see, contrived scenarios about virgin interpreters trying to pin alien utterances to their (putatively difficult to discern) objects are a perfect example of this.

Now the threefold typology of scientific / aetiologic / sceptic postures is related to the mundane / speculative distinction of origins in an important way. The scientific posture must be mundane in origin and cannot be speculative, as it needs to return to a cause's stable worldly effect in order to test its models. The aetiologic posture, it would seem, can be either mundane or speculative in origin; as one can certainly ponder the causes of an effect in response to a worldly friction or out of sheer curiosity. As for the sceptical posture, it must be speculative in origin, as putting in doubt worldly manifestations requires a counterintuitive effort of thought.

It is clear that McDowell's work is not scientific in the sense aimed at in (a). But his enterprise does embrace a constructive tone akin to (b), all the while making certain concessions which introduce elements of (c) into its premises. The result of

this mixed approach is that his work combines profound insights with serious errors. Our first task, then, will be to examine how this admixture of the speculative and the mundane plays out in McDowell's work. For if one can rule out the speculative origin of McDowell's problem and adopt a strictly mundane view, then one *ipso facto* separates the aetiologic wheat from the sceptic chaff, this last needing the continued sustenance of speculation. More specifically, our aim will be to canvass the various ways in which Davidson and Quine's general philosophic attitude—their latent *modus operandi*—introduces an element of scepticism into McDowell's work, which in principle should have been alien to his (otherwise remarkable) endeavour.

McDowell says that « we seem to be confronted with philosophical obligations of a familiar sort » and that although we should « unmask that appearance as illusion [...] It matters that the illusion is capable of gripping us » ([1994] 2002, p. xi). However, we believe that if one frames the issue in such a way as to forbid the play of speculative thought, then the illusion is *not* gripping at all. As we will see, once the argumentative field of force is so altered, not only do the legitimate terms of debate become clearer, but new possibilities for a tenable third way begin to emerge.

1.2.2 Setting up radical translation

As Michael Friedman points out, despite the fact that McDowell ends up rejecting coherentism, « it is precisely Davidson's philosophy of radical interpretation that sets the stage for McDowell's own argument » (2002, p. 44). The figures of Davidson and Quine indeed loom large in McDowell's writings. McDowell ([1994] 2002, p. viii) explicitly cites Davidson's "Truth and Meaning" and "On Saying That" as some of his most substantial intellectual influences. This subtle thinker (synchronically) reaches McDowell twice-removed in the person of Quine, "without whom not", in Davidson's memorable acknowledgement ([1984] 2001, p. v). But

the influence of these two thinkers on McDowell which we want to bring out is not so much declarative as it is operative, especially with regard to their meta-philosophical approach.

So what have Quine and Davidson chosen to think about, how do they go about thinking about it, and to what resolution do they ultimately come? At the risk of overly generalizing (we shall here focus on the commonalities), the respective answers are: the possibility of empirically grounding language and thought, raising doubts about the epistemic potency of ostension, and wholistic coherence as a normative standard (as we will see later in the chapter, W. Sellars' work basically shares these three concerns—although he gives them a different technical gloss).

A good way into these topics is the title of this section (1.2), which comes from two sources: for its signified, Quine's essay on "The Problem of Meaning in Linguistics" ([1953] 2001, p. 47-64) and subsequent elaboration in *Word and Object* ([1960] 1999); and for its signifier, an interesting cultural survey by historian Daniel Francis titled *The Imaginary Indian* (1997), which highlights the various ways in which the figure of the Native American has served as a semiotic vessel for the hopes, fantasies and fears of non-Native cultures. We shall leave the ethical and political implications of such projections aside. What is of interest to us is the common *fictional* nature of the narratives.

Quine provided a revamped context that went on to nourish post-war Anglo-American philosophy, sustaining most of Davidson's intellectual ventures (and captivating many of McDowell's). That context, of course, is radical translation. It is instructive to revisit the way in which Quine originally presented his fully developed scenario. In a section of *Word and Object* entitled "First Steps of Radical Translation", Quine sets up his mature "field linguist" narrative from a more overtly speculative formulation and then progressively adding layers of logical and scientific plausibility. The speculative core begins with what is in effect *the conclusion* of the radical translation argument:

> A first uncritical way of picturing this scope for empirically unconditioned variation [in one's conceptual scheme] is as follows: two men could be just alike in all their dispositions to verbal behavior under all possible sensory stimulations, and yet the meanings or ideas expressed in their identically triggered and identically sounded utterances could diverge radically, for the two men, in a wide range of cases. (Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 26)

Notice the strength of the claim being made: morphemically and spatio-temporarily isomorphic occurrences—isomorphic "*under all possible sensory stimulations*"—could each be nomologically answerable to "radically divergent" frameworks. Whatever the merits of this tenet, Quine recognizes he may have perhaps prematurely spilled the proverbial beans and quickly moves on to a more logicist gloss:

> Sense can be made of the point by recasting it as follows: the infinite totality of sentences of any given speaker's language can be so permuted, or mapped onto itself, that (*a*) the totality of the speaker's dispositions to verbal behavior remains invariant, and yet (*b*) the mapping is no mere correlation of sentences with *equivalent* sentences, in any plausible sense of equivalence however loose. Sentences without number can diverge drastically from their respective correlates, yet the divergences can systematically so offset one another that the overall pattern of associations of sentences with one another and with non-verbal stimulation is preserved. (*Ibid.*, p. 27; *cf.* also p. 72, 78)

This formulation was particularly attractive to Davidson, who deemed it « [t]he simplest, least questionable way of showing that reference is inscrutable » ([1984] 2001, p. 229). Yet if "simple" is an appropriate adjective, surely "least questionable" is not, as here again a very onerous claim is affirmed as a truism.

We finally come to the third form of Quine's scenario—the only one truly worthy of being called "radical *translation*". Once more, Quine presents this narrative as a synonymous gloss of the same issue. If the first statement is overtly speculative and the second logicist, this third is scientific in tone:

> The same point can be put less abstractly and more realistically by switching to translation. The thesis is then this: manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another. In countless places they will diverge in giving, as their respective translations of a sentence of the one language, sentences of the other language which stand to each other in no plausible sort of equivalence however loose. (Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 27)

Given the recurrent structure, this statement is ostensibly meant to be read in light of the antecedent proposals. Yet if read on its own, Quine's manual statement is not all that tendentious. Surely it is sober to recognize that rival translation manuals' respective takes on a common object-language *can* and *do* diverge in countless places. To argue that "manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways" is a plausible and easily defensible claim. Be that as it may, the two previous accounts condition the interpretation of the manual example. Seen in the light of these statements, especially permutation, one understands that the "countless" in Quine's formulation is intended to carry a *whole* lot more weight. From "countless places" in the sense of "so many places scattered here and there" we slide to "countless places" in the mathematical sense of "infinite"—a hasty inference from anatomism to wholism we will criticize throughout this work.

However, Quine's radical translation metaphor has come to be known not in the a priori / hermeneutic terms of relating books to one another, but rather in the a posteriori / empiricist setting centring around the various epistemological difficulties a (nondescript) "field linguist" would likely face in attempting to (re?)construct the lexicography of a totally alien language from on-site observations. This narrative, now part of the mainstream philosophical patrimony, typically unfolds as follows. A linguist goes to a foreign land inhabited by a people whose language he knows *absolutely nothing* about (hence the adjective "radical"). In a sense, his only resources are his own language, scientific training, keen senses, a notepad, and a shared humanity (although the effective contributions of this last are usually played down; compare Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 60-63 with Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 77). The

ontogenetic or inductive issue at stake is how, given these radical conditions, the linguist could successfully catalogue the native's behaviour and utterances so as to create a manual of synonymies. More speculatively, the epistemic or deductive issue is why, should such a manual be produced, would we be warranted in retroactively considering the link posited between the two languages to be empirically grounded?

The key question thus lies in ascertaining if and to what extent the field linguist's putative term-to-object synonymies rely on imperatives of intra-manual consistency. For if internal consistency is to be the ultimate epistemological ground, it seems to leave open the possibility that the structure we take to be our understanding in fact owes more to the free exercise of conceptual faculties than to each parts' correspondence with stable sets of possible experiences. What we have here, in effect, is a restatement of McDowell's tension between receptivity and spontaneity, one which registers decidedly in favour of the wholistic seat of the seesaw.

1.2.3 How far radicalism extends

Suppose we begin by recognizing that we *can* fruitfully understand each other across linguistic boundaries. How does this fact come about? In other words, what are the mechanisms underlying the ontogenetic development of cross-linguistic understanding? In the (somewhat implausible) context of a radically *tabula rasa* encounter, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the linguist's first attempts at establishing some workable grasp of the native's utterances would have to rely on a set of bold conjectures. But what of the world in all this? Surely *it too* is a resource at the field linguist's disposal—it is a field study after all, and not just some library exercise. A clue to decrypting what is meant by the native's utterances could thus be found in the very context in which an utterance is enunciated, thus dimming the boldness of the linguist's initial conjectures. Quine recognizes for example that « [t]he utterances first and most surely translated in such a case are ones keyed to present events that are conspicuous to the linguist and his informant » ([1960] 1999,

p. 29) and that « [f]or translation theory, banal messages are the breath of life » (*Ibid.*, p. 69). And so, the linguist waits for an occasion where the native will utter a fairly straightforward sound in a fairly straightforward manner in a fairly straightforward context, and then surmises a fairly straightforward guess at what was meant and *voilà*, first contact has been established. However, as with most things speculative, although we begin with something so simple as to not seem worth stating, we end up with something so complex as to be paradoxical (to echo Russell's famous ladder-discarding credo, [1918, 1924] 1998, p. 53).

It is important to understand that the alleged "indeterminacy of translation" which underwrites wholism is itself underwritten by an *erotetic* rationale, the exact (speculative) workings of which remain largely tacit. Indeed, the field linguist's attempts at pinning down the worldly objects of the native's utterances serve as a rhetorical template whence to unpack what is for all intents and purposes the true philosophic aim of the narrative. Let us therefore try to bring out the manner in which speculative scepticism is articulated in radical translation.

The stock tale presented to university students (extracted and creatively expanded from the suggestive account provided in Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 29) usually begins with the native declaring "Gavagai" as a rabbit shoots by. The *prima facie* bait we are meant to seize upon here, of course, is the idea that this representation enjoys an atomic bond with rabbits, a one-to-one correspondence with some stable aspect of the world (be it construed as a universal or a set of particulars). However, that somewhat facile lure is soon pulled away, never to return: « The nature of this entering wedge into a strange lexicon encourages the misconception of meaning as reference, since words at this stage are construed, typically, by pointing to the object referred to » (Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 62). Invited as we are to rid ourselves of any uncouth "folk-theoretic" delusions, our attention is subsequently drawn to the multiplicity of the event which was contiguous to the native's enunciation of "Gavagai". For instance, suppose the aforementioned rabbit was

leaping over a bush as the sun was setting. The representation in question could then have bushes as its object, or again the act of leaping itself, or the sun setting, or animal fur—and so on.

Now at this crucial moment in the radical translation narrative, the addressee is expected to proceed from these intervening factors—each of which expresses a purely contingent fact—to a generalized inference about the nature of representation *as such*. Relying on an understandable wish not to belabour the point, we thus move surreptitiously from an (apparently unbridled) enumeration of alternative referents to an *ampliative* induction: « The difficulty here is not just that those subjective components of the situation are hard to ferret out. [...] Theoretically the more important difficulty is that [...] *there is in principle no separating language from the rest of the world, at least as conceived by the speaker* » (*Ibid.*, p. 61; italics ours). By silently granting plausibility to this claim, we effectively participate in an important epistemological transition, one going from the non-atomic character of representation—from the idea that things are not as tidy as our linguistic mastery leads us to assume—all the way to the idea that new (wholistic) norms need be developed.

Of course, the more *ad hoc* "variables" keep chopping away at the erstwhile innocent terms of the problem, the more we are made to retreat from the world and look to our immediate subjectivity for a remnant of certainty. It is not surprising then to find Quine eventually leaving the "primordial" level where « the points of condensation [...] are things glimpsed, not glimpses » ([1960] 1999, p. 1) for of a speculative plane where « [i]n experimentally equating the [native's] uses of 'Gavagai' and [the linguist's] 'Rabbit' it is stimulations that must be made to match, not animals » (*Ibid.*, p. 31). What follows is a drastically revised vocabulary which takes pains to admit nothing that common sense could remotely recognize: « [The linguist] can reasonably conjecture that the native would be prompted to assent to 'Gavagai' by the microscopically same irradiations that would prompt him, the

linguist, to assent to 'Rabbit', even though this conjecture rests wholly on samples where the irradiations concerned can at best be hazarded merely to be pretty much alike » (*Ibid.*). The trench of mistrust having been dug so deeply, cruder arguments about the possible co-extension of multiple worldly referents—which were originally deployed to plausibly lure us into reconsidering « the misconception of meaning as reference » (Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 62)—seem like needless overkill.

The speculative tenor of radical translation, it would seem, has reached its sceptical consummation. The modernism at work here is twofold. Its more readily apparent manifestation lies in the eventual retreat to subjectivity, which of course betokens the sceptical conception espoused by David Hume, who famously averred that « [t]he mind has never any thing present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects » (*Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, § 12, part 1; in Pojman, 1998, p. 724). But it is important to realize that this mistrust of receptivity is in fact a derivative, answerable to a more fundamental *meta-philosophical* approach. Indeed, the sort of reductionism which makes it its business to reword our everyday vocabulary into "stimuli responses" is of a piece with the outlook that reads an ever-growing panoply of intervening variables into what would otherwise be fairly sedate cases of ostensive reporting.

Since our ultimate objective to take the wind from McDowell's sceptic sails, the key weakness to exploit is the fact that a proviso like "what can be doubted in the least degree should be doubted altogether" requires constant speculative fodder. The radical translation scenario conjured up by Quine, which in large measure provides a home for the polemics of Davidson—and later, mainly through him, John McDowell—is a perfect example of speculation feeding scepticism, the first being an irreplaceable and necessary constitutive feature of the second. We can summarize the main thrust of our critique by saying that *translation is only as indeterminate as it is kept radical.* Indeed, while radical translation's addressee can

be forgiven for not wishing to belabour the point about the many possible objects of "Gavagai", the whole point is *precisely* that in order to get her assent, it would be so laboured; and this in an open-ended fashion. Opting for this enumerative route instead of the ampliative shortcut would of course bring the play of speculation to the full light of day, thereby undermining the unwarranted supposition that since epistemic justification is non-atomic, it must be wholistic.

1.2.4 Dispensing with the burden of toil

In attempting to bring out the observational variables and theoretical imports which intervene at the level of atomic ostension, the radical translationist accepts a tacit account of how one should go about representing representation. In short, while Quine insists with regards to physical objects that « [a]nalyse theory-building how we will, we all must start in the middle » ([1960] 1999, p. 4), he frames his investigation of meaning in an aseptic *tabula rasa* scenario where, instead of asking how Adam could name things, he instead asks how Eve could name what Adam names.

A forceful argument against giving the mind this kind of ontological priority over the world is that it not only jettisons any credible gauge by which we could have evaluated the epistemic *merit* of our thoughts, but—more importantly—it leaves us unable to account for the ontogenesis of *those* thoughts (or of thoughts *tout court*). As McDowell writes:

> [Davidson] thinks the only point of wanting a rational connection between intuitions and thoughts is reassurance that we are justified in endorsing the thoughts, as if we could take it for granted in any case that they are thoughts, that they possess content. But if we do not let intuitions stand in rational relations to them, it is exactly their possession of content that is put in question. *When Davidson argues that a body of beliefs is sure to be mostly true, he helps himself to the idea of a body of beliefs, a body of states that have content.* ([1994] 2002, p. 68; italics ours)

Notwithstanding Richard Rorty's suggestion that « we secrete theorems and symphonies as our spleen secretes dark humors » (1980, p. 44), the speculative setting of radical translation thus leaves the burden of world-to-mind categorization to the native; with the convenient upshot that the linguist (with whom we are presumably to identify) has only to address the less onerous task of a mind-to-mind hermeneutic.

Yet the linguist's hold on the world is arguably only as strong as the native's ability to correctly seize upon the object of his own utterances. Indeed, the native's categorizations become the ground floor, transitively linking the spheres of culture and nature (it has long been a widespread assumption that Native peoples are more in tune with nature). However, in type-theoretic fashion, the problem of accounting for this last (presumably limpid) tie to the world is effectively ignored by the radical translationist. Leonard Peikoff encapsulated this manoeuvre most eloquently when he wrote: « The concepts are here. How did they get here? Somehow » ([1967] 1990, p. 97). Ironically, since Quine and Davidson's arguments are presented as a concern for the methods of the social sciences, this patently subjectivist ousting of the world can masquerade as a form of "naturalism".

The matter is akin to the sharply different answers one gets depending on whether ethical inquiry is set against the backdrop of a lifeboat (human *vs.* human) or a deserted island (human *vs.* nature). Like lifeboaters quarrelling over a certain store of wealth without burdening themselves with how it came to be, Quine and Davidson help themselves to a slew of pre-existing concepts. In the ethical case—as in its epistemological counterpart—the question of "distribution" fallaciously takes precedence over that of creation. Granted, concept-acquisition may be the result of "toil" or "theft". Indeed,

> Acquiring categories by honest toil is doing it the hard way, by trial and error, which is time-consuming and sometimes perhaps too slow and risky. Getting them any "other" way is getting them by theft, because you do not expend the honest toil.
>
> This is transparent in the case of Darwinian theft (which is perhaps better described as "inherited wealth"). In the case of symbolic theft, where someone else who has earned the category by sensorimotor toil simply *tells* you what's what, "theft" is also not such an apt metaphor, for this seems to be a victimless crime: Whoever tells you has saved you a lot of work [...]. (Harnad, 2002, p. 151)

Nevertheless, it seems entirely correct to recognize that « the vocabulary of theft must be grounded directly in honest toil [...], it cannot be symbolic theft all the way down » (*Ibid.*, p. 153).

Although the wholistic epistemology which emerges from the speculatively-contrived polemic of radical translation is originally posed as a response to the difficulties of inter-systemic encounters between cultures and languages, it is subsequently held to be a covering model applicable to all human cognition *per se*, even when the contact is *intra*-systemic. As Davidson writes:

> The problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign: it surfaces for speakers of the same language in the form of the question, how can it be determined that the language is the same? Speakers of the same language can go on the assumption that for them the same expressions are to be interpreted in the same way, but this does not indicate what justifies the assumption. All understanding of the speech of another involves radical interpretation. ([1984] 2001, p. 125)

In short, if the objects of third-person reports (e.g., a rabbit being pointed to) are in principle unassignable, then all one need do is substitute the "native" with a parent and construe each child as a kind of amateur "field linguist", and one becomes as disconnected from one's peers as from a "hitherto untouched people" (Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 28)—nay, *untouchable* people.

In truth, no one can consistently adopt the scepticism outlined above, even for argumentative purposes. Davidson recognizes this when he writes: « In giving up dependence on the concept of an uninterpreted reality, something outside all schemes and science, we do not relinquish the notion of objective truth [...] but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false » ([1984] 2001, p. 198). If we (not-so-radically) translate, what this statement boils down to is that the radical translation narrative avowedly has no practical bearings; if consistently pursued, it comes full circle (despite his speculative extravagance on topics of meaning and reference, Quine himself ends up advocating a very conservative world-view).

Yet the need for a drastic theoretical reworking of our conception of representation in terms of wholism is felt only on the assumption that the *ad hoc* creation of referential noise (of the sort which can be prefixed by a "But what if..." clause) is itself warranted. Seeing as how the rationale at work here is erotetic, it remains for us to uncover what sort of party is perpetually questioning the linguist's claims to objectivity—to uncover what are *its* standards in this regard. For if we want to put an end to Antæus' winning streak, we must deprive him of the ground whence he draws his powers.

1.2.5 The true instigator revealed

At the start of the chapter, we proposed that inquiry can be understood as either speculative or mundane in origin. To the extent that the catalyst is mundane, one is confronted with what Peirce called real or "genuine" doubt: « [G]enuine doubt always has an external origin, usually from surprise; and [...] it is as impossible for a man to create in himself a genuine doubt by such an act of the will [...] as it would be for him to give himself genuine surprise by a simple act of the will » (1998, p. 348). This last impetus, triggered so to speak by an immaculate conception of the creative mind, is what we term speculative. In light of this typology, we can

summarize our indictment of Quine and Davidson's negative influence on *Mind and World*'s project by saying that they effectively introduce in it a harmful element of *speculative scepticism.* Specifically, their wholistic arguments unwarrantedly initiate reflection on a topic hitherto unproblematic (by naturalist standards) and then bring to bear on that topic a policy of doubt limited only by ruminative acumen. Despite its scientific (linguistic) tone, the scenario of radical translation exhibits two very important traits: 1) it is not a genuine problem in the Peircean sense (i.e., it is speculative in origin); and 2) it requires that we supply a steady amount of doubt throughout (i.e., it is sceptical in gait, if not in destination).

When we think of scepticism, we tend to associate it with the classical scepticism of Pyrrho of Elis or the modern avatar of Hume. But scepticism as such is not a historical school but an approach, on which no one thinker has a monopoly. It is a general stance (to qualify it as "philosophic" would be to beg the question in its favour) which anyone at any time can adopt. Some say it represents the pinnacle of wisdom while some argue it is nihilist in gait and self-defeating in destination. Still others see it as a kind of necessary expedient, a "ladder" which one discards after use. The problem with scepticism, however, is that once one has adopted it, there's not much else to do or say (save perhaps rambling on in print about that fate). And so arises the instrumental variety, pioneered by Descartes in the seventeenth century and nowadays found under the rubric of "methodological scepticism".

The narrator of the Cartesian *Méditations* has been canonized in Western culture by the plastic terms of Rodin's *Thinker*: aloof, decontextualized, and self-absorbed. What this picture leaves out, however, is that shortly after having cast himself into the void by (provisionally) taking as completely false whatever he deemed in the least degree susceptible to doubt, the Frenchman hit upon rock-solid ground: his own (ideational) existence, thought he, admits of no such doubt. As Descartes writes: « Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one

thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable » (*Second Meditation*, in Pojman, 1998, p. 467). What ensued was no longer scepticism, but rather an almost too-optimistic belief in one's ability to *know* (science-fiction satirist Douglas Adams was not doing injustice to Cartesian rationalism when he wrote of a super-computer being programmed with the "*Cogito*" and then deducing from it the existence of "rice pudding and income tax").

Contemporary adherents to instrumental scepticism like Quine and Davidson tend to lack Descartes' system-building fervour. But that should not blind us to the fact that they nonetheless embrace a quintessentially Cartesian attitude towards inquiry. All told, the crucial feature is not so much the particular way in which a given sceptic policy expands hairline fissures of doubt into veritable canyons, but rather the manner in which one ascertains the presence of such fissures in the first place. If the enterprise is rooted and sustained by real doubt in the Peircean sense, then the criteria for the detection of fissures is the disruption of habit. By this mundane standard, opportunities for wedging fissures open would be rare (the rational animal is not so maladapted to its environment). In contrast, when the impetus and drive is speculative, the criteria is one's creative imagination (or lack thereof). By this lax standard, to ponder the possibility of a fissure is to detect one.

On the mundane view we advocate, doubt cannot arise from discourse speculatively folding onto itself. Instead, the disruption of habit comes from *beneath* the realm of discourse, from the brutality of a clash with the world: « Besides the lower consciousness of feeling and the higher consciousness [...] this direct consciousness of hitting and of getting hit enters into all cognition and serves to make it mean something real » (Peirce, 1992, p. 233). Yet when Samuel Johnson struck his foot against a large stone and declared that he had "thus" refuted Berkeley's idealism, we believe his appeal to brutality came too late. Properly construed, such impacts are not only potent arbiters of epistemic affairs; they should also be the *instigators* of inquiry. In this view, Davidson's ([1984] 2001, p. 125)

demand that speakers of a same language justify their assumption that their language is the same can be rejected as without grounds—what is in need of justification is Davidson's demand.

In the case of radical translation, the instigator of inquiry could be genuine: the science of linguistics is indeed called upon to catalogue languages foreign to its disciplinary encyclopaedia. In such cases, mis- or non-communication is the legitimate trigger, setting theoretical inquiry into motion. Yet when such is the motive, the matter is eventually settled: detailed observations, a few well-chosen conjectures, tentative attempts at employing the vocabulary gleaned therefrom, establishment of an investigative rapport with the object-population, cross-verification of manuals for accuracy and consistency—and, by all reasonable standards, the task pressed upon the linguist is resolved. Upon completion, more theoretically-minded linguists could generalize the methodology (notepad and all) employed in successful cases and prescribe a working set of guidelines for the practice of their science. Just as mis- or non-communication was the legitimate trigger setting inquiry into motion, effective communication would bring that endeavour to rest. The official end of hostilities with mundane disruptions would be marked by the publication of a textbook, that peace treaty of habit-taking which canonizes what Kuhn ([1962] 1996) called "normal science". Recognition that rival publications could diverge in "countless places" would be seen as a trivial side-effect of the collective scale of the enterprise and would in no way undermine confidence that the job is done. In any event, divergences big enough to matter would be dealt with *if* and *when* they would arise—the mere suggestion of an imaginary permutation or new variable would not suffice. What's more, should important divergences arise, the attempt to remedy them would rest on the premise that there is but *one* domain of reference (to wit, the world), and that as a result we should not rest with conflicting (overlapping) theoretical accounts. As Kirkham

writes, « a pure coherence theory of justification does have *some* surface plausibility on a Realist theory of truth. The reasoning would be that since the world itself is consistent, two or more inconsistent beliefs cannot *all* be true [...] » (1997, p. 216).

But that is not the rationale which guides a Quinean epistemology. In short, indeterminacy of translation entails the repudiation of any appeal to "Word and Object" correspondence, in no plausible sort of correspondence however loose. In terms of Charles Morris' tripartite typology (1971, p. 28-54), the *semantic* relation binding sign-to-object is undermined to the point of epistemic impotence by the speculative assumptions of the radical setting. As the stipulations raise the bar at the philosopher's leisure, when and where sign-to-object couplings seem to hold, the intervening variables are made more radical *ad hoc* (going all the way back to the intervention of the senses, if need be), thereby effectively cutting us off from our (erstwhile unproblematic) recourse to ostension.

Obviously, wholists have always had to find a way to reincorporate some kind of substitute for receptivity. Thus, once experience has been held to an impossible standard of precision and been found wanting, the shackles of *instrumental* scepticism are removed so as to clear the way for a renewed confidence in the mind's ability. The possibility of appealing to semantic sign-to-object references having been purged, radical translation rebuilds a recognizable world-view upon the remaining semiotic options, namely the *syntactic* and *pragmatic* axes. The theoretic account which traditionally emerges in the aftermath is thus one of wholistically managing representations along the sign-to-sign axis so as to pragmatically foster a sign-to-agent heuristic. Quine captures the essence of this kind of economical wholism when he writes: « Our boat stays afloat because at each alteration we keep the bulk of it intact as a going concern. [...] We warp usage gradually enough to avoid rupture » ([1960] 1999, p. 4).

Yet the radical translation framework whence this wholism emerges effectively begs the question against the representational atom: given the stringent scepticism it brings to bear on sign-to-object couplings, syntactic relations and pragmatic imperatives (like charity) have to win; the former because reference must be made to something other than our minds, the latter because the sign-to-sign axis cannot by itself provide any gauge by which to decide which self-consistent fabric we should adopt. The dialectic dice had thus been weighed against receptive atomism all along (as was ominously presaged by Quine's preliminary formulations). However, if we are to seriously heed McDowell's call for the elaboration of a viable way out of his oscillation, then speculative settings like radical translation are no ally to the enterprise.

> In the thesis that translation is indeterminate, which is meant to elaborate the moral of "Two Dogmas", [Quine's] aim is to stress "the extent of man's conceptual sovereignty" in the formation of world-views: that is—to put in a way that brings Quine into explicit contact with Kant—the extent to which *the content of world-views is a product of spontaneity operating freely, uncontrolled by the deliverances of receptivity*. (McDowell, [1994] 2002 p. 132; italics ours)

Granted, a naive construal of the role of experience in representation benefits from a thorough elucidation of the various conceptual elements which inherently accompany receptivity. It is precisely because receptivity is often an insufficient contributor to knowledge that philosophers as far back as Plato have rightly felt the need to posit the interplay of faculties that answer to modalities far different from perception. The point is that from an aetiological perspective, *such additions can never be permitted to undermine the natural landscape which might have legitimately suggested their need.* In other words, philosophic inquiry is not allowed to endanger the experiential episodes of receptivity in contrast with which the very notion of "spontaneity" finds its meaning. Whatever insights have been generated by the wholists' speculative probings of seemingly straightforward attributions of

referential content—and there are indeed many such insights—surely it is plausible to assume that a third way must have *something* to learn from the option of receptive atomism as well.

The sceptic posture and the speculation which sustains it conflicts with McDowell's project in ways far beyond this *petitio* neglect of receptivity. A mode of inquiry which takes as its starting point the claim that our representations can be efficacious and then submits this claim to doubt to see if it can withstand *ad hoc* criticism should in principle be totally foreign to McDowell's inquiry. Charles Taylor, in recapping of the rationale which leads to the wholist option, provides us with a rare and lucid glimpse into the motive force which fuels scepticism:

> What if someone does not "see" the adequacy of our interpretation, does not accept our reading? We try to show him how it makes sense of the original non- or partial sense. But for him to follow us he must read the original language as we do, he must recognize these expressions as puzzling in a certain way, and hence be looking for a solution to our problem. If he does not, what can we do? The answer, it would seem, can only be more of the same. We have to show him through the reading of other expressions why this expression must be read in the way we propose. But success here requires that he follow us in these other readings, and so on, it would seem, potentially forever. We cannot escape an ultimate appeal to a common understanding of the expressions, of the "language" involved. [...] The circle can also be put in terms of part-whole relations: we are trying to establish a reading for the whole text, and for this we appeal to readings of its partial expressions; and yet because we are dealing with meaning, with making sense, where expressions only make sense or not in relation to others, the readings of partial expressions depend on those of others, and ultimately of the whole.
>
> Put in forensic terms [...], we can only convince an interlocutor if at some point he shares our understanding of the language concerned. If he does not, there is no further step to take in rational argument; we can try to awaken these intuitions in him or we can simply give up; argument will advance no further. But of course the forensic predicament can be transferred into my own judging: if I am this ill equipped to convince a stubborn interlocutor, how can I convince myself? how can I be sure? Maybe my intuitions are wrong or distorted, maybe I am locked into a circle of illusion. (1971, p. 6)

This passage gives voice to the speculative keystone at the heart of the entire wholistic edifice. Indeed, if all thought is dialogic in form, then arguments for the indeterminacy of translation can be said to conceal an incredulous interlocutor of sorts who, at every turn of the narrative, marshals a slew of fresh new objections. Here is the co-conspirator hinted at earlier; the enthymematic premise which sees hairline fissures of doubt everywhere by constantly assuming (without basis) that perhaps yet another factor muddles our attempts to pin down what others mean by their utterances. He is manifest, for example, in Davidson's aforementioned comment to the effect that the burden of proof rests on those speakers who "assume" they share a language. In fact, the above disclosure by Taylor even takes Davidson's inference to its logical conclusion: not only should speakers of a same language doubt whether they are really in touch with each other, but a same speaker should doubt whether she is really in touch with reality at all (!).

The leitmotif in all these cases is the same: *what can be doubted in the least is doubted to the utmost.* We submit that to embrace such a standard is to engage in a Cartesian meditation, regardless of whether the place-holders are given less conspicuous contemporary terms.

1.3 Finding the right balance: towards a full-headed worldliness

1.3.1 Anchoring inquiry in real doubt

Our investigation into the speculative origin of McDowell's problem has yielded hard-earned intellectual capital we can now put to good use. As we saw, if we allow speculation to sustain sceptical criticism, in other words, if we give voice and/or audience to the stubborn interlocutor, then the "option" of an atomic contact with the world is for all intents and purposes ruled out from the outset by the terms of the investigation. To be sure, receptivity-based theories may rhetorically be called upon in wholist narratives to serve as foils, but such theories are nonetheless excluded from exerting a genuine force by the very speculative conditions of the inquiry. In

the absence of any competition, the way is cleared for wholism to hold a sort of hegemonic monopoly. Yet if this is so, there can be no genuine oscillation between the poles of atomism and wholism; syntactic relations guided by a pragmatic concern for the integrity of the whole are all there ever was to begin with.

However, if we uphold the policy of *not* allowing speculation to create *ad hoc* fissures of doubt, the option of wholism loses a great deal of its initial plausibility. By that same token, there appears to be no *prima facie* reason why we should rule out the possibility of efficacious punctate appeals to the world. In short, acceptance of our first policy towards the interlocutor teaches us to not beg the question in favour of wholism by pre-empting the possibility of atomistic justification. Curiously, by not letting our philosophic imagination run wild, the problem recovers its vitality and renews hope for a tenable way out.

Clearly then, when one is consistent in refusing to give the stubborn interlocutor a voice, hypotheses are *not* all born equal—some premises are just not subject to doubt. If we are to be consistent in our goal to eradicate speculation so as to pre-empt scepticism, we must also forgo the possibility of an aetiologic inquiry triggered by likewise musings. In other words, the price to pay for stifling the stubborn interlocutor is that philosophy can no longer begin in wonder (i.e., Rodin's *Thinker*), but must rather follow a three-fold sequence of '*real doubt*, conjecture, and refutation'.

According to a twofold (Popperian) epistemology of 'conjectures and refutations', progress is best achieved when these respective movements are held to sharply diverging standards of laxity and rigour; that is, when the generation of hypotheses is completely unimpeded and the criticism levelled at them totally merciless. But under such a policy, we believe the domain of speculative possibility will always overrule that of intuitive plausibility. Granted, the contentions brought forth by speculation are likely of unequal merit and could for the most part be easily defeated. What matters here is that the domain of speculative rambling, if left

unconstrained, is properly *infinite*. Yet since the refuting party of dialogic thought is *limited* in not being able to engage in a likewise flood of unmotivated speculation, the conjecturing party has an inestimable advantage. To clog a computer, better to ask it an infinity of small tasks then one very difficult one (which is why thoroughgoing speculative enterprises never make it past their sceptical propaedeutics). Virus-elimination at the output level is thus more than useless without virus prevention at the input (we say "*more* than", because an expenditure of resources is involved). We can therefore see how the epistemological respect for the mundane called for in our aetiological stance goes much deeper than an appeal to "folk-theory": once we grasp the symbiosis which logically binds speculation and scepticism, we realize that unconstrained conjectures *are* scepticism.

No doubt recognizing that a method of (infinite) trials and (finite) errors would cripple inquiry to a standstill should it be consistently applied, Popper attempted to constrain the domain of hypothesis—or rather, the flow of hypotheses from that domain—via a "rational theory of tradition". Of course, it makes perfect sense to recognize that a traditional construct presents a better case than one with no track record of its own. Like explicit scientific theories, traditions can indeed « bring some order into the chaos in which we live so as to make it rationally predictable » (Popper, [1963] 2002, p. 175). Yet an epistemology cannot claim to recognize the import of epistemic patrimony in inquiry while applauding the service rendered by the stubborn interlocutor—in effect the Popperian's ideal scientist—as he endeavours to subvert that patrimony by pure speculation. What's more, if submission of hypotheses is to be completely unobstructed, then where should attempt at refutation begin? An infinite domain is a pretty big place; to recognize the *prima facie* merit of a nearby construct without testing it is to appeal to induction (i.e., "it worked in the past, *ergo*, it is more likely than others to work in the future")—a type of inference which the falsificationist system was designed to supplant.

It may very well happen that what is gleaned upon completion of a well-conducted inquiry into causes shatters many strongly held assumptions. But such results, if and when they occur, must not only be reached *through* adversity—as Popper advocates—they must also have been *pushed* (not pulled) into the gauntlet of criticism because of real (i.e., non-speculative) adversity. As the old adage goes; "Cross the bridge when you get there". The proper reply to departures from the mundane is not to veto any result which happens to stray from dogmatically projected conclusions; such would make the exercise mere rationalization and question-begging. On the contrary, if what we saw atop the ladder was always what we saw at its bottom, then, all resources being equal, there wouldn't be much point in climbing. In fact, it is in virtue of that same principle that unlikely insights yield the greatest entropy. Popper is thus quite correct when he points out that the greater a theory's probability of corroboration, the lesser its explanatory power—and vice versa ([1934] 2006, §§ 82 and 83). But, under such a schema, what is the explanatory power of something explained? Curiously, none. Yet if explanation is fundamentally a process from the known to the unknown, what are we to make of a "movement" from the unknown to the unknown?

Granted, what we know now might avail itself untenable as inquiry expands its scope. But an epistemology of conjectural liberalism and perpetual distrust overdoes this truism by advocating the notion of a "successful hypothesis", which is a contradiction in terms. Of course, one could omit the prefix "hypo" when describing *successful* theses, but in such a case one would be forced to replace the *hyponymy* of "tentative and less-tentative" by the more accurate *antonymy* of "falsehood versus truth". In contrast, by the speculative standard, all legitimate items of knowledge must present at least one fissure, without which they are dogma (*cf.* Popper, [1963] 2002). Yet this is the hallmark of the sceptical attitude we wish to eschew. For once

speculation is allowed to open the door of doubt (no matter how slightly) there is no principled ground left on which to stand to refute the sceptic; nay, to refute the very task of refutation.

1.3.2 A revision / dismissal of the traditional program

According to the mundane-*cum*-aetiological view we advocate, philosophy should busy itself with legitimate mundane "how" problems instead of open-ended speculative "what if" questions. By ruling out speculative genesis and anchoring itself in real doubt, such a "naturalized" (we would prefer simply "well-conducted") epistemology dramatically alters the playing field and departs from many hitherto important issues and "problems". Someone like Barry Stroud (1981) is both correct and incorrect when he affirms that a naturalized approach does not so much *answer* traditional sceptical questions as it *changes the topic*. According to a widespread gloss, traditional epistemology is an ill-posed and ill-conducted forebear: « Thus the death-of-epistemology theorist holds that there is no barrier in principle to epistemology's going the way of, say, demonology or judicial astrology » (Dancy and Sosa, 1999, p. 88). Stroud's statement is therefore correct for those whose dialogic thought involves a stubborn interlocutor; and incorrect for those whose thought does not (in voice and/or audience). If ever there was a valid case for pleading "paradigmatic incommensurability", surely this is it.

But by employing *doctrina* instead of *scientia*, naturalized philosophy can carve out a unique niche for itself in the intellectual market. In fact, it may yet be able to catch an object notorious for escaping the grasp of science: *meaning*. For it seems a complete account of meaning perforce involves attributing humans with a faculty of spontaneity that allows them to dabble in the fabric of their representations in a way relatively autonomous to the make-up of the world. As McDowell writes: « [P]art of the point of the idea that the understanding is a faculty of spontaneity—that

conceptual capacities are capacities whose exercise is in the domain of responsible freedom—is that the network, as an individual thinker finds it governing her thinking, is not sacrosanct » ([1994] 2002, p. 12)

We have already seen how unconstrained speculation weighs the dice in favour of a receptivity-free wholism. Yet science also has much to learn from philosophy. Drastic reductionism begs the question against spontaneity by assuming from the outset that law-like behaviour is the hallmark of the real. As a result, just as receptivity's voice is ultimately lost in the cacophony of speculation, so spontaneity's case goes unheard when the ontological spectrum is made too narrow. Discourse on a given topic can be rather straightforward, as is the case with natural-scientific discourse about geological fissures. But when trying to understand understanding or represent representation, new difficulties arise, as the inquiry becomes akin to putting the universe in a bag and closing it from the inside. To the extent that natural scientific discourse is methodologically less problematic, it also lacks a certain richness of insight which humans naturally crave. As a result, it seems fair to say that natural science has a hard time countenancing the possibility that freedom may guide the organic integration of received empirical contents in a non-determinist way. But countenance we must, for wholistic philosophers are right on this point: the mind *can* engage in reworkings of its materials—reworkings the logic of which will likely escape the grasp of an idiom tailor-made to account for geological fissures. McDowell is thus largely correct in his general assessment that we need to distance ourselves from the "bald" scientism bequeathed by modernity if we are to gain a thorough and rigorous understanding of the freedom inherent in our construction of meaning.

Explicitly echoing Kant's credo vis-à-vis the interdependency of thought and intuition, McDowell thus rightfully insists that « intentions without overt activity are idle, and movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency » ([1994] 2002, p. 89). As a result, he pushes for a

fundamental "re-enchantment" of our world-view which gives science its explanatory due all the while admitting our (non-nomological) faculty of spontaneity as a fully legitimate denizen of nature:

> In a common mediaeval outlook, what we now see as the subject matter of natural science was conceived as filled with meaning, as if all of nature were a book of lessons for us; and it is a mark of intellectual progress that educated people cannot now take that idea seriously, except perhaps in some symbolic role. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 71)
>
> .....
>
> If we acquiesce in the disenchantment of nature, if we let meaning be expelled from what I have been calling "the merely natural", we shall certainly need to work at bringing meaning back into the picture when we come to consider human interactions. (*Ibid.*, p. 72)
>
> .....
>
> As I have acknowledged, this can seem to express a nostalgia for a pre-scientific world-view, a call for a re-enchantment of nature. And certainly it requires that we resist the characteristically modern conception according to which something's way of being natural is its position in the realm of law. (*Ibid.*, p. 74)

McDowell is thus convinced that if we are to successfully dismount the seesaw, we must first eliminate the gap separating mind from world. An awkward way to describe the position he his driving at would be to label it a "monism of mind and word" (note that it is patently not a "neutral" variant, a fact which will have great importance later in the second chapter, especially sect. 2.5.3).

1.3.3 Philosophy and science's divergent propensities

In contrast with science, philosophical discourse is more at ease dealing with our faculty of spontaneity. The flip side, however, is that philosophers seem to have serious problems coping with the idea of receptivity. For to understand the peculiarity of atomic receptivity means *accepting that it is limited*; i.e., that whatever information experience deliverers is *final* and cannot be subjected to an endless hermeneutic (on pain of no longer being what it is). A paradigm case of this tendency to relapse into speculation is Russell's notion of "knowledge by acquaintance", which offers no principled way to halt the atomistic reduction of

analysis: « [I]t is perfectly possible to suppose that complex things are capable of analysis *ad infinitum*, and that you never reach the simple » (Russell, [1918, 1924] 1998, p. 64)—a thesis David Pears aptly calls the "No Terminus Theory" (*Ibid.*, p. 6). If ever one did reach a point where one could lay claim to an irreducible contact between mind and world, Russell argues, the find would properly be *ineffable*. Whatever information it would convey would be so brute and immanent that one would not have any inkling what that atom pertained too—save, of course, by contaminating it with "descriptive" imports. As Russell remarks, « The only words one does use as names in the logical sense are words like 'this' or 'that'. [...] But if you try to apprehend the proposition that I am expressing when I say 'This is white', you cannot do it. [...] It is only when you use 'this' quite strictly, to stand for an actual object of sense, that it is really a proper name » ([1918, 1924] 1998, p. 62).

To execute such a Russellian 'this' without grafting it to an informational content like 'this *is such and such*' is to exhibit a skill of little cognitive merit and epistemological usefulness, insofar as such pointings never fail (*cf.* Kripke, [1972] 2001, to witness this feature of indexicality pushed to its absurd "come-what-world-may" conclusion). In any event, we believe radically atomistic theories like the one we have just sketched are as speculative as their wholistic competitors. Since the entities which populate the world ostensibly come equipped with their own gestalt-like buffer, reduction into 'colour patch time-slices' and their ilk is clearly the work of the stubborn interlocutor. In that sense, whether the stubborn interlocutor persists in calling attention to the bark or the forest, *super*scrutability reveals itself to be as philosophically unnatural as *in*scrutability.

Unable to rid itself of the stubborn interlocutor's speculative verbosity, philosophy's most sincere attempts to make sense of our Kantian faculty of receptivity thus tend to fall back into familiar modernist territory. Just as radical translation constantly brought into the picture extraneous factors and variables, radical atomism constantly breaks down what is presented in experience. Since in

both cases the interventions are without warrant, the goal of successful apprehension is perpetually postponed. Science may be "bald", but philosophy is a bit too lush and enchanted for its own sake.

It is harder to adhere to a noble desire to "not refute the sceptic" when the scepticism in question does not push for any specific program and reveals itself only after having appealed to a more sober world-view. Indeed, the sceptic posture is usually thought to intervene most poignantly at the very beginning of speculative inquiries, insisting on the need for an in-depth propaedeutic establishing the absolutely certain grounds whence inquiry proper can proceed. But, as many such attempts never make it past this anteroom, more scientifically-sounding sceptical inquiries provisionally take a certain number of claims for granted, preferring instead to submit these to speculative doubt at a later stage. Thinkers like Quine and Davidson thus differ from Descartes in two ways. First, they diverge in not declaring their thoroughgoing incredulity upfront. Second, they leave to others (preferably scientifically-minded persons) the task of supplying the "paradigms" which are to be wholistically built on the rubble of their anti-foundationalist critique.

This last take on scepticism has the rhetorical virtue of seeming less artificial than the first. The "native", the "field linguist", an established "linguistic science" (in fact, an entire stable world-view): these are the familiar terms with which the radical translation dialectic begins. We begin midway, we are told; thus apparently sharing with the aetiological posture a healthy reliance on a patrimony which has proven its worth. But sooner or later, when speculation deems the time has come, those claims provisionally accepted receive their full sceptical due; i.e., if they can be subjected to doubt in the least, they are doubted altogether. And so, at the close of the sceptical argument, we see that our reliance on a seemingly stable world-view was a paradoxical act of faith, and there is no principled reason beyond impracticality (*pace* Quine and Davidson) or faith (*pace* Descartes) why we should hold onto these.

Another factor which might lend credence to the stubborn interlocutor's *ad hoc* grievances against receptivity is our common-sense grasp that human representations *are indeed* malleable. But one must be on guard against this; Quine and Davidson are not merely rehashing platitudes. Rather, one must take wholism seriously when it asserts that *any* representation can be altered, so long as the change is kept grammatical within the whole (including most emphatically the rules by which such grammaticality is ascertained). Once this is done, the *ex nihilo* and *in media res* approaches to scepticism reveal themselves as species of a common genus: whether certainty is discarded at the beginning, middle, or end of argument, *doubt is non-negotiable and nothing else is beyond price*.

Granting validity to the enthymematic interlocutor's queries, however, goes against McDowell's laudable conception of philosophic inquiry. As he writes:

> There is a tendency to conclude that *even a non-misleading experience cannot genuinely be a case of openness to reality*. [...]
>
> But this misses the point. An objection on these lines would be appropriate if I were aiming to answer traditional sceptical questions, to address the predicament of traditional philosophy. [...] But my talk of openness is a rejection of the traditional predicament, not an attempt to respond to it. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 111-112; italics ours)
>
> .....
>
> [T]he sceptical questions lack a kind of urgency that is essential to their troubling us, an urgency that derives from their seeming to point up an unnerving fact: that however good a subject's cognitive position is, it *cannot* constitute her having a state of affairs directly manifest to her. There is no such fact. (*Ibid.*, p. 113)

Yet however intellectually sincere McDowell is in wanting to adopt his principled stance against scepticism, he does not secure his inquiry as firmly as we would have hoped. By our lights, his wilful "ignorance" of the sceptic is not radical enough: not only should philosophy henceforth forgo that futile task, it should *retroactively* expurgate those sceptical premises which have unduly managed to infiltrate its discourse, regardless of whether they are deployed in a plausible setting or a vacuum.

1.3.4 Towards a reconciliation via the eviction of speculation

We must credit McDowell for insisting that neither the scientific predilection for receptivity nor the philosophic penchant for spontaneity provides an adequate picture of the interface of mind and world. But what McDowell's revisionism tends to forget is that modernity has given us a *twin* heritage. The abandonment by modern science of philosophical matters was effected at the price of setting aside some of the topics of inquiry hitherto most revered. By impatiently departing the anteroom of speculation without the philosopher's blessing, science effectively had to commit itself to a self-imposed ban on a small set of problematic objects of study, most of them related in some way to the mind.

Granted, if we revisit our assumptions about what it means for something to be real we may yet accord our faculty of spontaneity the rightful place in nature it has long been denied. But to do so also requires that we review the other party's role in the schism. For while the scientific mind's disregard of the medieval "book of lessons" is today widespread, it nevertheless took centuries before the yearning for deep philosophic meaning could be suppressed (Newton, that paragon of "hard" science, spent most of his free time pursuing more occult studies). If science felt the need to leave philosophy, we may be assured that it had good cause to do so. As it turns out, a considerable portion of the blame rests on philosophy's shoulders. The culprit, in short, is its stubborn interlocutor.

McDowell is keen to the prospect that adopting a "re-enchanted" conception of nature would broaden the ontological spectrum of the admissible so as to include spontaneity. Yet doing so also entails an epistemological constriction of discourse so that Descartes' cunning deceiver can wreak no havoc. The same broad construal which admits the mind as an integral part of nature makes human beings invested members of their environment who could never even dream of such a fate as relativism or scepticism. Therefore, if we are ever to successfully rid ourselves of

the negative influences handed down to us by the modern schism between science and philosophy, we believe it is not so much philosophy we should "scientize" (*pace* scientifically-minded philosophers) nor science we should "philosophize" (*pace* McDowell) but rather the interlocutor we must evict.

Popper ([1963] 2002) has famously suggested falsifiability as a criteria by which to demarcate science from pseudo-science. To impose a likewise standard on philosophy would no doubt be to commit a gross error, inasmuch as this would rule out any topic where our faculty of spontaneity might be in play. Yet we will be committing an equally grave error if we "philosophize" science and fallaciously infer that since our object of study involves spontaneity we have *carte blanche* as to how we conduct our meta-discursive investigation. The lot of inquiries into meaning and mind will be well served—and their transcendental predicament alleviated—if we can muster enough normative self-confidence to make the unwarranted raising of doubt on the sole basis of imagination a criterion demarcating philosophy and pseudo-philosophy.

Unfortunately, McDowell the philosopher manifests a certain morbid fascination with speculative arguments. We have already seen how wholism rests on a critique of receptivity that could never have achieved any plausibility on non-speculative grounds. Sadly, instead of dismissing these contrived arguments as unworthy of serious consideration, McDowell finds wholistic theories to be philosophically "disastrous" ([1994] 2002, p. 144). Convinced that « Davidson manages to be comfortable with his coherentism [...] only because he does not see that emptiness is the threat » (*Ibid.*, p. 68), McDowell sees it as his foremost task to convince the patient that she needs the cure he has developed. Ironically, his remedy consists in showing that the speculative malady should never really have been there to begin with:

> We ought to have no problem about how an exercise of "conceptual sovereignty" can bear on the empirical world—can constitute taking a stand on how things are, a posture correctly or incorrectly adopted according to the way the world is arranged—if "conceptual sovereignty" is rationally answerable to how the world impresses itself on the subject in experience. (*Ibid.*, p. 141-142)

It is hard for us to make any sense out of this proposal—to reconcile the notion of "sovereignty" with "answerability". In any event, McDowell's semantic concoction suffices to help him cope with the lack of friction entailed in the coherentist credo:

> From this angle, we can see that there is more than an excess of simplicity in Davidson's formulation "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief". I suggested this emendation: nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except something else that is also in the space of concepts. In fact the emended wording is fine by my lights. (*Ibid.*, p. 143)

One can wonder whether a timid rewording is up to the considerable task of satisfying our « craving for rational constraint from outside the realm of thought and judgement » (*Ibid.*, p. 18). In our opinion, McDowell's "emendation" of Davidson's position is like fighting speculation with speculation (Christopher Hookway and Aryeh Frankfurter had good cause to suggest to McDowell that he is closer to the Davidsonian brand of "anti-relativism" than he might realize or care to admit; *cf.* McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 138). If nothing else, the portrayal of frictionless wholistic theories as "disastrous" is inconsistent with McDowell's professed refusal to grant the sceptic's worries any urgency. It is hard to believe that with such a policy in place one could ever find any genuine suggestion that the mind somehow holds a fully sovereign dominion over the content and structure of its representations. Perhaps in the course of an investigation into causes one could be called upon to allocate the mind some form of leeway analogous to that espoused (in the extreme) by wholism. Yet, if and when this would occur, it would not be to palliate speculative doubts, nor would it obliterate the faculties which it is called

upon to explain. Undermining the strong premise of experiential input on the basis of a speculative narrative is a manoeuvre impossible on the aetiologic posture we advocate.

