

Experience and Knowledge

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DECLARATION

I, Refeng Tang, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where material has been derived from other sources I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

Experience is the source of empirical knowledge. Does this require that experience itself be knowledge? My answer to the question is affirmative. Experience, in so far as it is the source of empirical knowledge, has to be itself knowledge. Following the traditional understanding of knowledge, this means that experience as the source of knowledge is a kind of justified true belief. This I call the gnostic conception of experience, or gnosticism for short. The aim of the thesis is to argue for gnosticism. The thesis consists of nine chapters.

Chapter 1 proposes gnosticism and examines some historical traditions from the gnosticist point of view.

Chapter 2 defends a version of traditional understanding of knowledge on which gnosticism is based.

Chapter 3 rejects nongnosticism by arguing against nonconceptualism. It is argued that nonconceptual experience cannot play a justificatory role for thought, since there is no systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought.

Chapter 4 rejects quasi-gnosticism by arguing against conceptualism. Based on the doxastic criterion of justification, the chapter challenges the justificatory role of nondoxastic conceptual experience.

Chapter 5 explores the relationship between experience and concept and argues that experience and concept are constitutive of each other.

Chapter 6 proposes and argues for doxasticism which says that experience is belief about the world.

Chapter 7 defends doxasticism against the disbelief objection which says we do not always believe what we experience.

Chapter 8 argues that the voluntariness of belief does not undermine doxasticism since experience is an active, rational exploration of the world.

With doxasticism established, chapter 9 returns to gnosticism by tackling the problem of the justification of experience. It is argued that experience can be justified as true without being inferential and is in this sense the foundation of empirical knowledge.

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1. Introduction: The Gnostic Conception of Experience

1. The English word “experience” has “*empeiria*” as its origin in Greek. In this thesis, I shall use the term to denote human sensory experience which can be either perceptual or nonperceptual. Perceptual experience is experience of physical objects, while nonperceptual experience is of something else.¹

By knowledge I mean propositional knowledge that we can communicate to each other. That is, I am concerned here with knowing that something is the case (“knowing that”); not with practical knowledge concerning how to do something (“knowing how”). We may distinguish two kinds of propositional knowledge, that is, knowledge of necessity and knowledge of contingency. In this thesis I shall confine myself to knowledge of contingency, which I also call empirical knowledge, that is, knowledge about the world around us, which includes us human beings within it.

Empirical knowledge, in contrast to knowledge a priori, is dependent on experience. Or, we may say, experience is the source of empirical knowledge. Does this require that experience itself be knowledge? My answer to the question is affirmative. Experience, in so far as it is the source of empirical knowledge, has to be itself knowledge. This I call the gnostic conception of experience, or gnosticism for short.

There are two points to note. First, gnosticism does not mean to say that we should identify knowledge with experience, an idea that has been correctly criticised by Plato in his *Theaetetus*. Plato denies that we should define knowledge in terms of perception. The reason is that, on the one hand, not all perceptions are knowledge (there are cases of misperceiving), and on the other hand, there is knowledge other than perception, say, memory (Plato 1997a, 164b) and inferential knowledge. Gnosticism would agree with Plato in both regards. On the one hand, gnosticism is a conditional. It says that in so far as experience is the source of knowledge, it is itself knowledge. Hence the fallibility of experience does not itself threaten gnosticism as long as we agree that there are true experiences and only true experiences are the source of empirical knowledge. On the other hand, gnosticism would agree that experience is not the only species of knowledge. For gnosticism, experience is a species of knowledge which provides the foundation for other species of knowledge. Memory and inferential knowledge are both based on experience.

Second, to say experience is knowledge is not to say one’s knowledge can transcend one’s conceptual capacities. The idea, again, can be found in Plato’s *Theaetetus*. Plato considers one challenge to the idea that perception is knowledge. When we hear people

¹ I leave it open whether this something else is a mental object. A detailed discussion of this is in chapter 6, § 2.

speaking a foreign language which we have not learned, we hear the sound of their voices when they speak without knowing what they are saying. Similarly, suppose we do not know our letters, we see them when we look at them without knowing them (1997a, 163b). To this challenge, Plato allows a reasonable reply. That is, “we know just that in them which we see and hear. We both see and know the shape and the colour of the letters; and with the spoken words we both hear and know the rise and fall of the voice. But what schoolmasters and interpreters tell us about, we don’t perceive by seeing and hearing, and we don’t know either” (1997, 163b-c). In this way, Plato allows that what we do not see and hear we do not know either. And for this reason, the example does not show that experience is not knowledge. It only shows what kind of knowledge we may have by having experience depends on what we already know.

The point of gnosticism is that we not only get knowledge through experience, but also base knowledge on experience which is itself knowledge. Knowledge has to have a sound foundation. The foundation of knowledge has to be its most solid part. Given this, anyone who wishes to insist that experience is the foundation of knowledge has to agree experience is itself knowledge. Hence gnosticism is a combination of the empiricist commitment that knowledge comes from experience and the rationalist insight that knowledge can only be derived from knowledge.

2. Gnosticism is very congenial to the perceptual model of knowledge we find in early ancient Greeks. The ancient Greeks more or less identify knowledge with experience, and especially with visual experience. One of the most common verbs in ancient Greek for saying “I know”, for example, is *oida*, which means “I have seen”. Hence, for ancient Greeks, what one knows is actually what one has seen. But this perceptual model of knowledge seems to fail to take root in ancient Greek philosophy owing to an apparent obsession with knowledge of necessity.

Greek philosophy is perfectly prepared to think that reality may be entirely different from what we ordinarily take it to be and it is this hidden reality which interests the ancient Greeks most and is taken as the real object of knowledge. This reality, nevertheless, is not something we human beings could possibly see. And if we stay with the perceptual model of knowledge, then it seems that we have to accept that we human beings simply have no knowledge at all. Hence according to Xenophanes, only the greatest god has knowledge of the truth of the universe which is one and changeless. For Xenophanes, we human beings simply have no knowledge; what we can do is just to “Let these things be believed as approximations to the truth” (Waterfield 2000, p. 30, F17).

The whole history of western philosophy is in a sense a struggle to fight this version of scepticism. And the typical solution is to give up the perceptual model of knowledge and

turn to something else. If we cannot see the reality, we may well be able to know the reality via a different route, that is, through reason.

This is the idea we find in Parmenides and Melissus. Parmenides identifies thinking with “being” straightaway. He claims that it is the same to think and to be, and the plurality of ordinary empirical objects is just an illusion. Melissus, too, turned his ontological conclusions against the sense and argues that sense objects are illusory. In like manner, Plato insists “a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just and pure, with understanding” (1997a, 176b). Similarly, for Aristotle, “knowledge is of universals” (1984, 1086b33). This means that there can be no demonstrative knowledge, which strictly speaking means no knowledge at all, of particulars (1984, 75b22-36). Aristotle thus makes a distinction between experience and art, according to which “experience is knowledge of individuals, art of universals” and “*knowledge* and *understanding* belong to art rather than to experience” (1984, 981a). For Aristotle, the difference between artists and men of experience is that “the former know the cause, but the latter do not” (1984, 981a, see also 981b-982a).

We see the main reason that the perceptual model of knowledge loses favour with Greek philosophers is that the dominant rigorous criterion of knowledge excludes knowledge of particulars. This rigorous criterion of knowledge is not anymore popular in contemporary philosophy and is certainly not the way I understand knowledge in this thesis. For this reason, there is a good chance that some Greek philosophers can still be considered gnosticists despite their explicit claim that experience is not knowledge.

Democritus, for example, recognizes that we may have knowledge of ordinary things, though he accords it low status. He distinguishes two forms of knowledge: one genuine, the other bastard. According to this distinction, “To the bastard kind belong all the following: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch. But the other kind is genuine and is far removed from the bastard kind” (Waterfield 2000, p.176). Democritus seems to hold the view that experience is knowledge of particulars.

Likewise, Plato should not be considered a nongnosticist for the simple reason that he adopts a rigorous criterion of knowledge. Plato nevertheless has a further reason to deny experience is knowledge, namely, the separation of experience and reason. Plato seems to draw a sharp distinction between experience and reason. According to him, experience is essentially devoid of reason which is essential for knowledge. For Plato, human beings and animals share a kind of sensory capacities he either calls experience or perception. And the only difference between human beings and animals is that we do calculations while animals do not. According to him, experiences are what “reach the soul through the body” and they are “some things which all creatures, men and animals alike, are naturally able to perceive as soon as they are born”, while reason and calculations are “the result of a long and

arduous development, involving a good deal of trouble and education” (1997a, 186c). And knowledge, for Plato, is to be found in reason: “knowledge is to be found not in the experiences but in the process of reasoning about them; it is here, seemingly, not in the experiences, that it is possible to grasp being and truth” (1997, 186d). Hence, concludes Plato, “perception and knowledge could never be the same thing” (1997, 186e). Experience is devoid of understanding, and hence cannot be gnostic.

Plato, however, is only a pseudo-nongnosticist. In Plato, the separation of experience and reason or concept is only a matter of analysis, not a matter of fact. For Plato, reason, in effect, always resides in experience and makes experience gnostic. This is why Plato has no difficulty in claiming what an eye-witness has is knowledge, although distinguishes this from saying that perception is knowledge (1997, 201b-c). According to Plato, it is more correct to say that the eyes are that “through which we see” than that they are “with which we see” (1997, 184c). The idea is that we see with the faculty of reason. This is exactly what I mean by saying experience is gnostic. Hence despite his explicit claim that perception is not knowledge, we may still have good reasons to consider Plato a gnosticist.

The gnosticist idea is more certain in Aristotle. Aristotle makes a clear distinction between human experience and animal perception. For him, experience is considered a capacity developed from perception which we share with other species of animals. According to Aristotle, perception is “a connate discriminatory capacity” which all animals share while experience is what we gain via memory” (1984, 99b35-100a9; see also 980b26-981a1). In fact, for Aristotle, experience is not only retention of percepts, but also “to have an account from the retention of such things” (1984, 99b35-100a2).² Although according to his rigorous criterion of knowledge, he would not consider knowledge of particulars as knowledge, he agrees that to experience is to make judgment and have knowledge about particulars.³ For this reason Aristotle says experience “seems to be very similar to science and art”. In fact, for Aristotle, “science and art come to men through experience; for “experience made art” (1984, 981a-5). Aristotle is thus a well-qualified gnosticist.

Allowing knowledge of particulars to be knowledge, we can now conclude that Aristotle is a well-qualified gnosticist. We can even allow Plato to be a gnosticist, with some qualification. The reason is that, for both of them, there is understanding in experience, although, in the case of Plato, understanding is analytically separated from experience.

3. The rigorous conception of knowledge in ancient Greek philosophy leads to a kind of

² For this reason, Everson says in Aristotle, “*emperia* is much closer to ‘concept’ than to ‘experience’, by which it is standardly translated” (Everson 1997, p. 227).

³ Burnyeat thus suggests that it would be less misleading to translate *episteme* as “understanding” rather than knowledge. This would allow us to interpret Aristotle as allowing for a wide range of different kinds of knowledge (1981).

extreme scepticism at the very beginning of Hellenistic philosophy.

Hellenistic philosophy starts from early Pyrrhonism. According to Diogenes Laertius, Pyrrho introduces the form of philosophy “which consists in non-cognition and suspension of judgement”. Pyrrho “would maintain that nothing is honourable or base, or just or unjust, and that likewise in all cases nothing exists in truth; and that convention and habit are the basis of everything that men do; for each thing is no more this than that” (Long & Sedley 1987, p. 13). Later Pyrrhonists “affirm the appearance, without also affirming that it is of such a kind”. They “perceive that fire burns”; but they “suspend judgement about whether it has an inflammable nature”. “Our resistance (so they say) is confined to the non-evident accompaniments of appearances”. Hence the Pyrrhonist scepticism is about the way things really are, not their appearances. Thus in his writings *on Sensations* Timon says: “That honey is sweet I do not affirm, but I agree that it appears so” (ibid.).

Citing Timon, Aristocles describes Pyrrho as declaring that “neither our sensations nor our opinions tell us truths or falsehood” (ibid., p. 15, F4). It is important to note that this Pyrrhonist scepticism has a base in its metaphysics. As Long and Sedley point out correctly, for Pyrrhonists, the cognitive incompetence is not due to a weakness in our faculty, but to how things are by nature, namely, the “indifferent, immeasurable and inarbitrable” nature of things (ibid., F3).⁴ Pyrrho thus holds a stronger version of scepticism. It is not that we cannot know the truth of the world, but that there is no truth of the world to be known. Hence the reason why “we should not put our trust in” our sensations or opinions is not that sensations or opinions may tell us falsehood, but that there is no truth or falsehood to be told about the world. For this reason “we should be unopinionated, uncommitted and unwavering, saying concerning each individual thing that it no more is than is not, or it both is and is not, or it neither is nor is not” (ibid., F4).⁵

An initial Epicurean response to the Pyrrhonist scepticism is that “if someone thinks that nothing is known, one thing he doesn’t know is whether *that* can be known, since he admits to knowing nothing” (ibid., p. 78). Strictly speaking, this response is not relevant. The point of Pyrrhonist scepticism is that there is nothing to be known, not that we cannot know what is there to be known. Epicurus may revise his response by saying that a Pyrrhonist cannot know whether or not there is anything to be known. But interestingly, the Pyrrhonist scepticism is based on something certain. A Pyrrhonist claims that there is nothing to be known in reality, not that nothing can be known. The challenge is not a challenge to our cognitive capacity, but a challenge based on a metaphysical claim.

The real Epicurean response to Pyrrhonist scepticism, however, is based on the idea that “the preconception of true has its origin in the senses, and that the senses cannot be refuted” (ibid.). According to Epicureans, neither can the senses be contradicted by reason,

⁴ This echoes Heraclitus’s claim that the thing itself is changeless, although it is sensed as being in constant change.

⁵ The world’s indeterminability, in Pyrrho, is linked to the desirability of equanimity. But we shall not digress to this here.

nor can the senses “convict each other”, nor the senses “be able to confute themselves, since all will always have to be considered of equal reliability”. Hence, the striking conclusion: “whatever impression the senses get at any time is true” (ibid., p. 78-79)⁶.

It seems that everything the Epicureans say about the senses is wrong. First, the senses can certainly be contradicted by reason. If you see two Gordon Browns in a conference room, you evidently need to investigate further. Second, the senses do convict each other. You may hear a noise as being of a car and later see that this is really the case. Thirdly, the senses do refute themselves for the very reason that they are not of equal reliability. Viewing an object close-by is obviously more reliable than viewing it from far away. Hence the Epicurean conclusion is wrong: not all the impressions the senses get are true.

However, when the Epicureans say all the sensory impressions are true, they mean they are true as facts: “our seeing and hearing are facts, just as having a pain is” (ibid., p. 79). For Epicurus, “The peculiar function of sensation is to apprehend only that which is present to it and moves it, such as colour, not to make the distinction that the object here is a different one from the object there” (ibid., p. 81). Hence “The eyes cannot discover the nature of things. So do not trump up this charge against the eyes, for a fault which belongs to the mind”. We should thus “distinguish opinion from self-evident” (ibid., p. 82). And, opinions, according to Epicurus, are true or false, “since they are judgements which we make on the basis of our impressions, and we judge some things correctly, but some incorrectly, either by adding and appending something to our impressions or by subtracting something from them, and in general falsifying irrational sensation” (ibid., p. 81).

If this is what the Epicureans mean by stating that all impressions are true, then it cannot be a response to the Pyrrhonist scepticism. Since all it says is that experience as experience is true, neither that there is truth in the world, nor that we can know the truth of the world, if there is truth in the world at all.

The Epicurean understanding of the senses may nevertheless give the impression that Epicurus is a gnosticist. But Epicurus is only a pseudo-gnosticist. Epicurus does claim that sensations, along with preconceptions and feelings, “are the criteria of truth” (ibid., p. 87). But how can the senses be the criteria of truth if they are not concerned with the truth of the world? When Epicurus says experience is always true, what he has in mind is experience without judgment about the world. For this reason, experience is only true as experience. For Epicurus, sensation is immune to the influence of memory, reason and other sensations and is hence “irrational”. All this differs from gnosticism in that, for gnosticism, experience is knowledge exactly because it is rational. Gnostic experience is rational in that it presupposes all the memory, reason, and other experiences. Gnostic experience is knowledge of the world, not knowledge of experience.

⁶ This view is recently advocated by Gupta who claims that experience is always reliable and “The fault, if any, lies with me and my beliefs—beliefs for which I am responsible” (2006, p. 29).

Hence, for experience to be a candidate for knowledge, it has to be able to be true or false. This is the idea we find in the Stoics. For the Stoics, impressions of rational animals are essentially rational, which means that they are “thought processes” (ibid., p. 237). Many sources suggest that the Stoics consider the senses as judgemental. According to the Stoics, “When we were explaining the power which exists in the senses, it was simultaneously made clear that many things are grasped and cognized by the senses; and this cannot take place without assent”. For the Stoics, “an animal must either have sense-perception removed from itself or it must be granted that kind of assent which lies in our power”. “It is no more possible for a living creature to refrain from assenting to something self-evident than for it to fail to pursue what appears appropriate to its nature” (ibid., p. 248). The Stoics thus propose a qualified identity of the mind and the senses: “For the mind, which is the source of the senses and is even itself identical to the senses, has a natural power it directs at the things by which it is moved” (Cicero 2006, 2.30). This is paralleled by the unnamed dogmatists in Sextus who claim that the same faculty is in one respect that of thought and another that of sensory experience.

Sensory impressions can thus be true or false. The Stoics then distinguish two kinds of impression, one cognitive, the other noncognitive. According to the Stoics, “Some sensory impressions arise from what is, and are accompanied by yielding and assent. But impressions also include appearances which are quasi-products of what is” (ibid. p. 237). Hence for the Stoics, “Of all impressions, some are cognitive, others not”. And “the impression arising from what is” is called the cognitive impression and is thus considered “the criterion of truth” (ibid., p. 241).

According to Sextus Empiricus, “The Stoics say there are three things which are linked together, scientific knowledge [episteme], opinion [doxa], and cognition [katalepsis] stationed between them. Scientific knowledge is cognition which is secure and firm and unchangeable by reason. Opinion is weak and false assent. Cognition in between these is assent belonging to a cognitive impression; and a cognitive impression, so they claim, is one which is true and of such a kind that it could not turn out false” (ibid., 254).

The picture seems to be this. Scientific knowledge is knowledge of necessity. Cognitive impressions are thus very much like what we call today knowledge of particulars and are the sources of inferential knowledge. Thus, “expertise is a tenor which advances methodically with impressions” (ibid., p. 259). For this reason the Stoics are well-qualified gnosticists.

4. Like Greek philosophers, modern philosophers are also fascinated by knowledge of necessity. Rationalists share a belief that it is possible, by the use of reason, to gain a

superior kind of knowledge to that derived from the senses.⁷ Descartes sees it as one of the first steps in metaphysics to “lead the mind away from the senses” (1985, p. 9). He believes that our inborn “natural light” or “light of reason” would enable us to “penetrate the secrets of the most recondite sciences” (1985, p. 400). Spinoza, for his part, considers “knowledge from random experience” perceptions that are “mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect” (1985/1988, p. 477). According to Spinoza, “It is of the nature of reason to perceive things truly, viz. as they are in themselves, i.e., not as contingent but as necessary” (1985/1988, p. 480). Leibniz, too, embraces the notion of an innate “natural light” of reason which, he argues, enables us to know “necessary truths”. According to him, “the senses can indeed help us after a fashion to know what is, but they cannot help us to know what must be or what cannot be otherwise” (1969, p. 550).

The fascination with knowledge of necessity does not itself disqualify rationalists from being gnosticists. There is a chance that Descartes agrees experience is knowledge, if he considers experience as cognitive.

On the face of it, Descartes may seem to deny that experience involves judgement. According to Descartes, “the perception I have of [an object] is a case not of vision or touch or imagination...but of purely mental scrutiny” (1996, p. 21). For this reason, knowledge does not come “from what the eye sees”, but “from the scrutiny of the mind alone” (1996, p. 21). For Descartes, “even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood” (1996, p. 22). Hence “something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind” (1996, p.21).

But again, as it is the case in Plato, the separation of sensory experience and reason is a matter of analysis, not a matter of fact. Concerning imagination and sensory perception, Descartes remarks: “I cannot...understand these faculties without me, that is, without an intellectual substance to inhere in...there is an intellectual act included in their essential definition” (1996, p. 54). According to Descartes, “there is in me a passive faculty of sensory perception, that is, a faculty for receiving and recognizing the ideas of sensible objects; but I could not make use of it unless there was also an active faculty...which produced or brought about these ideas” (1996, p. 55). And it later turns out, that the active faculty is in the “corporeal things” that produce the ideas in me (1996, p. 55). We may then think that there is a chance that Descartes is a gnosticist.

There is, nevertheless, one thing in Descartes which disqualifies him from being a gnosticist. Despite insisting that there is an intellectual act included in the essential definition of imagination and sensory perception, Descartes denies that sensory perception

⁷ It is nevertheless wrong to think of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz as pure “apriorists” who try to dispense with sensory experience entirely.

really involves judgement about the world. There are two reasons for this. First, for Descartes, sensory perception as a species of understanding does not involve judgement. Descartes brings all “the modes of thinking that we experience within ourselves” under two general headings: perception and volition. According to Descartes, perception is “the operation of the intellect”, which includes “sensory perception, imagination and pure understanding”, while volition is “the operation of the will” which includes “desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt” (1985, p. 204). As Descartes understands it, the operation of the intellect itself does not make a judgement. Neither sensory perception nor pure understanding is itself a judgement. According to Descartes, belief is assent to perceptions, and assent to perceptions and hence making a judgement is the act of the will.

Secondly, for Descartes, perception is a species of thinking only in the sense that it is not about the truth of the world. According to Descartes, “I certainly seem to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called ‘having a sensory perception’ is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking” (1996, p. 19). Descartes thus admonishes us to take experience as it is, not to believe that the world is really as we experience it. This then creates a gap between us and the world. Descartes is not saying that we do not usually believe what we experience. He actually observes that we very frequently take what we experience as the way the world is. His point is that we should not believe what we experience.

Hence, for Descartes, experience is not belief and we should take it that the world is as we experience it. Thus the conception of experience as a mode of thinking only makes Descartes qualify as a quasi-gnosticist.

Unlike Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza do not think that the light of reason in any sense resides in experience. Leibniz considers us to differ from animals only insofar as we are capable of a priori knowledge, rather than empirical knowledge. Empirical knowledge is something he feels that even animals are capable of attaining, at least to some degree.⁸ For he holds that empirical knowledge is basically a matter of memory, which animals have. He therefore states: “Men act like animals in so far as the succession of their perceptions is brought about by the principle of memory....In fact, we are mere empiricists in three quarters of all our actions” (1965, p. 152). From which it follows that, to the extent that we are mere empiricists, we are essentially no better than mere animals. Spinoza holds a view similar to Leibniz. Hence both Leibniz and Spinoza should be considered nongnosticists.

5. The fascination with knowledge of necessity can also be found in empiricists. For Locke, only intuitive and demonstrative knowledge which are concerned with necessary truth are

⁸ This is more radical than Locke. Although Locke believes animals perceive, it does not follow for him that they are capable of knowledge.

clear and certain (1975, p. 531; p. 537-8). Sensitive knowledge, according to Locke, goes “beyond bare probability” and yet does not reach perfectly to the degrees of certainty of either intuitive knowledge or demonstrative knowledge” (1975, p. 537). Hence while Locke holds that perception is “the first step and degree towards knowledge, and the inlet of all the materials of it”, he does not think perception itself actually constitute knowledge, not at least of any very interesting sort (1975, p. 149). Similarly, for Hume, “the only objects of the abstract sciences or of demonstration are quantity and number, and that all attempts to extend this more perfect species of knowledge beyond these bounds are mere sophistry and illusion”. Hence “the sciences of quantity and number...may safely...be pronounced the only proper objects of knowledge and demonstration” (1999, p. 209).

The fascination with knowledge of necessity, again, does not itself disqualify empiricists from being gnosticists. The first step that leads empiricists away from gnosticism is the familiar Cartesian scepticism about the senses. The Cartesian admonishment that we should not believe what we experience is crystallized in empiricism by introducing ideas or impressions as the direct objects of experience.⁹ Locke insists observation supplies our understanding with all the materials of thinking”. But what he means by “observation” is something “either about *external, sensible objects; or about the internal Operations of our Minds, perceived and reflected on by our selves*” (1975, p. 104). And when he does talk about observations about external, sensible objects, he insists what we perceive directly is idea instead of the external world. Hence, according to him, “’Tis evident, the Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the intervention of the *ideas* it has of them” (1975, p. 563; cf., e.g., Descartes, Third Meditation). Thus although he insists that we do have “*knowledge...of the existence of particular external Objects*”, he actually thinks that we can only infer the existence of the external world, but never perceive the world directly (1975, p. 537-8).

Berkeley follows Locke in saying that what we perceive directly are ideas instead of the external world. He thus plainly denies we can have empirical knowledge of any kind. According to Berkeley, “as it is impossible for me to see or feel anything without an actual sensation of that thing, so it is impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it” (1982, p. 25). In Berkeley, the empiricist idea leads directly to his rejection of the view that there is such a thing as “matter” or a material substratum underlying and giving rise to our various perceptions. This is to lose the world completely.

Hume, too, follows Locke in believing what we perceive directly are impressions. He claims that the common sense view which supposes that “the very images, presented by the

⁹ The understanding that what we perceive are ideas not the world is already found in Descartes. He writes: “from the fact that I perceive by my senses a great variety of colours, sounds, smells and tastes, as well as differences in heat, hardness and the like, I am correct in inferring that the bodies which are the source of these various sensory perceptions possess differences corresponding to them, though perhaps not resembling them (1996, p. 56).

senses, to be the external objects” is mistaken. And “nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object” (1999, 12.1, p. 201). For Hume, “every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind” (2000, 1.4.2, p. 129). The reason for this, according to Hume, is that our perception of an object may vary while the object itself remains the same. Hence what we perceive must be something other than the objects, namely, their impressions which are “internal and perishing existences” (1999, pp. 151-2). Thus, Hume claims, “no man, who reflects, ever doubted that the existences, which we consider, when we say, this house and that tree, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent”. This leads him to scepticism concerning our knowledge of “real existence and matter of fact” (1999, p. 108). If all reasonings concerning matter of fact is founded on the relation of cause and effect, which is only discoverable by experience, and experience can only give appearance, which is distinct from the real object, then even knowledge of particulars would be impossible. The reason is that the connection between appearances, which is provided by experience, does not entail a connection between the real objects.

There is also a second, more crucial, step which makes empiricists nongnosticists. This is the idea that, as a matter of fact, experience is devoid of reason. Despite his claim that it is in experience that “all our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself” (1975, p. 104), Locke is actually even further away from gnosticism than Descartes. The reason is that the faculty of knowing for Locke is different from the faculty of knowing for Descartes. For Descartes, the faculty of knowing is a capacity of understanding things in a certain way, while for Locke, the faculty of knowing is a capacity of receiving materials passively. Locke likens human mind to an “empty Cabinet” or “white paper” (1975, p. 55, p. 104). There are then no innate ideas as Descartes proposes. While it being true that there are no innate ideas, the image that the faculty of knowledge is simply an empty container waiting to be filled in is no less problematic.

According to Descartes, all human beings are endowed with an equally good faculty of knowledge. He writes: “the power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false—which is what we properly call ‘good sense’ or ‘reason’—is naturally equal in all men, and consequently that the diversity of our opinions does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others but solely because we direct our thoughts along different path and do not attend to the same thing” (1985, p. 111). In talking about this natural faculty of knowledge, Descartes very easily gives the impression that he is advocating the idea of innate knowledge. But this does not have to be the case.

Descartes does very frequently talks about innate ideas. According to Descartes, to

secure the foundation of knowledge, we should “make use of the intellect alone, carefully attending to the ideas implanted in it by nature” (1985, p. 224). However, what he means by innate ideas is still faculty of knowing instead of innate knowledge. Particularly, empirical knowledge, for Descartes, is not innate. He writes: “there is nothing in our ideas which is not innate to the mind or the faculty of thinking, with the sole exception of those circumstances which relate to experience, such as the fact that we judge that this or that idea which we now have immediately before our mind refers to a certain thing situated outside us” (1985, p. 304).

For Descartes, innate ideas are more like the concepts we need to obtain knowledge. According to Descartes, “the very ideas of the motions themselves and of the figures are innate in us”. Furthermore, “The ideas of pain, colours, sounds and the like must be all the more innate if, on the occasion of certain corporeal motions, our mind is to be capable of representing them to itself, for there is no similarities between these ideas and the corporeal motions” (1985, p. 304).

Descartes himself is actually very cautious not to run into the position that holds that we have innate ideas in the sense that we have innate knowledge. For Descartes, innate ideas are not something distinct from the faculty of thinking, although he does observe that there are certain thoughts which neither come from external objects nor determined by the will, but which come “solely from the power of thinking” (1985, p. 303). He writes: “This is the same sense as that in which we say that generosity is ‘innate’ in certain families, or that certain diseases such as gout or stones are innate in others: it is not so much that the babies of such families suffer from these disease in their mother’s womb, but simply that they are born with a certain ‘faculty’ or tendency to contract them” (1985, p. 303-304). Hence for Descartes, innate ideas are not anything other than “a natural power which enables us to know” (1985, p. 309). Descartes makes it clear that he has never written or even thought “that such ideas are *actual*, or that they are some sort of ‘forms’ which are distinct from our faculty of thinking” (1985, p. 309).

Admittedly, the idea of innate faculty is still problematic. However, it is important to appreciate the rationalist insight that we need a proper faculty to take in knowledge. The faculty of knowledge cannot be a container which passively takes in more and more materials. Locke sometimes says something very close to this. In his description of the acquisition of mathematical knowledge, he rightly observed that “A Child knows not that Three and Four are equal to Seven, till he comes to be able to count to Seven, and has got the Name and Idea of Equality” (1975, p. 55). A more accurate understanding of the matter is that a child does not have the *capacity* to know that three and four are equal to seven until she is able to count to seven and has knowledge about equality. Hence what is lacking in Locke is the rationalist insight that the faculty of knowledge has to be equipped with reason and concepts.

Now if we want to insist that a well-equipped faculty of knowledge is not innate, we will have to admit that the faculty of knowledge, just as knowledge, is also acquired. Children develop their faculties of knowing while developing knowledge. We certainly develop our capacity of knowing when we get to know more. No one would envisage teaching a baby advanced mathematics. Rationalists are wrong in saying that we have innate ideas before encountering the world but right in saying that we need knowledge to take in knowledge. Empiricists are right in saying that we do not have knowledge before encountering the world but are wrong in considering our capacity for knowledge as a passive, static white board ready for later inscription. We only have faculty of knowledge when we have knowledge; and we develop our faculty of knowledge while developing knowledge. The faculty of knowledge is a faculty equipped with knowledge. Both rationalists and empiricists are wrong in thinking that the faculty of knowledge has to be something innate.

Now, as far as the issue of gnosticism is concerned, the problem for empiricists is that there is no well-equipped faculty of knowledge, either innate or later developed, in experience. It is thus impossible for experience to be knowledge. Hence empiricists do not even qualify as quasi-agnostics, as Descartes does. With the natural light of reason residing in experience, Descartes can at least understand experience as a mode of thinking. Empiricists, however, without the protection of the natural light of reason, can only have an experience completely devoid of reason or understanding. The analytical separation of experience and reason we find in Plato and Descartes now becomes a factual separation. Experience becomes something in no sense gnostic. For this reason, empiricists are nongnostics.

6. Kant clearly affirms the empiricist emphasis on the role experience plays in our knowledge. For Kant, experience is the source of knowledge: “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience” (1929, B1). Hence, “In the order of time, therefore, we have no knowledge antecedent to experience, and with experience all our knowledge begins (1929, B1).

However, this affirmation is a qualified one: “though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience’ (1929, B1). Kant considers sensibility (receptivity) and understanding (spontaneity) as two fundamental sources of the mind from which our knowledge springs. For Kant, “Intuition and concept constitute, therefore, the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither concepts without an intuition in some way corresponding to them, nor intuition without concepts, can yield knowledge” (1929, A50/B74). Hence, for Kant, experience can only be the source of knowledge in the sense that it is a cooperation of sensibility and understanding. Kant thus rejects the

empiricist assumption that there can be a purely receptive apprehension of an object, without any conceptualization. He sees clearly that anything we have in thought must be first of all contained in experience.

Furthermore, for Kant, “the only use which the understanding can make of these concepts is to judge by means of them” (1929, A68/B93). Kant characterizes concepts as “predicates of possible judgments” (1929, A69/B94). Hence Kant is not just saying that concept gives experience a structure. What he means is that concepts make it possible for the subject to grasp an object by making judgements about the object. This can be seen from his distinction between judgements of perception and judgements of experience:

*Empirical judgments, insofar as they have objective validity, are **judgments of experience**, those, however, that are only subjectively valid I call mere **judgments of perception**. The latter do not require a pure concept of understanding, but only the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject. But the former always demand, in addition to the representations of sensory intuition, special *concepts originally generated in the understanding*, which are precisely what make the judgment of experience *objectively valid*. (2004, §18)*

As Allison points out correctly: “The distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience can be schematically formulated as the contrast between judgments of the form ‘It seems to me that p’, and those of the form ‘It is the case that p’”. Hence “The function of the categories is to convert claims of the former sort into the latter” (1983, p. 150).¹⁰

For this reason, experience has to be knowledge in the literal sense. Kant claims: “Experience is an empirical knowledge, that is, a knowledge which determines an object through perception” (1929, B218/A176). Kant is thus a perfect and explicit gnosticist. According to Kant, understanding works up “the raw material of the sensible impressions into that knowledge of objects which is entitled experience” (1929, B218/A176). He thus claims, “empirical knowledge...is what we entitle experience” (1929, B147). Or, “experience is knowledge by means of connected perceptions” (1929, B161).

8. The aim of the thesis is to explore the Kantian insight and argue for the idea that experience is knowledge.

When I say experience is knowledge, I am following the traditional understanding of

¹⁰ Chignell, nevertheless, thinks that, in the strict sense, judgement for Kant “plays a role similar to that played by ‘proposition’ in contemporary English-language philosophy. It is the logical object of an attitude...and always has a subject-predicate structure”. Hence, he concludes: “although Kant speaks loosely of “forming” or “making” judgments, what he really means is forming assents which have a subject-predicate judgment as their object” (2007, p. 35).

knowledge which says knowledge is a kind of justified true belief. Hence gnosticism can be rephrased as the idea that experience, in so far as it is the source of knowledge, is itself knowledge, namely a kind of justified true belief. The traditional understanding of knowledge is nevertheless not uncontroversial. The first task of the thesis is then to defend the traditional understanding of knowledge.

2. Knowledge and Justification

1. Knowledge is essentially true. But knowledge is not to be equated with truth. Knowledge is our grasp of truth. A typical way for us to grasp truth is to take truth as truth, that is, to believe truth as truth. For this reason, we may say, knowledge is true belief.

Knowledge should not be true by luck.¹¹ The truth of knowledge, we may say, is warranted in a certain way. It is important to note that I am here using the term “warrant” in a special sense. When I say the truth of knowledge is warranted I mean it is not arrived at by luck, I am not saying that the truth of knowledge is warranted as true. For this reason, I am using the term “warrant” in a sense different from the term “justification”, which is usually considered exchangeable with it. When I say knowledge is justified, I mean it is justified as true, that is, the subject has a reason for taking the truth as true. When I say knowledge is warranted, I mean it is warranted that the truth of knowledge is not arrived at by luck, that is, there is a kind of reliability behind the subject’s grasp of the truth.

A justification of knowledge is, of course, one way of warranting that the truth of knowledge is not arrived at by luck. As rational animals, we mostly, if not always, hold a belief for some reasons. By reason, I mean normative reason that provides one’s belief with a rational base. The reason for holding a belief is then its justification. The justification of a true belief provides a rational reliability for one’s grasp of truth and is thus a way of warranting that one’s grasp of truth is not arrived at by luck. We may then say that knowledge needs to be warranted by its justification.

That justification is a way of distinguishing knowledge from mere true belief or lucky guessing is very well recognized by, for example, Plato. To the question “why knowledge is prized far more highly than right opinion and why they are different”, Plato gives the following answer In *Meno*:

For true opinions, as long as they remain, are a fine thing and all they do is good, but they are not willing to remain long, and they escape from a man’s mind, so that they are not worth much until one ties them down by (giving) an account of the reason why...After they are tied down, in the first place they become knowledge, and then they remain in place. That is why knowledge is prized higher than correct opinion, and knowledge differs from correct opinion in being tied down (1997b, 97e-98).

To give “an account of the reason why” is what we call today “to justify”. Hence what Plato

¹¹ According to Peter Unger’s non-accidentality analysis, S knows that p if and only if it is not at all accidental that S is right about its being the case that p (1968).

means is that knowledge needs justification.

Knowledge, then, is true belief warranted by justification, namely justified true belief. This, roughly speaking, is the traditional conception of knowledge.

The traditional conception of knowledge is a way of construing the basic understanding that knowledge is a grasp of truth that is not arrived at by luck. The basic understanding contains two principles. The first is “the grasp of truth” principle, the second “not by luck” principle. This basic understanding of knowledge I take as uncontroversial.

However, the traditional conception of knowledge, as a way of construing the basic understanding, is not wholly uncontroversial. First, it is argued that belief is not the only way of grasping truth. Hence knowledge does not have to be a species of belief. Williamson notably claims that knowledge is unanalysable and we should “abandon the attempt to state necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge in terms of belief” (2000, p. 5).¹² Second, it is argued that justification is not the only way of warranting that the truth of knowledge is not arrived at by luck. It can then be argued that justification is not essential to knowledge. Hence Williamson insists that knowledge occupies a central status in epistemology. He claims, “Knowledge figures...primarily as what justifies, not as what gets justified” (2000, p. 9). This means that the essential feature of knowledge is that it justifies belief, not that it is justified. Williamson complains that in traditional epistemology, “the concept of knowledge was assumed to be unavailable for use in an elucidation of the concept of justification or evidence, on pain of circularity” (2000, pp. 8-9). For Williamson, justification is to be elucidated in terms of knowledge, not the other way round.

Williamson thus insists that knowledge is not analysable, that is, “the concept know cannot be analysed into more basic concepts” (2000, p. 33). Particularly, knowledge is not to be understood in terms of justification or belief. It is, in Williamson’s view, the other way round: justification and belief are to be understood in terms of knowledge. Justification is the feature or function of knowledge, while belief is what is justified by knowledge. For Williamson, belief is not “conceptually prior to knowledge” (2000, p. 10). On the contrary, knowledge is prior to belief in the order of explanation. In this way knowledge occupies a conceptual priority in epistemology. We can thus call this alternative conception of knowledge the knowledge priority thesis.¹³

A salient feature of the knowledge priority thesis is its emphasis on the separation of knowledge and belief. This may be traced back to Plato. In his *Republic*, Plato argues that knowledge and belief are wholly different, indeed incompatible, powers or states of mind. This is related to the distinction between the realm of Forms and the world of everyday life. For Plato, the realm of Forms is organized beneath the Form of the Good and only

¹² See also Williams 1973, p. 146-147.

¹³ The idea is couched in broader terms in Hyman by understanding knowledge as “the ability to be guided by the facts” (2006, p. 900). See also Hyman 1999.

graspable through reasoning, while the world of everyday life depends upon the realm of Forms and is revealed by our senses. The world of everyday life is metaphysically and hence cognitively deficient. Accordingly, Plato distinguishes two kinds of people, those who know and those who opine (1997c, 476d). Those who know are philosophers; they “in each case embrace the thing itself” (1997c, 480). Those who opine “opine everything but have no knowledge of anything they opine” (1997c, 479e). Hence for Plato, those who know always know, those who opine always opine. This then naturally separates knowledge and belief as different kinds of states or powers. Knowledge is an infallible power while opinion is a fallible one (1997c, 477e). Hence knowledge and opinion take different things as their objects. Knowledge and opinion “set over something different”, “the knowable and the opinable cannot be the same” (1997c, 478b).

Although the sharp distinction between “philosophers” and lay people is no longer considered plausible, the separation of belief and knowledge survives. Cook Wilson is a 20th century advocate of the separation. He writes: “Belief is not knowledge and the man who knows does not believe at all what he knows; he knows it” (1926, p. 100). This naturally leads to the idea that knowledge is unanalysable. Cook Wilson thus claims: “We cannot construct knowing—the act of apprehending—out of any elements” (1926, p. 803). This is exactly the idea we find in the knowledge priority thesis.

As I said at the beginning of the chapter, belief is a typical way of grasping truth and justification warrants that the truth of knowledge is not arrived at by luck. Now, if we follow the knowledge priority thesis and deny that knowledge is a kind of justified true belief, we may then wonder how we can stay with the basic understanding of knowledge. First, how can we grasp truth without believing truth as truth? Second, how can we warrant that the truth of knowledge is not arrived at by luck without our grasp of truth being justified? I am not saying that these two questions cannot be answered. The point is that these two questions have to be satisfactorily answered before any alternative conception of knowledge is established.

The advocates of the knowledge priority thesis nevertheless find the traditional conception of knowledge unsatisfactory and thus claim that the knowledge priority thesis is the only choice. First, Gettier’s counter-examples, if they work, seem to show that the traditional conception is not sufficient. Second, Radford’s counter-examples seem to show that the traditional conception is not necessary. Thirdly, the traditional conception, argues Williamson, simply cannot be right because it involves a hybrid conception of knowledge which takes truth as a separable external condition for knowledge.

The aim of this chapter is to defend a version of the traditional conception of knowledge against the above objections. First, Gettier’s challenge can be met if we understand the traditional conception of knowledge in the right way. Second, Radford’s counter-examples do not count as knowledge and hence cannot show that the traditional

conception is not necessary. Thirdly, there is a version of the traditional conception of knowledge which is in direct contrast to the mistaken hybrid conception of knowledge. Hence the traditional conception of knowledge is sufficient, necessary, and correct. The conclusion of the chapter is that we can have a version of the traditional conception of knowledge without losing the insight of the knowledge priority thesis, namely knowledge plays a role in justification.

2. The traditional conception of knowledge is challenged by Gettier who argues that the triple condition stated in it, which consists of truth, belief, and justification, does not “constitute a sufficient condition for the truth of the proposition that S knows that P” (1963, p. 13). Gettier presents two cases in which the triple condition is satisfied while it is not correct to say that the subject possesses knowledge.

In Gettier’s first case, Smith holds a justified conjunctive belief that “Jones is the man who will get the job, and Jones has ten coins in his pocket”. Based on this belief, he infers that “The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket”. But unknown to Smith, he himself, not Jones, will get the job. And also unknown to Smith, he himself has ten coins in his pocket. Hence Smith’s justified true belief that “The man who will get the job has ten coins in his pocket” is not knowledge because Smith bases his belief “on a count of the coins in Jones’s pocket, whom he falsely believes to be the man who will get the job” (1963, p. 14).

In Gettier’s second case, Smith holds a justified belief that “Jones owns a Ford”. And although he is totally ignorant of his friend Brown’s whereabouts, he is justified in believing it is true that “Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona”. As it happens, Jones does not own a Ford, but is at present driving a rented car. And by the sheerest coincidence, and entirely unknown to Smith, Brown is in Barcelona. Hence Smith’s justified true belief that “Either Jones owns a Ford, or Brown is in Barcelona” is not knowledge since Smith holds the belief for the wrong reason.

In both cases, Smith holds a justified true belief which does not count as knowledge for the reason that the justified true belief is arrived at by luck. Gettier concludes that this shows that the triple condition is not sufficient for knowledge and hence justified true belief is not knowledge.

Gettier seems to be right in saying that the unqualified triple condition is not sufficient for knowledge. But we need to be clear about why it is not sufficient and in what sense it challenges the traditional conception of knowledge.

What Gettier’s cases really show seems to be that justification cannot warrant that a true belief is not arrived at by luck. We then need to investigate what is wrong with the justifications involved in these two cases. It is clear then in both these two cases a true belief

is justified by a justified false belief. Hence the problem with the justification is that the justifier is a false belief. And knowledge, of course, should not be justified by a false belief. For a true belief's being justified by a false belief does not help to warrant that the true belief is not arrived at by luck.

The problem, really, is with Gettier's understanding of the traditional conception of knowledge. Gettier seems to construe the traditional conception as setting out a triple condition for knowledge which has its three elements separated from each other. But this is not a correct understanding of the traditional conception of knowledge. To see the point, we shall start with the condition of justification.

Gettier is certainly right in saying that "it is possible for a person to be justified in believing a proposition that is in fact false" (1963, p. 13). This means that justification should not be understood as something special for knowledge. Not only knowledge but also belief may need justification. This is not just to say that there is always a reason for holding a belief. There is obviously a difference between reason and justification. My reason (that on which I base my belief) may not justify it. Justification requires a kind of normativity between the justifier and the justified. In other words, justification involves correct reasoning. Hence the point is that in many cases, belief, just like knowledge, also needs justification in that it has to be derived from the justifier through a correct procedure of reasoning. The only thing is that some beliefs are well justified, while some others are poorly justified. Hence the difference between knowledge and mere true belief is not necessarily that the former requires justification while the latter does not. The difference is that the justification of knowledge is more demanding than the justification of mere true belief or false belief. In Gettier's two cases, what Smith has are in fact mere true, albeit justified, beliefs. They are mere true beliefs because they are poorly justified, namely, based on false beliefs. And it is for this reason that they are not knowledge.

The problem is thus with Gettier's understanding of justification. He seems to make no distinction between the justification of false belief or mere true belief and the justification of knowledge. For Gettier, the justification of knowledge can be exactly the same as the justification of false belief or mere true belief. For this reason, knowledge and mere true belief or false belief are understood as sharing the same kind of justification. This obviously is not the right understanding of the matter. The justification of knowledge is essentially different from the justification of mere true belief or false belief. As I mentioned above, the justification of knowledge is more demanding than the justification of belief. Then exactly how demanding is the justification of knowledge? The first thing we should see is that knowledge should not be based on a false belief. A false belief can justify either a false belief or a mere true belief, but it cannot justify knowledge, as we have seen in Gettier's cases. Hence the justification of knowledge should not involve any falsity.

This may allow some flexibility, though. Suppose that for fire safety regulation, school

classes should be smaller than 50. A fire expert counts the class number as 47 and thus believes it is less than 50 and hence knows it is within the safe limit. But the class number is actually 48. In this case we may still want to say that the fire expert knows that the class is within the safe limit, although her belief that the class is within the safe limit seems to be based on a false belief, namely, the class is 47.¹⁴ The “no falsity” requirement can accommodate cases like this. The reason is that the fire expert’s knowledge is based on the belief that the number of the class is less than 50, which is true, although the truth belief on which his knowledge is based is not accurate. The fire expert’s belief about the number of the class, as far as the safe limit is concerned, is not false; it is just that it is not accurate. The fire expert’s justification of her belief that the class is safe does not crucially depend on the exact number of the class. Hence in this case the justification of the fire expert’s knowledge does not involve or depend on something that is false; it does not rest on any false beliefs.

It can be objected, however, that there are cases in which even justification involving no falsity is not sufficient for knowledge. Consider Goldman’s well-known case of barn-facades (1976, p. 44-45). Henry drives through the countryside in which what appear to be barns are, with the exception of just one, mere barn facades. From the road Henry is driving on, these barn facades look exactly like real barns. Henry happens to be looking at the only real barn and believes that there’s a barn over there. In this case, the true belief that it is a barn is justified by an experience, in which no falsity is involved. Yet Henry’s belief is plausibly viewed as being true merely because of luck. Had Henry noticed one of the barn-facades instead, he would also have believed that there’s a barn over there. Therefore, according to the “not by luck” principle of the basic understanding of knowledge, Henry’s belief does not qualify as knowledge.

The case of barn facades is different from Gettier’s cases in that it is not so obvious that there is any falsity involved in the justification. Hence it seems to suggest that even justification that involves no falsity does not guarantee knowledge. But still, there must be something wrong with the justification and we need to be clear about why the justification in this case does not warrant that the truth of knowledge is not arrived at by luck.

The crucial point is to see that the experience of seeing the facade of a barn is not sufficient to justify the belief that there a barn there. Only the experience of seeing a barn can justify the belief about a barn. And the experience of seeing the facade of a barn is different from the experience of seeing a barn. To see a barn is not just to see its facade. We see a barn not only by seeing its facade, but also by seeing its sides and back. Seeing its sides and back gives us reason to believe that it is a barn instead of a barn facade. Hence the experience of seeing a barn has to be justified as an experience of seeing a barn by being distinguished from the experience of seeing a mere barn facade. For this reason the justifier

¹⁴ I owe this example to J. J. Valberg.

has to be justified as well.

Hence, Henry's belief does not qualify as knowledge because his belief that there is a barn there is not based on the experience which is justified as an experience of seeing the barn. From the road Henry is driving on, he is not able to tell the difference between a barn-facade and a barn. And without being able to distinguish a barn from a barn-facade, Henry cannot justify his experience as an experience of seeing a barn, even though he is looking at a barn. All Henry can know is that he is either seeing a barn or a barn-facade, no matter which one he happens to look at. For this reason, even when he happens to look at the barn, his belief that it is a barn is not justified by his experience.

It can be objected that this is to ask for too much. As Moore observed, "generally, when we talk of seeing an object we only mean seeing some *part* of it. There is always more in any object which we see, than the *part* of it which we see" (1953, p. 33). But there is a difference between seeing part of an object and being *restricted* to seeing part of an object to the extent that the subject cannot tell if she is seeing the object or something else which shares the same part with the object. Although seeing an object is almost always seeing part of it, this does not mean seeing any part of an object is sufficient for seeing the object. To see an object, we need to see the part of the object which is typical of the object so that this part of the object is sufficient for distinguishing it from a different object. In the barn facade example, seeing the facade of a barn is not sufficient for seeing a barn because the facade of a barn is not the part of a barn which distinguishes a barn from a barn facade.¹⁵

It can be further objected that usually seeing the facade of a barn is sufficient for seeing a barn—who would know there are barn facades in the area? There is then an alternative explanation of the case. Henry's belief that he is seeing a barn is based on the false background understanding that there is no barn facade in the area.¹⁶ Based on this false background understanding, he is justified in seeing the facade of a barn as a barn. Henry's belief that he is seeing a barn is thus poorly justified, that is, justified by a false belief.

Hence Henry's belief is justified either by something that is not itself justified or by something that is justified by a false belief. In whichever way we understand the case, Henry's belief that he is seeing a barn does not count as knowledge because the justifier is defective, that is, the justifier is either unjustified or justified by a false belief. There is then a further lesson we can learn from the case of barn facades: knowledge has to be justified by something that itself is justified. The experience of seeing the facade of a barn cannot be justified as an experience of seeing a barn and hence is not sufficient for justifying the belief that it is barn that is over there. Thus the justifier of knowledge has to be *sufficiently* justified, namely justified by a true belief.

¹⁵ Cf. Kalderon 2008, p. 941-2

¹⁶ I owe this point to J. J. Valberg.

Now justification should involve no falsity and the justifier has to be sufficiently justified. I shall call a justification that involves no falsity and has a sufficiently justified justifier a sufficient justification. Knowledge can then be understood as sufficiently justified true belief. To distinguish this version of the traditional conception of knowledge from other versions of the traditional conception that might be vulnerable to Gettier's counterexamples, I shall call it the qualified traditional conception of knowledge. According to the traditional conception of knowledge, the justifier has to be belief. It then follows that the justifier has to be a sufficiently justified true belief, namely knowledge. It turns out that knowledge can only be justified by knowledge. This I call the gnostic criterion of knowledge justification.¹⁷

Knowledge justification is in a sense a sagacious procedure. The person who knows not only holds a true belief that is justified, but also holds a true belief that is justified by something that is justified and true. Knowledge has to be a true belief justified by knowledge. In this way we can still stay with the traditional conception of knowledge while appreciating Gettier's point that an unqualified justified true belief does not count as knowledge.¹⁸

An apparent problem for the gnostic criterion of knowledge justification is that it seems to give a circular analysis of knowledge. If knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief and a sufficient justifier has to be knowledge, then it seems that we have to understand knowledge in terms of knowledge. The gnostic criterion of justification, I shall say, is not circular in the sense that we need to explain justification in terms of knowledge. To say knowledge justifies knowledge is not to define justification in terms of knowledge. It is only to set a condition for knowledge justification. To justify is to give normative reasons. Hence justification itself does not need to be defined in terms of knowledge. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that there is a sense that the gnostic criterion is circular: it cannot explain knowledge without appealing to the concept of knowledge, when trying to elaborate what kind of justification is needed for knowledge. But what I mean to give here is a picture of knowledge, not an analysis of knowledge. According to this picture, a piece of knowledge cannot be understood isolated from other pieces of knowledge. Being justified by knowledge is sufficient for a true belief to be knowledge.

Hence the lesson we can learn from Gettier's counter-examples and the case of the barn facades is that we need a rigorous criterion for knowledge justification. Knowledge justifies knowledge. Knowledge justifies and is justified by knowledge. The qualified traditional conception of knowledge, which says knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief, namely, true belief justified by knowledge, is thus sufficient.

¹⁷ Sellars says something very close to this when he says: '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' (1956, §36). Only one amendment: knowledge is not just something to justify what one says; it justifies what one knows. And belief would be something justifying what one says.

¹⁸ Feldman (1974) tries to mend the defect in Gettier's argument and suggest even a true belief justified by knowledge cannot be guaranteed status of knowledge. But what he finds problem with is actually induction instead of justification.

3. The gnostic criterion of knowledge justification shares with the knowledge priority thesis the understanding that knowledge plays a justificatory role. Starting with this common understanding, I shall now go on to argue that the traditional conception of knowledge is indispensable or necessary.

Radford describes a number of cases to show that one may have knowledge that P without being sure that P. Radford's counter-examples, if they work in the way he suggests, seem to show that the traditional conception is not necessary. Specifically, knowledge needs neither to be belief nor to be justified.

In Radford's first example, a man *claims* that he knows he locked the car but is not absolutely sure that he did and decides to go back and check. Radford thinks that in this case the man knows that he locked the car although he is not sure about it. He thus claims that "a man could know that P and yet not be sure that P" (1966, p. 1).

But we certainly should not think that the man knows that he locked the car just because he claims so. There must be an independent criterion for ascribing knowledge. According to the basic understanding of knowledge, knowledge has to be a grasp of truth that is not arrived at by luck. The way that the man grasps the truth seems to be his claim that he knows that he locked the car. But it is not clear in what sense his grasp of the truth is not arrived at by luck. If his claim is based on remembering checking when leaving the car or any other relevant details, then we may say his grasp of the truth is not arrived at by luck. But this obviously is not the case, otherwise he would not be uncertain about it and feel the need to go back and check. We may then suppose that his grasp of the truth is based on his background understanding of his own habit: he always locks the car but is never certain about this. And in this sense, we may say, his grasp of the truth is not arrived at by luck. But if it is true that the man possesses this background understanding, then he should not be uncertain about whether or not he has locked the car. His background understanding is obviously not sufficient for him to be sure that he has locked the car and hence cannot be the kind of thing that warrants that the man's grasp of the truth is not arrived at by luck.

In ascribing knowledge, we need to be clear about the man's basis for claiming that he possesses the relevant knowledge. The reliability of the man's habit can certainly be a rational basis for the claim. The problem rests, however, in the fact that the man obviously does not take it as a rational basis for his "knowing" that he has locked the car, otherwise he would not decide to go and check. Hence although the man claims that he knows, he actually does not really think that he knows.

We do not have to cleave to the traditional conception of knowledge in order to see the point. The knowledge priority thesis is in an even better position to see that the man in the above example does not really know that he locked the car. According to the knowledge

priority thesis, knowledge justifies belief. Now if the man knows that he locked the car, he should be justified in believing that he locked the car and there is no need to go back and check. But as it is described in the case, the man in fact believes that he needs to go back and check. If we follow the knowledge priority thesis and insist it is essential that knowledge justify belief, then there is no reason to believe that the man knows that he locked the car. Hence, according to the criterion set by the knowledge priority thesis, the example actually shows that when the man is not sure that he locked the car, he does not know that he locked the car.

It can be objected that, although it is the function of knowledge that it justifies belief, there might be cases that knowledge, for whatever reasons, fails to perform the function. But this reply is not plausible. First, if knowledge is defined by its function of justifying belief, then it is not easy to see how we can attribute knowledge to the subject when there is nothing there to perform the function. Second, even if we grant that there might be cases where knowledge fails to perform the function of justifying belief, there is still no reason to insist that the subject possesses the relevant knowledge. All we can say is that we do not know, in this case, whether or not the subject possesses the relevant knowledge.

In Radford's second example, a librarian thinks but is not sure that they have sold W. J. Locke's novel for pulp, so she decides to go and check. Her colleague's comment is that "she isn't sure about anything", although "she knows everything about this library". This is a case of third person knowledge ascription. The reason that her colleague makes the comment is that every time when the librarian says something about the library, it always turns out that she is right, although she is never sure about what she says. Radford thinks that this is another case that a person knows that P without being sure that P. But again, according to the priority thesis, if the librarian does know that the novel has been sold for pulp, then she should be justified in believing that there is no need to go and check. Hence the very fact that the librarian decides to go and check shows that she does not actually know that the novel has been sold. Or, we should at least say, in this case, there is no reason to insist that the librarian possesses the relevant knowledge.

Another problem with this second example is that, judging by the context, the librarian's colleague ascribe knowledge that P to her without knowing that P is true. The ascription of knowledge is based on the librarian's own reliability. This seems to be a very unusual case of third person knowledge ascription. It seems very implausible that one can ascribe knowledge that P to someone without one's knowing that P is true.

The above two examples are supposed to be the cases where the subject knows that P while is not sure that P. Radford's third example is more ambitious. It means to show that there can be knowledge when there is no belief at all. The third example is as follows. In a bet, Jean gets the dates of some events in English history correct without believing that he knows or has ever learnt anything about these. Radford claims this shows that "although in

this situation Jean knew that P, he was not certain, or sure, or confident that P. Indeed he was fairly certain that his answer to the question was wrong, i.e. that not-P, since he believed it to be a pure guess in a situation where only one of many such guesses could be correct” (p. 4). Moreover, Jean is not justified to be sure because he has forgotten that he has learnt something about these. According to Radford, we then have a case where knowledge is devoid of both belief and justification.

It is important to be clear about in what sense there is no belief involved in Jean’s guess work. We can detect two reasons in Radford’s example for saying that Jean’s knowledge does not involve belief. First, when being invited to do a quiz in English history, he is very unwilling to do it and claims he does not know any English history. He only agrees to do it when he is prepared to guess and is glad that the bet is not for real money. Second, although he can sometimes (but not always) give correct answers when pressed, he still refuses to double up. But it seems that these only suggest that Jean does not believe that he knows that P when he guesses P, not that he does not believe that P when he guesses that P. A guess can be considered as a weak form of belief. As a special case, a total blind guess is not a belief at all, since in this case, the subject would not believe what she guesses. But Jean does not seem to be making a blind guess. So there must be a certain degree of belief involved. It is nevertheless true that what Jean possesses is not a firm belief, and it is for this reason that it is a guess.

We may feel that there are good reasons to ascribe knowledge to Jean in this case. First, although Jean takes himself to be guessing, it is very unlikely that one can really get the dates correct just by guessing. Hence, we may say that Jean’s grasp of truth is manifested by the correct answers he gives. Second, although Jean at first claims that he has never studied any English history, he later suspects that perhaps he picked that up in a Shakespeare course or somewhere else and finally remembers that he did once have to learn some dates. Jean’s grasp of truth is then warranted not being arrived at by luck by the fact that he has studied the materials and has thus been exposed to the relevant facts.

Nevertheless, we may also have reasons to think that Jean does not really possess the relevant knowledge. First, Jean only believes his answer is correct when his interlocutor assures him this. If his interlocutor told him that the incorrect answer he gives is correct, he would also believe him and take his incorrect answer as correct. We can then say that Jean does not really grasp the truth. Second, the fact that one has been taught something does not warrant that one’s grasp of truth is not arrived at by luck. It is always possible that one has not learnt what one was taught and forgets what one has learnt. And judging by the way Jean behaves, he seems to have forgotten some part of what he has learnt, and as to the part he hasn’t forgotten completely, he cannot remember it clearly.

Hence the right way to describe the situation seems to be as follows. Jean used to possess the relevant knowledge; but strictly speaking, he does not possess the knowledge

when he is being asked the questions, since he cannot remember it with certainty. Jean only re-obtains the relevant knowledge when the correct answer he gives is assured and the incorrect answer is corrected by his interlocutor, if he can now remember the correct dates with certainty. The only reason that Jean can re-obtain the relevant knowledge is that he believes what his interlocutor says. This shows belief is necessary for knowledge.

We do lose substantial part of our knowledge from time to time. Some we forget completely. Some we remember partly. Some we remember vaguely. The possession and loss of knowledge do not always have a clear cut. It is sometimes a matter of degree. But we still need a conception of knowledge which gives us the idea about the kind of knowledge we really possess, not the kind of knowledge we half possess. And the cases that do not measure up the standard of knowledge we really possess do not count as knowledge, although they may in a certain sense be close to it. And whenever we really possess knowledge, we hold the relevant belief as well.

Williamson describes a case similar to Radford's third example:

When the unconfident examinee, taking herself to be guessing, reliably gives correct dates as a result of forgotten history lesson, it is not an obvious misuse of English to classify her as knowing that the battle of Agincourt was in 1415 without believing that it was. (2000, p. 42)

We then have a case where one has knowledge without holding the corresponding belief, namely, one knows that P without believing that P.

Williamson seems to be right in saying that the nervous examinee does not believe that P. His reasoning is like this. If the examinee takes herself to be guessing that P, then she does not believe that P is true. And if she does not believe that P is true, then she does not believe that P. This seems to be a correct reasoning. We nevertheless need to note that the examinee's not believing P does not necessarily mean that she believes not-P. It is more likely the case that she is just too nervous to think clearly and cannot judge if it is true that P, what she is doing is just to write down whatever occurs to her.

But is it true that the nervous examinee knows that P? We can detect two reasons for answering the question affirmatively. First, the answers she gives are reliably correct. This shows her grasp of the truth. The examinee's reliability in giving correct answers may also show that her grasp of the truth is warranted not being arrived at by luck. It's very unlikely that she can hit on correct answers like this solely by chance. This seems to suggest that the correct answers given by the examinee are supported by something more reliable and robust. It seems that there must be something with her which makes her give the correct answers. And this something, as Williamson sees it, is knowledge. Second, the examinee's grasp of the truth may be further warranted by the fact that she has studied the materials and has thus

been exposed to the relevant facts.

Given that the nervous examinee gives reliably correct answers, we may agree that she grasps the truth in a certain sense. But it is not clear in what sense her grasp of the truth is warranted as not being arrived at by luck. We all know that people are liable to make mistakes when they are nervous. In this sense it is a lucky thing that the nervous examinee does not make mistakes. If the nervous examinee takes herself to be guessing, she will also take it to be a lucky thing that she gets all the answers correct. And it is indeed a lucky thing to be able to do so, given her nervous psychological condition. The very fact that she is nervous and cannot judge if the answers she produces are correct makes her grasp of truth unwarranted.

Moreover, there is a further reason to think that the examinee does *not* possess the relevant knowledge. Maybe the nervous examinee can luckily fare well in her exam. But a slightly different situation would show more clearly that what she possesses is not knowledge. Suppose the nervous examinee is now a nervous interviewee for a teaching job in history. Being asked about the dates of some historical events, she gives the correct answer but admits that she is guessing. Would she be considered qualified to teach history? This answer is obviously “No”. To teach is to pass on knowledge to the students. The nervous interviewee certainly cannot teach if she takes herself to be guessing. The reason is that she does not possess the knowledge to pass on to someone else.

The point is not that one will lose one’s knowledge once one gets nervous. It is that if one is so nervous that she cannot judge whether or not P is true, then she loses her knowledge that P to a certain extent. One’s possession of knowledge that P is affected to the extent that one’s belief that P is affected. This only shows the close connection between knowing that P and believing that P.

To conclude, Radford and Williamson’s cases show that justified belief is essential to knowledge. First, one’s grasp of truth can only be warranted not being arrived at by luck when it is a justified belief. This means both belief and justification are essential to knowledge. Belief is the only way of grasping truth that may get a chance to be warranted not being arrived at by luck, and justification is the only way one’s grasp of truth get warranted. Second, one’s grasp of truth can only be used to justify a belief when it is itself a justified belief. Knowledge has to be justified belief. This is required by its capacity of justifying belief. In order for knowledge to be able to justify belief, it has to be itself justified belief. When one is not justified in believing that P, one does not possess the ability to justify other beliefs with P.

The idea that knowledge has to be a justified belief can be found in Kant’s distinction between opining, believing, and knowledge:

The holding of a thing to be true, or the subjective validity of the judgment, in its

relation to conviction (which is at the same time objectively valid), has the following three degrees: *opining*, *believing*, and *knowing*. *Opining* is such holding of a judgment as is consciously insufficient, not only objectively, but also subjectively. If our holding of the judgment be only subjectively sufficient, and is at the same time taken as being objectively insufficient, we have what is termed *believing*. Lastly, when the holding of a thing to be true is sufficient both subjectively and objectively, it is *knowledge*. The subjective sufficiency is termed *conviction* (for myself), the objective sufficiency is termed *certainty* (for everyone). (1929, B850/A822)

For Kant, knowledge is “the holding of a thing to be true” that is sufficient both subjectively and objectively. To be sufficient objectively, of course, is to be true. And to be sufficient subjectively is to be a justified belief, or as Kant terms it, to be a conviction. Knowledge is not only true but also a conviction. This is what I mean by saying knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief. Knowledge cannot justify a belief without being itself a justified belief. Or, to put it in Kant’s terminology, something that is not subjectively sufficient cannot give rise to a conviction which is subjectively sufficient. And knowledge would fail its justificatory function if it cannot lead to a conviction.

4. I have argued that Radford and Williamson’s cases actually show that knowledge cannot justify belief without itself being justified belief. And hence, if we follow the knowledge priority thesis and understand the function of justifying belief as the primary feature of knowledge, we will have to say that knowledge has to be a species of justified belief. This, nevertheless, does not mean that the justificatory role of knowledge could be substituted by the justificatory role of justified belief, although it is true that the justificatory role of knowledge could be substituted by sufficiently justified true belief.

One reason that Williamson thinks that knowledge is not a species of belief is that the justificatory role cannot be substituted by the justificatory role of justified true belief, if the latter does play a role as such. This is how Williamson depicts the way knowledge justifies belief:

Knowledge can justify a belief which is not itself knowledge, for the justification relation is not deductive. For example, I may be justified in believing that someone is a murderer by knowing that he emerged stealthily with a bloody knife from the room in which the body was subsequently discovered, even if he is in fact innocent and I therefore do not know that he is a murderer. (2000, p. 9)

Williamson is right in saying that “knowledge can justify a belief which is not itself

knowledge” when “the justification relation is not deductive”. But we should also note that knowledge justifies knowledge when the justification relation is deductive. A deductive justification leads us from knowledge to knowledge. Knowledge justifies knowledge, while mere belief justifies mere belief.

On the other hand, if all we want is to justify a belief which is not itself knowledge, then a justified belief can do an equally good job here. I may be justified in believing that someone is a murderer by being justified in believing that he emerged stealthily with a bloody knife from the room in which the body was subsequently discovered. In fact, the reason that I can justify my belief that the person is the murderer is exactly that I *believe* that he emerged stealthily with a bloody knife from the room. If the scene was present to me without my believing it is true, I would not be able to justify the relevant further belief with this.

Williamson’s point, nevertheless, is exactly to deny that belief plays a justificatory role in the same way knowledge does. Williamson insists that knowledge can do a better job than belief in justifying a belief that is not itself knowledge. He claims that knowledge is what justifies belief *absolutely*:

A belief is justified relative to some other beliefs from which it has been derived in some appropriate way (perhaps by deduction), but it is not justified absolutely unless those other beliefs are justified absolutely. Where does the regress end? On the assumption that it ends at evidence, the equation of evidence with knowledge implies that one’s belief is justified absolutely if and only if it is justified relative to one’s knowledge. The regress of justification ends at knowledge. (2000, p.9)

Williamson’s idea is that in the end, belief needs to be justified by knowledge, since for Williamson, belief justification only stops at evidence. And evidence, according to Williamson, is to be equated with knowledge, by which he means only knowledge counts as evidence.¹⁹ It thus turns out that justification stops at knowledge. Hence he claims: “knowledge, and only knowledge, justifies belief” (2000, p. 185). The idea, really, is that eventually it is knowledge which justifies belief. And this leads Williamson to “a very modest kind of foundationalism, on which all one’s knowledge serves as the foundation for all one’s justified beliefs” (2000, p. 186). Knowledge here cannot be substituted by justified true belief. Williamson claims: “if one is disposed to respond rationally to future evidence, then one’s future prospects are better if one now has knowledge than if one now has mere justified true belief” (2000, p. 184).

What concerns Williamson here is the consideration that mere justified true belief may

¹⁹ This equation of knowledge and evidence seems to be difficult to understand. Evidence are facts that make one believe that something is true. Knowledge is not just evidence; it is one’s grasp of evidence.

not be sufficient for knowledge and cannot play an equally satisfactory justificatory role. But as I argued in §2, we can admit that unqualified justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge without losing sight of the fact that knowledge is indeed a species of justified true belief. All we need to do is to see that knowledge has to be sufficiently justified true belief, namely true belief justified by knowledge. Hence, the fact that knowledge is something more than a mere justified true belief does not mean that knowledge is not a species of justified true belief, just as that true belief is something more than a mere belief does not mean that a true belief is not a species of belief. In other words, that mere justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge does not mean it is not essential for knowledge. In any case, Williamson cannot show how knowledge can justify belief without itself being justified belief. Knowledge needs to be justified belief in order to justify belief. Knowledge can only justify belief in virtue of being what one believes and what one is justified to believe. The knowledge priority thesis cannot deny knowledge is a species of justified belief if it insists that knowledge justifies belief.

The core idea of the knowledge priority thesis is that knowledge justifies. This I believe is absolutely correct. But we then need to see what is justified by knowledge can also be knowledge. A belief justified by knowledge through correct reasoning is actually knowledge, not just a true belief. We can then see things in two directions. Knowledge is not only that which justifies, but also that which is justified by knowledge. We cannot insist that knowledge justifies belief without seeing what is correctly justified by knowledge is actually knowledge.²⁰ Knowledge justifies knowledge. This is exactly the qualified traditional conception of knowledge I insist that we should stay with.

Hence the idea that knowledge justifies does not contradict the traditional conception of knowledge which insists that knowledge is justified. As far as justification is concerned, the knowledge priority thesis can be incorporated within the qualified traditional conception of knowledge. While the knowledge priority thesis starts with what knowledge can do, the traditional conception starts with how knowledge is acquired. To complete the story, we only need to have both and insist that knowledge not only justifies but also is justified. In fact, the very reason that knowledge justifies is that it is sufficiently justified.

There are then two points we can start with in understanding knowledge. First, we can start with the idea that knowledge needs to be justified, as the traditional understanding does, and end up with the idea that the justifier has to be knowledge. Second, we can start with the idea that knowledge justifies, as knowledge priority thesis does, and end up with the idea that knowledge can only justify in virtue of being sufficiently justified true belief, and that which is justified by knowledge is knowledge. In either way, we end up with the idea that knowledge, which is sufficiently justified true belief, justifies knowledge.

²⁰ Only in this way can we leave room for inferential knowledge.

Even Williamson finds it hard to deny the essential connection between knowledge and belief. In his attempt to understand belief in terms of knowledge, Williamson claims: “Knowing is ... the best kind of believing. Mere believing is a kind of botched knowing. In short, belief aims at knowledge (not just truth)” (2000, p. 47). Apart from truth, justification is a crucial element which connects belief with knowledge. A sufficiently justified true belief is knowledge; a belief that is not true or not sufficiently justified is a belief which is not knowledge.

This concludes my defence of the traditional conception of knowledge against Radford and Williamson’s cases. We can now be satisfied that the traditional understanding of knowledge is indispensable or necessary.

5. I have defended a version of qualified traditional conception of knowledge which is sufficient and necessary. Knowledge, according to the qualified traditional conception I recommended, is sufficiently justified true belief. But it can be further objected that the traditional conception of knowledge is simply incorrect, whether or not it is sufficient and necessary. We find this objection, again, in Williamson.

Williamson’s main objection to the traditional conception of knowledge is that “Knowledge is a mental state” or “factive attitude” while true belief is not (2000, p. 21). He argues that any analysis of knowledge which involves truth as its components must be incorrect since truth is a non-mental concept and should not be an element of the concept know, which is a mental concept (2000, p. 30). Thus the problem for the traditional conception of knowledge, according to Williamson, is that it fails to see knowledge is a mental state. This is typically the case when the denial of knowledge as a mental state goes together with content internalism. Williamson points out: “Having denied that knowing is a mental state, internalists naturally seek to factorize it into mental and non-mental components” (2000, p. 55). This factorization of knowledge, however, does not have to involve a commitment to content internalism. As Williamson makes it clear: “Because believing is such an obvious candidate, even those who concede externalism about mental content may be inclined to internalism about the attitude of knowing, regarding it as a mixture of mental and non-mental elements” (2000, p. 56).

What Williamson means by saying that knowledge is a mental state is that one counts as having knowledge just by being in a certain mental state, and that no further external condition is required. For this reason, Williamson claims “there is a mental state being in which is necessary and *sufficient* for knowing *p*” (2000, p. 21). In other words, truth is constitutive of the concept of knowledge, not an external condition for knowledge. By contrast, in judging a belief as true, we have to refer to external conditions; the truth of belief cannot be found in the belief itself. In other words, knowledge is essentially true

while belief is not. Williamson thus insists that truth is not an analytic element of knowledge.

Cassam's response to this is that knowledge is not a pure mental concept and can thus accommodate a non-mental element in it (Cassam 2009). This is to deny that knowledge is a mental state. The problem with this response is that it seems to lose sight of the distinction between knowledge and mere true belief, which is essential to the traditional conception of knowledge.

We may find it hard to accept that knowledge is a mental state, given the fact that truth is determined by the external world. But to say knowledge is a mental state is not to say knowledge is a pure inner state, if we take an externalist understanding of mental state. According to content externalism, the meaning of a mental state is determined by external factors. "S believes water is essential for life" entails there is water on the earth. Hence belief is a mental state although its meaning is determined by external factors. We can understand knowledge in the same way. Just as the meaning of belief is not to be found in the subject's inner state, the truth of knowledge is not to be found inside either. "S knows water is essential for life" entails that it is true that water is essential for life. But this should not prevent us from saying that knowledge is a mental state. Knowledge is a mental state despite the fact that its truth is determined by external facts.

Hence, to say knowledge is a mental state is not to say we can ascribe knowledge solely by investigating one's inner state. Just as we cannot ascribe belief without looking at the environment, as content externalism correctly insists, nor can we ascribe knowledge without looking at the environment.²¹

This is true for both first person knowledge ascription and third person knowledge ascription. For first person knowledge ascription, one knows that one knows not by looking inward, but by looking outwards upon the world. We look at the world when we decide if what we have is knowledge. One does not decide if one knows by looking inwards, but rather by looking upon the world.

For third person knowledge ascription, we cannot ascribe knowledge just by looking inside the subject. When ascribing knowledge, we investigate both the subject and her environment. Suppose someone says "it's raining outside". To decide if her claim counts as knowledge, we need to investigate the world and see if it is really raining outside. Just as when we say "S believes there is water in the cup", we investigate S's environment to decide if S does believe there is water (instead of T-water) in the cup, when we say "S knows it's raining outside", we investigate what is happening outside and decide if it is true that it's raining outside. We need to investigate the subject as well. First, we need to make sure that the subject is uttering her belief instead of a guess or simply a random sentence for

²¹ For the idea that one knows one's belief by looking outwards towards the world, see Evans 1982, p. 225.

fun. Once it is established that the subject is indeed uttering her belief, we then need to investigate what basis she has for holding the belief. If she just came in from the outside or is looking out of the window, then we may consider her belief as sufficiently justified and decide she really knows that it's raining outside. When we ascribe knowledge that P to someone, we judge that the subject holds a true belief that P and has a rational base for its truth. In contrast, a mere true belief is understood as a lucky guessing which is devoid of sufficient justification.