Behold, then, a dilemma: if we are right in our characterization of radical translation as inherently *sceptical* and correct in answering McDowell's call to not refute the sceptic *retroactively* as well as prospectively, does this not mean that the wholistic alternative which that narrative spawns should never have been a viable option to begin with?

Despite some well-intentioned moments of mundane sobriety, McDowell ultimately gives in to the stubborn interlocutor's claim that since the relational dispositions of a given representation *could* potentially link it to the whole system of which it is part, they *do* link it:

> No doubt there is no serious prospect that we might need to reshape the concepts at the outermost edges of the system, the most immediately observational concepts, in response to pressures from inside the system. But that no-doubt unreal prospect brings out the point that matters for my present purpose. This is that although experience itself is not a good fit for the idea of spontaneity, even the most immediately observational concepts are partly constituted by their role in something that is indeed appropriately conceived in terms of spontaneity. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 13)

How can a "no-doubt unreal prospect" become threatening, save on the speculative proviso that the imagination's ability to project a situation somehow lends that situation a certain epistemic weight which one is subsequently unable to fully dissipate? Such a stance is hardly reconcilable with the thesis that « thought can be distanced from the world by being false, but there is no distance from the world implicit in the very idea of thought » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 27); or again that « when we acknowledge the possibility of being misled, we do not deprive ourselves of "taking in how things are" as a description of what happens when one is not misled » (*Ibid.*, p. 26).

It seems to us that McDowell cannot have his mediaeval cake and eat it too. If he is to be true to his call for re-enchantment, he cannot in typical modernist fashion appeal to an "unreal prospect" so as to "bring out" that our "most immediately observational concepts" may in fact be answerable to no observation at all. As Daniel Dennett writes,

> [W]hile striking the Naturalistic Pose is as agreeable and welcome as it is easy, actually *doing* naturalized philosophy has proved difficult—indeed a very un-natural act for a philosopher to perform—and contemporary philosophy of meaning, even where it is most brilliant, has been inconstant in its commitment to naturalism. [...] [Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Quine, Sellars, Putnam, and Fodor] can be seen to be failed naturalists, unwitting "Meaning Rationalists" who have never quite managed to wean themselves from their Cartesian heritage. (foreword to Millikan, 1984, p. ix)

Although we have considerable reservations with the label "Meaning Rationalist" (*cf.* sect. 4.3.4), we do believe John McDowell qualifies as a "failed naturalist". This is especially unfortunate as we think he has at his disposal all the necessary materials to assemble a truly mundane stance. But just as McDowell's commitment to eschew refutation of the sceptic is not drastic enough for him to retroactively weed out Quine and Davidson's incredulity vis-à-vis reference, so his commitment to a re-enchantment of nature avails itself not consistent enough for him to completely sever relations with the modern thesis that the space of reasons can somehow show the book of nature to be illusory. Had McDowell done so, not only would he have discovered that a theory like wholism is uncalled for, but that, in an enchanted world, the Given is the furthest thing from a myth.

1.4 Closing ourselves to our openness: a case study in wheat and chaff

1.4.1 Bypassing intentionality

It could be argued at this point that we have been painting a rather lopsided portrait of McDowell's philosophy. Our attempt to bring out various sceptical elements which we believe obscure the path for tenable third way has largely neglected the

fact that, if anything, McDowell's project is not of Cartesian but of *Wittgensteinian* descent. Granted, that bloodline loses some of its supposed purity by the fact that McDowell's own therapeutic style departs from its forebear, in paying detailed attention to the arguments woven by such figures as Quine, Davidson and Sellars (*cf.* Thornton, 2004, p. 20-21). Nevertheless, there is much in McDowell's corpus which seems to tug in a direction opposite to the scepticism we have been emphasizing. What we want to do now is give those laudable elements their expository due—and this in the most advantageous light possible. Such a gloss will only serve our contentions, inasmuch as the better (i.e., non-sceptical) elements of McDowell's thought are in the end rendered impotent by his mixed sympathies.

McDowell is distinguished in Wittgensteinian scholarship by his bid to reorient theorizing away from what he calls the "criterial" (or "criteriological") view of intentional ascription. Born of the handy mantra that « An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria » (Wittgenstein, [1953] 2001, § 580), this view holds that agents ascribe intentional states on the basis of criterion-based inferences. However, McDowell argues that such an interpretation pours Wittgenstein's reflections into a quite familiar *modern* mould:

> The predicament is as follows. Judgements about other minds are, as a class, epistemologically problematic. Judgements about "behaviour" and "bodily" characteristics are, as a class, not epistemologically problematic; or at any rate, if they are, it is because of a different epistemological problem, which can be taken for these purposes to have been separately dealt with. The challenge is to explain how our unproblematic intake of "behavioural" and "bodily" information can adequately warrant our problematic judgements about other minds. ([1982] 1998, p. 382)

On a purely exegetical front, McDowell has defended the view that, in illustrating various cases where criteria are applied, Wittgenstein was not providing a mass of evidence whence to generalize some transcendent method of criteria application—much less a ubiquitous criterion (McDowell, [1982] 1998, p. 376-380). Rather, says McDowell, Wittgenstein was attempting to *show* how different criteria

are used in different settings. According to this interpretation, it was patently *not* a concern of Wittgenstein's to bridge non-problematic bodies of data like observable behaviour with more problematic ones like intentional states, but rather to argue by implication that no such bridging is needed to begin with. McDowell claims this much has been missed or at least downplayed by contemporary advocates of the criterial reading like Crispin Wright (1980) and Saul Kripke (1982) because, on the one hand, they are not fully receptive to the oblique statement of Wittgenstein's "quietist" method and because, on the other hand, their steadfast resolve that the only valid criteria would have to be empirical in nature (and concomitant lack of imagination) forbade them to seriously consider alternative modes of apprehension (*cf.* McDowell, [1984] 1998; as well as [1994] 2002, p. 92-93, 175-180). Convinced that multifarious epistemological criteria should be marshalled to suit equally plural cases, McDowell is thus devoted to the task of debunking the widespread assumption that different ontological levels admit different degrees of inferential access; the orthodox declension holding that contents are nested in beliefs which are in turn nested in outward behaviour—the passage from one level to the next supposedly entailing a necessary loss of epistemological certainty.

McDowell's grievance with the criterial view goes much deeper than an exegetical dispute. His *epistemological* objection to this view is grounded in an argument from priority. Much like Jerry Fodor ([1975] 2002) insists that the systematicity of thought could not possibly be drawn from natural languages because the acquisition of these very languages is dependent on a prior systematicity, McDowell argues that an agent being trained into a language-game of intentional ascriptions could not possibly induce a given criterion from context-sensitive mentions without first *using* that criterion. As he writes:

> [W]e should not jib at, or interpret away, the common-sense thought that, on those occasions that are paradigmatically suitable for training in the assertoric use of the relevant part of a language, one can literally perceive, in another person's facial expression or his behaviour, that he is in pain, and not just infer that he is in pain from what one perceives. (McDowell, [1978] 1998, p. 305; *cf.* [1982] 1998, p. 370)

McDowell thus wants to make allowances for the *transparent* use of criteria, not only by agents possessing full (operational) mastery of a given criterion, but most importantly by those being inculcated *into* that mastery—a stance which obviously flies in the face of the indeterminacy of translation thesis.

To illustrate, suppose someone says that a sentence, in and of itself, participates in some sort of truth-value attribution only upon entering into a greater system of human agents and social norms—in other words, a language-game. This view would concord with the contemporary criterial gloss. In essence, it would take Wittgenstein's *Investigations* to be providing an answer to the standard modernist project of establishing an algorithm of sorts going "from sound to significance", that is, of « compendiously describ[ing] the extra contribution, over and above the sharable sensory intake, that [someone's] competence with the language makes to his cognitive position on any of the relevant occasions » (McDowell, [1980] 1998a, p. 32). However, the openness thesis propounded by McDowell asks us to keep firmly in mind *what* we are dealing with and *where* we are discursively standing when we deal with it. When we speak of a "sentence", we are not just speaking of a string of sounds or a set of nomological buccal movements, which would be best described in a physical or medical idiom. Rather, the moment we opt for the term *sentence*, we have *already* imbued the object of our concern with the significance in virtue of which a sentence is properly a sentence. If one were to place a piece of organic matter on a plate, it would not make much sense to puzzle over the fact that this tissue is able to sustain life: *qua organic* matter; it would already be framed as capable of this feat. Similarly, a given linguistic item is *linguistic*; to mobilize amazement at this fact, one must contrive some sort of artificial doubt. Much like

how N. R. Hanson (1961, p. 4-19) called attention to the fact that the physical objects of scientific observation are theory-laden, we can say that McDowell heeds Wittgenstein's insight that the *humane* objects of philosophic investigation are *meaning-laden.*

In contrast, the criterial view loses sight of this and asks how this could be so. Yet in so doing, theories of the criterial bend confess their distrust of content as somehow inherently more mysterious than whatever surrogate they deem adequate to act as a support for semantic value. However, according to McDowell, the project of a "full-blooded" theory capable of explicating meaning in a meaning-free idiom (*cf.* Dummett, [1976] 2005) has about as much hope for success as that of an anthropology from a non-human perspective. Alluding to the basic schema which typically underpins such a project (*cf.* Tarski, 1944), he writes:

> When we say "'Diamonds are hard' is true if and only if diamonds are hard", we are just as much involved on the right-hand side as the reflections on rule-following tell us we are. There is a standing temptation to miss this obvious truth, and to suppose that the right-hand side somehow presents us with a possible fact, pictured as a unconceptualized configuration of things in themselves. (McDowell, [1984] 1998, p. 255)

Such an attempt to account for meaning thus engages in what McDowell calls the "sideways-on view". However, since no such transcendental fulcrum is available to us, philosophy should proceed instead from what he calls a "heads-on view". As McDowell writes,

> [W]e can understand the protest differently: not as making the theorems into promissory notes for some pictured explanation of the contents in question, "as from outside", in a theory of thought, but as insisting that the theorems *give* those contents, *not* "as from outside", by uses of an intelligible language. Our attention is indeed drawn to the contents of the used sentences, rather than the mere words (which are possible objects of attention even for someone who does not understand the language they are in): but not as something "beneath" the words, to which we are to penetrate by stripping off the linguistic clothing; rather, as something present in the words—something capable of being heard or seen in the words by those who understand the language. ([1987] 1998, p. 98-99)

In short, the upshot of this construal of representation is that *the ability to fix references is not dependent on the ability to ascribe intentions*. McDowell encapsulates this independence when he writes: « It is not that [indicative sentences'] capacity for use as expressive of belief breathes into them the life that enables them to represent reality, but rather that their antecedent capacity to represent reality is what makes them capable of expressing beliefs » ([1980] 1998a, p. 48).

If contents make themselves *manifest* to hearers, McDowell argues, then it is only normal that speakers communicating within a common language should grasp the objects of their discussions without having to engage in complex transitive inferences going from behavioural observations to conjectures about possible doxastic states to whatever contents should in principle be nested therein. In terms foreign to McDowell's lexicon (*cf.* Austin, 1962), we could say that he holds the locutionary contents of second-hand testimony to be accessible *in abstracto* of their illocutionary enunciations or perlocutionary effects.

McDowell remarks that « [c]hildren start acquiring knowledge by being told things, long before they are capable of so much as raising questions about the sincerity and reliability of their informants. Thus the utterances that they hear on the relevant occasions impinge on them with content, so to speak, in advance of being taken as expressive of belief [...] » ([1980] 1998a, p. 48). Surely McDowell is correct to point out how it is a form of sophisticated incredulity for philosophers to subsequently be puzzled at this fecundity and doubt that once that child grows up into a fully competent English-speaking adult, she can still *see* the referential contents of any given statement. In any event, it is clear that if one is committed to *not* following Davidson's stubborn interlocutor in sceptically upholding that indeterminacy of translation is domestic as well as foreign and that « [s]peakers of the same language can go on the assumption that for them the same expressions are to be interpreted in the same way, but this does not indicate what justifies the

assumption » ([1984] 2001, p. 125), one must acknowledge the broad principle that, when dealing with *significant* items, transparency is the default setting. For if one dismisses Davidson's speculative fears as philosophically unwarranted and grants that an agent (field linguist or otherwise) can indeed *see* her way into the content of a native's hitherto unheard utterance of "Gavagai!" in virtue of a shared membership to humanity, surely one must also grant that this applies to those who enjoy shared membership to a common language.

1.4.2 Adding a standing policy of distrust

As stated, we believe McDowell's apparent anti-scepticism is for all intents and purposes annulled by his other philosophic commitments. While we agree in spirit with any attempt to undermine the largely unquestioned security of the concatenation of <behaviour, beliefs, contents> (with accompanying losses in certainty at each step), we think McDowell's reversal of the accepted wisdom on intentional content is in no way compatible with his insistence—in *Mind and World* and elsewhere—that our finite human nature entails « a standing obligation to reflect about the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that govern [empirical thinking] » ([1994] 2002, p. 12); and that, consequently, « [t]here must be a standing willingness to refashion concepts and conceptions *if that is what reflection recommends* » (*Ibid.*, p. 12-13; italics ours). We argue that the scepticism inherent in this normative policy runs counter to the epistemic optimism of the openness thesis.

Whereas McDowell's standing obligation can appear benign on the surface, like some boy-scout creed to "Always stay alert", we must be on guard against trivializing its incorporation, for it has far-reaching consequences. The tension gains a deeper resonance when we consider it in light of McDowell's (failed) attempt at naturalism. McDowell's declared anti-Cartesian motto is that « it is epistemologically disastrous—to suppose that fallibility in a capacity or procedure

impugns the epistemic status of any of its deliverances » ([1986] 1998, p. 232). McDowell has even gone as far as arguing that the transparent contents delivered in our open access to the world are patently *not* defeasible ([1982] 1998).

The challenge his philosophy faces, then, is to show how this epistemological optimism can be made consonant with its insistence that we rational animals should perpetually reflect on the warrant of our beliefs because « [t]he best we can achieve is always to some extent provisional and inconclusive [...] » ([1994] 2002, p. 82). By our lights, the problem with such a stance is that it considers critical scrutiny to be epistemologically virtuous *regardless of the particular circumstances in which it is applied.* Questioning the grounds of our beliefs thus becomes a primitive not to be questioned. We will examine more fully the rationale behind this prescriptive tenet in the next chapter. What we want to focus on for the moment is the fact *the policy advocated by McDowell endorses exactly the same basic premise as the one that drives the sceptic.*

It seems we are faced with a choice: either we discard or weaken McDowell's openness thesis and keep his standing obligation intact, or we keep his openness intact and discard or weaken his obligation. Obviously, that disjunction dissipates the moment we construe rational scrutiny as answerable, not to any inherent virtuousness, but to the genuine disruption of habit by the world. In this perspective, one engages in verifications or revisions of one's concepts and conceptions only when those have failed to fruitfully guide one's conduct. In keeping with the mundane-*cum*-aetiologic posture we have adopted, we believe the scrutiny alluded to in McDowell's *standing* obligation should be construed rather as an *occasional* measure triggered *only* upon substantial disruption of habit—not mere speculative acumen. According to this view, refashioning beliefs and other representations is at best an *imposition*, not an obligation.

1.4.3 Two very different reasons to trust

Richard Bernstein has pointed out that, despite McDowell's extensive historical scholarship, he would have profited greatly from being « better acquainted with the American pragmatic tradition, especially the work of Charles Sanders Peirce » and that Peirce « anticipates, and is in agreement with, the letter and spirit of McDowell's claims » (2002, p. 18-19). While there is much in Peirce's systematic philosophy which does not garner our assent, we do concur with Bernstein's assessment to a certain extent. For although Bernstein (generously) suggests that « Peirce was also concerned to dismount from the oscillating seesaw between the Myth of the Given and unconstrained coherentism » (2002, p. 19), we believe that "seesaw" cannot gather *any* momentum if one is consistent in avoiding the kind of "self-deception" described by Peirce (we will remain silent on whether Peirce himself stays true to his repudiation). Indeed, whatever his failings, Peirce was correct to insist that philosophical inquiry must be guided by the recognition that scepticism is « a mere self-deception, and not real doubt » (1992, p. 29), and that while one may « find reason to doubt what he began by believing; but in that case he doubts because he has a positive reason for it, and not on account of the Cartesian maxim » (*Ibid.*). The alternative which sets the revision of our beliefs into motion, according to this view, is the forceful rupture of those expectancies we took, up until that point, to be a faithful representation of what is "thus and so".

Unfortunately, of the many doctrines originated by Peirce, it is not to this more sober one which McDowell turned. He writes: « There is a tendency to stop short of accepting that the obligation [to criticize beliefs] is perpetual. One imagines the obligation's ceasing to apply if one contemplates a state of affairs that would deserve to be called "the end of inquiry" » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 40). This last statement is quite revealing, as it offers us a glimpse into the landscape of possibilities considered in McDowell's investigations. What is telling is that contemplation of an "end of inquiry" is invoked matter-of-factly by McDowell as the

chief philosophical obstacle in the way of accepting that his critical obligation is perpetual. That, as it stands, is simply a *non sequitur*: why should an end-of-time state of collective omniscience be considered the prime alternative to accepting a perpetual obligation to question one's beliefs about the layout of the world?

By focusing exclusively on this asymptotic reluctance to accept the perpetuity of his policy, McDowell shows us that *another*—far less remote—alternative was entirely outside the reach of *his* philosophic imagination, namely the fact that one can be content with a given item of knowledge *here and now*. Indeed, his polemic completely overlooks the mundane possibility that one can reject the idea of continual stringency based on the *de facto* success of one's representations in the context that makes them relevant, i.e., one's actual life in a finite worldly environment today (we will have the opportunity to develop this idea of an immanent basis for certainty later on; sect. 4.3.2). In keeping with the thesis that the world makes itself manifest to subjects in a way quite natural to them, perhaps it is only fitting that McDowell had a blind spot for so obvious a response.

1.4.4 Attempting to reinstate a discarded benefit

In light of the preceding, the question left dangling is why McDowell would want to introduce into his system a policy of perpetual doubt which, for all intents and purposes, saps all the philosophical benefits afforded by his "openness to the world" thesis? The answer is that McDowell foists the standing obligation as a balm to alleviate the "discomfort" generated by his advocacy of an "unbounded" conceptual domain. Upon rejecting the image of conceptual representations as a wholistic fabric terminating in an outer boundary of experiential impingements, he recognizes that his revised picture risks looking like a space « within which our exercises of spontaneity run without friction » ([1994] 2002, p. 39). In an attempt to forestall the objection that the picture he recommends embodies « an arrogant anthropocentrism » (*Ibid.*), McDowell calls in the standing obligation to normatively chaperon our

subjectivity from within by « [e]nsuring that our empirical concepts and conceptions pass muster » (*Ibid.*, p. 40). Thus, in sharp contrast with the view we advocate, it is paramount to the success of McDowell's enterprise that the standing obligation not be triggered by any particular worldly friction, as its *raison d'être* is to supply that very friction. *Mind and World* may not make much of the fact, but it must be remembered that *the friction which McDowell seeks to reinstate was not so much lost as discarded.* In any case, it should be noted that McDowell's addition of this policy is completely *ad hoc*: while a tacit ethic of humility is expected, there is nothing to *vindicate* it in principle (though there is obviously much to *motivate* it).

Rather than dwell on the merits of McDowell's normative balm, let us go straight to the malady which it is called in to heal—or at least, curb—from the top down. For if an attempt is made by McDowell to capitalize on a (putatively shared) system of values, that attempt, in turn, stems from a properly *epistemological* concern. Indeed, only once McDowell's seesaw has recoiled away from atomism for purely technical reasons (towards the opposite dead-end of wholism) does the need for a more ethical / humanistic appeal begin to be felt. If we are to understand why McDowell chooses to nullify the advantages afforded by his openness thesis, it is therefore to the attack upon receptivity that we must turn.

Of the three main critics of atomism considered by McDowell, it is Sellars who has the greatest hold on his thinking. Quine and Davidson's writings may compete with Sellars' talk of a "logical space of reasons" in supplying McDowell with wholistic imagery, but the third's critique of the Given exerts a markedly greater influence on McDowell's reflections about the receptive side of Kant's twin faculties. Although the relativistic predicament which ensues from the rejection of receptivity is eventually deemed undesirable, McDowell's dismissal of the viability of an atomic contact maintains an almost axiomatic status throughout his attempt at a dismount. In a tug of war between McDowell's mixed influences, the Wittgensteinian side may sometimes overrule Quinean / Davidsonian scepticism vis-

à-vis the opacity of utterances (*cf.* McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 18-23, 27-29), just as Aristotle may sometimes overrule Rorty (*Ibid.*, p. 85-86). But in all the matches one finds in McDowell's corpus, Sellars' critique of the Given emerges an unscathed victor. In fact, McDowell's acquiescence to the argument put forth in Sellars' seminal "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" ([1956] 1963) is so strong that we even find the « faithful student » (McDowell's own words) fearing that the master himself may at times be « dangerously close to a lapse into the Myth of the Given » in his later work (*cf.* McDowell, 1998, p. 467). McDowell's philosophy may be dizzying in its eclecticism, but if it has one overriding concern, it is to avoid being found on the receiving end of that accusation.

Above and beyond exegetical predominance, Sellars' argument is all the more formidable in that one need not be overtly sceptical or speculative to follow its reasoning. Whereas Quine and Davidson present their pleas for wholism in a pseudo-empirical setting concerned with trans-linguistic acquisition and the like, Sellars' own attack is more fundamental, touching at the very structure of representation. A reply to Sellars therefore cannot be purely meta-philosophical, as is the case when we choose to reject the stubborn interlocutor. We will present a substantial reply to Sellars' argument in the third chapter. For now, let us examine the rationale behind his celebrated critique of the "myth" of the Given. For without a firm grasp of the inner logic of this philosophical argument, it is doubtful one can fully appreciate the recoil away from receptivity which triggers McDowell's dialectic.

1.5 Under the spell of Wilfrid Sellars: the mind's one-way door

1.5.1 The broad scope of Sellars' investigation

Much like Quine's "Two Dogmas" ([1953] 2001, p. 20-46) or Kuhn's *Structure* ([1962] 1996)—two wholist manifestos once seen as alternatives to a declining atomistic "paradigm"—historiography has looked down rather benevolently upon

Sellars' critique of the receptive atom. Yet if the winds of the Zeitgeist sometimes hasten discursive propagation, they often do so at the price of lessening the load of the vehicle, the result being that today it is not so much "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" itself which has currency in philosophical culture as its oft-repeated slogan, the "Myth of the Given". Nevertheless, as deVries and Triplett (2000, p. xv) point out in highlighting the fact that "Empiricism" is of greater length than Descartes' *Méditations* or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, a very specific argument underlies that tag line.

As Sellars' "Empiricism" is a piece of fundamental philosophizing, it is of relevance to a host of issues. Most notable among these is the debate surrounding the role, if any, of sensory experience in knowledge and claims about knowledge. Yet it would be a grave mistake to interpret Sellars' seminal reflections on the putatively "mythical" status of the Given as pertaining mainly to issues of perception, with discussions about language, science, and psychology as mere case studies or applications. Granted, as the essay's title testifies, the doctrine of empiricism does provide Sellars with a relatively stable and well-known platform whence to lay out his argument. But his philosophical probings go much deeper and have a much broader scope, as signalled by the fact that he chooses to identify his target with the fairly nondescript label of "the Given".

Sellars' work attempts to present its central tenet by means of successive sketches. As Sellars himself unequivocally states: « If [...] I begin my argument with an attack on sense-datum theories, it is only as a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness » ([1956] 1963, § 1). Like a museum built over a church built over a dolmen, we find this basic "framework of givenness" reflected in a number of technical dualisms throughout the history of philosophy, among which we can name description and (Given) acquaintance, conception and (Given) intuition, scheme and (Given) content, theory and (Given) observation, understanding and (Given) sensibility—and, of course, spontaneity and (Given)

receptivity. These pairings were obviously posited in their own peculiar contexts and, as such, are very different from one another. Nevertheless, they do overlap in a way that points to a common underlying object—one which ostensibly manifests a reality compelling enough for thinkers to have seized upon it time and time again with a fair degree of consistency across synchronic debates and diachronic traditions. Still, Sellars' own philosophic contribution does not consist in merely grouping the latter terms of the above couplings under yet another rubric. Rather, his attempt at describing the Given is subsidiary to a larger, much more complex logical argument vis-à-vis the relation which that supposedly "mythical" notion would have to entertain with its opposite party (i.e., the complementary class of things non-Given).

1.5.2 The Given's essential features

In their extensive and careful study of Sellars' "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", deVries and Triplett arrive at the following characterization of the Given: « *The general framework of givenness consists of the assumption that there are epistemic primitives—beliefs or other mental states that have some positive epistemic status but that are noninferential, conceptually simple, and epistemologically independent and efficacious* » (2000, p. 7; italics in original). By and large, this formulation seems to us quite accurate. Nevertheless, we believe it can be made even more precise by a few choice emendations. In keeping with our desire not to beg the question against the option of atomic receptivity, our guiding concern is to not confuse a *description* of the Given with Sellars' own philosophical *critique* of the Given. In an effort to establish a set of neutral notions whence the debate proper can proceed, we therefore propose to employ a more overtly technical nomenclature, preferring for example the neutral term *atomic* to "conceptually simple" or "epistemologically independent" (indeed, the question whether the Given can even be a "belief" or "mental state"—and an "efficacious" one at that—is the very crux of the issue).

In sum, if we break down the Given into its essential features, we gather that it is 1) *indexical*, 2) *atomic*, and 3) *noninferential*. These three features are the key targets of Sellars' negative thesis to the effect that there is no such thing as the Given. By that same token, the trichotomy entails an opposite set of features which make up Sellars' implicit positive thesis. While his polemic presents this logical alternative to the Given with considerably less force, it can nonetheless be deduced that the non-Given must be *symbolic*, *anatomic*, and *inferential*.

The appellations at play in our typological decomposition of the Given obviously cut across disciplinary boundaries. Any attempt at a stable description of the Given thus runs the risk of diverting our attention away from our intended target. When employing a certain vocabulary or making use of certain examples, one should always add a dash of semantic salt, as the distinction between the Given and the non-Given—mythical or not—aims at something fundamental to the human condition and about which no one academic field of inquiry has a monopoly (it could be argued, for instance, that the religious notion of an unmediated divine revelation gestures at a form of Givenness). Moreover, it should be duly noted that *in distinguishing various traits of the Given, we are considering as apart attributes which can not really exist apart*, as one considers a geometrical shape apart from its colour. It has been said of Sellars' work that « one is presented with a web of interrelated concepts and issues, such that one feels that one could grasp what Sellars had in mind by concept A if only one had a clear grasp of what he meant by concept B, and that understanding B would in turn be an easy matter if only one had a handle on A » (deVries and Triplett, 2000, p. xi). This hints at the fact that the features we have identified are bound by a certain logical ordinality. Although noninferentialism is arguably the epistemic cash value of the Given, that benefit is tributary to an atomistic makeup which in turn flows from an indexical nature. In order that we

may be better equipped to fully understand Sellars' notoriously difficult argument against the Given, let us then dig our way down from its most overtly epistemological trait to the core structural and semiotic features whence it springs.

Noninferentialism is perhaps the least abstract of the Given's features. In any event, it seems fair to say that it is the one which philosophers typically focus on. It's easy to understand why. If inference involves a transfer of (alethic, semantic, and/or doxastic) value from one set of objects to another, the merit of that latter set is dependent on the former in a way that may lead to an infinite regress. A robust validation of inferential knowledge must therefore extend beyond a myopic (type-theoretical) range and ground itself in some "self-authenticating episode" which « would constitute the tortoise on which stands the elephant on which rests the edifice of empirical knowledge » (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 34). The first task, then, is to determine *what* such a noninferential object might be (there is, of course, a second and more demanding task which we will leave aside until the final chapter, namely that of explaining how such a Given item could transmit its self-authenticated value upwards). One obvious and recurrent historical candidate in this regard has been the impingement which the world seems to make upon our senses. Yet as Sellars points out, several other candidates fit the bill: « Many things have been said to be 'given': sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself » ([1956] 1963, § 1). Despite this eclecticism, for an object to serve as a plausible dam to the infinite regress of inferences, it must possess one non-negotiable trait: it must not owe a debt to something other than itself. In other words, it must be *atomic*.

While the term "atomism" has been associated with sundry schools of thought (with prefixes like "logical", "semantic", etc.) that have ascribed it a host of meanings of varying philosophic worth, it is here deployed in its purely technical sense. Strictly speaking, a thing can be said to be *a*tomic (from the Greek "tomos"

or 'cut') just in case it can *not* be divided further; on pain of no longer being (or no longer being what it is). For things which can be so divided, we shall reserve the double-negating term *an*atomic:

> A property is anatomic just in case if anything has it, then at least one other thing does. Consider, for an untendentious example, the property of being a sibling. If I am a sibling, then there is someone whose sibling I am; someone other than me, since no one can be his own sibling. [...] So the property of *being a sibling* is anatomic; I *couldn't be* the only person in the world who instantiates this property. (Fodor and Lepore, 1992, p. 1)

In asking whether something is atomic or anatomic, we naturally exclude a middle ground between the two options, such that 'if not atomic, then anatomic', and 'if not anatomic, then atomic'. As a result, barring the unlikely event that something would be neither atomic nor anatomic, theories that conclude in a definite and covering way that 'nothing can be atomic' or that 'nothing can be anatomic' *ipso facto* settle the matter with regards to their opposite.

The link between atomism and noninferentialism is perhaps made clearest when we consider how these features play out in a theory of concepts. In keeping with the definitions just offered, an anatomic construal permits one to divide a concept into sub-components in order to account for that concept's individuation, i.e., what it is a concept *of*. Thus, to use one of philosophy's most shop-worn example, the concept 'Bachelor' is typically broken down into 'Unmarried' and 'Male'. On this classical anatomistic view then, to have a concept is to have those sub-components. Several advantages ensue from this. For one thing, semantic evaluability can be achieved by breaking down a concept into its constituents. If one who wants to know if a given thing is a 'Bachelor'—that is, if a given object belongs to the class presumably categorized by that concept—then one need only ask whether that thing is unmarried and male. Another boon of construing concepts as anatomic compounds is that it provides as general account of learnability. If one is already a competent possessor of the concepts 'Male' and 'Unmarried', then learning what a bachelor *is* is a matter

of being told and/or discovering that there is good grounds for warranting the conjunction of those two concepts under a new one. No doubt this general picture calls for many additional details, but it pretty much sums up a typical anatomic theory of concepts.

The play of inference becomes readily apparent in such anatomic linkages. For instance, the passage from 'Male' and 'Unmarried' to 'Bachelor' is typically construed as an induction, whereas the movement from 'Bachelor' to 'Male' and 'Unmarried' is seen as a species of deductive reasoning. Once we recognize that these inferential passages can be subject to transitivity, we see how anatomism can potentially lead to wholism:

> Consider, for an untendentious example of a holistic property, *being a natural number*. [...] [N]obody could coherently doubt—and, so far as we know, nobody has ever sought to do so—that if there any numbers, then there must be quite a few. One couldn't, for example, coherently wonder whether there is only the number three. (Fodor and Lepore, 1992, p. 2)

Of course, none of this applies to *atomic* concepts, which are held to be what they are (or are about) independently of any other concept. To continue wearing out our example, 'Bachelor' may be an inferential product of (two) other concepts, but 'Male' can be thought of as answerable to no other. In such a case, the concept 'Male' would be atomic in that it would be essentially—not inferentially—individuated. Thus, if the possession of a concept by an agent is such that it is fundamentally unaffected (both during and after its acquisition) by the possession (or acquisition) of other concepts or lack thereof, then this is because there is something which *alone* makes that concept what it is (or is about). In the case of 'Male', that something would likely be worldly males (or "malehood", depending on the metaphysic). It may very well turn out that some things are anatomic while some others are not. As such, there is nothing in principle to prevent an anatomic object from breaking into parts which themselves are atomic—in fact, that situation must exist if an atomic Given is to dam inferential regress (there is no

necessary induction going from anatomism to wholism). If we want to understand whence come the values of atomic representations, it is therefore not to other representations that we must turn but rather to some autonomous punctate force which needs no inferential assistance. This brings us to the last feature of the Given on our roster: indexicality.

As with atomism, a variety of schools claim the notion of index as their own. One deplorable consequence of this in philosophic circles has been the reduction of indexicality to subjectivity or "context-sensitivity"; as manifested in the oft-repeated error of naively equating the index with "egocentric particulars", "rigid designators", and their kin. Yet the index can be all these things and much more ("I", "you", and "there" do not exhaust the class of possible indices). While attempts by truth-conditional semantics and logic to rigorously incorporate an indexical dimension obviously have their place, one must bear in mind that those endeavours employ a notion of fairly limited scope, both relative to the index's semiotic origins and to the concern with Givenness generally. That said, wholesale adherence to the Peircean system, which originally spawned the notion of index (*cf.* Peirce, 1992, p. 1-10), would do more harm than good to an account of the Given. Contrary to the analytic tradition in philosophy, the problem is not that semiotics is limited in scope, but that it is too encompassing. Indeed, from a strict semiotic point of view, there is no controversy regarding the play of Givenness in our sign-economy (cognitive or otherwise); as a "triadic" realist (*cf.* Champagne, 2006), the semiotician of Peircean descent is *a fortiori* committed to a rich ontology which gives Sellars' position about as much credibility as using semiotics to address the controversy opposing nominalism versus realism: in both instances, the debate would be so thoroughly question-begged towards one camp that there would be no substantial polemic left to address.

Disregarding the overbearing weight of particular traditions, we can begin to capture the indexicality proper to the Given if we liken it to a *gift*. The worth of a gift may vary greatly, from a long sought-after item to a trite knickknack one has no use for. Yet in essence, a gift is something which one does not earn in the same fashion as one earns one's salary, for example. Likewise, we say a person has a gift for a certain task when that person manifests a competence which she has not earned through normal training. What is common to both instances is that a value comes to a receiver at a relative lack of expenditure on her part, in contrast to the complimentary class of non-gifts. We can thus say that the Given is an atomic "chunk" of non-inferential knowledge which indexically "falls on one's lap", so to speak.

As we will see in the second chapter, it will be of crucial importance to McDowell's attempt at resolving the tension between receptivity and spontaneity that someone must "Accept" a gift for it to be properly *Given* (we can think of the loafing genius who refuses to marshal his talent, or again a woman who refuses an admirer's bouquet of flowers). As he writes, « How one's experience represents things to be is not under one's control, but it is up to one whether one accepts the appearance or rejects it » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 11). This undermines the idea that receptivity absolves one of agency; an (albeit minimum) premium of sorts must be assumed by the accepting party to sustain that very act. Yet even if this argument should avail itself correct, it would not affect the fact that the burden of producing a Given must by and large be assumed by something which is *not* the receiver. In its broadest form, the giving party can thus be construed as the non-ego, a role which we naturally see fulfilled by the world (of the infamous "external" variety). Seen in this light, the Given can be said to involve some kind of causal-like force—of which we are *subject*.

A characterization of indexicality as involving causality is rather deficient. For if we ascribe the index a straightforward kind of worldly causality, like dominoes striking each other or a vial of mercury dilating in step with its ambient temperature, then it becomes hard to explain how such brute events could have any *epistemic* relevance. We are thus tempted to augment the notion by saying that the force at play is imbued with significance. Yet if the linking of events is essentially an act of thought, it seems we have left the realm of causality and entered right into that which we wanted to contrast from the start: inference (for a conflation of conventional codifications and indexical correlations, *cf.* Eco, 1976; and the critical discussion in Deely, 2001, p. 712-719). If our grip begins to get slippery at this point, it is because we are nearing the nexus where receptivity and spontaneity cross swords.

1.5.3 Assigning the Given a task it cannot fulfil

We now have at our disposal all the necessary tools to understand Sellars' argument to the effect that the Given is a "myth". Once again, it is important that we formulate our exposition of Sellars' case against the Given in the broadest terms possible. First, as with the umbrella-term "Given", the philosophic *thesis* presented in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" has (and was intended to have) bearing on issues beyond empiricism and the philosophy of mind. Another reason to go the generalized route is that only the most fundamental aspects of the critique presented in Sellars' essay end up exerting an (albeit very pronounced) influence on McDowell's work. The need is thus felt for a summation which does justice to its source, all the while disregarding particular technical squabbles (e.g., over "sense-data" theories) which have no relevance whatsoever to McDowell's grand philosophic reflection on the interface of mind and world. Let us then extract what is most vital to Sellars' celebrated attack—a core tenet we will call the "asymmetry of indexicality thesis".

Sellars argues that the notion of a Given, be it a sense datum or any other, is in effect a « mongrel resulting from a crossbreeding of two ideas », namely:

> 1) The idea that there are certain inner episodes [...] which can occur to human beings (and brutes) without any prior process of learning or concept formation; and without which it would *in some sense* be impossible to see, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular, or *hear* that a certain physical sound is C#. (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 7)

and,

> 2) The idea that there are certain inner episodes which are non-inferential knowings that certain items are, for example, red or C#; and that these episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge as providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions. (*Ibid.*)

Sellars believes that « as far as the above formulation goes, there is no reason to suppose that having the sensation of a red triangle is a *cognitive* or *epistemic* fact » (*Ibid.*, § 7). The pivotal issue here lies in determining exactly the conditions that an experience must satisfy so it may rightfully claim to serve as an item of *knowledge*. To this query, Sellars answers that all items of knowledge must in some way demonstrate epistemic *authority* ([1956] 1963, § 34). The question which flows from this is whether it is logically possible for something to impose epistemic authority by its very act of being—that is, whether it is possible for something to be "self-authenticating". The Given, it is held, can atomically stand on its own feet thanks to its indexical force. According to this view, a green thing authoritatively imposes the truth of its greenness; there is no need to go beyond one's atomic link to that thing and seek out *other* reasons to confirm or justify the epistemic warrant that the thing in question is indeed green.

However, Sellars argues that this primitive knowledge can seem plausible only if we ignore a slew of inferences which are anatomically bound to the authentification of any belief. Of these linkages, the most obvious is the collateral knowledge one must possess (and mobilize) in order to correctly frame an encounter with a Given: «

Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the colour of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort *are* appropriate » (*Ibid.*, § 19). In essence, the argument is that unless one can authenticate the framing conditions of an indexical episode, one cannot authenticate the content purportedly delivered in that episode. This contention parallels the previously-discussed argument to the effect that a translation manual's epistemic authority is only as strong as the initial conjectures of a field linguist. However, Sellars is not denying a priori that framing conditions could in principle be adequately specified (the stubborn interlocutor murmuring dimly in the background, Sellars does warn that such conditions would be subject to « the vagueness and open texture characteristic of ordinary discourse »; *ibid.*, § 18). His point is only that should such precise specification of framing conditions be achieved, we would have to recognize that the warrant of our observations no longer "stands on its own feet" but is inferentially "joined at the hip" with the warrant of our stipulations.

Sellars identifies another, much more subtle, anatomic linkage which seemingly ruptures the atomicity of a noninferential Given. It is part and parcel of the notion of a Given that the indexical force which delivers its content to the mind simply cannot be mistaken. As H. H. Price—arguably one of the most sophisticated defenders of the Given the empiricist tradition has produced—writes:

> When I see a tomato there is much that I can doubt. I can doubt whether it is a tomato that I am seeing, and not a cleverly painted piece of wax. I can doubt whether there is any material thing there at all. Perhaps what I took for a tomato was really a reflection; perhaps I am even the victim of some hallucination. One thing however I cannot doubt: that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape, standing out from a background of other colour-patches, and having a certain visual depth, and that this whole field of colour is directly present to my consciousness. What the red patch is, whether a substance, or a state of a substance, or an event, whether it is physical or psychical or neither, are questions that we may doubt about. But that something is red and round then and there I cannot doubt. [...] And when I say that it is 'directly' present to my consciousness, I mean that my consciousness of it is not reached by inference, nor by any other intellectual process [...]. (1932 [1981], p. 3)

Contrary to this view, Sellars argues that for the Given to yield something which could rightly lay claim to being an item of knowledge, it would have to manifest one important trait proper to all things epistemic: it would have to open itself to the possibility of falsity. As part of his polemic against empiricists, Sellars astutely observes that while « it is the fact that it *does not make sense* to speak of unveridical sensations which strikes these philosophers, though for it to strike them as it does, they must overlook the fact that if it makes sense to speak of an experience as *veridical* it must correspondingly make sense to speak of it as *unveridical* » ([1956] 1963, § 7). If we understand this correctly, it means Price's infallible bulgy colour-patch could never serve as knowledge.

According to deVries and Triplett, « fallibility of belief [...] actually plays *no* role in Sellars' argument » (2000, p. xxvii). Indeed, Sellars' comment about the link between the veridical and unveridical does not go on to do much work in his essay, although we are not alone in having seized upon this passage (*cf.* for example Dancy and Sosa, 1999, p. 160). In any event, the difficulties which Sellars apparently wants to draw attention to are analogous to Parmenides' law. The affirmation that a thing is true or real *and could not be otherwise* may perhaps transcendentally mark off an (albeit quirky) *ontological* fact. However, it seems clear that such Givenness (empiricist or rationalist) would have nothing in common with what we normally take to be the very stuff of understanding. For « in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, *we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state*; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says » (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 36; italics ours). An indexical episode which would inevitably self-authenticate therefore could not be considered *epistemic*.

We can thus better appreciate the rationale behind Sellars' earlier-quoted description of the Given as a "mongrel" begotten by ideas which in fact cannot

copulate ([1956] 1963, § 7). In sum, Sellars maintains that the episodes in Russell's account of "knowledge by acquaintance" should not be considered a species of the genus *knowledge*. In the words of H. H. Price:

> It may [...] be suggested that though that which is given is not altered by the attempt to know about it, yet its *givenness* is destroyed by that attempt; so that although a certain red patch after being described is the same entity as it was before, yet it is not the same datum—for it is no longer a datum at all, but has become an 'intellectum' instead. (1932 [1981], p. 17)

Price eloquently sums up the sort of predicament alluded to by Sellars by saying that "we murder to dissect" (*Ibid.*, p. 15; note that this is *not* the view defended by Price).

1.5.4 The ineffable limit of thought

Would this have been all to Sellars' position, it would not have added anything substantially new to the historical repertoire of philosophical tenets. What we would have, in effect, is mere a reaffirmation of idealism. But while Sellars' project does align with idealism to some extent, the originality of his stance rests with the fact that he chose to *virtually*—not completely—eliminate the "non-idea" from the playing field. Indeed, Sellars does not rule out the possibility that we do connect with worldly objects in a manner consistent with the standard account of the Given.

> Let me make it clear, however, that if I reject this framework [where the perceptually given is the foundation of empirical knowledge], it is not because I should deny that observing are *inner* episodes, nor that *strictly speaking* they are *nonverbal* episodes. (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 38)
>
> .....
>
> There is clearly *some* point to the picture of human knowledge as resting on a level of propositions—observation reports—which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them. (*Ibid.*)

We can get a good understanding of what motivates this concession if we think of Sellars' reflections as guided by a central desideratum, one captured by Wittgenstein's admonition that « in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit » ([1921] 2002, p. 27). Indeed, how could

one ever disrobe the object of thought of its ideational garment and *speak* of a world beyond language? Whoever acquiesces to this tenet is then confronted with a choice. On the one hand, one can adopt a "pansemiotist" stance and maintain that the world *qua* ontological sphere is « perfused with signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs » (Peirce, 1998, p. 394). On the other hand, one can opt for "transsemiotic agnosticism" which explicitly construes the non-represented as « a vague, uncharted nebula » about which nothing can be said (*cf.* Nöth, 1995, p. 81). If we slice our notions as thickly as a William James, a convincing case could be made that—at least epistemologically—these two positions involve a trivial "difference which makes no difference". However, *metaphysically*, it seems sober to acknowledge that transsemiotic agnosticism departs from pansemiotism in a potentially important way by refusing to *fuse* thought and object. In short, same premises, different entailments.

As advantageous as pansemiotism may be on a philosophical front, one gathers that it was not palatable to Sellars' core intuitions (someone like Richard Rorty, for instance, will have no such qualms on the matter). Sellars' agnostic metaphysic thus departs from wholesale pansemiotism in obliquely acknowledging the presence of some *terra incognita*. From a biographical standpoint, it could be surmised that Sellars' reluctance vis-à-vis pansemiotism stems from some primitive sympathy towards scientific realism, an attitude common to positivist-era philosophers. Indeed, it can be argued that no one has taken up the task of uniting experience and thought with greater militancy than that motley assemblage which at one time rallied under the aptly titled banner of "logical empiricism". Yet the irony is that, by a series of progressive retreats from their incipient ideal, this influential movement did more to spread the "inchoate" feeling of disconnectedness from the world described by McDowell than any nineteenth-century idealist school. As a contemporary witness to this tragic spectacle, Sellars was acutely aware of the philosophic difficulties which ensue when one digs a chasm between *in praesentia* contact and

in absentia representation. In light of these concerns, his work ostensibly seeks a way to incorporate an ineffable ontological domain which can buttress scientific realism against relativistic attacks—all the while being spared the epistemological vicissitudes associated with the notion of experiential receptivity. Sellars found he could achieve just that via what we call his "asymmetry of indexicality thesis": experiences may yet *cause* our ideas, but they cannot *justify* them.

While the asymmetry of indexicality thesis recognizes the possibility that worldly forces affect our bodily lives in several ways, it insists that these causal influences could never enter the discursive space where a claim to knowledge can be deployed. The *hic et nunc* contacts which are the stuff of receptive experience, Sellars argues, are fundamentally incommensurate with our abstract representations in a way that bars us from ever supposing that the epistemic warrant of the latter could be answerable to the former (for that task, it is to wholistic coherence that one must turn). Returning to our earlier analogy, we can summarize this asymmetrist view by saying that the moment one of receives a gift, it is no longer Given but *Owned*.

Such a dynamic in epistemology obviously blends perfectly with an agnostic stance in metaphysics, as both accord the mind's non-discursive encounters with the world a *limit* place (in the mathematical sense of the term). Thus, much like Berkeley evocatively likened infinitesimals to empty "ghosts", Sellars criticizes those who seek to moor epistemological normativity on the far side of the frontier of thought by pejoratively belittling their notion of Givenness as a "myth".

1.5.5 McDowell's concurrence with Sellars

As we saw, McDowell maintains that the mind's openness to the world allows it to transparently bypass surrogates like second-hand reports so as to access objects directly (sect. 1.4.1). Were we to hold that agents engage in quasi-forensic

verifications of other agents' claims before accepting them, he argues, we would be artificially introducing a distance between mind and world which clearly plays no part in our everyday cognitive situation:

> Consider a tourist in a strange city, looking for the cathedral. He asks a passer-by, who is in fact a resident and knows where the cathedral is, for directions, hears and understands what the passer-by says, and finds the cathedral just where his informant said he would. [...]
>
> If we accept the conception of mediated standings [...], can we match the intuitive verdict? That would require the tourist to have at his disposal an argument to a conclusion about the whereabouts of the cathedral [...]. I believe this is hopeless [...]. If we make the ancillary premises seem strong enough to do the trick, it merely becomes dubious that the tourist has them at his disposal; whereas if we weaken the premises, the doubt attaches to their capacity to transmit, across the argument, the right sort of rational acceptability for believing its conclusion to amount to knowledge. ([1993] 1998, p. 417, 418)

In light of inference's impotence, a reader unaware of McDowell's collateral philosophic commitments would be forgiven for thinking that the cathedral's location is *Given* to the tourist (compare, for example, McDowell's view of hearsay with the noninferential account of "semantic access" developed by Fodor, 1998, p. 75-80). However, as it turns out, this is not the case, and McDowell stays true to his asymmetrist sympathies.

His motive here is understandable enough. Should the forceful self-evidence of the worldly landmark cited above carry over into the space of reasons, one would be warranted in having recourse to ostension (e.g., "Look and see for yourself that what I say about the cathedral's location is true")—thereby effectively undermining the Sellars-inspired contention that the Given « offers us at best exculpations where we wanted justifications » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 13). In order to avoid any such seismic shifts in his grid of philosophic commitments, McDowell is compelled to construe the openness thesis as pertaining only to the causal or "input" half of a

cognitive transaction. Once inside the mind's one-way door, the contents noninferentially delivered answer to a justificatory epistemology that is inferential through and through.

This, of course, threatens to bring McDowell back to the sort of free-floating coherentism that marks one end of the seesaw. For since « spontaneity characterizes exercises of conceptual understanding in general » (*Ibid.*, p. 11), there is nothing to ensure that whatever accounts woven in defence of a given claim attest to its actual objectivity and not just prowess or expediency within the whole. In other words, although the world heretofore made itself "open" to the mind in experience, incorporation of the asymmetrist constraint makes it slip away into a remote (ineffable) region. Seeing how McDowell is not prepared to discharge his Sellarsian commitments, he must therefore find a way to reintroduce some kind of friction into his picture. Breaking away from the transcendentalism espoused by Sellars and Kant, McDowell thus opts to supply friction *from within*, as it were, via « a standing willingness to refashion concepts and conceptions if that is what reflection recommends » (*Ibid.*, p. 12-13). As we will see in the next chapter, McDowell believes our natural constitution as rational animals entails not only the *ability* to critically reflect on the merit of our representations, but an *obligation* to do so (although he insists that the compelling power of this edict needs to brought out by civilized upbringing).

We can now better compass the rationale which led McDowell to advocate his policy of mistrust vis-à-vis beliefs, new or established (sect. 1.4.2). As the one-way door conception risks letting spontaneity run amok, McDowell felt compelled to add a « standing obligation to reflect about the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that govern [empirical thinking] » ([1994] 2002, p. 12). Whereas Sellars' penchant for the philosophy of science had him substituting the empirical friction thrown by the wayside with a principle of economy « which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once » ([1956] 1963, § 38), McDowell's own humanistic

bent sees him opt for a more ethical-sounding replacement. As deVries and Triplett point out, « McDowell is a moral (or more broadly, normative) realist whereas Sellars is not » (2000, p. 91n10). In either case though, the situation we get is essentially the same we had with Quine and Davidson: atomistic ties to the world having been undermined to a point of virtual impotence (by collateral noise or asymmetrical structure), syntactic relations and pragmatic imperatives come in to fill the epistemological void.