Hence the idea that knowledge is a mental state does not commit us to the idea that knowledge is a pure inner state with its truth internally determined. The idea is that truth is the essential feature of knowledge, not an external condition of it. Only in this sense can we understand the difference between knowing and believing truly by luck. As McDowell points out, true belief needs not amount to knowledge because "a belief leaves it open that the believer has hold of the truth by accident, and knowledge excludes that" (1995, p. 884).

Now the question is: does the qualified traditional conception of knowledge commit to the kind of mistake pointed out by Williamson? Is it true that the traditional conception of knowledge has to commit to the hybrid view which takes truth as an extra external condition? My answer to the question is negative. To see the point we need to see exactly how knowledge excludes the possibility that the believer has hold of the truth by accident. The idea is best elucidated by McDowell.

6. McDowell starts with the Sellarsian idea that knowledge "is a certain sort of standing in the space of reasons". His target is a deformation of this Sellarsian idea which is "an interiorization of the space of reasons, a withdrawal of it from the external world". The deformation happens "when we suppose that we ought to be able to achieve flawless standings in the space of reasons by our own unaided resources, without needing the world to do us any favors" (1995, p. 877).

The best way to understand this is to consider sense data theories which assert that we base our belief on appearance that may not be the way the world is. The problem with this idea is the sceptic threat that we would not be able to get knowledge if we base our belief on appearance. As McDowell puts it, "However careful one is in basing belief on appearances, if one's method falls short of total freedom from risk of error, the appearance plus the appropriate circumstances for activating the method cannot ensure that things are as one takes them to be" (1995, p. 880).

One response to this is to surrender to scepticism and accept "it must be a mistake to think we can achieve knowledge through perception" (1995, p. 881). This response does not seem to be desirable. The second is to stay with "a rather touching *a priori* faith in the power of human reason to devise fully effective protections against the deceptive capacities

of appearance” (1995, p. 881). This second response is unrealistic. We may then want to turn to a third option and embrace “the hybrid conception” according to which knowledge is a hybrid combination of an internally justified belief and an external condition, namely truth. As McDowell puts it, for the hybrid conception, “knowledge is a status that one possesses by virtue of an appropriate standing in the space of reasons when—this is an extra condition, not ensured by one’s standing in the space of reasons—the world does one the favour of being so arranged that one takes to be so is so” (1995, p. 881).

However, McDowell finds this third option problematic as well. McDowell compares the hybrid conception with a full-blown externalist approach, which simply denies the Sellarsian idea that knowledge is a certain sort of standing in the space of reasons. As McDowell puts it: “According to a full-blown externalist approach, knowledge has nothing to do with positions in the space of reasons: knowledge is a state of the knower linked to the state of affairs known in such a way that the knower’s being in that state is a reliable indicator that the state of affairs obtains” (1995, p. 882). For a full-blown externalist approach, reliability must be external to the space of reasons. The hybrid conception rejects the externalist idea that reliability must be external in this sense. However, without the external fact included in the reliability, the hybrid conception is the view that “a satisfactory standing in the space of reasons is only part of what knowledge is; truth is an extra requirement” (1995, p. 884).

To avoid the hybrid conception, which draws a clear distinction between the space of reasons as an inner sphere and truth as an external element, McDowell insists that facts play a role in justification. Of course, facts themselves do not justify anything; it is their availability to the subject that counts as the subject’s entitlement to knowledge and hence plays a role in justification. McDowell insists that we should not “separate truth...from reliability in policies or habits of belief-formation” (1995, p. 883).²² Hence not being able to base one’s judgment on truth would be a failure of rationality, not just a bad luck. McDowell writes: “Suppose one is subject to a misleading appearance that one has a proof of something. In that case, surely, one must have miscondacted oneself in the space of reasons; it cannot be that the world is the only thing one can blame for what has gone wrong” (1995, p. 879). Should we make mistakes about the world, we should not just repine at our bad luck, but rather reflect on the way we approach the world as well.

McDowell’s idea that truth plays a role in justification explains why knowledge can be understood as justified true belief without making truth a condition of knowledge which is external to the space of reasons. The crucial idea is that justification is not an isolated element added to mere true belief, nor is it an element shared by knowledge and a mere true belief or a false belief. Justification of knowledge is essentially different from justification

²² Note that McDowell is here talking about belief-formation. This shows that McDowell has no intention to separate knowledge and belief.

of mere true belief. For one thing, justification of knowledge should involve no falsity. This implies that truth cannot be an isolated element of the triple condition. If knowledge has to be justified by a true belief, then truth already plays a role in justification and hence cannot work as a separate condition for knowledge, namely a condition external to justification.

Truth contributes to knowledge justification and is thus not any more a condition of knowledge which is external to justification. For this reason knowledge can be understood as a mental state. Justification ensures that a mental state is knowledge by including truth within its procedure as a justifier. Williamson is right in emphasizing the distinction between mere true belief and knowledge. But the only way that knowledge is distinguished from mere true belief is that it is sufficiently justified. This is exactly the point of emphasizing that knowledge has to be *sufficiently justified* true belief. Knowledge has truth internally built in the relevant belief through sufficient justification. This is what McDowell means when he says justification of knowledge needs the world to do us a favour. Hence in a sufficiently justified true belief, truth is not any more a condition external to belief and justification. This is why knowledge as sufficiently justified true belief can be a mental state.

Hence to say knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief is not to say there are three independent elements in knowledge which are truth, belief, and sufficient justification. Particularly, truth is not a condition for knowledge which is separated from justification and belief. A sufficiently justified belief is justified by truth. A sufficiently justified true belief is not truth combined with belief plus sufficient justification.

When we say knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief, we are not saying it is sufficient justification plus true belief. A true belief which is sufficiently justified is different from a true belief which is unjustified or poorly justified. The former is firm, or, as Plato puts it, stable, while the latter is weak and uncertain, as we find in Radford's examples.

McDowell denies knowledge is a hybrid combination of an internal justified belief and an external truth condition. But this is not to deny that knowledge is a species of belief. McDowell seems to be happy with the traditional conception and insist knowledge has to be belief. Commenting on an example that one had an experience of seeing without realizing that the experience was indeed a seeing, McDowell remarks: "One did not form the relevant belief, let alone get to know that that was how things were" (2003, p. 681). In any case, McDowell's criticism of the hybrid conception of knowledge does not necessarily commit him to the idea that knowledge is not belief. The point of McDowell's criticism is not that knowledge cannot be a belief; but rather that truth condition is not an external element which makes no contribution to the internal justification of knowledge.

McDowell's point is not to equate the traditional conception of knowledge with the hybrid conception of knowledge. His intention is to guard against a mistaken account of the traditional conception of knowledge which interiorises the space of reasons in such a way that truth is only considered an isolated condition for knowledge which makes no

contribution to the justification of knowledge. By criticising the mistaken account of the traditional conception of knowledge, McDowell actually at the same time establishes a correct account of it, according to which truth essentially contributes to the justification of knowledge and is no longer an isolated condition for knowledge. We can then understand knowledge as a species of justified true belief without factorizing knowledge as consisting of three isolated, independent elements.

For this reason, the traditional conception of knowledge, properly understood, does not commit to the hybrid conception of knowledge criticised by McDowell. What McDowell is doing is actually pointing in the direction of proposing a correct version of the traditional conception of knowledge.

Williamson's objection is based on the understanding that the traditional understanding of knowledge divides knowledge into three components, namely, belief, truth, and justification. But this does not have to be the case. In fact, the central idea of the traditional conception is that knowledge is a species of belief. Justification is concerned with the process of arriving at the belief. Most, if not all, beliefs are somehow justified. But knowledge is sufficiently justified in that it is obtained through a valid, reliable process. Truth is concerned with the value of belief. Hence both justification and truth are actually qualifiers of belief, instead of separate components of knowledge.

The real insight of McDowell's attack on the hybrid conception of knowledge is that the truth of knowledge is arrived at by the relevant belief's being justified by the truth, not by adding a condition external to the belief. Belief aspires to truth. Knowledge is the fulfilment of the aspiration through a rational procedure. It is in this sense we say knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief.

The gnostic criterion of justification gives truth a justificatory role while insisting truth can only play a justificatory role in virtue of being what one believes and being what one is justified to believe, namely being what one knows. When the gnostic criterion says knowledge can only be justified by justified true belief, it is not to understand truth as an independent element. Truth is only a constitutive element of the three aspects mentioned. Knowledge is either justified by truth that is taken as truth through sufficient justification, or justified by belief which is sufficiently justified as true, or justified by a sufficiently justified belief which is true.

Hence McDowell's idea that truth plays a role in knowledge justification actually defuses Williamson's accusation that the traditional conception of knowledge commits to the mistaken hybrid conception of knowledge. The traditional conception of knowledge is thus established as a correct understanding of knowledge, as well as sufficient and necessary.

7. Nevertheless, the idea that truth plays a role in knowledge justification does not lead McDowell to the gnostic criterion of justification. McDowell does not require that knowledge be justified by what the subject knows; he only requires that knowledge be justified by a fact that is available to the subject. And the availability of a fact to a subject means neither that the subject takes the fact as a fact, nor that she is justified in taking the fact as a fact. This, in effect, is exactly the view of justification we find in the knowledge priority thesis.

For McDowell, a fact play a justificatory role without being what one believes or what is justified. This is his “third person approach to epistemology”, in contrast to “a first person (and present tense) approach to epistemic entitlement” (2003, p. 681). For McDowell, “epistemology’s topic should be, not what subjects know, but what they are in a position to know, which is separated from the first topic precisely by cases in which opportunities to know are not taken—cases in which subjects have entitlements that are not beliefs” (2003, p. 681). According to McDowell, it is possible that “one had, at the relevant past time, an entitlement that one did not then realize one had” (2003, p. 681). What McDowell calls “entitlement” is “the availability of a fact to a subject in an episode or state of sensory consciousness” which may be “possessed without one’s then realizing it” (2003, p. 681). McDowell believes that one may have entitlement to a piece of knowledge without realizing this. “One was in a position to acquire a bit of knowledge about the world, but because of a misapprehension about the circumstances, one did not avail oneself of the opportunity. One did not form the relevant belief, let alone get to know that that was how things were” (2003, p. 681). Moreover, for McDowell, a fact can be used for knowledge justification without being justified as a fact. In fact, the reason that the subject may not believe that a fact is a fact is exactly that she is not justified to do so.

McDowell’s third person approach to epistemology spoils his insightful idea that truth should not be external to the space of reasons. Truth can only be internal to the space of reasons by being internal to the subject, namely, being what the subject believes and what the subject is justified in believing. The subject has to take a fact as a fact in order for the fact to play a role in justification. In effect, a fact cannot be available to the subject without the subject taking it as a fact. The protest is well-recognized by McDowell: “One could hardly countenance the idea of having a fact made manifest within the reach of one’s experience, without supposing that that would make knowledge of the fact available to one” (1988, pp. 214-5). Hence McDowell’s criterion of knowledge justification, namely that the availability of a fact justifies knowledge or belief, is not sufficient. McDowell’s own understanding of justification is insufficient in that, as it is in the case of the knowledge priority thesis, the subjective conditions for justification are left out. Only knowledge, namely sufficiently justified true belief, justifies knowledge. We thus have to insist on the gnostic criterion of justification.

8. I have defended a version of the traditional conception of knowledge as sufficient, necessary, and correct. First, I defend the traditional conception of knowledge as sufficient by introducing the gnostic criterion of knowledge, which shares with the knowledge priority thesis the view that knowledge essentially plays a justificatory role. Second then, I defend the traditional conception of knowledge as indispensable by arguing that knowledge can only justify a belief in virtue of being a justified belief. I finally defend the traditional conception of knowledge as correct by joining McDowell in insisting that truth plays a role in knowledge justification. This allows us to understand knowledge as a kind of justified true belief without falling into the mistaken hybrid position which treats truth as an isolated condition for knowledge that is external to justification and belief.

The version of the traditional conception of knowledge I defended construes knowledge as sufficiently justified true belief. Then to say experience is the source of knowledge is to say it is a sufficient justification of knowledge. According to the gnostic criterion of knowledge justification, only knowledge justifies knowledge. This means that, experience, insofar as it is the justifier of knowledge, has to be itself knowledge. This is the idea of gnosticism I proposed in the last chapter. And following the qualified traditional conception of knowledge I defended in this chapter, it follows that experience, insofar as it is the justifier of knowledge, has to be itself sufficiently justified true belief. This is the revised version of gnosticism.

The rest of the thesis is to argue for and defend gnosticism. This is mainly achieved by reflecting on McDowell's unsatisfactory understanding of experience which is closely related to the abovementioned defect of McDowell's epistemology. But before setting out to criticise McDowell's own conception of experience, I shall first join him and argue that experience has to be conceptual. This takes us to the next chapter where I criticise nonconceptualism as epistemologically insufficient.

3. Nonconceptualism and the Myth of the Given

1. Gnosticism says experience, in so far as it is the justification of knowledge, has to be itself knowledge, namely sufficiently justified true belief. This implies experience is essentially conceptual or an exercise of conceptual capacities. The idea that experience is conceptual is called conceptualism, as opposed to nonconceptualism, which asserts that experience is nonconceptual in that it is independent of the conceptual capacities the subject may possess. In this chapter, I shall reject nonconceptualism by arguing that experience cannot justify belief without being conceptual. The idea that a nonconceptual Given plays a justificatory role in empirical knowledge is only a myth.

Nonconceptualism has a close affinity with traditional empiricism. Concerning the nature of experience, there are two closely related elements in traditional empiricism. The first is the idea that no conceptual capacities are involved in experience. The second is the idea that what is directly experienced is impression, not the world. Sense data theories inherit both of these two elements. Sense data are independent of conceptual capacities and are the direct objects of experience. The idea that there is a mediating object between the subject and the world faces insurmountable difficulties and is not any more in favour.²³ Nevertheless the idea that knowledge is derived from experience which is independent of any conceptual capacities is still appealing.

We may think the two elements of traditional empiricism I mentioned above, the idea that experience is nonconceptual and the idea that what we directly experience are impressions, are independent claims, and it just so happens that traditional empiricists put them together as their distinct understanding of experience. Thus we may feel it is possible to separate these two elements and insist experience is independent of conceptual capacities without committing to the idea that there is a mediating object between the subject and the world. This is the position typical of contemporary nonconceptualism.

Nonconceptualism says that experience is nonconceptual.²⁴ Evans might be the first to use the term in this way. While emphasizing the connection between experience and a conceptual subject, Evans contrasts experience with concept, that is, to understand experience *itself* as independent of concept. Despite his claim that “conscious perceptual experience...serves as the input to a *thinking, concept-applying and reasoning system*” (1982, p. 158), Evans does not require that “the content of conscious experience itself be

²³ John Foster is one of the few who is still arguing for this position (2000). See also Jackson 1976, 1977.

²⁴ Some nonconceptualists, say, Byrne (2009), Crane (1992, 2009), Evans (1982), Peacocke (2001), Tye (2006) adopt an intentional approach and insist experience has some form of representational content, while some others, say, Martin (1997, 2002) and Travis (2004), hold experience is non-representational. I shall nevertheless bracket this difference among nonconceptualists in this chapter.

conceptual content”. He actually claims “The informational states which a subject acquires through perception are non-conceptual, or non-conceptualized” (1982, p. 227).

This is later joined by many others who take a mixed position and claim that at least some content of experience is nonconceptual.²⁵ As McDowell puts it, on this “mixed position”, “the content of experience is partly conceptual and partly nonconceptual” (1994, p. 59). The idea of the mixed position is this. We may sometimes exercise conceptual capacities in experience, but conceptual capacities are not essential to experience. In some circumstances we may not exercise conceptual capacities in experience, either because we simply do not have the relevant concepts, or because we just do not exercise the conceptual capacities we may possess. We then have two kinds of nonconceptual experience. The first is the kind of nonconceptual experience that in no way leads to empirical knowledge, since there would be no relevant thought if we simply do not have the relevant conceptual capacities. This is the kind of nonconceptual experience the richness argument aims to argue for. The second is the kind of nonconceptual experience that does lead to empirical knowledge, since we do possess the conceptual capacities for the relevant thought, which needs to be based on the nonconceptual experience. These two kinds of nonconceptual experience require separate treatments.

A quick response to the first kind of nonconceptual experience is that it does not seem to be of much import. This kind of nonconceptual experience cannot be a source of empirical knowledge, since we simply do not have the relevant knowledge, due to the lack of relevant conceptual capacities. For this reason, the first kind of nonconceptual experience should be less interesting to us.

Nevertheless, it is important to note the difference between the subject having the relevant conceptual capacities and her having a name for an object or property. For those objects or properties we do not have names for, the experiences of them can still be conceptual, in that our conceptual capacities are not restricted to naming an object or property. Hence experiences of objects and properties for which we do not have names are still the source of empirical knowledge and deserve careful treatment. For this reason it is important that we have a reply relating to this kind of nonconceptual experience. I shall return to this in chapter 5.

The second kind of nonconceptual experience seems to be more pervasive and damaging. To say experience is nonconceptual in this sense is to say we experience without exercising the conceptual capacities we may possess. And yet this nonconceptual experience is accessible to us and is the source of empirical knowledge, which is articulated by using the conceptual capacities we may possess. It is this second kind of nonconceptual

²⁵ Apart from some self-claimed nonconceptualists, most of which take the mixed position and only insist some contents of experience are nonconceptual, there are also many other philosophers who never claim themselves as nonconceptualists but in fact take a nonconceptualist understanding of experience. Quine and Davidson are well-qualified nonconceptualists in this sense.

experience I shall focus on in this chapter. My attack on the second kind of nonconceptual experience would nevertheless apply to the first kind of nonconceptual experience as well. It is to attack the idea that we may base empirical knowledge on experience which is not itself conceptual.

The main task of the chapter is to argue that nonconceptual experience cannot rationally justify empirical knowledge. Nonconceptualist epistemology is based on the idea that there is a systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought. I argue that this systematic relation can only be established when one exercises one's conceptual capacities to conceptualize one's nonconceptual experience. The crucial point is: to conceptualize a nonconceptual experience is simply to have a conceptual experience. Nonconceptual experience, whatever it is, turns out to be something irrelevant.

I shall also consider two other attempts to base empirical knowledge on nonconceptual experience. One is to justify empirical knowledge in an externalist way, the other to base empirical knowledge on nonconceptual experience without justification. I argue that both are problematic.

The conclusion of the chapter is that nonconceptual experience cannot in any sense be the source of empirical knowledge.

2. Before setting out to argue against nonconceptualism, I shall make it clear that when I talk about conceptual capacities, I actually equate them with language ability. Concepts are constituents of thought. When we think in language, there are no additional concepts expressed by language. Language is the concepts we think in, not an expression of the concepts that may have their independent existence.

The equation of conceptual capacities and language ability is essentially a Wittgensteinian understanding of concept. Wittgenstein is explicitly against the idea that when we think in language, there is an additional occurrence accompanying the verbal expression of thought: "When I think in language, there aren't 'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought" (1953, §329). This is against the following picture: "what he really 'wanted to say', what he 'meant' was already present somewhere in his mind even before we gave it expression" (1953, §334). To the idea that one has the thought before finding the expression, Wittgenstein asks the following question: "What did the thought consist in, as it existed before its expression?" For Wittgenstein, "Thinking is not an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking, and which it would be possible to detach from speaking, rather as the Devil took the shadow of Schlemiehl from the ground" (1953, §339). Thus, following Wittgenstein, Dummett claims there are no "*naked* thoughts" which are "devoid

of linguistic or other representational clothing” (1989, p. 192).²⁶

But what if someone says “It is this big”, showing the size of an object with the distance between her palms?²⁷ In this case, it seems that the concept of the size of the object is expressed by a gesture, not language. But we need to see language does not have to use acoustically conveyed sound pattern; it can instead use visually transmitted sign pattern. In fact, this is where sign language comes from. Language does not have to take the form of words; it can also take the form of gestures, pictures, etc.

It can be objected that we do not always think in language. We may sometimes, say, think in images. But to think in images is not to think in concepts. To say we can think in images is just to say there are constituents of thought other than concepts; it is not to say images are concepts. A concept, even a concept like “chair” or “table”, has to be general in a certain sense. The concept “chair” does not refer to any particular chair, or any particular kind of chair, but rather applies to any, or any kind of, chair. An image, in contrast, cannot be general in the same sense.

It can be further objected that creatures with no language ability may also be able to think and arguably possess concepts in a certain sense. But even if we allow for the possibility that non-linguistic creatures think, we have to specify in virtue of what they think. If they think in language (it doesn’t have to be human language), then we can still say conceptual capacities are language ability. If they think in images, then they are not thinking in concepts. Concepts have to be general in a certain sense, and only language possesses this function. To learn a concept is to learn the language. Some may think we can use image to represent certain kind of thing and thus make image work in a general way. But if image can really be used in this way, it is used as a language. And only in this way, it can function as something general and work as a concept.

The separation of conceptual capacities and language ability has recently been advocated by Ginsborg, as a way of reconciling the conceptualist insight with “the empiricist principle that experience precedes thought” (2006a, p.356). On the one hand, Ginsborg admits that “it is hard to suppose that experience can present us with objects unless those objects are also presented to us as having features or properties” (2006a, p. 354), and this implies experience can only present us with objects when it has conceptual content (ibid., p. 355). On the other hand, she insists that we should respect “the empiricist principle that our ways of thinking about the world are indebted to our ways of perceiving it, rather than the reverse” (2006a, p. 365). For Ginsborg, “our concepts are determined by the way in which we experience things rather than the other way round” (2006a, p.365). She thus agrees with nonconceptualist that “experience precedes thought, rather than the other way round” (2006a, p. 350).

²⁶ See also Brandom 1994, Davidson 1975, Dummett 1993.

²⁷ My thanks to Paul Snowdon for raising the question during the viva.

Ginsborg thus believes we can have a version of conceptualism which “does not commit us to a view on which experience is shaped by a set of concepts which we possess antecedently to any experience. Rather it makes room for the idea that empirical concepts are possible only in, and through, experience” (2006a, p. 357). Ginsborg then states that the problem with nonconceptualists is that they have a more demanding understanding of concepts; that is, they identify conceptual capacities with capacities for inference or reasoning (as in the case of Crane and Martin), or even with the possession of a linguistic capacity (as in the case of Ayers; *ibid.*, p. 355-6). According to Ginsborg, it is this demanding understanding of concepts which renders conceptualism implausible.

As I argued above, it is not clear what conceptual capacities can be if they are not language ability. Ginsborg realizes that the less demanding understanding of concepts (as in Peacocke 1983), which characterizes a concept as a “way of thinking” or a “mode of presentation” and “allows that thinking includes the having of experiences and the modes of presentation may be perceptual”, only makes conceptualism a “vacuous” view (2006a, p. 356). For Ginsborg, conceptual capacities do not “demand that one has mastered a language” (*ibid.*, p. 359). But this does not mean she agrees with (early) Peacocke that we should understand a concept as a mode of presentation. She suggests: “Rather than construing the possession of a concept as a matter merely of being able to perceive things in a certain way...we can take it to involve, in addition, the consciousness that they ought to be perceived in that way” (*ibid.*). But the problem is, how can experience involve the consciousness that things ought to be perceived in “that way” if “that way” is not designated by language? There is no way of understanding conceptual capacities without understanding it as language ability.

More importantly, the proposed rapprochement is at the expense of the basic idea of conceptualism. First, for conceptualists, conceptual capacities have to be linguistic affairs. Second, it is essential to conceptualism that there cannot be experience before the acquisition of conceptual capacities, namely, language ability. Neither would this reconciliation satisfy nonconceptualists. For those nonconceptualists who insist that conceptual capacities are language ability, what Ginsborg calls conceptualism is just a version of nonconceptualism.

Hence there are also strategic reasons for equating conceptual capacities with language ability in this thesis. First, this is the understanding both Sellars and McDowell are happy to follow. And to argue for conceptualism in this sense is to argue for real conceptualism. Second, if we can show that experience presupposes language ability, this would also satisfy those who hold a less demanding understanding of conceptual capacities. Hence, in arguing against nonconceptualism, the equation of conceptual capacities and language ability will satisfy both conceptualists and nonconceptualists.

3. Nonconceptualism understands experience as independent of the relevant conceptual capacities we may possess. A nonconceptual experience is also called a Given. The term “Given” is to be understood in contrast with “concept”. C. I. Lewis might be the first to introduce the term “Given” in contemporary philosophy. According to Lewis, the Given is “the immediate data, such as those of sense, which are presented or given to the mind”, and the concept is “a form, construction, or interpretation, which represents the activity of thought” (1929, p. 39). While the concept is the product of the activity of thought, the Given is independent of such activity. The Given is something in my experience which is “qualitatively no different than it would be if I were an infant or an ignorant savage”. Hence according to Lewis, the Given has three features. It is the sensuous feel quality of experience, it is what remains unaltered in experience, and it is ineffable. While “The pure concept and the content of the given are mutually independent; neither limits the other”.

Lewis does not take experience as a pure Given, but rather claims that experience has the Given and a conceptual interpretation of the Given as its two elements. According to Lewis, it is something generally recognized that “there are in experience these two elements, something given and the interpretation or construction put upon it” (1929, p. 48). But the idea that there is a nonconceptual, certain, and indubitable Given that is immediately aware of by the subject is taken to be established. The interpretation in experience, although claimed to be in experience, is actually a separate element and does not change the way the subject is aware of the Given. It is thus very natural that contemporary nonconceptualists take the idea of the Given while discarding Lewis’s point that there is also an interpretation of the Given in experience. Experience, then, becomes a pure Given.

Philosophers may conceive the Given in different ways. For traditional empiricists, the Given are ideas or impressions. For sense-data theorists, the Given are sense data. For adverbial theorists like Chisholm, the Given is appearance. For theorists of appearing like Alston, the Given is again appearance which is supposed to entail the existence of an external object. For Evens, the Given is the information we get from the world which has a kind of objective meaning. For Peacocke, the Given is the nonconceptual content in experience which can be correct or incorrect. For Naive realists like Martin and Travis, the Given is simply the world that presents in experience. In whatever way the Given is conceived, the essential feature is that it is independent of the conceptual capacities we may possess.

While nonconceptualists take the empiricist idea that experience is independent of conceptual capacities, they take care to avoid another component of traditional empiricism, namely, the idea of direct object. Hence one distinct feature of nonconceptualism is its divergence from the sense data theories. Evans, for example, is anxious to distinguish himself from sense data theorists. He criticises traditional epistemologists for considering

sensation as data “intrinsically without objective content”, into which the subject is supposed “to read the appropriate objective significance by means of an (extremely shaky) inference” (1982, p. 122-3). For Evans, “The only events that can conceivably be regarded as data for a conscious, reasoning subject are seemings—events, that is, already imbued with (apparent) objective significance” (1982, p. 123).

Similarly, Alston makes it clear that theories of appearing are to be distinguished from sense data theories in that they hold “In normal perception the direct, nonconceptual awareness involved is awareness of the external object perceived” (2002, p. 72). According to theories of appearing, “*X appears ϕ to S entails x exists*” (2002, p. 72). Thus the appearance entails the relation between a perceiving subject and a perceived object. Alston writes: “the heart of sense perception of external objects consists of facts of ‘appearing’, facts that some object or other looks, sounds, smells, or tastes in a certain way to a perceiver” (2002, p. 71).

Peacocke insists that the nonconceptual representational content is “with a correctness condition”. According to Peacocke, an observational concept *F* can be “plausibly individuated partly by its relations to a particular sort of nonconceptual content” and “the holding of the correctness condition for the nonconceptual content in question ensures the holding of the correctness condition for the conceptual content *That’s F*” (2001, p. 254).

Martin adheres to a version of disjunctive understanding of the object of experience, according to which the object of perceptual experience is the physical world, while a non-perceptual experience may not have an object at all. Hence, for Martin, “the actual objects of perception, the external things such as trees, tables and rainbows, which one can perceive, and the properties which they can manifest to one when perceived, partly constitute one’s conscious experience, and hence determine the phenomenal character of one’s experience” (1997, p. 83).

Denying that experience is something which mediates between the subject and the world, nonconceptualists are confident that they can base empirical knowledge on nonconceptual experience. I shall follow Sellars and call these positions the doctrine of the Given. The doctrine of the Given is the idea that we can base empirical knowledge on nonconceptual experience, namely the Given.

It is not so easy to see how this idea of the Given could work. The question is: how can we base knowledge on something which is not knowledge? One version of the doctrine of the Given is to insist that the Given *is* knowledge. This is the idea that experience, though nonconceptual, can still be knowledge and thus provide foundation for inferential knowledge. This version of the doctrine of the Given has been adequately attacked by Sellars.

An initial strategy in Sellars’s attack on the Given is to attack the idea that nonconceptual experience can be knowledge. According to Sellars, any kind of knowledge,

inferential or non-inferential, has to be acquired, has to involve concept formation, and has to presuppose knowledge of many other things. Sellars thus claims that we cannot have knowledge without having the relevant concepts. The point is that, if we agree that nonconceptual experience is knowledge, we will have a species of knowledge “not only noninferential”, but also “presupposing no knowledge of other matter of fact, whether particular or general” (1956, §32). This is to suppose knowledge is unacquired, which, according to Sellars, ruins the most important point of empiricism. To stay with the empiricist idea “that all classificatory consciousness, all knowledge that something is thus-and-so...involves learning, concept formation, even the use of symbols”, we have to insist that nonconceptual experience is not knowledge (1956, §6).

Sellars’s point is that the justificatory role of experience requires that it be knowledge, and the latter in turn requires that experience presuppose conceptual capacities. This initial attack only works for those who agree that experience has to be knowledge in order to justify knowledge. But most nonconceptualists insist that nonconceptual experience justifies empirical knowledge, while happily agree that nonconceptual experience is not knowledge. It is the fallacy of this second version of the doctrine of the Given I shall now aim to expose.

4. There can be different ways of understanding nonconceptual experience as the foundation of empirical knowledge. Some nonconceptualists take a very positive attitude to this. They take certain judgements and beliefs to be rationally grounded in the non-conceptual content possessed by experience. Others insist we can justify empirical knowledge in an external way. Still others think we can base empirical knowledge on experience without justification. I shall now concentrate on the first version and will comment on the other two briefly afterwards.

Peacocke argues that there is a rational linkage between nonconceptual content of experience and beliefs or judgments. For him, “the nonconceptual protopropositional content of experiences” can afford “not merely reasons but good reasons” for judgements and beliefs (1992, p. 80). Peacocke admits that an experience of square “will indeed also have a representational content involving that concept if the thinker possesses the observational concept square”. But the point is that, for him, the rational linkage of experience and judgements does not rely on the fact that the subject possesses the concept. According to Peacocke, the nonconceptual content in experience “has a correctness condition that concerns the world”, and “when the correctness condition of the relevant nonconceptual contents is fulfilled”, the object will really be as experienced (1992, p. 80). If the correctness condition of the experience of a square is fulfilled, the object will really be square. The nonconceptual experience can be true or false, this gives a rational reason for a belief or judgement which is based on it.

Peacocke emphasizes that the “ways which feature in nonconceptual content are then at the conscious, personal level, and are not merely subpersonal”. Hence “As features of the subjective experience, their presence can entitle a thinker to make a particular judgment, or to form a certain belief” (2001, p. 253). Peacocke thus claims:

A thinker can be rational in making a transition from an experience with a certain nonconceptual representational content to a judgment with a certain conceptual content, in particular in making a transition to judging a content in which an observational concept is predicated of presented objects or events. Such a transition is rational when the thinker is entitled to take her experience at face value, and when the observational concept is individuated in part at least as one that the thinker must be willing to judge when experience has a certain kind of nonconceptual representational content (and is being taken at face value). (2001, p. 254)

Similarly, Ayers argues that experience does not need to have conceptual content in order to stand in a rational relation to belief. He thinks that something propositional can be based on something that is not only non-propositional, but also could not possibly be propositional (2004, p. 247).

Both Peacocke and Ayers believe that nonconceptual experience provides reason for empirical knowledge. Then exactly what is the reason? Nonconceptual experience certainly cannot work as the reason, since what we get in experience is only that “it looks *that way*”. And exactly what *that way* is is still to be decided. Hence the first problem is: how can we get from *that way* to, say, square? How can we know to look *that way* is to look square? The only reason that you can point at a shape and by doing so mean a certain shape is that you already see that shape as a certain shape, that is, you already employ the concept of that shape in your visual experience. Now without the concept of that certain shape being employed in experience, we would not be able to know what that shape is.

For experience to justify empirical knowledge in a rational way, we have to know what the experience is. To present experience as a reason for empirical judgement, one has to be able to articulate it in language. This leads us to the problem of self-knowledge of experience. For experience to justify empirical knowledge in a rational way, one has to know what one’s experience is. This I consider as the minimum requirement for rational justification. What justifies empirical knowledge has to be something that can be used for justification. The subject has to have self-knowledge of her experience in order to justify other beliefs with her experience.

This is why McDowell urges us to respect the “time-honoured connection between reason and discourse” (1994, p. 165). McDowell criticises Peacocke for severing “the tie between reasons for which a subject thinks as she does and reasons she can give for

thinking that way”. For McDowell, reasons have to be articulable, and this requires that reasons be conceptual. He thus claims: “Reasons that the subject can give, in so far as they are articulable, must be within the space of concepts” (1994, p. 165).

There should be no problem for self-knowledge of experience if we understand experience itself as conceptual: self-knowledge of experience is simply experience itself. Understood in this way, to self-ascribe an experience is just to look at the world and have an experience. This is very much like self-knowledge of one’s belief: to have self-knowledge of one’s belief is just to have the belief. As Evans happily agrees, “in making a self-ascription of belief, one’s eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward—upon the world” (1982, p. 225).

But without experience presupposing conceptual capacities, the subject will not be able to have self-knowledge of her experience in this way. Nonconceptualism has to explain how we can have knowledge of our own experience if experience is not itself conceptual. Nonconceptual experience itself certainly does not count as self-knowledge of experience. Nonconceptualists thus have to treat self-ascription of belief and self-ascription of perceptual experience in different ways. This is exactly the case we find in Evans.

For Evans, the self-ascription of experience follows a different model from the self-ascription of belief. According to Evans, one’s self-knowledge of experience is exactly the judgment to be based on the experience. Thus “a subject can gain knowledge of his internal informational states...by re-using precisely those skills of conceptualization that he uses to make judgements about the world”. He writes:

He goes through exactly the same procedure as he would go through if he were trying to make a judgement about how it is at this place now, but excluding any knowledge he has of an extraneous kind. (That is, he seeks to determine what he would judge if he did not have such extraneous information.) (1982, p. 227-8)

Evans is suggesting that one conceptualizes one’s experience when trying to give a description of it. In fact, this may be the only solution available to him. And he claims what the subject gets from the procedure “will necessarily be closely correlated with the content of the informational state which he is in at that time”. The distinct feature of this kind of self-knowledge is that “he may prefix this result with the operator ‘It seems to me as though...’”. In this way, according to Evans, the subject can produce in himself, and give expression to, “a cognitive state whose content is systematically dependent upon the content of the informational state”, and “the systematic dependence is a basis for him to claim knowledge of the informational” (1982, p. 227-8).

Now, according to Evans’s picture, to have self-knowledge of one’s experience is to conceptualize the experience, and the conceptualization of experience relies on the

systematic relation between experience and the judgment based on experience. This first of all draws our attention to the alleged systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and empirical knowledge.

5. No matter how the epistemological relation between experience and thought is conceived, nonconceptualists always insist there is a systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought. Evans writes, “the subject’s thoughts, plans, and deliberations are also systematically dependent on the informational properties of the input” (1982, p. 158).

However, given the claim that experience is independent of conceptual capacities, how can nonconceptualists secure the systematic relation between experience and the judgement based on it? Nonconceptualists seem to assume that there is a structure in the Given, which is correspondent to the structure we have in thought. But from where does the Given get its structure? If there is a structure in the content of the experience, this structure will only come from the conceptual capacities we exercised in it. If there are no conceptual capacities exercised in experience, there will be no structure to be found in it.

It is exactly this supposed systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought that falls prey of Sellars’s attack on the Given. Sellars denies that “there is any awareness of logical space prior to, or independent of, the acquisition of a language” (1956, §30). He points out that the idea “is committed to a stratum of authoritative nonverbal episodes (‘awareness’) the authority of which accrues to a superstructure of *verbal actions*, provided that the expressions occurring in these actions are properly *used*” (1956, §34). He writes:

The idea that observation “strictly and properly so-called” is constituted by certain self-authenticating nonverbal episodes, the authority of which is transmitted to verbal and quasi-verbal performances when these performances are made “in conformity with the semantical rules of the language,” is of course, the heart of the Myth of the Given. (1956, §38)

The alleged systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought is a radical mistake which Sellars first of all finds in sense data theories, according to which, “epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder—even ‘in principle’—into non-epistemic facts” (1956, §5).

This also applies to other versions of the idea of the Given, say, theories of appearing. Sellars remarks: “The essence of the view is the same whether these intrinsically authoritative episodes are such items as the awareness that a certain sense content is green or such items as the awareness that a certain physical object looks to someone to be green”

(1956, §34). It is this self-structured Given which is taken as the foundation of knowledge. As Sellars points out: “For the *given*, in epistemological tradition, is what is taken by these self-authenticating episodes. These ‘takings’ are, so to speak, the unmoved movers of empirical knowledge” (1956, §38).

For Sellars, there is no systematic relation between the Given and thought. This makes it impossible for the Given to justify thought. Thus according to Sellars’s attack on the Given, for experience to be within the space of concepts, it has to presuppose conceptual capacities.

If experience is considered as independent of our conceptual capacities, then it will be difficult to understand how we can relate experience to conceptual knowledge, and hence derive knowledge from experience. According to nonconceptualism, when I see a plant in front of me, the way I experience the plant, say, the greenness I sense, has nothing to do with the concept “green” which I may possess. Then the problem is, how can I have the thought “the plant is green” if the greenness I sense is not related to the concept “green” in the first place?

The reason there is no systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought is that language does not gain its existence from nonconceptual experience. The structure determined by our conceptual capacities is not derived from the alleged structure pre-existent in nonconceptual experience. What is problematic is exactly the empiricist idea that experience precedes thought.

Nonconceptualists may have a response to this. Although experience itself is not an exercise of conceptual capacities, it presupposes conceptual capacities in a general sense. We are already in a language system, and against this language system, there is a systematic relation between a nonconceptual experience and a description of it. The idea is: the systematic relation between a nonconceptual experience and a description of it can be established once we exercise our conceptual capacities and conceptualize the nonconceptual experience.

Now we need to examine what it is to conceptualize a nonconceptual experience.

6. According to nonconceptualism, our language ability makes it possible for us to relate nonconceptual experience to thought. This is called the conceptualization of nonconceptual experience. Evans, for example, insists judgments based upon experience “necessarily involve conceptualization”. Hence, “in moving from a perceptual experience to a judgement about the world (usually expressible in some verbal form), one will be exercising basic conceptual skills” (1982, p. 227). In the same vein, Crane says “belief formation conceptualizes the content of perceptual states” (1988a, p. 153). The idea is that, as concept users, we have no problem in conceptualizing a nonconceptual experience and assigning it a

conceptual content. And it is the conceptualization of nonconceptual experience which provides reason for empirical knowledge.

The question is then: what is it to conceptualize a nonconceptual experience?

The first thing we should note is that to conceptualize a nonconceptual experience is to conceptualize the object of experience. Hence the question is refined as: how to conceptualize the object of experience?

Suppose I am looking at a chair. Without my experience being conceptual, I do not see the chair as a chair or anything else. Now I begin to conceptualize my experience, or more precisely, the object of my experience, namely the chair. If I am still looking at the chair, then to conceptualize my experience of the chair is simply to have a conceptual experience of the chair. Hence what I end up with is a different experience, not a conceptualization of the same experience. If we agree with nonconceptualists that it is in fact the conceptualization of nonconceptual experience which gives reason for empirical knowledge and admit that to conceptualize an experience is actually to have a conceptual experience, then we have to accept it is conceptual experience which provides reasons for empirical knowledge. Nonconceptual experience, if there is such a thing at all, drops as irrelevant.

Suppose, conversely, that I am determined to conceptualize the original experience and not to shift to a different experience. What I need to do is to turn away from the object of experience and try to conceptualize it in my memory. This would require that I have a vivid, snapshot-like memory which captures every detail of the object without putting it under a description. It is not clear that we can have a memory like this, however let's grant this possibility for the sake of argument. I can now conceptualize the object in my memory and decide it is a chair that I was experiencing. This, however, is still not to conceptualize experience; it is to conceptualize the memory of the experience, or, more accurately, the memory of the object of the experience. Moreover, once my memory is conceptualized in this way, I now have a different memory of the same object. There are then two points to note. First, we still cannot conceptualize the nonconceptual experience. All we can do is to conceptualize the memory of the experience. Second, to conceptualize a memory is to have a conceptual memory. Hence even the conceptualization of a nonconceptual memory is not possible.

Thus, to conceptualize a nonconceptual experience, if there is an experience as such at all, is either to have a conceptual experience, or to have a conceptual memory. Then what plays the justificatory role is either a conceptual experience or a conceptual memory, the nonconceptual experience or memory does not in any sense contribute to the justification.

Martin has a special case against this. He invites us to imagine that Archie, having failed to find the cuff link in the drawer, later searches his memory of the contents of the drawer and pays attention to or conceptualizes the cuff link in his memory of the drawer and eventually finds the cuff link in the real drawer (1992, p. 749-750).

The idea that the subject searches his memory for the cuff link does not seem to be plausible. It is understandable that we may search the drawer without being able to find the cuff link which is not only in the drawer but also well in our view field. This explains why, when two people are searching the same drawer from equally good points of view, one finds the cuff link while the other does not. (As I understand it, to be in one's view field is not the same as to be in one's experience). But if the subject is uncertain about the result of his search of the drawer, it is more likely that she searches the drawer again instead of searching her memory. In any case, as Martin himself admits, eventually the key has to be found in the drawer, not in his memory.

More importantly, Martin seems to commit to a snapshot view of experience and memory, which is very problematic. For Martin, experience is like a snapshot which can be retained in memory without losing any details or undergoing any changes. The snapshot conception of experience assumes that when we see, we have all the details of the object in experience. But as Noë points out correctly: "We *don't* have the detailed world in consciousness all at once" (2004, p. 51). Hence "The world is present to me now, not as represented, but as accessible" (2004, p. 192).²⁸

The snapshot view of experience is falsified by the phenomena of difference blindness, in which the subject fails to spot a visible difference that has been made to the scene when the change that gives rise to the difference is not viewed by the subject. Suppose you are looking at your friend and talking to her. Something else draws your attention and you turn to it briefly. When you turn away, your friend changes the position of her arm. You turn back to your friend but don't notice the difference between the two scenes. The lesson we may learn from this is that we do not see the difference because we do not see every detail of the scene. As Noë remarks, "vision is, to some substantial degree, attention-dependent...you only see that to which you attend." (2004, p. 25).

Dretske's response to the case of difference blindness is that we see both scenes, although we don't see the difference between the two scenes. Seeing the difference between the two scenes, according to Dretske, demands extra attention (2004). However, it is important to note the difference between different senses of seeing. Suppose I briefly see two sheets of white paper, both of which are fully printed with English words, without seeing any particular words on the sheets. In this case I certainly cannot tell if the two sheets of paper are printed with the same words in the same order. And this, of course, is not because I have seen all the words on the sheets but cannot tell the difference between the words on the two sheets. The reason is that I simply haven't seen any particular words on the two sheets. Hence, seeing two sheets of paper printed with English words is different from seeing all the English words printed on the two sheets of paper. In the same vein,

²⁸ For Martin, the world is not represented by, but rather constituent of, experience.

seeing a room full of furniture and toys is different from seeing all the furniture and toys in the room. My experience of seeing a sheet of paper printed with English words is then not something like a snapshot of the sheet which I can later refer to and conceptualize.

Consequently, to have a memory of experience is not to retain a snapshot. In fact, what is retained in memory is already something conceptual. As Quine remarks correctly: “Actual memories mostly are traces not of past sensation but of past conceptualization or verbalization” (1960, p. 3). One’s experiential memory changes when one’s understanding of the matter changes. I might think someone smiled to show her friendship. But later I realize she is not really a friendly person and was not friendly to me at that particular occasion. I may then change my way of understanding and say “she smiled to fake friendship”. Now the point is: a sincere smile is essentially different from a fake smile. So, in trying to recall how she smiled, I may now have a different image.

Hence both experience and memory of experience are already conceptual. Neither is a snapshot to be conceptualized. In fact, the problem for Martin’s example is exactly the problem for the idea of conceptualizing a nonconceptual experience. To conceptualize nonconceptual experience is simply to have a conceptual experience. And if we agree that it is the conceptualization of nonconceptual experience which plays a justificatory role, then we have to admit that it is conceptual experience which justifies belief. The rational link between nonconceptual experience and thought is then a myth. This is exactly what Sellars calls the Myth of the Given.

I shall now move on to consider the suggestion that nonconceptual experience justifies belief in an externalist way.

7. It can be suggested that it is good enough if nonconceptual experience justifies empirical knowledge in an externalist way, and that for this reason, we don’t need to worry about the rational relation between experience and knowledge. This is the strategy, for example, taken by Alston.

Alston admits that “adult human perception” is “heavily concept laden”. He agrees that “Perception is, typically, a certain kind of use of concepts, even if...the cognition involved is not only that”. His contention is that “there is a cognitive component of perception that is non-conceptual” and “it is this element that gives perception its distinctive character vis-a-vis other modes of cognition”. For Alston, “this nonconceptual direct awareness of objects is fundamental to conscious perception” (2002, p. 73), or, “These appearances are nonconceptual in character”. He writes:

There is a crucial distinction between ‘The tree looks green to S’, on the one hand, and ‘S takes the tree to be green’ or ‘S applies the concept of green (of tree) to what S sees’

on the other...In order for the tree to look green to S it is only necessary that S visually discriminate the tree from its surroundings by its color (not necessarily only by its color). (2002, p. 71-72)

Alston's understanding of looking green is obviously not plausible. As Rosenberg points out correctly, "S will presumably also 'visually discriminate the tree from its surroundings by its color' *whatever* color it looks to her" (2006, p. 160). What we need to specify here is exactly that the colour is *green* rather than any others. And this cannot be done by simply discriminating the tree from its surrounding which, presumably, is either not green or a different shade of green.

Alston nevertheless insists that "our direct awareness of X's...provides a basis (justification, warrant...) for beliefs about those X's" (2002, p. 71). According to Alston, "nonconceptual appearances can provide justification for beliefs about the objects that appear" (2002, p. 82). The reason is that "how things appear is a reliable, though fallible, guide to how they are" (2002, p. 73). He claims, "if, as I have been arguing, looking P is in itself a nonconceptual mode of experience, however much it may be blended with subsequent conceptualization, belief about what is perceived can be justified by a nonconceptual experience from which they spring" (2002, p. 83).

Alston's strategy is to insist that there is a causal relation between nonconceptual experience and perceptual beliefs, and this causal relation, is not only compatible with the rational relation but also presupposed by the latter. According to him, "if the belief were not engendered by the looking, it would not be nearly so plausible to suppose that the looking justifies the belief" (2002, p. 84). He thus insists that belief can be justified by appearance in an externalist way. For Alston, "one can be *prima facie* justified in believing that X is P by virtue of that belief's stemming from X's appearing to S as P". Thus for Alston, although the subject does not herself have any cognitive grasp at all of the reason for her belief, her belief is still justified by the appearance in that it is caused by the appearance. What Alston has is then a third person conception of justification: "One can be justified in believing many things that one has not justified and, indeed, is not able to justify" (2002, p. 85).

Similarly, what Evans has can only be an externalist story, since, for him, there is only a causal relation between information states and experiential judgments:

In general, we may regard a perceptual experience as an informational state of the subject: it has a certain content—the world is represented a certain way—and hence it permits of a non-derivative classification as true or false. Judgements are then based upon (reliably caused by) these internal states; when this is the case we can speak of the information being 'accessible' to the subject, and, indeed, of the existence of conscious experience. (1982, p. 227-8)

The externalist understanding of justification is problematic. First, this is not the normal way we understand justification. When we say S is justified in believing P on the basis of X, we mean S takes X as her reason for believing P. Justification is thus essentially a reason-giving activity, which cannot be replaced by a causal relation. Second, it is not true that a subject cannot cite her experience as her reason for holding a belief. If one's belief stems from a certain experience, then one usually knows that one's belief is derived from the experience and can thus cite the experience as one's reason for holding the belief. Hence what we need is to explain this reason giving activity, not to deny it. Thirdly, it is simply a mistake to say that a belief is caused by something, either experience or something else. As a matter of fact, our beliefs are mostly based on reasons, not physically caused by something. That is the nature of our rationality. Fourthly, a causal relation between nonconceptual experience and belief cannot be sustained because there is no one to one relation between a nonconceptual experience and a belief which is supposed to be caused by it. A nonconceptual experience does not have the capacity to cause a belief. The reliable causal relation between nonconceptual experience and the judgement based on it is itself a Myth of the Given.

8. It can even be suggested that experience can work as the tribunal of thought without justification. This is the idea we find in Quine.

Quine claims that "our statements about the external world face the tribunal of experience not individually but as a corporate body" (1953, p. 41). But he conceives experience as "the stimulation of...sensory receptors" (1969, p. 75). Hence what he means by the tribunal of experience is something very different from what we may expect. According to Quine, "surface irritations generate, through language, one's knowledge of the world" (1960, p. 26). And "it is to such stimulation that we must look for whatever empirical content there may be" (1960, p. 26). For Quine, the base blocks of the arch of knowledge "are sentences conditioned...to non-verbal stimuli" (1960, p. 11). He writes: "So the proposition that external things are ultimately to be known only through their action on our bodies should be taken as one among various coordinate truth, in physics and elsewhere, about initially unquestioned physical things" (1960, p. 4).

Hence Quine does not think that we can base theory on sensations in the way traditional epistemologists conceive it. For Quine, sensation or experience is nonconceptual. This is what he calls the "unsullied stream of experience" (1960, p. 10). He is thus against the idea of trying "to abstract out a pure stream of sense experience and then depict physical doctrine as a means of systematizing the regularities discernible in the stream" (1960, p. 2). According to Quine, "two men could be just alike in all their dispositions to verbal

behaviour 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” (1960, p. 26). For Quine, there is a definite distinction between the invariant content and the variant conceptual trappings, between “report and invention, substance and style, cues and conceptualization”. And the “conceptual sovereignty” is the domain within which one can “revise theory while saving the data” (1960, p. 5). Quine thus points out the mistake of “seeking an implicit sub-basement of conceptualization, or language” in sense data (1960, p. 3). He writes:

...we have no reason to suppose that man’s surface irritations even unto eternity admit of any one systematization that is scientifically better or simpler than all possible others...Scientific method is the way to truth, but it affords even in principle no unique definition of truth. Any so-called pragmatic definition of truth is doomed to failure equally. (1960, p. 23)

Quine correctly maintains that there is no systematic relationship between a sense datum and a later conceptualization. Then how can we account for knowledge which is supposed to start from experience? Quine’s suggestion is that we should give up the goal of justifying science on the basis of observation and instead study the ways in which we form beliefs. According to Quine, “The stimulation of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has had to go on, ultimately, in arriving at his picture of the world. Why not just see how this construction really proceeds? Why not settle for psychology? (1969, p. 75)

Quine thus recommends that we study the psychological processes that take us from sensory stimulations to beliefs about the world. For Quine, “Epistemology, or something like it falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science” (1969, pp. 82-3). He thus thinks that the question of “reason” is not essential for epistemology and we can instead do epistemology by answering the question of “cause”. It is not essential to know what the reason is for holding a belief. We can instead satisfy ourselves by investigating what is causally responsible for one’s holding a belief. He thus thinks the talk of “cause” can replace the talk of “reason” in epistemology. This is the idea of Quine’s “naturalized epistemology”.

Unlike all the nonconceptualists mentioned above, Quine sees it clearly that there is no systematic relation between nonconceptual experience and thought. Hence it is not possible to cite nonconceptual experience as the reason for thought, whether it is in an internalist or an externalist sense. Quine thus considers experience as the tribunal of thought without endowing it with a justificatory role.

However, it is not clear that this “surrender of the epistemological burden to psychology” is satisfactory. First, as it is widely recognized, rational relation is distinct from

and irreducible to causal relation. Belief is a rational state and needs a rational basis; a causal explanation cannot serve the purpose. Second, as I said at the end of last section, as rational animals, we base our beliefs on reasons. Belief is not something blindly caused by a physical happening; we simply do not formulate belief in this mechanical way. Thirdly, there is no reliable causal relation between “surface irritation” and a generated belief. As Quine himself well recognizes, there is no systematic relation between the surface irritation and thought. There is then no reason to think that science could eventually provide us with a satisfactory story about the causal relation between sensation and thought. Hence nonconceptual experience cannot even work as a causal tribunal of thought, if there is a kind of tribunal as such.²⁹

9. The problem with nonconceptualism is that once experience is conceived as nonconceptual, it would immediately lose the kind of structure on which we need to base thought. There is then no way to establish a connection between thought and experience. Nonconceptual experience thus cannot in anyway work as a foundation of thought, either rational or causal. It cannot be the source of knowledge exactly because it is not accessible to thought. And the reason that nonconceptual experience is not accessible to thought is that the world is not accessible to nonconceptual experience. Nonconceptual experience does not say anything about the world. That is why it cannot tell us anything about the world.

²⁹ For criticisms of naturalized epistemology, see, for example, Kim 1988, Lennon 2000 & 2003.

4. Conceptualism and the New Myth of the Given

1. McDowell's conceptualism says the content of experience is conceptual, that is, experience is itself an exercise of conceptual capacities. This is to oppose nonconceptualism which states that the content of experience is nonconceptual. The most important motivation for conceptualism is an epistemological consideration. What much engages McDowell's attention is the debate between the empiricist form of foundationalism which embraces the Myth of the Given and Davidson's "unconstrained coherentism" (McDowell's terminology) which, according to McDowell, is "the thesis that there are no external rational constraints on exercises of spontaneity" (1994, p. 143). McDowell believes conceptualism can reconcile the truth in both without falling into the errors of either.

The idea of nonconceptualism is that experience is independent of any conceptual capacities the subject may possess. That is, experience is itself nonconceptual or nonconceptualized; it is something waiting to be conceptualized. We can distinguish two different ways of envisaging the relation between nonconceptual experience and empirical knowledge and thus distinguish two different versions of nonconceptualism. First, there is an effort among nonconceptualists to take nonconceptual experience as the foundation of our empirical knowledge. What they have is therefore the empiricist form of foundationalism. Since what is considered as the foundation of knowledge is a nonconceptual Given, it is also called the doctrine of the Given.

The main problem with this version of nonconceptualism, according to McDowell, is that it cannot explain how we can justify empirical knowledge with experience. The reason is that nonconceptual experience cannot provide reasons for empirical knowledge. This is based on Sellars's attack on the doctrine of the Given. Sellars's reasoning is like this. If experience is to be able to justify empirical knowledge, it has to be itself knowledge. And if experience is to be knowledge, it has to presuppose knowledge of many other things, that is, to possess the relevant conceptual capacities. Hence it is a myth that experience which presupposes no conceptual capacities can justify empirical knowledge. McDowell joins Sellars in his attack on the Myth of the Given. He insists nonconceptual experience cannot justify empirical knowledge: "Intuitions without concepts' are mute; they can pass no verdicts" (1999, p. 92). The reason is that the relation between nonconceptual experience and belief is causal instead of rational and "a merely causal relation cannot do duty for a justificatory relation" (1994, p. 71, n. 2).

In the light of this, a nonconceptualist may also envisage experience as having nothing rational to do with empirical knowledge, as Davidson does. This is the second version of nonconceptualism. This version of nonconceptualism denies it is necessary to base our

empirical knowledge on experience. Davidson admits “meaning and knowledge depend on experience, and experience ultimately on sensation”.³⁰ But according to Davidson, “this is the ‘depend’ of causality, not of evidence or justification”. This leads him to epistemological coherentism which denies “knowledge is grounded on something that counts as an ultimate source of evidence” (1983, p. 146). For Davidson, “the search for epistemological foundations in preconceptual experience” is “pointless” (1988, p. 47). Hence the second version of nonconceptualism embraces coherentism to avoid the Myth of the Given.

McDowell is equally unsatisfied with this second version of nonconceptualism. He urges us to guard against Davidson’s “unconstrained coherentism” which excludes experience from our belief system. McDowell insists that experience has to work as a rational constraint on thought, that is, to provide justification for empirical knowledge. On the one hand, “our activity in empirical thought and judgment” must be “recognizable as bearing on reality”. Hence “there must be external constraint” on thought (1994, p. 9). On the other hand, it is the “cognitive predicament” (1996, p. xii) of human beings to confront the world by means of experience. Hence the only way for thought to be constrained by the world is for it to be constrained by experience. This requires that we consider experience as a foundation or tribunal of empirical knowledge. Thought must be subject to a verdict from experience. This is the idea of his minimal empiricism.

But how can we make experience a rational constraint on thought without falling into the Myth of the Given? Both Sellars and McDowell believe the only obstacle for the idea that experience justifies empirical knowledge is the idea that experience is non-linguistic or nonconceptual. Thus for Sellars and McDowell, the only problem for nonconceptualism and the Myth of the Given is that nonconceptual experience does not speak and hence conveys no verdict. The solution would then be to see that experience actually speaks and conveys a verdict. In this sense, Sellars’s attack on the Given actually at the same time points to a solution. And here is his psychological nominalism:

...all awareness of sorts, resemblances, facts, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities—indeed, all awareness even of particulars—is a linguistic affair. (1956, §29)

For Sellars, “perceptual experience also involves a conceptual or propositional component—a ‘thinking’ in a suitably broad sense of this accordion term”. “In perception, the thought is caused to occur to one...” And the best term to call such a thought, according to Sellars, is “taking something to be the case” (1975, pp. 129-130). This gives a positive understanding of experience: experience has a thinking component in it. And the positive understanding of experience in turn leads to a positive understanding of the relation between

³⁰ It is not extremely clear what the distinction between sensation and experience is supposed to be for Davidson.

experience and knowledge. Being a linguistic affair, and hence being “in the logical space of reasons”, experience can now play a justificatory role for empirical knowledge. As Sellars puts it, “in characterizing experience as a state of knowing, ... we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says” (1956, §36).

The basic idea of McDowell’s conceptualism is actually Sellars’s psychological nominalism.³¹ According to McDowell, “The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity” (1994, p. 9). Hence “the world’s impressions on our senses are already possessed of conceptual content” (1994, p. 18). This means experience is already conceptual and does not need further construction. “When experience makes conceptual content available to one, that is itself one’s sensibility in operation, not understanding putting a construction on some pre-conceptual deliverances of sensibility” (1994, p. 67).

Thus conceptualism seems to be able to solve the epistemological problem successfully. As Sellars and McDowell understand it, once we realize experience is linguistic or conceptual, the rational relation between experience and belief is established and there should be no problem in bestowing a justificatory role upon experience. And for McDowell, this means “appearances can constitute reasons for judgements about objective reality” (1994, p. 62). Hence according to McDowell, once we realize experience is conceptual, there is then no problem for confronting our beliefs with the tribunal of experience. And the foundation of our empirical knowledge is secured. We can “avoid the Myth of the Given without renouncing the claim that experience is a rational constraint on thinking” (1994, p. 18). This is the alleged epistemological advantage of conceptualism over nonconceptualism.

I agree with Sellars and McDowell that it is necessary that experience is linguistic or conceptual for it to play a role in belief justification. But is this sufficient? This crucially depends on what Sellars means by saying that experience is “a linguistic affair” or “a state of knowing” and what McDowell means by saying that experience is “conceptual”. In what follows, I shall argue that being linguistic or conceptual in the sense Sellars and McDowell propose is not sufficient for experience to play a role in belief justification.

³¹ It is important to note Sellars himself never uses the term “conceptualism” to dub his position. And where he does use the term “conceptualism,” he relates it to the idea of “treating sensations as though they were absolutely specific, and infinitely complicated, *thoughts*” (1956, §26). And “this assimilation of sensations to thoughts” is exactly the central idea of the Myth of the Given that Sellars means to attack (1956, §25). But Sellars’s attack on the idea of the assimilation of sensations to thoughts actually paves the way for his psychological nominalism. For Sellars, the distinction between sensation and experience is clear and crucial. In Sellars, the positive understanding of experience, namely, experience presupposes conceptual capacities, is at the same time a negative understanding of sensation, that is, without presupposing conceptual capacities, sensation cannot be assimilated to thought. As Sellars himself makes it clear, “the primary connotation of ‘psychological nominalism’ is the denial that there is any awareness of logical space prior to, or independent of, the acquisition of a language” (1956, §31). Hence given the divergence of the use of the terminology, the basic idea of Sellars’s psychological nominalism and McDowell’s conceptualism is essentially the same. And for the sake of simplicity, I assume it does not do much harm to call Sellars a conceptualist. But it is also important to note a difference between Sellars and McDowell. For McDowell, experience is conceptual through and through, while for Sellars, “perceptual experience involves a sensory element which is in no way a form of thinking, however intimately it may be connected with thinking” (1975, p. 129).

2. Saying experience is conceptual, conceptualism may give the impression that it insists experience is belief. But this is not the case. Both Sellars and McDowell agree experience is not belief. For Sellars and McDowell, that experience presupposes conceptual capacities does not mean it is itself a belief. In this sense, they are with Evans. Evans insists that we “reserve ‘belief’ for the notion of a far more sophisticated cognitive state” (1982, p. 124). This is to “take the notion of *being in an informational state with such-and-such contents* as a primitive notion for philosophy, rather than to attempt to characterize it in terms of belief” (1982, p. 123).

For McDowell, as it is for Evans, there is a disconnection between experience and belief. “Its appearing to me that things are thus and so is not obviously to be equated with my believing something. Certainly not with my believing that things are thus and so” (1994, p. 140; see also 2002a, p. 278). McDowell’s conceptualism requires only this:

In experience one takes in, for instance sees, that things are thus and so. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge. (1994, p. 9)

What McDowell requires for experience to be conceptual is only that experience possesses the kind of conceptual content we can also judge; it is not that experience is itself a judgement.

It might be worth mentioning that for McDowell, there is a distinction between judgement and belief, according to which, “judging, making up our minds what to think, is something for which we are responsible—something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely happens in our lives”, while “a belief is not always, or even typically, a result of our exercising this freedom to decide what to think” (1998, p. 434). McDowell does not require that we always acquire a belief by making active judgement. And he agrees perceptual belief acquisition is not typically a matter of active judging. Hence when he says experience is not belief, he is not just saying that we do not make active, critical judgement in experience. What he means is that there is no acceptance in experience. To acquire perceptual belief, “having it look to one as if things are a certain way” has to *become* “accepting that things are the way by a sort of default” (1998, p. 439).

Hence McDowell says experience is conceptual not in the sense that experience is belief; it is only in the sense that experience is propositional. The content of experience is considered as something merely presented, not actually accepted, in experience. We may define a belief as a doxastic propositional attitude and understand belief as a doxastic

attitude which is propositional.³² For McDowell, experience is propositional but not a doxastic attitude; it is not a proper propositional attitude.

Things seem to be more complicated in Sellars. Sellars happily agrees that “observings” are “knowings” (1956, §36). On one occasion he writes: “Thus, on the occasion of sensing a certain color configuration, one takes there to be an object or situation of a certain description in one’s physical environment” (1975, pp. 129-130). This may give the impression that Sellars thinks that experience involves attitude or judgement. But a more careful study of Sellars suggests the opposite. Sellars writes,

...to say that a certain experience is a seeing that something is the case, is to do more than describe the experience. It is to characterize it as, so to speak, making an assertion or claim, and—which is the point I wish to stress—to endorse that claim. (1956, §16)

Sellars here makes a distinction between saying that “a certain experience is a seeing that something is the case” and describing the experience. The former is to characterize experience as making an assertion or claim and to endorse that claim, while the latter only describes experience as it is. For Sellars, to experience is to be presented with a conceptual content but not to endorse that content. Hence what Sellars is trying to say is actually this. To describe an experience as seeing something is the case is to take an attitude towards the content of the experience. The attitude, namely the endorsement, is not in experience; it is in thought. Thus Sellars’s talk of endorsing the claim in experience suggests that there is no attitude in experience and the attitude is in the endorsement of the claim.

It can be objected that Sellars’s saying of endorsing experience does not simply mean there is no attitude in experience. Sellars also talks of experience as making an assertion or claim, and this, the objection goes, implies that he thinks experience involves attitude, since an assertion or claim should be something like a judgement or belief. For this reason Williams suggests that, for Sellars, when we endorse an experience, “what we endorse are claimings, not claimables”. He thus thinks that “Sellars takes the assertional character of experience very seriously” (2006, p. 312).

According to Williams’s reading, Sellars’s understanding would allow judgement in both the endorsement of the claim and the claim itself. To endorse the claim is to endorse the judgement contained in experience, that is, to judge a judgement. This seems to suggest that Sellars has two judging subjects in mind. One is the experiencing subject, the other the thinking subject; and the thinking subject seems to be a higher subject and judges what the experiencing subject judges. While it is true that Sellars does sometimes give the impression that he has in mind two subjects, especially when he talks about “a higher court”, the idea of

³² It is important to note that, for me, a propositional attitude is not an attitude towards a proposition, but rather a *propositional* attitude towards the world.

two judging subjects within one person does not seem to be promising (1956, §16). Furthermore, even if Sellars does say that there is a lower level judgement in experience, it still will not be right to say that this lower level judgement is belief. The lower level judgement is not belief since it is not something endorsed by the subject. Most importantly, Sellars's own remarks about the claim contained in experience do not seem to support the reading that the claim is indeed a judgement. To see the point, we need to be clear about what Sellars really means by "assertion" or "claim".

According to Sellars, we can judge an experience in three different ways: say, as "a *seeing that* something is green", as "a case of something's *looking* green", and as a case of something's merely looking green (1956, §16). I shall follow McDowell and call these three cases "a trio of possible experiences" (1998, p. 443). As Sellars describes it, in the case of judging one's experience as seeing that something is green, one ascribes the claim that something is green to one's experience and endorses it. In the case of judging one's experience as something's looking green, one ascribes the same claim but does not endorse it. In the case of judging one's experience as something's merely looking green, one ascribes the same claim but rejects it.

Sellars says that "the experience of seeing that something is green is...the occurrence of the propositional claim 'this is green'" (1956, §16). But for Sellars the same claim is contained in the other two cases of the trio as well. The three experiences "may be identical as experiences", that is, "indistinguishable" from each other, and yet one be properly referred to as a seeing that something is green, the second merely as a case of something's looking green, and the third as a case of something's merely looking green (1956, §16). If the three experiences can share the same claim, then it is very unlikely that the claim can be a judgement. We can see this more clearly when Sellars shifts his angle from a third person judgement to a first person report. He writes:

Thus, when I say "X looks green to me now" I am *reporting* the fact that my experience is, so to speak, intrinsically, *as an experience*, indistinguishable from a veridical one of seeing that x is green. Involved in the report is the ascription to my experience of the claim 'x is green'; and the fact that I make this report rather than the simple report "X is Green" indicates that certain considerations have operated to raise, so to speak in a higher court, the question 'to endorse or not to endorse.' I may have reason to think that x may not after all be green. (1956, §16)

We can see from the above passage that for Sellars, the experiences reported as "X looks green to me now" and "X is green" contain the same claim "x is green". And this should be the same for the experience reported as "X merely looks green to me now". Hence all the three cases of the trio contain the same claim "x is green". That experience

contains this claim, of course, does not mean it is true that x is green. Nor does it mean that the subject believes or judges that x is green. And the crucial thing is: nor does it even mean that there is a lower level judgement in experience which says that x is green.

For Sellars, the three experiences in a trio of possible experiences present the same propositional content and hence contain the same claim. In fact, the three cases of the trio share the same experience which can only be reported in different ways according to the different judgements made about the experience. What we find in experience is a neutral assertion or claim which is not in any sense a judgement. Hence what Sellars means here by propositional assertion or claim is just proposition. This suggests that for Sellars, experience is only propositional, not judgement-involving. The belief or judgement is only in the endorsement or rejection of experience.

Hence for Sellars, to endorse the claim contained in experience is not to endorse the judgement made by experience, or, to judge a judgement. It is to endorse a neutral proposition. Williams might be right in saying that for Sellars, when we endorse an experience, “what we endorse are claiming, not claimables”. But the point is that for Sellars, a claiming is a claiming only in the sense that it is propositional. There is no judgement in the claiming. Assertion or claim understood in this way is not concerned with truth. As Sellars makes it clear, only when “characterize S’s experience as a seeing”, we “apply the semantical concept of truth to that experience” (1956, §16).

This understanding of experience as an assertion without judgement is compatible with the aim of Sellars’s attack on the Given. All Sellars means to do at this stage is to show that ‘looks’-talk presupposes ‘being’-talk. He writes:

The point I wish to stress at this time, however, is that the concept of *looking green*, the ability to recognize that something *looks green*, presupposes the concept of *being green*, and that the latter concept involves the ability to tell what colors objects have by looking at them—which, in turn, involves knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its color by looking at it. (1956, §18)

The idea is that things cannot look to one in a certain way without one being able to see things in a certain way. And to be able to see things in a certain way is to possess the relevant conceptual capacities. Hence things cannot look to one in a certain way without one having the relevant conceptual capacities. And this would eventually defeat the idea that one can enjoy a certain kind of phenomenal “looks” before one has the relevant conceptual capacities. The idea that phenomenal “looks” may come before thinking and transmit its content to thinking is exactly the “heart of the Myth of the Given” Sellars means to attack (ibid., §38). Hence the attack on the Given is not about whether or not experience is judgement. For Sellars, it is not essential that experience be a judgement about the world.

What is crucial for Sellars is the idea that experience presupposes conceptual capacities to such an extent that things can look to one in a certain way. And it is this idea that is taken by McDowell in advocating his conceptualism. Hence at this point, McDowell agrees with Sellars completely:

The conceptual episodes Sellars is concerned with, when he speaks of visual experiences as “containing” claims, are not as such cases of judging. Even if one does judge that things are as they look, having them look that way to one is not the same as judging that they are that way. (1998, p. 439)

Sellars’s claim that experiences are episodes or states of knowing goes together with a special understanding of “states of knowing”. For him, as McDowell puts it nicely and agrees readily, “‘epistemic’ can amount to no more than ‘concept involving’” (1998, p. 436).

Now it should be clear what Sellars and McDowell mean when they say experience is “a linguistic affair” or is “conceptual”. For Sellars and McDowell, to experience is to exercise one’s conceptual capacities in a certain way. But for both of them, experience is only an exercise of conceptual capacities in such a way that it may provide propositional content for belief which is an endorsement or rejection of the content. According to this understanding, experience can only be something to be believed or disbelieved. No matter how closely experience is related to perceptual belief, it can never be the belief itself. There is always a gap between experience and belief.

Moreover, a further gap between experience and the world lurks. Conceptualism actually gives a very strange picture of experience. According to this picture, experience speaks (it is propositional). But it does not mean to speak about the truth of the world, since the three experiences in a trio of possible experiences speak the same thing. No matter what the world is like, experience would speak in the same way. This means experience is not sensitive to the truth of the world. There is then a gap between experience and the world: experience may remain the same no matter what the world is really like.

McDowell may give the impression that he wants no gap between experience and the world. For McDowell, conceptualism would equip us “to understand experience as openness to the world”, since it takes “receptivity itself to impinge rationally on belief” (1994, p. 143). This works together with his disjunctive understanding of experience. McDowell is against “the idea of emissaries that either tell the truth or lie” (1994, p. 143). Unlike sense-datum theorists, McDowell denies there is a “*highest common factor*”, which intervenes between us and the world, shared by “deceptive” and “nondeceptive” experience (1988, p. 210). According to his disjunctive understanding of experience, whereas in the case of deceptive experience, “what is given to experience is a mere appearance”, which in

a sense “intervenes between us and the world”, in the case of nondeceptive experience, “it is the fact itself made manifest” (1988, p.214; 1994, p. 143). Hence McDowell claims: “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”.³³ We thus have “fallible openness” to the world (1994, p. 143).

But we have seen that for McDowell, as it is for Sellars, experience is still a neutral appearance despite being conceptual. And a neutral appearance can be neither fallible nor openness to the world. It cannot be fallible because it does not mean to speak about the truth of the world and cannot be said to be false even when the content of experience is different from the way the world is. It cannot be openness to the world because it is open to three different ways the world might be and is thus not sensitive to the truth of the world. As Stroud points out correctly, “if all impressions are ‘appearances’ whose contents always fall short of implying anything about the independent world, the ‘openness to reality’ that McDowell rightly demands of a satisfactory account of experience is lost” (2002, p. 88).

McDowell claims: “the real trouble with conceiving experiences as intermediaries is that we cannot make sense of experiences, so conceived, as purporting to tell us anything, whether truthfully or not” (1994, p. 143). And he thinks we can get rid of the trouble by seeing that experience indeed tells us something, that is, experience has a conceptual content. But the problem is that, although nondoxastic conceptual experience does seem to tell us something, it does not purport to tell us anything *about the world*, whether truthfully or not. And for this reason experience, so conceived, is still an intermediary between the subject and the world.

We can then find two gaps in conceptualism, a gap between experience and belief and a gap between experience and the world. Hence for conceptualism, experience is not belief and is not sensitive to the truth of the world. In brief, experience is not belief about the world. This is the view I call nondoxasticism. A nondoxasticist can be either a nonconceptualist or a conceptualist. Conceptualism is thus the conceptualist version of nondoxasticism which says experience is propositional but not doxastic.

3. Despite their commitment to nondoxasticism, Sellars and McDowell still insist experience plays a justificatory role in empirical knowledge. Particularly, for McDowell, “experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are” (1996, p. xii). According to McDowell, facts can work as external constraints on thought if they can manifest themselves in experience, and for facts to manifest themselves in experience is for experience to be conceptual. Hence the conceptuality of experience

³³ I guess McDowell actually means “when experience is not misleading”, given that he allows experience to be misleading without us being misled. See chap. 6 for more of this.

provides an external constraint on thought which is “from outside the activity of thinking...though not from outside what is thinkable, so not from outside the space of concepts” (1994, p. 144).

Sellars is in a sense well recognized as a coherentist. Sellars’s attack on the Given destroys the empiricist form of foundationalism by showing that experience cannot be a foundation in the “static” sense (1956, §38). For Sellars, non-inferential knowledge, like inferential knowledge, presupposes knowledge of other facts. The foundations of our empirical knowledge are not “self-authenticating...unmoved movers” (1956, §38). This is to abandon “the traditional empiricist idea that observational knowledge ‘stands on its own feet’” (1956, §36). Sellars claims, “Empirical knowledge...is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once”. Thus, “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” (1956, §38).

But Sellars’s epistemology, if there is a sense of coherentism in it at all, is essentially different from Davidson’s “unconstrained coherentism”. Like McDowell, Sellars also wants experience to be the source of knowledge. For Sellars, this first of all means experience should play a justificatory role in our belief system. Moreover, Sellars has no intention of saying that “empirical knowledge has *no* foundation”. He insists that empirical knowledge is not “empirical knowledge so-called”. Empirical knowledge has to have a foundation in a certain sense. Sellars writes: “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” (1956, §38). All these suggest that, for Sellars, experience has a special status in belief justification.

In any case, both Sellars and McDowell insist experience plays a justificatory role in virtue of being propositional. McDowell writes:

No doubt when it appears to me that things are thus and so, I usually (at least) believe that it appears to me that things are thus and so, but it is not obvious that the appearing *is* the belief; and whether it is or not, we can innocuously credit the appearing itself with rational implications for what I ought to think. (1994, p.140)

We may then wonder how experience, which is not a belief about the world, can justify our beliefs about the world. Given the two gaps we find in conceptualism, that is, the gap between experience and belief, on the one hand, and the gap between experience and the world, on the other hand, it is not clear how a rational connection between experience and thought is supposed to be secured. The two gaps seem hard to bridge. First, to justify a belief, experience has to provide not only a content to believe but also a psychological attitude of believing. It is hard to see how a nondoxastic experience can provide thought

with an attitude of believing. Secondly, to justify a belief about the world, experience has to be itself about the truth of the world. It is hard to see how experience, which is not an assertion about the truth of the world, can provide thought with the truth of the world. As Stroud puts it nicely, how could appearance, which does not imply any thing about the truth of an independent world, “ever give one reason to believe anything about what is not an ‘appearance’” (2002, p. 89)?