We also see how the sophisticated position developed by Sellars allows McDowell to advocate "openness" *and* repudiate the Given as a "myth" in the same breath: the transparency (and seeming Givenness) of "openness" pertains only to the *ontogenesis* of representations, not their epistemic justification. Thus, no matter how noninferential and atomic the contents delivered by openness may be, the moment these enter the mind, the door snaps shut behind them; they are no longer answerable to punctate correspondences with the world. As Thornton writes:

> A mediated epistemic standing is one that depends on rational relations to other positions. In other words, it is justified by other positions such as grounded beliefs. An unmediated standing, by contrast, would be one that was foundational [...]. Both Sellars and McDowell take perception to involve a mediated state. (2004, p. 194)
>
> .....
>
> Rather than attempting to decompose the concept of knowledge into constituent elements that form its epistemological base or foundation, McDowell suggests that *it* is the most basic concept in play. Justification is thus explicated from the starting-point of knowledge taken as a basic standing in the space of reasons. (*Ibid.*, p. 195-196)

Drawing on the technical distinctions we have established, we can translate this by saying that McDowell aligns himself with Sellars in holding knowledge to be irreducibly symbolic, anatomic, and inferential (i.e., non-Given). Thus, no matter how "open" our contact with the world may be, McDowell holds that claims purporting to bear on that domain in the end have their merit only within the symbolic space of reasons (which, on his pansemiotism, is "unbounded"). From a

normative standpoint, McDowell's standing obligation to critically reconsider our beliefs effectively annuls the direct realism afforded by his openness thesis. In short, McDowell agrees with Sellars that the world enters the mind by way of a one-way door—only he happens to think that that door is very wide.

1.6 Conclusion

The goal of this first chapter was to present the main philosophic arguments which give rise to the oscillation between atomism and wholism—flagging those sensitive areas we will exploit further in our quest for a third way while displaying the meta-philosophic means by which we intend to do so.

In sum, the seesaw is set in motion by a recoil away from the idea that atomic episodes of receptivity can be the arbiters of epistemological matters. The oscillation thus begins with the plausible idea that the mind's representations are answerable to one-to-one correspondences, the standing of each being assessed by juxtaposing it with its parallel object in the world. According to this stance, a representation is objectively grounded if it can indeed be perceived to be "thus and so". This view is therefore atomic and non-inferential, insofar at the experiential verdict returned has nothing to do with whatever other beliefs one might have. Moreover, since the mind has no say in the worldly matter of whether or not a given correspondence between a representation and its object indeed obtains, this option holds that it is not to conceptual spontaneity but to receptivity that epistemological normativity must turn.

This stance, however, is not without problems. Accordingly, we distinguished two kinds of philosophic reprobations in this chapter, both of which uphold some form of wholism as an alternative. The first attack on atomism is exemplified by the "radical translation" scenario developed by Quine and Davidson, and the second by the asymmetry of indexicality thesis elaborated by Sellars. The former view holds that one could not even pin down the worldly referent of an utterance—let alone

normatively assess its merit—if one did not already possess a wholistic context within which it could be located. According to this gloss, there are so many variables at play in ostensive reporting that any clear and distinct target established amidst informational tumult is more a product of mind than of world. In light of this underdetermination, it is claimed that divergent systems of representations can square equally well with worldly contacts, and that our means for choosing between self-consistent rivals is pragmatic expediency. Yet we argued that if one adopts a philosophic posture that does not allow the intervention of speculative scepticism, this kind of critique of receptivity can not even attain *prima facie* plausibility.

As we saw, McDowell's commitment to anti-scepticism wavers. Granted, his work makes a sincere effort to try and renew with "enchanted" conceptions that admit representational freedom as a non-problematic feature of the natural realm. Unfortunately, McDowell upholds other commitments which effectively sap the philosophic force of his more sober tenets. A particularly salient expression of this is his belief that we should refashion our representations if that is what spontaneous thought recommends, a quasi-ethical demand which effectively undercuts the transparency of his "openness to the world" thesis.

In an attempt to understand why McDowell does not simply espouse a strong kind of empirical realism, we were led to examine another key argument against receptivity. In contrast with Quine and Davidson's, this Sellarsian critique of "the myth of the Given" does not appeal overtly to the *ad hoc* generation of doubt. Central to that stance is the technical contention that, owing to the very structure of representation, atomic receptivity can at best cause beliefs, not ground them in any epistemologically meaningful way. As we saw, McDowell was most impressed by this Sellarsian argument, and made it a point to try and accommodate it in his philosophizing—a decision whose far-reaching repercussions will become increasingly apparent in the next chapter.

Is this right though? Is the interface of mind and world so constituted that while representation may be causally rooted in receptive experience, that worldly pedigree is structurally barred from ever bestowing upon it epistemic merit? It seems we are faced with a fork in the road. Either we go the *symmetry* route and accept that the warrant of our representations (knowledge, beliefs, etc.) can appeal to their indexical origin; or we go the *asymmetry* route and grant that while such atomic indexicality may contribute to their ontogenesis, their validation is answerable solely to a wholistic epistemology where internal coherence supplants any and all worldly arbitrament. By our lights, there is no great dilemma here: the asymmetry of indexicality expounded by Wilfrid Sellars—and accepted by John McDowell in his own flight from Givenness—is simply mistaken. We take it to be an axiom that a long stretch of reasoning is only as good as its conclusion; and the implications of asymmetry, as we will see in the third chapter, are simply disastrous.

Fortunately, philosophical reflection allows us to draw out the ramifications of a given tenet and see where, if we are consistent, it will lead us. Let us then provisionally suspend judgement on the matter and dutifully follow McDowell down the path he has chosen. Once we reach the end of that road, we will be in a position to determine whether the decision to go the asymmetry route was a good one—or whether we took a wrong turn and should part company with McDowell so as to retrace our steps back to the original point of bifurcation. As McDowell himself states, « If following what pass for norms of inquiry turns out not to improve our chances of being right about the world, that just shows we need to modify our conception of the norms of inquiry » ([1994] 2002, p. 151). For if the ends don't justify the means, what *on Earth* does?

CHAPTER II

McDOWELL'S THIRD WAY: FUSING THE TWIN FACULTIES

> If you board the wrong train, it is no use running along the corridor in the other direction.
>
> Dietrich Bonhoeffer
> *The Way to Freedom* (1935-39)

2.1 Introduction

We have argued that McDowell's respect for the canons of philosophy is inconsistent with his professed disavowal of sceptical concerns. Even if such historical sensitivity is indeed a bane to the search for a tenable third way, it is clearly central to the exposition of McDowell's arguments. Indeed, any serious appreciation of *Mind and World*'s dialectic calls for a working familiarity with a host of historical reference points, the most notable being: 1) the general atomistic schema developed by Russell and other empiricists, 2) Sellars' (negative) critique of the Given, 3) Quine and Davidson's (positive) wholism, and 4) Rorty's (and Davidson's) relativistic conclusions. This somewhat terse curriculum obviously neglects many other thinkers considered by McDowell, like Evans, Aristotle, Kant, and Gadamer (all of whom we will encounter in due time). What's more, some of the prerequisites we have listed play a more *tacit* role in McDowell's narrative. For example, the "inchoate" anxiety vis-à-vis frictionless wholes is largely taken for granted, as are the precise technical reasons underpinning the Sellarsian flight from Givenness. Nevertheless, those four historical points of reference do the most work

in the architectonic of *Mind and World*, their interplay constituting the main lines along which runs the oscillation between atomism and wholism. In short, (1) is an initial state from which (2) recoils to (3), leading to (4) whence a movement back to (1) commences—unless of course we find a tenable third way out.

The historical dimension manifest in *Mind and World* belies the fact that McDowell's positive-theoretic recommendations have a profoundly revisionist drift to them, owing much to Wittgenstein's belief that philosophical problems are in fact products of the shortcomings of our conceptual (or linguistic) vocabulary. In his extensive monograph, Tim Thornton wonders whether McDowell's « assumption that the history of philosophy can be of positive help in forming a correct understanding of our place in nature » is compatible with his Wittgenstein-inspired therapeutic style of philosophizing (Thornton, 2004, p. 20; *cf.* p. 244). Whatever the degree of stableness of this hybrid approach, it is clear that the historical component of *Mind and World* is not intended to provide a shopping list of established "-isms" which might perchance fit McDowell's peculiar conjunction of grievances and desiderata. Granted, in a less revisionist mood, McDowell stated his programmatic desire « to stand on the shoulders of the giant, Kant, and see our way to the supersession of traditional philosophy that he almost managed, though not quite » but which Hegel, who « we take almost no notice of », purportedly did (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 111). But in spite of the fact that he embeds his reflection in contexts familiar to those trained in the orthodox philosophical tradition, McDowell attempts to dismount the futile back and forth by means—not of substantial theories—but of radically novel ways of "picturing" the interface of mind and world. We can capture the tenor of this Wittgensteinian twist to McDowell's enterprise by saying instead that "If we can't see any farther than our predecessors, it is because giants are blocking our view".

McDowell's work invites us to entertain two conceptual possibilities which—if they are indeed possible—certainly lie along lines of vision not habitual to our eyes. The most elemental of these is his advocacy of what can only be described as "*receptive spontaneity*": « The position I am urging appeals to receptivity to ensure friction, like the Myth of the Given, but it is unlike the Myth of the Given in that it takes capacities of spontaneity to be in play all the way out to the ultimate grounds of empirical judgements » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 67). In essence, this proposal consists in a radicalization of Kant's credo: the twin faculties are said to be so closely allied in their partnership as to be *indistinguishable* (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 9). According to McDowell, the experiential episodes we naturally think of as paradigm-cases of pure receptivity to the world comprise a certain degree of spontaneity. Similarly, he holds that the sovereignty we have over our most abstract beliefs is in fact subject to a form of receptivity by way of a standing obligation to pass those convictions under review. Just as human nature provides the mind with a means of taking in the world but moderates that passivity by requiring it to Accept or Refuse the deliverances of experience, so does it bestow upon the mind the freedom to adjust the rational linkages of its representations but curbs that agency by exacting upon it a responsibility to critically attend to the rational warrant of these manoeuvres.

As a consequence of this amalgamation of receptivity and spontaneity, McDowell champions a *pansemiotist* picture: « Although reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere » (*Ibid.*, p. 26). What we have here is a fundamental revision of Kant and Sellars' transcendental framework: since in light of the aforementioned fusion « we need no longer be unnerved by the freedom implicit in the idea that our conceptual capacities belong to a faculty of spontaneity » (*Ibid.*, p. 10), there is no need to posit an ineffable limit beyond thought so as to buttress our representations and prevent them from foundering into relativism. Although this entails that the

judiciary role formerly assigned to "the tribunal of experience" now lies squarely *within* the bounds of thought, we should not be bothered by that fact. Instead, McDowell believes we should accept that the mind is so constituted that its web of representations has no outer periphery. On this view, only once we shall come round to embracing this pansemiotist picture and desist considering implausible alternatives shall we find peace and put an end to the seesaw. It is not so much the limit beyond thought of the transsemiotic agnostic we must dissipate nor a greater agnosticism we must observe, but rather the "inchoate anxiety" we must learn to overcome.

Our goal in this chapter will be to canvass this McDowellian third way, and then criticize what we consider its main weaknesses. The first parts of the chapter will attempt to reconstruct the structure of McDowell's complicated argument, gathering various sub-arguments scattered throughout *Mind and World* and assembling them in a way that brings out their (sometimes latent) logical connections. Since we will be striving to establish a synoptic analysis that is as faithful and comprehensive as possible, the overall tone of our discussion will remain largely uncritical. Beginning with the general Kantian ideas that serve as an inspiration and frame of reference for McDowell's search, we will retrace the core amendments that he argues must be made if we are ever to overcome the fatal flaws in Kant's synthesis and realize a satisfactory dismount from the oscillation. Using Gareth Evans' views on "singular thought" as a foil, we will then detail McDowell's technical account of his own fusion of receptivity and spontaneity. This will subsequently lead us to an in-depth examination of the ancillary proposals that ensue from the McDowellian fusion, the most notable being pansemiotism and the doctrine of "second nature". Upon having summarized in an orderly fashion the logic of McDowell's positive-theoretic contribution, the final portion of the chapter will be devoted to criticising the more problematic elements of his proposal. We will conclude with an overall assessment of the tenability of McDowell's third way, and preview the path soon to be taken.

2.2 The main thrust of the McDowellian dismount

2.2.1 Selectively modifying the Kantian heritage

We have likened Kant's admonition that « Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind » ([1787] 1965, B75) to a beacon mentoring McDowell's investigations from afar. Kant figures in *Mind and World* as a trailblazer of sorts—one with the distinction of having come « within a whisker of a satisfactory escape from the oscillation » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 42). His central accomplishment, in McDowell's view, was his overwhelming preoccupation with the bringing together of opposites. However, the fatal flaw which undermined the success of Kant's philosophic achievements, McDowell argues, is to be found in his transcendentalism.

Distinguished in his own time by an intimate familiarity with the rival traditions of rationalism and empiricism, Kant brought his thorough understanding to bear on nothing less than the question of the interface of mind and world. At the heart of his complex reflections on this issue lies his contention that the very structure of our knowledge of the world presupposes the active involvement of the mind. There is no point in passing in review the specific arguments which lead Kant to this momentous conclusion; for McDowell, ignoring technical preoccupations with synthetic a priori judgements and the like, retains only the general pith of the Kantian insight. That Kant was concerned to distinguish the scope and import of his various categories (e.g., with regards to the nature of mathematics and so forth) is thus of little relevance to the project which unfolds in *Mind and World*. What matters instead is the general idea that our conceptual faculty is not a mere receptacle waiting to be filled with an experiential content which somehow has (or had) a life of its own prior to being receptively poured into that vessel. As Robert Brandom observes,

> [W]ith Kant and Sellars, McDowell understands experience as a thoroughly conceptual achievement. Thus he insists that anything that does not have concepts does not have perceptual experience either. [...]
>
> McDowell also insists that anything that does not have perceptual experience does not have concepts either. [...] In his synthesis of these themes of classical rationalism and classical empiricism, as in so many other respects, McDowell is a Kantian. (2002, p. 92, 93)

To affirm that mind and world are so intertwined, however, is no small move. Indeed, despite its deceptive simplicity, it is this quintessential insight which forms the cornerstone of Kant's famous "Copernican Revolution". The reason why the objects of human knowledge, regardless of how far we seek them, fit so nicely within our conceptual expectations, is that they are products of a precisely *human* apparatus (*cf.* Kant, [1787] 1965, Bxvi). This apparent truism, however, has profound consequences for our conception of our place in the ontological scheme of things. In a sense, the Kantian project of accounting for the intelligibility of experience proves almost *too* successful, as it compels us to acknowledge that it is not so much the mind which is in the world, but rather the world that is in the mind.

Yet if epistemological inquiries more easily bow before the verdicts of logical reasoning, matters of ontology are an altogether different affair, being frequently marred with partialities immune to argument. Thus, while Kant's insight is more readily granted *qua* theory of knowledge, its metaphysical outcome does not go down so smoothly. As McDowell rightly points out:

> [T]he idea of the Given is not something that comes to us in calm reflection, as if from nowhere, as a possible basis for the epistemology of empirical knowledge, so that we can cheerfully drop it when we see that it does not work. Rather, the idea of the Given is a response to a way of thinking that underlies the familiar philosophical anxiety about empirical knowledge [...].
>
> We can seem to be forced into the idea of the Given; that is what happens when we are impressed by the thought that conceptual capacities belong to a faculty of spontaneity, and fall into worrying that our picture deprives itself of the possibility that exercises of concepts could be what it depicts, because it leaves out any rational constraint from outside the sphere of thought. ([1994] 2002, p. 15)

However, McDowell insists that such a retreat is futile, being but one more movement in the endless oscillation between a receptivity-based atomism and a wholism governed by spontaneity. What this strategy advocates, in effect, is a return to the original idea of experience as an unmediated access to the real. But while « the idea of the Given can give the appearance of reinstating thought's bearing on reality », McDowell argues that that appearance is in fact « illusory » and « does not fulfil its apparent promise » (*Ibid.*, p. 15, 16). Thus, by opting to reject pansemiotism, one effectively resets the dialectic back to its initial state. The problem is that this initial state is not one rest: in reviving the idea of receptive input, one revives all the puzzles that accompany it, for « in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit » (Wittgenstein, [1921] 2002, p. 27). A pansemiotist view, it would seem, is something our philosophic imagination simply has to learn to live with.

There is however another, more subtle, way to reject pansemiotism: posit a "limit" beyond thought and deny its involvement in thought *per se*. Seen in this light, experiential receptivity can be construed as an irreplaceable and necessary constitutive feature of the possibility of knowledge whilst disowning the idea that there could be such a thing a normative assessment free of discursive considerations. As we have seen (sect. 1.5.4), this is the strategy employed by Sellars in his bid to safeguard his realist sympathies. In his case, the world is seen as holding a merely *causal* office. Sellars points out that for the indexical impacts which the world produces upon the mind to have any authoritative sway, they must necessarily rise above their *hic et nunc* character. Therefore, to posit experiential episodes as a justification for the acceptance of some claim, one must alter them in such a way that they may fit into a "logical space" where premises and inferences are the only currency.

Nevertheless, even if the brute causation which empiricism exalts cannot do any *epistemic* work, it can be acknowledged as a plausible contributor to the *ontogenesis*

of our symbolic representations. Whereas for Sellars this function is assigned a causal-*cum*-diachronic priority, in Kant it is glossed as a condition of possibility commanding a ontological-*cum*-synchronic priority. In any event, the Kantian noumenal realm is much like Sellars' mythical limit in being (fittingly) beyond our reach. The mind may be endowed with the ability to sound out its very boundaries by transcendentally deducing the conditions under which its experience of the world is possible, but any cogitation to that effect is by its very nature indefensible.

An obvious retort to all this, of course, is that "talk" of the ineffable is highly specious at best. The centrality of the noumenal realm in Kant's philosophy (which was intended as a safeguard for moral and religious assumptions) makes it a particularly facile target for this kind of accusation. Yet even Sellars will be seen by McDowell as transgressing the self-imposed agnosticism on matters non-semiotic—especially in his sequel to "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (Sellars, [1967] 1992), where the quasi-noumenal character of the unspeakable side of the Wittgensteinian frontier of thought is played up.

> Sellars thinks the transcendental role of sensibility, in properly Kantian thinking, is to supply manifolds of "sheer receptivity" to guide conceptual representations. At one point, he suggests that Kant needs this picture if he is to "avoid the dialectic which leads from Hegel's *Phenomenology* to nineteenth-century idealism". This remark is instructive.
>
> Sellars is invoking Hegel as a bogeyman: as someone who, by failing to acknowledge any external constraint on thought, makes it unintelligible how what he is picturing can be directed at what is independently real [...]. (McDowell, 1998, p. 466)

Thus, despite his concordance with Kant and Sellars on many other fronts, it is on account of an ineffable world beyond mind that McDowell will choose to stray from their philosophic counsel (forcing him to examine the extent of his Hegelian sympathies in the process).

2.2.2 Embracing the world fully in thought

Julian Dodd stakes out two basic ways of construing the objective alignment of mind and world: « Whereas a correspondence theorist holds that facts are extralinguistic items which make propositions true, an identity theorist, by contrast, believes true propositions to *be* facts » (1995, p. 160). Assuming propositions to be the truth-bearers par excellence (while it may yet have some validity) is rather awkward for our purposes, which centre on the normative assessment of representations generally. Nevertheless, Dodd's distinction brings to the fore two very different ways of picturing the relation which ensues when the mind objectively represents the world. In essence, the issue here is whether, in such cases, it even makes sense to speak of a *relation* holding between mind and world. For Dodd's correspondence theorist, although a perfect alignment would signal the attainment of complete objectivity, that epistemological state would not endanger the fundamental difference distinguishing the thinking subject from her worldly object. In contrast, for Dodd's identity theorist, such a perfect match would effectively extinguish the relation, thereby entailing a complete merger of thought and object.

Given McDowell's commitment to fusion and pansemiotism, it should come as no surprise that he falls into the latter category. McDowell claims that « there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort 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 » ([1994] 2002, p. 27). He openly recognizes that this view owes much to the *Philosophical Investigations*' assertion that « 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* » (Wittgenstein, [1953] 2001, § 95).

Now despite its apparent philosophic extravagance, McDowell argues that the idea of the mind fully reaching the world in fact has a plausibility bordering on the platitudinous. As he writes:

> [T]o say there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world is just to dress up a truism in high-flown language. All the point comes to is that one can think, for instance, *that spring has begun*, and that very same thing, *that spring has begun*, can be the case. That is truistic, and it cannot embody something metaphysically contentious, like slighting the independence of reality. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 27)

Note the patent lack of any "disquotational" apparatus in this passage. What in the standard convention would figure as the quotation-free object of a quoted metalinguistic sentence (*cf.* Tarski, 1944) is here provocatively rendered in the same (italicized) manner, since for McDowell the very identity of the content at hand (i.e., that spring has begun) licenses the abolition of any substantial ontological distinction (for a working out of this stance's Wittgensteinian roots, *cf.* McDowell, [1984] 1998, especially p. 254-255). The reiteration of spring's beginning can perhaps have some informational value, making explicit to others and to oneself the fact that the thinking agent has fully embraced a feature of the world—which McDowell here conveniently takes to be « everything that is the case » ([1994] 2002, p. 27; *pace* Wittgenstein, [1921] 2002, § 1). But such reiteration, in McDowell's view, serves merely to underscore, not undermine, realism. He thus argues that it is imperative no metaphysical role-attribution be read into the doubling:

> [A] phobia of idealism can make people suspect we are renouncing the independence of reality [...]. But we might just as well take the fact that the sort of thing one can think is the same as the sort of thing that can be the case the other way round, as an invitation to understand the notion of the sort of thing one can think in terms of a supposedly prior understanding of the sort of thing that can be the case. And in fact there is no reason to look for priority in either direction. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 28)

A strange way to reformulate McDowell's point would be to say that if and when we successfully represent, we do not. When the thinking agent entertains a truth about the world, the contribution of her representational apparatus (be it conceptual and/or sensory) to this epistemic state is for all intents and purposes erased. There is thus no need, McDowell argues, to posit the presence of some representational

vehicle *through which* agents access the world: « When we are not misled by experience, we are directly confronted by a worldly state of affairs itself, not waited on by an intermediary that happens to tell the truth » ([1994] 2002, p. 143). As Dodd remarks: « From the perspective of the identity theorist, the correspondence theorist is guilty of double vision: she looks for correspondence where there can only be coincidence » (1995, p. 160).

McDowell wants to construe truth as an objective alignment of mind and world so pronounced that the two basically merge into each other. Assured by his ethical realism (*cf.* McDowell, [1979] 1998) that his standing obligation to reflect can supply the friction sought by the mind without having to somehow exit its own domain, McDowell thus breaks with Kant and Sellars' metaphysical agnosticism and confidently defends a pansemiotist view of representation he labels "The Unboundedness of the Conceptual" ([1994] 2002, p. 24-45). According to this view, « [a]lthough reality is independent of our thinking, it is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere » (*Ibid.*, p. 26). What we have here is a proposal to fundamentally revise the way we "picture" the domain of our representations, taking the Quinean image of our knowledge as web or fabric of representations (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 13, 129-135), construing it as a Sellarsian "logical space of reasons" (*Ibid.*, p. 5, 135, 158), and removing the outer rim of the Kantian *Ding an sich* (*Ibid.*, p. 44, 83).

2.3 Crafting "receptive spontaneity": the technical case for fusion

2.3.1 Evans as a heuristic opponent

Despite his considerable efforts, McDowell's attempts at philosophical syncretism do not always conjugate perfectly, as the ideas espoused by his varied influences sometimes conflict. Such a confrontation occurs when his construal of experience as imbued with spontaneity meets Gareth Evans' thesis that our atomic or "singular" access to the world does not involve anything we could properly recognize as

belonging to the conceptual realm. *Mind and World* thus finds in the person of Evans a worthy opponent, someone who purportedly defends the very distinction which McDowell makes it his duty to undermine.

In contrast with McDowell's advocacy of a radical fusion, Evans believes we have good grounds to distinguish conceptual contents from experiential contents. The underlying motivations at work in Evans' philosophy could not be farther from those driving McDowell's. The broad framework within which Evans frames his reflections belongs to the "analytic" tradition in philosophy, especially as laid down in the work of Frege and the early Russell. In today's intellectual climate, Evans' interests can appear somewhat outmoded. If Frege's logical writings still command a certain respect, Russell's original atomist program does not fair so well. As Sellars emphasized with great force, the two kinds of knowledge posited by Russell's distinction between "knowledge by description" and "knowledge by acquaintance" differ in ways so fundamental as to suggest the very impossibility of their mutual support (sect. 1.5). Although they did not share his incredulity vis-à-vis Givenness, the logical empiricists had concurred with this appraisal to the extent that they too believed Russell's modes of knowledge to be irreconcilable. Being privy to these critiques and to the eventual failure of Russell's attempt to account for the epistemic contribution of empirical receptivity, contemporary philosophers thus have an unfortunate tendency to roll their eyes and scoff at any variant of this project.

However, these subsequent readings—which later came to form the received view on ostension—were alien to Russell's early work. Not only did Russell see it as his philosophical business to technically explain his notion of a receptive acquaintance, he also believed (if only for a time) that such project could be successful. To construe his investigations into receptive atomism as somehow doomed from the outset by the "Given" or "synthetic" nature of the object of study is a dis-embellishment of hindsight, one resting on a historiographic narrative later written by the putative victors.

One of the chief virtues of Evans' highly original work is that it puts aside these contemporary prejudices and tries to see what positive insights can be gleaned from Russell's original atomist program. By taking this route, Evans' endeavour to philosophically elucidate the mechanics of "singular" thought does not endorse the sort "causal theory of reference" which became popular in the wake of Saul Kripke's influential *Naming and Necessity* ([1972] 2001). In Evans' opinion (and ours), that « bandwagon is going nowhere » ([1982] 2002, p. 79). Thus, while it may strike the contemporary palate as superseded, it is against a *Russellian* backdrop that Evans develops his contention that the contents of experience are not conceptual—and it is from this perspective that McDowell will pose Evans as a rival fit to challenge his own fusion thesis.

According to Evans, Russell came to be profoundly dissatisfied with the Fregean system which he had made it his duty to build upon. In such a conception of truth-conditional semantics,

> [a] genuine referring expression has as its sole function the identification of an object such that if it satisfies the predicate, the sentence is true, and if it fails to satisfy the predicate, the sentence is false. But if the expression fails to identify an object at all, then the truth-evaluation of the sentence cannot get started, and the whole sentence is an aberration. (Russell, perhaps rather unwisely, said that the sentence is 'nonsense'. What he meant by this was that someone who uttered the sentence would be like someone who uttered nonsense in that he would have said nothing at all). (Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 42)

Evans suggests we not make too much of Russell's "unwise" wording, insofar as the distinction between "sense" and "*Bedeutung*" (Frege, 1997, p. 151-180) was never to impact Russell's philosophy in the way it would Frege's (Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 42-43; *cf.* also Frege, 1997, p. 290). In any event, what matters here is only how Russell went on to resolve the defect with respect to expressions that fail to identify their worldly object in a clear and definite way.

Frege's seminal contribution had consisted in drawing an intuitively powerful analogy: predication is a sort of function whose operator is the grammatical predicate and whose argument(s) is the substantive subject(s) (*cf.* Frege, 1997, p. 130-148). Although Russell deemed this insight to be of great moment, he ostensibly could not stop himself from seeing in it an important shortcoming. For it seemed that no matter how much one refined the logical conditions for satisfying the predicative functions alluded to by Frege, those specifications still would not secure the link of the entire apparatus to its referential domain. « Russell was as aware as anyone else that not everything can be thought of by description, on pain of the whole system of identification failing to be tied down to a unique set of objects, in the circumstances which Strawson has called 'massive reduplication' » (Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 45; *cf.* Strawson, [1959] 2002, p. 20-22). Russell's contribution was thus to augment Frege's logicist system with a dimension borrowed straight from the British empiricist tradition. Expressions can supply us with a publicly accessible "knowledge by description" of the truth conditions by which one could gain access to a clearly defined set of objects in the world, but they remain impotent to actually give the mind a intimate "knowledge by acquaintance" of those discrete objects (*cf.* Russell, [1918, 1924] 1998). For that one has to turn to the encounters themselves—to what is *Given* to us by the senses. By following this insight, Evans is apparently espousing a view diametrically opposite to McDowell's fusion.

We are uncertain to what extent there is really a conflict between Evans' views and McDowell's. Although McDowell devotes an entire chapter of his book ("Lecture III: Non-conceptual Content") to a polemic against Evans' stance on singular reference, Evans is actually a relatively minor character in *Mind and World*'s overall argumentative structure, and the tensions McDowell addresses therein appear contrived. For one thing, McDowell's "enchanted" view of human endowments and Evans' technical "neo-Fregean" semantics would not suggest themselves as the most pertinent candidate for a comparison and contrast analysis.

Moreover, Evans' arguments in favour of non-conceptual content play a somewhat peripheral role in the overall scheme of his seminal *Varieties of Reference*; thereby lending credence to our feeling that the conflict which makes Evans a foe of the McDowellian fusion—while not entirely baseless—may have a more personal motivation. Indeed, McDowell's inquisitiveness seemingly has more to do with his own profile as a thinker and posthumous editor of Evans' work than any palpable clash of ideas. Evans' early passing no doubt deprives us of many of the ideas central to the « non-stop barrage of intellectual stimulation » his colleague and friend was subjected for some ten years (*cf.* McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. viii). It is therefore understandable that McDowell should have wanted to come to grips with his motley philosophical interests, and would have seen those rationalizations as important steps in his search for a third way. Nevertheless, we should enter the caveat that the work done by Evans' tenets in *Mind and World* is disproportionate to that found in his published philosophy.

That generosity, however, does not prevent Evans' arguments from providing us with an excellent springboard whence to explore the most salient features of McDowell's fusion thesis. In the three sections that follow, we will thus look at what McDowell considers to be the three strongest reasons given by Evans for thinking that receptive experience deserves to be accorded a stratum of its own, and will examine the systematic replies put forth by McDowell to defend his radical admixture of "receptive spontaneity".

2.3.2 Experience as involving concepts

The first argument of Evans' for differentiating the contents of experience from those of concepts is that the information carried by the latter is "coarser-grained" than that of former; as reflected for example in the fact that we categorize far fewer concepts of colour than are available in the actual spectrum of human sight. Central to Evans' theorizing on this topic is what he calls "Russell's Principle": « Russell

held the view that in order to be thinking about an object or to make a judgement about an object, one must *know which* object is in question—one must *know which* object it is that one is thinking about » (Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 65). Now this principle has important bearings on the case of the colour spectrum, insofar as our senses seem to provide us with far more shades than we can reasonably *know* in the technical sense expected by Russell's Principle. As Evans writes: « Do we really understand the proposal that we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour we can sensibly discriminate? » (*Ibid.*, p. 229).

The fact that conceptual thought deals in coarser-grained contents allows us sift through the barrage of information made available in experience and pick out objects with greater determinacy. In contrast, the contents furnished by sensory inputs manifest a fineness of grain which effectively prevents experience from satisfying the demand that we be explicitly cognizant of which object we intend. As a result, Evans adopts the following stance: « In order to make Russell's Principle a substantial principle, I shall suppose that the knowledge which it requires is what might be called discriminating knowledge: the subject must have a capacity to distinguish the object of his judgement from all other things » (*Ibid.*, p. 89). To withdraw this necessary condition from experience would be to rob it of its epistemic value and reduce it to a merely causal exposure—what Evans called the "Photograph Model" (*Ibid.*, p. 76-79).

All of this is not to say that Evans denies that we can grasp the objects of experience. His argument is only that the respective degrees of information carried by experience and concepts shows their contents to differ in a fundamental way. In a sense, we could say that experiential episodes supply the mind with "analog" contents, while the concepts abstracted therefrom carry "digital" information (for an elaborate endorsement of this view, *cf.* Dretske, [1981] 1999, especially Chapter 6). Whereas concepts are vehicles of coarser-grained or digital contents which can pick out their referents *in absentia*, experiences generate fine-grained or "analog"

contents that require the mind to be *in praesentia* of a given object in order to meet the discrimination called for by Russell's Principle. The idea of divergent degrees of informational richness therefore implies that our minds routinely mobilize two different modes of knowledge in order to apprehend to world (i.e., description / *in absentia vs.* acquaintance / *in praesentia*)—a distinction which runs counter to McDowell's peremptory insistence that the conceptual faculty intervenes even in the most punctate of experiential impingements.

Although a cursory glance will reveal Evans' comments on this subject to be relatively scarce and suggestive at best, McDowell seems to have considered talk of the colour spectrum a sufficiently robust template from which to unpack the ramifications of his fusion stance. McDowell's initial reaction to Evans' argument is to question the tacit assumption that « a person's ability to embrace colour within her conceptual thinking is restricted to concepts expressible by words like "red" or "green" and phrases like "burnt sienna" » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 56). A challenge is here issued at the idea that linguistic categories overlap isomorphically with conceptual categorizations. Appealing to introspection, McDowell insists that we can and do form concepts of shades which lie between more conventionally delineated concepts (*Ibid.*). While we may not always have the linguistic resources to produce a name for these intermediate qualities, nothing prevents us from giving them an expression « that is exactly as fine-grained as the experience, by uttering a phrase like "that shade", in which the demonstrative exploits the presence of the sample » (*Ibid.*, p. 57).

At this point in McDowell's argument, one could reasonably see in this externalist marshalling of worldly samples at hand (presumably natural classes) a restatement of the notion of knowledge by acquaintance. If anything, it seems to do more to reiterate Russell's distinction than to collapse it. The kind of indexical ostension at the heart of McDowell's recourse to "that shade" implies a situational embeddedness which runs counter to the transcendent generality normally taken to

be a defining trait of concepts. McDowell recognizes that his argument invites such a reading, as burdening the world with the individuation of contents « would cast doubt on its being recognizable as a conceptual capacity at all » (*Ibid.*). He thus directs the remainder his argumentative energies at the (somewhat implausible) task of extending the scope of "*that* shade" beyond its immanent context—while trying to hold fast to the idea that "that *shade*" would still be available to the mind. In short, he wants to show that we can be acquainted *in absentia*.

McDowell believes that « [w]e can ensure that what we have in view is genuinely recognizable as a conceptual capacity if we insist that the very same capacity to embrace a colour in mind can in principle persist beyond the duration of the experience itself » (*Ibid.*). His claim, in short, is that experiential contents have the ability to survive beyond an agent's causal exposure to the relevant object(s). If we stay with a strictly "ocular" gloss (and uncritically accept the rather shaky assumption that the conclusions drawn in this area can be applied in an unproblematic way to all the senses), we can say that McDowell believes the *ex post facto* retention of experiential contents provides a strong rebuttal to Evans' claim that the contents of receptivity must be distinguished from those of the conceptual realm. McDowell sees in this argument from afterimages a theoretical vindication of his fusion thesis: « [F]rom the standpoint of a dualism of concept and intuition, these capacities would seem hybrids. There is an admixture of intuition in their very constitution [...] » (*Ibid.*, p. 59).

Our aim here is only to expose the arguments put forth by McDowell in defence of his fusion thesis, not to pass under review the cogency of his elaborate claims. Suffice it to point out that the success of his reply to Evans on the topic of "fineness of grain" ultimately depends on whether or not one can indeed pick out a nondescript shade with the same level of determinacy as a colour-concept even when 1) one *can not* name "that" shade in question, and 2) a sample of the shade is absent from one's immediate surroundings.

2.3.3 Concepts as involving spontaneity

Even if one were to assume that McDowell's arguments show in a definite way that 'concepts are involved in experience', that conclusion would not directly lend support to his broader claim that '*spontaneity* is involved in experience'. Indeed, posing Evans' technical arguments in favour of non-conceptual content as some sort of adversary or obstacle to the kind of pan-spontaneity advocated by McDowell involves a considerable enthymeme: the putative antagonism requires that the "conceptual" be put in the same broad camp as "spontaneity". McDowell recognizes the strain his dichotomous framework places on the traditional notion of concept:

> Now we should ask why it seems appropriate to describe the understanding, whose contribution to this [Kantian] co-operation is its command of concepts, in terms of spontaneity. A schematic but suggestive answer is that the topography of the conceptual sphere is constituted by rational relations. The space of concepts is at least part of what Wilfrid Sellars calls "the space of reasons". When Kant describes the understanding as a faculty of spontaneity, that reflects his view of the relation between reason and freedom: rational necessitation is not just compatible with freedom but constitutive of it. In a slogan, the space of reasons is the realm of freedom. ([1994] 2002, p. 4-5)

Obviously, simple affirmation that such is McDowell's usage will not do; we need arguments to secure the transitive inference that 'there is spontaneity in experience'. For, strictly speaking, if we construe "sheer receptivity" as the Given, this commits us only to viewing a "tainted receptivity" as symbolic, anatomic, and inferential (sect. 1.5.2). As such, incorporation of a more onerous notion like spontaneity in this mix warrants further explanation. Let us explore this missing link.

Evans' second argument against fusing the contents of concepts with those of experiences is that the latter are immune in a way that allows them to present themselves as they are regardless of what we believe; as in the case of someone who is told that an appearance is illusory yet is powerless to refashion his sight accordingly (*cf.* Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 122-123). McDowell recognizes that « Evans is here insisting that the active business of making up one's mind is the proper

context in which to place conceptual capacities, and that is something I have been urging throughout these lectures » ([1994] 2002, p. 60). However, the crucial issue here is whether the fact that a worldly object presents itself *forcefully* in experience commits the mind to a likewise belief in the conceptual realm. In short, the philosophic problem is how to construe the fact that the world often makes the mind "offers it can't refuse". The question is one of pivotal importance, for it seems that, « [i]f one does make a judgement, it is wrung from one by the experience [...] » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 61). Does not this kind of strong indexicality undermine or hinder our exercise of spontaneity? The matter is made all the more difficult by the fact that, despite their "coercive" nature, experiential episodes *do* let us know that things are "thus and so".

For his part, Evans argues that this compels us to acknowledge that experiences provide us with contents *distinct* from those we wilfully embrace in spontaneity: « [I]t seems to me preferable to take the notion of *being in an informational state with such-and-such content* as a primitive notion for philosophy, rather than to attempt to characterize it in terms of beliefs » (Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 123). Yet it is seemingly constitutive of the very idea of the conceptual realm—of the space of *reasons*—that we should have a say in deciding what we believe. We can thus say that McDowell, like Evans, is searching for a "primitive notion for philosophy"; only he wants to countenance a stronger notion which will allow the reach of our spontaneity to extend all the way down to our most basic episodes of receptivity.

We have already had a brush with McDowell's way about this task, albeit under a different guise, when we mentioned his insistence that for a gift to be properly Given it must be Accepted (sect. 1.5.2). Simple and straightforward though his tenet appears to be, it contains some important difficulties which undermine its strength, putting in question the overall tenability of McDowell's positive-theoretic proposal. We will have ample opportunity to discuss these rigours later in this chapter. What we want to do now is look at the logic which underpins it.

At first glance, the idea of a "receptive spontaneity" seems an outright contradiction in terms. A superficial look at this notion could suggest that McDowell's enthusiasm for Kant's credo has led his fertile imagination to bite off more than he can philosophically chew. Most of these understandable apprehensions can be put to rest if we keep in mind that what McDowell means by "spontaneity" is far broader than what we normally take the term to signify. One way to explicate McDowell's idiosyncratic use of the term would be to say that it is for him an umbrella term covering all grades of freedom. At the stronger and more familiar end of that spectrum, we find that freedom which allows agents to dabble freely in the fabric of their representations. This is arguably the species of spontaneity most familiar to us. It is responsible, for instance, for deciding which plank of Neurath's wholistic boat gets moved where (*cf.* Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 3). Yet McDowell holds that spontaneity is also manifest in weaker acts of the mind. As he writes: « *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement *if* the subject *decides* to take the experience at face value » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 26; italics ours).

Thus, while McDowell readily concedes that the faculty which rescues sensible intuition from Kant's proverbial blindness is symbolic, anatomic, and inferential, he insists that those features entail the involvement of yet another—and less structural—one. For if the realm of mind is indeed a Sellarsian "space of reasons", this implies that the inferential ligatures which bind that wholistic fabric together must be grasped *as* reasons. In our view, there is much to recommend this insight. One can perhaps argue that the layout of our anatomic linkages is dictated by an impersonal logic, but even the strongest rationalism would loose all plausibility if it did not recognize that the current which runs through that inferential circuitry is the assent—however minimal—of the thinking agent.

> We would not be able to suppose that the capacities that are in play in experience are conceptual if they were manifested only in experience, only in operations of receptivity. They would not be recognizable as conceptual capacities at all unless they could also be exercised in active thinking, that is, in ways that do provide a good fit for the idea of spontaneity. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 11)

Thus, from the most sophisticated scientific decision to the very lobby of the Sellarsian one-way door (sect. 1.5), all that is mind is construed by McDowell as lying within the purview of human spontaneity. As such, what is "drawn into" experience is not just conceptual thought—but genuine freedom as well:

> [W]e cannot simply insulate the passive involvement of conceptual capacities in experience from the potentially unnerving effects of the freedom implied by the idea of spontaneity. If we think that the way to exploit the passivity of experience is to deny that spontaneity extends all the way out to the content of experience, we merely fall back into a misleadingly formulated version of the Myth of the Given. [...] *If those impingements are conceived as outside the scope of spontaneity, outside the domain of responsible freedom, then the best they can yield is that we cannot be blamed for believing whatever they lead us to believe, not that we are justified in believing it.* (*Ibid.*, [1994] 2002, p. 13; italics ours)

The last portion of this passage alludes to the Sellarsian argument against receptivity. For the receptive fragment to contribute knowledge—that is, for the content it forcefully delivers to have any *epistemic* value—it seems it must open itself to the possibility of falsity (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 7; *cf.* sect. 1.5.3). The very notion of 'Truth', we could say, has the same kind of *anatomic* structure as the concept 'Sister': by its very nature, it presupposes another concept, in this case 'False'. As a result, an experiential content that would impel its own veracity upon the mind by an undeniable presence (e.g. the empiricist's sense-datum) would be structurally impotent to enter into the realm of spontaneity. Seen in this light, Givenness effectively bars the mind from exercising its most primitive freedom in cognition, namely the (binary) choice to think or not to think that a content is indeed thus and so (*cf.* sect. 4.4.2). A "mythical" episode of pure receptivity, divorced as it

would be from any spontaneity, could therefore generate only dogmas—not beliefs (much less reasons): « The trouble about the Myth of the Given is that it offers us at best exculpation where we wanted justifications » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 13).

2.3.4 Spontaneity as an upshot of our human nature

The third and final argument of Evans' addressed in *Mind and World* states that, since we share perception with animals that do not possess our conceptual faculty, we should recognize the contents which belong to concepts as supplementary—and hence *different*—from those manifested in experience (*cf.* Evans, [1982] 2002, p. 124). According to this view, « mere animals only receive the Given, whereas we not only receive it but are also able to put it into conceptual shape » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 123).

Although he obviously does not share Evans' conclusion that the contents of experiences and concepts differ in some fundamental way, McDowell agrees with the basic premises whence that inference is drawn:

> Mere animals do not come within the scope of the Kantian thesis, since they do not have the spontaneity of the understanding. We cannot construe them as continually reshaping a world-view in rational response to the deliverances of experience; not if the idea of a rational response requires subjects who are in charge of their thinking, standing ready to reassess what is a reason for what, and to change their responsive propensities accordingly. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 114)

The challenge McDowell faces, then, is to show how this view of spontaneity as exclusively human in conjunction with the sober recognition that « [i]t is a plain fact that we share perception with mere animals » (*Ibid.*) does not undermine the fusion thesis by committing him to the same conclusion as Evans. For while Evans' stance is congenial to his dichotomous Russellian framework, it would appear to drag McDowell into conflict with his own monistic commitments.

Since McDowell readily acknowledges the truth of the premises at hand, the only strategy that remains for him to exploit is to produce supplementary claims that shift the balance of argument in his favour (clearly, humans are indeed free to "reassess what is a reason for what"). He proposes to adduce such a countermeasure, outlining his tactic as follows:

> [...] I want to borrow from Hans-Georg Gadamer a remarkable description of the difference between a merely animal mode of life, in an environment, and a human mode of life, in the world. For my purposes, the point of this is that it shows in some detail how we can acknowledge what is common between human beings and brutes, while preserving the difference [i.e., between human being and brutes] that the Kantian thesis forces on us. ([1994] 2002, p. 115)

According to this account, the kind of sentience with which animals are endowed is fit to cope with biological imperatives in a way that promotes their survival. But whatever evolutionary adaptation has furthered sentience as a feature of animal life has done so at the price of forgoing spontaneity, since « a merely animal life is shaped by goals whose control of the animal's behaviour at a given moment is an immediate outcome of biological forces » (*Ibid.*). It is at this point that Gadamer steps in: « Now Gadamer's thesis is this: a life that is structured only in that way is led not in the world, but only in an environment » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 115; *cf.* Gadamer, [1960] 1992, p. 438-456).

Although he summons this distinction to further his own view of the human mind, McDowell takes great care not to let this differentiation between a meaning-rich "world" and a drier "environment" degenerate into a construal of animals as causally drifting in the flow of their proximal inputs, which would suggest the underlying presence of a matrix totally alien to what we could legitimately credit as sentience. Granted, McDowell sees in Gadamer's particular usage of "environment" and "world" a way to ensure that whatever receptivity animals *do* possess can be clearly segregated from our own human brand of receptivity. However, he is aware that endorsing a strict "stimulus-response" construal of animal conduct would

effectively sanction the "bald" naturalist's contention that intentionality in general is but a sympathetic projection of our own (private and unverifiable) autopsychological lives (sect. 1.3.2 and 1.3.3):

> This is not to imply that features of the environment are nothing to a perceiving animal. On the contrary, they can be problems or opportunities for it [...].
>
> This talk of what features of the environment are for an animal expresses an analogue to the notion of subjectivity, close enough to ensure that there is no Cartesian automatism in our picture. Exactly not: we need to appeal to an animal's sensitivity to features of its environment if we are to understand its alert and self-moving life, the precise way in which it copes competently with its environment. [...] To register how far we are from the Kantian structure, we might say that what is in question here is proto-subjectivity rather than subjectivity. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 116-117)

Due to his opposition to mechanistic interpretations, McDowell feels compelled to acknowledge that animals have some sort of intentionality—however naïve or undeveloped—at their command. However, lest this minimal concession to a "proto-subjectivity" be understood as insinuating the presence of some shared spontaneity that would run across the spectrum of life forms, McDowell's next paragraph opens with an unequivocal reaffirmation of his Gadamer-inspired conviction that, « [i]n a merely animal mode of life, living *is nothing but* responding to a succession of biological needs » (*Ibid.*; italics ours).

In truth, the appeal to Gadamer does not really confirm McDowell's stance—at least not in the sense of providing support for it. Rather, what the distinction between "environment" and "world" does is provide McDowell with an another way to *state* his conviction that animal thinking has nothing in common with human thought (while this manifestly helps us get a better grasp of the intuitions driving his confidence on the matter, it is actually very much like the Given in that "it offers us at best exculpation where we wanted justifications").

2.4 Friction resurrected: locating a basis for perpetual self-criticism

2.4.1 Laying the groundwork for a tribunal within

We have travelled a very long chain of reasoning, and now come to the final links. Let us briefly pause and recap. As McDowell sees it, we should push for a drastic reinterpretation of the Kantian credo so as to fuse the twin faculties of spontaneity and receptivity: « The original Kantian thought was that empirical knowledge results from a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity. [...] We can dismount from the seesaw if we can achieve a firm grip on this thought: receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 9). As we have seen, this radical fusion has profound consequences for the way we are to picture the interface of mind and world. Experiential episodes are to be reconsidered in a way that allows for the contribution, however minimal, of a distinctly human brand of freedom. At its most primitive level, spontaneity intervenes in our decision to take sensory contents at face value, to assent that things are indeed "thus and so". In so doing, we effectively rob the gift of indexicality of its mythical character. But fusion at the most punctate level also beckons us to rethink our metaphysical outlook on a macroscopic scale, reconsidering the conceptual realm in such a way that it becomes all-encompassing. This, in short, entails *pansemiotism*, a tenet we shall now explore.

McDowell's "unbounded" view of the conceptual realm, as we have said, borrows liberally from Quine's wholistic imagery (*cf.* McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 13n11). Although McDowell's overall program is far more concerned with therapeutically reconciling "mind and world" than with establishing the places of philosophy and science, the wholistic penchant of his positive-theoretic proposal does share with Quine the conviction that « the network, as an individual thinker finds it governing her thinking, is not sacrosanct » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 12). However, as a member of what Rorty has called the "Pittsburgh School of Neo-Hegelians" (*cf.* Thornton, 2004, p. 3), what bothers McDowell in Quine's position

is not so much that it grants us leeway in how we configure our least observational representations but, more crucially, its ambiguity in holding experience as a "tribunal" to which the whole must conform, if only *en masse* (*cf.* Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 41). Granted, Quine effectively hollows out representations of any self-standing meaning by adhering to an aseptic stimulus-response model. Yet despite the fact that multiple networks of representations can be made to match ostensions equally well (Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 26; *cf.* sect. 1.1.3), the authority of those rival wholes is nevertheless diffused to the extent that, in the end, « [t]he edge of the system must be kept squared with experience » (Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 45). In a sense, we can say that in Quine's tribunal picture, although contacts can (in principle) deliver any verdict, they must nevertheless deliver *some* verdict—an admixture Quinean scholar Roger Gibson has aptly characterized as "Behaviourism cum Empiricism" (Gibson, 2004, p. 181-199).

One of the main concerns of McDowell in *Mind and World* is to evaluate the plausibility of such a stance, to investigate the philosophical possibility of such a "minimal empiricism" (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. xi). He summarizes the genesis of the problem as follows:

> To make sense of the idea of a mental state's or episode's being directed towards the world, in the way in which, say, a belief or judgement is, we need to put the state or episode in a normative context. [...] This relation between mind and world is normative, then, in this sense: thinking that aims at judgement, or at the fixation of belief, is answerable to the world—to how things are—for whether or not it is correctly executed.
>
> Now how should we elaborate the idea that our thinking is thus answerable to the world? [...] Even if we take it that answerability to how things are includes more than answerability to the empirical world, it nevertheless seems right to say this: since our cognitive predicament is that we confront the world by way of sensible intuition (to put it in Kantian terms), our reflection on the very idea of thought's directedness at how things are must begin with answerability to the empirical world. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. xi, xii)

As McDowell sees it, Quinean wholism cannot claim worldly impingements as efficacious members of the epistemic judiciary (which includes maximal integrity of held beliefs). The impotence here stems from Quine's "minimally empirical" construal of the edge of the whole as comprised of semantically-hollow behavioural relations. By so denying the possibility of anything that could resemble self-standing contents—the infamous "idea" idea (*cf.* Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 48)—Quine effectively deprives himself of anything that could have effectively supplied some form of nontrivial receptivity.

> Receptivity figures in the explanatory background of circumstances that belong together with evolving world-views in the order of justification. But receptivity itself cannot rationally interact with spontaneity, in the way that Quine's rhetoric implies, though his official conception of receptivity precludes such interaction.
>
> Against this, I claim that although Quine's half-hearted attempt to picture world-views as products of a rational interaction between spontaneity and receptivity is unacceptable, [...] that is no reason to discard the very idea of such an interaction. The trouble lies not in the idea itself, but in the half-heartedness—in the fact that while the rhetoric depicts the interaction as rational, Quine conceives receptivity in such a way that it cannot impinge rationally on anything. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 141)

The crux of the issue then, is whether the underdeterminacy in Quine's wholism extends all the way out to the experiential episodes themselves, or whether we should make a "minimal" concession to empiricism whereby receptive friction prevents the slide from underdetermination to *non*determination. For it seems this is precisely what we must do if we want to justify our conviction that « [s]uiting empirical beliefs to the reasons for them is not a self-contained game » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 5). All of this, of course, is but another way of glossing the "world as ineffable limit" theme touched on earlier with respect to Sellars and Kant (sect. 2.2.1). It should therefore come as no surprise that McDowell directs his attention to the contradictions nested in the view of experience as a tribunal with the same leitmotif as ever, namely that it is absurd for a philosophy to straddle both sides of the frontier of thought.

2.4.2 Recovering our rightful place in nature

McDowell strongly believes we should resist the appeal to transsemiotic agnosticism, inviting us instead to embrace pansemiotism wholeheartedly. However, eschewing recourse to a transcendental limit, while it may yet avoid a crucial mistake, does not alleviate the anxiety of the oscillation *per se*. For the strategy itself does not address the discomforts that come with the option of whole, chief among which is the fear that an asymmetrical "one-way" interface leaves open the possibility that the mind might not be warranted in laying any claim to objectivity. If McDowell wishes to imbue all that is mind with spontaneity but wants to obstruct the march of relativism, it would seem something *more* is needed. Let us examine his creative response in this regard.

As we saw in the first chapter (sect. 1.3), McDowell suggests that by reuniting with pre-modern world-views, we may yet learn to accommodate a fact which oftentimes seems queer to our eyes; namely that our faculty of spontaneity—while not *lawful*—is nevertheless not *sui generis* (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 66-86). According to this view, we can exorcise the metaphysical alienation if we moor our conception of the intelligible onto a ontology free of the reductive tendency which gained ascendancy in post-Cartesian / post-Galilean times:

> Setting our faces against bald naturalism, we are committed to holding that the idea of knowing one's way about in the space of reasons, the idea of responsiveness to rational relationships, cannot be reconstructed out of the materials that are naturalistic in the sense that we trying to supersede. [...] So it looks as if we are picturing human beings as partly in nature and partly outside it. [...]
>
> But there is a way out. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 77-78)

.....

> Exercises of spontaneity belong to our mode of living. And our mode of living is our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. So we can rephrase the thought by saying: exercises of spontaneity belong to our way of actualizing ourselves as animals. This removes any need to try to see ourselves as peculiarly bifurcated, with a foothold in the animal kingdom and a mysterious separate involvement in an extra-natural world of rational connections. (*Ibid.*, p. 78)

According to this account, the primary virtue of the pre-modern world-view was that, whatever debates it witnessed, it effectively provided its adherents with a tacit construal of mind analogous to that which thinkers since at least Kant have striven to recover in explicit theorizing (with varying degrees of success). Thinkers working in pre-modern times basically took it for granted that the proper place of the human mind—freedom included—is the natural order of things (although man typically occupied a privileged abode in most cosmologies, religious or secular).

McDowell maintains that the crucial point which divides philosophizing in Antiquity and the Middle Ages from the more incredulous modern brands is the place of law in explanation. For if the mind's representations are indeed steeped in an all-encompassing freedom, as McDowell holds, then it is only normal that a philosophical outlook which makes lawful behaviour the hallmark of the world's intelligibility should have trouble integrating the spontaneity side of the Kantian co-operation.

> Sellars traced the anxieties of modern epistemology to the fact that the idea of knowledge is the idea of a position in a justificatory network; this was the context in which he mentioned the space of reasons. Anxiety about knowledge, of the familiar modern kind, results when that fact is juxtaposed with the threatened extrusion of the space of reasons from nature. It is not that the idea of knowledge as a position in the space of reasons was new—as if it was not until around the seventeenth century that people hit on the thought that becomes so pregnant in modern epistemology, that knowledge is a normative status. But before the modern era, the idea that knowledge is a normative status was not felt to stand in tension with, say, the idea that knowledge might be the result of an exercise of natural powers. A naturalism that responds to this tension [...] is quite different from a naturalism like Aristotle's, which never feels a tension here, and has no need for imagery of grounding or foundations. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 80n12)

It would be inaccurate to say that McDowell nostalgically conceives his call to renew with the pre-modern world-view as doing revisionist justice to farsighted achievements hitherto neglected by philosophic historiography. Rather, he insists

that what we can learn most from rekindling with the pre-modern past is that theirs was precisely *not* a theoretical achievement but a commonsensical assumption as to the state of things. As he writes:

> [T]here is an intelligible tendency to set up the study of nature as the very exemplar of what it is to investigate how things are. Thus, when nature threatens to extrude the space of reasons, philosophical worries are generated about the status of rational connections, as something that we can be right or wrong about. One response to these worries is to resist the extrusion in the manner of bald naturalism, leaving the conception of nature unquestioned but insisting that after all the putative rational requirements that we want to defend can be founded on, or constructed out of, independent facts of nature. If I am right about the genesis of the worries, it must be anachronistic to read something like this into Aristotle. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 79-80)

According to this gloss, Aristotle's conception of nature as a "book of lessons" allowed him to inquire into objects of study like norms or minds free of the (philosophically pathological) need for a complex reductionist apparatus.

As is typical of McDowell's rather adumbrated author-based accounts, he has little use for the specific categories and other technicalities of the full Aristotelian system (a cursory look at the figures we have encountered thus far highlights the many theses left out, be they Quine's grievances with positivistic conceptions of science, Davidson's project for a non-circular truth-conditional semantic, Sellars' hostilities towards sense-data theories, or Kant's technical intersecting of the analytic / synthetic and a priori / a posteriori). Instead, McDowell praises the Stagirite only in a most general way.

> In Aristotle's conception, the thought that the demands of ethics are real is not a projection from, or construction out of, facts that could be in view independently of the viewer's participation in ethical life and thought, so that they would be available to a sideways-on investigation of how ethical life and thought are related to the natural context in which they take place. The fact that the demands bear on us is just, irreducibly, itself. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 83)

Although his own ethical views largely converge with Aristotle's (*cf.* McDowell, [1980] 1998b), McDowell's compliments are thus directed not so much at specific Aristotelian tenets as to the *meta-philosophical* way they are argued for. The virtue of Aristotle's inquiries into the human condition, he maintains, is that they never once stop to ponder whether they are grounded in a sufficiently robust outlook (it would probably be no great leap to conjecture that McDowell's imagination was captivated by what seemed to him a widespread "quietism" *avant la lettre*).

In a sense, Aristotle's idea that man is an indivisible conjunct of *animality* and *rationality* is taken by McDowell as a harbinger to Kant's credo about the inseparable contributions of conceptual thought and experiential intuition. It is not so much that Aristotle's philosophy actually contains something akin to the Kantian synthesis of spontaneity and receptivity McDowell so ardently strives to make tenable. Rather, Aristotle's naturalist approach stokes McDowell's confidence that his radical amalgam can indeed be achieved.

> I have been considering the tendency to oscillate between two unpalatable positions: a coherentism that loses the bearing of empirical thought on reality altogether and a recoil into a vain appeal to the Given. I have proposed a diagnosis of this tendency: it reflects an intelligible distortion undergone by the Aristotelian idea that normal mature human beings are rational animals. Animals are, as such, natural beings, and a familiar modern conception of nature tends to extrude rationality from nature. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 108)
>
> .....
>
> In Aristotle's conception of human beings, rationality is integrally part of their animal nature, and the conception is neither naturalistic in the modern sense (there is no hint of reductiveness or foundationalism) nor fraught with philosophical anxiety. What makes this possible is that Aristotle is innocent of the very idea that nature is the realm of law and therefore not the home of meaning. (*Ibid.*, p. 109)
>
> .....
>
> But instead of trying to integrate the intelligibility of meaning into the realm of law, we can aim at a postlapsarian or knowing counterpart of Aristotle's innocence. (*Ibid.*)

It is central to McDowell's way of viewing the pre-modern conception that the human mind not be construed as something *distinct* from the natural realm. Aristotle is (rightfully) seen as an exemplar of this laudable assumption that rational animals have their place in a cosmos of unbroken continuity. Seen in this light, McDowell contends that Aristotle's "innocent" approach to inquiry provides us with a general blueprint for the development of a tenable third way capable of exiting the seesaw. While this obviously reads much into a body of thought foreign to the issue at stake, that is precisely the point. Nevertheless, it is an ironic consequence of McDowell's hybrid approach to philosophy that he should strive to answer Wittgenstein's search for the discovery that will bring us peace ([1953] 2001, § 133)—by renewing with that activity's most prominent system-builder.

2.4.3 Counter-spontaneity as an upshot of our "second nature"

McDowell's insistence that spontaneity is a feature unique to humans flows from his desire to reconnect with the "enchanted" conceptions of nature purportedly taken for granted prior to the advent of modern thought. But above and beyond supplying him with the thoroughgoing example of an outlook respecting the ontology proper to both Kantian faculties, McDowell finds much in Aristotle's thinking which, he argues, vindicates his precept that we have a perpetual obligation to question the merit of our beliefs (sect. 1.4.2).

> The best we can achieve is always to some extent provisional and inconclusive, but that is no reason to succumb to the fantasy of an external validation.
>
> If we enrich it, then, to include a proper place for reflectiveness, Aristotle's picture can be put like this. The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter our appreciation of its detailed layout is indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 82)

Notice the pivotal role played by the notion of "a decent upbringing". As McDowell explains,

> If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one's eyes opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature. I cannot think of a good short English expression for this, but it is what figures in German philosophy as *Bildung*. (*Ibid.*, p. 84)

As German scholar Rüdiger Bubner warns, « [i]t must be made clear that *Bildung* as a modern concept assumes much more of the subject's power of spontaneity than what Aristotle had in mind with his talk of second nature » (2002, p. 211). It is unclear whether McDowell intended his alternating usage to reflect corresponding theoretical nuances (Bubner does not detect any such rationale). In any event, without reading too much into McDowell's choice of words, we can follow his lead and look into the German notion as a way to better pin down the kind of philosophical work he expects from our supposed "second nature". The original meaning of the word *Bildung* (from the German "*Bild*" or "picture") is, roughly, "something formed according to the inner depiction of an exemplary model". The suggestion here is that the "pictures" which come to shape a person's world-view can be transmitted via upbringing, thereby allowing human animals to culturally reproduce the abstract schemes in which their rational *differentia* finds its home.

While it is clearly an emergent outgrowth proper to the community of rational animals, this "second" nature is still through and through *natural*. Although the cultural specifics will vary, inculcation of "pictures", McDowell argues, is *not* a contingent social phenomenon. In fact, so convinced is he that the "second nature" brought out by upbringing « could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 84) that he thinks it effectively « gives human reason enough of a foothold in the realm of law to satisfy any proper respect for modern natural science » (*Ibid.*). Secure in the strength of this

supposed objective grounding, the idea of "second nature" becomes pivotal to McDowell's architectonic in providing the means by which one is introduced to the rules governing the abstract space of reasons.

> In rampant platonism, the structure of the space of reasons, the structure in which we place things when we find meaning in them, is simply extra-natural. Our capacity to resonate to that structure has to be mysterious; it is as if we had a foothold outside the animal kingdom, in a splendidly non-human realm of ideality. But thanks to the notion of second nature, there is no whiff of that here. [...] [A]lthough the structure of the space of reasons cannot be reconstructed out of facts about our involvement in the realm of law, it can be the framework within which meaning comes into view only because our eyes can be opened to it by *Bildung*, which is an element in the normal coming to maturity of the kind of animals we are. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 88)

We have already seen how that abstract "space" is composed of intertwining inferences. In essence, the whole is glued together by the anatomic dictum that « nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief » (Davidson, 1986, p. 310). Such inferences, however, require the assent of a thinking agent. Just as one must Accept that the contents Given in experience are "thus and so" (thereby reducing the "given" to a lower case, non-mythical, variety), so must one Agree that "this follows from that". Yet if the reasons for believing a conclusion accrue from the validity of the deduction whence it is drawn (e.g., a *modus ponens*), the reasons for believing in the rules of inference themselves would have to come from an altogether different source. This is where the idea of "second nature" steps in. In McDowell's view, recognizing the commitments which anatomically flow from our representations is a most civilized affair. Perhaps a good way to summarize what McDowell is driving at would be to say that the space of reasons must be tended by a "*practice* of reasons".

It has been customary since at least Plato's *Meno* to consider education as the chief broker of new-found entailments. The Greek idea of *anámnêsis* had made the grasping of previously unfamiliar reasons a salutary means of ridding oneself of the corruption inherent in our finite predicament so as to commune—if only through a

veil—with the incorruptible truths that make rationality possible. While McDowell would be uncomfortable with the idea that the space of reasons somehow gives one ingress to a privileged realm of transcendent truths, his construal of "second nature" clearly retains the social dimension of this account (*cf.* McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 95)—a selective move which echoes Richard Rorty's push for epistemology as an ongoing conversation devoid of any trans-historical pretensions (*cf.* Rorty, 1980, p. 360-394):

> In being initiated into a language, a human being is introduced into something that already embodies putatively rational linkages between concepts, putatively constitutive of the layout of the space of reasons, before she comes on the scene. This is a picture of initiation into the space of reasons as an already going concern [...]. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 125)
>
> .....
>
> The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. (*Ibid.*, p. 126)

Although the polemic against Evans had McDowell devote a significant amount of argumentative energy towards discrediting the commonplace idea that « mere animals only receive the Given, whereas we not only receive it but are also able to put it into conceptual shape » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 123; *cf.* sect. 2.3.4), his view of the social dimension of reason now spurs him to make a very bold claim: « [I]t is not even clearly intelligible to suppose a creature might be born at home in the space of reasons. Human beings are not: they are born mere animals, and they are transformed into thinkers and intentional agents in the course of coming to maturity » (*Ibid.*, p. 125).

Whatever its merits, this thesis plays an important *epistemological* role in McDowell's positive-theoretic attempt to dismount the seesaw. We have seen how the idea of a "standing obligation" is called in to serve as a substitute for the empirical friction discarded in the flight from Givenness (sect. 1.4.2). McDowell thinks "second nature" rids this policy of its *ad hoc* character:

> People sometimes object to positions like the one I have been urging [i.e., "the unboundedness of the conceptual"] on the ground that they embody an arrogant anthropocentrism, a baseless confidence that the world is completely within the reach of our powers of thinking. This looks akin to an accusation of idealism. Why should we be so sure of our capacity to comprehend the world if not because we conceive the world as a shadow or reflection of our thinking?
>
> But an accusation of arrogance would not stick against the position I am recommending. In my first lecture [on "Concepts and Intuitions"], I said that the faculty of spontaneity carries with it a standing obligation to reflect on the credentials of the putatively rational linkages that, at any time, one takes to govern the active business of adjusting one's world-view in response to experience. ([1994] 2002, p. 39-40)

Thus, according to McDowell, what ultimately prevents the slide into relativism is the fact that we can normatively oversee the manner in which we choose to weave our representations. The kind of empirical friction we let go of when we abandon the mythical hope for some form of Givenness can be reinstated if we fold thought onto itself.

Whereas this can seem to be embracing the wholistic horn of the dilemma, McDowell thinks that if we renew with Ancient ways of thinking, we can begin to see our way to a conception which makes the reflective policing of beliefs an integral part of our nature as rational animals. As he succinctly puts it, « [w]e are looking for a conception of our nature that includes a capacity to resonate to the structure of the space of reasons » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 109). In this respect, McDowell believes that « Kant's lack of a pregnant notion of second nature explains why the right conception of experience cannot find a firm position in his thinking » (*Ibid.*, p. 97). Seeing as how Kant was already only « within a whisker » from a robust solution (*Ibid.*, p. 42; *cf.* sect. 2.2.1), then, with these amendments in place, McDowell reckons the oscillation should be laid to rest.

2.5 Salient problems with McDowell's fusion and pansemiotism

2.5.1 Is "friction-with-a-veto" still friction?

In the first chapter, we expressed our belief that an attempt to successfully end the futile oscillation between atomism and wholism should devote the bulk of its efforts to evicting the stubborn interlocutor of dialogic thought and to undoing the considerable harm done by the Sellarsian asymmetry of indexicality thesis. It should clear by now that this is *not* the strategy adopted in *Mind and World.* The elaborate dismount developed by McDowell is ambitious, to say the least. Perhaps it is only normal that so grand an issue as the seesaw should attract a retort of comparable grandeur. Be that as it may, what we want to do in the remainder of this chapter is mark out those areas where we disagree most with McDowell's proposal.

McDowell believes the chief virtue of the Aristotelian approach is that it places the rational animal in a natural context, alongside the other denizens we take to be paradigm-cases of intelligibility. McDowell commends Aristotle for this outlook, which he attributes to the Greek thinker's providential ignorance of the modern equation between nature and the realm of law. However, we believe the praise should go even deeper, extending to very meta-philosophy championed by Aristotle (one which, we opine, would have remained intact had he been privy to the fairly cohesive scientific world-view which gained prominence after Descartes, Galileo, and Newton). The outstanding merit of Aristotelianism, in our view, is that it approaches mind and world with the same ontological humility. If peripatetic wanderings show immanent particulars to be the most elementary constituents of the world, then it is the duty of the philosopher to refashion his metaphysical theories accordingly. Similarly, if investigations into the nature of the rational animal reveal the play of faculties that seemingly refuse to answer to the rigid principles found in forests and beaches, the philosopher is to take into account this fact in way that does not jeopardize those other findings. In keeping with this *aetiologic* posture, we should like to call into question one of the core tenets involved in McDowell's

positive argument, namely that the mind must Accept the contents presented to it by the world—that it must marshal spontaneity to judge the deliverances of receptivity to indeed be "thus and so".

We think the mind's contribution in experience should be conceived as much thinner than the kind of unmitigated spontaneity McDowell wants involved in even the most primitive contact with the world. We are quite friendly to the idea that an irreducible contribution must be made by the subject in order for it to intelligibly partake in whatever qualitative contents are involved in an episode of indexicality. For while we hold that the bulk of the energy expenditure (understood broadly) is assumed by something *other* than the mind in such events, we nevertheless think a minimal part of the total cost must be covered by the apprehending agency. We therefore agree with McDowell that the matter simply cannot be reduced to a neatly divided subject-object transaction, with the world picking up the tab. However, we would render the epistemic primitive advocated in *Mind and World* in a manner still more basal than what it endorses, supplementing McDowell's philosophy with the notion of a brute *conative* act whereby a living creature expresses the raw energy which distinguishes it from inanimate matter. With this contribution firmly in place, there would be no tension inherent in the idea of experience as making the subject "an offer she can't refuse": her agency could be sliced thinly enough for her to receptively "take in" that deliverance, even though she did not have a spontaneous say in the matter (we will elaborate on this important idea in sect. 4.4.2).

McDowell's bottom line, however, is thicker. The most basic choice his epistemology admits must be recognizable as a full-fledged exercise in spontaneity. As McDowell states: « Minimally, it must be possible to decide whether or not to judge that things are as one's experience represents them to be » ([1994] 2002, p. 11). The rationale at work in this stance is as follows. To begin with, the ability to Accept or Refuse a content is arguably as far as an epistemological primitive can go while remaining a plausible candidate for the label of "spontaneity". Now there is

nothing inherently wrong with this—with the idea that we don't always have a say in what we think about the world. But McDowell's flight from Givenness forbids him to countenance the possibility that the world could actually coerce the mind into understanding it, with or without its consent. Countenancing forceful empirical contents in this manner would prevent spontaneity from extending all the way out to the most pointed tips of the Quinean web of representations, thereby undermining McDowell's pansemiotist commitments. It is only when freedom saturates that rim through and through that the rim effectively dissipates, and an unbounded realm ensues.

Thus, for all his commitment to the Sellarsian segregation of index / symbol, atomic / anatomic, noninferential / inferential; McDowell grasps that it is precisely such a fundamental divergence that must be overcome if we are ever to dismount—or even "dissolve"—the seesaw. While Sellars and Kant had allowed the above dichotomies to go unchallenged and had chosen to reduce their left-hand parties to a "mythical" or "noumenal" limit status, McDowell wants to do away with the dualisms altogether by proposing bold new conceptions which merge the opposites into an indiscernible compound. It is thus an essential requirement of the McDowellian project that the sort of minimal agency at play in the Acceptance or Refusal of receptivity not be differentiated from the sort involved in more overt acts of spontaneity. As such, McDowell wants the meagre energy expenditure assumed by the mind in recognizing that things are indeed "thus and so" to differ *in degree but not in kind* from the freedom to creatively dabble in the fabric of beliefs. As he sees it, « the capacities that are in play in experience [...] would not be recognizable as conceptual capacities at all unless they could also be exercised in active thinking, that is, in ways that do provide a good fit for the idea of spontaneity » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 11). In his view, if we construe the subject's active contribution in experiential receptivity as anything less than full-fledged spontaneity, « then the best [impingements] can yield is that we cannot be blamed for believing whatever they

lead us to believe, not that we are justified in believing it » (*Ibid.*, p. 13). The fusion thesis thus leads McDowell to claim (rather paradoxically) that « even though experience is passive, it draws into operation capacities that genuinely belong to spontaneity » (*Ibid.*).

As our aetiologic stance asks us to be mindful of what's actually the case, we feel we must disagree with McDowell's claim that the freedom at play in Accepting (or Refusing) extends all the way. We are very keen to any epistemology that soils "pure" empiricism by insisting on the conative dimension at play in receptivity. To be sure, the empiricist insight that our sensory organs provide us with a free lunch of sorts contains a (quite sizeable) kernel of truth. But analogies with dominoes or photographs can only go so far: while it is true that something akin to causality is involved in experience, it is equally true that experience (in the nontrivial sense that concerns epistemology and not forensic medicine) is a privilege *of the living*. Taking the world in through one's sensory apparatus entails an effort on our part. Whether that conative dimension is best construed as lying within the purview of mind or body is irrelevant. If one wishes to repair the harm done to the human being by Cartesian dualism and renew with Aristotelianism, then one must be as attentive to animality as one is to rationality. On this point, McDowell fares quite well. However, we believe such a stance teaches us unequivocally that humans patently *do not* have the kind of ennobling privilege to Refuse the Given which McDowell's philosophical deliberations take them to have.

McDowell is fond of saying that Givenness « offers us at best exculpations where we wanted justifications » ([1994] 2002, p. 13). For him, this poses a problem. But what if the quest for justifications *is* the quest for exculpations? McDowell insists matter-of-factly that « it is one thing to be exempt from blame, on the ground that the position we find ourselves in can be traced ultimately to brute force, it is quite another thing to have a justification » (*Ibid.*, p. 8). Whence comes this demand that justification be anything *more* than a release from further

epistemological responsibility? The inference which says that the Given cannot be a reason for any claim (or any set of claims) flows only if one construes justification as both discursive *and* open-ended. We readily acknowledge that justification—both its demand and its supply—is essentially a discursive activity. But we wholeheartedly reject the mistaken assumption that the discursive nature of justification perforce makes it open-ended (*cf.* sect. 4.3.2). Supplying explanations to back up one's claims indeed requires something along the lines of civility (of the kind exemplified by enlightenment thinkers' scholarly correspondence). But if one walks away from the epistemological negotiation table and ceases further intellectual commerce with an interlocutor unimpressed by one's empirical demonstration(s), one is most emphatically relieved of any blame. To find fault with an expositor of reasons for leaving the matter up to the world itself is to confess a (quasi-Platonic) veneration of the space of reasons as not just a public sphere where arguments are presented, but as a telepathic common-area where individual participants loose their volitions.

One can object, as McDowell does, to scientism when it purports to have a monopoly on objectivity. But there is no good inference going from the rejection of such pretensions all the way to an endless exercise in disputation within the space of reasons where, with no world in sight, any party is allowed (both ontologically and normatively) to veto the deliverances of receptive experience if she so chooses, *modulo* whatever correct manners may be shared because of a common upbringing. Appeals to the world need not always involve a momentous *experimentum crucis*, but there is a way to construe the cessation of discursive justification—the attainment of a *commendable* epistemic exculpation—in more humble terms which do not dictate ahead of the world what can and cannot count as evidence for a claim.

Since we do not share McDowell's acquiescence to the Sellarsian "one-way door" account of the relation between *in praesentia* indices and *in absentia* symbols, we are not beholden to his constraints. We have no quarrel with the fact that our

embeddedness in nature is such that the world routinely forces upon us an epistemologically nourishing free meal (albeit one not much refined). In fact, we take this condition to be a boon, not a bane, for philosophy. To illustrate the point, let us single out two very considerable difficulties a view like McDowell's faces.

First, the choice to Accept or Refuse does not sit well with a "one-way door" interface of mind and world. On that construal of representation, it is structurally impossible for the mind to ascertain what is before it as a candidate for Refusal or Acceptance. Knowing *what* a content is entails *knowing* what a content is, by which time the content has entered inside the space of mind. McDowell himself recognizes that « [i]n experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, *before one has any choice in the matter* » ([1994] 2002, p. 10; italics ours). However, recognition of this fact is far from benign, and should have been of great moment for McDowell's philosophy. For either a) the asymmetrical door is opaque and the freedom to Refuse or Accept is in fact just a fortuitous exercise in guesswork, or b) that door is transparent and the idea of an *all-encompassing* freedom needs some serious re-evaluating.

Yet there is a more tangible problem with McDowell's stance. If spontaneity does indeed extend all the way to the mind's most primitive experiential impingements, it should be possible in principle to shut oneself to receptivity altogether—all the time. Obviously, such a policy can not be implemented. If we consider that thinking is the rational animal's means of earning its living in the world, we gather that the penalty for consistently Refusing all incoming candidates would likely be death (or some form of vegetative autism). What is important here is that this "friction" is not the product some inner policing of representations, and that the *reason* for the impossibility of an unyielding Refusal lies outside the "space of reasons".

2.5.2 Can "friction-from-within" really provide friction?

In all, we can identity two expressions of "friction from within" in McDowell's picture. The first takes place on very small scale—the smallest McDowell's all-encompassing spontaneity permits. It resides in the ability to Accept or Refuse the contents of experience at the most elementary (binary) level. The human mind is said to endogenously generate friction insofar as it can stymie the stream of receptive input. We have just presented the difficulties this idea faces. Let us now look at the problems associated with the more elaborate friction in McDowell's dismount, that which operates on a larger scale.

According to McDowell's account of "second nature", rational animals have the ability to institute epistemic norms to guide them in critically inspecting the fabric which makes up their "unbounded" conceptual realm. He argues that « [i]t is essential to conceptual capacities, in the demanding sense, that they can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 47; note that the "credentials" here are purely *rational*, not empirical). But while it is a natural outgrowth of our human nature, this "standing obligation to reflect" needs to be brought out through upbringing. The leading channel through which the norms of reflective thought are transmitted is culture. Just as each member of the community of rational animals participates in a common nature, so too do they participate in a common "second nature". Through education, human offspring are initiated into a set of guidelines that effectively lay down what is to be considered rationally justified. However, McDowell claims that this does not undermine the objective status of what is transmitted in our socialization: « The bare idea of *Bildung* ensures that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman, and that should eliminate the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason » (*Ibid.*, p. 95). However, since the conventions so promulgated « may have hitherto unnoticed defects, such as

parochialism or reliance on bad prejudice » (*Ibid.*, p. 81), the cultural norms themselves are not exempt from review, and « a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance » (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

As it stands, we have no problem with this view. What we take issue with is McDowell's desire to turn the norms instilled in *Bildung* into a *substitute* for the kind of empirical friction relinquished in his flight from Givenness. Above and beyond the fact that we deem this flight to be misguided, our complaint is that the "counter-spontaneity" provided by the reflective imperative is patently *not* a replacement for worldly receptivity.

We have seen how, in forswearing recourse to a transcendental limit upon the mind's domain, McDowell considers himself to be setting right what Kant and Sellars (in his later work) supposedly did wrong. Contemplation of this crucial failing on the part of his philosophic mentors eventually leads McDowell to reconsider the ideas of a thinker who figures fleetingly but flatteringly in *Mind and World*, Hegel. What McDowell finds in Hegelian philosophy is not only an analogue of pansemiotism but a generalized support for his contention that thought can effectively fold onto itself in a way that allows it to supersede experiential impingements as arbiter of epistemic affairs. As McDowell writes, « Hegelian Reason does not need to be constrained from outside, precisely because it includes as a moment within itself the receptivity that Kant attributes to sensibility » (1998, p. 466). McDowell's own gloss is devoid of the world-historical presumptuousness of Hegel's *Geist*. But while McDowell's version has a more pluralist tone, it nevertheless rests on a fundamentally universalist assumption. Indeed, McDowell believes that since we rational animals partake in a ubiquitous biological nature, the *Bildung* brought to the fore by our peers « could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism » ([1994] 2002, p. 84; ironically, despite the

fact that McDowell calls in the strictures of culture to supplant the friction typically provided by the world, his original intent was to curtail accusations of anthropocentric arrogance, *cf.* sect. 1.4.4).

Like McDowell ([1994] 2002, p. 126; 2002, p. 296), we have a hard time believing that the world-views, institutions, practices, and ready-made categorizations implicit in natural languages could have been passed on for so long—and accepted and employed by so many—had not the bulk of them fruitfully served us in ways that attest to their relative objectivity. As Ruth Millikan poignantly writes,

> If we can understand why singing fancy songs helps song birds, why emitting ultrasonic sounds helps bats, why having a seventeen-year cycle helps seventeen-year locusts, why having ceremonial fights helps mountain sheep, and why dancing figure eights helps bees, surely it is mere cowardice to refuse even to wonder why uttering, in particular, *subject-predicate sentences*, *subject to negation*, helps man. Surely there is some explanation for this helping that is quite general and not magical. (1984, p. 7-8)

As such, we readily recognize that the epistemic "theft" afforded by culture spares us much toil (sect. 1.2.4). But in sharp contrast with McDowell's "standing obligation" to spontaneously criticize our beliefs, we think such a process of acculturation gives us sense of security in our beliefs. If anything, *Bildung* teaches us to trust, not distrust.

How can McDowell claim that the (symbolic) conventions which make up a person's *Bildung* admit some kind of worldly motivation—all the while marshalling technical incredulity at those aspects of our human "sapience" closest to our animality, the most notable being our (indexical) ability to perceive? For if human nature can be made to secure the epistemic standing of complex socio-cultural institutions like education, why can't it similarly validate the ability of our minds to take in (in a nontrivial way) its worldly environment by way of a sensory apparatus? Strangely enough, in McDowell's Sellarsian epistemology, it is precisely such

proximity to the world which excludes "observational" representations from supplying friction—whereas the distance of conventional institutions assures them that role. In this inverted asymmetrist scheme, "second nature" is a first-class citizen and "first nature" is relegated to an unmentionable status. Yet why is it that McDowell can appeal to our biology so as to prevent *Bildung* from spinning in the void it is intended to fill, but he can cite that same status as evidence for the epistemic impotence of the Given? If our nature as rational animals can ground the critical norms passed on in upbringing, surely it can likewise succour symbolic representations indexically driven through the mind's supposed "one-way door" as they negotiate the "logical space of reasons". Echoing the criticism made at the close of the last section: if a cultural practice of 'eating poisonous mushrooms while jumping off cliffs' cannot be passed on across generations, what is this to be attributed to?

We think it is pure speculative delusion to suggest that "a decent upbringing" (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 81, 82) might somehow supplant worldly friction. Granted, it may be that, as a philosopher investigates the interface of mind and world, she comes to believe that the sphere of thought is so constituted that it has no outer rim. This does not, however, preclude the fabric of our representations—of our culture—from subsuming beneath it a realm of nature quite alien to any of the humane comforts we understandably surround ourselves with. The existence of such a worldly domain can be transcendentally deduced from within culture, if one wishes, via an optimism in the fertility of our *Bildung*; as McDowell does when he urges that our shared biological situation assures us a foothold in the realm of law ([1994] 2002, p. 84). Yet the presence of the order of nature can be felt with more urgency, regardless of whether one wants to or not, in the way it occasionally tears the fabric of culture from beneath; be it in surprise, ignorance, injury, error—and ultimately, death.

When we first pondered why McDowell clings to the rejection of Givenness in spite of his insistence that the world is basically made "open" to us, we remarked that his imposition of perpetual scrutiny did not take into due consideration a very proximate reason agents have to trust that their representations have an objective basis; to wit, the fact of effective success (sect. 1.4.3). Accordingly, we argued that McDowell's "standing obligation" should be weakened in such a way as to be triggered only upon the substantial frustration of those expectations which grow out of hitherto fruitful representations. Although we are endowed with spontaneity, it seems to us a flagrant misuse of that faculty to engage in speculative ruminations which prompt *ad hoc* visits to the doctor to see if one's representations of health "pass muster". Until and unless symptoms actually manifest themselves, one should assume that one is free of disease.

This idea that humans revisit their conceptions only when compelled to do so seems so plain as to go without saying—the casual reader of *Mind and World* likely supplies that missing element herself. But upon further examination, we see that the conspicuous absence of any remark to that effect by McDowell is a calculated move after all (*cf.* the careful rationalist wording spotted earlier in this section). For countenancing disruptions of habit implies accepting exactly the kind of empirical friction McDowell's "second nature" ardently strives to supersede, insofar as a balloon popping unexpectedly behind one's head clearly sits outside the realm of spontaneity (it simply won't do to affirm that one drapes the *hic et nunc* fact with meaning as soon as one gets a cognitive hold on what's happening: that one subsequently does so is not the product of choice). The way we see it, it is precisely because these rents run *counter* to civilized expectations that "first nature" makes a better normative bulwark to our spontaneity in representation. Such a view also answers the oft ignored but all important philosophic question: why is common sense so common?

Just as McDowell overdoes Kant's credo when he insists that spontaneity and receptivity not only co-operate, but are not « notionally separable » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 9); so does he overdo Wittgenstein's insight when he takes the passage « How do I know that this colour is red?—It would be an answer to say: "I have learnt English" » (Wittgenstein, [1953] 2001, § 381)—and hastily infers that it would be "*the* answer" to cite inculcation into a language.

2.5.3 The ambivalent role of the noumenal

According to McDowell, the concession to a noumenal realm beyond the phenomenal—no matter how slim its limit-like ontology—is the whisker's breadth which ultimately prevents the Kantian synthesis of receptivity and spontaneity from successfully overcoming the seesaw.

> If one posits an empirically separable contribution from receptivity, one commits oneself to something Given in experience that could constitute the ultimate extra-conceptual grounding for everything conceptual, and it is a way of putting a central Kantian thought to say that that idea must be rejected. [...]
>
> But Kant also has a transcendental story, and in the transcendental perspective there does seem to be an isolable contribution from receptivity. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 41)

McDowell thus sees himself as taking Kant's insights to their logical completion by removing the obstructing dogma of the noumenal:

> [I]f we take Kant's conception of experience out the frame he puts it in, a story about a transcendental affection of receptivity by a supersensible reality, it becomes just what we need. Outside that frame, Kant's conception is a satisfactory way to avoid our dilemma, the apparently forced choice between the Myth of the Given and a coherentism that renounces external constraints on thinking. But the frame spoils the insight, because the radical mind-independence of the supersensible comes to seem exemplary of what any genuine mind-independence would be [...]. (*Ibid.*, p. 95-96)

This "buffet" view of the historical canons has ruffled many a specialist's scholarly feathers. Graham Bird, for instance, believes McDowell's split interpretation of Kant, with the transcendentalist metaphysic as a "monstrous" or

"dark" side, to be fundamentally mistaken. According to him, not only is McDowell's work sorely lacking in exegetical accuracy, it fails to see that there is much to recommend Kant's commitment to noumena (Bird, 1996, p. 236-243). To be fair though, McDowell openly admits that his reading of Kant owes much to Strawson's commentary in *The Bounds of Sense* ([1966] 1990); prudently showing reservations about whether « Strawson's Kant is really Kant » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. viii). In any event, whereas Bird contends that McDowell's philosophy should have embraced an ontological realm beyond thought, we find Robert Stern at the opposite end of the hermeneutic spectrum portraying McDowell as a too-conservative emulator of Hegel's refurbishing of the Kantian framework. According to Stern, it would have been beneficial to McDowell's overall project had he embraced idealism more boldly.

> To put the contrast simplistically: while McDowell's wants to vindicate common sense, to put us back in touch with tables, cats and other people, [...] Hegel wants much more—to vindicate a kind of conception of philosophy that Kant had thought was impossible, and which would also appear to have no place in McDowell's therapeutic, late-Wittgensteinian outlook. (Stern, 1999, p. 260)
>
> .....
>
> [...] Hegel makes clear that he sees such metaphysical modesty as culturally and intellectually disastrous. (*Ibid.*)

In light of this reading, Stern finds much irony in the fact that « McDowell (and, in a different way, Rorty) should take themselves to be representing an authentically Hegelian outlook, when they argue for *greater* philosophical quietism and modesty [...] » (*Ibid.*, p. 264).

It is an understandable consequence of our meaning-making apparatus that we tend to see contemporary thinkers as reprising the archetypal roles canonized in histories of philosophy. But valuable though such historical juxtapositions may be from a literary standpoint, it is probably a sound methodological policy to resist these sorts of erudite (re)constructions. However, in this instance the divergent appraisals of Bird and Stern teach us two very important things. First, it becomes

increasingly apparent that Thornton's fears about the inherent instability of McDowell's hybrid historical-*cum*-quietist approach may have been well-founded. Second—and more importantly—we begin to make out the outlines of a certain ambivalence vis-à-vis the noumenal in McDowell's dialectic. For despite his calls to repudiate the agnostic view and replace it with pansemiotism, McDowell portrays the incorporation of a world beyond mind as inherently *attractive* to theoretical reflection.

The considerable task McDowell sets himself in *Mind and World* is made all the more laborious by his acceptance of an assortment of philosophical constraints, chief among which is his steadfast refusal to construe the Kantian co-operation of spontaneity and receptivity as anything less than an all-out fusion, one so tightly-knit as to prevent us from wedging-in even a "notional" distinction. As we have seen throughout this chapter, the attempt to make this radical amalgamation hold forces McDowell into an ever-expanding body of rationalizations (of varying strengths). The pre-eminent danger faced by his fusion and pansemiotist theses is that the parties they are designed to reconcile might eventually loose their very identity in the blend. However, progression towards such a final "synthesis" of opposites would dramatically bring home the fact that McDowell has parted in an important way from the original Kantian intent. The more McDowell's fusion and pansemiotism are developed—in other words, the more one is convinced by his arguments that the twin faculties are not even "notionally" discernible—the more one wonders whether it would not simply be best to espouse some kind of monism. It is thus vital that the inevitable collapse of McDowell's amalgam be perpetually forestalled. As a result, although McDowell stalwartly declares that we should forgo the possibility of a noumenal realm, his philosophy manifests a mixed attitude: its positive-theoretic proposals enjoin us to repudiate the noumenon, yet require it in order to make our presumed anxiety vis-à-vis wholism intelligible.

On that score, it is interesting to note the ubiquity of the following pattern: McDowell's position is "not quite like this"—but "not quite like that" either. Granted, philosophical stances can sometimes be quite elaborate. But if some esoteric detail of McDowell's stance escapes our grasp, then that missing element should be produced forthwith; as there is a point beyond which philosophical subtlety becomes obscurantism. Unfortunately, since no such stable account emerges, the idea of a "receptive spontaneity" (or a "spontaneous receptivity"?) reveals itself to be not a philosophic dismount—but a rhetorical seesaw all its own. Were such a notional "hide and seek" merely a provisional literary device intended to accentuate some key feature(s) of McDowell's theses, then temporarily feeding this kind of tension could be forgiven. This, however, is not the case. Not only is the strategy never relinquished, it is actually used by McDowell as a very substantial motive for dismissing significant rival positions, most notably those of Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty. For although McDowell considers Kant's transcendentalism the crucial weakness to be avoided at all cost, we find him wielding the abandonment of a limit beyond mind as a reproach against the ideas of Rorty and Davidson.

That is a rather puzzling move. Indeed, the newcomer to McDowell's philosophy could be forgiven for seeing it as a companion to those of Rorty and Davidson. Both of these thinkers have wrestled with basically the same issues concerning the interface of mind and world, and both have come to conclusions roughly analogous to those advocated by McDowell: the mind is at home in its own expanse, and the desire for rigid foundations beyond thought should be renounced. In Davidson's case, the impetus for this stance was a subtle working out of the logical consequences of Quinean wholism. Like McDowell, Davidson has a hard time swallowing the idea that experience could serve as an epistemological tribunal whilst lying outside the realm of mind. The following is not atypical of Davidson's writing:

> [I]f we reject the idea of an uninterpreted source of evidence no room is left for a dualism of scheme and content. Without such dualism we cannot make sense of conceptual relativism. This does not mean that we must give up the idea of an objective world independent of our knowledge of it. The argument against conceptual relativism shows rather that language is not a screen or filter through which our knowledge of the world must pass. (Davidson, [1984] 2001, p. xx)

This passage by Davidson could easily pass for an excerpt of *Mind and World*:

> The idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought. But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts [...]. The attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do. (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 7)

Whereas Davidson's concerns centre around meaning and the possibility of a non-circular science of semantics, Rorty's philosophical interests are less technical and deal with culture in its broadest sense. Nevertheless, Rorty too appears to be travelling the same philosophic path as McDowell. Again, consider the following:

> [W]e would do well to abandon the notion of certain values ("rationality", "disinterestedness") floating free of the educational and institutional patterns of the day. We can just say that Galileo was *creating* the notion of "scientific values" as he went along, that it was a splendid thing that he did so, and that the question of whether he was "rational" in doing so is out of place. (Rorty, 1980, p. 331)

And McDowell:

> What is at work here is a conception of nature that can seem sheer common sense, though it was not always so; the conception I mean was made available only by a hard-won achievement of human thought at a specific time, the time of the rise of modern science. ([1994] 2002, p. 70)
>
> .....
>
> We can acknowledge the great step forward that human understanding took when our ancestors formed the idea of a domain of intelligibility, the realm of natural law, that is empty of meaning, but we can refuse to equate that domain of intelligibility with nature, let alone with what is real. (*Ibid.*, p. 109)

Parallels like these are by no means exceptional, and similar comparisons can be made almost at leisure. Nor is there anything particularly novel about the affinity of the contents themselves, insofar as McDowell openly acknowledges the influence which the works of Davidson and Rorty have had on his thinking (in fact, he credits an enthusiastic reading—his « third or fourth »—of Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* for triggering the reflection that was eventually to lead to *Mind and World*, [1994] 2002, p. ix; and he is equally explicit in stating that he delineates his « stance against [Davidson's] by way of a contrast that it would be easy to relegate to the edges of the picture, with massive agreement in the centre », *ibid.*, p. viii).

In light of McDowell's obdurate condemnations of any and all epistemological theories that intimate some latent recourse to the "mythical" Given, one would have expected Rorty and Davidson to be showered with plaudits for their staunch observance of the Wittgensteinian admonition that one cannot think both sides of the frontier of thought. Not so. Although Davidson and Rorty were correct not to espouse the idea of a unrepresented realm beyond representation, McDowell believes their philosophies should be reprimanded for not being sufficiently attracted to the "noumenal temptation". The following eloquently sums up the tenor of his indictment: « It is true that Rorty resists the blandishments of traditional philosophy, but the effect of the framework he assumes is that he can do that only by plugging his ears, like Odysseus sailing past the Sirens » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 147). Davidson is also seen as closing his eyes to the vertigo posed by his wholism: « Of course Davidson believes that his position is a place where thought can come to rest, not a movement in an interminable oscillation. But I think he contrives to make it seem so only by going insufficiently deeply into the motivation of the Myth of the Given » (*Ibid.*, p. 15).

It seems the extra-mind picture must be dispensable enough for the unbounded picture to eventually overcome its pull—but attractive enough to exert a flight from the idea of a whole "spinning in a void". In other words, for pansemiotism to hold, one must find peace; for pansemiotism to be sought, one mustn't find peace. McDowell has even gone as far as to make his empathy towards Givenness—a view he deems to be radically mistaken—his badge of philosophic distinction. In a text originally written as an introduction to *Mind and World*, he states:

> So why should anyone prefer my way to Davidson's? Well, there is, I believe, an intuitive appeal to the idea that empirical thinking must be answerable to impressions if it is to be contentful at all, and Davidson's approach does nothing towards explaining that away. [...] Suppose someone is really tempted to think both that empirical thinking must be answerable to impressions and that it cannot be. Davidson does nothing to help such a person. [...] Whereas on my side, I offer a story whose point is to acknowledge, but explain away, the attractiveness of the other of the two sources of the anxiety, the thought that impressions cannot constitute a tribunal. (McDowell, [1999] 2000, p. 8)

We can now ascertain the distance which separates our own approach to inquiry from that of McDowell. Specifically, we see how unlikely it would have been for him to heed our call to *not* consider rival speculative arguments (sect. 1.2.5). For what we take to be a key weakness of McDowell's approach, he considers a strength. In any event, there is something quite revelatory about McDowell's stance. It is worth noting that while he prides himself on being able to comprehend the attraction presented by the pole of receptive atomism, he does not show equal empathy for the wholistic stances espoused by Davidson and Rorty. Why is it, then, that those who appeal to some form of Givenness are pulled towards something inherently attractive, whereas those who claim to find peace in wholes seemingly have to feign their philosophic repose? Does not such an interpretation lend credence to our earlier suggestion that wholism should never have arisen to begin with, and that the Given might actually be the furthest thing from a myth?

2.6 Conclusion

We described our purpose as twofold, first presenting McDowell's positive ideas then criticizing them. In a sense though, the totality of this chapter acted in the service of this latter task. Since we decided to follow McDowell down the Sellarsian road he accepted to see if it led to worthwhile ideas, we were effectively letting McDowell plead his own case by detailing his arguments. The question, then, is whether the third way which emerges from it all is indeed tenable.

Combined with his desire not to "lapse" into any sort of Givenness, McDowell's appreciation of the relativist pitfalls of wholism pushes him towards something far more radical than any of these options taken independently. As we have seen, he maintains that if we fuse receptivity and spontaneity together, we can reap the benefits of each while being spared the vicissitudes of their troublesome relation. However, we argued that such a project is doomed to fail. Should creative travails succeed in spawning something which would vaguely resemble the fusion McDowell pushes for, that conception would prevent us from capitalizing on the epistemological advantages proper to punctate receptivity and wholistic spontaneity. Indeed, one is inevitably presented with a choice. Either one recognizes the faculties of receptivity and spontaneity as *distinct* faculties and attempts to *account for their relation*, or one *forgoes explaining that relation* by positing an all-encompassing mingling of attributes and accepts that the *neutral* variant which emerges from the fusion will be quite unlike its pre-synthesis parentage. For once it is claimed that mind and world are one, it simply cannot be business as usual in epistemology.

Although McDowell is steadfastly opposed to the first of these disjuncts, he cannot bring himself to surrendering the distinctions he claims to repudiate, which would collapse the twin faculties of the Kantian co-operation into a truly *indistinguishable* amalgam. In spite of his Hegelian inclinations, McDowell harbours a certain cosmological humility; one which, though commendable, is incommensurate with the radicalism of his fusion thesis. For instance, out of a fear

that the "unbounded" view of mind he advocates—which has all the trappings of idealism—might signal « a baseless confidence that the world is completely within the reach of our powers of thinking » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 39-40), he develops an intricate historical rereading of the natural which shifts the burden of empirical friction onto culture. Our spontaneity, according to this gloss, is not curbed by worldly contacts, but by the rational humility instilled in upbringing. However, we argued that since cultural norms are in turn limited by a natural order that is precisely *not* cultural, the problems at hand are merely *transposed* to a societal level—not addressed. Thus, in the final analysis, we believe *Mind and World*'s bid to be unsuccessful.

We must admit that many of the ideas in *Mind and World* are quite entrancing, providing (as promised) a great deal of fodder for the philosophic imagination. Yet if this is the strength of this work, it is also its chief weakness. For it is not McDowell's ideas as such which must be judged, but whether they are equal to the problem they are adduced to resolve. On this count, we cannot help but feel that McDowell's proposals do not live up to their intended purpose. Certainly, we can admire the way he strove to refine and improve "pictures" which, it would seem, had little hope to begin with. Nevertheless, McDowell is arguably more convincing in portraying the oscillation between atomism and wholism than he is in elaborating a tenable way out of those dead-ends. All told, we think the McDowellian fusion is a logical invalid supported only by a rhetorical pacemaker: it is a third way that can have it both ways only so long as its inevitable collapse into monism is adroitly kept at bay.

To be sure, McDowell would likely be unscathed by such an assessment, as the want of palpability of his proposals is very much a product of design: « [I]f I am right about the character of the philosophical anxieties I aim to deal with, there is no room for doubt that engaging in "constructive philosophy", in this sense, is not the way to approach them » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. xxiv). Such proclamations

notwithstanding, one can reasonably wonder whether McDowell stays true to this "therapeutic" approach—whether he really heeds his own call to « exorcize the questions rather than set about answering them » (*Ibid.*). Clearly it is no great stretch to recognize that a distinctly *positive* vision is sketched in *Mind and World*. In any event, McDowell's meta-philosophical commitments are his own, and we do not feel bound by them.

Instead of trying to drastically revise the conceptions of mind and world which suggest themselves most *naturally* to us and supplant them with arcane notional admixtures which disintegrate at the slightest theoretical contemplation, would it not be preferable to tinker with a handful of small but unhealthy philosophical ideas, namely the asymmetry of indexicality and the inference from anatomism to wholism? That such a move would not only be aetiologically sensible, but economical as well, surely is no coincidence.

CHAPTER III

HALTING THE INITIAL RECOIL: REJECTING ASYMMETRY

> A wise general eats his enemy's food. One of his chickens is worth twenty of mine.
>
> Sun Tzu
> *The Art of War* (c. 6th cent. B.C.)

3.1 Introduction

As McDowell sees it, the oscillation is not a problem in need of a solution, but rather a "symptom" to be "dissolved". Indeed, he repeatedly characterizes his enterprise as rendering explicit a latent anxiety which he believes underlies philosophic discourse on epistemology and metaphysics. According to this "therapeutic" gloss, the reason why philosophy is trapped in a quandary between the atom and the whole is that it is notionally ill-equipped. As we saw in the second chapter, McDowell's own way out of the seesaw consists in proposing a bold new way of picturing the interface of mind and world, one that supposedly fuses the opposite features whose difficult reconciliation perpetuates the back-and-forth instability. Thus, he contends that « in order to escape the oscillation, we need to recognize that experiences themselves are states or occurrences that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 24). But we have argued that the notion of "receptive spontaneity" has about as much chance of success as that of a "square circle".

McDowell, of course, has an elaborate story about human culture which is intended to soothe the understandable objection that regulation from within the expanse of mind is a stand-in which falls short of objective normativity. However, as we have tried to show, that story is moot. Among other things, it supposes that cultural norms of reflective thought are somehow sovereign in a way that lets them *supplant* (and not merely add to) worldly friction. But clearly civilized upbringing cannot discharge philosophy from recognizing that the world imposes on the mind (and on culture) a landscape of possibilities *with or without* its co-operation. In our view, we may indeed have a "second nature", but it is inept to buffer the second recoil away from the whole.

These improbable suggestions, however, did not arise in a vacuum. Rather, the drastic fusion thesis was intended to negotiate the demands of a prior philosophic constraint. While *Mind and World* asks us to try and fathom audacious new ideas that run counter to some of our most strongly held intuitions, its revisionist dialectic is nevertheless beholden to one nonnegotiable covenant: thought may enjoy a *causal* contact with its objects, but it cannot recuperate those contacts as *reasons*. Since this Sellarsian thesis strikes at the very heart of the semiotic structure of representation, McDowell believes the only way to circumvent the problems associated with the idea of an ineffable domain is to advocate a pansemiotist outlook. Given our negative appraisal of that undertaking, what we want to do in this chapter is part company with McDowell's positive-theoretic proposals and return to the fork in the road we met up with at the close of the first chapter so as to critically re-examine the technical arguments which forced him into so implausible an account in the first place. Instead of trying to make the McDowellian fusion tenable by adding yet another battery of corrective nuances, we want to rewind the path of the seesaw, identify the precise logical moment when the dialectic went

wrong and direct all our efforts on remedying *that* point. In short, if are to put an end to the oscillation between atomism and wholism, we believe one of the principal tenets which must be ablated is the asymmetry of indexicality thesis.