McDowell does not seem to see any difficulties here. He writes:

...suppose one asks an ordinary subject why she holds some observational belief, say that an object within her field of view is square. An unsurprising reply might be “Because it looks that way”. That is easily recognized as giving a reason for holding the belief. Just because she gives expression to it in discourse... (1994, p. 165)

According to McDowell, for experience to justify a belief, all we need is that the subject gives expression to experience in discourse. And this is made possible by the conceptuality of experience. Hence what McDowell requires for a rational justification is simply that the supposed reason must be expressible in language. What is behind this is actually a special criterion of justification, according to which, all we need for justification is that what does the justifying is in the space of reasons, that is, is something propositional or something expressible in language. We may call this the propositional criterion of justification.

The propositional criterion of justification strikes us as very unusual. It seems to suggest a line of reasoning such as the following. If (1) X is entertaining a proposition p (which does not imply X endorses p); (2) X believes if p then q; then (3) X is justified in believing q. This obviously is not what we expect for an ordinary inferential justification. We can see clearly what is missing here, that is, X’s commitment to or acceptance of p in (1). In belief justification, what needs to be justified is a belief, namely, a state with an attitude of believing, not just a proposition. What needs to be justified is not only why one believes *this*, but also why one *believes* this. It is the psychological state of believing that justifies the logically related psychological state of believing. One cannot be justified in believing the logical consequence of p if one does not believe p. Only what one believes justifies what one believes. Nothing one does not believe can justify what one believes, whether it is conceptual or not. Or, more generally, only an attitude justifies an attitude; a content cannot justify an attitude.³⁴

Therefore, to justify a belief, the justifier has to be a belief. That is, it has to be a propositional attitude, not just a proposition. We can then put the reasoning of inferential justification as follows. If (1a) X believes p; (2a) X believes if p then q; then (3a) X is

³⁴ For a very similar view see Stroud 2002, p. 89.

justified in believing q (although X may not actually believe q for some reason, say she has not related (1a) and (2a) properly). Thus only a belief can justify a belief. This I call the doxastic criterion of justification. I take it that the doxastic criterion is essential for an ordinary inferential justification. Hence the propositional criterion is not sufficient.

It is important to note that when I say the propositional criterion is not sufficient, I am not saying it is not essential. I agree with Sellars and McDowell that it is essential that a justifier be propositional. And I believe this is why nonconceptual experience as a pure Given cannot justify empirical knowledge. On the other hand, when I say the doxastic criterion is essential, I am not saying that it is sufficient for justification. It is obvious that the doxastic criterion is not sufficient for knowledge justification; what justifies knowledge has to be something true. But it is also important to note that the doxastic criterion is not sufficient for belief justification either. For belief justification, what does the justification has to be at least an equal of what is to be justified, that is, a belief. But being a belief is not sufficient for being a justifier. For a belief to be able to justify another belief, it has to be something more than a belief, that is, a belief with a better epistemic status. And it is exactly for this reason that coherentism does not work. I shall return to this in §5 where I discuss the problem with Davidson's coherentism. The main target of the paper is nevertheless Sellars and McDowell's conceptualism and for this purpose we shall concentrate on the positive aspect of the doxastic criterion of justification, that is, it is essential for justification. The doxastic criterion is essential for both belief justification and knowledge justification, although it is sufficient for neither.

If we apply the doxastic criterion to the case of experience, then it requires that experience be belief in order to justify other beliefs. It is obvious that, given their endorsement of nondoxasticism, Sellars and McDowell's understanding of experience fails the doxastic criterion of justification. It then seems that neither Sellars nor McDowell would be able to bestow experience a justificatory role.

McDowell would disagree that the doxastic criterion is essential for knowledge justification. His "third person approach to epistemology" does not require that knowledge be justified by what the subject believes or knows (2003, p. 681). McDowell is against "an interiorization of the space of reasons, a withdrawal of it from the external world" (1995, p. 877). He points out rightly that justification cannot be an internal process independent of external fact. He thus introduces truth into the process of knowledge justification. However, for him, this only requires that the relevant fact be available to the subject, which means neither that the fact is what the subject knows nor that it is what the subject believes. For McDowell, a fact can play a role in knowledge justification without the subject taking the fact as a fact. To apply this to the case of experience, McDowell does not require that the subject take the fact manifested in experience as a fact. For him, experience would be able to justify empirical knowledge if only it can be a manifestation of the world. And this,

according to McDowell, is ensured by the understanding that experience is openness to the world.

McDowell's understanding of knowledge justification is, however, problematic. First, while it is true that fact plays a role in knowledge justification, it is not clear that fact can justify knowledge simply by being available to the subject. Fact can only play a role in the space of reasons as a fact by being taken as a fact. McDowell's "third person approach to epistemology" contradicts with the nature of the space of reasons. The space of reasons should not be an internal sphere, to be sure, but it has to be a matter of the first person in that fact can function as a fact in the space of reasons only if it is what the subject believes. Second, the problem with McDowell's understanding of knowledge justification is more obvious when we remember that knowledge is not only something true but also something taken as true. That is, it is essential that knowledge be belief.³⁵ And if knowledge is a species of belief, then it has to be justified as belief as well as true. And to justify a belief, as we saw above, the justifier has to be belief. We can then conclude from the above two points that the doxastic criterion is essential for knowledge justification, just as it is essential for belief justification. And for experience to justify empirical knowledge, it has to be belief.

We nevertheless need to note that when Sellars and McDowell say experience justifies empirical belief or knowledge, they are not talking about an ordinary inferential justification. For Sellars and McDowell, experience is not itself belief, hence what needs to be justified is actually a basic belief or an observational belief which has the same content as the relevant experience. Call this basic justification. Basic justification is different from an ordinary inferential justification. In ordinary inferential justification, we infer a belief from a different belief, that is, a belief with a different content. But in basic justification, experience is expected to justify a belief with the same content, that is, to justify basic belief with its content endorsed in the basic belief.

Hence there might be a chance for basic justification to avoid the doxastic criterion of justification. There would then be a chance for experience to possess a justificatory role without being doxastic. We now need to see if the doxastic criterion of justification, which is essential for an ordinary inferential justification, is avoidable for basic justification. For this we need to see how Sellars and McDowell respond to the doxastic criterion.

4. As I quoted in the above section, according to McDowell, to give a reason for holding an observational belief, an ordinary subject might say "Because it looks that way". But it is not clear how something's looking "that way" can justify the belief that it is really the case that

³⁵ As I mentioned in chapter 2, §6, it is Williamson's contention that knowledge is not a species of belief (2000). But McDowell seems to stay with the traditional understanding and insist knowledge has to be belief. Commenting on an example in which one had an experience of seeing without realizing that the experience was indeed a seeing, McDowell remarks: "One did not form the relevant belief, let alone get to know that that was how things were" (2003, p. 681).

it is that way. Something's looking that way could equally justify the belief that "it looks that way" or "it merely looks that way". Hence there is a gap between "it looks that way" and "I believe it is that way".

McDowell's reply to the difficulty is that "An impression is something like an invitation—a petition...to accept a proposition about the objective world" (2002a, p. 278):

I think we need an idea of perception as something in which there is no attitude of acceptance or endorsement at all, but only, as I put it, an invitation to adopt such an attitude, which, in the best cases, consists in a fact's making itself manifest to one. (2002a, p. 279)

It is understandable that McDowell introduces the idea of invitation at this point. For McDowell, although experience is a neutral appearance, there is a good chance, though not a specific reason, that experience is the way the world is. Hence the subject might feel disposed to take it as a manifestation of the world. But this does not seem to help very much with the question we need to deal with. An invitation is something to be accepted or rejected. And what we need is an acceptance or belief. The acceptance of an invitation should not be taken for granted and still requires justification.

Hence the crucial point here is whether or not the acceptance of the invitation can be justified. If McDowell can show us a way of justifying our acceptance of the content of an experience without making experience itself a belief, he would then be able to bestow experience a justificatory role without making it a belief. But for McDowell, the invitation becomes acceptance quite automatically. He writes:

Unless there are grounds for suspicion, such as odd lighting conditions, having it look to one as if things are a certain way – ostensibly seeing things to be that way—becomes accepting that things are that way by a sort of default...(1998, p. 439)

According to McDowell, experience becomes belief "by a sort of default". This is obviously a very thin sense of justification, if it is a justification at all. We shall see that even this very thin sense of justification demands experience to be belief. McDowell actually suggests that experience becomes belief without any positive reasons. There can only be two ways for this to happen. First, experience causes a belief with the same content. In this case, the relation between experience and belief is causal instead of rational. This obviously is not the option McDowell would be willing to take. Then the only alternative is that experience is itself belief. If experience produces belief with neither a causal procedure nor a rational connection, then it has to be itself the belief. Hence McDowell cannot show how experience can become belief "by a sort of default" without identifying experience with

belief.

But maybe McDowell also has in mind a stronger sense of justification. According to McDowell, we accept the invitation of experience when there is no reason not to accept it. This may suggest we do need a justification when we reject the invitation. And the rejection of the invitation is supposed to be justified by knowledge of “odd lighting conditions”. However, our knowledge about the lighting conditions, like other empirical knowledge, also needs to be justified by the relevant experience, namely the experience of the lighting conditions. And to follow McDowell’s suggestion, in order to use the experience of the lighting conditions to justify one’s knowledge of the lighting conditions, one has to accept the invitation of the experience of the lighting conditions “by a sort of default”. And this, as we saw above, requires that the experience of the lighting conditions be belief, if we don’t want to assume a causal relation between experience and belief.

Hence McDowell cannot justify the acceptance or rejection of the invitation of experience without understanding experience as belief.

Like McDowell, Sellars’s understanding of experience as nondoxastic makes it impossible to satisfy the doxastic criterion of justification. But unlike McDowell, Sellars does make a notable effort to show that experience can be justified. For Sellars, to justify experience is to justify it as veridical. And to justify experience as veridical is to justify that the viewing conditions are normal.³⁶ Sellars insists that basic belief as an endorsement of experience is justified inferentially. According to Sellars, when the subject forms a belief that “there is a red apple in front of him” on the basis of experience, “he is inferring from the character and context of his experience that it is veridical and that there is good reason to believe that there is indeed a red apple in front of him” (1975, p. 130). Hence, according to Sellars, the justification of an observational belief is in fact an inferential justification. For Sellars, the endorsement of the content of experience is justified by inferring from the character and context of one’s experience that it is veridical.

If experience can be justified as veridical in this way, then we may have good reasons to derive a belief from experience without experience itself being a belief. That is, to form a belief with the content of experience endorsed in it. The basic belief is then justified and is partly justified by experience. In this way, experience plays a justificatory role in a limited sense.

³⁶ McDowell disagrees with Sellars that “the reporter must be able to give evidence of her reliability in reporting the sort of state of affairs in question” (2002, p. 100). But it seems that McDowell is talking about a different kind of reliability. The kind of reliability McDowell has in mind is the reliability of my being able to “tell a green thing when I see one (in the right conditions of illumination)”, that is, I am a reliable concept user. And for this kind of reliability, I think McDowell is right in saying that “It is held firm for me by my whole conception of the world with myself in touch with it, and not as the conclusion of an inference from some of that conception” (2002, p. 101). But what Sellars means here is the reliability of one’s experience, not the reliability of one’s conceptual capacities. And for Sellars, the reliability of one’s visual experience, in a certain circumstance, depends on the right illumination condition. Hence for Sellars, what needs to be justified is that the illumination condition is right, not that when the illumination condition is right I can tell a green thing when I see one. What Sellars means to justify is the viewing condition, not one’s conceptual capacities.

This may seem to suggest a way for a proposition to contribute to the justification of a belief, if not to justify a belief solely by itself. A proposition can be used for further belief justification if it is justified as being from a reliable source. In this way while experience cannot justify a belief solely in virtue of being propositional, it may contribute to the justification of a basic belief by being justified as a reliable source of content and hence provide content for the basic belief.³⁷ Thus there might be a chance for Sellars to escape the doxastic criterion of justification. If the subject is justified to endorse the content of an experience, then she can form a basic belief with the content of the experience endorsed in the belief without the experience itself being belief and justify other beliefs with the basic belief thus formed. In this way, nondoxastic experience can play a justificatory role in that its content contributes to the basic belief which in turn justifies other beliefs.

However, one's belief about "the character and context" of one's experience needs to be justified by the experience of the character and context of one's experience. This in turn requires that the experience of "the character and context" of one's experience be justified as veridical. To avoid an infinite regress, we have to stop at a point where experience is belief. Eventually the justifier has to be an experience which is belief. The moral is: justification can only be completed by an experience which is belief. Hence Sellars cannot justify experience as veridical without making experience itself a belief. Denying experience is belief, Sellars cannot justify basic belief successfully.

We see that experience cannot play an ultimate justificatory role solely in virtue of being propositional. Basic justification, like ordinary inferential justification, has to satisfy the doxastic criterion of justification as well. To justify a belief, experience has to be itself belief. Conceptualism, as a version of nondoxasticism, cannot bestow experience a justificatory role.

5. I have argued that it is essential that basic justification, that is, justification of an observational belief, meet the doxastic criterion of justification. The doxastic criterion of justification, I shall argue, is what Davidson has in mind when he denies experience a justificatory role.

McDowell claims that the propositional criterion of justification is what Davidson requires when he says "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief" (Davidson 1983, p. 141). He thinks "there is more than an excess of simplicity in Davidson's formulation" and suggests the following emendation: "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except something else that is also in the space of concepts" (1994,

³⁷ I should make it clear that I do not believe that to justify experience is to justify it as reliable. But I shall not pursue the issue here. And for the sake of argument, I shall grant Sellars that to justify experience as reliable is a way of justifying experience.

p. 143).³⁸ We have said enough about what McDowell means by saying experience is “in the space of concepts”. Now we shall turn to Davidson’s slogan.

In his further explanation of the slogan, Davidson says that he agrees with Rorty when Rorty says: “nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our languages so as to find some test other than coherence” (1980, p. 178). This seems to suggest that what Davidson requires for justification is a proper belief, that is, something “we already accept”, and not just something “in the space of concepts” or something propositional. It is for this reason that Davidson challenges any version of foundationalism with the following two questions:

All such theories must explain at least these two things: what, exactly, is the relation between sensation and belief that allows the first to justify the second? And, why should we believe our sensations are reliable, that is, why should we trust our senses? (1983, p. 141)

While the first question challenges the idea that sensation can justify belief, the second challenges the idea that sensations can be justified as trustworthy. Let’s start with the first challenge.

Davidson thinks that there is no reason to think that sensation can justify belief. First, “sensations themselves, verbalized or not”, cannot “justify certain beliefs that go beyond what is given in sensation” (1983, p. 142). The reason is that sensations are not to be identified with certain beliefs. Davidson insists that we distinguish “between perceiving a green spot and perceiving that a spot is green” (1983, p. 141). What Davidson means here seems to be this: perceiving a green spot is only to have a sensation prompted by a green spot while perceiving that a spot is green is to believe or judge that a spot is green. For Davidson, to have a sensation prompted by a green spot is different from believing or judging that a spot is green. It will not help if we “formulate judgements that do not go beyond stating that the perception or sensation or presentation exists” (1983, pp.141-2). For one thing, “if the basic beliefs do not exceed in content the corresponding sensation, they cannot support any inference to an objective world” (1983, p.142). On the other hand, “there are no such beliefs” at all. We see Davidson believes that what sensation lacks is a belief about the world.

Second, Davidson thinks that one may have a sensation without being aware that one has the sensation. Hence the problem, as Davidson sees it, is that a sensation may not be a

³⁸ McDowell later understands Davidson’s slogan in a different way and claims that we do not need to follow Davidson’s criterion of justification: “Davidson’s so-called coherentism is encapsulated in the claim that ‘nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief’. The case I have described violates this dictum; it is a case in which there was an entitlement that was not a belief. Of course it is precisely because the entitlement was not a belief that the subject did not form the belief that the entitlement in fact warranted. But it was an entitlement even so, as the subject later realizes” (2003, p. 681).

conscious state and hence is not a belief (1983, p.142). For Davidson, sensation seems to be something rather physical. It is something we can be aware of, but is not itself awareness.

In brief, Davidson's worry is that sensation is not conscious belief about the external world and hence cannot be used as a justification of beliefs which go beyond what is given in sensation. Based on this, Davidson writes:

The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. ...the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in this sense are the bases or ground of those beliefs. But a causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified. (1983, p. 143)

We now move on to Davidson's second challenge to foundationalism.

Davidson sees no reason for giving experience special epistemic status. According to Davidson, there is no reason that we should "believe our sensations are reliable" and "trust our senses" (1983, p. 141). Davidson's complaint is not just that a certain piece of experience cannot be justified as reliable. What he has in mind are cases such as the brain in the vat, and the worry is that "not only may our senses sometimes deceive us; it is possible that we are systematically and generally deceived" (1988, p. 43). His worry seems to be that experience in general is not concerned with the truth of the world, or, as he puts it, in sensation, "no question of truth can arise" (1982, p. 163). Hence for Davidson, "empiricism is the view that the subjective ('experience') is the foundation of objective empirical knowledge" (1988, p. 46). It is exactly for this reason that Davidson denies a person can tell if all his beliefs about the world are true by confronting the totality of his beliefs with the tribunal of experience. He claims, "No such confrontation makes sense, for of course we can't get outside our skins to find out what is causing the internal happening of which we are aware" (1983, p. 144). For this reason, Davidson insists that experience, or sensation as he calls it, cannot be the foundation of knowledge:

If the ultimate evidence for our schemes and theories, the raw material on which they are based, is subjective in the way I have described, then so is whatever is directly based on it: our beliefs, desires, intentions, and what we mean by our words...like sensations, they could be just as they are, and the world be very different. (1988, p.43)

Davidson's complaint, again, is not that experience or sensation can be wrong, but rather that experience is not concerned with the truth of the world.

We see Davidson has two reasons for denying experience a justificatory role. First, for Davidson, experience is not a conscious belief. By this he means that experience is not a propositional attitude, not that experience is not propositional. Second, Davidson thinks

experience is subjective in the sense that it is not concerned with the truth of the world. In brief, for Davidson, experience cannot justify a belief because it is not a belief about the world. It is clear then the doxastic criterion of justification is what Davidson has in mind when he says “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief”. And as I argued earlier in this chapter, the doxastic criterion is essential for belief justification and is the one Sellars and McDowell’s conceptualism could not satisfy.³⁹

The doxastic criterion of justification, nevertheless, does not lead Davidson to the correct epistemological conclusion. This has to do with his understanding of experience. Understanding experience as nondoxastic, the only choice for Davidson is to embrace a version of coherentism which denies experience a justificatory role. According to Davidson, “although sensation plays a crucial role in the causal process that connects beliefs with the world, it is a mistake to think it plays an epistemological role in determining the contents of those beliefs” (1988, p. 46). He claims that “empirical knowledge has no epistemological foundation, and needs none” (1988, p. 46). The problem with this is that it makes thought lose contact with the world. As McDowell puts it, Davidson’s coherentism is only “a version of the conception of spontaneity as frictionless” (1994, p. 14).

Davidson’s reply to this is that experiential belief is caused by experience, which, according to him, is in turn a direct contact with the world. He insists that “What the senses ‘deliver’ (i.e., cause) in perception is perceptual beliefs, and these do have an ultimate evidential role” (1999, p. 106). Hence Davidson sees no problem for a coherentist to show that thought is in direct contact with the world. He says he is a coherentist only in the sense that “the beliefs that are delivered by the senses are always open to revision, in the light of further perceptual experience, in the light of what we remember, in the light of our general knowledge of how the world works”. And this, according to Davidson, does not prevent him from thinking there is a contact between thought and reality. He insists: “There must be ‘friction’ between the world and our thoughts if our thoughts are to have any content at all, and I find this friction right here, in the external causes of our perceptual beliefs” (1999, p. 106).

There are three problems with the causal relation between sensation and belief conceived by Davidson. First, Davidson seems to take it for granted that the senses are able to “deliver” perceptual beliefs. But the senses can only deliver beliefs if there are beliefs in experience to be delivered. And according to Davidson’s understanding of experience, it is obvious that there is no belief for the senses to deliver. Second, Davidson cannot even explain where the conceptual content in thought comes from. As Sellars’s attack on the Given reveals, it remains mysterious how a nonconceptual experience can provide

³⁹ Hence observes Ginsborg: “McDowell’s own view on the question of reasons for belief is weaker than Davidson’s, in that he allows reasons for belief to include not only other beliefs but also states with unasserted propositional contents, which is what he takes experience to be” (2006, p. 351).

empirical knowledge with a conceptual content, no matter what the relation between experience and belief is, causal or rational. It is essential that sensation be conceptual, even as a cause of belief. Hence Davidson's nonconceptual sensation cannot cause the basic belief which has a conceptual content. The third problem for Davidson's picture is that a causal relation between sensation and belief cannot really get our belief system in touch with the world. Remember Davidson's complaint about sensation is that it is subjective and cannot take us to the objective world. Then we may wonder how we can get in touch with the world by having beliefs caused by subjective sensations which are not themselves direct contact with the world.

Coherentism is not satisfactory any way. As I mentioned in §3, while being essential, the doxastic criterion of justification is not sufficient. A belief does not justify another belief just because it is a belief. The justifying belief must have a better epistemic status than the belief to be justified. There must be something in the justifying belief which makes it able to justify another belief. Hence the kind of justification Davidson's coherentism appeals to is not a proper justification. The coherence of a set of beliefs does not make these beliefs sufficiently justified. A coherent false story is still a false story. As far as our beliefs about the world are concerned, what we want is truth, not just coherence, and the coherence of a set of beliefs does not justify the truth of these beliefs. A justifier has to have its individual credit. Coherentism in fact has a set of beliefs none of which is properly justified.

Hence it is essential that empirical knowledge have a foundation. And this foundation has to be found in experience. It is clear then Davidson's problem is with his understanding of experience. With his understanding of experience as a pure Given, neither can a causal relation between sensation and belief be sustained, nor can the causal relation (if it does exist) connect our belief system with the external world.

Davidson's understanding of experience is problematic in two ways. On the one hand, experience is understood as something not accessible to the subject; it is not belief and the subject may not even be aware of it. On the other hand, experience is understood as something not open to the world. Experience is said to be subjective in such a way that we cannot depend on it to get the truth of the world. And to solve the problem we have to work in both directions. On the one hand, experience should be something the subject is committed to, namely belief. On the other hand, experience should be about the truth of the world. Briefly, experience has to be belief about the world. Only in this way can thought be connected with the world through experience.

6. It is Sellars and McDowell's merit that they make an important move in the right direction, that is, to understand experience in a different way. For them experience is conceptual and can thus provide a conceptual content for thought. This explains where the

content of the basic belief comes from and at the same time makes the relation between experience and belief rational instead of causal.

But this only solves part of the problem. Experience's being conceptual is not sufficient for making the relation between experience and belief a justificatory one. Sellars and McDowell actually share Davidson's understanding of experience in an important sense, that is, experience is not a belief or assertion about the truth of the world. Hence, as Davidson correctly points out, for McDowell, experience "is not a belief, but a propositional attitude for which we have no word. We then decide whether or not to transform this neutral attitude into a belief" (1999, p. 107). In Davidson's wording, McDowell gives no explanation of "why an attitude which has no subjective probability whatever can provide a reason for a positive belief". Here, by "attitude", Davidson actually means proposition. For this reason, McDowell "seems committed to epistemic intermediaries, the propositional contents we 'take in', between the world and our opinions about the world" (1999, p. 107).

McDowell may not see this as a problem. He confesses that while Davidson focuses on concerns about "the possibility of knowledge", he himself focuses on concerns about "how content is possible" (1994, pp. 146-7). His aim is only to show that experience provides content for belief, not that it provides attitude for belief. While McDowell may well solve the problem of content, he leaves the problem of attitude or "the possibility of knowledge" untouched.

McDowell's criticism of nonconceptualism is that "the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications" (1994, p. 8). But if all a conceptualist can do is to point to whatever is in front of her when being asked for reasons for her belief, then she is still offering exculpations where we wanted justifications—although what is used as exculpations are conceptual experiences instead of nonconceptual experiences. Without being doxastic, experience as conceptualists understand it can only be something *given* to us to be accepted or rejected. In this sense, a nondoxastic conceptual experience is still a Given, although not a pure Given. We can thus identify a residue of the Given in conceptualism.

To see the point, we need to distinguish two different senses of the Given. The first sense of the Given is what Sellars means to attack and McDowell intends to avoid. Experience as a Given in this sense is understood as something nonconceptual or nonpropositional; it is something *given to the subject to be conceptualized*. We find the idea in different versions of nonconceptualism. The Given in the second sense makes a distinction between what we experience and what we believe. Experience as a Given in this second sense is understood as something nondoxastic; it is something *given to the subject to be accepted or rejected*. It is this second sense of the Given that we find in conceptualism.

Insisting experience presupposes conceptual capacities, conceptualism does make an important contribution to fighting the idea of the Given in the first sense. But understanding experience as nondoxastic, conceptualism commits itself to the Given in the second sense.

While attacking the first sense of the Given, conceptualism still considers experience as something given to us, instead of something we take as a belief. To treat a conceptual content as something to be endorsed or rejected is to treat it as a Given, although a conceptual Given.

As Rorty observes correctly, the point of Sellars's attack on the Given is his attack on "the distinction between what is 'given to the mind' and what is 'added by the mind'" (1997, p. 5). But the understanding of experience as something waiting to be endorsed or rejected makes, in its own way, a distinction between what is given to the mind and what is added by the mind. Devoid of attitude or judgement, conceptual experience is still a Given which needs to be endorsed or rejected. While we do not need to add a conceptual scheme to conceptual experience, we still need to add attitude or judgement to it. For this reason, a nondoxastic conceptual experience is still a Given.

Hence I agree with Wright when he accuses McDowell of recasting a new version of the Given:

...this amounts not to a *rejection* of the Given as such, but a recasting of it. What is given in experience is essentially of propositional form that so-and-so is the case...In rejecting the Myth of the Given, McDowell intends to reject a mythology about *what* is Given, and how, but not the very idea that anything is. (1998, p. 397)

While denying experience is a nonpropositional Given, McDowell insists experience is a propositional nondoxastic Given.

The Given in the second sense has its root in Descartes. Descartes admonishes us to treat experience as a Given. That is, when the object is presented to the intellect, the intellect should intuit it "in a fashion exactly corresponding to the way in which it possesses the object", instead of judging that the world is as it is represented in experience (1985, p. 47). In this way, Descartes thinks, we can avoid being deceived by any experience. Experience is thus disconnected from the believing subject and becomes pure (though perhaps conceptual) data to be judged. For Descartes, there is a distinction between experience, which is a nondoxastic Given, and the intellect, which makes judgement.

The motivation for the second sense of the Given is two dimensional. On the one hand, as we find in Descartes, it is motivated by the intention to avoid being deceived by experience. This rationalist motivation is based on the consideration that experience is not always reliable and "the intellect" is in a better position to decide what to believe. On the other hand, there is an empiricist motivation to base empirical knowledge on experience. And it is thought that the only way of doing this is to make sure experience is free of the contamination of judgement about the world.

Both the rationalist and empiricist motivation for the second sense of the Given are

ill-founded. First, with respect to the rationalist consideration, to avoid being deceived by experience, we do not have to deprive experience of all trace of judgement. What we need to do is to experience the world carefully and to revalue the judgement made in previous experience when in doubt. Second, concerning the empiricist consideration, to isolate experience from belief about the world would only disconnect experience from the world. Thus the only way to base empirical knowledge on experience is to make a real connection between experience and the world, that is, to make experience itself a belief or judgement about the world.

There is no doubt that we should avoid coherentism and insist experience justifies empirical knowledge. And the only way to do this is to see that experience is belief. Experience as conceptualists understand it cannot play the justificatory role as McDowell requires, nor is it able to provide the kind of “observational reports” on which other propositions rest, as Sellars claims. The Given in the second sense that we find in conceptualism makes it impossible for conceptualism to bestow experience a justificatory role. To denounce coherentism without insisting experience is belief can only lead to a New Myth of the Given.

The Myth of the Given that Sellars means to attack is a myth that a nonconceptual experience can provide a conceptual content for thought. The New Myth of the Given, to which both Sellars and McDowell are committed, is a myth that experience which is not a belief about the world can justify a belief about the world. The New Myth of the Given is a myth that what one does not believe can justify what one believes, and what is not about the world can justify what is about the world.

7. One of conceptualism’s greatest enticements is its epistemological advantage. But conceptualism, in effect, includes the rider that to be conceptual is only to be propositional. Hence conceptualism is a version of nondoxasticism which says experience is conceptual but not doxastic. Nondoxasticism endorsed by conceptualism falls foul of its epistemological ambition. Experience understood as nondoxastic cannot justify a belief. This epistemological difficulty belies a virulent mistake in conceptualism, namely, there is still a sense of the Given in it. The Given in this sense deprives experience a role of justification in empirical knowledge. What conceptualism has is only a New Myth of the Given.

The New Myth of the Given should not be understood as a myth of experience. We may exorcise the idea of the Given completely by insisting experience is belief and can thus play a justificatory role in empirical knowledge. The next task of the thesis is then to argue that experience is indeed belief. But before venturing that task, we need to have a better understanding about the relationship between experience and concept.

5. Experience and Concept as Mutually Constitutive

1. We can distinguish two views concerning the relationship between experience and conceptual capacities or language ability. One is the view that experience comes before conceptual capacities or language ability. Call this experience priority thesis. The other is the view that conceptual capacities or language ability comes before experience. Call this concept priority thesis. Nonconceptualism exemplifies the experience priority thesis, while conceptualism has a tendency to embrace the concept priority thesis.

Nonconceptualists follow traditional empiricists and understand conceptual capacities as something derived from experience. They thus claim an advantage in explaining where concepts come from. Peacocke, for example, considers the nonconceptual content of experience necessary for learning observational concepts. Concerning the case of learning the observational shape concept *pyramid*, he observes the following quandary:

On the one hand, the representational content of this experience, in the case of learning from a positive instance, must be sufficient for someone rationally to apply the concept—must entitle her to apply the concept—when experience is being taken at face value. If that were not so, it would not be an observational concept after all. Yet on the other hand, this representational content cannot include the concept *pyramid*, for that would require the learner already to possess the concept. The learner could have such experiences only if the lesson were unnecessary. (2001, p. 252)

The solution to the quandary, according to Peacocke, “is to acknowledge that there is such a thing as having an experience of something as being pyramid shaped that does not involve already having the concept of being pyramid” (2001, p. 252). The idea is that, to make the learning of concept pyramid possible and necessary, one’s experience should have a content that is individuated by the concept pyramid without involving the concept.

The point of Peacocke’s solution is that experience has a content individuated by the relevant concepts before these concepts are learnt. But this seems neither necessary, nor possible. It is not necessary because concept learning is not to apply a concept to a nonconceptual experience, but to apply it to an external object. All we need for concept learning is that the subject has the kind of sensory ability that enables her to apply a concept to an object. The solution is not possible because it is not clear how experience can have a content individuated by the concepts that are not only not involved in the experience but also not possessed by the subject. It is not clear how an experience can be “an experience of something as being pyramid shaped” without involving the concept of being pyramid. It

seems that an object can only be experienced as pyramid shaped when the subject apply the concept of being pyramid shaped to the object.

Peacocke's solution also implies that learning new concepts will not change the content of the relevant experience since the content of the latter is already individuated by the concepts before the concepts are learnt. Thus experience needs to undergo no change during the course of concept learning. In other words, we develop conceptual capacities without developing experiential ability to a new stage. The development of language ability does not bring about the development of experiential ability. But as we have seen, there is no reason to think that experience has a content individuated by the concepts that are not possessed by the subject. For this reason, experience has to undergo some kind of changes in order to possess a content that is individuated by the concepts learnt by the subject. It is to be admitted that the kind of perception one can have before obtaining the relevant concepts is nonconceptual. And there is no doubt that perception of a nonconceptual being is nonconceptual. But there is no reason to believe that experience of a conceptual being has to be the same as that of a nonconceptual being.

Conceptualists see this clearly and insist sensory ability undergoes a substantial change once conceptual capacities are acquired. For conceptualists, the crucial point is to see what happens to experience once one possesses conceptual capacities. The idea is that our conceptual capacities permeate sensibility in such a way that we have experience which is itself conceptual.

We may then suspect a connection between conceptualism and concept priority thesis. According to Sellars and McDowell, experience is conceptual because it presupposes conceptual capacities, namely, experience comes into existence because the subject possesses conceptual capacities. As McDowell puts it, experience is conceptual because conceptual capacities permeate the sensory and make it an exercise of conceptual capacities. Hence the reason that experience is conceptual is that conceptual capacities play a role in experience. "The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity" (1994, p. 9). This seems to suggest that conceptual capacities have a kind of explanatory priority over experience.

For both Sellars and McDowell, conceptual capacities are prior to experience in the order of philosophical explanation. It is not clear, however, what the nature of the priority is. Both Sellars and McDowell emphasize that conceptual capacities are presupposed by experience. But they never say things the other way round, that is, experience is presupposed by conceptual capacities. Sellars may even seem to deny the dependence in this direction in his psychological nominalism, according to which "not even the awareness of such sorts, resemblances, and facts as pertain to so-called immediate experience is presupposed by the process of acquiring the use of a language" (1956, §29).

It is not very clear, for Sellars, what exactly this awareness, which is not presupposed

by the process of acquiring the use of a language, is. But the neglect, if not denial, of the fact that experience is presupposed by conceptual capacities, would at least be compatible with, if not entail, the idea of temporal priority of conceptual capacities over experience. Some of McDowell's remarks may seem to encourage this understanding. According to McDowell, "experience has its content by virtue of the drawing into operation, in sensibility, of capacities that are genuinely elements in a faculty of spontaneity" (1994, pp. 46-7). And,

Learning to talk is not just acquiring a new range of expressive behaviour, with the kind of thing a creature has to express left unaltered, but acquiring conceptual capacities, which includes acquiring the propensity for such capacities to be actualized in sensory consciousness. (1998a, p. 412)

This may give the impression that McDowell is suggesting the following picture. We first have our language ability which gives us conceptual capacities. And *then* this fantastic language ability permeates sensibility in such a way that we have experience which is itself conceptual. Of course, McDowell says, "acquiring conceptual capacities...includes acquiring the propensity for such capacities to be actualized in sensory consciousnesses". But his point is that this "propensity" is not itself an exercise of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness. According to McDowell, "spontaneity permeates our perceptual dealings with the world, all the way out to the impressions of sensibility themselves" (1994, p. 69). All this seems to suggest language ability and hence conceptual capacities come before experience.

It is quite easy to understand Sellars and McDowell as saying language ability comes before experience. It seems to be impossible for experience to be an exercise of language ability if the latter is not already there in the first place. But McDowell never provides a theory of concept acquisition. So it's not extremely clear what he has in mind.⁴⁰ Sellars does say something very illuminating regarding concept acquisition. While the theory he has does not necessarily commit him to the temporal priority of conceptual capacities, he never makes it clear how we should understand the matter.

Conceptualism thus seems to have a tendency to hold the concept priority thesis.⁴¹ In any case the uncertain situation behoves conceptualism a theory of concept acquisition. In what follows I shall argue that the priority thesis causes serious problems for conceptualism.

⁴⁰ Pietroski may understand McDowell as saying language ability is temporally prior to experience. He thus claims that McDowell owes us a theory of concept acquisition by emphasizing "One does not acquire conceptual capacities in a vacuum" (1996, p. 634). De Gaynesford, nevertheless, understands McDowell as holding "an interdependence claim" which "regards our experience and concept use as two aspects of what is essentially the same arrangement" (2004, p. 26).

⁴¹ Ginsburg seeks to reconcile the conceptualist insight with the empiricist understanding of concept acquisition by suggestion that experience is conceptual but not linguistic. But as I argued in chapter 3, this proposed rapprochement fails for two reasons. First, the separation of concept and language is itself problematic. Second, the idea that experience is conceptual but not linguistic satisfies neither conceptualists nor nonconceptualists.

The way out, I shall suggest, is to see that there is a third alternative, namely that experience and concept are constitutive of each other. This third alternative shows that the priority thesis is not essential to conceptualism. We can understand experience as conceptual without understanding conceptual capacities as preceding experience.

2. Conceptualism would run into severe difficulties if it understands conceptual capacities as something coming before experience. First, it would be difficult to understand how we can gain our language ability if we understand language ability as something prior to experience. Second, it seems we can never be ready to have experience if we believe experience has to presuppose conceptual capacities temporally. Thirdly, if conceptual capacities are external to sensibility in the first place, then it would be hard to understand how it can permeate sensibility and make the latter conceptual.

The first problem is concerned with language acquisition. It seems obvious that language acquisition relies on experience. So the question is: how can we gain our language ability without having the relevant experience? Unlike traditional empiricists, Sellars denies we obtain our language ability from experience, no matter how this is to be understood. But he shares with empiricists the belief that “the capacity to have classificatory beliefs of the form ‘x is F’ is acquired” (1956, §45). They are acquired, but not dependent on episodes of nonverbal, nonconceptual awareness. According to Sellars, “instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it” (1956, §45).

Both Sellars and McDowell emphasize the fact that conceptual capacities are conditions for experience. According to Sellars, before one can recognize a green colour, one has to have the concept “green”. But how can one have the concept “green” without being able to recognize a green colour? Suppose someone claims that she possesses the concept “green”. But when you show her a shade of green, she cannot recognize this as green. Wouldn’t this show that she actually does not have the concept “green”? McDowell might say if someone possesses the concept “green”, then she would be able to recognize a shade of green as green. We can happily allow this. It is equally true, however, that if she cannot recognize a shade of green as green, then we have to say she does not possess the concept “green”. Understood in this way, experience seems to be a necessary condition for language ability. It seems to be a conceptual necessity that language ability presupposes experiential capacity.

While correctly emphasizing that we cannot have experience without having the relevant conceptual capacities, Sellars and McDowell seem to have ignored the fact that we cannot have conceptual capacities without having experience. We then face the following

question: how can we have conceptual capacities without having the relevant experience? The Wittgensteinian idea that to grasp language is to join a language game does not and is not meant to give a positive explanation of the relationship between experience and concept. Hence it still behoves conceptualists to give a story of concept acquisition.

The second problem with the concept priority thesis is concerned with experience. It would be difficult to understand how we can have experience if conceptual capacities are understood as something coming before experience. According to Sellars, to have the concept of being green “involves the ability to tell what colors objects have by looking at them—which, in turn, involves knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its color by looking at it” (1956, §18). Now, there is an immediate problem for Sellars, as Sellars himself well recognizes:

...since one can scarcely determine what the circumstances are without noticing that certain objects have certain perceptible characteristics—including colors—it would seem that one couldn't form the concept of *being green*, and, by parity of reasoning, of the other colors, unless he already had them. (1956, §19)

And his response to the worry is to emphasize that “one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element”. Sellars admits the process of acquiring the concept of a certain colour “may—indeed does—involve a long history of acquiring piecemeal habits of response to various objects in various circumstances”. But he emphasizes “one has no concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all” (1956, §19).

It is true that conceptual capacities come as a whole package.⁴² As Merleau-Ponty points out,

As far as language is concerned, it is the lateral relation of one sign to another which makes each of them significant...Since the sign has meaning only in so far as it is profiled against other signs, its meaning is entirely involved in language. Speech always comes into play against a background of speech; it is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language... (1964, p. 42)

The holistic idea of conceptual capacities is not to be denied, but the idea of a “whole battery of concepts” can be very problematic once we understand it as something preceding experience. We don't really know what “the whole battery of concepts” means when it is supposed to be something presupposed by experience. Take the example of colour concepts.

⁴² Interestingly, Aristotle has a similar idea about practical wisdom. For him, practical wisdom is a whole package and all the virtues must come together: “he will possess all of them as soon as he acquires the one, practical wisdom” (2000, 1145a).

What is it to have the whole battery of colour concepts? Is it enough to know “red”, “blue”, “green”, “yellow”, “white”, and “black”? If the answer is “Yes”, then we don’t know why can’t only two of them, say “red” and “blue”, do equally well. We don’t understand why the list is sufficient to be counted as the whole battery of colour concepts. If the answer is “No”, then we are forced back to the original question and it seems we would never know what it is to have the whole battery of concepts. No matter how long the list is, we can never say this is the whole battery of concepts: this seems to suggest we can never be ready for having experience.

The idea that experience has to presuppose “the whole battery of concepts” also worsens the first problem for the concept priority thesis, namely, the problem of concept acquisition. Experience’s presupposing “the whole battery of concepts” implies one should have well-developed conceptual capacities without even being able to have experience of anything.

The third problem for the concept priority thesis is concerned with the conceptuality of experience. It would be difficult to understand the conceptuality of experience if we understand conceptual capacities as coming before experience. If language ability is something external to sensibility in the first place, then it would be hard to understand how it can permeate sensibility in the way McDowell conceives it.

McDowell claims that the Aristotelian understanding of nature and the mental allows conceptual powers to be “operative in the workings of our sensibility, in actualizations of our animal nature, as such” (1994, p. 74). He believes Aristotle’s ethics shows us this different conception of nature: “If we generalize the way Aristotle conceives the moulding of ethical character, we arrive at the notion of having one’s eye opened to reasons at large by acquiring a second nature” (1994, p. 84). But for Aristotle, practical wisdom is not an external element permeating moral experience later on. Aristotle’s ethics does not consider rationality as something prior to or external to moral experience. If we understand language ability as coming before experience, we cannot be naturalist in the Aristotelian sense. For Aristotle, moral development is a matter of habituation. Aristotle never says that moral knowledge can come before virtues.

Hence the conceptuality of experience mustn’t be understood as the idea that conceptual capacities come before experience. If we understand the explanatory priority of conceptual capacities in a temporary sense, then conceptual capacities have to be something which come from a vacuum and make experience conceptual by working as an external factor. It would then be difficult to understand where conceptual capacities come from, how we can have experience, and how experience can be conceptual.

3. The way out, I shall suggest, is to see that we do not have to be caught between the

language priority thesis and the experience priority thesis. There is a third alternative, i.e. to see that experience and concept are interdependent. We can agree with conceptualism that experience cannot be independent of conceptual capacities. But we also need to see that conceptual capacities cannot be independent of experience either. This is the fact both nonconceptualism and conceptualism seem to have neglected. Conceptual capacities not only make difference to sensory ability, but also take the development of sensory ability as its condition. Experience and concept come into being together, neither occupies a prior position. The crucial point is that they are each the condition for the other. This points to an understanding of the relationship between experience and concept that is stronger than the one held by conceptualism.

If we reflect on the way we learn language, we find it is sometimes so obvious that experience is the condition for language acquisition. This can be understood in two senses. In the first sense, it is obvious that language has phenomenal features. Language is just the sounds (or gestures, in the case of sign language) we make and the letters (or raised dots, in the case of Braille) placed on the paper. We either hear them, see them, or touch them. They do not seem to be much different from other things we experience in the world. Spoken language has acoustic features, sign language and written language has visual features, and Braille has tactile features. There is something it is like to listen to, to read, or to “touch” a language. This is also true for abstract words like “if...then”, “the”, “and”, etc. One understands these words as of certain meanings when experiencing them in acoustic, visual, or tactile version. No one can have conceptual capacities without first of all having sensibility. Even Helen Keller needs to use touch to build her conceptual system.

However, this is not the sense of condition I shall dwell on here. What I am going to say only applies to those concepts regarding material objects or physical features of the world which we may experience, namely, empirical concepts.

What is an adult doing when she tells a child “This is blue”? The common answer is that she is teaching the child the name of the colour. But it is equally right to say that she is teaching the child the right way of experiencing the world. The child learns a new concept when she gains a new way of experiencing the world. To know the meaning of “blue” is to be able to see a shade of blue as blue. To know the meaning of “chair” is to be able to see a chair as a chair. Thus experience is the constitutive element of conceptual capacities. To experience is to possess and use a concept. To learn a language is to learn to experience. Language gets its existence first of all in experience.

Only when a child sees a green tree as green can we say that she has grasped the concept “green”. Only when we have the relevant experience, say, to experience X as F, can we say that we have the relevant conceptual capacity, namely, possess the concept F. Conceptual capacities are not independent of experiential ability. Experience is the criterion of conceptual capacities. One can only be said to have grasped a concept when one can

experience the world in a certain way.

It can be objected that this is not always the case. It is not necessary for one to have seen a book in order to have the concept of book. One can know what a book is by hearing this: “a book is a set of printed pages that are fastened inside a cover so that you can turn them and read them” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, 2000). After hearing this, one might then be able to recognize a book as a book. For the sake of argument, let’s grant this. Let’s grant that one can grasp a concept by hearing a definition or description of something. There are two points to note, though. First, this is only possible for compound concepts. To be able to do this, one needs to have the relevant basic concepts which essentially come together with experience. Second, the criterion of one’s grasp of the concept “book” is that one can see a book as a book, not that one can recite the definition or description of a book. If this is true, then the criterion of grasping a concept is experiential ability. However we learn an empirical concept, the criterion is: to grasp the concept is to be able to experience in a certain way. Just as to learn the concept “green” is to learn to experience green things as green, to learn the concept “book” is to learn to, say, see a book as a book.

It is obvious that language acquisition relies on experience. Experience is the condition for conceptual capacities. It is then clear that we cannot have conceptual capacities without having the relevant experiential ability. Conceptual capacities can never be independent of experience.

This is not, however, to deny the conceptualist insight that experience has to be an exercise of conceptual capacities. Just like language ability is the necessary condition for experience, experience is likewise the necessary condition for language ability. On the one hand, one cannot have the concept blue without being able to experience a shade of blue as blue; on the other hand, one cannot experience a shade of blue as blue without having the concept blue. Or, to put it more generally, on the one hand, conceptual capacities are not independent of experience, one only possesses a concept when one can experience in a certain way; on the other hand, experience cannot be independent of conceptual capacities, one can only experience the world in a certain way when one has the relevant conceptual capacities. Hence experience and language ability are co-existent or interdependent.

A colour word has a meaning once the child learns the language, but it is equally true that a shade of colour has a meaning once the child learns the language. Hence language learning has a double effect; it gives one experiential ability as well as language ability. Concept and experience are together in the first instance. Experience is the constitutive element of conceptual capacities, and vice versa. Experience and conceptual capacities come together and neither has a priority over the other. Conceptual capacities and experience are constitutive of each other. This I call the constitutive thesis of experience and concept.

According to the constitutive thesis I propose here, Jackson’s Mary had a conceptual

defect before she was released from her white-black room and was taught the concepts of different colours.⁴³ People may think that she had the concepts before she was released. But this is not true. One cannot have concepts of colour without seeing the colours. What Mary had before she was released were concepts of different wavelengths. The rule she was following was just to call the light of a certain wavelength red, blue, or green... A defect in experience is also a defect in concept.

Nonconceptualism is wrong in saying that conceptual capacities are derived from experience and make no contribution to experience; but conceptualism would be equally wrong if it says that concepts come before experience. Like nonconceptualists, conceptualists understand language acquisition as independent of the *development* of sensory ability. According to conceptualists, language acquisition makes difference to sensory ability but do not take the development of sensory ability as its condition. It is true that experience is an exercise of conceptual capacities. This nevertheless does not require one have conceptual capacities before having experience. What we need to see is that concept and experience come into being together.

4. Conceptual capacities are at once experiential ability. We acquire language ability while developing our experiential ability. This immediately solves the first problem for the concept priority thesis, namely the language acquisition problem.

The constitutive thesis also solves the second problem for the concept priority thesis easily. Understanding experience and concept as constitutive of each other, we can save the holistic insight about concept formation without falling into the difficulty of explaining experience. The problem with the priority thesis is to treat our conceptual capacities as something static and complete, and we never know when they are complete. The constitutive thesis, in contrast, treats conceptual capacities as something developing together with experiential ability. Hence, whatever level of conceptual capacities we are at, we are at once at the corresponding level of experiential ability. The development of conceptual capacities and experiential ability come together. What we need to see is that both conceptual and experiential capacities are developing. Both concept and experience come in degrees.

Finer-grained conceptual capacities are therefore corresponding to finer-gained experiential ability. Learning a new language, for example, enables us to discriminate some subtle differences between the pronunciations we would not otherwise be able to discriminate. Meaningless sounds are not only difficult to memorize, but also difficult to discriminate. But once we learn the language, we can discriminate the very subtle

⁴³ See Jackson 1986.

differences between the pronunciations. In fact, learning to discriminate the subtle differences between pronunciations is the basic part of learning a new language. And interestingly, when learning a new language, it is more difficult for the learner to pick up the differences which her mother tongue does not possess. For example, English speakers may find it hard to pick up the tones in Chinese and Thai, while Japanese speakers may find it hard to pick up those English pronunciations they do not have in their mother tongue.

It can be objected that animals may have better perceptual capacities, although they do not have the relevant conceptual capacities. A dog may be able to discriminate many different kinds of smells without possessing the relevant conceptual capacities. But to discriminate a smell is not to experience a smell as of a certain kind. Experiential ability should not be reduced to the ability to discriminate.

The constitutive thesis also explains how experience can be conceptual and solves the third problem for the concept priority thesis naturally. According to the constitutive thesis, conceptual capacities are not something originated from somewhere else and permeate experience as external factors; they are themselves experiential ability. Experiential ability is constitutive of conceptual capacities, not just an exercise of conceptual capacities which are supposed to belong to a different domain. Experiential ability, like conceptual capacities, is a matter of habituation. The way we experience the world is the result of habituation. We are habituated to experience the world in a certain way and hence obtain conceptual capacities. This process of habituation is at once a development of conceptual capacities and a development of experiential ability.

The constitutive thesis thus shows why nonconceptualism must be wrong. To have conceptual capacities is to experience in a conceptual way, that is, to have conceptual experience. Experience is essentially conceptual in that we experience as conceptual beings. The way we experience is constitutive of our conceptual capacities. The point is that once we have the concept, we would inevitably experience in a conceptual way. In this sense, Aristotle's ethics does shed light on this. We do not first have a visual impression and then decide it is blue. We experience a shade of colour as blue directly, just like a virtuous person decides what the right thing to do is directly without comparing her moral choice with any moral principles.

Experience is essentially conceptual in that it couldn't be what it is without having the relevant conceptual capacities; we experience as conceptual beings. The way we experience is constitutive of our conceptual capacities. The point is that once we have the concept, we would inevitably experience in a conceptual way. In fact, this is what we mean by saying one has conceptual capacities. One can grasp the concept only when one can experience in a certain way. We experience in the way a conceptual being experiences. For this reason, human experience is essentially different from animal perception. It is a myth that we can experience without using any conceptual capacities we may possess. It is typical of a

conceptual being that she experiences in a conceptual way. Human beings have a special way of experiencing the world. For a conceptual being, experience has to be conceptual, since her conceptual capacities consist in her being able to experience in a certain way, that is, her experience's being conceptual. Conceptual capacities are in fact experiential ability. One cannot have the concept blue without experiencing a shade of blue as blue. Thus conceptual capacities are constitutive of experiential ability.

For this reason, it is impossible to separate the function of the eye and the function of the mind. As James puts it:

The two mental functions thus play into each other's hands. Perception prompts out thought, and thought in turn enriches our perception. The more we see, the more we think; while the more we think, the more we see in our immediate experiences, and the greater grows the detail and the more significant the articulateness of our perception. (1987, p.1038)

The reason that experience is conceptual is that there is no pure sensitivity in our mental life. Sensitivity is always sensitivity with a certain level of understanding. And a conceptual being, with its conceptual capacities, can only have the kind of sensitivity marked by this level of understanding. This is why pure sensitivity is nowhere to be found in our real experience.

While nonconceptualists, by inheriting the empiricist idea, imagine experience as independent of conceptual capacities, conceptualists, by inheriting the rationalist idea, may suggest a relation of independence in the other direction, that is, conceptual capacities are independent of experience. They both assume the distinction between sensibility and understanding should imply a certain kind of independence concerning these two capacities. It is exactly this separation of sensibility and understanding that the constitutive thesis aims to fight.

5. The constitutive thesis implies that conceptual capacities are essentially experiential ability. For this reason, the experience of a conceptual being is essentially conceptual. The constitutive thesis thus promises a more satisfactory reply to the richness argument against the conceptuality of experience.

The richness argument against the conceptuality of experience claims that it cannot be the case that experience is always conceptual, since in some cases, we simply do not have the relevant conceptual capacities. The idea of the conceptuality of experience, the objection

goes, does not do justice to the fine-grained phenomenology of experience.⁴⁴

The richness of experience seems to be very impressive, in contrast to the thinness of concept. As James puts it vividly: “Each concept means just what it singly means, and nothing else...The perceptual flux as such, on the contrary...is always a much-at-once, and contains innumerable aspects and characters which conception can pick out, isolate, and thereafter always intend” (1987, p. 1008). James thus insists that no account of experience “can ever be a full equivalent, and that in point of genesis it remains a secondary formation” (1987, p. 1038, no. 1). In the same vein, Armstrong observes: “And we ourselves are often hard put to translate our perceptions into words. If we think of the wealth and subtlety of the information that we gain by our eyes, to take one example only, we see that much of it eludes the relatively coarse mesh of the net of language” (1988, p. 127). Thus Peacocke claims the existence of “the fine-grained representational content of experience” is not at issue. What is at issue is its character (2001, p. 240).

A straightforward response to the richness argument may be to deny that we have the relevant experience when no corresponding conceptual capacities are available. When the subject does not have the concept “indigo”, she does not have the experience of “indigo” either. However, the point of the richness argument is that although the subject, say, does not have the concept “indigo”, she is still conscious of the shade of colour in a certain way. And we may have to say this particular way of being conscious of the shade of colour is nonconceptual. To insist that experience is always conceptual, we then need to explain in what sense it is conceptual.

In his reply to the richness argument, McDowell suggests that we can use demonstrative expressions to solve the problem. For a shade of colour for which we do not have a special word, we can use expressions like “it is of this shade”.⁴⁵

This solution does not seem to be promising. In what sense is the shade of colour conceptualized by using demonstrative “this”? The demonstrative “this” is certainly not the name of the colour. As Wittgenstein makes it clear, if we do not want to produce confusion we should do our best not to call demonstrative words names at all. The reason is simple. It is characteristic of a name that it is defined by means of the demonstrative expression “That is N”. But we do not give the definition: “That is called ‘this’”, or “This is called ‘this’” (1953, §38). To use demonstratives is to point at the object, and “a name is not used with, but only explained by means of, the gesture of pointing” (1953, §45). “This shade of blue” does not explain the concept of a special shade of blue. As Wittgenstein remarks: “Imagine someone saying: ‘But I know how tall I am!’ and laying his hand on top of his head to

⁴⁴ The richness argument may also be based on cases where we are appreciating a piece of art work. When looking at a drawing, we may find there is always more to discover. But this is a case of the richness of the drawing, not the richness of experience which is supposed to go beyond our conceptual capacities. There is always more to discover in the drawing, but not in experience.

⁴⁵ See also Brewer 1999, p. 172.

prove it” (1953, §279).

Moreover, naming is not enough for conceptualization. As Wittgenstein makes it clear:

For naming and describing do not stand on the same level: naming is a preparation for description. Naming is so far not a move in the language game—any more than putting a piece in its place on the board is a move in chess. We may say: nothing has so far been done, when a thing has been named. It has not even got a name except in the language-game. This was what Frege meant too, when he said that a word had meaning only as part of a sentence. (1953, §49)

Hence it’s the meaning of the name which matters: “When we forget which colour this is the name of, it loses its meaning for us; that is, we are no longer able to play a particular language-game with it” (1953, §57).

If we were to grant demonstratives too much conceptual value, our conceptual capacities would shrink dramatically. We could then talk in phrases such as “This is like this” or “This man goes to this city”. This is not to conceptualize, but rather to point—which we may do before we have well-developed conceptual capacities.

The consequence of this is significant. If we can use a demonstrative for an unnamed colour, we can certainly use it for the colour red when it is not named. In fact, I do not see why we cannot use it for all shades of colour we can imagine. This seems to suggest the concept “colour” plus a demonstrative would be sufficient for the kind of concepts to be presupposed for any colour experience. This should apply equally well to shape, taste, and smell.

We may even take this further. With the help of demonstratives, our concept repertoire does not even need to be fine enough to have concepts like “colour”, “shape”, “taste”, “smell”, “roughness”, “hardness”. Concept “quality” would be sufficient. We can describe any property by saying “It is of this quality” or “It feels thus”. Then it seems, with the help of demonstratives, the concepts to be presupposed by experience could be highly abstract. Conceptualism understood in this way may still be an interesting position. But its scope and strength may shrink dramatically. As Martin points out correctly: “In the broader scheme of things, such purely demonstrative judgements are of little epistemic or pragmatic value. What matters in making judgements about the objects we apprehend is knowing how to classify them. A judgement of the form ‘this is thus’ will not do any such thing for one” (2001, p. 443).

The problem with McDowell’s response is that a demonstrative expression does not help to put the content of experience in the space of reasons. We cannot designate a colour by pointing at it. The colour which is only recognized as “this shade” is isolated from the whole conceptual scheme of colour. And a content of this kind cannot play any justificatory

role. If someone asks you: Do you think the colour of the tie match the black suit? You can't reply by saying because it is of this shade, so it doesn't match. You have to say something about the colour, no matter what. You can say because this colour is too dark (or bright), so it doesn't match.

Moreover, what McDowell is trying to do seems to be showing that experience is articulatable. This, nevertheless, is not the point of the conceptuality of experience. The point of the conceptuality of experience is that it is exactly certain kind of conceptual capacities that make a certain experience possible. We certainly do not wish to say that it is the concept "this colour" or "coloured thus" that makes the subject experience the shade of colour in a certain way. Hence even if we grant McDowell that his reply is successful regarding the articulatability of experience, this still does not tell us very much about the conceptuality of experience.

The issue of the articulatability of experience is concerned with our conceptual capacities. It can be a debate about our conceptual capacities, which is not specifically relevant to the nature of experience. Thus the talk of articulatability of experience can shift the debate about the conceptuality of experience to a debate about the extent of conceptual capacities. The conceptuality of experience is sometimes understood as the content of experience being exhaustible by its articulation. This may give the impression that for experience to be conceptual is for it to be articulatable. However, this is not true. Nonconceptualism can agree at least some experiences are articulatable without agreeing these articulatable experiences are conceptual. Even if the content of experience is fully articulated, that still does not mean it is conceptual. The content of experience can be articulatable without being itself conceptual. It is true that experience cannot be conceptual without being articulatable. But being articulatable does not entail it is conceptual. Particularly, to articulate an experience with demonstratives does not show that the experience is conceptual.

McDowell's solution betrays a crucial divergence between his conceptualism and Sellars's psychological nominalism. For Sellars, "the simple ability to feel a pain or see a color, in short, to sense sense contents, is acquired and involves a process of concept formation" (1956, §6). But what McDowell is trying to do here is to show how experience which does not presuppose the relevant conceptual capacities can still be conceptual. By responding in this way, McDowell loses sight of the crucial point in Sellars's attack on the Given, namely, that there is no awareness of the space of logic prior to conceptual capacities.

6. The best way to respond to the richness argument, I shall argue, is to see that experience and concept are constitutive of each other. Specifically, experience is dependent on

conceptual capacities the subject may possess. We would not be able to experience the world in that particular way without the relevant conceptual capacities. Hence we can agree that for a shade of colour we do not have a name for, we cannot experience the shade of colour in the way specified by that name. A subject who does not possess the concept “indigo” will not be able to experience a shade of colour as *indigo*.

However, to say that the subject does not possess a particular concept or a special name for a certain shade of colour is different from saying that she does not have the relevant conceptual capacities to grasp the shade of colour. It is impossible for someone who does not have the concept “indigo” to see a shade of indigo as indigo. But she should have no problem in seeing the shade of colour as a shade of dark blue. And this would be enough for her experience to be conceptual. Hence our not having a special name for a shade of colour does not mean the experience of that shade of colour is not conceptual. The fact that we do not have a special name for a shade of colour does not imply there are no conceptual capacities to appeal to for the experience of this shade of colour.

It is true that there is no special concept for every shade of colour we are able to discriminate in experience. But this does not mean our experiential discriminating ability is finer grained than our conceptual capacities. Take the example of dark and light. The conceptual dimension of dark and light is supposed to capture any sensible differences in the dimension. For any sensible difference, you can say it is darker or lighter. It is true that we see more shades of colour than we have names for. But this is not to say that those shades of colour we do not have names for are beyond our conceptual capacities. Corresponding to one’s experiences of different shades of blue, there are conceptual capacities of different dimensions of the colour: saturation, brightness, and the shades of colour the blue colour is tinted with, etc.

The key point is that to say experience is conceptual is to say it is anchored in a conceptual scheme, not to say that we have to give a name for every shade of colour. On the one hand, giving a shade of colour a special name does not help to make the experience conceptual if the name is not within our conceptual scheme. Suppose we call a shade of blue Mary. Without putting Mary in the conceptual scheme of colour, the name does not help to put the shade of colour within the space of reasons. We cannot say because my sweater is Mary, so it is not green. Similarly, to know the name of indigo is not enough to experience a shade of indigo as indigo. You have to know which shade of dark blue it is. To give every shade of colour a special name, like Mary, John, and Sally, does not help to put them in the conceptual scheme. The conceptual scheme is a conceptual network with different hierarchies and dimensions of concept. On the other hand, to put a shade of colour into our conceptual scheme does not require a special name. To say a shade of colour is light soft blue is already to put it in the conceptual scheme. We can do a lot of things with this in the space of reasons. We can say it is not red, it is not dark blue, it is a pleasant shade

of colour, etc.

There is a distinction between X's falling within our colour-conceptual scheme, and X's falling under a particular colour-concept (being named by a colour term). The scheme in fact allows colours without names fall within it and hence become conceptual. A colour experience's being an exercise of conceptual capacities does not rely on a special concept for the shade of colour. To say that experience is conceptual is to say that we can somehow locate the content of experience within the conceptual scheme. An experience of an unfamiliar shade of colour can be conceptual if only one sees it as, say, a shade of dark blue with a tint of red. Hence, it is not true that our conceptual capacities are not rich enough to capture the content of experience.

Suppose you are looking at a shade of colour which you do not have a name for. Someone asks you: "what do you see?" You say: "I see a shade of dark orange." Then the conceptual content of your experience is "a shade of dark orange". If you say instead "I see a shade of orange with a tint of brown", then "a shade of orange with a tint of brown" is the conceptual content of your experience. Or you may say "I see a shade of warm orange". In this case "a shade of warm orange" is the conceptual content of your experience. The way you experience the world is constitutive of the kind of conceptual capacities you exercise when having the experience.

Then the question might be: exactly which one is the conceptual content of that experience? This is in fact the wrong question to ask. The question is based on the assumption that there is one single experience behind the three conceptual contents. But in fact there is no single *that* experience except for the three experiences each structured by the kind of conceptual capacities you exercise at the moment of having the experience. The crucial point is that the content of experience depends on the kind of conceptual capacities that are in operation when you have the experience.

But what about the phenomenal features? If it is the same shade of colour which is perceived, then the phenomenal features must be the same. I have said there is no single experience behind the three experiences. Hence there is no reason to believe that the phenomenal features must be the same. People with different conceptual schemes may see different things. Or if you like, they may see the same thing in different ways. And these different ways are different both conceptually and phenomenally. Think about the duck-rabbit figure. It is certainly not right to say the experience of the figure is phenomenally the same for people who see it as a duck and for those who see it as a rabbit. To say that amounts to saying that the experience of seeing a picture duck can be phenomenally the same as that of seeing a picture rabbit. Were this the case, the subject would have no reason to believe it is a picture duck rather than a picture rabbit, or the other way round. A subject who sees the figure as a duck can tell clearly that she sees it as a duck rather than a rabbit, not that she has an image which is equally duck-like and rabbit-like and

it just so happens that she judges it as a duck rather than a rabbit. The difference is in the experience, not in the judgement based on a neutral experience. The point of the phenomena is that preoccupations infect the way we see the figure, not just the way we make judgement from experience. Were the latter the case, the phenomenon of duck-rabbit picture would not be of much interest.

Peacocke argues that “We must, in describing the fine-grained phenomenology, make use of the notion of the *way* in which some property or relation is given in the experience. The same shape can be perceived in two different ways, and the same holds for the shape properties, if we regard them as within the representational content of experience” (2001b, p. 240). Peacocke cites Ernst Mach’s example of one and the same shape that can be perceived either as a square or as a regular diamond. And on this example he comments: “These are not different shapes. The shape of an object need not alter when it moves; and an object can be perceived either as a square, or as a diamond, in either of the standard orientations relative to the perceiver” (2001b, p. 240-241). But this, as I argued above, is exactly a case which demonstrates that the way we experience the world is conceptual.

Is our language ability sufficient to capture the richness and fineness of experience? This is, again, the wrong question to ask. Our conceptual capacities are not there to capture the rich content of experience. Experience is itself an exercise of conceptual capacities. We develop experience ability while developing conceptual capacities. Our experiencing ability does not go beyond conceptual capacities. For this reason, the richness argument against conceptualism is wrong-headed.

To see the point, we may need to consider a different version of the richness argument that can be found in Collins. Collins understands McDowell’s conceptualism as suggesting that “The scene I take in perceptually will support a large and open-ended number of propositional descriptions and no one of them is essential or required”. He protests that “experience does not come, as though, with subtitles” (1998, p. 379). McDowell’s reply to this is that the conceptual content of experience is exactly “the open-ended manifold of propositional entitlement, not some selection from it” (1998b, p. 413). As he makes it clear earlier in his book:

Note that grounding need not depend on an inferential step from one content to another. The judgment that things are thus and so can be grounded on a perceptual appearance that things are thus and so. This does not obliterate the characteristic richness of experience (especially visual experience). A typical judgement of experience selects from the content of the experience on which it is based; the experience that grounds the judgment that things are thus and so need not be exhausted by its affording the appearance that things are thus and so. Selection from among a rich supply of already conceptual content is not what Evans takes judgement to effect, a transition from one

kind of content to another. (1994, p. 49)

But this does not seem to be plausible. The conceptual experience has to be itself a selected one. The way one experiences the world has to be constitutive of the concept that is exercised at the moment.

8. Experience is a way of exercising whatever kind of conceptual capacities we may have. This does not pose a high requirement to our conceptual capacities in the way that our conceptual capacities have to be so perfectly developed that every discernible feature of the world has to be captured by a special word. First, although naming objects and properties is one important aspect of conceptual capacities, our conceptual capacities are not restricted by this ability. We can conceptually grasp a discernible feature of the world without giving that very feature a special name. Second, our experiential ability is restricted by our conceptual capacities. That which we cannot name we cannot experience as under that particular description either, although the relevant experiential ability can be supported by some other aspects of our conceptual capacities. The crucial idea is that conceptual capacities have soaked through experience. Experience is thus constitutive of whatever kind of conceptual capacities the subject may possess. While some subjects may have better developed conceptual capacities and hence experience the world in a more subtle way, some other subjects may have very limited conceptual capacities and thus experience the world in a cruder way. While some people are only able to experience things as looking red, sounding loud, or tasting sweet, some other people are also able to experience things as looking elegant, sounding ominous, or tasting French.⁴⁶

The point of the constitutive thesis is that conceptual capacities are at once experiential ability. This means experience is not only conceptual, but also conceptual in the literal sense, namely a full, active exercise of conceptual capacities. Now if we understand conceptual capacities as capacities to make judgement, then it seems natural to say that experiential ability is an ability to make judgement. And given the direct relation between experience and the world, we are led to the idea that experience is judgement or belief about the world. This takes us to the idea of doxasticism that I shall discuss in the next chapter.

⁴⁶ Gendler and Hawthorn observes: "Not only do we say things like: that looks red, that sounds loud, that tastes sweet, we also say things like: that looks elegant, that sounds ominous, or that tastes French" (2006, p. 10). This certainly should not be taken for granted for every single subject. For a subject who has no idea about tasting French, it is impossible for her to experience a dish as tasting French.

6. Experience as Doxastic

1. In this chapter I shall argue that experience is belief about the world. This is the view I term doxasticism, as opposed to nondoxasticism, which we find in both nonconceptualism and conceptualism.

Doxasticism is the idea that experience is essentially doxastic. It is itself belief or judgement, not a state or episode with a neutral content to be accepted or rejected. The world, so to speak, forces beliefs upon us in experience. The attitude of believing is intrinsic to experience, not something about an experience, or over and above an experience. The doxastic attitude in experience can be believing, disbelieving, or doubting (suspension of belief).

It is important to note that when I say experience is belief, I mean experience is itself belief, not just that we derive beliefs from experience. It is not, then, just that we always believe what we experience. Saying that we believe what we experience would allow the possibility that there is a gap between experience and belief, which implies that experience is only something we can believe, disbelieve, or doubt, not that it is itself belief. Of course, something we can believe, disbelieve, or doubt can also be itself belief, but when people say that we derive belief from experience, they typically mean that experience is not itself belief. In contrast, the point of doxasticism is that experience is itself a doxastic state which can be described as a belief, disbelief, or doubt. The doxastic attitude is already in experience. It is true that later reasoning or experience may challenge the experience. But what is challenged is an experience with the attitude of believing as a constitutive component, neither an attitude towards experience, nor experience without an attitude. For this reason, doxasticism is to be distinguished from Armstrong's claim that perception is the acquiring of belief. Armstrong, while trying to make a close connection between perceptual experience and belief, actually makes it clear that "perceptions are not beliefs" (1988, p. 132).

I should further make it clear that when I say experience is belief, I mean it is conceptual belief, namely, belief involves conceptual capacities. Belief, as I understand it, is essentially a conceptual state. Doxasticism is thus to be distinguished from the claim that experience is doxastic but nonconceptual. The close connection between concept and belief is in fact well recognized. Many philosophers insist experience is nondoxastic because they think it is nonconceptual. Dretske, for example, advocates non-epistemic perception exactly because he is opposed to the view that the exercise of conceptual capacities is essential for perception (1993). Similarly, Jose Luis-Bermudez also connects "non-doxastic" with "nonconceptual" (1995, p. 335-36). But it has recently been argued by Byrne (2009) and Smith (2001) that experience is doxastic, albeit nonconceptual. Smith claims, "perceptual

consciousness”, being nonconceptual, “is intrinsically doxastic, or engaged”. By saying perceptual consciousness is doxastic, Smith means that it is “in reactive and responsive engagement with the environment” (2001, p. 308).

I should also emphasize that by “conceptual” I mean linguistic. Hence when I say experience is conceptual belief, I mean it is belief that has language as its vehicle, not just belief that is expressible in language. This, of course, is not to say experience has a subtitle. What I mean is that the way experience conceptualizes the world is the way our language ability does it. Doxasticism is thus to be distinguished from Ginsborg’s view that experience is doxastic but non-linguistically conceptual (2006a). What she is advocating, from my point of view, is actually a version of nonconceptualism.

It seems undeniable that experience is a form of belief. The confidence we all have in dealing with the world seems to be sure evidence that there is commitment in experience. We would not be able to manage so well if experience were not belief. Experience presupposes a general understanding of the world. When you try to reach something you see in front of you, you not only take it that this something you see is also something you can reach but also believe it exists in the literal sense. It is phenomenologically obvious that to experience is to believe. Understanding, desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt are already in experience.

In ordinary language, we report experience as a commitment to the truth of the world. If I say “I saw Mary in Waitrose yesterday”, I am not just reporting the fact that I had the experience of seeing Mary in Waitrose yesterday, I am committing to the fact that Mary and I, particularly Mary, were in Waitrose yesterday at a certain point of time. Sometimes the experience itself may sound more important than the fact to which the subject is committed. When I say “I saw the Queen in Banbury yesterday”, I may concern myself less about the fact that the Queen was in Banbury yesterday, than with emphasizing what an exciting experience it was to see the Queen. But again, the very reason that the experience is exciting is that the person I saw in Banbury *was* the Queen.

The aim of the chapter is to argue for doxasticism. My argument for doxasticism consists of three steps. First, experience always has one and only one object, which is either physical or mental. Second, experience has its physical or mental object in virtue of being conceptual, that is, being an exercise of conceptual capacities. Thirdly, to exercise conceptual capacities in experience is to make judgment about the world. The conclusion is that experience involves judgment or belief about the world.

2. The initial step of my argument for doxasticism is to establish that to have experience is to have experience of an object. Experience always has one and only one object, which is either physical or mental, and hence does not have an existence independent of its object.

This I call the object-dependent thesis of experience.

To see the point of the object-dependent thesis we need to recognize that experience can have a variety of objects, chairs, mirror images, shadows, pictures on the screen, voices, rainbows, mirages, afterimages, or hallucinatory images.⁴⁷ The object of experience can be roughly distinguished as physical and mental or external and internal.⁴⁸ An afterimage does not exist as a physical object; but it does exist as a mental object. And that's why psychologists are interested in studying it and try to explain it. When someone reports to a psychologist in the lab that she is having a certain kind of afterimage, she is reporting a fact about a mental object. Her report of the fact can be true or false; and she can lie about it if she prefers to do so. This suggests that a mental object is important and should not be dismissed as a non-object. A mental object is the real object of experience in that it does not exist as something mediating between the subject and a further physical object, although it is true that, unlike a physical object, a mental object cannot exist independent of the subject's experiencing it.

The experience of seeing a chair has the chair as its object while the experience of hallucinating a chair has the image of a chair as its object. Experience is individuated by its object. An experience of seeing a chair cannot be an experience as such without the chair being its object. In the same vein, the experience of hallucinating a chair cannot be an experience as such without the image of a chair being its object.

Perceptual experience takes physical objects as its object, while nonperceptual experience takes mental objects as its object. The object of perceptual experience can exist independently of it, but perceptual experience cannot exist independently of its object, otherwise it would not be qualified as a perceptual experience. For nonperceptual experience, neither can the mental object exist independently of the experience, nor can the experience exist independently of the mental object. The dependence in the latter direction is manifested by the fact that a nonperceptual experience cannot be summoned up at will. There can only be a hallucinatory experience when there is a hallucinatory image there to experience. The dependence is even stronger than it is the case in perceptual experience in that it is more difficult to get rid of the experience once the mental object is there. Hence for both perceptual and nonperceptual experience, experience cannot exist independently of its object.

The idea of mental object may be reminiscent of sense datum theories. Both the object-dependent thesis of experience and sense datum theories seem to agree that experience can have mental objects. There are nonetheless crucial differences between the

⁴⁷ The idea that we perceive different kinds of things can be found in Austin. He writes: "There are no *one* kind of thing that we 'perceive' but many *different* kinds, the number being reducible if at all by scientific investigation and not by philosophy: pens are in many ways though not in all ways unlike rainbows, which are in many ways though not in all ways unlike after-images, which in turn are in many ways but not in all ways unlike pictures on the cinema-screen—and so on, without assignable limit (1962, p. 4; see also p. 8).

⁴⁸ I consider mirror images and mirages as physical objects.

two. Sense datum theories insist that the mental object is a common factor shared by perceptual and nonperceptual experience, and in perceptual experience the mental object is something mediating between the subject and a physical object, while for the object-dependent thesis, only nonperceptual experience has a mental object, and the mental object, where there is one, is the only object of experience. The object-dependent thesis understands both perceptual experience and nonperceptual experience as having an object while differentiating these two kinds of experience in accordance with the kind of object they may have.

The central claim of sense datum theories is that perceptual experience and nonperceptual experience share a common factor which is exactly the mental object we have in nonperceptual experience. But nonperceptual experience is only an abnormal experience which implies a certain kind of malfunction of our visual system. There is no reason to think that what we have in the abnormal case should also be something we have in the normal case. Particularly, there is no reason to think that we have what we have in the normal case in virtue of having the kind of thing we have in the abnormal case. On the contrary, a mental object which is possessed by experience in abnormal cases is exactly the kind of thing should not be possessed by experience in the normal cases.

The object-dependent thesis may then seem to be very close to a disjunctive analysis of experience, given that they both treat different species of experience in different ways.⁴⁹ But there are subtle differences between the two kinds of position as well. And the nature of the difference depends on which version of disjunctivism and what kind of experience we are considering.