This chapter will seek to articulate an assortment of problems and inconsistencies which we believe are damning to the Sellarsian thesis. After setting the general context, we will challenge asymmetry in two volleys, starting from more intuitive appeals and progressively working our way towards more a priori arguments. Our first concern will be to show how the asymmetry stance effectively misappropriates representational contents. Questioning whether the asymmetrist can have access to diachronically established stores of knowledge, we will argue that the appropriation of any such heritage by an agent involves a cognitive effort which itself cannot have recourse to prior contents. We will then turn to Sellars' contention that economic considerations within the whole offer a viable source of normativity. Putting this claim to the test, we will examine the case of trivial variances which do not jeopardize the integrity of the whole. Upon confirming wholism's normative impotence in such instances, we will try to bring to the fore the peculiar way in which asymmetry accommodates the theft of content from experience *de facto* while denying that origin a proper epistemological standing. As a means of further illustrating the fallaciousness of this view, we will propose a thought experiment which will exhibit how observation inevitably contributes to the warrant of claims to knowledge, even when those claims are arrived at via argument. Our second critical volley will then ask what ensues when one applies the asymmetry thesis within the realm of mind. The recurrent theme of our assault on this front will be that wholism is not immune to the asymmetry thesis itself. In fact, we will endeavour to show that the asymmetrist stance effectively undermines the very inferential space it deems to be the legitimate medium of intelligibility.

3.2 Returning to the fork in the road: asymmetry revisited

3.2.1 *"E pur, si muove"*

There is general philosophic motif which we should like to bring to the fore. It is unclear to us whether it pertains to ontology or epistemology (or both). In any case, it is not proper to any particular thinker, period, or school. Rather, it is a generic pattern which surfaces time and time again as a harmful piece of reasoning. The manoeuvre typically unfolds as follows. First, a distinction is made between two kinds of objects (broadly construed). The philosopher, taking an inventory of the reality that surrounds her, quickly gathers that it manifests some sort of *prima facie* plurality. The things that populate her environment are many, and vary in their natures. Thus, to the most readily accessible class of middle-sized material objects that are brought rather nonchalantly to her cognitive attention, she adds more exotic articles such as relations, signs, minds, etc. (this store of items becomes increasingly populous when a thinker is particularly astute and/or has access to a developed patrimony of philosophical works). However, sooner or later, the philosopher comes to the conclusion that the roster of things which exist is too ponderous. The profligacy must end and a trim is in order.

Preferences in ontology are a curious thing, as their *ad hoc* admixtures of negative disdain and positive preference often seem answerable only to an aesthetic rationale. In any event, the philosopher eventually wishes to eliminate an undesired object, distinctly changing its official status in such a way that it is no longer considered part of the catalogue of things real. This raises the museological problem of *deaccession*, which is the actual removal of an object from the space occupied by a collection. For museums, this step can take an array of shapes, ranging from transfers to other institutions to public auctions to simply tossing an object on the curb. But if philosophical discourse can overtly let it be known that a given article of being is no longer welcomed—no longer part of what is deemed the *true* metaphysical landscape—difficulties arise when such alienation gives way to

deaccession. For if an object hitherto considered real by thought now finds itself disdained, "where" are we to put it? Hence arises the second movement of the motif. The philosopher must now find a way to retroactively expurgate an object which, it was hitherto held, possessed an actuality—however abstract—that was sufficiently compelling for it to be thought of as a denizen of the real.

Now one may rightfully argue that speculative acumen is not a license for being. But what we wish to consider here are not objects for which there is absolutely no ground, but rather those cases where one recognizes the existence of something *de facto* yet subsequently wishes to withdraw it from metaphysical circulation. Things the being of which does not present itself in the first place obviously do not confront one with the problem of having to execute deaccession against one's *prima facie* intuitions. To be sure, the matter of establishing what is a *de facto* acknowledgement of being is a tricky one. Without engaging in hermeneutic speculations disproportionate with their basis, we can nevertheless establish some more robust grounds whence to decide whether or not a given item is indeed taken to be minimally real despite a thinker's technical arguments to the contrary. If nothing else, it seems fair to say that arguments in favour of removing an object from the official ontological roster are rather dubious when they repeatedly appeal to the object in question (such is the case with McDowell, whose repeated employment of receptivity and spontaneity does more to substantiate the ontological likeliness of those faculties than to reinforce his contention that the notions are in fact one and the same).

We thus have a strange situation: *the philosopher recognizes that there is something the existence of which she wants to deny.* How to proceed? The problem, in short, is how to rid oneself of something which, whilst it cannot survive philosophical scrutiny, nevertheless accrues widespread recognition—notably by

oneself on a more intuitive level. The oldest solution to this quandary (as old as philosophy itself) has been to posit a distinction between appearance and reality, and to relegate the undesirable party to the illusory side.

Take the case of change, a particularly unsettling issue for early Greek philosophical thought. Consider a piece of burning wood. As it burns, a change occurs. First the wood was brown and cold; then it is replaced by something black and hot. In other words, one thing comes into existence while another exits. This, as it stands, presented a philosophical puzzle of sorts: "where" did the first object, which was brown and cold, "go"? Similarly, where did the subsequent object, which is black and hot, "come from"? This problem may strike the contemporary mind as no problem at all: it is readily apparent to us that nothing came or went in or out of existence. Yet we owe this comforting explanation largely to Aristotle, whose distinction between form and matter (and potency and act) paved the way for a robust account of change. The pre-Socratics, however, took an altogether different route. Instead of preserving the *prima facie* acknowledgement that in some strange way there are both *two* and *one* states involved in change and endeavouring to produce an account that would do justice to this pre-theoretic point of origin, they became ontologically *partisan*. Thus, for Heraclitus, the burning wood was in fact a succession of two things, and all intuitions to the contrary were considered illusory (*cf.* Burnet, [1892] 2003, p. 144-177). In contrast, Parmenides held that there is only one thing involved in the burning wood, and all intuitions running counter to that tenet were deemed by him mere appearance (*Ibid.*, p. 189-201).

Both of these thinkers were willing to rewrite the book of nature. All is change, said one; nothing changes, said the other—*but neither of these stances actually fits the data*. No doubt faithful adherents of a particular school were able, through intensive study, to bring themselves to see the error of their epistemologically primitive ways and to seriously believe their master's doctrine. They most likely looked upon this privileging of a given aspect, not as an ontological bias, but as a

profound sort of clarity, one capable of discerning the *really* real from the *apparently* real. In the end, though, the respective partisanships remained, and the situation which gave the philosophers cause to ponder—the mundane impetus—went on unexplained.

In contrast, we believe that what was unique about Aristotle's own approach was a kind of ontological humility (sect. 2.5.1). The vast explanatory feats accomplished by Aristotle were made possible by an unrelenting sobriety of thought, which is not only remarkable when compared to his predecessors (including most emphatically his teacher, Plato), but which would likely still stand out amongst today's philosophies. Aristotle was able to make change intelligible because he shunned facile recourse to "appearances" and made it a sort of methodological compact to always strive for concordance with the data that set his inquiries into motion. By our lights, this is the aetiologic posture all philosophers should adopt: to eschew ladder-discarding.

> According to Aristotle, the question to start with is not: What must reality be like in order to make it possible for us to acquire knowledge of it? But simply: What, as a matter of fact, is reality? (Peikoff, 1999, p. 14)
>
> .....
>
> All the others in their various ways engage in disconnected, free-floating theorizing. They come at some point to some conclusion in conflict with the facts of reality as reported by our senses, and they proceed to say, "Down with reality". Or rather, they don't put it that way; they say, "This isn't reality, it is simply appearances; true reality is the world that lives up to our theories".
>
> But Aristotle refuses to endorse any dichotomy between reality and appearance. For him, reality is what we observe, and any theories that go counter to it are simply wrong. [...] Aristotle's typical procedure is that he conscientiously presents [the pre-Socratics'] arguments, and then he says, in a matter-of-fact way, "But we see these things, they are obvious, they are facts, and facts are facts". Then, of course, since he is a great philosopher, he proceeds to make mincemeat of the arguments that led to the denial of those facts. (*Ibid.*, p. 15)

This approach, far from being a disconnected ideal, is of great consequence for the solving of philosophic problems. In the case of change, it was only when a thinker finally took it upon himself to bow before the natural layout before him that the way was cleared for a robust comprehension of the object of study. This much is only normal. For how can one hope to account for a situation when one obstinately refuses to acknowledge the full reality of some of the elements that comprise it?

The case of representation is very similar to that of change. According to the broad Kantian framework we have been exploring, the human mind is endowed with two faculties, one receptive (i.e., "sensible intuition") and the other spontaneous ("conceptual understanding"). The issue at the heart of our concerns—and which gives rise to McDowell's seesaw—is how we can conjugate these twin faculties so that neither supersedes the other. However, how can one hope to explicate the relation between receptivity and spontaneity when one denies the existence of one of the relata (*pace* Sellars)—or of the relation itself (*pace* McDowell)?

McDowell's proposal renders fertile aetiologic explanation impossible. Appealing to a distinction between appearance and reality in therapeutic guise, he enjoins us to re-conceive the matter far differently then we did upon beginning our inquiry: there is *really* only one faculty at play, not two. All intuitions to the contrary are depicted as either remnants of lingering historical dogmas or symptoms of our limited imagination. Sellars' own stance shares with McDowell the appeal to mistaken appearances, but glosses the situation differently. According to him, there is indeed only one faculty, but that is because receptivity is a chimera. How then does he deaccession this item? On this count, Sellars could have followed Heraclitus and Parmenides in invoking the facile distinction between appearance and reality. However, since this manoeuvre would have effectively deprived his philosophy of much plausibility, he instead employs perhaps the least subtle strategy of all, relegating the Given to that children's table of metaphysics whose attendants are euphemistically labelled "heuristic".

At the close of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind", Sellars addresses the obvious question of how so massive a delusion as the "Myth of the Given" could have gained prominence. While he remains steadfastly committed to his conviction that talk of things Given is totally baseless from a strictly philosophical standpoint, he conjectures that « in the attempt to account for the fact that his fellow men behave intelligently not only when their conduct is threaded on a string of overt verbal episodes [...] but also when no detectable verbal output is present », some human must have once developed « a *theory* according to which overt utterances are but the culmination of a process which begins with certain inner episodes » (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 56). According to this instrumentalist gloss, although the Givenist « mislocates the truth of these conceptions » and « confuses his own creative enrichment of the framework of empirical knowledge, with an analysis of knowledge as it was », thereby mistakenly believing his constructs « to be antecedent objects of knowledge which have somehow been in the framework from the beginning » (*Ibid.*, § 62), the fictional language of basic noninferential impressions can nevertheless serve as a shorthand helping us understand how we fix references. However, Sellars stresses that the usefulness of such rhetoric does not warrant our believing that a *real* situation underlies our belief in receptivity:

> [W]hile our 'ancestors' came to notice impressions, and the language of impressions embodies a 'discovery' that there are such things, the language of impressions was no more tailored to fit *antecedent* noticings of these entities than the language of molecules was tailored to fit antecedent noticings of molecules. (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 62)

In keeping with the asymmetry of indexicality thesis, this stance is a convenient compromise: it rejects something as mythical whilst keeping all of the benefits associated with it. As Sellars writes:

> [O]f course, as long as the existing [common sense] framework is used, it will be *incorrect* to say—otherwise than to make a philosophical point *about the framework*—that no object is really coloured, or is located in Space, or endures through Time. But, *speaking as a philosopher*, I am quite prepared to say that the common sense world of physical objects in Space and Time is unreal—that is, that there are no such things. (*Ibid.*, § 41; italics in original)

How one can sensibly make such a major concession to the attributes of a theory and still maintain that there really is no legitimate metaphysical substratum vindicating that theory's standing is an ambidextrous feat of expediency well beyond us. Yet perhaps we should not be so appalled at such a stance, insofar as it is not without precedent. For instance, a certain catholic Cardinal by the name of Bellarmine once proposed to construe the heliocentric cosmology upheld by Copernicus and Galileo as « really just an ingenious heuristic device for, say, navigational purposes and other sorts of practically oriented celestial reckoning » (Rorty, 1980, p. 329)—while denying it the official status of truth. There is, of course, a well-known aetiologic retort to such a stance, which until recently commanded the respect of learned individuals. However, owing in no small part to Sellars' asymmetry argument, times have changed, and we now find the confrontation of reason and faith construed as a trivial matter of personal preference. Emboldened by the Sellarsian critique of representation, Richard Rorty writes: « *Mere* looking at the planets will be of no help in choosing our model of the heavens, any more than *mere* reading of Scripture » (1980, p. 332; italics in original). Perhaps then the time has come to move beyond ostention and "make mincemeat of the arguments that led to the denial of those facts".

3.2.2 Laying down a setting whence to proceed

What we want to do now is establish a framework where we can better pin down the mechanics of the asymmetry of indexicality thesis. Not only will doing so prevent digression into textual exegesis, it will also allow us to bring into sharper focus the technical philosophic argument which lies behind the "myth of the Given" slogan.

Figure 1 Virgin launch pad.

Let us begin then by marking-off an area of space by a rectangle and henceforth refer to this space as a "launch pad" (fig. 1). Ignoring size constraints, this box can be occupied by *anything*. Whatever is present in the launch pad makes itself manifest in the manner and degree appropriate to it. Thus, if there is a duck, it will walk like a duck, quack like a duck, etc. Similarly, if it is a typographical letter, well, it will neither quack nor walk but simply offer itself to sight. In short, the space of the launch pad is a neutral canvass which can be occupied by anything. The only difference is that its contents are framed for special reflective consideration, the launch pad being but a convenient way to mark off a difference between subject and object (please note that a human being can figure as the content of the launch pad, as is the case for example with cryptic natives).

Let us now place an agent in the vicinity of this launch pad. Once again, guided by non-speculative sobriety, let us construe this agent as a healthy human adult. Given the agent's nature as a rational animal and the constitution of the object as whatever it is, some sort of indexical impingement ensues from the encounter. Let us assume that whatever proximal requirements are needed for the agent to grasp a given object in the launch pad are met. Thus, since a duck quacks and the human agent hears, the human agent hears the duck quack (the non-existence of the Pegasus and the like ensures that these do not enjoy this indexical power, thereby leaving the question of "what there is" to what there is. Existence needs no midwifery).

In keeping with the "intentional realism" propounded earlier (sect. 1.3), our agent should not be construed as a mere automaton, one which could be studied by medicine or biology but which would have little relevance to epistemology. The term "indexical" would be inappropriate in such a brute case, insofar as we would be lacking the significance in virtue of which indices rise above mere causality (sect. 1.5.2). As McDowell writes, « movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency » ([1994] 2002, p. 89; *cf.* Sect. 1.3.2). Likewise, deVries and Triplett point out that Sellars' outlook was « willing to go beyond descriptions of behavior and to theorize about causes and explanations of that behavior » (2000, p. 138; *cf.* Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 53-55). This much is only normal. For if there is to be a "logical space of reasons" at all, it must perforce be woven with representations of a *symbolic* order, insofar as « [l]anguage and all abstract thinking, such as belongs to minds who think in words, is of the symbolic nature » (Peirce, 1998, p. 307) and the « symbol is the only kind of sign which can be an argumentation » (*Ibid.*, p. 308). Accordingly, we shall say that symbolic representation allows an agent to transport the contents of the launch pad *in absentia* of their referent(s), thereby allowing her to communicate with others via convention.

Now the asymmetrist argues that the contents which dwell in such a symbolic space cannot be gauged on the basis of whatever forceful inputs might spring from the launch pad. For example, if we place the letter 'Q' in the pad and the ensuing exposure motivates the agent to think (in a symbolic space) that "The letter Q is in the box", the asymmetrist argues that although this belief may yet have been *caused* by an experiential episode, it cannot be *validated* by a simple return to the point of origin—by an ostensive appeal to the 'Q' Given. According to this view, while the ontogenesis of representations may be rooted in an input that is atomic, any normative claim made by the agent would *a fortiori* have to be *wholistic*. Indexical force thus enjoys a dubious standing at best, being forever excluded from the symbolic space where human intelligibility takes root (*cf.* fig. 2).

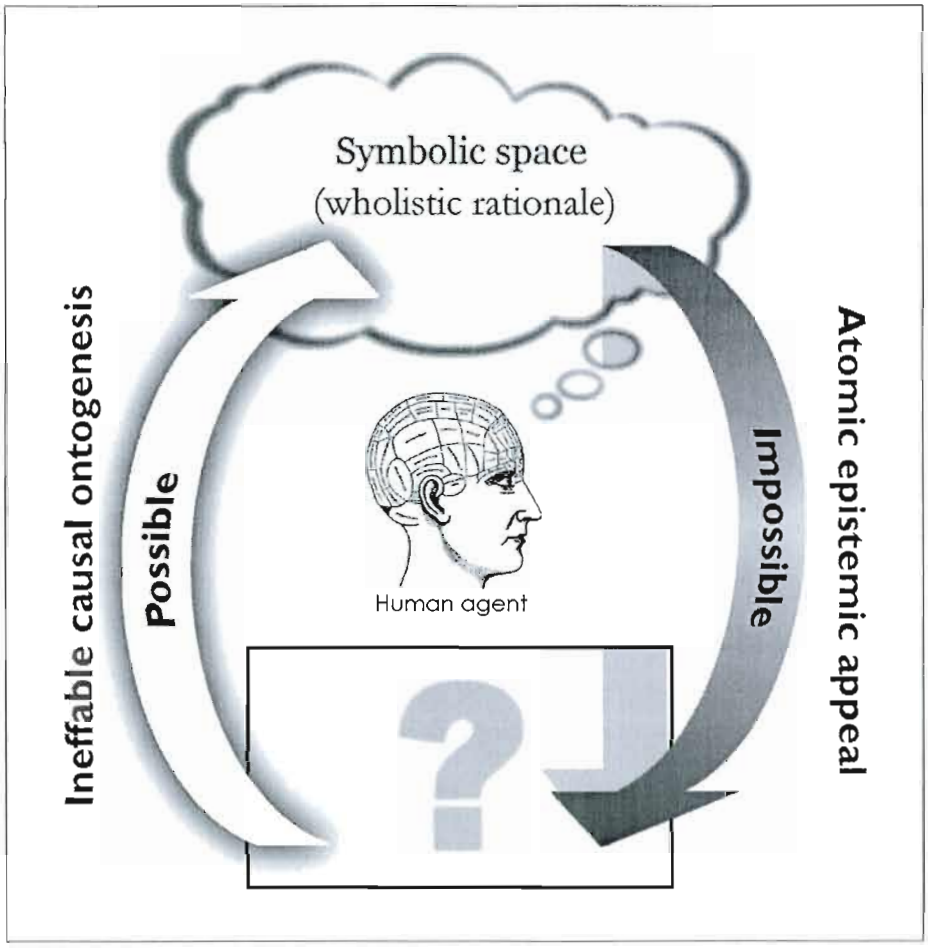

Figure 2 The asymmetry of indexicality thesis.

This schema has no pretension of being scientific, nor is it presented as philosophically profound or novel. That said, it does have the advantage of clarity, delineating the scope of our concerns. Indeed, not only does it provide a tangible platform whence to express the thesis of asymmetry; it also establishes a setting where the atomism-versus-wholism dilemma surfaces most acutely. To illustrate what is at stake, consider the following limit cases. Confronted with a launch pad, an agent could choose to call upon her faculty of spontaneity exclusively, without taking advantage of whatever input her faculty of receptivity may provide her. Eyes closed and hands tied behind her back, she may declare that there are two carrots in

the box, or a cigar, or whatever else. In such a case, the agent obviously has acquired some mastery of the concepts 'Carrot' and 'Cigar'. However, whatever gains might follow from the possession such concepts (acquired by toil or theft) could not be put to use should the agent in question shun her faculty of receptivity, as the chances of receptivity-free success are slim, to say the least. Representation, it would appear, requires that we call upon our faculty of receptivity, since spontaneous thoughts without receptive content *are* empty.

Suppose then that our agent vows to rely exclusively on her faculty of receptivity. Sensing whatever emanates from the launch pad before her, what can she possibly think of the contents lodged therein? The only answer under these conditions seems to be thus: what is before her is what it is. Granted, she is likely confronted with an object far coarser than the classic sense-datum (sect. 1.3.3). Nevertheless, there is a sense in which she must *choose* which of her concepts best fits the data. Representation therefore requires that we accept our role as agents and delve into a patrimony beyond the punctate area summoned in experience, since receptive intuitions without concepts *are* blind.

Pinning down the fact that healthy human agents manage to successfully represent the worldly objects before them, the aetiologic inquiry consists in asking *how* this comes about. The real or genuine friction at stake is that an agent's success at this cognitive task can waver when presented with objects of ever growing complexity. In other words, it is true that linguists (and natives) sometimes fail to take things for what they are (though rabbits are usually easy cognitive fare). We thus have access to a starting and finishing point, the endeavour being to "reverse engineer" the various contributions at work. This anchor not only furnishes us with a sense of direction; it also imposes bounds on the possible scope of our hypotheses, as each Kantian faculty is impotent when considered independently. Moreover, this

interpretation fits into a genuinely "re-enchanted" picture. Not only is the mind's ability and competence recognized and respected, so is the domain which that mind is attempting to successfully represent.

Read in this light, McDowell's *Mind and World* can become a clear-headed reminder that, after a wave of enthusiastic but ill-starred programmatic reversals, neither atomist nor wholist construals of mind and meaning will do. The problem, in sum, is that each of these broad theoretical interpretations sees itself as an epistemological panacea and refuses to learn from the other. The atomist is right to insist that objective representations are indexically anchored to their object in a bond which tenaciously resists the kind of all-encompassing permutations (speculatively) posited by wholism. In other words, whatever is in a launch pad simply *cannot* be represented as any thing one wishes—no matter how much one refashions one's web of representations. However, the atomist is wrong to proceed from this truth to denying that representation admits a certain plasticity. For the wholist is right to insist that ostensions are not as neat an epistemological affair as atomists would have us believe, and there is indeed some truth to the idea that not all representations can be put in jeopardy at once. Be that as it may, the wholist overdoes the insight, and sees in the anatomic ligatures of representation a license to claim that the whole is the true epistemic arbiter. McDowell thus warns against falling prey to a seesaw between « on the one side a coherentism that threatens to disconnect thought from reality, and on the other side a vain appeal to the Given, in the sense of bare presences that are supposed to constitute the ultimate grounds of empirical judgements » ([1994] 2002, p. 24). The issue we must therefore negotiate is how to conjoin the faculties of receptivity and spontaneity in a single theory *such that neither renders the other obsolete*. If one views the situation this fairly unceremonious way, then the blueprint for a tenable third way is plain: receptivity

and spontaneity are both potent contributors to epistemic objectivity, and « [t]o neither of these powers may a preference be given over the other » (Kant, [1787] 1965, B75).

We surmise that the vast majority of thinkers who employ Sellars' derogatory "myth of the Given" slogan do not fully appreciate the rationale which was originally propounded to support it, nor are they alive to its practical ramifications. For instance, take the case of a man who, upon being presented a hidden-camera recording of himself selling black-market goods, claims that the person shown in the video is not him (though, plainly, it is). Can the faculty of spontaneity wholistically manipulate the symbolic space in a way that runs counter to the contents of indexical input? In other words, can this fraudulent person refashion the whole of his representations so as to contradict the deliverances of receptivity? While such a feat of subterfuge would be far-fetched, the asymmetrist is committed to the view that this can in principle be achieved. Holding that receptivity has no authoritative sway in epistemic affairs, the asymmetrist concludes that the only imperative normatively guiding the symbolic space is coherence within the whole. In what follows, we will endeavour to show that this asymmetrist argument breaks down when it is taken seriously.

3.3 Some serious problems with one-way doors, part one: getting in

3.3.1 Diachronic theft

One of the chief problems faced by someone wishing to dismiss the very possibility of a (non-trivial, non-virtual) semiotic transaction ultimately Giving contents to the mind is that of producing a plausible substitute. The standard manoeuvre in this regard has generally been to call in the whole. It is unclear to us how an entirety of representations could generate *new* contents without adding anything to that whole. Nevertheless, the wholist's argument on this front usually rests on an intuitive analogy with inference. The assumption is that, given a working set of contents, the

mind could effect computations which rearrange the components of those premises into new items of knowledge. Thus, much like the classical syllogism takes starting premises and draws from them a conclusion hitherto absent (or latent), the philosophic cash value of this view is that the "new" representation spawned would arise strictly from "within" the wholistic confines of the mind.

As we stated in the first chapter (sect. 1.5.2), on those occasions where Sellars presents a positive-theoretical alternative to the supposedly "mythical" Given, he does so in a far more cryptic fashion than his usual fare of meticulous attacks, the net result being that his philosophical case for the whole comes through with considerably less force than his negative stance. Be that as it may, we are made to gather that the non-Given must be symbolic, anatomic, and inferential, and that these features imply some sort of wholism. While Sellars' comments to this effect are often quite murky, the following is perhaps the least ambiguous statement we find in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind":

> One seems forced to choose between the picture of an elephant which rests on a tortoise (What supports the tortoise?) and the picture of a great Hegelian serpent of knowledge with its tail in its mouth (Where does it begin?). Neither will do. For empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once. ([1956] 1963, § 38)

The claim being made here is that refashioning the whole with an eye to maximal integrity (*à la* Neurath's boat) is an alternative that boldly departs from the "tortoise" and "serpent" images. According to this gloss, empiricism and Absolute idealism are two sides of the same foundationalist coin, and both can be struck down by pointing out their inability to avoid regress.

Yet one can legitimately wonder whether Sellars' preferred conception—the idea that knowledge is "a self-correcting enterprise"—can itself withstand the grievance levelled at the preceding foils. Could one not insert a likewise parenthetical snub after Sellars' stance? Echoing the criticism enunciated earlier vis-à-vis the toil-free

vacuum of wholism (sect. 1.2.4), could we not ask: *Whence come these claims which can be put in jeopardy?* While the wholistic rejection of the Given prides itself on forgoing recourse to something that is *not* within the purview of the thinking subject, it nevertheless requires the presence of a body of contents the origins of which are taken for granted.

One fairly recent trend in this regard has been to propose that we inherit a viable set of representations as part of an ongoing generational dialogue. For his part, Richard Rorty—who correctly saw himself as « draw[ing] some corollaries from Sellars' doctrine » (1980, p. 389)—argues that one need not bother with "where" or "how" the ideas which make up such cultural patrimony arose, pushing instead for a wilful disregard of such questions (*Ibid.*, p. 315-356). But clearly this stratagem won't do. Its most straightforward problem is that it tosses the difficulties at hand onto another set of agents whom, it is assumed, somehow generated the primeval contents from which the generational dialogue supposedly snowballed. In so reducing cognition to a mind-to-mind transaction, Rorty adopts a stance analogous to Quine and Davidson's: the burden of content-ontogenesis is shifted onto an imaginary community deemed at one with nature (sect. 1.2.4). Whereas the language "radically" translated is a system synchronically alien, Rorty conceives his own "untouched people" as *diachronically* foreign. No doubt enraptured by the Nietzschean account of the Fall, Rorty pictures this community as one "uncorrupted" by the impulse to seek an objective alignment between mind and world:

> The urge to say that assertions and actions must not only cohere with other assertions and actions but "correspond" to something apart from what people are saying and doing has some claim to be called *the* philosophical urge. It is the urge which drove Plato to say that Socrates' words and deeds, failing as they did to cohere with current theory and practice, nonetheless corresponded to something which the Athenians could barely glimpse. The residual Platonism which Quine and Sellars are opposing is not the hypostatization of nonphysical entities, but the notion of "correspondence" with such entities as the touchstone by which measure the worth of present practice. (Rorty, 1980, p. 179)

We will answer this anti-correspondence view in the fourth chapter. For now, let us note that, unless one posits the presence of some strong innate repertoire of concepts lodged in an agent's brain (a questionable supposition), whatever cultural patrimony is handed down to us—"Adamic" or otherwise—presents itself as but another object before the mind. Even though one's culture and natural language spares one the toil of many worldly categorizations, this does not absolve one of the toil needed to appropriate that inheritance itself. It is true that the vast majority of agents within a given community do not have to discover for themselves the worldly basis for the concept 'Mammal', and make inferences upon that content which will effectively generate new concepts. In this sense, most of us have not only profited from cognitive theft, but have made interest on the profit. But it must be recognized that every individual who does own that concept has had to earn it in toil, and that *this* discovery involves a process identical with the one performed by the trailblazer who gave her peers and descendants 'Mammal'.

A wholistic theory may thus be superlatively well-suited to describe how each mind constructs its inbred representations on the basis of a pre-established patrimony, describing in convincing detail how an agent can run with the baton of her forebears. But a purportedly "receptivity-free" account of content ontogenesis will ultimately avail itself incomplete if it fails to provide an explanation of how that agent manages to grab hold of the inheritance to begin with. On that front, it is doubtful that any kind of bootstrapping can provide a viable explanation of content ontogenesis. To put the matter starkly, the wholist wishing to work solely with a receptivity-free account of inferential ontogenesis and a diachronic bequeath would have to assemble those materials to produce an algorithm of sorts capable of predicting the contents which will be present in the next launch pad (fig. 3) *before* the experiential surprise of receptively discovering some pages down what that content actually is.

3.3.2 Normative impotence

Suppose we take it for granted that an antecedent store of contents is somehow "there" for the agent to exploit. Given this (generous) head start, can representational contents still be accounted for in a way that makes due without receptivity? Sellars' own brand of wholism would fit well with such an *in media res* perspective, insofar as it seems to be providing an account of the rationale legislating a "hermetically-sealed" symbolic space. Central to his positive alternative to the Given is the idea that we cannot put *all* the claims of knowledge we possess in jeopardy at once (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 38).

This much strikes us as true. Indeed, we consider this pivotal tenet to be one of the more important contributions to have come out of the critique of atomistic theories. However, this achievement is generally overdone by some who—in their eagerness to find a substitute to the once dominant atomistic paradigms—have assigned it an epistemic weight it simply cannot carry. This infatuation towards wholism has expressed itself in a variety of theoretical excesses (for a survey, *cf.* Fodor and Lepore, 1992). What we want to do here is critically prod the tacit assumption that the principle of economy alluded by Sellars somehow spares one the duty of accounting for the *receptive* dimension of representational content. As a case study, consider the following launch pad (fig. 3):

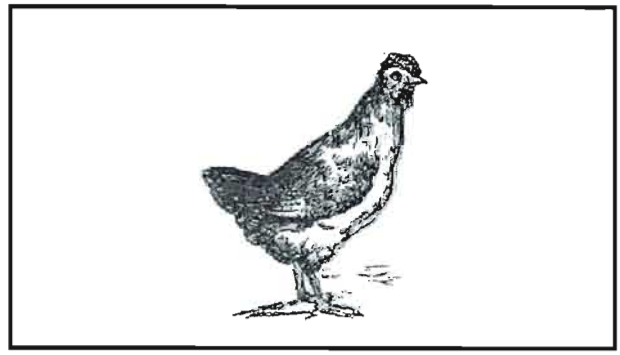

Figure 3 Launch pad A.

We take it to be self-evident that this launch pad prompts the representation of a chicken. That most sensible view of course rests on some form of inductivism, a world-to-mind inference which in these philosophically troubled times has become quite suspect. Contemporary philosophers incredulous towards induction, having retreated to implausible theoretic idioms, would no doubt prefer to construe the agent's "grasp" of the aforementioned chicken as a "guess" the standing of which is to be subsequently subjected to verification. Such a strange and artificial contortion, relying as it does solely on the human faculty of spontaneity, is supposed to spare the philosopher from any (putatively problematic) recourse to receptivity. Yet the chances of such receptivity-free success are slim, to say the least. As Charles Peirce—himself the pioneer of "abductive" inference—pointed out,

> It is well within bounds to reckon that there are a billion (i.e., a million million) hypotheses that a fantastic being might guess would account for any given phenomenon. [...] [I]t suffices to show that according to the doctrine of chances it would be practically impossible for any being, by pure chance, to guess the cause of any phenomenon. (1931-1958, vol. 7, para. 38).

We do not want to be misunderstood as endorsing Peirce's own take on inference. Regrettably, Richard Bernstein (2002, p. 19) is correct when he points out that Peirce (in some moods) endorsed a theory of cognition quite similar to the asymmetrism espoused by Sellars (*cf.* Peirce, 1992, p. 11-27). Rather, we see the fertility of the 'Chicken' representation spawned by the above launch pad as sobering call to accept the mind comprises an irreducible component of *receptivity* (abduction cannot "solve" induction; *induction* solves induction).

In any case, suppose an agent were to claim that 'The image of a banana is in the box'. These rival chicken and banana claims would then have to vie for epistemic merit within the symbolic space of reasons. How then is an individual or a discursive community to determine which of the conflicting representations has the upper hand? The crucial point here is that since such a trivial matter in no way jeopardizes the bulk of a system of knowledge, scientific or otherwise, the principle

of economy is of no help. While we readily concede that the inability to imperil all of one's beliefs at once imposes a limitation on the kind of spontaneity one can marshal (insofar as we can only effect modifications by increments), such impeded warpage at best provides only a *subtractive* epistemic power: a concern for integrity can only *rule out* contents that are "somehow" already "there"—not generate them.

3.3.3 Synchronic theft

In light of the fact that the wholistic principle of maximal integrity is impotent to normatively address less-than-major divergences in content, what is to be the arbiter of epistemological discords (individual or communal)? An epistemology will be next to useless if it cannot address this kind of dilemma, which is by far the variety we most frequently face (paradigm-shifting situations are not an everyday occurrence). The Sellarsian answer to such trivial rivalries of content, it would seem, is a paradoxical hybrid: receptivity *de facto* / nothing *de jure*. Recall that Sellars *qua* asymmetrist accepts the possibility that indexical force might contribute to the ontogenesis of representations (sect. 1.5.4). Agnostically refraining from talk of Givens but reaping all their ontogenetic benefits, the asymmetrist simply calls upon the one-way door construal and asserts that the content is "already" within the domain of mind. McDowell explains this philosophical *tour de force* as follows:

> Sellars devotes part of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" to defending a notion of sensory impressions. The point of the defence is to distinguish impressions from bits of the Given, and Sellars effects this by carefully refusing to attribute any direct epistemological significance to impressions. They have an indirect epistemological significance, in that without them there could not be such directly significant circumstances as seeing that things are thus and so, or having it look to one as if things are thus and so. But it is only in that indirect way that impressions enter into the rational responsiveness of empirical thinking to the course of experience. We can have an innocent interpretation of the idea that empirical thinking is rationally responsive to the course of experience, but only by understanding "the course of experience" to mean the succession of appearings, not the succession of impressions. ([1994] 2002, p. 140-141)

Thus, although the wholistic principle of maximal integrity is impotent to settle the chicken-versus-banana debate, it would seem that the matter can be resolved in a non-problematic manner: a banana claimant would clearly be wrong, since at the inner foot of the mind's one-way door lies a chicken representation. Lest this be thought of as a case of Givenness, McDowell (following Sellars' lead, [1956] 1963, § 45) reassures us that the content at hand is an "appearing", not an "impression". One can rightly wonder whether any such slide in terminology can dissipate the fact that an epistemically fecund input from the world has occurred. For those philosophers weary of countenancing any indexical contribution can insert representational dominoes at leisure, but as long as the final one tips over without our agency, that is a telltale sign that we are dealing with *receptivity* (of all people, McDowell should have been alive to this sort of terminating chain, *cf.* McDowell, [1981] 1998, p. 319). As David Kelley puts it: « Any effect whatever is a discriminative response to stimuli, in the sense of a differential reaction to them: that is what a causal relation *is* » (1986, p. 203; italics in original).

Be that as it may, a chicken content has suddenly "appeared" within the expanse of mind, thereby providing pseudo-empirical (phenomenal?) fodder for the normative assessment of rival claims which could not otherwise register as anything but inconsequential to the ongoing integrity of the whole's pre-existing configuration. Should it be asked what, pray, brought *this* content (and not another) about; the answer, *pace* agnosticism, would be conveniently simple: *one literally cannot say*. In essence, the asymmetrist position takes the "helping oneself to content" reproach rightly levelled at Davidson by McDowell ([1994] 2002, p. 68, *cf.* sect. 1.2.4) and elevates into a key component of its theory of representation (we can summarize this peculiar situation in figure 4).

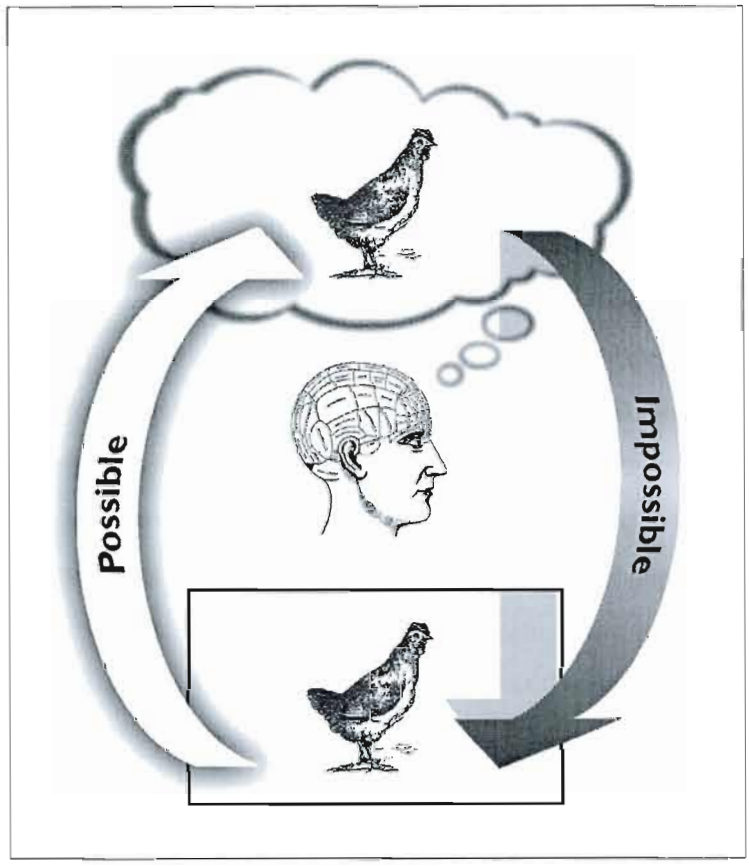

Figure 4 The supposed asymmetry of launch pad A.

Instead of trying to conceal conceptual theft as a flaw, the asymmetrist flaunts it as a boon of her structural account. Since it is a truism that the process of intelligibly apprehending an object is capped off by its intelligible apprehension, Sellars argues that epistemology can make due without the process that got us there, as all that can really be the subject of meaningful discourse is the complete product:

> [W]hen we picture a child [...] learning his *first* language, *we*, of course, locate the language learner in a structured logical space in which *we* are at home. Thus, we conceive of him as a person (or, at least, a potential person) in a world of physical objects, coloured, producing sounds, existing in Space and Time. But though it is *we* who are familiar with this logical space, we run the danger, if we are not careful, of picturing the language learner as having *ab initio* some degree of awareness—'pre-analytic', limited, and fragmentary though it may be—of this same logical space. (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 30)

Here then, in a nutshell, is the argumentative recipe behind the "myth of the Given" critique: let the world and our cognitive apparatus do whatever they need to do to deliver contents to the mind's symbolic space and then, once the contents are "there", rebuke any attempt to establish the epistemic merit of such items on the basis of their experiential origin by raising the objection of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* (sprinkling vague allusions to the whole along the way so as to intimate some sort of substitute).

3.3.4 Argument and observation

Naturally, there is a strong intuitive pull away from the one-way door conception of experience. It would therefore go a long way towards securing the veracity of the asymmetrist view if it could produce some kind of intuitive account that supports its claims. Let us then take a look at one the more frequently cited examples in this regard, the Mueller-Lyer illusion (*cf.* deVries and Triplett, 2000, p. 25).

In this image, two lines of equal length are juxtaposed side by side for easy comparison. Located at the tips of each line are arrow heads, the pair of one of the lines pointing inwards, the other lines' tips pointing outward. The net effect of this is that the lines appear to be of unequal lengths, the inward-pointing arrows seemingly compressing the line on which they are appended, the outward ones stretching theirs. Thus, although the lines are in point of fact identical with respect to their lengths *in rerum natura*, the human agent indexically exposed to them will experience them as being uneven.

What is interesting about this strange image is that even if one is made privy to the fact that the lines are in fact of even lengths, the indexical force it will exert on us will continue to prompt a representation of unevenness. As McDowell writes: « How one's experience represents things to be is not under one's control, but it is up to one whether one accepts that appearance or rejects it. [...] In the Müller-Lyer illusion, one's experience represents the two lines as being unequally long, but

someone in the know will refrain from judging that that is how things are » ([1994] 2002, p. 11, 11n9). We thus seem to be confronted with a very potent case of indexical asymmetry: an index causes a representation (i.e., of unevenness) in one direction but, once that content is coherently situated within the rest of an agent's wholistic web, the revamped symbolic representation of the image (as even) cannot return to its origins and appeal to a likewise indexicality so as to establish its merit. In other words, once the atomic knowledge by acquaintance crosses the threshold of the mind's one-way door and is anatomically meshed with the whole, it looses is noninferentiality. Proving that the lines are even (which indeed they are) is subsequently a matter of complex demonstration within the space of reasons. As Richard Rorty would say (sect. 3.3.1), "mere looking" seems to be of no help.

We reject this asymmetrist account. However, before we sound out why, let us be clear on what is at stake: the asymmetrist does *not* claim that anatomic inferences contribute to normatively assessing the situation in a way that augments the contribution of Givenness. Rather, the asymmetrist position is that anatomic inferences totally *supplant* Givenness in the normative assessment of a representation's epistemic merit. It is thus not a simple matter of weighing the strength of abstract arguments against that of ostensive evidence (e.g.: 'I have burned my hand, and whatever inferences I or anybody else weaves must conform to this'). Instead, owing to a complex technical argument, the self-evident is held to be a "myth" which can have no epistemic sway whatsoever. In sum, the Sellarsian thesis is not that the Given must share its epistemic authority with the non-Given, but rather that the Given has no such authority.

As a means of illustrating why we believe the asymmetrist view to be seriously wrong, consider the following experiment. Instance an agent who has no clue what the Mueller-Lyer illusion is. She has no knowledge of this object, neither "by description" nor "by acquaintance". Let this agent sit alone in a quiet room equipped with an image-projector. Suppose that the said illusion is suddenly

displayed for her to see, and that ample noise-free time is allowed for her to fully take in the indexical force issuing from her proximal exposure to the worldly object. We now turn off the projector and close the lights in the room, such that she is immersed in total darkness. At this point, we allow her to hear a voice which explains to her in great detail everything that is required for her to repudiate her erstwhile representation of the lines as uneven (argumentation in favour of even lines need not be merely assertoric—she can engage the voice in interactive discourse). Suppose, then, that after some time our agent is convinced by the inferential discourse that the lines were in fact even, despite what she saw. In other words, after a symbolic exchange in the space of reasons, she now normatively holds the representation of the lines as uneven to be incorrect.

The question we must now ask is: is it true, as the asymmetrist holds, that the indexical episode which our agent experienced when the image was made visible is authoritatively impotent in the pitch black space of reasons which ultimately led her to think of the lines as even? Granted, since the giving of reasons to this effect was properly *in absentia*, the exercise was through and through symbolic; the voice simply could not have produced the image *in praesentia*. However, can one really infer from this that the indexical force played *no* part in the *normative* assessment which our agent arrived at?

What is important to recognize is that the argument convincingly presented to our agent must call upon the unevenness of the lines. Indeed, one of the pivotal premises of the inferential chain presented to her in darkness is that 'The lines appear uneven to whoever sees them'. What would happen to that complex argument should the lines in fact appear *even*? The only way for the agent to assess the cogency of the argument is for her to take advantage (in an epistemically *efficacious* way) of the indexical episode which alone can establish whether the lines indeed appear uneven to whoever sees them. For while logical reasoning alone could no doubt establish the formal validity of the inferences eloquently presented,

the question of those inferences' actual epistemic merit—their merit as *knowledge*—will forever hang in the air unless one ruptures the asymmetry and sneaks a peak at some representational relation tenaciously asserting its own normative standing with or without the whole. Talk of a space of reasons is fine. But reasons are reasons for or towards something, and the index must be allowed to point both ways.

Notice that we have not provided an illustration of the Mueller-Lyer illusion. Let those who knew *what* the preceding was *about* determine for themselves to what extent that "acquaintance" contributes to their normative assessment of our argument, of our *reasons* for upholding symmetry. Granted, the weight of the indexical contribution will vary greatly, and gauging its scope is a loose affair at best. Nevertheless, what is important here is that according to the asymmetrist, there should be no such contribution. In all aetiological sobriety, we cannot help but think that something is drastically wrong with such a claim, and that the asymmetrist is letting a small and unwarranted (technical) tail wag a very big (naturalist) dog.

Let us remark that the Mueller-Lyer is just that: an illusion. We are dealing with what Millikan (1984) would call an *abnormal* case. This important fact weakens the asymmetrist's stance and lends credence to ours. Citing an extraordinary situation as an exemplar of a generalized epistemological claim robs that claim of much of its credibility—or at least much of its scope. It is one thing to claim that indexical asymmetries can and do occur; it is another to elevate such a structure to the status of covering model for all mental representation. By that same token, the fact that even the Mueller-Lyer image cannot be established as illusory without returning to its indexical force only makes our critique more robust (it goes without saying that indexical symmetries abound and are more obvious in cases involving the representation of healthier objects).

3.4 Some serious problems with one-way doors, part two: once in

3.4.1 Is immunity guaranteed?

In the flight from atomic receptivity, it is generally assumed that a dominant epistemological paradigm has been unseated to make way for a better one. Granted (in the twentieth century at least), the negative portion of this revolution has proceeded with more enthusiasm than the positive one. Rebuilding efforts just don't seem to attract as many practitioners of the philosophical arts, especially in an age when constructive theorizing is viewed with cynical suspicion. Perhaps this meagre offering of positive views explains why certain texts find themselves fast-tracked to a success and prominence arguably disproportionate with their actual content; and why someone like Quine—whose "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" « is perhaps the most analyzed short philosophical paper written in the last fifty years » (Fodor and Lepore, 1992, p. 37)—writes of being « lucky to have had [recognition] so abundantly while I am here to marvel at it », suggesting « in due modesty » that it may have been « excessive » (Quine, 1985, p. 479).

In any event, the point here is that those fleeing from atomism obviously saw (or wished to see) wholism as a substantial alternative under which to repair. If this is so, then it seems that the attack on Givenness was not intended as some sort of epistemological nihilism denying the very possibility of thought. Rather, most critiques of receptivity—including those of Quine, Davidson, and Sellars—claim that by rejecting the idea of self-authenticating punctate episodes, we are not divesting ourselves of the possibility of establishing the epistemic merit of our representations. However, it is argued that atomistic conceptions are fatally defective in this regard, and that we must drastically reconsider what it means for an item of knowledge to be in good standing. In its most generic form, the argument

has been that any representation liable of bearing some sort of epistemic value—liable to be intelligible and perhaps shown to be true or false—must be anatomic in structure. The widespread (but mistaken) assumption is that if this much can be demonstrated, then victory for wholism is assured.

Now there are many ways to go about showing that an atomist epistemology could not be feasible. In the first chapter, we looked at two such approaches. In the first instance, atomism is said to be impossible because the mind's experiential contact with the world is pervaded by informational noise, and that if we need to sift through this to reach a representation's referent, then that representation is perforce anatomically linked to others. As McDowell explains,

> The idea is that if concepts are to be even partly constituted by the fact that judgements in which they figure are grounded in the Given, then the associated conceptual capacities must be acquired from confrontations with suitable bits of the Given: that is, occasions when pointing to an ultimate warrant would have been feasible. But in any ordinary impingement on our sensibility, it would have to be a manifold Given that is presented to us. So in order to form an observational concept, a subject would have to abstract out the right element in the presented multiplicity. ([1994] 2002, p. 7)

As we saw when discussing the speculative scenario of "radical translation", this is the tract of reasoning favoured by Quine and Davidson (sect. 1.2.3). Sellars is by no means a stranger to this kind of argument. For example, he writes:

> Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the colour of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort *are* appropriate. And while this does not imply that one must have concepts before one has them, it does imply that one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element. (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 19; italics in original)

But what sets Sellars apart from other attackers of atomism is the other, more profound, criticism he levels at Givenness; to wit, the asymmetry of indexicality thesis. Our claim is that it is precisely the strength of Sellars' critique of the "myth of the Given" which imperils it.

Sellars could not have foreseen that faithful students of his thought like Richard Rorty would one day expound relativist doctrines (correctly) claiming him as a precursor (sect. 3.3.1), nor that philosophers like John McDowell would come to see wholism with enough philosophic suspicion to consider it the unpalatable pole of a tug-of-war with the Given—one sufficiently flawed to generate sympathy towards its supposedly "mythical" antipode (sect. 2.5.3). Blissfully ignorant of such latter-day developments and secure in the conviction that the whole would steer epistemology to a better sort of normativity, the scientifically-minded Sellars trusted that whatever blows he would deliver at receptivity would be fair game and would do no harm to his own positive-theoretic stance. Indeed, one of the reasons why there have been so many attacks directed at receptivity in contemporary times has been the widespread confidence that an alternative source of normativity is in the offing. Thus, so long as philosophers assumed that they could switch over to a wholistic epistemology, their appetite for critical deconstruction went on unimpeded. In our opinion, nowhere was this virulence more prominent than in the work of Wilfrid Sellars. But Sellars' attack went too far and deep: by directing his efforts at undermining so basic a semiotic feature as the structural relation which ties the indexical order to the symbolic, it jeopardized the haven he thought he could retreat to. For we argue that the abstract space of reasons where Sellars claims intelligibly and normativity take root is not immune to the asymmetry argument. Much the opposite: every argument which can be levelled at something outside the mind's one-way door can be applied with equal effectiveness *inside* it.

Recall that, in opting for the expression "the Given", Sellars was stressing the breadth of his philosophic concerns (sect. 1.5.1). It is because of its sweeping range that "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" has become a classic of philosophy still read today. In effect, Sellars claims that if empiricism upheld so mistaken a view of knowledge, it is because it rested on a tacit epistemological assumption which, once we are made aware of it, reveals itself the keystone of most other

schools as well. In fact, by its own assessment, the Sellarsian program aims to debunk an idea so pervasive that it spans what have typically been considered antagonist traditions in the history of philosophy:

> This framework has been a common feature of most of the major systems of philosophy, including, to use a Kantian turn of phrase, both 'dogmatic rationalism' and 'skeptical empiricism'. It has, indeed, been so pervasive that few, if any, philosophers have been altogether free of it; certainly not Kant, and, I would argue, not even Hegel, that great foe of 'immediacy'. (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 1)

As a case study in how Givenness can play out on rationalist terrain, consider the *Cogito*. According to the standard Cartesian account, all the objects of thought can in principle be doubted. But even if one were to contemplate an object for which there is no basis whatsoever, this contemplation would obliquely yield at least one item of knowledge whose epistemological basis is secure, as the very act of thinking any object *eo ipso* attests to the existence of the thinking subject. All other representations may depend on others (i.e., be anatomic), may be reached only by a process of reasoning (i.e., be inferential), and may be bound to various abstract conventions (i.e., be symbolic). But the *Cogito* is *Given*: it is atomic, noninferential, and indexical (sect. 1.5.2). That is, its very structure is sufficient to support its content, it requires no other representations to be intelligible, and it imposes itself via a force we need not produce ourselves. The pivotal Sellarsian argument against this kind of Givenness, of course, is the asymmetry of thesis. According to this view, indexical force may perhaps impose the apprehension of a content upon an agent, but any subsequent epistemic appeal to that content cannot rest on a likewise semiotic mechanism. In terms of the schema put forth earlier (fig. 2), it is held that the arrows cannot form a loop which goes "to and fro". As a result, the asymmetrist maintains that the Cartesian *Cogito* is at best an ineffable revelation, not the fertile axiom the rationalist takes it to be; and that whatever normative support it may offer is in fact beholden to the whole, not any discrete self-authenticating insight.

Note that all of this falls squarely within the "framework of Givenness" *yet in no way involves the senses*. The entire affair takes place in a purely ideational sphere, one which makes it its rationalist badge of honour to forgo any recourse to the body's experiential episodes. The asymmetrist contention that it is impossible to return to indexical origins thus holds whether the content in question is "outside" or "inside" the realm of mind. The asymmetrical attack upon the Given, as Sellars himself insisted, is *not* limited to sense-data and the like, but is rather directed at the structure of representation *per se*, be it construed in internalist, externalist, or neutral terms. Keeping this in mind, we argue that Sellars took his assault to a level so basic that it effectively sacked the abstract space of reasons which he (wrongly) believed could house epistemology in the aftermath of the asymmetry critique.

3.4.2 The indexical symmetry of inference

As we saw when we discussed the *tour de force* of ontogenetic theft whereby contents enter the mind's supposed one-way door, the asymmetry thesis holds that those representations which "somehow" appear within the symbolic space answer only to a wholistic rationale (*cf.* fig. 4). According to this view, any agent wishing to defend claims to objective knowledge is barred from indexically returning to whatever (ineffable) point of origin perchance gave rise to her beliefs, having thus no other recourse but Given-free argumentation within the space of reasons. Let us then ask: since Givenness is a formal (i.e., symmetrical) relation which can rear its "mythical" head in any ontological realm, is this symbolic space immune to it?

Consider the following situation, all solidly located in an agent's symbolic space (fig. 5). For the purpose of clarity, let us christen the first chicken (which is said to be P) *Primo*, and the second (which is inferred to be Q) *Secundo*:

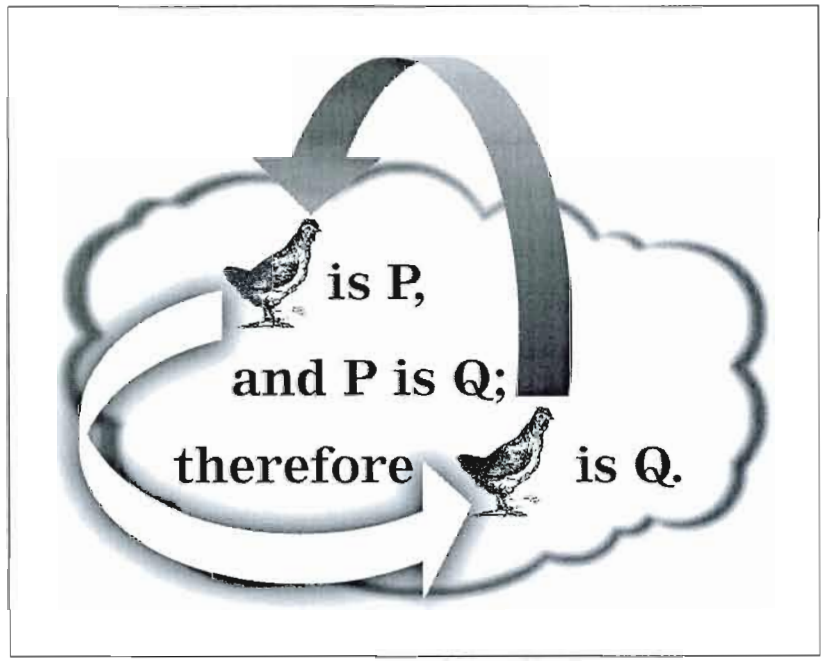

Figure 5 The asymmetry issue in a symbolic space.

It is clear that the conclusion *qua* inferential product could not arise if there was no Primo, insofar as without that content the premise that 'Primo is P' could not be asserted and without that premise the conclusion could not be drawn. In that sense, Primo the chicken is a contributor to the ontogenesis of the conclusion, partaking in the movement which asymmetry (agnostically) permits; namely that something (a premise) gives rise to a representation (a conclusion).

Admittedly, it can seem somewhat queer to say that premises "cause" a conclusion in inference. Of course, we say this while keeping in mind the caveat spelled out earlier about the deficiencies of alluding to the idea of "causality" where indexical force is concerned (sect. 1.5.2). What is important here is the ontogenetic dynamic proper to inference. What does it mean to say that a conclusion is *drawn* from premises? It means that the premises supply the materials which go on to make up the conclusion. Deduction—the paradigmatic exemplar of inference—is said to be monotonic: a conclusion drawn deductively contains nothing in it that was

not already in the premises. Now the issue is whether this feature allows us to say that the premises indexically caused the conclusion, or whether the allusion to such a causal-like "impact" upon the conclusion (however mild) is misguided. Causation itself has always been a tremendously thorny topic. However, contemporary logicians have found that the notion can be handled robustly if construed counterfactually. The idea is to assess the presence of causation by logically travelling upstream, so to speak. Thus, we can say that A caused B when the situation is such that if A had not occurred then B would not have occurred. Since a deduced conclusion contains no content that was not previously in the premises, it is therefore accurate to say that premises are causal contributors to a conclusion.

As we have seen (sect. 1.5.4), the asymmetrist is at liberty to agnostically concede the possibility that something indexically gives rise to a representation. What she takes issue with is rather the movement which seeks to indexically return to that origin in order to secure the representation's status. On *this* front, we argue that the asymmetrist must throw away inferences along with experiences, since it is precisely a *symmetrical* return to causal origins which confers epistemic merit onto a conclusion in inference. Here's why. Once again, let us remark that there can be no 'Secundo is Q' if there is no 'Secundo'. Now 'Secundo is Q' is a *conclusion* only if it signifies '(That chicken which is P) is Q'. For if Secundo cannot appeal to Primo as its referent, then 'Secundo is Q' has no epistemic support, and reverts to being a mere *assertion* about *another* chicken, Secundo, being Q. The inference (in this case a Barbara figure) may thus ontogenetically follow from its premises, but the valid pedigree of its conclusion is useless if Secundo cannot indexically "return" to Primo (much like evidence can indexically cause a certain verdict in a murder trial but awaits an ostensive appeal which will reap that normative benefit). In short, the inferential ligaments which bind the conclusion to the premises and confer validity onto the third proposition are possible only if a semiotic movement "to and fro"

Primo and Secundo is possible. If the Secundo chicken cannot rightfully claim to stand for the Primo chicken, then every content in the above schema (fig. 5) must be *sui generis*. If this is so, then all inference is impossible.

A crude objection to this would be that inference cannot involve anything remotely close to the Given, since one of the distinctive features of the Given is that it is noninferential. In order to avoid such a gross confusion, we should make it clear that our argument pertains only to the *content-respect* which makes inference possible. There is no doubt that the conclusion of an inference owes whatever epistemic status it has to a relation that is patently anatomic. As we made clear when describing the "causation" whereby premises give rise to a conclusion, the product of a monotonic inference contains nothing in it that was not previously in the premises. Leaving aside the question of what constitutes a valid rearrangement, we can say that a rearrangement of contents must take place for there to be an inference proper, the contents available in the premises being colligated in such a way that the ensuing product is built from nothing but those antecedent premises. For all these reasons, we grant that a conclusion is indeed anatomically bound to its premises. However, what we take issue with is the view that this somehow eliminates atomism in a way that makes the conclusion of inference fully non-Given. Our claim is rather that a conclusion is anatomically bound to the premises which indexically give rise to it only because this anatomical relation *subsumes* atomic relations without which there could not be the sort of content-respect that confers onto the conclusion a special normative status. In other words, if an argument runs 20 minutes, and its conclusion an additional 2 minutes, those last two must point to the previous twenty *noninferentially* for the inference to make its point (on pain of regress). For whatever is said about a term in a conclusion will be merely *asserted arbitrarily* and not entailed if that conclusion's term cannot atomically represent the same term in a premise.

The lesson here is a powerful one: it suffices that one cannot establish the epistemic merit of a conclusion (i.e., gauge if it indeed follows) without pointing to the contents imbedded in the antecedent premises which spawned it to show that—contrary to the asymmetry thesis—indexical appeal to a causal origin must in some sense be epistemologically efficacious. Thus, if it were true, the Sellarsian thesis of indexical asymmetry would not only disconnect the mind from a world beyond it (sect. 3.4.3), it would also deprive one of the kind of content-respect that is a precondition to rational thought within the symbolic "space of reasons".

3.4.3 No refuge

In *Mind and World*, McDowell astutely remarks that « The Myth of the Given is especially insidious in the case of "inner sense" » ([1994] 2002, p. 21) and that « when we reject the Given here, we can seem to be rejecting "inner" awareness altogether » (*Ibid.*). Feeling a grave epistemological danger lurking, he ominously asks: « How can we reject the Given without thus obliterating "inner" awareness? » (*Ibid.*). In keeping with his conviction that the noumenal is the last bastion of the Given (sect. 2.2.1), McDowell thinks that insisting on pansemiotism spares him this destructive fate. His argument, in short, is that if we do away with the "inner-outer" distinction, we need not worry about the rejection of Givenness obliterating the "inner" (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 36-39; *cf.* Taylor, 2002).

If McDowell does not agree with the transcendentalist view espoused by his mentors Kant and (to a lesser extent) Sellars, it is because, following Wittgenstein's "quietist" optimism and Hegel's (far from quiet) idealism, he insists that « thinking does not stop short of facts. The world is embraceable in thought » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 33; *cf.* sect. 2.2.2). The Hegelian motive behind this stance has historically been labelled "idealist". The incorporation of Wittgenstein, however, adds a surprisingly new turn to the old dichotomy. Indeed, Wittgenstein ([1921] 2002, §§ 5.6 to 5.641) has famously maintained that idealism (i.e., the "inner"),

when consistently pursued, amounts to realism (i.e., the "outer"). Thus, from a Wittgensteinian viewpoint, it really makes no difference whether it is we who are in the world or the world that is in us; the distinction is essentially vacuous and can be turned like a glove.

We are quite sympathetic to this kind of position. As we suggested when discussing the instability of McDowell's fusion thesis (sect. 2.5.3), we think that any monism must perforce be *neutral*. But whatever merits are attached to such a rejection of Cartesian dualism, the manoeuvre itself does nothing to palliate the destructiveness of the "myth of the Given" critique. McDowell does not seem to fully appreciate that the most ardent form of idealism (or neutral monism) can still contain symmetrical appeals. It is simply not true, as he claims, that « We fall into the Myth of the Given only if we suppose that this pointing would have to break out through a boundary that encloses the sphere of thinkable content » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 39). Although McDowell is well aware that the Given's all-encompassing scope makes it applicable "endogenously" (*Ibid.*, p. 136, 158), he can be satisfied that his pansemiotism is immune to Sellars' attack only to the extent he construes the Given as applying only to mind-world relations. Since that narrow reading is philosophically (and textually) mistaken, we think his confidence is misplaced.

Generally speaking, the idea that a wholistic web of ideational items can be a normative refuge remains plausible only so long as that space is spared from the asymmetry critique. However, this asylum is a myth all its own, as the technical notion of something "Given" is germane not only to sensory experience and the like but to any case where an *atomic* appeal to an *indexical origin* is made in order to *non-inferentially* establish some sort of epistemic value (for a survey and critique of narrow construals of the Given, *cf.* deVries and Triplett, 2000, p. xxvi-xxx). The exact nature of the origin is of no importance; "Givenism" is defined by its (symmetrical) form, not its content. A mind-to-mind relation (e.g., Descartes) can

involve Givenness as easily as a mind-to-world relation. It therefore cannot be that a wholistic web of non-Given reasons is a substitute for Givenness, since the very logical being of inferential knowledge, as we have just seen, depends on an appeal that is patently Given.

Wilful of ignorance of the Given's broad scope notwithstanding, there is just no way one can dismiss Givenness all the while laying claim to some remnant of an intelligible domain. In a perverse way, McDowell's fears that in rejecting the Given we might be « obliterating » the "inner" realm as well as the "outer" are very much justified. Truth be told, in rejecting the Given, *any* realm where the epistemic tries to take root is annihilated. For it really makes no difference what ontological domain one chooses to situate inference in; so long as an atomic appeal to indexical origins is made, the asymmetrist must reject it. "A is A" in a mind-to-mind space (fig. 5) shares the same symmetrical relation as "A" bearing on A in a mind-to-world context (fig. 4). If one maintains that the latter is not possible at its most basic structural level (and not just as a matter of happenstance), then one is *eo ipso* committed to the view that the former is also impossible. The whole thus lives on borrowed time: it remains a plausible sanctuary only so long as one does not submit it to the same ruthless anti-Givenness critique which Sellars directed at experience.

Had Sellars considered that the content-respect at the heart of inferential knowledge is patently symmetrical, he would have no doubt restricted his assault. In fact, he probably would have managed to take out empiricism had he not tried to take rationalism along with it. As things stand, his critique is unsuccessful because it succeeds on both fronts. Whereas the McDowellian oscillation considers wholistic relativism to be the main philosophic danger flowing from the "myth of the Given" critique, we hold that since what really ensues from the asymmetry argument is the obliteration of reasons as such, the actual pitfall is *nihilism*.

We should like to conclude our rejection of asymmetry with a brief observation. Alan Turing, in laying down the conceptual groundwork for addressing the question

of mathematical decidability in his imaginative 1936 paper "On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the *Entscheidungsproblem*", insisted that we grant him a handful of axioms:

> The machine is supplied with a 'tape' (the analogue of paper) running through it, and divided into sections (called 'squares') each capable of bearing a 'symbol'. [...] The 'scanned symbol' is the only one of which the machine is, so to speak, 'directly aware' [...]. (quoted in Monk and Raphael, 2002, p. 500)
>
> .....
>
> Let us imagine the operations performed by the computer to be split up into 'simple operations' which are so elementary that it is not easy to imagine them further divided. (*Ibid.*, p. 502)
>
> .....
>
> Besides these changes of symbols, the simple operations must include changes of distribution of observed squares. The new observed squares must be immediately recognisable by the computer. (*Ibid.*)

We must confess to a limited interest in the "cognitive sciences", which appear to us riddled with questionable alchemic hopes which are not assumed in the full light of day. Without endorsing the computationalist construal of mind which enthusiastically sprang from the above architecture, we nevertheless find it remarkable that, for the Turing machine to effect its anatomic-inferential-symbolic computations, it must be "directly aware" (i.e., indexically) of its contents in an "immediately recognisable" (noninferential) manner that "cannot be divided further" (atomic).

3.5 What now?

When we described the principal features that make up what Sellars aptly called the "Given", we did not dwell too much on their opposites, mentioning only in passing the traits which by implication constitute the "non-Given" (sect. 1.5.2). If we accept that the Given is indexical, atomic, and noninferential, then we can likewise affirm that the non-Given is symbolic, anatomic, and inferential (*cf.* fig. 6).

non-Given	Given
Symbolic	Indexical
Anatomic	Atomic
Inferential	Noninferential

Figure 6 The respective features of the non-Given and Given.

The members that comprise each vertical tripartition are more or less synonymous with each other. Much like speaking of being triangular and trilateral amounts to the same thing, there is a certain redundancy in saying that an index is atomic and so on. This is of no great importance, insofar as what interests us in the chart is not so much its rows as the relation (if any) between the columns. Putting aside the various polemics, what we have here are two very different "orders" of representation, to each of which can be annexed one of the Kantian faculties. Thus, the order of the non-Given is where *spontaneity* can express itself, whereas that of the Given is where *receptivity* occurs.

With this framework in place, Sellars mobilizes an argument which, though sophisticated in its presentation, involves a fairly straightforward inference: "The orders of spontaneity and receptivity *differ*; therefore they cannot *relate* in a fertile way". This asymmetrist argument is not unique to knowledge or the mind (it can be invoked, for instance, to defend the absurd claim that since movement and rest differ, one can only *hold* a baseball in one's mitt, not *receive* it). Of course, the reasoning itself at work here is analogous to that which gives rise to the (in)famous mind-body problem bequeathed by Descartes. Now McCulloch (2002) has rightly called attention to the *anti-Cartesian* character of McDowell's project of radically

uniting mind and world. Indeed, the stated purpose of the McDowellian fusion thesis is to ensure that we not picture the world as some sort of ineffable space which extends ever so slightly further than that of the realm of mind. Nevertheless, by trying to go the monist route, we think McDowell effectively grants the premise that if spontaneity and receptivity differ, they cannot relate: *since he wants them to relate, he insists that they don't differ after all* (figure 7 summarizes these views).

In contrast with these approaches, we will seek neither to obliterate the Kantian relata nor to reduce one of them to virtual impotence. Owing to our aetiological posture, we simply cannot deny that *we have good grounds to notionally distinguish receptivity from spontaneity, Givenness from non-Givenness*. As Crispin Wright so aptly put it: « The overcoming of dualisms is a good thing only when the duality is bogus; otherwise, it is just the missing of distinctions » (2002b, p. 173). However, what we want to do is grant the premise that freedom and reason belong to an order altogether different from experiential compulsion—yet demolish the mistaken supposition that this somehow entails an impossible coexistence. The position we will defend in the next chapter is that, when conducted under proper (i.e, non-speculative) norms, the mind's representations involve a scale which is greater than the atom but smaller than the whole, and that on such a scale the twin faculties can be construed in such a way that their interplay becomes non-problematic.

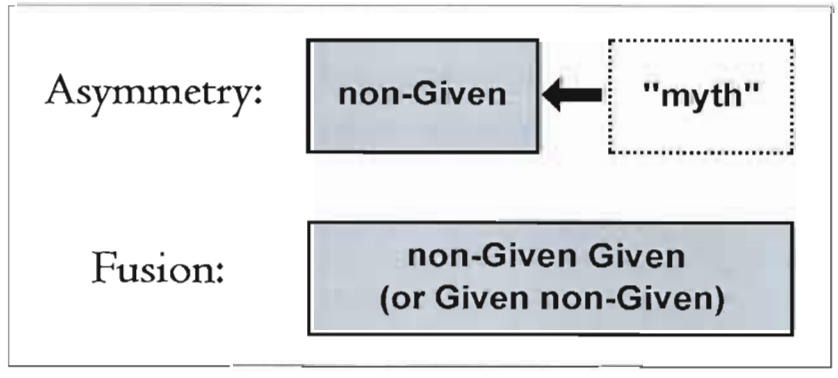

Figure 7 Two misguided ways to resolve the tension between the non-Given and Given.

3.6 Conclusion

As we take inventory, we see that there are several forces at work in McDowell's oscillation. Chief among these is the initial recoil away from the idea of a discrete receptive contact with the world. Yet in so fleeing from any and all things Given, it is uncritically assumed that there is a fallback position theorists can migrate to. The promised land in this case is provided by the whole, which marks the opposite end of the seesaw. Shrinking from the world into the safe confines of the mind, it is hoped that the whole will supply what was deemed missing from the atomic content, namely a plausible source of epistemic normativity—at least one which can survive the technical criticisms levelled at empiricism. Secure in this belief (and in the conviction that anything punctate would at best be ineffable), Sellars designed a very powerful strike: it is not so much that empiricist theories are wrong in claiming sensory episodes as reasons; rather, it is the very idea that one could symmetrically return to indexical origins which is mistaken.

However, much like McDowell's fusion thesis remains plausible only so long as its constituents are artificially kept *un*fused and their inevitable collapse into monism delayed (sect. 2.5.3), Sellars and others' assumption that a wholistic fabric of inferences could house representation in a post-Given epistemology feeds on a narrow construal of the Given as pertaining only to sensory episodes. Accordingly, all we have done in this chapter is taken the philosophic assault on Givenness (not just empiricism) *seriously*—and looked at where it leads. What this investigative strategy has taught us is that Sellars' attack was *too* powerful. For if one stays true to his programmatic ambitions and holds fast to the idea that the Given is a formal (symmetrical) appeal which transcends any specific ontological domain, then inferential knowledge must be rejected: *content-respect is the quintessential indexical symmetry*. It is as if some army general was so convinced that his enemy's continent was distant that he remorselessly devised a weapon splintering the very structure of physical matter, thereby devastating his own continent in the process

(Granted, demonstrating that the rejection of Givenness leads to nihilism is not *per se* a refutation of the asymmetry thesis. It could very well be that noninferential appeals are indeed impossible in *any* domain. However, since this would effectively obliterate inferential knowledge as well, it is hard to see how one could *argue* such a claim).

Since we have rejected the initial recoil away from atomism by undermining its most potent technical critique, does that mean we should take up the empiricist project anew? Not at all. To a certain extent, the idea of placing the burden of epistemic normativity solely on the shoulders of receptivity is a deeply misguided project which is doomed to fail. What then are we to do? Well, we have seen how McDowell and Sellars tried to do away with the Kantian co-operation—the former by fusion, the latter by asymmetry. In the end, however, neither accomplishes what is needed most, namely an elucidation of the modalities whereby spontaneity and receptivity interact. Thus, putting an end to the seesaw between atomism and wholism requires not only that we avoid these futile poles, but also that we strive to meet another desideratum: preserving the relata whose difficult joining sets the problem in motion. For just as the change of a burning piece of wood can only be explained once we accept that there is indeed a sense in which two things *and* one thing are involved, so will the mechanics of representation be elucidated and the oscillation ended when we accept that receptivity and spontaneity are distinct non-contradictory faculties of equal standing.

CHAPTER IV

TOWARDS A STRONGER THIRD WAY: ANATOMISM WITHOUT WHOLISM

> This amounts, in effect, to the declaration: "Since the intrinsic has failed us, the subjective is our only alternative".
>
> Ayn Rand
> *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology* (1967)

4.1 Introduction

What does it mean to search for a third way? What would such a philosophic avenue look like, should one find it? A sensible means of ascertaining this would be to look at the antecedent poles whose problematic struggle a third way is intended to arrest. The options of atomism and wholism we have been discussing throughout this work are both means of theorizing « the way concepts mediate the relation between minds and the world » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 3); that is, they are broad models that tell us how we should represent representation. In the unstable situation addressed in *Mind and World*, the two opposing candidates are "the myth of the Given" and "unconstrained coherentism" (and their respective cognates).

Those labels are, of course, highly semantically charged, connoting as they do a host of (sometimes debatable) interpretations and value-judgements. Accordingly, we have preferred to employ a more neutral nomenclature. Yet it is a fact that

atomism and wholism are not mere structural features devoid of philosophic weight. For instance, when one holds that the mind's representations are answerable to correspondences with their respective objects, one thereby commits oneself to a slew of assumptions about the proper conduct of epistemological normativity. Adherents to the atomistic account are thus more likely to see ostensions as an effective means of grounding beliefs, establishing the veracity of claims, and so on. In contrast, when one holds that punctate appeals to receptivity are impossible (even in theory), one is compelled to seek alternative modes of normativity. As such, the wholist embraces not only a different quantitative scale, but also a different qualitative construal of the epistemological dynamic governing that expanse. On this view, multiple (and conflicting) configurations of symbolic representations can be made to fit with identical patterns of indexical forces. Accordingly, the wholist maintains that we choose freely how we represent—*en masse*—that things are "thus and so". This, then, is what we should except of a third way: a template of how much content is involved in the assessment of a representation—and an account of what faculty(ies) ultimately does the adjudicating. In short, *a third way must state a scale and explicate a norm.*

On that count, McDowell proposes an "unbounded" scale with, as a norm, a *Bildung*-instilled incredulity vis-à-vis one's beliefs—spontaneous criticism from within supplanting experiential receptivity as a source of friction. We will not recap the complex and interwoven fabric of arguments by which McDowell seeks to breathe life into this fusion of receptivity and spontaneity. What is important is the manner in which his reasoned deliberations construe the antagonist poles of the oscillation. For the greatest point of divergence between McDowell's proposal and ours is that he sees the difficulties of each as grounds to extinguish the very distinction between receptivity and spontaneity, whereas we think a better account of their relation is in order.

If we picture the argumentative structure of the present work as "Y"-shaped (with a "fork in the road" located in the middle), we can say that our itinerary in this final chapter is to break with the McDowellian and Sellarsian ideas presented in the second and third chapter so as to travel in a new direction consistent with the general aetiologic posture laid down in the first. We will begin by revisiting under a new light the problematic oscillation portrayed by McDowell. Our discussion will look at how atomistic and wholistic theories both rest on metaphoric appeals, either tacitly or in the form of didactic illustrations. Instead of viewing the employment of metaphors with suspicion, we will embrace the feature as a benign fact about human understanding generally. With this methodological attitude in place, we will present what we believe are the rudimentary conceptions or images underlying the respective poles of the seesaw. Although our investigation into this topic will admittedly have much in common with McDowell's therapeutic approach, we will insist that metaphoric imagery must nevertheless answer some basic constraints, chief among which are that a proposed picture be exempt of any inner contradiction and that it reflect what is actually (naturalistically) the case. McDowell's fusion will be seen as failing the first of these requirements, whereas atomism and wholism will be deemed wanting in aetiological fidelity.

Having examined the core images which animate the oscillation, we will then forge ahead on a new path and present the key aspects of our own theory of representation. Since we consider the appeal to intuitive images to be inevitable, we will draw an engaging picture of our own, one which, we argue, holds more philosophic promise than the divergent assumptions at the heart of atomism, wholism, and fusion. This primitive framework will allow us to address an important epistemological issue we have encountered throughout this work—namely, the question of when (if ever) one should consider that certainty about the world has been attained. Attending to this matter will permit us to further expand on the philosophic rationale which lies behind our rejection of McDowell's

standing policy of critical mistrust. Upon outlining some of the more important commitments that are required by our positive conception, the remainder of the chapter will be devoted to explicating the place of receptivity and spontaneity in our third way. Consolidating the many lessons learned, we shall endeavour to produce an account that is more tenable than the ones we have examined thus far.

4.2 Proceeding from the ideas already on the table: the seesaw revisited

4.2.1 On the use and misuse of imagery

Stephen C. Pepper has argued that at the heart of each philosophic system lies what he calls a "root metaphor". The central idea behind Pepper's elaborate theory is remarkably simple: « A man desiring to understand the world looks about for a clue to its comprehension. He pitches upon some area of common-sense fact and tries if he cannot understand other areas in terms of this one. This original area becomes then his basic analogy or root metaphor » ([1942] 1972, p. 91). For instance, the most primitive root metaphor of all is animism (*Ibid.*, p. 120-123), which takes the human being's attributes (e.g., bodily shape, emotions, motives, etc.) and projects them as the interpretative key to all things. Similarly, mechanistic world-views rest on analogies with machines (*Ibid.*, p. 186-212), whereas the organicist tacitly expects « that every actual event in the world is a more or less concealed organic process » (*Ibid.*, p. 281).

Pepper's systematic typologies are actually far more complex than our superficial outline suggests. Although we have no desire to rehearse those classifications here, much less reprise Pepper's ambitious program for an exhaustive survey and evaluation of metaphysical conceptions, we do want to borrow from him the idea that understandings of a given object of study are inevitably steeped in tacit appeals to primitive metaphors which shape the direction of explicit theorizing.

The sort of latent presuppositions embodied in Pepper's root metaphors are occasionally assailed, most notably by philosophers (that community of thinkers who have come to see it as their duty to pass under review the most commonsensical of metaphysical beliefs). As Sandra Dingli points out, McDowell's so-called "quietist" approach « involves exposing mistaken assumptions in pictures which have held us captive in their grip and, once we have realized the error of our way of seeing things, it puts forward new pictures » (2005, p. 195). While one may rightfully question whether and to what extent McDowell abstains from positive theorizing and remains "quiet" about the issues he addresses, it does seem fair to recognize that *Mind and World* relies heavily on inventive means of picturing abstract situations, and this in order to both "diagnose" philosophic ailments and point the way to more satisfactory conceptions. As Dingli correctly observes: « One thing that is certain about pictures which quietists favour is that they are replete with metaphors [...] » (*Ibid.*, p. 199).

However, Crispin Wright has voiced fears that McDowell might simply be exhuming « barriers of jargon, convolution, and metaphor before the reader hardly less formidable than those characteristically erected by his German luminaries »—thus fostering an obscurantism which Wright believes has been absent since « the academic professionalization of the subject » (2002a, p. 157). In an attempt to safeguard « the care and rigor which we try to instill into our students » and to protect « the susceptible » from being wastefully carried away by the ideas of *Mind and World*, Wright warns that « McDowell is a strong swimmer, but his stroke is not to be imitated » (*Ibid.*, p. 157, 158).

In contrast with Wright, we think McDowell should be commended for taking the risks he does. While it may irk some to recognize it, philosophic metaphors are to theories what cults are to religions: precursors waiting to be sanctified by greater adoption. In our opinion, it takes a significant lack of hindsight not to recognize that today's accepted theories were once fledgling intuitions, and a matching lack of

foresight not to recognize that today's tentative pictures may perhaps enjoy a likewise good fortune in the future. Although Wright obviously feels more at home in the last hundred years or so of Anglo-American philosophical discourse, we cannot help but wonder whether someone like F. H. Bradley (was *he* a professional?) warned his students to be weary of the disruptive idiom of a Bertrand Russell. In any event, Wright's paternalistic comments vis-à-vis McDowell's approach rest on a romanticized delusion: barriers of jargon already exist, and what Wright is really bemoaning is a perceived changing of the guard.

Of course, the transmutation from the marginal to the mainstream in such a case is answerable to processes that comprise their fair share of contingency. However, like the practice of 'eating poisonous mushrooms while jumping off cliffs', the question of a philosophic proposal's basis in the natural order is not wholly foreign from that of its promulgation in the cultural realm (sect. 2.5.2). When advancing a new metaphor, a high premium should therefore be put on demonstrating its basis in reality—especially, one would hope, when the addressees are freethinking philosophers. In other words, one should seek to put forth images that are motivated (in the sense in which even a rough outline of the African continent on a restaurant napkin is motivated).

In our view, McDowell is not so much at fault for essaying new ways of picturing as he is for enjoining us to conceive ideas which are plainly contradictory (sect. 2.5.3). On that count, pleading the limitations of our "language" can only go so far. Granted, philosophers are often captive of their own prejudices, and new metaphors can be used with great effect to awake stagnant debates from their (unfortunately too-common) dogmatic complacency. Many philosophic problems are indeed ill-founded and should be undermined "from the outside", as it were. But one must be on guard no to overdo this. *Any* abstract intellectual problem, if one ceases to consider it, magically ceases to be problematic (illiteracy also dissolves

philosophic tensions). The abusive attempt to exorcise "blind spots" in cases where there is simply nothing there to be seen therefore does more to undermine the credibility of what is an otherwise noble move.

If one has a hard time finding a way to reconcile receptivity and spontaneity in explicit theorizing, one need not blame oneself nor reject the inquiry as chimerical. Heraclitus and Parmenides had due cause to ponder change, even if they lacked the means to reconcile their own oscillation and fathom an appropriate way out (had McDowell been around then, what would he have told them?). What we want to do now is begin to show how providing an answer to the question of how to represent representation is not only soluble but by and large inevitable, and that the manner in which one pictures the referential bond to an object orients the stances one will adopt when faced with the more overt problem of trying to reconcile receptivity and spontaneity in an explicit theory.

4.2.2 A pervasive but misguided metaphor

It has long been an assumption of Western thought that the sword would be removed from the stone in one swift tug, or not removed at all. As far as suppositions go, this one is probably not without basis; perhaps it reflects a transposition of the law of the excluded-middle on a grander scale. In any event, atomism seems to construe representation as such a neat disjunction: a positive state is achieved when reference hits its target, and if a representation does not attain its intended mark, it simply does not refer. In both cases, reference is held to happen in a flash that admits no gradients. Thus, one often sees the notion of reference described as if it were some kind of beam which, if and when it emanates, travels in a straight line from representation to represented. Some think the referential laser always fires but its targets vary, whereas others insist that targets all exist on the same level but reason that the laser fires only in some cases. Neverthless, both camps accept a common premise: *reference proceeds from a representation to an object directly* (*cf.* fig. 8).

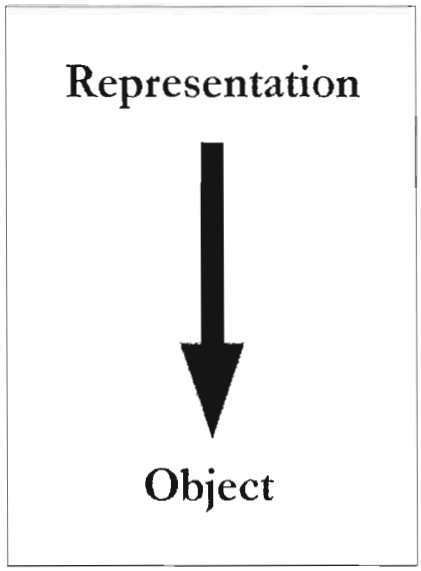

Figure 8 The "laser" picture of atomism.

If this picture should appear banal, then this means we are nearing our objective. In fact, it is perhaps because the idea it depicts seems so bromidic that it is rarely if ever framed for attentive consideration. It is ubiquitous, cutting across some of the more rigid boundaries of philosophy (the beam can be reworked, for instance, into a "multiple denotation" reaching a plurality of immanent individuals, to suit nominalist demands that no real universal be aimed at; *cf.* Martin, 1958, p. 99-100).

Given this (largely tacit) framework, the question soon arises: since agents are obviously fallible in their referring, how should one picture unsuccessful attempts at representing the world? Two basic answers (or, if you will, families of answers) suggest themselves: 1) the laser beam always fires but hits targets of varied substantiality, or 2) all objects partake of a same worldly substantiality, but the laser beam does not always fire. For the first of these options, if there is no cat on the mat in the principal worldly domain, then any representation to that effect directs itself to some cat on a mat in some (weaker) subsidiary domain. Thus, for Morris:

> A sign must have a designatum; yet obviously every sign does not, in fact, refer to an actual existent object. [...] Since 'designatum' is a semiotical term, there cannot be designata without semiosis—but there can be objects without there being semiosis. The designatum of a sign is the kind of object which the sign applies to, i.e., the objects with the properties which the interpreter takes account of through the presence of the sign vehicle. And the taking-account-of may occur without there actually being objects or situations with the characteristics taken account of. [...] Where what is referred to actually exists as referred to the object of reference is a *denotatum*. It thus becomes clear that, while every sign has a designatum, not every sign has a denotatum. A designatum is not a thing, but a kind of object or class of object—and a class may have many members, or one member, or no members. The denotata are the members of the class. This distinction makes explicable the fact that one may reach in the icebox for an apple that is not there and make preparations for living on an island that may never have existed or has long since disappeared beneath the sea. (1971, p. 20-21)

The Fregean strata of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* provide adherents of the laser metaphor with another means of accommodating references that miss their target (or simply never had one to begin with): the beam hits only a *Sinn*. The key feature here is that lasers coming short of their legitimate referential target are deemed to differ in ontology from those that succeed—Frege even wrote of "*Scheingedanke*" or "mock thoughts" (1997, p. 230; *cf.* Evans, 1982 [2002], p. 28-30). It should be noted that while the description of intermediary targets as "ideational" or "logical" appears to be a widely accepted move, unreserved opprobrium is heaped on whoever dares to recast the same posits in a more overtly metaphysical idiom—as testified by the ridicule and relative neglect of A. Meinong's theory of "subsisting" objects (*cf.* Grossman, 1974).

Russell—enamoured neither of Frege's abstract stratum (sect. 2.3.1) nor Meinong's subsisting realms—thought the positing of intermediary referential targets totally unacceptable. He thus opted for the second basic option, according to which all objects partake of an equal degree of substantiality but representations do not always fire. As McDowell explains,

> Russell's restriction results, in effect, from refusing to accept that there can be an illusion of understanding an apparently singular sentence (or utterance) [...]. The upshot, in Russell's hands, is that we can entertain and express singular propositions only where there cannot be illusions as to the existence of an object of the appropriate kind [...]. ([1986] 1998, p. 229)

Russell was by no means alone in adopting such a stance, as the logical positivists (largely following the early Wittgenstein's lead) had made it fashionable for philosophers to vigorously declare this or that representation "meaningless" (*cf.* Ayer, [1936] 1952). Adherents to this view thus contend that it is preferable to construe reference in such a way that if the laser attains its object, then there is reference; and if not, not.

One of the driving forces having led philosophizing about language, mind and knowledge in the English-speaking world has therefore been the attractive assumption that one could generate a robust account by associating the notion of meaning with that of truth-conditions. To know that P is to know when and where P would be true. What this stance calls for, of course, are normative means of ascertaining what does and does not obtain in the strong sense. A considerable portion of the history of the analytic tradition can thus be read as a sustained and concerted effort to make the laser view of reference work—to ensure theoretical constructs never allow bald French kings to be "denoted" (*cf.* Russell, [1905] 1956).

4.2.3 Wholism's equally impractical retort

Although the idea of organizing the theory of meaning around a hardboiled notion of truth remained dominant for quite some time (it as not yet fully eroded), many philosophers understandably despaired at trying to make the laser view work. By the 1950s, cracks in the truth-conditional program began to show up with increasing frequency. P. F. Strawson ([1950] 1971) was arguably the first prominent dissenter in this regard. By insisting that representations need a more palpable contribution of agency in order to reach the world, he effectively "humanized" the idea of a

denotational laser beam. Although his revamped construal still countenanced two levels of objects, the pragmatic tinge he added never stopped gaining ground. By the time we reach the influential essays of W. Sellars and W. V. O. Quine, the world no longer has any role to play in epistemological normativity.

Sellars' contribution to the recoil away from punctate receptivity consisted mainly in undermining the presumption that, just as photons hit our sensory apparatus, so we can direct our reference to an object. Although Sellars cautiously countenanced the possibility of direct experiential impingements, his asymmetry thesis denounced the very idea that one could muster likewise indices. History shows that this critique, though marred in narrow misinterpretations, was quite effective (owing in large part to the timely attractiveness of its slogan). Sellars, however, was arguably more adept in the art of philosophic criticism than he was in that of constructive system-building. On this last front, history also shows that it was Quine who supplied the most potent positive contribution.

Quine is pivotal in that he took some of the most vital theoretical pillars of the analytic project and literally turned them upside down. We have seen how Russell feared that a logicist semantic might end up floating above the domain it seeks to represent in a way that allows for the establishment of self-consistent systems which are different but equal, and how he called in the notion of an empirical acquaintance as a way to eliminate vulnerability to such "massive reduplication" (sect. 2.3.1). Unfortunately, as that project matured, the difficulties inherent in grafting a receptive dimension became increasingly apparent. Despite being an able student of Russell's thought—his early fame had come from mimicking his mentor's derision of Meinong-like theories of subsistence (*cf.* Quine, [1953] 2001, p. 1-19)—Quine did not try to stymie the empiricist blueprint from the top down. It is a testament to the profundity of his philosophical ability that he instead returned to the origins of the project itself, re-examined afresh its founding impetus, and gave an entirely different appraisal of the very feature which had worried Russell. There can indeed

be divergent systems that are perfectly equal in their truth-valences (i.e., "equivalent"), he held, but this should not be glossed as a weakness for an epistemology to have. Rather, Quine argued, the trait which philosophers in the first half of the twentieth century had tried so hard to avoid is the one we should embrace: the underdetermination of experience, and the representational spontaneity it affords, testifies to our pragmatic flexibility in the face of counter-evidence. According to this view, wholes are resilient, and we should look to that characteristic in rethinking how to represent representation.

Quine described his doctrine variously as « a man-made fabric » whose inner-workings are akin to « a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience » ([1953] 2001, p. 42), a boat which « stays afloat because at each alteration we keep the bulk of it intact as a going concern » ([1960] 1999, p. 4), or again as an arch where the « overhead block is supported immediately by other overhead blocks, and ultimately by all the base blocks collectively and none individually » (*Ibid.*, p. 11). What we have here is a rival root metaphor worthy of the laser beam.

The problem with such a wholistic epistemology, however, is that it is not very convenient to implement. The most convincing critiques of atomism had as a leitmotif the clarion call that "things just don't happen that way" (e.g., Kuhn, [1962] 1996). Yet notice how the atomist framework, though discarded in the name of sobriety, was supplanted by an equally unworkable idea. While it may seem attractive on paper to some more speculative-minded theorists, the whole does *not* play into normative assessments of representations. In other words, things just don't happen that way. Perhaps the community of inquirers had to take the idea of wholism seriously at least once to learn the lesson. In any case, the irony is that wholism's adoption has arguably resulted not in a greater concern for integration, but in a generalized trepidation over any philosophic endeavour beyond the piecemeal. As one needs to consider the interwoven network of sciences and languages in its entirety to establish the epistemic merit of even the slightest item,

every normative assessment becomes a rather imposing affair. Insofar as this might have stimulated a renewed sensitivity for context, then, to that extent, we think the change of metaphor has been for the best. However, anecdotal evidence suggests to us that the practical impossibility of bringing a total *Summa* to bear on a given claim to knowledge has not had such a salutary effect. Since the whole cannot be lugged around, judgement becomes forever qualified and postponed.

That is not to say that nothing has been gained by the attempt to construct a brave new epistemology. Several notable advances have been made. We now know that observation (scientific or otherwise) is not as free from theory as was once assumed. We see that economic considerations for integrity and coherence often overrule empirical considerations, and that some representations can be entrenched so deeply as to withstand repeated counter-evidence while others can be revised simply because developments in other areas have made them to onerous to tow. Furthermore, in what is perhaps the most surprising rapprochement between the "analytic" and "continental" traditions since their great divergence over anatomism—over the so-called "internal relations" which Hegelian wholists made so much of (e.g., McTaggart, 1910)—there is now a heightened sensitivity to the role of history and societal practices in structuring our understandings. The wholistic adventure has thus left the intellectual landscape of Western philosophy changed in a way that rules out an ingenuous return to atomism.

Of course, this tally paints a somewhat rosy picture, and leaves out many of the more ugly details. For in the sweeping realization that the human mind can choose among many world-views, the "view" portion has arguably been focused on to the detriment of the "world". The transformation, it seems, happened too quickly; the net result being that discursive pluralism gave way to that indigestion of the intellect which is relativism (the atomistic program may have had its failings, but to our knowledge it never compelled any thinker to wilfully turn off the lights which the enlightenment—whatever its flaws—struggled so hard to ignite). For sure, many of

those who uphold the standard of whole have refused to acknowledge the presence of any inner rationale for this downturn, pointing instead to the fact that theoretical endeavours are carried on by very human practitioners who can inject their own philosophical agendas into given tenets. Nevertheless, the partiality goes both ways, and the non-relativist strikes us as guilty of artificially grafting an optimism onto wholism which it simply cannot sustain.

Some wholists have maintained that the only way to be true to their commitment is to confront relativism head-on, the argument being that this will effectively dissipate the ailment. One has due cause to wonder whether such a move would be beneficial. Whatever the merit of that assessment, it seems untendentious to affirm that, as the memory of the original effervescence wanes, the wholistic program is attracting the same sort of incredulous commentators and true-believers who had jointly carried through the (temporary) demise of atomism. As a result, many thinkers (ourselves included) have come to conclude that the threat of relativism does not disappear by rushing headlong into it. Yet while the list of that faction continually grows, there are still those, like Davidson and Rorty, who cling to the general Quinean insight and try to reassure others that contemporary philosophy should not falter in its abdication of receptivity. According to this gloss, the promise of wholism lingers in coming to fruition only because we have not yet purified ourselves of our realist expectations. But there obviously wouldn't be much to McDowell's seesaw if those pleas were in fact taking hold. Wholism, it would seem, was hyperbole.

4.2.4 Why atomism is still the lesser of two evils

We opened our investigation by asking what role, if any, supplemental representations play in the apprehension of a given object. While we endorsed neither the atomist nor the wholist answers to that question, we did conclude on more than one occasion that wholism is the least plausible of the two options. We

stand fast by that assessment, and can now make some clearer sense of why that is. The most obvious reason is that the Given (which McDowell situates as one pole of the oscillation) actually has some basis, if only on a more humble scope.

We have seen in the third chapter that the symmetrical return to indexical origins plays a crucial role in the mind's ability to draw inferences. In short, every deduction perforce involves representational lasers that reach their object directly. We may therefore find the appeal to referential lasers occult when those hit worldly targets and travel through walls, but we must nevertheless countenance such a direct access inside the symbolic space of reasons, on pain of having the entire inferential apparatus cave in. The fact that we summon atomic references in content-respect thus gives *some* credence to the idea that this is the manner in which minds enter into objective contact with the world. Since entailments ultimately subsume ostensive appeals which preclude the anatomic involvement of other representations, it is perhaps only normal that some should want to interpret all forms of demonstration, including empirical ones, along similar lines.

Ostensive reporting would seem to be the perfect companion to receptivity, insofar as these movements "to and fro" the mind are both held to operate via some kind of indexical force. In experience, a human agent is submitted to a stream of forceful stimuli. Seeing how we can invite others to position themselves in a manner that allows them to undergo similar inputs, it is tempting to think of our claims to knowledge as somehow imbued with a comparable energy. The laser view, we could thus say, is an outgrowth of the empiricists' photographic analogy. Just as the mind is construed as an exposure-sensitive medium that records whatever experiential impingements it is subjected to, so can the radiation be reversed and aimed back at the world in a referential act. All of us who have tasted relish are fairly secure in our belief that it tastes a certain way. As such, we tend to confidently nurture a representation to the effect that 'relish is sweet'. If pressed to prove or justify (to ourselves or to others) that this *in absentia* representation (belief,

cognition, written statement, etc.) has an objective basis in fact, we would be naturally inclined to establish the warrant of our representation by way of an *in praesentia* ostention: "Taste it, and you'll clearly confirm that 'relish is sweet'". This is the basic motive behind the Russellian notion of "knowledge by acquaintance" (sect. 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

However, owing to the many criticisms that have been levelled at it, the informed participant of academic philosophy has become almost conditioned to take a dim view of this sort of appeal. Even if nothing stands out as particularly problematic *prima facie*, there is a knee-jerk tendency to actively search for a flaw. True, inviting others to experience something is a *discursive* act, and (like the wholist) we believe there is no principled way to isolate the contribution of the actual face-to-face encounter with the world from the context that imbues its experiential results with normative significance. All the same, we can think of *no* example even remotely close to the tasting of relish that would suggest our minds determine the warrant of representations spontaneously from within their wholistic web. It is true that neither atomism nor wholism are tenable positions; but at least atomism loosely suggests itself from our daily life. Wholism, lacking as it does in such mundane motivation, is parasitic: it is a speculative tenet manufactured to remedy the technical failings of a more plausible theory.

But although it unjustifiably pushes the anatomic character of representation all the way to a speculative extreme, wholism is right to insist that reference cannot proceed *directly* from a representation to its object without the contribution of supplementary contents. That said, the idea that it is the whole which alone establishes the epistemic merit of each item does not bear out either. What is needed then is a fresh metaphor which does justice to the fact of human representation—*one doubly plausible because it avoids the straits of the laser view and mobilizes less than the whole in a given normative assessment.*

4.3 Towards a more tenable third way

4.3.1 Introducing a new metaphor

Our rejection of the laser view—of the idea that reference proceeds from a representation to an object directly—would no doubt look more academically respectable if it turned on the sort of serious technical features that bothered the likes of W. Sellars. Alas, our grievance is far more vain. Quite simply, we cannot shake off the suspicion that, when a theorist says of an utterance like "The cat is on the mat" that it "*picks out*" a feline on a padding (what sound does *that* make?), she is invoking a sort of action at a distance, the proposition issuing a mysterious beam going from the utterer directly to the intended target—travelling through a wall or two, if need be.

We reject the idea that meaningful linguistic acts like utterances somehow bear on their worldly referent(s) without a more concrete actantial contribution on the part of the animal utterer. *Qua* communicative tool, we have no trouble conceiving language as a potent information-carrying vehicle. No doubt a Wittgensteinian talking lion (*cf.* [1953] 2001, p. 190) would be understood by agents partaking in his species-specific mode of communication, but his roars would not by themselves reach their intended object—"by themselves" here meaning "without a more concrete involvement on the part of the agent(s)". This does not entail that the lion at the receiving end of the communication channel has to decipher the roar's contents on the basis of the emitter's observable bodily behaviour. As far as we're concerned, the above situation could just as easily accommodate McDowell's argument that the ability to fix the worldly referents of hearsay is not dependent on the ability to ascribe intentions in others (sect. 1.4.1). What we do claim is that, in their shared understanding of the roar, both receiver and emitter have access to a

representation whose tie to the world lies dormant until and unless they *do* something with it. Nomologically-inflected puffs of air are no doubt of great utility in orienting human (and leonine) agency, but whatever contact with their worldly object(s) those afford exists *in potentia* in the minds of agents.

Although we emphatically do *not* embrace Peirce's philosophy (we will explain why shortly), this stance is more or less consonant with the American thinker's contention that « every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood » (1998, p. 135; there is also a kinship with the Strawsonian amendments outlined above, sect. 4.2.3). However, our position diverges with the above formulation insofar as we attach no particular importance to the sentence-unit. As we see it, some theoretical judgements may be too hefty to fit neatly in a sentence, and nothing prevents these from being transmissible only in paragraphs, texts, or entire academic degrees.

Thus, although it strikes us as aetiologically sensible to construe symbolic representations as promissory notes on conduct, our third way accepts that some abstract ideas cannot be expressed (to oneself or to others) in a single sitting, as it were. We thus prefer to picture the situation as follows (fig. 9). We shall call this the *constrictive* or "lasso" view and label any set of representations which anatomically collaborate in the task of apprehending a worldly object a *string of discourse*.

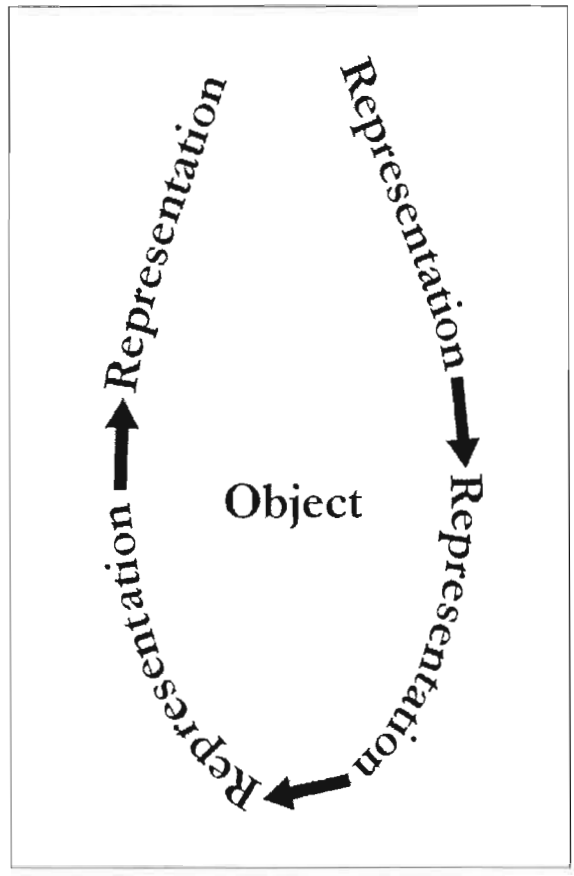

Figure 9 The constrictive (or "lasso") view.

According to this view, the mind has at its command an interpretative leeway such that it need not adjust its representations in tight one-to-one correspondences. As scientists or lay persons, we are not compelled to produce piecemeal accounts for every single one of our concepts and conceptions (some of these, like the connective "and", need not ever possess any straightforward empirical account)—yet neither do we need to consult the whole in order to assess the merit of a claim to epistemic objectivity.

There is nothing "contingent" or "sociological" about the anatomism we advocate. Much the contrary, we believe the fact that humans employ neither atomist not wholist epistemologies springs from the very "architecture" of the mind.

In short, we think this anatomist model is the only valid way to construe the representation of worldly objects because it is the only structural account congenial to our *finite* nature. More generally, we believe it reflects the Aristotelian insight that the principles which underlie any intelligible order are perforce « neither one nor innumerable » (189a20).