It is typical of the naive realist version of disjunctivism that it evades a positive statement about the object of nonperceptual experience, while agreeing with the object-dependent thesis that perceptual experience has one and only one object, namely a physical object. Thus Snowdon claims: “The experience in a perceptual case in its nature reaches out to and involves the perceived external object, not so the experience in other cases” (2005, p. 136-7). Snowdon only makes it clear that nonperceptual experience does not involve an external object, but makes no claim about whether this kind of experience may have another kind of object. Martin is more explicit with a negative claim about the object of nonperceptual experience. In talking about the case of hallucination, Martin suggests that “one might better deny that there is any object of experience at all in this case, it merely seems to one as if this is so” (2002, p. 395).

We may then wonder what prevents disjunctivism from admitting that a nonperceptual experience has a mental object. One possible answer is that this simply is a matter of terminology. For disjunctivists, objects can only be physical and there is no point of talking

⁴⁹ For the idea of disjunctivism, see Martin 2002, McDowell 1982, Snowdon 1981, 1990, 2002, 2005. The idea can be traced back to Hinton (1973), although Hinton never uses the term “disjunctivism”.

about mental objects. Thus a mental object is not an object at all.

While this seems to be a plausible understanding of the situation, I suspect there is a deeper reason for denying that a hallucinatory experience has a mental object. This has to do with a basic commitment that disjunctivism shares with sense datum theories, namely a perception-illusion disjunction first described by Hinton. According to Hinton, the experience of having a light appearance, can be either an experience of seeing a flash of light, or a phosphene, “what you get for instance when an electric current is passed through your head in a certain way by experimental psychologists” (1973, p. 40). Disjunctivism thus denies that a veridical experience and an illusion or hallucination share a common factor without denying that they have something in common, namely, they are experientially indistinguishable. Hence, from the subject’s point of view, for any given experience, there are two possibilities, either it has a physical object, or it does not. The latter case is therefore a failure. It fails to do the kind of thing it is supposed to do, namely, include an external object as its constituent.⁵⁰

It is exactly for this reason that Martin claims that, in hallucination, “it merely seems to one as if” there is an object of experience. The idea that a hallucinatory experience is indistinguishable from a corresponding normal experience is so prevalent that it is often taken for granted that if one hallucinates a chair then one is having an experience which is introspectively indistinguishable from an experience of seeing a chair. But the indistinguishability between hallucination and an alleged corresponding normal experience should not be taken for granted. It is not clear that it seems to the hallucinating subject as if there is a physical object there. Unless the hallucinating subject is totally insane, she would normally be able to tell that what she has is a hallucinatory image, not a physical object. Probably what is misleading here is the way we describe a hallucination. We usually describe a hallucination as one of a certain physical object. We thus have hallucination of a chair, of a dagger, of a dead relative, etc. This may give the impression that the hallucination is indistinguishable from an experience of a physical object. But this does not have to be the case. Just as a picture of a chair does not have to be indistinguishable from a chair, a hallucination of a chair does not have to be indistinguishable from a chair either.⁵¹

Hence nonperceptual experience should not be considered a failure. It is true that things go wrong in nonperceptual experience. But it is not wrong in the sense that a nonperceptual experience fails to have a physical object as it is supposed to have. It is only wrong in the sense that it has an abnormal object, namely a mental object.

The idea of indistinguishability is also clear in the epistemological version of disjunctivism. McDowell claims, “I can make the disjunctive structure explicit like this:

⁵⁰ The indistinguishability thesis thus leads to the idea that even when having normal experience, the subject can only take it to be so by default, which seems to suggest a weak version of scepticism.

⁵¹ For more detailed discussions about the indistinguishability thesis see chapter 7, §3.

experiences in which one seems to perceive that things are thus and so are *either* experiences in which it is given that things are thus and so *or* experiences in which it seems to be given, but is not given, that things are thus and so” (2009, p. 470-471). Based on the indistinguishability thesis, McDowell makes some positive claims about the object of nonperceptual experience, and seems to get things completely wrong. McDowell groups illusion and nonperceptual experience together and call them deceptive experience. He remarks, “when experience misleads us there is a sense in which it intervenes between us and the world” (1994, p. 143). The idea is that deceptive experience is only a mere appearance which mediates between us and the world.

The idea of mere appearance is itself problematic. Experience is appearance. Many different kinds of things can appear in experience. A physical object can appear in experience, a hallucinatory image can appear in experience. Whatever appears in experience is just the object of experience; in no sense experience is a *mere* appearance. The only reason for talking about mere appearance is that it is assumed that only physical object appears in experience. If we allow that non-physical object appears in experience, then there is no point of talking about mere appearance.

In any case, it is a mistake to think that an appearance could be something mediating between us and the world. In the case of hallucination, what we have is only a hallucinatory image, there is no physical object behind the image. The fact that the hallucinating subject may take the hallucinatory image as a chair does not make the hallucinatory image something mediating her and a chair. Where is the chair, anyway, which is supposed to be mediated by the hallucination? The same holds for the case of after-image. In the case of after image, what appears in one’s experience is an after-image. This after-image is the object of one’s experience; it is not something mediating between one and a further or deeper object of one’s experience. What we have to give up is the idea that the object of experience has to be something we can pick up and show to someone else. Whatever one has in experience is the object of experience; it does not have to be a physical object.

McDowell in fact even wants to say that even in the case of illusion, where the physical object does appear, there is still an appearance which is not the physical object, but something mediating between the subject and the physical world. This is why he says, as I quoted above, “when experience misleads us there is a sense in which it intervenes between us and the world”. The reason for this is that the appearance we get in this case is different from the way the object “really” is. In the case of Müller-Lyer illusion, the appearance, it is said, is that the two lines are unequal, while the “reality” is that they are equal. Hence, according to McDowell, this appearance must be different from the “reality” and can only be something mediating between the experiencing subject and the physical object. But even if we agree that the two lines appear unequal, this does not make it necessary to assume an appearance of the two lines which is not the two lines themselves. What appear in

experience are just the two lines. That particular way of appearing does not make the two lines become something else, which mediates them and the subject.

The crucial point here is to have a correct understanding of appearance. Traditionally, the concept of appearance is understood in contrast with the concept of reality. This is the idea that things may appear in a way different from the way they are. When I say “It appears that Mary is very happy with the exam result”, I am expressing the possibility that things may appear in ways which is different from the way they are—Mary may not be happy with the exam result at all. We may say “John appears as a doctor in the movie” which means John acts as a doctor in the movie but he is actually an actor, instead of a doctor. We thus have the corresponding substantive “appearance” which means it is something different from the real thing. It’s something on the surface, or, superficial; it may or may not tell the truth. But this should not be the way we understand appearance as experience. A different way of saying I experience something is to say that something appears in my experience. For this reason we may say experience is appearance. This allows the possibility that things may exist but are not in my experience at a certain moment. This also accommodates the fact that we always experience things from a certain point of view; that is, in experience, things always appear to us in a certain way. Hence appearance is the way things present in one’s experience. What we need to note is that what appears in experience is the object of experience. Hence appearance cannot be separated from the object that appears. Or, more accurately, there is no appearance which is to be distinguished from the object appears.

In any case, it is very common that things appear in many different ways in our experience. A circular object may appear elliptical from certain direction, a square rectangular or trapezium. That doesn’t make it the case that what appears in experience has to be something other than the object. The Müller-Lyer diagram, as a designed case, may be less familiar to ordinary subjects, but this does not make it more necessary to assume a mediating appearance to accommodate the line’s particular way of appearing. As Valberg puts it: “only what is present in experience can *look*, or *appear*, one way or another. The way an object looks is, we might say, its way of being *manifest* to us” (1992, p. 78). Applying this to the case of a straight stick half-immersed in water, Valberg remarks: “If in the bent-stick case the object present is not the stick but a sense-datum, then it cannot be true (as we are supposing) that the stick looks bent; for the stick cannot *look* bent unless *it* is present” (1992, p. 79).

It is the merit of disjunctivism that it treats different species of experience in different ways. Disjunctivism is right in rejecting the common factor assumption, or Common Kind Assumption, as Martin terms it (2006, p. 357). But it is not clear that it treats each species of experience in the right way. Both versions of disjunctivism give perceptual experience,

especially veridical experience, a prominent role in understanding experience.⁵² Hence the physical object becomes the only possible real object of experience. If we cannot find a physical object of experience, as it is in the case of hallucination, then it must be either because experience in a sense intervenes between us and the world, as McDowell suggests, or because there is no object for the experience at all, as Martin suggests. And partly due to the influence of sense datum theories, McDowell even thinks that in the case of illusive experience, where there is indeed a physical object presenting in experience, experience is still an appearance which intervenes between us and the world.

Hence while sense datum theories are wrong in giving nonperceptual experience a prominent role in understanding experience, disjunctivism is wrong in giving perceptual experience a prominent role in understanding experience: that is, to assume that physical object is the only kind of object experience one can have. Different kinds of experience need to be treated in different ways, but neither should occupy a prominent role. To assume one of them occupies a prominent role is itself an attempt to treat them in the same way.

The object-dependent thesis of experience allows us to see that experience is always belief. The fact that the object of experience is a mental object does not prevent experience from being belief. When one stares at the bulb when the lamp is switched on and then turns one's eyes away, one experiences afterimages. One doesn't believe there is anything physical there. Nevertheless one does believe there is an afterimage there. For this reason the experience is still belief. When one hallucinates, one either believes one is hallucinating, or believes one is seeing a physical object. In either case, one's experience is belief. If one believes one is hallucinating when one is hallucinating, then the hallucinating experience is not only a belief, but also a true belief. If one believes one is seeing a physical object when one is hallucinating, then the hallucinating experience is a false belief. In either case, experience is belief.

But a nondoxasticist may agree that experience is object-dependent while denying experience is belief. For nondoxasticism, experience only provides material for belief formation but is not itself belief. Nondoxasticism understands experience as providing data, either nonconceptual or conceptual, for further interpretation. The nonconceptualist version of nondoxasticism understands the data to be interpreted as nonconceptual, while the conceptualist version understands it as conceptual. I shall now move on to the second step of the argument and show that the nonconceptualist version of nondoxasticism is wrong.

4. The second step of my argument for doxasticism is to insist that to have experience of an

⁵² Martin, for example, writes: "we explain the veridical perception by reference to the relational properties it alone possesses, and we explain the other two by reference to their indiscriminability from this. So, the particular situation of veridical perception is fundamental to the explanation of the character of all cases of perceptual experience" (2002, p. 402).

object is to experience the object under certain descriptions. This is the idea of conceptualism which asserts that experience is essentially an exercise of conceptual capacities. Experience has its object by being a grasp of its object. And experience can only grasp its object by putting it under certain descriptions. Experience has its object in the sense that the subject takes its object as its object.

Conceptualizing or theorizing is obviously essential or indispensable in some kinds of experience. Suppose you want to buy some furniture. To decide if you can fit in the furniture, you have to do some measurements. You measure the room and the furniture. And to measure is no doubt to experience in a conceptual way. Through measuring, you find the room is 3mX4m, and the bed is 2mX2m, and the bedside tables are 0.5mX0.5m. So you decide you would be able to fit in the furniture. Hence your judgement about the possibility of fitting in the furniture can only be based on the conceptual experience you have when you do the measuring.

It can be objected that this only shows there is an advantage in conceptual experience, not that every case of experience has to be conceptual. Particularly, in this furniture example, we do not always need to do the measuring. If the room is very big, then there is no doubt that there is enough space for the furniture. But to experience a room as very big is also to experience it in a conceptual way. And to experience a room as very big is not to have an experience of the room and then conceptualize it as very big. One experiences the room as very big when one first experiences it; it is not a later conceptualization.

It is phenomenologically true that we experience the world as meaningful. When we enter a room, we see tables, chairs, lamps, books, etc. Again, as Cowley puts it, “whatever we see or hear, we see or hear as such-and-such, or as is sometimes said, under a certain description. And different people see or hear the same thing under different descriptions”. Thus, “In looking and seeing we are getting things sorted out and organised in our purview. Perceiving is making sense of things by the senses” (1968, p. xiii). There is no way to find a pure experience with no understanding in it. We cannot see without seeing “as”. This applies to the case of sound as well. We not only attribute sounds to an object, but also attribute meaningful sounds to the object. Thus we say “I hear the bus coming”.

The conceptuality of experience is best exemplified by our experience of language. Once we learn a language, we relate the pronunciation and its meaning directly. When think aloud and hear what someone else says, the sounds we make or hear are straightaway meaningful, there is no need to make sense of the sounds. As Cowley observes, “in thinking aloud or in hearing what others say we do not have the experience of producing or hearing these curious sounds we make. For the sounds are uttered or heard as meanings. In listening to someone we hear his meaning, make it ours or reject it, and in talking we simply think or mean aloud”. We do not hear language “as sounds or even as words, but as meanings—information, funny stories, sentiments, compliments, insults, appeals, demands,

etc” (1968, p. 151-152). Hence, “The meaning, as Merleau-Ponty says, devours the sign” (1968, p. 152). Similarly, to be able to read is to be able to see the marks on the page as meaningful. Thus, “We do not see the marks and interpret them. We do not see the marks as such at all. To read is to see the meaning on the page. It is not in the margin or somewhere off the page, but there, accumulating from line to line and page to page” (1968, p. 152).

Locke thinks that the reason that we perceive an object under a certain description is that “the *Ideas we receive by sensation, are often in grown People alter’d by the Judgment, without our taking notice of it*” (1975, p. 145). And the fact that we do not take notice of it only shows “how very quick the actions of the mind are performed” (1975, p. 147). Hence “the Perception of our Sensation... serves only to excite” “an *Idea formed by our Judgment*” “and is scarce taken notice of it self; as a Man who reads or hears with attention and understanding, takes little notice of the Characters, or sounds, but of the Idea, that are excited in him by them” (1975, p. 146-7).

According to Locke, what we get from a three dimensional object is a two dimensional retina image. But “the Judgment presently, by an habitual custom, alters the Appearance into their Causes: So that from that, which truly is variety of shadow or colour, collecting the Figure, it makes it pass for a mark of Figure, and Frames to it self the perception of a convex Figure, and an uniform colour; when the *Idea* we receive from thence, is only a Plain variously colour’d, as is evident in Painting” (1975, p. 145). But the thing is, the three dimensional object looks to us to be three dimensional, not that it looks two dimensional and we infer from the two dimensional appearance that the object is in fact three dimensional. For a human perceiver, it is not that her judgment alters a plain appearance into a three dimensional figure, the appearance is three dimensional and conceptual in the first place. Locke is well aware of the fact that habituation plays a role here. But what habituation has done is far more significant than Locke understands it to be. Habituation does not make the action of mind a too quick to notice performance; it actually helps to develop perception in such a way that we perceive an object as an object directly. Our conceptual capacities are constitutive of our perceptual ability.

The crucial idea is that there is no intermediary in perceptual experience. Hence it is not the speed of the action of mind that matters here. The point is that there is no action of mind involved at all. As Cowley puts it, in actual experience, “we get whatever we get as we get it. Interpretation and inference start from what we actually see and hear” (1968, p. 149). As conceptual beings, our experience necessarily involves conceptual capacities. To experience is to understand. We do not have an experience and then stand back, think about the experience, and conceptualize the experience. Conceptualization or interpretation is already in experience. As Merleau-Ponty makes it clear: “The pure impression is, therefore, not only undiscoverable, but also imperceptible and so inconceivable as an instant of perception” (2002, p. 4). The idea is nicely captured in Wittgenstein’s following remarks: “It

is almost as if ‘seeing the sign in this context’ were an echo of thought.” “‘The echo of a thought in sight’—one would like to say” (1953, p. 212). Strawson puts the same idea in this way: “the visual experience is *irradiated* by, or infused with, the concept; or it becomes *soaked* with the concept” (1970, p. 63).⁵³ The unimaginability of a nonconceptual Given shows that this is not the way we experience the world. Nonconceptual experience is itself a myth. We don’t know where it is, what it is like, and what its function is.

It can be objected that even we do possess the relevant concepts, those concepts are not necessary for a particular experience. Evans, for example, claims: “It is not necessary, for example, that the subject possess the egocentric concept ‘to the right’ if he is to be able to have the experience of a sound as being to the right” (1982, p. 159). Evans, of course, is not making the claim that one can perceive a sound as being to the right without possessing the concept “right” or “to the right”. What he means to say is that conceptual capacities make no difference to the relevant experience. A person possesses the concept “right” experiences a sound the same way as a person who does not possess the concept. As Davies puts it: “a subject may have an experience without possessing the concepts that would be used in the specification of the content of that experience” (1991, p. 462).

It is true that obtaining conceptual capacities does not necessarily change the way things look, sound, or feel to us. The essential change that possession of conceptual capacities makes to experience is that it makes the subject experience things as under certain descriptions.

It can then be further objected that even if we have the conceptual capacities, we may still do not always exercise the conceptual capacities when having the experience. Hence it is not always true that we experience things as under certain descriptions. Experience of the direction of an object, sound, etc. is notably of this kind. When we experience a sound to the right, we may only experience it as to that particular direction without being aware of the fact that that direction is to the right. When we experience an object to a certain direction, we may only experience it as being to that direction without conceptualizing the direction.

We need to note this objection is particularly targeted at experience of directions. And in this case, demonstratives can be used as a concept, for the very act of pointing signals a direction. While pointing at a shade of colour cannot tell us what colour it is, to point at a direction is to decide or determine a direction.

It is possible that you hear a sound as being to the right without realizing it is to the right. You may simply experience it as coming from *that* direction, pointing to *that* direction with your “mind’s finger”, namely, by attending to that direction. You may later realize that *that* direction is actually to the right. Another person may directly experience the sound as being to the right. Then what’s the difference?

⁵³ See also Lennon 2004.

The point is this. Usually the purpose of experience is to attend to the object, not to attend to the direction of the object. Hence our experience of the direction of the object is exhibited in our experience of the object. But there are also cases where you need to attend to the direction of the object particularly, and in these cases your experience is conceptualized in that way.

While it is true that this reply does not apply to the case of colour experience, it is also true that the objection itself is not applicable to colour experience either. It is seldom, if ever, the case that we experience a shade of red without experiencing it as a shade of red. Campbell is right in saying that we may perceive a physical object without paying special attention to the colour of the object. But this is not to say we may fail to experience a shade of red as red when we pay attention to, and have experience of, a shade of red.

The way we grasp the object of an experience is to put it under certain descriptions. This is the way we, as conceptual beings, experience an object. We grasp the object of experience by exercising our conceptual capacities. If experience is always experience of an object, then it has to be always an exercise of conceptual capacities.

5. The final step of my argument for doxasticism is to maintain that to exercise conceptual capacities in experience is to make judgment about the world. According to this understanding of the conceptuality of experience, we not only take the object of experience as its object, but also take the object of experience as existent in a certain way. Experience is concerned with the way the object exists and is thus doxastic.

Concepts are the constituents of thoughts. To have conceptual capacities is to be able to think. And to think is, among other things, to make judgements. Philosophers sometimes talk about detached thinking, namely, to entertain a proposition without making judgement. But that would be a case of deciding what to think, not a case of thinking devoid of judgement. To have concept A is to be able to judge that something is A. Conceptual capacities are thus capacities of making judgements.⁵⁴ To conceptualize the world is to apply concepts to the world. And to apply concepts to the world is to make judgements about the world. Therefore, if experience is a conceptualization of the world, it must be judgement about the world.

At this point, doxasticism distinguishes itself from conceptualism. For conceptualists, experience, though conceptual, is still data to be interpreted or judged. The conceptualist version of nondoxasticism insists that experience is conceptual but nondoxastic. We find this idea in Runzo's non-doxastic "propositional" analysis of perception. According to Runzo,

⁵⁴ It is exactly for this reason that conceptual capacities are essentially language ability. To make judgement is to judge X is A. And both X and A need to be expressed in language. For this reason, thinking is essentially language involving.

To perceive an object or state of affairs, X, is, and is no more than, to be episodically aware of a set of *propositions* about X... This awareness of (set of) propositions during perceiving is akin to entertaining propositions... (1977, p. 214-5)

Hence for conceptualists, to say that experience is conceptual is only to say it is propositional. This is, as I shall try to explain, closely related to the conceptualist understanding of conceptual capacities and its understanding of the way conceptual capacities are exercised in experience.

For conceptualists, to have conceptual capacities is to be able to enter the space of reasons, but not necessarily to be able to make judgements. According to McDowell, “conceptual capacities are capacities whose paradigmatic actualizations are exercises of them in judgment, which is the end—both aim and culmination—of the controlled and self-critical activity of making up one’s mind” (1998a, p. 410). For McDowell, it is very important that a minded creature should be able to make up its mind. “A creature that cannot make up its mind does not, in the relevant sense, have a mind. It cannot, in the relevant sense, be minded in a certain way” (1998a, p. 411). Hence what McDowell means by conceptual capacities are the kind of capacities we find in critical thinking or judgement making or the activity of making up one’s mind. In other words, when one decides what to believe one is exercising one’s conceptual capacities. Then the question is: what exactly are these conceptual capacities? Are they what we use in making up our mind about the world, or are they the making up our minds itself? McDowell seems to mean the former. For McDowell, conceptual capacities themselves are not capacities to make up one’s mind; they are only something we use in making up our mind. Conceptual capacities, on this understanding, are not equivalent to capacities of making judgement.

Understanding conceptual capacities as something we use in making judgements instead of capacities of making judgement, McDowell then takes it that it is possible for us to exercise our conceptual capacities without making up our mind about the world. McDowell thus has in mind two ways of exercising conceptual capacities, one active, and the other passive. For McDowell, when we make judgement about the world, we exercise conceptual capacities actively, and when we experience the world, we exercise conceptual capacities passively. For this reason, although McDowell suggests that we identify conceptual capacities by considering their role in activity of making judgement, he thinks that “we can extend the idea of actualizations of that range of capacities beyond the active exercises that define them as the kind of capacities they are” and understand experience as a passive exercise of conceptual capacities. In this way, “the very same capacities can be actualized, outside the control of the subject, in the receptivity of sensibility” (ibid., p. 410).

Hence the deciding itself does not seem to be included in conceptual capacities, or at

least is not the part of conceptual capacities which permeates experience and makes it conceptual. For McDowell, to say experience is conceptual is not to say one makes up one's mind in experience, it is only to say that in experience we find the kind of thing we find in critical thinking, which is the kind of activity of making up one's mind. Thus conceptualism, while insisting experience is conceptual, begrudges experience the capacity for making judgement.

But we need to see conceptual capacities are not only capacities to structure the world but also, no less importantly, capacities to make judgement about the world. To possess conceptual capacities is to possess the capacities for making up one's mind, not just to possess something which can be used in making up one's mind about the world. That is, to have conceptual capacities is to be able to take attitudes toward the world. Conceptual capacities are themselves concerned with the truth of the world. Understood in this way, conceptual capacities cannot be exercised in a passive way, as McDowell conceives it. There is only one way to exercise conceptual capacities: to make judgement about the world.

If conceptual capacities are capacities for making up one's mind, then experience can only be an exercise of conceptual capacities in virtue of being a judgement about the world. Experience is conceptual not only in the sense that it has a certain kind of conceptual structure but also that to have experience is to take what is experienced as existent in a certain way. To experience is to make up one's mind about the world, that is, to take a doxastic attitude about the world.

There is an important sense in which experience is passive: we can only see what is in front of us. But this does not mean we do not make up our mind when we see. To see is to believe. This is the way we make up our mind when we see. If in experience, as McDowell puts it, we are saddled with content, then we should take that content as what we believe. To experience is to make up one's mind about the world, that is, to take attitude or form judgement about the world. To say experience is conceptual is not just to say it is propositional; it is to say experience is both attitudinal and propositional. Experience is itself a full-fledged exercise of conceptual capacities which are themselves capacities for making judgements.

Experience is an exercise of conceptual capacities in the sense that it is a judgement about the world. This is exactly the idea Strawson takes from Kant when he says experience is permeated with conceptual capacities.⁵⁵ Strawson asserts, "perceptual judgement" is "internal to the characterization of the experience" (1979, p. 95). When I describe my experience, I do it by describing a judgement about the world. We cannot give a veridical characterization of experience without reference to the relevant judgements (1979, p. 95-6).

⁵⁵ This is precisely what Strawson takes to be the main thrust of the argument of the Transcendental Deduction. See Strawson 1966, pp. 100-12.

Thus “our sensible experience itself is thoroughly permeated with those concepts of objects which figure in such judgements” (1979, p. 96). The point is that, “Sensible experience is permeated by concepts unreflective acceptance of the general applicability of which is a condition of its being so permeated, a condition of that experience being what it is; and these concepts are of realistically conceived objects” (1979, p. 96). Strawson writes:

...mature sensible experience (in general) presents itself as, in Kantian phrase, an *immediate* consciousness of the existence of things outside us. (*Immediate*, of course, does not mean *infallible*.) ... the ordinary human commitment to a conceptual scheme of a realist character is not properly described, even in a stretched sense of the word, as a theoretical commitment. It is, rather, something given with the given. (1979, p. 99)

And the very reason that experience is judgement is that conceptual capacities are essentially capacities for making judgement about the world. As Strawson makes it clear: “The concepts of the objective which we see to be indispensable to the veridical characterization of sensible experience simply would not be in this way indispensable unless those whose experience it was initially and unreflectively took such concepts to have application in the world” (1979, p. 96). What Strawson tries to put forward here is not just a conceptualist idea that experience is conceptual. The idea is that experience involves a commitment about the existence of the object, or judgement about how things stand in the world. We take what we experience as the world because we exercise conceptual capacities in such a way that we take the object of experience as existent in a certain way. Experience is for this reason judgement about the world. This is exactly the idea of Doxasticism.⁵⁶

7. To say experience is doxastic is to say experience is always experience of facts. Dretske claims that perceptual experience can be either “a consciousness of things”, or “a consciousness of facts”. While the former is “a concept-free mental state” and nondoxastic, the latter is “a concept-charge mental state” and doxastic. According to Dretske, perceptual consciousness of things does not entail perceptual consciousness of facts and thus cannot be a doxastic state. Hence, for Dretske, experience is not always doxastic. Here is Dretske’s example for concept-free perceptual consciousness of things:

The first time I became aware of an armadillo (I saw it on a Texas road), I did not know what it was. I did not even know what armadillos were, much less what they looked like. My ignorance did not impair my eyesight, of course. I saw the animal. I

⁵⁶ This is different from McDowell’s understanding of Strawson. McDowell writes: “my Kant is Strawson’s, and Strawson’s Kant is no doubt not the real Kant” (McDowell 2000, p. 342, no. 1).

was aware of it ahead of me on the road. That is why I swerved. Ignorance of what armadillos are or how they look can prevent someone from being conscious of certain facts (that the object crossing the road is an armadillo) without impairing in the slightest one's awareness of the things—the armadillos crossing roads—that (so to speak) constitute the fact. (1993, p. 266)

Dretske thus concludes that, in perceptual experience, "S is conscious of x" does not entail that "S is conscious of x is F". Hence perceptual consciousness of things does not entail perceptual consciousness of facts.

Dretske seems to take it for granted that he saw an armadillo, although he did not know what it was. What he means to show is that his seeing an armadillo is not an awareness of the particular fact that the animal is an armadillo, given that he was ignorant about what an armadillo was. But why should we require Dretske be aware of this particular fact? If Dretske did not see the animal as an armadillo, then of course he did not judge it is an armadillo. This is no harm to the idea that experience is judgement.

More importantly, Dretske obviously was conscious of *some* fact. At least, he was conscious of x is an animal, which is a fact. And, of course, this is not all what he saw. Insisting that his sight was not impaired in the slightest by the defect of his conceptual capacities,⁵⁷ Dretske may claim that he actually saw a small animal with a nine-banded leathery armour shell. Then we can say Dretske was conscious of the fact that x is a small animal with a nine-banded leathery armour. All we need to admit is that what kind of fact you take in while having the perceptual experience is determined by what kind of conceptual capacities you possess. The subject's lack of a special concept would not prevent an experience from being an awareness of facts.

Dretske nevertheless has a further reason to doubt that experience is always doxastic. Paralleling Evans's richness argument against conceptualism, Dretske has a richness argument against doxasticism, according to which we see more than we believe. He claims: "Sensation... is informationally profuse and specific in the way a picture is. Knowledge and belief, on the other hand, are selective and exclusive in the way a statement is" (1988, p. 152). Hence, "Typically, the sensory systems overload the information-handling capacity of our cognitive mechanisms so that not all that is given to us in perception can be digested" (1988, p. 157).

Dretske's example is that one may see 27 children in the playground without believing that one sees 27 children there, if one does not have time to count (1988, p. 156). But it is not clear we should require the subject know the exact number of the children she sees in order for her to hold a belief about what she sees. The subject does not see 27 children if she

⁵⁷ I seriously doubt that this can be the case. But I shall not pursue the point for the moment.

has no time to count; she sees only many children or more than a dozen children. What one sees depends on to what extent one exercises one's conceptual capacities. This is actually related to the criterion of seeing. For Dretske, one sees X if X is there to be seen. But we need a different conception of seeing here. One only sees X when one sees X as X. One only sees 27 children if one sees 27 children as 27 children. If one does not see 27 children as 27 children, then one only sees the children in the playground, the number of whom is, unseen and unknown to one.

Dretske also cites some laboratory evidence to show that we see more than we believe. Psychological evidence shows that we can at most process seven items at a given moment. According to Dretske's understanding, "The rule represents some kind of limit to how much information we can exact from our sensory experience, not a limit to how much information can be contained in this experience" (1988, p. 158). And given that we can see more than seven items in a case of experience, Dretske argues, this implies we see more than we believe. But there is no evidence that experience contains more information than our cognitive capacities may process, apart from an objective observation that there are indeed more to experience over there. What is at work here is still the objective view of experience to which I objected above.

Dretske insists that "Our own perceptual experience testifies to the fact that there is more information *getting in* than we can manage to *get out*" (1988, p. 159). He cites an experiment in which the subject is exposed to an array of nine or more letters for a brief period but can only identify three or four letters (1988, p. 159). He then concludes that the subject can cognitively recognize fewer letters than she has in her experience. But, again, there is no reason to think the subject manages to experientially take in all the letters exposed to her. One can only take in the information one can process. The experiment actually shows the limit of experience, which is at once the limit of our cognitive capacity.

The extent the subject exercises her judging ability is the extent she experiences the world. Experience and judging ability are constitutive of each other. It is exactly for this reason that experience is doxastic. In other words, experience is doxastic to the extent our conceptual capacities allow, just as the way we experience the world is restricted by our conceptual capacities.

8. I have argued for the following three points stage by stage. First, experience is object-dependent. It either has a physical object, or a mental object. Second, experience has its objects in virtue of being an exercise of conceptual capacities. Thirdly, to exercise conceptual capacities is to make judgment. We can then conclude that experience is judgement or belief about the world.

7. Experience and Disbelief

1. To have experience is to be in a state of believing. In this sense, experience is doxastic. This is the idea of doxasticism.

Even nondoxasticists would agree that there is a strong connection between experience and belief. Martin admits that “in a situation in which a subject is perceiving veridically, and in no way distrust his experience, he will feel compelled to judge that things are that way” (2002, p. 399). He even agrees, “Perceptual experiences do not merely have power over a subject’s belief, they also have authority” (2002, p. 390). Despite this, Martin insists that “experience does not have the expected coercive effect over one’s beliefs” (1993, p. 85). Likewise, many of those who recognize a close connection between experience and belief deny experience is doxastic. This is due to the idea that we do not always believe our experience.

It is widely accepted that we may experience the world in one way while believing in another, namely experience is belief-independent. Evans claims “the subject’s *being* in an informational state is independent of whether or not he believes that the state is veridical” (1982, p. 123). And here are some examples Evans has in mind:

It is a well-known fact about perceptual illusion that it will continue to appear to us as though, say, one line is longer than the other (in the Müller-Lyer illusion) even when we are quite sure that it is not. Similarly, it may still seem to us as though such-and-such an episode took place in the past, even though we now believe our apparent experience of it to have been hallucinatory. And our being placed in the

appropriate informational state by someone telling us a story does not depend upon our believing the story to be true. (1982, p. 123)

McDowell shares with Evans the idea that the way we experience the world is independent of the relevant belief we may hold about the world. He claims “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” (1994, p. 11). Hence the belief-independent thesis says experience remains the same whether we believe what we experience. If we believe experience is belief-independent in this way, and insist a subject cannot hold conflicting beliefs simultaneously, then we have to accept that the content of experience might not be the content of an actual belief.

There is obviously a close relationship between nondoxasticism and the belief-independent thesis. But it is important to note the distinction between the two theses. The belief-independent thesis says experience is not affected by the belief held by the subject, while nondoxasticism says experience is not a belief. The belief-independent thesis emphasizes the primitiveness of experience while nondoxasticism focuses on the inertness or insufficiency of experience in producing a belief. We get nondoxasticism from the belief-independent thesis only when we add that there cannot be conflicting beliefs in a subject simultaneously and that the conclusion drawn from the case where the content of experience conflicts with the belief held by the subject should be generalized into cases where there is no such conflict between experience and belief. For nondoxastists, the belief-independent thesis naturally leads to nondoxasticism. According to McDowell, “the content of a perceptual experience cannot be explained as the content of an appropriate actual belief, since there may be no belief with a suitable content” (1994, p. 60).

Thus the impediment to accepting doxasticism is a consideration based on cases that one disbelieves one’s experience, or, as Martin puts it, cases of “disbelief in perception” (1993, p. 83; see also Martin 2002, p. 387; Peacocke 2009, p. 477). This I call the disbelief objection to doxasticism. The disbelief objection says one may have a belief with content not-P while having an experience with content P. This means experience may fail to produce a corresponding belief, since in this case, there is simply no corresponding belief exists.

The disbelief objection particularly focuses on cases of sober hallucination and familiar illusion. In the case of sober hallucination, it may look to one that there is, say, a chair in front of one while one disbelieves that there is a chair there. In the case of familiar illusion, things may look a certain way while the subject does not believe they are in fact that way. Take the example of Müller-Lyer illusion. For someone in the know, the line with outwards wings appears longer than the one with inwards wings although the subject believes the two lines are the same length. The two lines look unequal without the subject

believing this. It is this kind of alleged inconsistency between experience and belief which is supposed to generate a threat to doxasticism.

One response to the disbelief objection is to admit that in some special cases experience is not doxastic but insist that it normally is. Ginsborg proposes an identity claim restricted to some experiences. She admits that there are cases in which experience is not believing, although “these cases are parasitic on the primary case in which seeing is believing, and, for the most part, knowing” (2006a, p. 355). Smith seems to endorse a weaker claim and insists that “believing plays an essential part in perceptual experience” (2001, p. 284). He nevertheless admits that “it is certainly not true to say that one believes in the existence of any and every object one perceives, not that one necessarily believe such objects actually to be the way they appear” (2001, p. 284). Responses of this kind imply that the majority of our experiences are beliefs. Particularly, those experiences that are used for belief justifications are themselves beliefs.

We may want to be happy with this kind of response. After all, for experience to play a justificatory role in empirical knowledge, all we need is just that those experiences that are used for belief justification are beliefs. But it is not clear that we can fend off the disbelief objection so easily. First, if experience is itself belief, then an opposite judgement should only contradict the experience as a belief, not to deprive the belief we may have in experience. Hence doxasticism should not allow exceptions where experience is not belief. Second, the disbelief objection starts with the idea that in some special cases such as familiar illusions we don't believe what we experience. This means, in these special cases, experience does not have a corresponding belief, and hence cannot be a belief. Experience is the same kind of mental state in a case of disbelief as a case of belief, so if it is not belief in the one case, it is not belief in the other. This implies, the reasoning goes, even in those cases where experience does have a corresponding belief, experience is still not itself a belief. Hence doxasticism needs to show how we can stop the reasoning from working in this way.

Smith also makes a more positive effort to defend the idea that experience is belief. He tries to accommodate the conflict between the content of experience and the content of belief by making a distinction between perceptual belief and theoretical belief and insisting “perceptual belief can exist alongside a contradictory theoretical belief” (2001, p. 292). In the case of a seeming appearance of a huge spider crawling over me, although I was told by the psychologist that this is not a real spider, I may still generate a perceptual belief that there is a spider approaching if the appearance is vivid enough. Smith suggests that in this kind of cases, we should allow the existence of conflicting beliefs. He thus insists that “a certain kind of perhaps qualified belief is essential to perception” (2001, p. 288). This qualified belief is a perceptual belief that might conflict with the belief the subject may possess. But the perceptual belief Smith proposes is actually a non-belief; it is not what the

subject actually believes. Doxasticism requires that experience be belief in the literal sense. It requires that experience be what the subject believes, not a certain kind of qualified belief that the subject does not really believe.

My strategy for responding to the disbelief objection will be to argue that experience is doxastic through and through. This is based on an attack on the idea of deceptive experience which asserts that experience can be deceptive even if the subject is not deceived. I shall suggest that we replace the idea of deceptive experience with the idea of disadvantaged experience. A disadvantaged experience, while not being a belief that P when it is the case that P, is not a belief not-P either. Hence the possibility that experience is belief is not excluded by the fact that the subject holds the belief that P. All we need to do in replying to the disbelief objection is then to find the belief in a disadvantaged experience, which does not conflict with the belief the subject may hold.

2. The disbelief objection is based on a particular understanding of the fallibility of experience. It is a notorious fact that experience is fallible, that is, we sometimes make mistakes in experience. The fallibility of experience may itself motivate the view that there is a gap between experience and belief: if experience is fallible, then it may not be very good news if it is belief. But this consideration should not be decisive. If we are allowed to hold false beliefs, then it is not right to deny experience is belief simply because it is fallible. The disconnection between experience and belief is actually based on a particular understanding of the fallibility of experience, that is, to understand the fallibility of experience as caused by experience's being able to be deceptive.

The idea of deceptive experience can be traced back to Ayer. Here are Ayer's examples of deceptive cases:

It is remarked that a coin which looks circular from one point of view may look elliptical from another; or that a stick which normally appears straight look bent when it appears in water; or that to people who take drugs such as mescal, things appear to change their colour. The familiar cases of mirror images, and double images, and complete hallucinations, such as the mirage, provide further examples.⁵⁸ (1969, p. 3)

According to Ayer, "the fact that appearances vary...proves at least that people sometimes do not perceive things as they really are". It is here he introduces the concept of "deceptive experience":

⁵⁸ It does not seem to be right to consider mirage as a case of hallucination. See chapter 6 for an account of mirage.