4.3.2 Two sorts of scepticism

According to the constrictive view we have just sketched, our representations do not *all* have to answer to the world; but somewhere along the way strings of them must. There is a thus a limit to our interpretative leeway. An agent attempting to explain and/or justify a very complex theory may postpone submission of her narrative to the test of forceful indexicality for quite some time (some objects have a wide girth and require a fairly long lasso to be apprehended). But so long as an agent claims to be discoursing on things as they are in the world, the anatomic string she weaves must sooner or later allow her to seize hold of whatever it purports to represent.

The norm proper to our constrictive view not only condones impatience with anatomic linkages that extend on the sole basis of speculation—it encourages intolerance in such instances (when no discursive end is in sight, no worldly end is in sight as well). McDowell, in contrast, believes that one should always be ready to consider criticisms, since « [t]here is no guarantee that the world is completely within the reach of a system of concepts and conceptions as it stands at some particular moment in its historical development » ([1994] 2002, p. 40). Although we could challenge this contention on purely textual grounds by highlighting its flagrant contradiction with McDowell's Wittgenstein-inspired claim that « when we see that such-and-such is the case, we, and our seeing, do not stop anywhere short of the fact » (*Ibid.*, p. 29; *cf.* sect. 2.2.2), we want to focus on the substantial philosophic presuppositions which underwrite the sceptical contention—disquietingly unproblematic to McDowell's eyes—that we can never be certain our

representations ever actually bear on their worldly objects. Addressing this topic will also give us an opportunity to stake out exactly why we part company with a thinker whom we have approvingly mentioned a few times in the course of this work, namely Charles Sanders Peirce.

Karl Popper prefaced his seminal *Logic of Scientific Discovery* by forthrightly declaring his conviction that « *the growth of knowledge can be studied best by studying the growth of scientific knowledge* » ([1934] 2006, p. xix; italics in original). That a philosopher openly states adherence to this methodological assumption is somewhat unusual; that a philosopher upholds such a tenet, however, is not. Indeed, one of the distinctive features of the "analytic" tradition in philosophy has been its respect for the scientific method. Whereas "continental" thinkers arguably view social reform as their chief pursuit, English-speaking philosophers have in the main directed their efforts to epistemological matters, with a particular emphasis on making sure the scientific enterprise is secure in its footing. For some, this means philosophy must act as keeper of the formal apparatus of logic which scientists routinely call upon in their quest to elucidate the regularities of the world. For others, the disinterested deliberations of philosophical thought can serve as a source of arbitrament when disciplinary disputes arise. Still others follow Popper ([1934] 2006, p. 10-20; [1963] 2002, p. 44-78) and see it as philosophy's task to provide a criterion to guide both the scientist and lay person in ascertaining what sorts of knowledge can and cannot claim to being scientific in status.

These very lofty assignments no longer command unalloyed confidence. A growing number of contemporary thinkers have come to view "analytic" philosophy's (still pervasive) fascination with science, if not with suspicion, then at least with more reserve. Rorty is arguably one of the best-known English-speaking advocates of the stronger gloss (sect. 2.5.3 and 3.2.1). As for McDowell, he holds that « it is possible to go that far with Rorty and still dissent from his suggestion that, in order to avoid entanglement in that familiar unprofitable epistemological activity,

we need to discard the very idea of being answerable to something other than ourselves » (2000, p. 110). This statement comes some years after the publication of *Mind and World*, and one may rightfully question whether the view it describes can be neatly integrated in the systematic network of ideas presented in that work. Indeed, it could be argued that McDowell's talk of an answerability « to something other than ourselves » (*Ibid.*) betokens an obvious breach of the Wittgensteinian frontier of thought (sect. 1.5.4 and 2.4.1), one that goes against his reproof of the Given as an unsound « craving for rational constraint from outside the realm of thought and judgement » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 18). But without unduly straining to iron out contradictions which ostensibly do not bother their originator, it is safe to say that McDowell believes developments in scientific thought have promulgated in their wake impoverished world-views which now make it difficult for us to countenance features of human life that do not exhibit any sort of straightforward lawfulness (sect. 1.3.2 and 2.4.2). To that extent, we join McDowell in maintaining that the root metaphor of the world as *ratio* has yielded some discoveries but has blinded us to others.

The better philosophers have managed not to concentrate on scientific knowledge to the detriment of other sorts of knowledge. Popper's philosophy has nurtured an ambivalent outlook in this regard. On the one hand, it is abundantly clear that scientific knowledge occupies for him a privileged position. But whilst the Popperian corpus never strays from the conviction that science (specifically *physical* science) affords us the best case study for an investigation of knowledge in general, it is also replete with (laudable) warnings to the effect that philosophers should remain conversant with and open-minded to other sources of knowledge. This reflects the other methodological posit of Popper's *Logic*, namely that « [p]hilosophers are as free as others to use any method in searching for the truth » ([1934] 2006, p. xix)—which in turn reflects his broader contention that « [t]he initial stage, the act of conceiving or inventing a theory, seems to me neither to call

for logical analysis nor to be susceptible of it » (*Ibid.*, p. 7). As we have already had cause to mention (sect. 1.3.1), such a twofold epistemology of 'conjectures and refutations' not only sanctions the *ad hoc* raising of doubt in its conjectural phase, it also encourages stringent incredulity in its critical phase as a matter of principle—the scepticism being all the more fierce when dealing with successful representations. Nevertheless, despite these considerable faults, we think Popper is to be commended for resisting the eliminativist reflex and holding that *all* knowledge, scientific or otherwise, is of a kind. Yet if this is so, can we not ask why science should be considered the best gateway into the study of human knowledge generally? In other words, why should the scientist's elaborate theories about this or that feature of the world be the examplar which, in virtue of a synecdoche-like induction, informs us about other, more humble epistemic ventures? Could not the reverse hold true?

The standard answer here, which has become one of the leading bromides of our age, is that scientific knowledge is the most tenable because, through its wilful exposure to criticism and revision, it can forever be improved. In essence, this idea is a syncretism of two philosophical tenets. The first is Popper's aforementioned claim that « *the criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability* » ([1963] 2002, p. 48; italics in original). The second is Charles S. Peirce's contention that « *those two series of cognition—the real and the unreal—consist of those which, at a time sufficiently future, the community will always continue to re-affirm; and of those which, under the same conditions, will ever after be denied* » (1992, p. 52; italics ours). This is not to say that thinkers who adhere to these views quote Popper and Peirce as their source of inspiration. Neither has the discursive absorption of these originators' respective ideas gone through without adulteration and warpage. But those two philosophical doctrines have been combined to produce a coherent view of the scope and method of scientific knowledge. Peirce writes of an asymptotic horizon towards which unobstructed inquiry will inexorably tend.

Seeing as how the passage of time in this picture is a constant we cannot control, Popper's philosophy allows for the addition of a catalyst which accelerates the journey. Peirce, of course, knew nothing of Popper's ideas, so we can only surmise what his reaction would have been. However, it is clear Popper would resent seeing his theses mixed into such an epistemological cocktail, insofar as he abhorred the notion of an optimistic teleology (*cf.* Popper, [1945] 1971, p. 5-8). In fact, *that* is Popper's contribution to the syncretism. The resultant conception thus supplies a positive normative standing by way of a double-negation: "We can never get there, but we can never get there faster by being doubtful" (this, it seems, is a retort to scepticism in our times).

The analogy with a journey here is appropriate. Knowledge is akin to a trek in that it perforce has a beginning and an end. In terms of the twofold distinction set down in the first chapter, the beginning of inquiry can be either speculative or mundane (sect. 1.2.1). On this count, Peirce's stance has much more to recommend it than Popper's. As Peirce was fond of saying, doubt is not something that happens when one writes an interrogative remark on a piece of paper (1992, p. 115; 1998, p. 336). Rather, real doubt in the Peircean sense originates from *outside* the purview of agency as a forceful privation of habit. In contrast, Popper actively sought to steer his readers towards a "critical attitude", propounding that « whenever we propose a solution to a problem, we ought to try as hard as we can to overthrow our solution » ([1934] 2006, p. xix)—a suggestion not unlike McDowell's standing obligation (sect. 1.4.2 and 2.4.3). Yet despite this divergence, Peirce and Popper both insist that inquiry must work its way up from whatever epistemic materials it fortuitously has at its disposal. As Popper eloquently put it, « the critical attitude is not so much opposed to the dogmatic attitude as super-imposed upon it [...]. A critical attitude needs for its raw material, as it were, theories or beliefs which are held more or less dogmatically » ([1963] 2002, p. 66). Again, we find an echo of this view in McDowell, who rightly argues that « [e]ven a thought that transforms a tradition

must be rooted in the tradition that it transforms » ([1994] 2002, p. 187). Returning to the analogy of inquiry as a journey, we can thus say that Peirce and Popper (and McDowell) dismiss what we shall call *scepticism of beginnings*.

Owing to a variety of factors, amongst which we can count Peirce's and Popper's respective works, such scepticism no longer wields any substantial influence in contemporary philosophy. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of *scepticism of ends*. This is all the more tragic in that the widespread currency which scepticism of ends now enjoys can be attributed—this time more definitively—to the works of Peirce and Popper.

It is as if a bargain was struck with the sceptical deceiver whose speculative machinations were uncovered in the first chapter (sect. 1.2.5). It was agreed that humankind would be permitted to look upon its current store of representations with some measure of epistemic respect as the inevitable starting point whence all inquiry must commence. Yet in exchange for this concession, it was also agreed that inquiry would forever be barred from resting peacefully on a given item—and this, *as a matter of principle*. Thus, regardless of whether or not there would be due cause to keep the process of inquiry in motion, this covenant stated that the mind would have to mobilize its faculty of spontaneity and goad inquiry into activity with speculative criticism. Thus, while this mixed view enjoins us to recognize that the betterment of our representations must proceed from those materials already are at our disposal, no sooner has this been said does it order us to regard that patrimony with suspicion, since we cannot be "fully" certain of its merit. If it be asked by what standard one can suspect that potential failings lurk beneath what are ostensibly healthy representations, the answer is: by the standard of unknown things known to come. Scepticism of ends therefore marks a reprise of that well-known theme of appearance versus reality (sect. 3.2.1); with the real now projected as a distant future, and appearance the stuff of the present.

Philosophers like Peirce and Popper therefore encourage us to abandon scepticism of beginnings only to supplant it with scepticism of ends. Of course, if one focuses on a certain subset of cases, the trade-off can seem reasonable. It is a fact that much of what we are led to believe has no basis in reality and will in due course reveal itself false. Given the considerable presence of such cases, it is understandable that one should want to speed up the process by prodding representations and submitting them to various tests, formal or informal. However, this restricted account sugar-coats the issue to the point of distortion. For supposing that we critically survey our inherited patrimony with an eye to falsity, what are we to make of those representations which pass muster? It is here that scepticism of ends reveals its membership to the superordinate class of scepticism *tout court*. If we should never fully grant truth to our successful representations, it is on account of their being deficient by comparison to an ideal "end of inquiry" which, it is asserted openly, we shall never reach (the expression is thus quite a misnomer).

As it is a pronouncement on the very possibility of the mind representing the world, scepticism of ends pertains to all claims to knowledge. Each and every thought, belief, theory, and so on, is held to be ever-so-slightly distanced from its object in virtue of the fact that in even the most undefeated case an alternative representation *could* one day be adopted. We thus see how scepticism of ends turns on issues of modality. There is a present state of affairs, which belongs to an *assertoric* order (the rejection of scepticism of beginnings grants as much); as well as a future state of affairs, which modally-speaking belongs to the *problematic*. Now it is a profound insight of semiotic investigation that in most if not all binary oppositions one term testifies to what has been called "markedness", an axiologically-charged feature absent from the other, "unmarked", term (the insight was originally Roman Jakobson's, but has since gained a life of its own; *cf.* Chandler, 2002, p. 110-118). To be a marked term is to have a *different* rationale subservient to that of the unmarked term, whose own being requires no further

sanction. If we juxtapose these considerations onto the above modalities, we obtain some interesting results. It is one of the more robust axioms of modal logic that the assertoric implies the problematic, not the other way round. Given the overlap of these distinctions, which is to be the marked term in an epistemology, an assertoric present or a problematic future? As we see it, scepticism of ends plants its normative flag in the problematic camp, thereby construing present representations as deficient by comparison. But can a thinker fully committed to a construal of inquiry anchored in worldly friction and not speculation overrule the assertoric on account of a modal reversal which makes the actual a marked state and the possible an unmarked one—an *unproblematic* problematic?

Ironically, it is because scepticism of beginnings views the assertoric present with unjustifiable suspicion that thinkers like Peirce and Popper called for its abandonment. One of the central argument against this misguided view was that it is « as useless a preliminary as going to the North Pole would be in order to get to Constantinople by coming down regularly upon a meridian » (Peirce, 1992, p. 29). However, we fail to notice any significant philosophical change when the situation is transposed from a geographical picture to a temporal one. That the present is deemed epistemologically inferior to a possible future instead of a possible present makes no difference, insofar as the asymptotic entelechy which scepticism of ends upholds as the "true" standard (with respect to which our representations fail to measure up) supplies the same sort of "clear and distinct" certainty which adherents of that view hold as a reproach against scepticism of beginnings. In either case, the present's actuality is not appraised for what it is: a state where we manage to represent *de facto* (*cf.* sect. 1.4.3).

In fact, if pushed, we would rather endorse a scepticism of beginnings than a scepticism of ends. For while nothing prevents a quest for indubitable First Principles from being achieved in principle, it is inscribed into the very constitution

of the notion of future—be it a distant terminus or a proximate morrow—that it shall always be out of reach (although, rhetorically, appeals to a completed future seem more plausible to the educated Westerner).

Since our natural inclination is to trust uncontested beliefs, not distrust them (sect. 2.5.2), it is reasonable to assume that scepticism of ends arose to meet technical demands removed from everyday affairs. In our view, the repudiation of accessible certainty in favour of an ever-elusive horizon of inquiry marks an attempt to insulate epistemology from the disconcerting effects brought upon by a series of (apparently very traumatic) paradigm shifts in the sciences. As Nicholas Rescher writes:

> [I]f any induction whatsoever can safely be drawn from the history of science it is this: that much of what we currently accept as the established knowledge of the day is wrong, and that what we see as our body of *knowledge* encompasses a variety of errors. In fact, there are few inductions *within* science that are more secure than this induction *about* science. (2003, p. 18; italics in original)

The allusion to lessons learned from the history of science is telling. In Rescher's view, the sudden and dramatic breaks famously catalogued by Kuhn ([1962] 1996) are not only the diachronic signature of human thought as it strives to fathom the world. Rather, the fact that we have heretofore exchanged deficient representations for others of greater explanatory power becomes grounds for an inductive generalization about the synchronic nature of knowledge as such. In essence, the argument is: "Newton (or Euclid, etc.) was wrong; *ergo*, no one can be fully right".

To be sure, the future holds many untold developments, and there is some warrant in holding that "For all we know, things might turn out very differently from how we currently conceive them". However, scepticism of ends makes much of this, as it rejects the equally plausible supposition that "For all we know, things might turn out exactly as we currently conceive them". The philosophic issue here turns on the "for all we know" clause. We take it that this clause forbids us to weaken the standing of a representation *we know* to be tenable. In contrast, a sceptic

of ends like Rescher—building on the syncretism of Peirce's asymptotic view and Popper's falsificationist mistrust—believes past shifts in the paradigms of science instruct us to always qualify epistemic standing and forever consider even our most robust representations as heuristic devices whose bearing upon the world can at best be surmised but never confirmed.

There are two very questionable premises without which this considerable inductive leap breaks down. First, it must be assumed that representations find their value only as a corporate whole such that sizeable changes in scientific theory drag all other forms knowledge along with them. This wholistic assumption however, does not suffice, and must be supplemented with another tacit premise. It must be assumed that the trials and tribulations of scientists inform us about the nature of less lofty forms of human knowledge (*cf.* for example Popper, [1945] 1971, p. 374-375). Barring these assumptions, it would not be unreasonable to construe changes in scientific theories as interesting but relatively minor developments which preoccupy a select few but really have no bearing on the kind of knowledge that comes into play in other cognitive situations. For an inference along the lines of "Newton (or Euclid, etc.) was wrong; *ergo*, no one can be fully right" is valid only if we assume that Newton or Euclid are the only possessors of genuine knowledge.

Popper, as we saw, declares upfront his belief that the growth of knowledge *per se* is best understood by studying the growth of *scientific* knowledge. In his view, this is a bold conjecture, and there is nothing inherently wrong in the fact that a philosopher might want to adopt this methodological viewpoint without much fanfare, insofar as he thinks the real test of that assumption's merit comes from whether or not it survives the test of criticism. Now as was made explicit, scientific knowledge can tell us about other sorts of knowledge only if all knowledge if of a kind. This strikes us as a very just premise (especially when motivated by a concern for the nature of knowledge and not wholism). However, untold bodies of representations have remained largely unchanged throughout human history—and

this in spite of whatever "paradigm shifts" have taken place in the natural sciences in the last few hundred years or so. Are we to dismiss these everyday representations (say, that onions cook better when a saucepan is uncovered)?

For our part, we do not feel the least hint of intellectual shame in recognizing that such items have been singularly unaffected by the rise of Einsteinian physics or non-Euclidean geometries. If one is truly committed to the view that natural science does not exhaust the real and that wholism is untenable, then these disciplinary traumas should not propel one into doubting one's most readily-accessible representational certainties. Why should one feel the need to regard the recipe which orients one's cooking as a "conjecture" on account of the physicist's travails? Sadly, when philosophers make pronouncements that weaken the latter sort of knowledge, it is all representations which are made more distant from their objects.

Does this mean that in tossing incredulity by the wayside we should consider our undoubted representations *infallible*? For example, despite placing the completion of inquiry in a distant future, Peirce sometimes enjoined his reader to accept that « that which you do not at all doubt, you must and do regard as infallible » (1998, p. 336). The motive here is an almost cynical resignation before the fact that « we think each one of our beliefs to be true, and, indeed, it is mere tautology to say so » (Peirce, 1992, p. 115). However, just as the assertoric present is not problematic, neither is it apodeictic—at least, not in the sense in which it would rob the future of contingency. In our opinion, the entire line of reasoning is thoroughly misguided: it is not a matter of our representations being fallible or infallible, but of their being objectively based in reality or not. As such, the solution is to drop the idea that « the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion » (*Ibid.*, p. 114-115) altogether and redirect our theoretical gaze back at the world (*cf.* Champagne, 2006, p. 24-26).

Peirce and Popper's shared construal of inquiry as a matter of opinions explains why they dropped scepticism of beginnings, only to embrace the scepticism of ends. It is normal that one should begin with some opinions which one considers, indeed

quite tautologically, to be true. Yet it is also normal that a construal based on the notion of opinion should come to visualize inquiry as a process forever incomplete. If objectivity is seen as a matter of assent, then the question of the mind's bearing upon the world will forever remain a mysterious chimera so long as dissent is possible—that is, so long as humans have spontaneity (*cf.* sect, 2.5.1). But if we are to take the idea of epistemic normativity seriously and not trivialize it, then we must recognize that, properly construed, assent should not be the cause but *the effect* of objectivity. This is no return to any kind of "naive" view, as assent is still required to complete the relation. Robert Brandom describes McDowell's work as addressing what he calls "the rational constraint constraint", that is, « to make intelligible how perceptual experience embodies the way the world imposes not merely *causal*, but *rational* constraints on thinking » (Brandom, 1998, p. 369). The influence of Sellars here is unmistakable. The whole question, of course, turns on what is to be counted as rational. As we understand it, the aforementioned constraint can read in both directions, that is, to make intelligible how rationality embodies not merely *discursive*, but *perceptual-cum-causal* constraints on thinking. In so doing, we not only rescue the much-abused idea of rationality from the clutches of rationalism, we also unpack the ramifications of the notion of "imposition" (or "constraint", for that matter).

The Galilean plea that "Regardless of accepted opinion, the layout of the world is what it is" is not the sole privilege of those who seek to understand that worldly domain through the lens of a telescope, and can be invoked by the simple individual to rebuke the most abstruse of misguided opinions. The reason why inquiry begins with an immanent social-historical context is because that's the only context there is. That does not, however, pose a problem, as success *here and now* routinely provides us with an incontrovertible demonstration that objective knowledge is possible. The philosopher can thus urge with great expository skill that one's representations can

never successfully bear upon their worldly object(s), but to the extent that one enjoys a roasted drumstick of gavagai by the fire, we think one is justified in not taking scepticism of ends seriously.

There is a tendency to scoff at such an argument and to stipulate that it is somehow inadmissible (philosophy tends to nurse a rationalist prejudice to the effect that the only knockout arguments must be a priori). But doing philosophy the "naturalist" or aetiologic way means that it is sometimes the colloquium which has to learn from the campfire—especially when the former becomes so perplexed by its various theoretic entanglements that it loses all perspective and starts discarding ladders. If a certain string of discourse enables one to successfully better one's lot, then all the better; if not, then revisions are in order. But since the anatomic strings in either case are *not* related to the whole, failures of some discourses to seize upon their worldly object(s) does not prove fatal for all others. There is thus no basis for holding a scepticism of ends—for thinking that a lasso would have to constrict forever.

4.3.3 Respecting content-respect

Let us review what we have set down thus far. We have proposed a new *root metaphor*: representations combine into anatomic strings which enable agents to apprehend worldly objects. Justification is largely a discursive activity, and it is through the combined use of discourse and the world itself that agents make the case for the objectivity of their representations (sections 4.4 and 4.5 will be devoted to elaborating how this collaboration plays out). Discursive deliberations, however, cannot go on without end, nor can they stop to ponder all the possible variables and retorts which can be dreamed up by speculative objectors (tangible or schizophrenically imagined). This constrictive picture was therefore augmented with a *norm*: whatever loosens the lasso is "bad", and whatever tightens it around an object is "good". As such, the dialogue of inquiry begins when we loose hold of a

portion of the world, and ends when we recover it. This norm in turn provides us with a *scale*: the lasso's string is only as long as what is needed to succeed in the apprehension of a worldly object, which means it must perforce be greater than an atom yet smaller than the whole (following a quintessentially Aristotelian insight, any size in between these extremes was held susceptible of intelligible discourse). Having presented these key features of our third way, what we want to do now is take a closer look at the discursive string itself.

According to the standard atomist account, since a chemist's theoretical representations arise from glimpses into a microscope under such and such conditions, whatever claims she makes can be defended by instructing other agents on how to indexically return to the microscope under the same conditions (in the heyday of the Vienna Circle, these were called "protocol sentences"). Once such an observational recipe is made public in the symbolic space of reasons, it is held, the chemist can wash her hands of the affair. As we see it, there is much to recommend such an account. It is absolutely correct, for instance, to construe normativity in such a way that an agent is *not* responsible for another's acquiescence. As we have just seen, it is one of the cardinal points of our third way that hermeneutic credulity in the face of possible alternatives cannot go on without end. It is thus correct to require that others muster their own energy in order to grasp for themselves the truth of epistemic matters.

But what is deeply wrong with this atomist picture is that it purports to separate the contribution of experience from the discursive context that allows the chemist to imbue what she sees with some epistemic value (as a verdict upon a claim). The reductionist assigns the latter a considerable epistemic load *de facto* but grants it no substantial contribution *de jure*. Of course, this criticism has been reiterated time and time again, and rehearsing it once more would border on the platitudinous. However, what *is* worth describing is how the positive wholistic alternatives typically implicit in such critiques of receptivity have dramatically overdone the idea

that the mind's representations are anatomically bound. Realizing full well that the laser view is hopeless to vindicate normative claims to knowledge, they take *that* insight and turn it into an all-encompassing interpretative key. In so doing, the wholists end up creating their own hardships, the most obvious being relativism. As McDowell writes, « Davidson recoils from the Myth of the Given all the way to denying experience any justificatory role, and the coherentist upshot is a version of the conception of spontaneity as frictionless, the very thing that makes the idea of the Given attractive » ([1994] 2002, p. 14).

But the dangers posed by the flight from receptivity run much deeper than relativism. Indeed, we have argued at the close of the previous chapter that if one rejects the idea of empirical knowledge on account of its indexical symmetry, then one *eo ipso* rejects inferential knowledge along with it. Theories wishing to stay away from indexical appeals should thus be careful not to fall into hasty generalizations that assign undue scope to the (otherwise sober) recognition of anatomism. If we want to keep content-respect (and we do), our creative mulling for a third way must therefore allow *some* kind of direct referential beam into its overall picture. The laser picture appears in our earlier figures as an arrow going from the symbolic space to the launch pad (figs. 2 and 4). Whilst we may want to abolish this view in such mind-to-world contexts, it is clear that whatever picture of representation we supplant it with must find a way to leave figure 5 be.

Although content-respect is pivotal to the successful working of (monotonic) logical reasoning, it is crucial to the unfolding of thought processes generally. Evans, recognizing « that there must be a sense in which thoughts are structured » (1982 [2002], p. 100), called the feature which « makes it possible for a subject to think of an object in a series of indefinitely many thoughts, in each of which he will be thinking of the object in the same way » (*Ibid.*, p. 104) 'The Generality Constraint'. Like Evans, we would not want recognition of such a feature to be taken as an endorsement of the kind of commitments usually associated with

"language of thought" theories (*cf.* Fodor, [1975] 2002). That being said, we have a hard time seeing how one could ever hope to do justice to the recognition that « [t]he though that John is happy has something in common with the thought that Harry is happy » (Evans, 1982 [2002], p. 100) without in some way acknowledging that the commonality at hand turns on something (i.e., being happy) being regarded in a same fashion across thoughts (that the commonality in this example rests with a predicate is unfortunate, as the constraint in question is, appropriately enough, more general still). One can object to the specific mode of being a given theory assigns to the self-standing items at play in content-respect; in Evans' case, he is bothered by their characterization as "symbols" (*Ibid.*, p. 101). But the situation seems to us no more burdened by ontological partisanships than is for example the call to recognize that there is some sense in which "a=b" both is and is not the same as "a=a" (*cf.* Frege, 1997, p. 151-152). Similarly—and far less demandingly—all we require for our third way is the recognition that the thought that "a=a" involves some common content "a" in both cases.

In sum, *we hold that apprehension of the mind by itself can be atomic, whereas apprehension of the world by the mind must be anatomic* (but not wholistic). The net value here is clear enough: this view avoids regress. Since we hold that ideational contents make themselves manifest in a noninferential manner, there is therefore no need to suppose that a string of discourse is itself held together by little lassos.

4.3.4 On the importance (or lack thereof) of letting the mind directly refer to its own contents

The sort of aetiological humility we embrace sometimes forces us to straddle facile partisanships. No doubt things would be much simpler if we opted to refuse the mind the ability to directly refer to its own contents. This move would be particularly easy to implement given our commitment to the view that thoughts which (collaboratively) purport to represent the world must in the end allow us to

fruitfully alter that world. But as we see it, there is no reason why we cannot both recognize that 1) thought is a thoroughly natural tool which we employ in order to guide agency *and* that 2) thought is patently different from anything else in the physical world. As Aquinas pointed out, although knowledge must in the end answer to the thing understood, « still it is not necessary that the mode of the knowledge and the mode of the thing should be the same » ([1259-64] 2006, 2.75).

It would seem, then, that we are making an exception for the mind. We are (the mind is *an exceptional thing*). Curiously, many philosophers today would label our position "anti-naturalist". For instance, Ruth Millikan has attracted a great deal of attention for attacking theories that assign the mind abilities which do not accord neatly with what we know of other human organs (e.g., kidneys). Millikan is similar to McDowell in many respects (although he would likely resent the rapprochement; *cf.* McDowell, 2004, p. 100-105). Both manifest a revulsion against the Given bordering on the compulsive—yet both fancy themselves as opponents of wholistic theories. Sadly, just as is the case with McDowell, Millikan overdoes an otherwise sober stance:

> [S]uppose we were *consistently* to deny that there are any epistemological "givens". We could admit that people are (sometimes) aware of the intentionality of their thoughts, just as they are sometimes aware of others looking at them or aware that it is raining. But we would maintain that this kind of *awareness of*, indeed every kind of *awareness of*, is in part an external relation, the inside of the awareness—that feeling part—giving no absolute guarantee that it *is* the inside of a genuine *awareness of* relation. Consciousness, that is, does not contain *within* it or directly before it any *objects* of consciousness. Even an awareness of an awareness does not have the object awareness as an *unmediated* object. There is nothing diaphanous about consciousness.
>
> An unsettling possibility! One implication would be that we are no more in a position to know *merely via Cartesian reflection* that we are truly *thinking*, i.e., that we or our thoughts intend anything, than that we are thinking truly. Absolutely *nothing* is guaranteed directly from within an act of consciousness. That is the most ultimate form that an attack upon "the given" or upon rationalism could possibly take.
>
> That is the position that I will adopt in this essay. (Millikan, 1984, p. 91-92)

Familiarity with the "art world" has taught us that as soon as a practitioner gets some attention by employing a novelty, flocks soon follow who implement it with tenfold fervour (the tacit expectation perhaps being that this will earn them ten times the originator's praise). In any event, Millikan ominously echoes the central claim of our third chapter, albeit approvingly: « Should we have expected to be able to give up all the other givens (including, in accordance with Sellarsian insight, the givenness of knowledge of sensations) while keeping the givenness of meanings? » (*Ibid.*, p. 11).

Insofar as Millikan seeks to question the laser metaphor and its occult posits, we consider her an ally. Indeed, thought does not by itself ensure its bearing on the world beyond mind. Moreover, everything from theoretical psychology to everyday life instructs us that the mind is deeper than conscious thought can fully comprehend. But to explode these truths and alienate the mind so fully from itself as to drive a wedge of suspicion through content-respect is a move we simply cannot endorse. In essence, Millikan's proposal takes the destruction of content-respect we held as a reproach against Sellars and construes it—not as an espousal of nihilism—but as a commitment to "naturalism" (obviously not the sort we are trying to emulate).

When we discussed the epistemic task which McDowell's unduly assigns to the notion of culture (sect. 2.5.2), we cited Millikan as a good example of a thinker who seeks to situate various logical devices within the natural realm. But Millikan seems to think that in order to construe logic in a radically non-Platonic way, the specific character of logic must be dramatically altered so as to mimic the relief of the biological world. Let us then ask: why can't something like the law of identity be totally un-mysterious and un-magical while remaining an unassailable *law* which is *necessary* and not just "reproductively established"?

As we see it, snobbery vis-à-vis the necessary because it is not contingent is no better than snobbery towards the contingent because it is not necessary. Why can't reality be big enough to accommodate both? More to the point, what's to be gained by taking a notion away from rationalism and "naturalizing" it if in so doing we rob the notion of the sort of monotonic truth-preservation that made it epistemologically attractive in the first place? In keeping with our aetiological posture (sect. 3.2.1), we believe it shows a lack of humility to assail thinking because it manifests features *different* from those found in the more straightforwardly natural world. We do not follow Millikan in lumping naturalism with the fanatic rejection of the Given. Those are distinct philosophic commitments, and there *is* a way to recognize that the Given, although not the panacea atomists make it to be, has *some* basis in fact.

Since we hold that one cannot draw any inference without engaging in some sort of indexically symmetrical appeal (sect. 3.4.2), we accept that the mind is capable of noninferentially accessing its own contents. To the extent that such an access can be labelled "privileged", we have argued that the privilege is a fairly banal one, amounting to no more than a respect of contents. We can be fully confident that, from one thought to another, the contents handled by our minds will not somehow shift. While an agent can be frustrated by the fact that an anatomic string does not succeed in actually allowing her to take hold of a worldly object, she can at least find peace in the fact that the discourse she essayed made sense. There is thus no need to raise the accusation of meaninglessness every time certain representations do not bear out. True, when such failures occur, the process of inquiry is set in motion and a host of representations are revised. However, this can never endanger the logical structure of inferential knowledge *per se*, which remains intact.

Millikan, however, would see in such a concession a pervasive "meaning rationalism", since we effectively hold that « there need be no such thing as being confused about *what* one is thinking of » (Millikan, 1984, p. 326)—all in all a rather modest claim, when one stops to think about it. While we accept the "meaning" half

of Millikan's derogatory label, we simply do not see how the "rationalism" portion could apply. The accusation of rationalism (in the very loose sense in which Millikan uses the term) would stick only if we were making the indexical appeal to contents the necessary *and sufficient* cause of inferential knowledge. In other words, the criticism that countenancing content-respect is somehow "rationalist" is well taken only if the "clarity and distinctiveness" at work is transformed into a perpetual inference machine, as if grasping the axiom of identity was all that was needed for the world's secrets to unravel effortlessly before one's mind. Now *that's* rationalism: the idea that the unaided light of reason is the sole source of knowledge. We propose no such thing.

Incidentally, we find it to be an odd quirk of history that—differences in scientistic jargon notwithstanding—Millikan's view that « Absolutely *nothing* is guaranteed directly from within an act of consciousness » (1984, p. 92) is deemed respectable (and even revolutionary) whereas a certain Korzybsky was generally considered the village idiot of philosophy for denying the law of identity on grounds that nothing ensures that A is in fact A (*cf.* Sebeok, 1994, p. 281). Both of these views are, of course, of a kind (let us flee from Descartes, if we must; but let us not flee from reason).

4.4 Receptivity, spontaneity, and their relation: proffering a new account

4.4.1 The benefits and hazards of engaging in reductions

Many (if not most) philosophers working within the "analytic" tradition believe that epistemological objectivity is best sought by undoing the harm already done by natural language. But when aided and abetted by the rationalist persuasion that monotonic entailments are divorced from worldly affairs (*cf.* Wittgenstein, [1921] 2002, § 5.43), speculation can take command of the logicisation of language in a way that makes even the most connotation-ridden dialect a preferable option; as

witnessed by the fact that atomism—spurred on by the speculative interlocutor—whets its referential laser so fervently that its tip ends up having literally no semantic extension (sect. 1.3.3).

It is understandable that an epistemological inquiry into causes should engage in reductions of some kind, as primitive situations allow the play of receptivity to be more readily ascertained. But the enthusiasm for reduction is overdone by the standard atomist account. Russell is led to conclude (with Leibniz) that « what is complex must be composed of simples, though the number of constituents may be infinite » (Russell, [1918, 1924] 1998, p. 173). In this sense, a purely logical tenet leads to *metaphysical* convictions. Whilst a convenient ontology of discrete atoms may seem to discharge a theory from having to account for more complex worldly objects (these would supposedly be re-constructed by means of formal devices), it does so at the price of making its basic constituents properly *ineffable*—which, to put it mildly, is not a very promising trait for a justificatory fulcrum. Indeed, once this framework is in place, it appears impossible to build our way back up to any sort of bona fide knowledge. The more logical and linguistic ingredients we add to the mix in order to make obtain something close to our common sense conception of knowledge, the more it seems unlikely that the atoms themselves are carrying any epistemic weight. Given the terms set down by the atomist, the conceptual component of thought (i.e., Kant's "understanding") basically does all the work, whereas the experiential component ("sensibility") seems a needless adjunct.

To be sure, the sworn atomist would insist that, though ineffable in comparison with ordinary language, punctate ostensions nevertheless connect us with an external worldly object—"*blankly* external", McDowell would say ([1982] 1998, p. 391; *cf.* [1986] 1998, p. 229-231). But insofar as one acknowledges that such a worldly atom would be too primitive to carry the sort of semantic content we typically expect from within language, claims about the theoretical availability of such discrete (pseudo?)quales simply cannot be called upon to rescue the disconcerting conclusion

that it is in fact the syntax which does all the semantic work. In this sense, Sellars' asymmetry thesis (sect. 1.5.4) represents an attempt to separate the atomists' *existential* claim (which it agnostically concedes *could* be true) from their *epistemological* one (which makes little sense). As an acute critic of empiricism, Sellars brought the inner contradiction of atomism to the full light of day. He is only being consistent when he states that « the metaphor of 'foundation' is misleading in that it keeps us from seeing that if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former » (Sellars, [1956] 1963, § 38). According to this view, we cannot work our way up, we can only work our way down—a contention which, all told, trades one implausibility for another.

One of our goals in this work is therefore to emphasize that the atomist *school* (e.g., Russell, Carnap, etc.) is not the sole spokesperson of receptivity. Strictly speaking, receptivity is the idea the world makes itself known forcefully to us and that we are equipped with a faculty suitable to profit from this fact. In introducing the term, Kant described it as the mind's « power of receiving representations in so far as it is in any wise affected » ([1787] 1965, B75). Now it may be that the indexical force at play entails a Given which is also atomic and noninferential. But we believe there is a way to recognize atomicity in its technical sense (i.e., not involving another content) without falling into any sort of speculative myopia.

As we have made clear (sect. 4.3.3), we are prepared to accept that the representation by a mind of its own ideational contents can be atomic (i.e., like the "laser beam" metaphor). In fact, it is pivotal to the success of our proposal that references to one's own thoughts need not follow the constrictive view we advocate for the apprehension of worldly objects. We have tendered two important reasons for this. For one thing, strong-arming the mind into anatomism where a simple atomic appeal suffices involves a breach of aetiological sobriety. Refusing the mind such a privileged access would basically mean that an agent would have to *inquire*

whether she is in fact thinking what she is thinking at a given time (*cf.* Millikan's boastful adoption of this "unsettling" stance, sect. 4.3.4). But we fail to see how such an "inquiry" could do otherwise than cripple the mind into a state of schizoid paralysis. Thus, although we object to the laser view on account of mystic forces like passing through walls and such, it seems reasonable to recognize that thoughts can appertain to their brethren through a diaphanous medium which in principle can offer neither resistance nor noise. Making allowances for this is not only the sensible thing to do from a methodological standpoint, it is also consequential on a theoretical front. Indeed, it is our belief that noninferential representation is the only way an epistemology can support content-respect. Although content-respect is at the heart of inference and computation (sect. 3.4.1 to 3.4.3), it is in fact present in *any* relation holding between common ideas, including psychological associations which fail to demonstrate any logical validity; otherwise the very fibres which hold representations together into discursive strings would unravel.

However, since we recognize that justification (and the normative defence of knowledge in general) is a discursive activity involving not only observations but also arguments, framing conditions, and so forth, we do not think the structural feature of Givenness can be applicable to the case of mind-to-world representation, which we construe as irreducibly *anatomic* (but *not* wholistic). As we look about, we simply cannot put aside the overwhelming evidence that the objects which people the world are far more coarse than is expected by empiricist reductions, and that whatever normative claims one can make about these objects perforce involve more than one representation.

As such, we think it is of prime importance that one not loose sight of which certainties about the world and the mind are truly self-evident and which are arrived at through the prism of abstract thought-experiments. Our animal life provides us with a baseline of experiential input. While philosophers may want to go beyond this and work their way down to an (unique and ineffable) atom or up to an (equally

unique and ineffable) Hegelian "Absolute" in order to gain a better aetiological understanding, such ventures should never be allowed to discard the mundane ladder which gets them there (ironically, Russell viewed his original philosophy of logical atomism as a revolt against the doctrines of his one-time master, noted neo-Hegelian Francis H. Bradley; *cf.* Russell, [1918, 1924] 1998, p. 158).

Now in staking out our differences with Millikan's approach to philosophical inquiry, we have made it clear that logic occupies an undisputed place in our third way. Our anatomist construal of representation has no desire to rob logical entailments of their monotonic character. As such, we are committed to concurring with the aforementioned dictum that what is complex is *eo ipso* comprised of simpler constituents. But while this logical truth is binding in virtue of its ironclad rationality, that remarkable potency does not by itself provide the theorist *of representation* with a sufficient basis whence to (re)build an entire epistemological apparatus (*cf.* for example the ambitious but ill-fated attempt by Carnap, [1928] 2003). The reason for this insufficiency, we argue, is that the results yielded by a totally consistent reductionism differ greatly depending on whether the cry to "Reduce the complex" is recursively employed in the metaphysical or the epistemological sphere. To understand why, let us look at the difference between these two philosophic projects.

Although every critically-minded philosopher who has ever put pen to paper has likely entertained her own take on the distinction, it seems untendentious to affirm that metaphysics pertains to existence or being "as such"; whereas epistemology studies in an abstract manner the means by which that existence or being is "grasped" or "apprehended" (the quotation marks here are not intended to convey any incredulity towards the projects in question, but to keep the focus generalized). We can therefore encapsulate the difference at hand by saying that the former sort of inquiry deals with the object while omitting to consider the presence of any apprehending subject, whereas the latter studies mainly the subject (but is *a fortiori*

bound to countenancing the object of its apprehension, be it deemed real or unreal). This work has not thus far proposed any sort of metaphysical doctrine in the sense just outlined, insofar as we have not sought to understand being *in abstracto* of a thinking subject. Our concern has instead been *epistemological*, our aetiologic exploration focusing on the representational relation which can hold between mind *and* world.

Given these distinctions, what becomes of the reduction of the complex to the simple? In metaphysics, the answer is straightforward enough: one is logically driven to reach a point which can be divided no more, thereby attaining an object which fully deserves the appellation *a*-tom. Theorists usually assume that the end-product of such a reduction would be the same in the epistemological realm. To go back to an example that was used when illustrating the Given's main characteristics (sect. 1.5.2), if the concept 'Male' is regarded as an atomic rock-bottom which can be reduced no further, then its bearing upon worldly males should be singularly unchanged by whatever developments might perchance take place in an agent's collateral store of concepts. This sort of sovereignty of content is what makes atomism such an interesting structural (or rather, *non*-structural) feature in the eyes of epistemologists. For whatever changes perchance occur in a scientific theory or any other outlook, atomicity ensures that certain elementary representations remain neutral points of reference throughout (*cf.* Fodor, [1990] 2002). There is, of course, a great deal of debate among atomist theorists over what constitutes such a bedrock, that is, over what can in point of fact be counted as completely devoid of any internal complexity. But regardless of these contingent matters, there is a robust understanding of what can and cannot count as atomic in principle: in all cases, the ostension must "go without saying".

Let us now ask: is the epistemologist warranted in thinking that her atomic contents can be likened to the sort of atomic monads arrived at in metaphysical investigations? *Prima facie*, there would seem to be grounds for an affirmative

answer. After all, both were arrived at by means of a logical inference which guarantees that if there are complex things, then there are simples. But while this much is true, we argue that *the terminating simplicity one arrives at in epistemology—although it can be used to safeguard or at least confirm objectivity—is different from that encountered in a metaphysical inquiry.* For the kind of monad or atom countenanced by Leibniz or Democritus in the realm of being *qua* being requires that one abstract out the subject from the object, which is a move epistemology cannot follow (on pain of no longer being the philosophic project it purports to be). What we want to do in the next section is expand on this argument, and then spend the remainder of chapter delving into its far-reaching ramifications.

4.4.2 Countenancing receptivity from the start

The sorts of minds and worlds philosophers ponder will always be scale-models of the real things. That is as it should be, since the price to pay for generalized understanding is a coarse pixelation of one's picture. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the most important errors are made at the stage where one decides what is and what is not to be counted as relevant to one's theorizing. What if, for instance, a certain theoretical conception avails itself severely deficient or faulty? In such a case, revising the parameters already in place becomes a much simpler and attractive task compared to adding a neglected element (which one, anyway?).

Consider the case of receptivity. There is no need, we have argued, why one should have to wait until the end of time to find out whether one's representations have an objective basis (sect. 1.4.3 and 4.3.2). Not only does such a misguided view reflect an overreaction vis-à-vis the internal travails of scientists, it completely overlooks the fact that our *de facto* success in life equips us with an unassailable proof that human knowledge can indeed bear on the world. Consequently, we have placed the end of inquiry in the here and now. Moreover, we have insisted that whatever revisions agents engage in as part of a process of inquiry leave the logical

structure of inference totally unaffected, insofar as basic principles like the law of identity remain Given (it is a considerable cognitive and/or theoretical accomplishment, however, to explicitly grasp and/or state this fact). This, we claimed, is not a concession to rationalism but to reasonableness. In sum, our third way countenances two areas where our faculty of spontaneity appears to be impotent. First, the mind cannot remake the world as it wishes. Second, although it can refashion representations liberally in its effort to conform to the world, the mind is unable to escape the most fundamental laws of logic. All this seems to point to one conclusion: spontaneity has limits, and there is indeed receptivity in representation.

Admittedly, it can be hard to fit this feature into a more reflective theoretical account, as witnessed by the fact that philosophy is drawn time and time again into relativism and idealism. Why is this so? We believe the main reason for this difficulty is that through a laudable attentiveness to the necessary requirements of normativity, *the accepted construal of knowledge in its most generic form has unfortunately begged the question in favour of spontaneity.* To echo a quintessentially Wittgensteinian way of speaking (minus anti-programmatic aspirations), we could say that philosophers are "held captive" by a conception which forecloses a harmonious incorporation of the Given. *Contra* McDowell however, the solution we propose does not require that one seek to conjoin antonyms, nor does it require that we give up constructive philosophizing.

As a means of bringing to the fore the issue at stake, consider the following situation. A person is standing on a railroad track. There are large brick walls behind and to one side of her (thus forming an L-shaped barrier). As a train comes rushing towards her, she can stay put and die; or she can move over to the side unobstructed by a wall and live. Now the philosophical question here is this: supposing she moves out of the way, does she subsequently have a reason to support what she has done? In other words, does the situation provide her with a full-

fledged *justification*—or does it at best supply her with an *exculpation*? Would removing the side wall and giving the person two sides to choose from modify the situation in any way? In other words, do situations which admit no alternative possibilities (other than the absence of the living agent) provide material that is properly *epistemic*, or are such cases too structurally primitive to partake in the deliberations of the space of reasons?

It could be argued that the scenario we are invoking egregiously betokens the sort of unwarranted excogitations we rejected in the first chapter. However, a cursory review of one's daily life will reveal the remarkable extent to which our thinking is indeed shepherded to such and such contents with or without our explicit consent—every time a phone rings, for example. Moreover, not only does our scenario exhibit greater naturalistic ubiquity, it is not guilty of any self-contradiction. Whereas a narrative like radical translation concludes its extravagant strictures with the claim that there can in fact be no such thing as an authoritative translation (i.e., it engages in ladder-discarding), our setting is not only mundane in impetus, it reflexively seeks to aetiologically comprehend the very idea of a mundane impetus. Thus, in the final analysis, what truly differentiates our incoming-train scenario from speculative fictions is the fact that we do no add anything more to the mix. One is free to roam the evocative setting we have proposed, without any fear that her philosophic reflections will meet with erotetic wangles at every step (all we ask are two walls and a train, no more).

So the person on the tracks is, quite literally, cornered. Her train of thought (no pun intended) is suddenly coerced into taking a certain direction. What we have here then is a patent case of "an offer one can't refuse". That we experience such events is beyond question. The epistemological bone of contention, though, is whether such happenings supply us with knowledge in the demanding sense of the term. As Peirce aptly put it: « A man cannot startle himself by jumping up with an exclamation of *Boo!* » (1998, p. 195). There is just no way one can entertain a

thought along the lines of "I am startled", insofar as the reflexive grasp that one is indeed in such state effectively dissipates the shock. One could thus claim that the event of surprise is so thinly immanent that all experiences of it are perforce memories, and as such belong to the order of *in absentia* representations, not indices. If this is correct, then it seems fair to recognize that the predicament has distinctly *transcendental* trappings. For if surprises are unavoidably cognized as recollections *ex post facto*, then talk of brute indexicality would seem to be deduced through a veil of symbolic thought, as it were. This view would be fully consonant with the one-way door conception of the mind (sect. 1.5.3). There is indeed a sense in which we necessarily clothe all indexical experiences with symbolic meaning; in that regard, the transcendental critique is well taken. For his part, McDowell argues that « [t]he idea of a transcendental passivity is at best problematic anyway » and that « [a]dding this problematic idea only undermines the reassurance that empirical passivity could afford » ([1994] 2002, p. 42).

But the issue goes well beyond that of surprise. Suppose that the person in our example opts to dodge the incoming train by stepping over to the side available to her. Let us grant that, as she stands safely removed from the ensuing wreck, the entire event (including what might have taken place as part of her ongoing mental life) is fully draped in symbolic garb. Her heart may be pounding still, but the surprise itself has been thoroughly domesticated. What is to be the *normative* status of the *in absentia* representations she now entertains? Specifically, is she warranted in thinking "I had a *reason* to move out of the way"—or should she be limited to thinking "I had *no choice* but to move out of the way"? Although there is no sharp boundary delineating the domain of the ethical within the more broadly normative, the dilemma should be read in an *epistemological* key. In short, the question is whether Samuel Butler was correct when he wrote that « He who complies against his will, Is of his own opinion still » (*Hudibras,* 1663-78).

McDowell's own answer to this question would be that such an event provides one with exculpation only. He writes: « According to the Myth of the Given, the obligation to be responsibly alive to the dictates of reason lapses when we come to the ultimate points of contact between thinking and reality; the Given is a brute effect of the world, not something justified by it » (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 42). McDowell therefore maintains that the Given's very "brutality" prevents it from contributing to any normative appraisal. We can better compass this contention by examining the very notion of the normative. Normativity in its most basic sense, we could say, involves a selection among alternatives, bestowing a certain weight upon some things and not others. In the ethical sphere, the normative triage pertains to actions "good" or "bad". *Epistemological* normativity manifests itself in the aspiration to find reliable means of sorting out the "true" from the "false" (similarly, "marked" and "unmarked" terms involve a normative arrangement, albeit one which surreptitiously presents itself as a *descriptive* distinction). In all these cases, normativity requires a minimum of *two* alternative classes in which to put the things appraised. The possible outlets one is presented with can be very high in number, but for there to be a *choice*, at least two must be present. In sum, normativity requires that an agent select which among two or more disjuncts are to be deemed superior to the other (and/or arrange these in an ordered set). Figure 10, we could then say, is the most primitive state in which normativity can unfold.

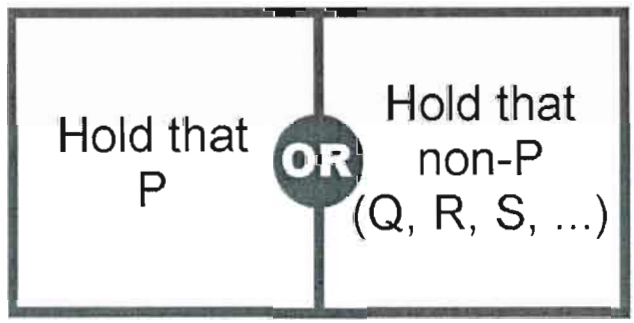

Figure 10 Binary alternatives as the most primitive prerequisite of normativity.

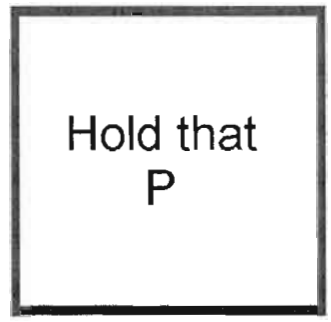

Figure 11 Non-epistemic unary situation.

Now consider the peculiar case of the Given. By definition, the Given makes the mind an offer it can't refuse. In this case, something is, and could not be otherwise: there is no room for negotiation. The world is simply letting us know that P, whether we like it or not (we can render this predicament in figure 11). According to the atomist, the mind can and should be connected to the world in this way. Of course, such a state would effectively foreclose the possibility of any misalignment between mind and world (hence its attractiveness to the epistemologist). But if we try to intelligibly express what it is that is being forcefully delivered, the best we can do is fall back to William James' memorable description of the unary state as a "bloomin' buzzin' confusion" (note that this peculiarity does not in itself provide grounds for dismissing the ontological possibility of this sort of situation).

Although advocates of this view recognize this situation to be the baseline of thought *in theory*, they maintain that humans are so constituted that a corrupting influence intervenes *in practice*. One of the more popular culprits adduced in this regard is the idea that the human mind is cluttered by all sorts of superfluous psychological noise and inferential imperfections, a huge portion of which comes pre-packaged in natural languages. What is needed, according to this gloss, is a system of symbols which « will be completely analytic, and will show at a glance the logical structure of the facts asserted or denied. [...] It is a language which has only

syntax and no vocabulary whatsoever » (Russell, [1918, 1924] 1998, p. 58). Russell, of course, believed such a language would ultimately link up with its referential domain via punctate ostensions, and that « [i]n a logically perfect language the words in a proposition would correspond one by one with the components of the corresponding fact, with the exception of such words as 'or', 'not', 'if', 'then', which have a different function » (*Ibid.*). All that is needed for objective knowledge, according to this view, is to travel the open book of nature with a sensory apparatus and a well-chosen posse of syntaxic connectives. In keeping with the prototypically *empiricist* insight, epistemology thus becomes a subtractive endeavour, a question of trimming representations until a point of direct contact with the world is reached. In essence, the hope is one of recovering a lost alignment between representation and represented, the world effectively furnishing an Adamic lexicon (the idea of a formal apparatus sifting through the contingent disorderliness of common language is of course not limited to atomism; *cf.* for example the "regimentation" proposed by Quine, [1960] 1999, p. 157-190).

There would seem to be good grounds for discounting an "ultra-atomised" content as a possible recipient of normativity. For if an agent were to give her assent to the P of figure 11, the ensuing judgement would be indiscernible from that of her dissent, which would also register as P. Since in either case one is cornered into thinking that P, any exercise of agency would for all intents and purposes be nullified. In fact, it could be maintained (against Samuel Butler) that the very notions of assent and dissent loose their meaning in such cases. Obviously, commitment to the view that « it is only because experience involves capacities belonging to spontaneity that we can understand experience as awareness [...] of the world » makes the predicament all the more worse (McDowell, [1994] 2002, p. 47). If one holds that freedom permeates rational thought, then it is only normal that one should come to view "offers one can't refuse" as outside the purview of

rationality—with the consequence that Givenness becomes either an ineffable margin or is dispelled altogether (compare Sellars' transsemiotic agnosticism, sect. 1.5.4; with McDowell's pansemiotism, sect. 2.2 and 2.4.1).

But one need not follow McDowell's fusion in order to recognize that the "mono-thematic" character of the content Given in figure 11 would place it squarely outside the purview of epistemology. As McDowell writes: « If we suppose that rational answerability lapses at some outermost point of the space of reasons, short of the world itself, our picture ceases to depict anything recognizable as empirical judgement; *we have obliterated empirical content altogether* » (*Ibid.*, p. 42-43; italics ours). Thus, McDowell contends, it is not only the application of normative assessment that is made impossible by Givenness, but the very possibility of meaningful content as well. To understand why that is, one need only recall that the smallest unit of information is the *binary* digit or "bit". Since "offers one can't refuse" appear to be *unary*, their very structure would seem to make them incapable of acting as transmitters of information. A submariner cannot emit (or receive) Morse code information when the light of a periscope is left perpetually "on" (or perpetually "off").

Since we have severely criticized the rejection of Givenness throughout this work, it could appear that we are playing devil's advocate by raising these problems. Not quite. What we want to emphasize is this: we fully agree that the consequences just outlined follow from the conception of the Given as depicted in figure 11, that is, from a construal of receptivity as *unary*. Acquiescence in this case is a simple matter of logic; we would never dare pretend that something unary could be a vehicle of information—much less an object of normative appraisal. What we do want to argue, however, is that *receptivity is* not *unary in the sense expected by the standard atomist account, but rather presents itself to a living agency as a* binary *alternative.*

To see how this is the case, let us return to the idea of an offer one can't refuse which is at the heart of the notion of receptivity. Take the case of the person cornered into dodging the train. It seems fair to say that she was coerced by her environment into taking that direction, and that since spontaneity and understanding in general require the presence of at least two possible alternatives, the situation generated an outcome devoid of epistemic value. But is it really correct to say that there was but a single alternative, such that 'Moving to the side' becomes an unintelligible singleton? It is understandable that we should come to view the situation in this way, as remaining put would have resulted in her certain death. Yet is not this gruesome fate also a possible alternative, one which—despite its unattractiveness—is on par with that of the dodge? Granted, the normative charges attached to these respective options exhibit a salient inequality, one so pronounced that the negative party propels agency almost necessarily to the positive side. However, one must be on guard not to let such polarized normativity rewrite the logically-prior descriptive state whence the sharp contrast arises. In other words, one must not let the repellent option of death recede into an untold obscurity. For the person's demise remains as legitimate a possible outcome as that person's side-stepping the incoming train (in fact, it is only because that possibly exists that the positive alternative is compelling).

Here then is our main thesis regarding the faculty of receptivity: *in every instance where the world makes itself known to the mind, there are only two alternatives; namely, acquiescence or death.* We hold that a thinking agent declines to Accept "offers she can't refuse" only at her own peril *qua* living animal. As we see it, if the objective representation of the world by the mind is to be our theoretical concern, then there is no way to circumvent the fact that a) the situation of figure 11 is ineffable and that b) figure 10 plainly involves the faculty of spontaneity, not that

of receptivity. In other words, *the unary monad begins to low, and the binary choice between P and other contents begins too high.* By our lights, only figure 12 can do justice to the notion of receptivity without destroying it.

In short, our intent is to incorporate worldly friction at the most elementary level—instead of having to append it further downstream by artificial means (*pace* McDowell). As we saw when discussing philosophy and science's divergent propensities, if one constructs an account of mind solely on the terms laid down by the natural sciences, then it becomes difficult if not impossible to reconstruct spontaneity with lawful materials only (sect. 1.3.3). *Mutatis mutandis*, if one focuses primarily on spontaneity in developing one's theoretical understanding of representation, receptivity will later haunt one's theory as a bothersome square peg where only round holes are available. Since a philosophic conception stands or falls on the variables it chooses to countenance, we have made allowances for friction from the very start. There is thus no need to fear that relativism might creep up at some point and leave the mind disconnected from the world. In this sense, our proposal is diametrically opposed to McDowell's. For it is not a refined "second nature" which provides socialized humans with friction from the top-down in our philosophy. Rather, we hold that *normativity arises bottom-up from the finite character of life as such* (human or otherwise).

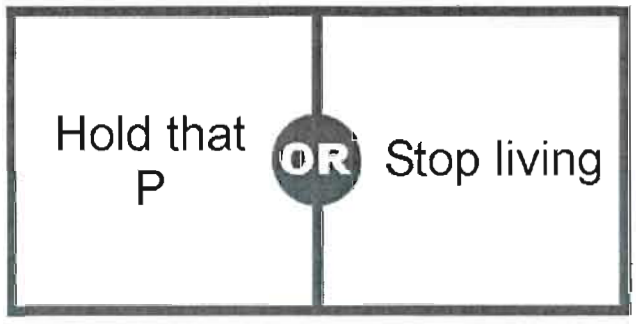

Figure 12 Receptivity as a binary choice between a content and the absence of life.

To be sure, an animal may wish to Refuse what it is Given. In that sense, although the *subject* of indexical forces is incapable of spontaneity, it remains capable of a minimal agency. When a content tries to be driven into the mind, a veto of last resort remains at one's disposal. But what could such a rejection possibly look like? How can one both stand before the approaching train and obstinately spurn its incontrovertible command to move aside, or have a spoonful of relish in one's mouth and Refuse to taste its sweetness? There is, we argue, only one way to accomplish this, namely by the cessation of life. We the living may not be able to deny experiential impingements, but a corpse can pull the remarkable feat of both having relish in its mouth and not tasting it. Likewise, the person with a death wish is a rare and tragic guinea pig who teaches the rest of us that the dictates of an incoming train can indeed be Refused. However, until and unless an agent is willing to surrender that privilege which is her life, the Given must be Accepted.

So why should an agent want to live, to choose the left-hand side of the above disjunction? We are not quite sure (self-love, perhaps?). By its very nature, the conative contribution to thought is a fairly slippery topic of discourse. No doubt the distinctiveness of the power itself goes a long way towards explaining why conation remains a vastly under-explored area of philosophic inquiry. Humbly bowing before these (no doubt unavoidable) difficulties, we will not attempt to describe the notion in detail (let us only gesture that conation seem to us most manifest in extreme bodily exertion, as a trained powerlifter leaves his technical execution in the hands of his conditioning come competition day and directs his efforts solely on the task at hand, with the raw desire "UP!" filling his being, as it were).

To summarize, we maintain that if we do not let loose the stubborn interlocutor, the furthest we can take *epistemological* (not metaphysical) simplicity is the elementary situation illustrated in figure 12. Let us then ask: how many concepts are involved in this construal of receptivity? Strictly speaking, since there is but a single representational content in figure 12, the situation fully satisfies the requirements of

an atomic theory (sect. 1.5.2). Now it could be replied that the play of agency contaminates this atomicity. As we see it, such a criticism would be gravely mistaken. We could cite for instance Sartre's thesis that « All consciousness is positional in that it transcends itself in order to reach an object, and it exhausts itself in this same positing » ([1943] 1958, p. xxvii). But this strategy, though respectable in its own right, appears to us rather overdone for the purpose at hand, as *there is simply no supplementary consciousness there to be exhausted.* Rather, the situation schematized in figure 12 seeks to identify a *conative* contribution which, and as far as we can see, has not the faintest relation to conceptual content, however loosely construed. The right-hand side of figure 12 is, in fact, a void. It is intended to underscore the fact that "offers one can't refuse" present the mind with an (albeit unpalatable) alternative. An agent may embrace the option of life in all instances, but the ubiquity of this decision should not obscure the fact that genuine alternatives were available throughout; thereby imbuing the lone content of the left-hand side with normative value. But to transmogrify the raw drive which seeks to avoid the right-hand side it into an additional conceptual content (or into a cogitating homonculus) would not only be to engage in an unwarranted hypostatisation, it would bespeak a general poverty of insight into those aspects of human life which cannot be captured by the sole exercise of intellectual deliberation.

4.4.3 Worldly objects as complex

If all there was to epistemology was the choice to Accept the deliverances of experiential impingements, there would be no need for a normative theory of knowledge partitioning the true from the false. Supposing the presence of a non-vanishing and univocal source of proximal stimuli, the distal configuration of the world would be untendentious. Error and subjectivity would be the problem of the dead and could not, by definition, affect those living. For the very fact that one would be alive would entail that one Accepted all the contents forcefully put before one's mind up to that point. It would be an empiricist Garden of Eden, as there

would be no possible misalignment between one's representations and the layout of the world. Certainly, the lottery of experiential exposure would vary from one agent to another, the result being that individual stores of representations would differ. There would thus be a need for schools and language to help agents profit from others' experience and fill in the gaps. But all in all, humanity would be running around in an epistemological "shopping spree" without end. The book of nature would be open for all to read, all would be born literate, and (presuming commitment to a continued life) the only remaining issue would be how to take in as much of the landscape of the world as possible in one lifetime.

This, of course, is pure fantasy. However, as recently as the positivists' Unified Science Movement, the picture has been sufficiently motivated to captivate the programmatic aspirations of very able thinkers (the Utopian ideal itself can be traced as far back as Pythagoras and Plato, but obviously the rationalist view of the senses as an impediment to truth spoils the inclusion). So what's wrong with the picture? If it is indeed motivated to a certain degree, why does it not bear out in point of fact? The reason is that *the choice to Accept the Given and live is a necessary but not sufficient condition of knowledge and representation*. In other words, the normative choice of alternatives does not end the moment one has chosen to live. Such a conative Acceptance of receptivity's input marks the *beginning* of objectivity, not its end. If we are to understand why that is, we must not look to any inherent flaw in the "crooked timber" of humankind. Rather, we must look to the world's complexity.

According to atomism, normativity in epistemology is a question of trimming excess representations until a point of direct contact with the world is reached. However, the idea of logically pruning representation to its bare essentials rests on the supposition that a corresponding ontology of worldly kernels is in the offing. As Brand Blanshard writes in his classic polemic, *Reason and Analysis*:

> One of course does not prove that the world is made of atomic facts, related to each other only externally, by showing that a wonderfully convenient system of statements would be applicable to them if only there were such things. An ideal language is surely to be devised by first noting what things exist and then adjusting the language to their nature and relations.
>
> Now in the intercourse of mathematics with atomism the curious fact is that this process was reversed. The language was not accepted because the facts required it; the facts were construed to be thus rather than so because the conditions of what was conceived as an ideal language required it. ([1962] 1991, p. 140)

But what if the world comprises certain objects the representation of which, for one reason or another, simply does not admit of any kind of atomic reduction?

Certainly the choice presented in figure 12 is more plausible when we are dealing with a bulgy red tomato (sect. 1.5.3). But consider an object like that presented in figure 13. Even if we were to amend the idea of Givenness so that it became a disjunctive choice rooted in an agent's desire to live, it remains doubtful we could do justice to the worldly feature illustrated in the right-hand side of this schema by confining it to a one-place mould "P". Since atomism is by definition committed to the view that receptivity involves a direct contact which cannot be "cut" ("*tomos*") further, it would reject a priori the complex configuration of figure 13 as an inadmissible candidate for representation.

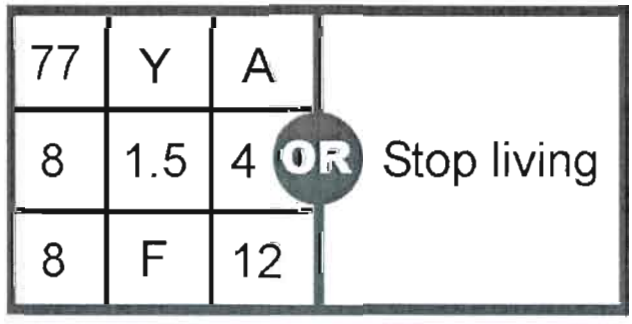

Figure 13 Complexity of content and the play of spontaneity.

Should a claim pertaining to the object of figure 13 be put the test, atomist normativity would instead instruct us to "analyse" or break it down in such a way that we could experience it one atomic bite at a time. However, the discursive instructions brokering such contacts would no more count as part of the epistemic justification than the connectives binding the various qualities were considered as belonging to the complex object.

But the mind's contribution in atomism can go beyond supplying logical syntax and framing conditions for punctate encounters. According to a familiar framework, we should countenance two broad ontological categories. On one hand, we should recognize that there are immanent worldly particulars. On the other hand, this view posits the (far more controversial) existence of transcendent generals or "universals". In this deeply-ingrained schema, particulars are represented in language by grammatical subjects, whereas generals are represented by predicates. Oddly enough, despite having accrued their authority through the scholastic tradition, these distinctions were not cast aside by early twentieth century logicism. Much the contrary, Frege breathed new life into the overlapping subject / predicate and particular / general dichotomy by likening it to the mathematical function (sect. 2.3.1). Whatever its origins, this schema underwrites a very strange division of labour: the world furnishes only immanent subjects, and the mind supplies all the rest. As McDowell explains,

> There was a time when the standard view of reference was inspired by Russell's Theory of Descriptions. The idea was that whenever a thought is directed at a particular object, part of its content is given by a specification of the object in general terms: conceptual terms, the equation I am considering would lead us to say. [...] So the picture is that the conceptual realm does have an outside, which is populated by particular objects. ([1994] 2002, p. 105)
>
> .....
>
> This picture has predications in the conceptual realm, but thought supposedly has to break out of the conceptual to make contact with the objects of which predications are to be made. And that leaves no room for a coherent conception of how a predication, located within the circumscribed conceptual realm, could be brought into connection with an object. (*Ibid.*, p. 106)

As critics of this view were quick to point out, if the particulars we connect with in experience are so simple as to be in fact ineffable, the mind's contribution to intelligibility (i.e., predication) is no mere addendum. It as if a friend invites you over for dinner but asks you to bring the food, the cookware, the utensils, and to do all the cooking. What does the friend's contribution amount to then? The wholists' answer, in effect, is that the "guest" does all the work. In so doing, wholistic thinkers were simply working out the logical consequences nested within the standard atomist account(s). But no sooner had they completed this task did relativists move in and work out the consequences which logically followed from *their* wholistic account(s). Obviously, neither the atomist nor the wholist-relativist answers will do. For if the end result is that we cannot *describe our acquaintances* nor *acquaint ourselves with our descriptions*, then something must have gone deeply wrong somewhere.

Atomism construes the grammatical subject as a referential laser with virtually no girth and then, in order to prevent such a construal from being totally irrelevant, it posits a suitable ontology. However, not only do we not share the view that grammatical subjects somehow need to tag onto worldly particulars in order to be contentful, we also find no convincing reason to rule out irreducible ontological complexity from the armchair. It could very well be that atomists were right in their claim that, when pursued to an extreme, ostension would have to be ineffable (*cf.* the "No Terminus Theory", sect. 1.3.3). However, we do not see why we should buy into the ancillary premises typically annexed to this thesis, namely that 1) such manic reductionism—logical though it may be—is desirable and that 2) whatever does not admit of atomic ostension admits of no reference. The first of these premises is rooted in speculation and the second in a unjustified prejudice against the anatomic.

Atomists recognize that the world often presents us with an informational surplus-value: « In mathematics we frequently call a problem overdetermined if more data are given than are necessary to solve the problem [...]. In this sense our experience is (epistemologically) overdetermined. We experience more than is necessary in order to gain the knowledge that can be obtained » (Carnap, [1928] 2003, p. 311). In keeping with their assumption that the only possible way to refer to the world is to directly target a particular by means of indexicals—be they simple terms like "this" or statements detailing a "protocol" for contact—atomists view features like multiplicity and informational richness as calls for reduction. In short, atomists take the complexity of worldly objects as an indication to redouble their efforts, whereas we see it as a clue that most things in the world do not admit of neat ostensions and a call to work out a theoretical understanding of representation that is irreducibly anatomic.

Granted, one can sometimes make quite elementary claims about the world (e.g., that a tomato is red). However, even in such modest cases, we do not see how one could divorce the justification's context from the actual experiential episode. As such, we hold that the simplest ostensions involve the *anatomic* collaboration of more than one representation. In sum, the smallest possible justification we are prepared to countenance would run along these lines: "I claim that P"—"You mean like this?"—"Yes"—"Oh, I see. P it is then" (taken with a large grain of salt, we could describe our anatomist stance as an hermeneutic impatient with hermeneutics). Such a string of discourse may seen rather plain, but there is a universe of semantic richness separating it from an ineffable atom (and a great expanse between it and the whole as well). Does such an anatomist stance mean that representations are forever barred from achieving a high degree of precision, like clumsily trying to pick up a pin off the floor with mittens? The question is quickly settled when we ask: precision *by what standard?* If we prohibit the intervention of the stubborn interlocutor, the above discourse reveals itself a gem of epistemological precision.

4.4.4 Spontaneity as an upshot of complexity

According to our constrictive view, there is nothing inherently problematic about the fact that reference to worldly objects requires the collaboration of more than one representation. As we see it, this is no different than saying that while information is most efficiently transmitted by employing binary digits, not everything can be transmitted by the use of a single bit. In other words, if a representation like "$E=mc^2$" could be written as "E", it likely would be. But it can't, so it isn't (in fact, popular folklore has Einstein saying that « Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler »). In terms of our lasso metaphor, what this means is that beyond a certain point, purgation of representations increases the risk that we might loose hold of the worldly object we aim to capture.

We hold that it is the complexity of the left-hand side of figure 13 which makes human spontaneity possible. In essence, we think that the objects of the world are so constituted that the mind can successfully represent them in more than one way. Suppose for example that one has to teach the content of figure 13 to a class of undergraduate students. There are several ways to go about this task. In discoursing with the class, one could weave together an anatomic string to the effect that "77, Y, A, 8, 1.5, 4, 8, F, 12". Or again, one might opt to for "77, 12, 2(8), 4, 1.5, Y, A, F". Moreover, if for some valid reason it would facilitate exposition, the discursive string could be augmented with supplementary contents. The point is this: all of these different representations would succeed in referring to (i.e., seizing hold of) the object of figure 13. In other words, according to the lasso view we advocate, the student having fully understood each of these explanations would be equipped to affect the worldly object in question. However, against the relativist, *the world supplies a limit to the sort of interpretative leeway one can engage in*. For instance, a person who has been taught that "Y, 4, 3, 2, 1" would never be able to employ that

anatomic string of representations to successfully control the object represented in figure 13 (in light of the disjunction, there is no way one could both be alive and pull this off).

Of course, if the mind was a spectator seated in a one-seat theatre and forced at the point of a gun to assent at some giant P projected before it, this much would be obvious, and there wouldn't be any controversy about knowledge (let alone room for living error). However, the world's complexity allows humans to go about representing that domain in more than one way. Not only are the objects we encounter far more *intricate* than the atomist school's supposed unary content, the *multiplicity* of objects in the world is such that we need not always heed the world's imperatives. A great many things may therefore have to occur for us to even realize that a long anatomic string of representations was mistaken. But regardless of the complexity, spontaneity has its limits, and the world's indexical force will seep through the thickest wall of books.

We know that our representations sometimes fail to accomplish the sort of things they should have allowed us to do, had they been true. More importantly still, we also know that our representations allow us to accomplish fruitful inflections of the worldly landscape when they are true. In our view, however, it would be philosophically misguided to respond to this by seeking a line delineating the scope of our leeway, figuring out in advance of error what we control and what we do not. According to our anatomist stance, *it suffices to know that the constantly moving frontier between these two states perforce lies somewhere between a totally receptive atom and a totally spontaneous whole.*

To illustrate, imagine that the complex object in question is the structure of a skyscraper. Our teacher, in this case an engineering professor, has a very complex string of representations about how to properly construct such a structure. She knows that this anatomic string bears on its object since in the past she (and others following more or less the same combination of contents) was able to employ it to

great success in erecting a very tall building. Things would probably be much simpler if skyscrapers admitted only one representation, in comparison to which all other would be false. In fact, she probably would welcome such rigid unambiguity. However, she recognizes that the complexity of the object in question is such that her representations afford her considerable elbow room. For example, she would never deny that several competing design plans can be equally sound from an engineering standpoint, although she would likely be hard-pressed to point out exactly where that interpretative leeway ends. Nevertheless, our professor is fully confident that she knows—not merely supposes, but *knows*—how to build a skyscraper. Thus, when she enters the classroom everyday, she never doubts that the complex information she will convey enjoys an objective relation with the world and that, to the extent her students appropriate her instructions, these can and will be of great value in their own endeavours.

Now the classroom itself is a space of discourse, not action *per se*. One talks and reads about building skyscrapers, but one does not actually build any then and there. The strings of symbolic representations which are exchanged in that space are thus *in absentia* of their object proper. As the teacher unravels the long discursive string which enables her to successfully erect tall buildings, students are free to ask her questions. This erotetic dimension is no hindrance and does not bother the professor in the least, as she knows both from pedagogical theory and from experience that such queries facilitate the students' ability to make the representations their own. However, every once and a while, she encounters a student whose persistent questioning seems to drag the class further and further away from their intended object. It seems every time she answers one interrogation, two more pop up. In the best case scenario, this would be an indication of a student's avid interest in the subject matter and/or eagerness to make sure the job will be well executed once in the field. But the proliferation of questions can sometimes follow a very different erotetic rationale. It is as if a student is trying to

forestall the actual building of skyscrapers and remain forever seated in the classroom. Discursive exposition of theory becomes an end in itself, and one gets the impression that, should the student be taken through the entire construction process step by step from initial planning to completion, the interrogative pestering would continue unabated even after the deed is done.

However, the professor's mandate is to teach, not to vociferate gratuitously. Thus, if a student brings a salt dispenser to class and asks what relation her knowledge of its emptiness or fullness has to the building of skyscrapers, she promptly and accurately answers: *none*. Or again, if on a visit to a construction site a student walks over to a beam of steel, crouches over, presses her face to the metal, and asks if the grey of patch of colour before her then and there is the reason why knowledge about skyscrapers is objective, the teacher promptly and accurately answers: *no*.

4.5 Closing arguments: synoptic review of our proposal

4.5.1 Scale

It seems fair to say that, from a non-speculative perspective, the most interesting cases of normative controversy involve worldly objects that are very complex. It is legitimate to aetiologically inquire, for example, into how an elaborate scientific theory manages to be true—how such a complicated string of representations manages to take hold of the world. Such an epistemological task is all the more pressing when the object at hand is carried by a fairly large and intricately twined semiotic vehicle (say an entire body of literature). Given that it is impossible to reduce our most meaningful representations to punctate encounters an independent judge could verify piecemeal, we need an epistemology that fits the bill.

One of the reasons why wholistic theories gained prominence is because they satisfied this need for a larger framework. Kuhn's talk of "paradigms" ([1962] 1996), whatever its faults, provided epistemologists with a theoretical idiom capable of accommodating the representations collectively held by entire disciplines (Kuhn was by no means the sole driving force behind this wholistic turn). But in our view, the unfortunate downside to this move away from reductionism was that normativity became effectively detached from the world. To be sure, consistency and coherence are considerable epistemic virtues. However, the assumption that such traits increase the probability of objectivity holds up only so long as one takes them to be features of the worldly domain represented (short of such a realist reading, lies are to be avoided only because we lack the requisite memory, and errors are failures only because they do not gain favour with the review boards that oversee the cohesion of our "paradigm"). In describing epistemological normativity as an alignment between mind and world, we have thus knowingly embraced the sort of "mirror of nature" correspondism famously criticized by Richard Rorty (1980). But to the extent that such representations are (or strive to be) depictions of the world, it is not to satisfy any manic impulse—much less to surreptitiously reinforce some hegemonic political and social order. The position we have taken throughout this work is rather that *representations matter*, the question of how we go about rendering the world being in our view an issue of *vital* importance.

The fact that symbolic representations like linguistic devices are detachable from immanent contexts should not blind us to the fact that they have enjoyed evolutionary good fortune because they served a purpose beyond the poetic, and that somewhere along the way our schemes (linguistic or otherwise) must be submitted to the test of worldly correspondence. Whatever her excesses (sect. 4.3.4), Ruth Millikan has done much to underscore how *in absentia* representations serve our furtherance as biological organisms. We have therefore taken it for granted since the

beginning of this work that humans can and do routinely represent objects in the world, and have taken up the question of *how* this fact comes about so as to develop a proper framework for evaluating the normative standing of such representations.

That aetiological inquiry, conducted as it has been in a mundane (i.e., non-speculative) key, has had to address three competing theoretical models, namely atomism, wholism, and McDowell's unbounded fusion. Each of these construals, we argued, rested on more or less tacit ways of picturing the interface of mind and world. Given our dissatisfaction with each of these, we felt it necessary to produce a metaphoric conceptualization of our own. As such, we described our anatomist third way as a lasso of representations constricting around an object.

Atomism, in contrast, construes the representational bond as some sort of beam or "laser". In keeping with the atom's noninferential and indexical nature, the understandable expectation is that an individual representation reaches its object directly, without the co-operation of collateral representations. As we have argued, there is much to recommend such a view in an abstract symbolic domain, especially since we deem this sort of noninferential Givenness to be the cornerstone of mental associations generally (sect. 3.4.2 and 4.3.3). Indeed, if we eschew speculation, it becomes quickly apparent that the search for normative security cannot be open-ended (sect. 4.3.2). Certainly, appraising the warrant of a representation can be tedious business. However, if someone wishes a justification of why a given syllogism colligates in such a way that its conclusion ensues or why conflicting remarks about an identical content warrants her being dismissed as self-contradictory, normative grounding should go no further than an appeal to Givenness. As we argued in the third chapter, content-respect is a precondition of inquiry, not an object of it. Thus, whereas a question like "Why are tigers aggressive?" merits an anatomic (but not open-ended) answer, we hold that a query like "Why are tigers tigers?" merits no answer. Upholding a double-standard in this regard is imperative, as we think the former sort of (anatomic and non-Given)

explanation has no hope of succeeding if the latter sort of (atomic and Given) explanation is rejected (note that this does not involve acquiescence to any sort of "analyticity": when we maintain that "Gold is gold" goes without saying; we do *not* claim that "Gold is yellow" enjoys a similar privilege).

Thus, from our perspective, the atomist commits an understandable but misguided extension: she takes validation of our knowledge of the world to be an analogue of content-respect (sect. 4.2.4). While we endorse the basis whence this juxtaposition proceeds and sympathize with the (overly-optimistic) belief in our ability to get to know the world, we nevertheless think the idea of ineffable punctate encounters does not hold up. Empiricism, in our view, should be soiled by discourse: one does not objectively represent the world simply by experiential exposure to nature's book of lessons (sect. 4.4.3). Inference (loose and tight), psychological associations, the kitchen sink—all can be twined via content-respect into potent discursive strings that enable us fathom worldly objects. Our third way thus construes experience as a necessary *but not sufficient* condition of normative justification.

Admittedly, this can seem akin to Rorty's contention that "*mere* looking" cannot settle the question of which set of representations best renders a portion of the world (sect. 3.2.1). However, given our non-speculative stance, we see nothing in this move away from atomism which might remotely suggest the adoption of any sort of wholism. The wholist, in contrast, effectively takes anatomism to be a license for flights of philosophic fancy (sect. 1.2.2). Observation, we are told, is underdetermined to such an extent that any representational scheme can be made to fit with experience. This fallacious leap from anatomism to wholism thus sanctions a profound change of epistemological outlook. The warrant of a representational scheme is no longer a matter of properly conjugating experiential receptivity with

conceptual spontaneity. The laser metaphor of atomism having been (to a certain extent rightfully) discredited, a new metaphor arises—one which is beholden to the faculty of spontaneity only.

In our assessment, this move away from receptivity, which marks the initial recoil in McDowell's seesaw, commits a grave epistemological mistake. To be sure, justification is a largely discursive activity which involves something like a "space of reasons" (*pace* Sellars). But just as experience supplies one with a necessary but not sufficient condition for normative justification, so we have argued that argumentation is a necessary *but not sufficient* contributor to our objective knowledge of the world (sect. 3.3.4). We believe this combined view faithfully captures the spirit of Kant's thesis to the effect that « Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind » ([1787] 1965, B75). Upholding this tenet, however, does not spare us the task of explicating the particular *relation* which holds between conceptual spontaneity and indexical forcefulness.

McDowell's work, as we have seen, answers this challenge in a very different way than ours. On some level, McDowell senses that an appeal to argumentation alone is unable to fully account for the epistemic warrant of our representations. Coherentism, he argues, gives one a sense of vertigo. In making such a claim, McDowell effectively lets his case against wholism rest on the subjective undesirability of the theory. But as thinkers like Davidson and Rorty would be quick to reply, wholism is not made less reasonable on account of the discomforts it might engender. There is nothing, they point out, which ensures that our persistent urge to find foundations in fact testifies to the availability of such ultimate epistemological bedrock. Rather, they maintain that we should learn to master whatever dizziness may spring from an exclusive appeal to internal coherence (*cf.* for example Rorty, 2000, p. 126-127).

Like McDowell's rejection of wholism, this sort of voluntary embrace rests on a subjective appeal: one is more likely to buy into it if one does *not* in point of fact feel any vertigo. It therefore appears both parties have reached a stalemate. Not so, says McDowell. The advantage of his own philosophy over wholism, he maintains, is that it sympathizes with the yearning for Givens (sect. 2.5.3). To be sure, his own therapeutic project converges with Davidson and Rorty insofar as it too aims to dislodge the craving for external constraints. But instead of leaving the idea of empirical friction as is and calling for its abandonment, he attempts to rethink the notion so that we can accommodate it into our overall picture while staying within the bounds of the Wittgensteinian frontier of thought (sect. 2.2). His means of achieving this tall order is to revisit the Kantian project and remedy its central failing by rejecting transcendental agnosticism, thereby fusing receptivity with spontaneity.

In the end though, what we get is not a truly novel notion, but an unstable compound weaker than the sum of its constituents: experience looses its ability to supply friction, and conceptual thought sees its freedom undercut by an ethos of scepticism. Our anatomist third way, in contrast, does not require that one relinquish the notions of receptivity and spontaneity, but rather directs its efforts at elucidating their interrelationship without jeopardizing their distinctiveness.

4.5.2 Norm

Just as we have encountered three different scales in this work, so have we dealt with three basic sources of normative arbitrament, namely offers one can't refuse, concern for maximal integrity and coherence, and spontaneous criticism of beliefs arising from socialized humility. We have rejected the last two notions, which are espoused—by no means exclusively—by Sellars and McDowell, respectively. Although we did not adopt *in toto* the atomistic empiricism of the sort propounded by the early Bertrand Russell, we did insist that the idea of a forceful imposition of content can be reworked in such a way that it gains in plausibility and escapes the

shortcomings of the standard account. Central to this reworking was the realization that offers one can't refuse admit an alternative after all; to wit, the demise of the apprehending agent. In our view, there is a "quite sizeable kernel of truth" in empiricism (sect. 2.3.1). However, according to our interpretation, atomism ends up spoiling this insight. Perhaps owing to the predilection for reductionism which gets the speculative philosopher to the point of a single representational content (sect. 1.3.3), the living agency which does the actual apprehension becomes totally forgotten (*cf.* fig. 11). In truth, there may be more to this than a simple penchant for reduction. For although the logicist program which drives the philosopher to dig all the way down to the atom manifests a healthy anti-psychologism, that same impetus often degenerates into what may be termed *anti-agentism*, which is an altogether different beast. In any case, the end result is a unary state which, despite its epistemological attractiveness, is riddled with profound difficulties. Topping the list in this regard is the fact that if the representation of the world ultimately rested on foundations that foreclosed the possibility of falsity, there would be no such thing as error, much less a need for norms guiding humans in their thinking. Clearly, this is not the case.

This discrepancy between theory and practice has always been recognized by atomists, and most advocates of the view have found solace in the twentieth century's fashionable tendency to blame any and all philosophic puzzlement on the "vaguaries" of natural language (sect. 4.4.2). Departing from this (by now stale) strategy, we chose to countenance the possibility of error at the most primitive level. Experience, we argue, can indeed serve as a potent source of normative arbitrament. However, if we do not fall prey to anti-agentism, we see the Given does indeed admit an alternative. Offers one can't refuse are disjunctive in that the vital energy which is coerced into Accepting a content can protest by effectively ceasing to be. Granted, by its very nature, this is a veto one exercises at one's peril; but that peculiar trait does nothing to undermine the insight. Therefore, aside from the more

overtly volitional dimension at play in assent to logical entailment, we hold that the grasp of a single content involves a conative contribution on the part of the thinking agent.

Does such a primitive situation deserve to be placed under the heading of receptivity? We believe so. Conation is by all standards an under-appreciated dimension of our lives. But while it is doubtful inquiry into the matter can ever be satisfactorily carried out by theorists (as opposed to artists and athletes, for example), it seems crystal clear to us that the conative drive deserves to be notionally distinguished from the far more complex exercise in conceptual thought that we have here termed the faculty of spontaneity. *There is something patently* distinct *between a cognitive state whose only alternative is the absence of the apprehending agent and one which does not threaten that agency directly but postpones that disjunct with a brochette of contents to spontaneously choose from.*

Now the abstract construal of receptivity we have developed is intended to answer a legitimate (i.e., non-speculative) technical concern. We know from everyday life that the world manages to instruct us in an informative way, and it behoves us to produce a sensible aetiological account of how this is so. In keeping with our policy of not discarding ladders, it is thus imperative to ensure that we not advocate a tenet which contradicts logically-posterior data. This in turn entails that we not fall into any sort of ineffable situation. Thus, to the extent that one carries reduction to the point of a single content, one is justified in asking how the resulting conception can in fact support the inquiry's intuitive point of departure. But our aetiologic posture also means we must not loose sight of the fact that a reduction has taken place when we reach such a level, and that it is *we* who are responsible for its making. The experiential stream may be constituted by myriad confrontations between conative agency and worldly contents but it is not lived as such, and it is a planned exercise in conceptual deliberation which attains such an explanation. Consequently, we have not assumed the need for any sort of mysterious

recombination of contents, much less striven to orchestrate the eventual emergence of language-compatible intelligibility by means of a factitious notational apparatus (for an aetiological naturalist, talk of having to reconstruct our familiar surroundings from abstract theoretical postulates begs the question, if anything does).

Recognizing complexity in this way is not only methodologically sound, it also allows us to develop a plausible account of how our representation of the world affords us spontaneity. We have already said that receptivity is acquiescence before an offer one cannot refuse. So long as an animal (human or otherwise) is alive, that activity obliges it to take cognizance of the world. Given that we are mortal creatures imbedded in that milieu and not just imperishable beings spectating from afar, the contents forcefully delivered to us actually have an axiologic significance beyond the merely informative. In effect, we are presented with an alternative by the world: "Know me or perish". Assuming a healthy conative drive (which we might characterize as self-love), an agent presented with such a disjunct will likely come to see the cognitive task of understanding its surroundings as a serious affair. Yet it may be asked how, if this indeed characterizes the human condition, the project of developing principles that lead us to greater alignment with the world is time and time again viewed with incredulity. In short, would not the philosophic commitments of the relativist and sceptic *ipso facto* condemn them to the status of endangered species? It is here that the notion of complexity intervenes.

Consider the following fable. Instance a person falling down a tall building. Suppose that the person's life-expectancy lies somewhere in the range of 80 years or so, and that the edifice in question of such height that it would take over 120 years of plummeting to actually reach ground level. Given these parameters, it is possible a falling person could spend her entire existence unaware of her fate. In fact, were she to read a book informing her of her situation, she would likely laugh the matter away. Having long ago domesticated whatever vertigo might have perchance ensued from her fall, she might scoff at talk of a ground floor forcefully making its presence

known. Supposing a strong theoretical bend, she might even find the time to write books of her own, developing a sophisticated philosophic position called "free-floatism". The doctrine could even gain adherents who, leaping in their turn, would happily seek to confirm for themselves the cogency of those teachings.

But now suppose the building were shortened such that it takes a year to travel down its length in free fall. All other things being the same, this curtailment would have serious repercussions for free-floatism. The plausibility of the doctrine, we could then say, feeds on building height: the taller the structure, the more credible the theory. We maintain that a relation of this kind holds between spontaneity and complexity: the greater the world's complexity, the greater leeway we have in how we represent it. The sizeable philosophic difficulty here is that the complexity we live in often exceeds our ability to detect the world's contribution with any obviousness. Going back to figure 13, we can say that our representation of the world is fragmented to such a degree that, if one is cunning enough, one can meander through grids of semiotic complexity without ever having to answer the disjunction *per se*.

To be sure, each is free to shrink our fable's building, as it were, and test for themselves the relativist's contention that the world can accommodate *any* representation. But the idea of a single living agent confronting the world (à la Robinson Crusoe) is very much like that of a single mental content isolated from all others: it is by and large the product of a deliberate reduction, something we know can obtain but hardly ever encounter without doctoring (sect. 4.4.1). Just as the experiential flux is already complex, so our life is already *social* (Crusoe was marooned with considerable luggage, notably mastery of natural language categories). In and of itself, this is nothing to be feared or avoided. In fact, we have argued that it is such baseline complexity which gives rise to our freedom in thought and representation. Granted, it this same trait which makes possible short-sighted abuses of spontaneity. But in order to find a constructive way to undercut these

philosophical stances which does not rely solely on their intrinsic loathsomeness, we must not relinquish the very of idea of freedom. Rather, the new intellectual must reclaim *both* faculties by achieving a firmer grasp of the specific manner in which conceptual spontaneity conjugates with experiential receptivity (we hope this work will have contributed to bettering our understanding in this regard).

There are those who, upon hearing these arguments, would ignore the message they are intended to convey, latch onto our insistence that the baseline (ideational or social) is already complex, and attempt to shave off the pestering indexical disjunction. That such can be done—with impunity, moreover—is a fact we cannot dispute. But not only would such a move effectively reset the oscillation to the "frictionless spinning in a void" position, it would also highlight how the normative issue of thought's bearing on the world raises indelible *ethical* and *political* concerns.

4.6 Conclusion

What we tried to do in this chapter is put the various conclusions drawn over the course of our investigation to good use so as to fashion an alternative more tenable than McDowell's fusion. Breaking away from the rival pictures of representation as a beam of light or a fabric, we proposed a new image: representations bind together via content-respect to form strings of discourse which constrict around their worldly object. This image entailed an anatomic scale and a non-speculative norm recognizing both receptivity and spontaneity.

As a means of letting our proposal grow out of the issues already examined, we revisited the oscillation between atomism and wholism under a new light. Central to our gloss was the idea of competing root metaphors. As we see it, atomism construes epistemological normativity as a mirror-image of experiential input, with the mind targeting worldly referents in the same manner as radiations impact its sensory apparatus. Since this view takes objectivity to be a direct contact,

intermediaries like language are seen as an impediment to the mind's ability to represent the world. However, we saw how the wholist claims that it is precisely these so-called impediments which do all the normative work, insofar as a pure ostension would be ineffable. As such, wholism replies with a metaphorical idiom of its own (one which, on many fronts, surpasses that of atomism).

By accepting the atomist as the sole spokesperson of experiential receptivity, the wholist concludes that if receptivity is impotent, than we should jettison it from epistemology altogether. However, we argued that it is at this precise moment of the theoretical cut-and-parry that anatomism becomes lost as a possible option. Why should we accept that the proper way to respond to the implausibility of a unary atom is to embrace the whole as a substitute? Certainly, if one assumes that the atomist school is the sole experience-friendly epistemology on the market, then the absurdity of ineffable appeals entails the absurdity of receptivity as well. But what if the assumption of exclusivity is dropped? Would it not be far more prudent (and aetiologically sensible) to say that, in its speculative fervour to reduce the complex to the simple, atomism dictated from the armchair what the world should be like in disregard of what the world actually is? For we should not loose sight of the fact that *empiricism and reductionism are distinct philosophic commitments*. Indeed, nothing prevents the founding of a school of "coarse empiricists" who would look to actual human life, not manic logicism, as their source of guidance. As such, we think one can buy into the idea of experience as a source of epistemic normativity—while recognizing that the only objects one can ever be receptive to are *complex*.

Granted, one can dip below such a *de facto* line and engage in phenomenological reductions, if one wishes. But if one goes out into a field and digs a hole where there was none to begin with, one cannot subsequently be dismayed that a hole will be there—much less loose sight of the heap waiting besides the hole or curse the dirt

for not being able to stay there and be in the hole at the same time. In any event, that one can dig below such a baseline says more about our ability to shovel than about the landscape we alter.

According to the outlook we advocate, there are essentially two ways the mind can lose hold of a worldly object, namely by twining anatomic strings which are too loose or too tight. In either case, it is philosophical prejudice vis-à-vis one of the Kantian faculties which leads to the loss of objectivity. Seen in this light, wholism and atomism reveal themselves incapable of seizing upon worldly objects; the first because its desire to rely exclusively on the faculty of receptivity unduly reduces reference to the point of ineffability, the second because its wish to make due only with spontaneity allows for the *ad hoc* proliferation of interpretations and defensive stratagems. However, we believe both of these views should be rejected, as ineffability and prolixity both make normativity impossible. As stated, we think this epistemological view is in keeping with Aristotle's contention (in metaphysics) that the principles which make intelligibility possible must be « neither one nor innumerable » (189a20).

It is a fact that objects larger than ineffable atoms and smaller than an (equally ineffable) "Absolute" fit our anatomic theory of representation like a glove. In this sense, one could argue that we are guilty of the sort of reification we hold as a reproach against atomism. Yet this could also be a sign that our theoretical account is tailor-made for the world as we find it. Obviously, we think the ontology enjoys priority over the epistemology in this case. But we shall let the fecundity of this work (as a lasso) defend that contention.

CONCLUSION

> We are not retreating. We are advancing in another direction.
>
> Major General Oliver P. Smith
> Answer to a journalist (December 6, 1950)

Throughout this work, we have been considering ways to model how agents represent the objects of the world, with a particular emphasis on what sort of account can be produced if one wants to normatively establish the warrant of such representations. At the heart of that investigation lies a fundamental tension. It seems intuitively clear that an important component of our ability to understand our worldly surroundings is a matter of being receptive to whatever presents itself to us in experience. Yet insofar as our knowledge of that domain is a structured product which we can detach from its immanent experiential origins and carry around with us (and share with others) in abstract form, it is evident that representation allows us a fair share of freedom. Things would no doubt be simpler if all we had to do to establish the objective basis of our *in absentia* representations was to go back to their indexical birthplace. But such a move would at best repeat a discrete event, and it is hard to see how that could carry the sort of weight expected of intelligibility and epistemic justification.

Faced with this dilemma, the widespread reaction has been to try and rebuild our theoretical understanding of representation in such a way that we can ground reasons without having to call upon the problematic faculty of receptivity. With this programmatic orientation firmly in place, the impulse has been to find alternative sources of normativity. Amidst the proposals that have sprung from this effort, a

fairly stable idea has emerged. The general consensus amongst theorists wishing to reject the appeal to atomic receptivity has been that, when considered as a corporate body, representations supply their own brand of normativity. As long as philosophers kept their sights focused on the atomic scale, these wholistic forces went largely unnoticed (or at any rate under-appreciated). However, the moment the project for an empirical normativity was seriously dumped, a store of new insights opened up. It was like a wholistic Klondike.

But like any gold rush, there comes a time when the riches are depleted, and a somewhat bleaker mood sets in. Thus, one of the things that has become increasingly apparent—probably to the dismay of the paradigmatic pioneers themselves—is that wholism has a tendency to lead to relativism. As neither sheer receptivity nor unconstrained spontaneity have availed themselves tenable sources of knowledge, the Zeitgeist has issued a call for tenders. Enter *Mind and World.*

If there were a great Agency behind developments in the history of ideas, it could not have chosen a better spokesperson than John McDowell. With its memorable depiction of post-wholist discourse as a seesaw, his book *Mind and World* presents a profoundly *dialectic* exercise where contradictory theses exert pressures that call for a synthesis. Although McDowell claims not to produce any constructive theorizing, he does present an ensemble of philosophic ideas which work together in sustaining an ambitious aim. His goal, in short, is nothing less than a full dismount of the futile oscillation between atomism and wholism.

In the first chapter, we singled out two far-reaching concessions we thought could only lead such an enterprise to calamitous results; namely the sceptical assumption that the mere possibility of yet another variable makes ostensive appeals impotent, as well as the technical argument that indexical force can at best cause but not warrant a representation. Motivated by a thoroughgoing naturalism which refuses to countenance arguments that arise from imagination alone, we felt compelled to think-over the basis of wholism. While we opted to present our

opposition to the first of these two ideas from the very beginning, we forwent criticising the asymmetrist thesis so as to better understand the elaborate manner in which McDowell negotiated that constraint. By the end of the second chapter though, we duly concluded that the countermeasures had grown out of proportion, and opined that major revisions were in order. We thus opted to retrace the steps which lead McDowell to so questionable a tenet as fusion, and investigate what went wrong—not with that proposal—but with the problem it was intended to assuage.

Instead of accepting the rejection of atomism as an article of faith, we retraced McDowell's seesaw to its initial egress so as to re-examine for ourselves the most notable critique levelled against atomist epistemologies. Seeing how we had conclusively rejected speculative scenarios that question-beggingly protect their wholistic contentions in the first chapter, we devoted the third chapter to considering a subtle argument which exploits a difference which we ourselves recognize, namely that between the Given and non-Given. According to the Sellarsian critique, experiences causally contribute to the mind in a manner that renders them impotent to normatively vindicate the symbolic representations which are the (publicly accessible) bearers of epistemic value. Taking the asymmetrist's ambitions at face-value, we applied the technical rejection of Givenness to all spheres, worldly *and* ideational. Although this tactic brought to the fore a host of implausible consequences, by far the most damning outcome was the realization that indexical asymmetry sunders content-respect. As a result, the conclusion we drew at the close of our inquiry was that adopting the asymmetrist constraint is ultimately self-defeating, insofar as it effectively subverts both atomistic *and* wholistic epistemologies. A good way to summarize the critiques of the first and third chapter would be to say that, *when it rests on radical scenarios, wholism begins in scepticism; and when it rests on indexical asymmetry, wholism ends in nihilism.*

However, as we saw in the second chapter, McDowell takes an entirely different view of the situation. Whereas we see the poles of the seesaw as extremes to be avoided, he sees them as limitations to be overcome. Thus, although McDowell shares with us the belief that neither receptivity nor spontaneity by themselves provide tenable sources of knowledge, he believes the failings of each can be remedied by erasing the very distinction between the notions. Although we have made an honest effort to try and understand this proposal, we nevertheless think that the idea of blurring the boundary between receptivity and spontaneity can be rejected from the outset on aetiological grounds. To be sure, the reigning fashion of the day is to seek out and destroy dualisms of all sorts (we've lost count of how many dogmas have been uncovered since Quine). But the situation we are concerned with is not like the now-prevalent rejection of the analytic and synthetic, a distinction which was artificially contrived from the very beginning. Rather, the distinction which McDowell seeks to assail is at the very heart of philosophic epistemology.

There is a sense in which our thinking is free from the world, and another in which it is not. Of course, this sort of cryptic statement is far from satisfying, and heeding the challenge of elucidating the actual relation is a legitimate (and pressing) pursuit. Yet we simply cannot sanction a philosophy which sees in this curious tension a tangible call for resolution—but then makes it its programmatic mission to discard the problem-situation which set its inquiry into motion. Although we have made a conscious effort to steer clear of exegetic commentary, it seems to us that whatever Kantian inspiration there might be in *Mind and World* has been overstated by its author, and that Wittgenstein and/or Hegel would have been far more apt sources in this regard. For while McDowell declares his allegiance to Kant's admonition, we believe his advocacy of a radical notional fusion belies a gross misreading: *Kant does not say that thoughts and intuitions are one and the same.* In fact, he made it a point to insist that...

> These two powers or capacities cannot exchange their functions. The understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can knowledge arise. *But that is no reason for confounding the contribution of either with that of the other; rather it is a strong reason for carefully separating and distinguishing the one from the other.* (Kant, [1787] 1965, B75-B76; italics ours)

Considering the kind of concerted efforts that have been successively exerted to make the atomist and wholist programs viable, one could be forgiven for entertaining the knee-jerk abandonment of epistemology altogether. We surmise that the frantic flight from Cartesianism and the concomitant rise of "externalism" (*cf.* Rowlands, 2003) points not to a revamped conception of epistemology but to a renewed interest in metaphysics (one still too petrified by the echo of the positivists' invectives to come out of the closet fully). Perhaps this shift is motivated by a desire to eradicate relativism once and for all. However, we believe it likely will do so only at the cost of drastic eleminativism. Externalism is a tough epistemology to sell when it comes to those many concepts that do not have a corresponding worldly counterpart. Are we to unearth the distinction between appearance and reality once again? If this happens, we think those disciplines that do not enjoy the privilege of an external object will simply retreat deeper into hermeneutic self-sufficiency.

Instead of melodramatically jumping ship, we would much rather see the twentieth century as epistemology's (slow and painful) recognition that the mind's representations are not little kernels that tag onto things—yet neither are they constructs answerable to nothing but themselves. In our opinion, the moral here is that one should not overreact. *It was an overreaction that took anatomism and blew it up into a wholistic panacea—and it will be an overreaction if we let the hard-earned anatomic insight be discarded along with the whole.*

The world is what it is, regardless of what we think, and we refuse its inputs only at our own peril. Metaphysical complexity, however, buys us some epistemological time. Nevertheless, this does not mean that spontaneity has free reign. Luckily,

most humans implicitly recognize this, and go about their daily business accordingly. Now if we are particularly intelligent (or are lucky enough to trade with others who are), we can conjugate receptivity and spontaneity in a way that allows us to enjoy the benefits of a surplus-value. But while the fruits of one's labour can be exchanged, the conviction of objectivity which ensues from fruitful conduct is not transferable, as it requires the assent of each thinking animal. Of course, to the extent that they manage to transport their persons to the nearest university lectern, the sceptic and the relativist also marshal actantial fecundity. But if this does not provide them with sufficient evidence that the mind's representations can correspond to their worldly objects, then one should simply let them go their merry way—remembering all the while that it is the realist side of their comprise (and *ours*) which allows them to go about discarding ladders without falling.

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