If, to take a familiar example, a coin looks at the same time round to one person and, from a different angle, elliptical to another, it follows that it is to one of them at least presenting a deceptive experience... So that if each of these persons judges that he is perceiving the coin as it really is, at least one of them will be undergoing an illusion. (1956, p. 87)

The point here is that an object may look different in different circumstances, and given that there can only be one way for an object to be, only one appearance manifests the way the object is, all the others must be deceptive.

The idea of deceptive experience is obviously based on a non-doxastic understanding of experience. According to this understanding, if experience does not manifest the way the object is, it induces the subject to make a false judgment, but is not itself a false judgement. Deceptive experience is thus distinctive in its power of inducing the subject to make a mistaken judgement; it is not necessary that a false judgement is really produced. Hence Ayer says that it is not necessary that “anyone should ever actually be deceived by an experience of this kind” (1956, p. 87).

Not all the cases Ayer lists are considered deceptive by contemporary philosophers. But the idea of deceptive experience endorsed by contemporary philosophers does not seem to be capable of excluding those cases that are not anymore considered deceptive. Here is McDowell’s notion of deceptive experience:

I shall speak of cases as deceptive when, if one were to believe that things are as they appear, one would be misled, without implying that one is actually misled. (1988, p. 210)

This means that having a deceptive experience does not entail that the experiencing subject is deceived, and an experience can be deceptive while the subject is not deceived. It is in this sense McDowell talks about “the deceptive capacities of appearance” (1995, p. 881). And this is where the gap between experience and belief begins to emerge: to experience is one thing, to believe another.

This is exactly where we have the disbelief objection. The disbelief objection is the idea that experience can be deceptive when the subject is not deceived. This is not just to say that experience can be deceptive when the subject may occasionally not to be deceived. The idea is that experience can be deceptive even if the subject is never deceived. It can even be described as the idea that experience can be deceptive even if no one has ever been, or would ever be, deceived. There is something intrinsic to the experience which is bound to be deceptive.

Understood in this way, it seems we have to admit that the vast majority of our

everyday experiences are deceptive. If we follow McDowell's notion of deceptive experience, then it seems not only that experience *can* be deceptive, but also it is almost *always* deceptive.

Take Ayer's first example of various illusions: "a coin which looks circular from one point of view may look elliptical from another". This kind of illusion seems to be everywhere in our everyday life. Suppose you are looking at a big building with lots of circular windows. Now whichever window you are facing directly and see as circular, you see the others as elliptical to a certain extent. Then from whatever perspective you look at the building, your experience of the building has to be illusive in Ayer's sense. Now, if we follow McDowell's notion of deceptive experience, then for every case of your experience, only a small bit of it is not illusive.

And this kind of example, to repeat, is everywhere. Look around your room, you find the edges of the mugs and the bowls look elliptical, and the round mirror looks elliptical. This holds for things with other shapes as well. If you look at your friend without facing her directly, you will get an "illusion" of her, although you rightly see her as your friend.

If we follow McDowell's notion of deceptive experience, that is, an appearance can be deceptive without the subject really being deceived, then we may say to see a shadow is to have a deceptive experience, since a shadow looks as if it is coloured darker than the other part of the ground, although that part of the ground isn't coloured darker and the subject does not believe it is coloured darker.

If we follow McDowell's notion of deceptive experience, we would have to accept that most, if not all, of our everyday experience is deceptive in a certain sense. If we insist a coin looks elliptical from a certain point of view and thus has an illusive appearance, then we have to accept that most of our experience is illusive. There is hardly an escape. Illusion seems to be almost everywhere. And it seems that in most cases, we experience the world by having various kinds of illusion of it!

Hence there must be something wrong with McDowell's notion of deceptive experience. To avoid the disastrous consequence, we have to give up this problematic notion.

It is exactly this problematic idea of deceptive experience which underlies the disbelief objection. If an experience is deceptive, then the only belief that can be derived from the experience is the belief that P when it is not the case that P. And allowing that experience could be deceptive without the subject being deceived, it is then possible that there is a deceptive experience from which the subject can only derive a belief that P while the subject actually holds the belief that not-P. If we agree that a person does not normally hold conflicting beliefs consciously, we will have to accept that a deceptive experience is not a belief. Hence the crucial point is to problematize the idea that experience can be deceptive without the subject being deceived.

To reject the idea of deceptive experience is to reject the idea that an experience may have a content P while the subject believes not-P. There is then no direct conflict between the content of experience and the content of the belief the subject may hold. The disbelief objection thus loses its power. All we need to do then is to show experience always has a corresponding belief which is held by the subject.

The idea of deceptive experience is first of all based on the assumption that there is a distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience, according to which, a veridical experience is a manifestation or correct representation of the world and hence non-deceptive, while a non-veridical experience is not a manifestation or an incorrect representation of the world and hence deceptive. The idea is further strengthened by a second assumption that a non-veridical or deceptive experience has an intrinsic feature which is indistinguishable from a veridical one.

I shall first weaken the idea of deceptive experience by arguing against the second assumption and then venture to extrapolate the idea by collapsing the very distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience.

3. The second assumption which strengthens the idea of deceptive experience is the thesis that there is an intrinsic feature in a non-veridical experience which is indistinguishable from a veridical experience. This I call the indistinguishability thesis.

The idea of deceptive experience allows an appearance to be deceptive even if the subject never believes the appearance. The idea itself is a conditional: if the subject takes a non-veridical experience as a veridical one, then she would be deceived. This relies on the possibility of the subject taking a non-veridical experience to be a veridical one, which in turn relies on the assumption that a non-veridical experience is indistinguishable from a veridical one. The idea of deceptive experience thus heavily relies on the assumption that a non-veridical experience is indistinguishable from a veridical one.

What the indistinguishability thesis is trying to say is this. A non-veridical experience, in which it looks P while it is in fact the case that non-P, is indistinguishable from a veridical experience in which it looks P while it is in fact the case that P. The reason that the two experiences are indistinguishable is that in both cases it looks P. This is how Ayer understands the indistinguishability between a non-veridical experience and a veridical one:

...there is no intrinsic difference in kind between those of our perceptions that are veridical in their presentation of material things and those that are delusive. When I look at a straight stick, which is refracted in water and so appears crooked, my experience is qualitatively the same as if I were looking at a stick that really was crooked. (1969, p. 5-6)

In the same vein, McDowell allows what is given to experience in deceptive and non-deceptive cases “to be the same in so far as it is an appearance that things are thus and so” (1988, p. 214).⁵⁹

It is important to note how damaging this indistinguishability thesis could be to our understanding of experience. If a non-veridical experience is indistinguishable from a veridical experience, then a veridical experience would be equally indistinguishable from a deceptive experience. The consequence is that a veridical experience, however veridical, would not be able to guide us to the truth of the world. And it is exactly this indistinguishability thesis that leads to the idea that experience is not belief. A veridical experience, being indistinguishable from a deceptive experience, cannot be an assertion or belief about the world. Hence while non-veridical experience gains its power of deceiving by being indistinguishable from a veridical experience, veridical experience loses its power of guiding us to the truth of the world. And experience, in general, loses the power of asserting. Experience is not anymore an assertion about the world. We cannot then depend on experience for the truth of the world.

But the indistinguishability thesis seems to be very dubious. Take the example of a straight stick half immersed in water. According to the passage from Ayer I quoted above, the experience of looking at a straight stick which is half immersed in water is qualitatively indistinguishable from the experience of looking at a crooked stick. But this does not seem to be right. If there is no “qualitative” difference between these two cases of experience, then even an instructed adult wouldn’t be able to discriminate a straight stick which is half immersed in water and a crooked stick.

And indeed, we have good reasons to believe, at least in this case, the non-veridical experience is distinguishable from the veridical one. One’s experience of seeing a stick half immersed in water is obviously different from one’s experience of seeing a crooked stick out of water. As in the case of the stick in the water, we not only see the stick, but also the water, and that makes the experience of the stick half immersed in water different from one’s experience of a crooked stick out of the water. We need to see experience should not be understood as an isolated picture; an experience is an experience of the whole thing which includes not only the object one is particularly interested in, but also the other objects closely related to it and the whole environment as well. The idea that a straight stick half immersed in water looks the same as a crooked stick out of the water only holds when we think about the case in an abstract way, namely, they both in a sense look crooked. But they

⁵⁹ McDowell’s embrace of the indistinguishability thesis is clear in the following passage: “the *same* claim would be ‘contained’ in, say, each member of a trio of possible experiences of which one is a case of seeing that there is a red and triangular physical object in front of one, one is a case in which something in front of one looks red and triangle although it is not, and one is a case in which it looks to one as if there is something red and triangular in front of one although there is nothing there at all” (1998, p. 443).

look crooked in different ways.

The same holds for Sellars' example of looking at a tie in a green-lighted room. The tie looks greenish in the room. Sellars says that the tie looks the way a greenish one would look under normal light condition. But, we may assume, the whole room is within the subject's experience. If everything in the room looks greenish, that may suggest that the light is funny. Certain things should not be greenish under normal light, say, one's hands. And if the whole room looks greenish, then the subject will not see her tie as green just because it looks as greenish as her hands. The way a tie looks under green light condition is certainly distinguishable from the way a green tie looks under normal light conditions.

This applies to many other cases as well. To see myself in the mirror is different from seeing myself in front of me. I not only see the image in the mirror but also the mirror as well. And seeing the mirror, with my knowledge about mirrors, would guarantee that I see the mirror image as a mirror image, not another "I" in the mirror.

We thus have to take the context into consideration. According to the indistinguishability thesis, the appearance of a circular coin seen from a certain point of view is indistinguishable from the appearance of an elliptical coin. But this can't be true. The appearance of a circular coin seen from a certain point of view is certainly distinguishable from the appearance of an elliptical coin seen from exactly the *same* point of view. In having the experience, one not only sees the coin but also is conscious of the point of view from which one sees the coin. For the same reason, to see a shadow is different from seeing a darker-coloured area. When seeing a shadow, one is aware of the light and the object that blocks the light.

This is also true for the case of hallucination. Someone might say: suppose there is a book on the table, we can all see the book, and the subject is hallucinating a book on the table which is exactly the same as the book which is really on the table. In this case, a veridical experience is indistinguishable from a non-veridical experience. But there is no real difficulty here. If the subject is hallucinating, then the book would still be in front of her even she turns away. If she sees a book on the table, then she won't be able to see it if she turns away. When one hallucinates, what one hallucinates would follow one everywhere as long as the hallucination lasts. This is obviously not the case for any physical objects that one perceives. One has to follow the objects in order to see them. Another way of distinguishing a hallucination and an experience of a book is to try to remove the book. A subject who is hallucinating a book cannot remove the "book" in front of her, while it is easy for the subject in a normal case to remove the real book she sees in front of her. Someone may hallucinate with her eyes closed, then her body sensation would tell her that she is hallucinating instead of seeing.

It can be objected that there must be cases where a non-veridical experience is so similar to a veridical one that it is impossible for us to distinguish them. A fake book may be

made in such a way that it looks exactly like a real book. But first, this seems to shift the topic of indistinguishability of deceptive experience and veridical experience to the topic of the indistinguishability of authentic object and decoy object. Second, even the distinguishability of decoy object and authentic object should not be taken for granted. A fake book might look exactly like a real book. But what if you try to read it? The point is that our experience is an active exploration of the world; it is not a static picture of the object. We'll find out the difference between similar objects by experiencing more aspects of them. No two different objects are indistinguishable in principle. There is a difference between "difficult to distinguish" and "impossible to distinguish". As Austin points out correctly,

From the fact that I am sometimes 'deluded', mistaken, taken in through failing to distinguish A from B, it does not follow at all that A and B must be indistinguishable. Perhaps I should have noticed the difference if I had been more careful or attentive; perhaps I am just bad at distinguishing things of this sort (e.g. vintages); perhaps, again, I have never learned to discriminate between them, or haven't had much practice at it. (1962, p. 53)

The fact that practice contributes to our experiential ability and improves our ability to distinguish similar objects is sharply observed by the Stoics:

I will even concede that the wise person himself—the subject of our whole discussion—will suspend his assent when confronted by similar things that he does not have marked off; and that he will never assent to any impression except one such that it could not be false. But he has a particular skill by which he can distinguish true from false impressions in <normal> cases and he must bring experience to bear on those similarities. Just as a mother discriminates her twins as her eyes become accustomed to them, so you, too, will discriminate them, if you practice. You see how the similarity of eggs to each other is proverbial? Nevertheless, we have heard that there were quite a few people on Delos, when things were going well for them there, who used to rear a great number of hens for their living; well, when these men had inspected an egg, they could usually tell which hen had laid it. (Cicero 2006, 2.57)

Different objects are in principle distinguishable. Hence the Stoics would agree that there are similar things in the world which are difficult to distinguish, but they deny that these similar things are identical (Cicero 2006, 2.54). And for this reason, we say, it is possible to distinguish them.

A so-called deceptive experience is only indistinguishable from a so-called veridical

one if we understand experience as an isolated picture or snapshot. But we need to see experience is holistic both spatially and temporally. First, spatially, we experience or take in the whole object or, more usually, the whole scene with all the relevant objects in it, not isolated bits or aspects of a single object. When I look at the edge of a mug, I see not only the edge, but also the rest part of the mug, and I see the apparently elliptical-looking edge as the circular edge of the mug, not an elliptical ring hanging over there. When I look into the mirror, I see not only my image in the mirror; but also the mirror. When I see the shadow on the ground, I see the sunshine and the object which blocks the sunshine as well. When I see the stick half immersed in the water, I see not only the stick, but also the water. And a so-called non-veridical experience is distinguishable from a veridical one when we understand it as the experience of the whole scene.

Second, temporally, experience is a dynamic, evolving process, not a static picture or snapshot. It is an active exploration of the world, not a passive receiving of information. To put it in another way, experience is essentially an embodied process. If I am puzzled by the way the edge of my mug looks from a certain distance, I can go closer and look at it again. In a while I will get used to the different ways things look from different perspectives. If I am not sure if the stick half immersed in the water is crooked or not, I can take it out of the water and look at it again. There are many different ways of experiencing the world, and we are not bound to sit still and passively look at whatever we've got in front of us. It is exactly in this way and for this reason that experience continuously reveals reality to us. When you walk on the street, you see things as you walk. You experience people and the traffic from different perspectives and distances, and through different sense organs (you hear the traffic as well as seeing it).⁶⁰ All this makes a so-called non-veridical experience distinguishable from a veridical one.

We thus have good reasons to doubt that it can be established that a non-veridical experience is indistinguishable from a veridical one.⁶¹ The idea of deceptive experience cannot be supported by the alleged indistinguishability. But a non-veridical experience may be deceptive simply because it does not manifest the world as it is and hence induces the subject to make a false judgement. For this possibility we turn to the first assumption on which the idea of deceptive experience is based, namely the very distinction between veridical experience and non-veridical experience.

4. The distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience is widely accepted. There

⁶⁰ For the idea that experience involves action, see Noë 2004 and Schellenberg 2007. See also Dretske 1988, p. 155.

⁶¹ In this sense, my view is different from that of Austin. Austin does not deny that "there may be cases in which 'delusive and veridical experiences' really are 'qualitatively indistinguishable'". His point is to deny that "such cases are anything like as common as both Ayer and Price seem to suppose" and that "the fact that we are sometimes 'deceived by our senses' have to be explained by such cases". "We are not, after all, quasi-infallible beings, who can be taken in only where when avoidance of mistake is completely impossible" (1962, p. 52).

can be different ways of understanding the distinction, though. For representationalists, a veridical experience represents its object as it is, while a non-veridical experience does not. For nonrepresentationalists, a veridical experience is a manifestation of the world, while a non-veridical experience is not. To avoid complications, I shall stick with the non-representationalist expression of the distinction. But what I shall say about the distinction is neutral to the way it is expressed.

According to the distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience, a veridical experience is non-deceptive in that it is a manifestation of the world and supports a right judgement about the world, while a non-veridical experience is deceptive in that it is not a manifestation of the world and supports a wrong judgement about the world. Now the question is: in what sense is not a non-veridical experience a manifestation of the world and does it support an incorrect judgement about the world?

To answer the question, we shall start with some familiar cases from everyday life. Take Ayer's example of looking at a coin from a certain point of view. A coin looks elliptical from a certain point of view while it is indeed circular. For this reason, it may be said, the experience is non-veridical because it does not manifest the way the coin is. And it is deceptive in that it would support a wrong judgement about the coin, namely, the coin is elliptical.

But both of the two points are mistaken. First, the way the coin looks is indeed a manifestation of the way the coin is. It is right for a coin to look elliptical from that particular point of view. A coin's appearing elliptical is exactly the right way for a circular object to appear from that particular point of view. That's just the way a coin looks from that particular point of view. It is right for a circular object to look elliptic when we are not facing it directly. In fact it is simply wrong for the coin to look circular from that particular point of view. Second, the coin's looking elliptical from that particular point of view does not normally induce the subject to make an incorrect judgement about the coin, namely that the coin is elliptical. In fact, it is exactly this elliptical appearance which makes the subject *see* the coin as circular. The subject would certainly get confused if a coin looks circular from that particular point of view. And the coin's looking circular from that particular point of view would definitely not lead the subject to judge that the coin is circular. Hence the experience in which the coin looks elliptical does manifest the way the coin is and does not normally induce a false judgement about the object.⁶²

The fact that we may get different impressions from the same object does not simply mean only one of them is a manifestation of the world and all the others are not. Hence to get a different impression is not to get a wrong or misleading impression; on the contrary, it is exactly this different impression which provides knowledge of the relevant object in a

⁶² For a similar understanding of the matter, see Austin 1962, p. 26.

different circumstance and leads to a true judgement about the object.

The thing is, the same object does not have to look the same way in different circumstances, and it is right for it to look different from different perspectives, under different light conditions, etc. And in all these cases, neither can we say the appearances are not manifestations of the way things are, nor can we say the subject is deceived by these different appearances. Not only the so-called non-veridical or deceptive experience does not deceive us, it is actually conducive to our right judgment of the objects. The so-called deceptive experience is actually a clue to the truth of the world and hence guides us to a correct judgement about the world. It is not something we dismiss or try to get rid of; it is by virtue of which we obtain the truth of the world.

There are numerous familiar examples of this kind in our everyday life. Take the example of parallel roads. Parallel roads may in a sense look converging and for this reason the experience of seeing the roads may be considered deceptive. But again, we have two reasons for saying the roads' looking converging is not a deceptive experience. First, this is just the right way for parallel roads to look from far away. Second, the converging looking of the parallel roads does not lead to the wrong judgment that the roads are indeed converging. A normal subject would *see* the converging looking parallel roads as parallel. In fact the very look of converging without crossing gives the clue that the roads are parallel. The point here is that the subject does not need to infer from the converging-but-not-crossing look of the roads that they are parallel; she *sees* the roads as parallel. The experience is a manifestation of the way the roads are, and is not deceptive.⁶³

We may then think that the idea of non-veridical experience should be restricted to those unfamiliar cases. This, in fact, is exactly the way McDowell intends to use the term "deceptive experience".

Things are indeed a bit different with some less familiar cases. Take the example of a straight stick half immersed in water. A straight stick looks crooked when it is half immersed in water. In this case, we may still want to say that it is just right for a straight stick to look that way in that circumstance. There is nothing wrong with the experience. Suppose someone comes and says: "That stick half immersed in water doesn't look crooked to me". We would all be surprised and think there must be something wrong with *her* experience. But is it true that the appearance induces a false judgement about the shape of the stick, even if an experienced subject does not mistakenly judge the stick as crooked? One thing we should admit is that in this case the subject won't be able to see the stick as straight even if she judges that the stick is straight. But neither should we say that the experience would induce the subject to judge that the stick is crooked. As I argued in the last section, the experience of seeing a crooked looking straight stick half-immersed in water is

⁶³ For a similar treatment of the apparent alteration of the size of an object, see Martin 2001, p. 204.

distinguishable from the experience of seeing a crooked stick out of the water and hence will not induce the subject to judge that the stick is crooked. Hence, even in this case it is still not correct to say that the experience is deceptive. This is the same for the case of Müller-Lyer diagram, in which the line with outwards wings appears longer than the one with inwards wings although they are the same length. It is right for one line to look longer than the other. And the appearance does not induce a false judgement about the comparative length of the two lines. Although the two lines do not look equal, they do not look unequal either, since they do not look the way unequal lines would look.⁶⁴

Perhaps, then, we should restrict the idea of non-veridical experience to the kind of experience which does not have a physical object, say, experience of having a hallucination or seeing an afterimage. In this case, it is true that the appearance is not a manifestation of the physical world. But is it deceptive in the sense that it supports a wrong judgement about the world? Not really. Hallucinations, as I argued in the last section, are in principle distinguishable from perception and are normally experienced as hallucinations. They thus do not necessarily support any kind of wrong judgement about the world and are not in any sense deceptive. Therefore it is fine if we want to use the term “non-veridical” experience to designate experiences that do not have a physical object, but this term should not carry with it the implication that a non-veridical experience must be deceptive in that it induce the subject to make incorrect judgements about the world.

The distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience is intended to be a distinction that is relevant to the world. What is behind the distinction is the idea that experience has an intrinsic feature which is independent of the subject’s understanding of the situation. It is exactly this intrinsic feature of experience which lends support to the idea that experience may be deceptive. In saying that “if one were to believe that things are as they appear, one would be misled”, McDowell assumes that things definitely appear a certain way, no matter what kind of judgment we may hold about them (1988, p. 210). According to this understanding, once one is presented with a Müller-Lyer diagram, the experience got to be in a certain way and is inevitably illusive.

But the idea of the intrinsic feature of experience is dubious. It is easy to understand that things may look different to different subjects or to the same subject in different circumstances. But we also need to see things may look different to the same subject in the same physical circumstances. A duck-rabbit figure may look to a subject either as a duck or as a rabbit, depending on the kind of mind-set she may have at the moment. As I mentioned in chapter 5, if we assume the figure give rise to the same appearance in the two cases, then we will have to accept a duck and a rabbit have the same appearance, which is obviously absurd.

⁶⁴ This awkward situation makes Merleau-Ponty says something really obscure and profound: “The two straight lines in Muller-Lyer’s optical illusion are neither of equal nor unequal length” (2002, p. 6)

We don't even need to appeal to these contrivances of psychology to see the point. There are numerous examples of this kind in everyday life as well. Take the example of a shadow. We can imagine that for someone who has no previous knowledge of shadows, the shadow area might appear coloured darker than the other part of the ground. But for most of us who are familiar with shadows, the shadow area does not look *coloured* darker, although it may look darker. In fact, it seldom occurs to us that the shadow area is darker. It only appears to us that it is a shadow, not that it is a darker area, although it is true that a shadow does look darker. The same goes for the case of after-image. An after-image taken as a colour patch on the white wall looks different from the one taken as an after-image. Hence Austin remarks: "descriptions of looks are neither 'incorrigible' nor 'subjective'". He writes:

Of course, with very familiar words such as 'red', it is no doubt pretty unlikely that we should make mistakes (though what about marginal cases?). But certainly someone might say, 'It looks heliotrope', and then have doubts either as to whether 'heliotrope' is right for the colour this thing looks, or (taking another look) as to whether this thing really looks heliotrope. There is certainly nothing in principle final, conclusive, irrefutable about anyone's statement that so-and-so looks such-and-such. And even if I say, '...looks...to me now', I may, on being pressed, or after looking at the thing more attentively, wish to retract my statement or at least amend it. To rule out other people and other times is not to rule out uncertainty altogether, or every possibility of being challenged and perhaps proved wrong. It is perhaps even clearer that the way things look is, in general, just as much a fact about the world, just as open to public confirmation or challenge, as the way things are. I am not disclosing a fact about myself, but about petrol, when I say that petrol looks like water. (1962, p. 42-4)⁶⁵

Similarly, Stroud says, "One's acceptance of how things appear to be is also revisable, just as one's beliefs about what is so are" (2002, p. 88). Our understanding of appearance or experience is revisable exactly because it is judgmental. Like any other kinds of judgement, experience or appearance can be false and is subject to revision.

The way things appear or look cannot be separated from the way we understand them. Things look the way we understand them to be. The circular edge of a mug in a certain distance looks circular to a competent subject, while it may look elliptical to someone who does not have the relevant understanding. Parallel roads look parallel to a competent subject while they may look converging to someone who does not have the relevant understanding.

Thus Wittgenstein remarks, when you feel the seriousness of a tune, what you are

⁶⁵ According to Austin, "our senses are dumb...our senses do not *tell* us anything, true or false" (1962, p. 11). For Austin, "looks and appearances provide us with *facts* on which a judgement may be based" (1962, p. 43).

perceiving could not “be conveyed by reproducing what you heard” (1953, p. 210). In like manner, we can say, how an object looks to you cannot be conveyed by pointing at that object. If someone asks me what I think about a painting, I cannot give an answer by pointing at the painting. Appearance may change when our understanding of the situation is different. Again, Wittgenstein writes: “I meet someone whom I have not seen for years; I see him clearly, but fail to know him. Suddenly I know him, I see the old face in the altered one. I believe that I should do a different portrait of him now if I could paint” (1953, p. 197).

There is no definite way for an object to look. Hence the very distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience collapses.

5. With the distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience collapsed, the idea of deceptive experience is now baseless. In fact, it is not even right to say that experience is deceptive when the subject is really deceived. Experience can be deceived but not deceptive. If there is anything deceptive at all, it must be something other than the experience concerned. Sometimes the object of experience can deceive. In the Müller-lyer illusion, it is the Müller-lyer diagram which is deceptive, not the experience of looking at the diagram. What we have can only be a deceived experience, not a deceptive experience.

In some cases it is not so easy to tell exactly what deceives us into having a false experience. The experience of seeing a mirage of oasis as a real oasis, we may say, is deceived by the optical process unknown to the subject, during which light rays are bent to produce a displaced image of distant objects and the sky. But it is hard to say what deceives the subject into having a hallucination. The same goes for the case of after-image. The idea of something deceptive is not always plausible.

Hence, the idea of deceptive experience is itself problematic. On the one hand, it might be true that we sometimes have false experience, that is, see things in the wrong way, because we are deceived by something else, say, the object of experience or a wrong mind-set. But it is a strange thing to say that we are deceived by our own experience. On the other hand, the fact that we make mistakes in our experience does not necessarily mean that there must be something deceptive. Take Austin’s example of a proof-reader’s negligence of a mistake, say, the proof-reader fails to notice that what ought to be “causal” is printed as “casual”. Is the experience deceptive, or is the print deceptive? Neither. It might be just that the proof-reader is so engrossed with the meaning of the whole sentence and ignores this mistake. Or as Austin puts it: “he simply misreads” (1962, p. 27). Recall that even when a word is correctly printed, it is still possible to misread.

If one does not experience an object as it is, that simply means that what one has is a false experience. False experience or misperceiving is not a case of deceptive experience. That one experiences something in the wrong way does not mean one’s experience is

deceptive, just like one's making a mistaken judgment does not mean one's judgment is deceptive. The point is: in having the experience, one already makes the judgment. The experience is not something leading to a judgement, true or false; it is itself a judgment. We do not need "the power of human reason" to "devise fully effective protections against the deceptive capacities of appearance" (McDowell 1995, p. 881). It is simply not part of the function of appearance that it deceives us. The function of experience is to understand the world as it is. Experience as belief can only be distinguished as true or false. As the Stoics make it clear, "some perceptual impressions are true, some false" (Cicero 2006, 2.79).

Experience is judgmental but not deceptive. This is not because experience is always true, but because it is not the kind of thing to deceive. A false experience is only false, not in any sense deceptive. Experience is the kind of thing to be deceived. One can be deceived *and* have a false experience, but cannot be deceived *by* one's own experience. To say one is deceived by one's experience is to say one is deceived by oneself. People do talk about self-deception, but not in this sense. To say one is deceived by one's own experience is to say one is deceived by one's own judgment.

However, there is a difference between the unfamiliar cases which are called illusions and the case of seeing a coin from a certain point of view which are not usually considered illusions. The subject cannot see the crooked looking stick as straight even if she judges that the stick is straight. Hence unlike a typical everyday life case, the experience does not direct us to the truth of the world. We do not judge the stick as straight in virtue of having its crooked-looking appearance in our experience. Then how should we account for the difference?

The difference lies in the fact that the experience of looking at a straight stick half immersed in water is in a sense disadvantaged. The best way to judge the shape of a stick is to see it in the air, not to see it when it is half immersed in water. Hence as far as the shape of the stick is concerned, the experience of seeing a stick in the air is an advantaged experience, while the experience of looking at the stick when it is half immersed in water is a disadvantaged experience. There is a third kind of experience, namely everyday life experience. Seeing a coin from a certain point of view is an experience of this kind. The subject can judge the shape of the coin by having the experience, but this is not the best way to make the judgement. In this case, the best way to judge the shape of the coin, namely the advantaged experience, is the one one has when facing the coin directly.

We can then distinguish three kinds of experience: advantaged experience, everyday life experience, and disadvantaged experience. An advantaged experience is the best way to experience or judge a certain aspect of its object, while a disadvantaged experience is not in a position to judge a certain aspect of its object. An everyday life experience is in a position to judge a certain aspect of its object but not the best way to make the judgement.

The concept of disadvantaged experience should not be understood in a static way.

First, an experience might be disadvantaged in one sense but not in another. As I said above, as far as the shape of the stick is concerned, the experience of looking at the stick when it is half immersed in water is disadvantaged. But if our concern is to observe the phenomenon of light refraction, then this same experience is an advantaged experience. Second, an experience might be disadvantaged for some people but not for others. We can say that the best way to judge the shape of a coin is to face it directly, not to see it from a different point of view. Hence for someone who is not familiar with this kind of situation, seeing a coin from a certain point of view, as far as the shape of the coin is concerned, is a disadvantaged experience. But for a normal competent subject, this is not anymore a disadvantaged experience. Back to the example of looking at a straight stick half-immersed in water. For an ordinary subject, as I said above, as far as the shape of the stick is concerned, the experience is disadvantaged. Yet a scientist, who is very familiar with the refraction phenomenon, may be able to see the straight stick half immersed in water as straight. And for her, the experience is not any more disadvantaged. Hence familiarity plays a crucial role here. When the situation is familiar to us, a disadvantageous condition may become a clue to the truth and conducive to a right judgement about the object. Hence, Austin remarks: "It is important to realize here how familiarity, so to speak, takes the edge off illusion" (1962, p. 26).

To make the difference between the three kinds of experience clearer, I shall propose a double meaning understanding of appearance. There can be two meanings of an appearance. One is its phenomenal meaning, the other is its engaged meaning. The phenomenal meaning of an appearance normally requires a special attitude or way of attending, which we may have to be taught, or to practice, and is difficult to maintain. The engaged meaning of an appearance is that which we grasp when we engage with the world. When we say the coin looks circular from a certain point of view, we are talking about the appearance with an engaged meaning. When we say the coin looks elliptical from a certain point of view, we are talking about the appearance with a phenomenal meaning. Similarly, when we say that parallel roads look converging, we are talking about the appearance with a phenomenal meaning. When we say, pointing at the two parallel roads, that those roads look parallel (though they apparently look converging), we are talking about the appearance with an engaged meaning.

Appearances with different meanings are actually different appearances. There is no appearance which is devoid of meaning or independent of our understanding about the object that appears. We can then distinguish engaged appearance and phenomenal appearance. An engaged appearance is the way things appears to us when we have engaged with world for a while and have learnt the engaged meaning of the appearance. Phenomenal appearance is the way things may look to us before we have had any engagement with the world and when we have not learnt the engaged meaning of the appearance.

Our perceptual experience is an active engagement with the world. Hence what we usually have is an engaged appearance. In everyday life, we very often ignore the phenomenal appearance of an object, or, an object gains its engaged appearance while loses its phenomenal appearance. In most cases, the phenomenal appearance of an object is not anymore natural to us. It remains submerged. It takes effort for us to realize that a circular coin looks elliptical from certain points of view, that a shadow looks coloured darker. The engaged appearance of an object becomes our second nature and plays a prominent role in our everyday life. Austin says, “we all know that what looks crooked may not really *be* crooked” (1962, p. 88). And we should add, for this reason, what looks crooked may not even look crooked at all.

The establishment of the engaged appearance of the object is a matter of habituation.⁶⁶ And there is a point that we theoretically know the engaged meaning of an object, but still cannot see the object with its engaged meaning straightaway, that is, the engaged appearance is not yet established. This is the case when a person in the known is facing a Müller-lyer diagram. She knows the engaged meaning of the diagram, since she is “familiar” with the diagram. But she is not really habituated to get the engaged appearance so as to be able to *see* the diagram with its engaged meaning, for the simple reason that it is not part of her everyday life.

The best way to experience the comparative length of two lines is to view them when they are not with wings in opposite directions. Hence as far as the comparative length of the two lines is concerned, the experience of looking at the Müller-lyer diagram is a disadvantaged experience. The Müller-lyer diagram as a purpose-designed diagram is not part of our everyday life. Hence we don’t get a chance to learn to experience this kind of diagram. But as I said above, a disadvantaged experience can become an everyday experience if we get the chance to practice. When looking at the Müller-lyer diagram, if the subject concentrates on the length of the two lines and tries to get rid of the distraction of the wings, she’ll find the two lines look equal. And if she practices a lot, she’ll gain the ability of seeing the two lines as equal although they may still look unequal when she shifts her attention. That is, she’ll establish the engaged appearance of the Müller-lyer diagram if she practices a lot. An experienced builder will see the equal length wooden bars as equal whether they have inward or outward wings.⁶⁷

It is to be admitted that there are cases where no practice can transform a disadvantaged experience into an everyday life experience, that is, it is impossible to establish the engaged appearance of the object. The same colour illusion may be considered an example of this kind.⁶⁸ The same shade of grey looks darker when surrounded by white

⁶⁶ This may remind us of Aristotle’s theory of moral development (2000).

⁶⁷ I own this builder example to Adrian Moore.

⁶⁸ My thanks to Mark Kalderon for alerting me the possibility by drawing my attention to the same colour illusion.

colour patches than when surrounded by black colour patches. And it is very unlikely that this kind of disadvantaged experience can be transformed into an everyday life experience by practice. It seems to be something firmly programmed in our neural system.

We can then understand the three kinds of experience in terms of the concept of engaged meaning and engaged appearance. In an advantaged experience, the phenomenal meaning of the object coincides with its engaged meaning. The object only has one appearance. That is, its phenomenal appearance is also its engaged appearance. A disadvantaged experience is an experience when the viewing condition is so disadvantaged that the subject cannot experience the object as it is. The subject cannot experience the object with its engaged meaning. But the concept of disadvantaged experience is a dynamic concept. As I said above, we learn to experience. If the subject engages with the object sufficiently, a disadvantaged experience may become an everyday life experience in which the subject can experience the object with its engaged meaning.

We can then replace the idea of deceptive experience with the concept of disadvantaged experience. A disadvantaged experience is not deceptive in the sense Ayer and McDowell understand it; it does not induce a false judgement when the subject does not hold the false belief.

6. I have argued that the distinction between veridical and non-veridical experience on which idea of deceptive experience is based is problematic and suggested that we replace the idea of deceptive or non-veridical experience with the idea of disadvantaged experience.

The concept of disadvantaged experience first of all stops the disbelief object from working in a rampant way and hence saves nondoxasticists from running into the danger of committing to the idea that we seldom believe what we experience, which would inevitably threaten the understanding that we normally believe what we experience, which is shared by both doxasticists and nondoxasticists. And given the fact that the disbelief objection is based on an idea of deceptive experience which implies experience is mostly deceptive, this threat is too real to ignore. The distinction between disadvantaged experience and everyday life experience shows why the disbelief objection, if it has a bite to the case of disadvantaged experience at all, cannot be extended to the case of everyday life experience.

More importantly, to falsify the idea of deceptive experience is at once to disarm the disbelief objection. The most powerful part of the disbelief objection is the idea that an illusive experience can only lead to the belief that not-P when it is the case that P. And for someone in the know who holds the belief that P, it is impossible that she at once consciously holds the belief that not-P which is supposed to be the one that may be derived from the illusive experience. Hence, concludes the objection, there is no belief corresponding to an illusive experience. Now if we realize that, for people in the know, an

illusory experience is not deceptive and does not have to lead to the belief that P when it is the case that not-P, then the possibility that there be a corresponding belief for a familiar illusion is not excluded. All we need to do is to identify a belief corresponding to a familiar illusion.

At this point it is important to note the difference between saying experience is belief-independent and saying it is not belief. To say experience is independent of a certain belief is not to say it cannot be another belief. In fact, the very reason that it is independent of one belief is that it is another belief. In the case of familiar illusion, the appearance we have in experience in no way guides us to the truth of the world, and this experience does not seem to be relevant to the belief we may hold. Take the example of Müller-lyer illusion. The subject does not see the two lines as equal although she firmly believes that the two lines are equal (through measuring the two lines, say). Hence the experience is independent of the belief one holds about the comparative length of the lines. But this does not mean the experience cannot be another belief, if we realize that the Müller-lyer illusion is a disadvantaged experience instead of a deceptive experience.

Hence what we need to do is actually to identify a belief for the disadvantaged experience.

One thing we should note is that experience is generally belief even if a small part of it does not have a corresponding belief. In the Müller-lyer illusion, the subject's experience that there are two lines with their wings there is a belief, even if part of her experience which is about the comparative length of the two lines may not be the content of her relevant belief. However, what I'm going to show is that even for this small part of the experience, there is still a corresponding experience.

I have argued that for an observer who is familiar with the Müller-lyer diagram, the two lines do not look unequal. Then what do they look? The answer is: it only looks *as if* that the two lines are unequal. The "as if" is already in experience, and the corresponding belief, of course, is that it looks *as if* the two lines are unequal. In the same vein, a stick half immersed in water does not really look crooked and the subject does not believe it is crooked. It only looks *as if* the stick is crooked and the subject believes it looks *as if* the stick is crooked. It is important to note looking crooked is phenomenologically different from looking *as if* it is crooked. The experience of the water and the unusual crooked looking contribute to the "as if". In the same colour illusion, for an observer in the know, it only looks *as if* that the two squares are different colours. An observer in the know would be able to pick up the information from the fact that A is surrounded by white squares while B is surrounded by black squares and hence get an "as if" in her experience.

The crucial point is that the belief is not based on a previous belief; it is based on what we have in the relevant experience. Jackson observes that there can be disbelief even when there is no contradicting previous belief:

But suppose I had not known that I was wearing blue glasses, what would I have believed then if I had not known the wall was white? Must it in this be true that I would have believed that the wall was blue? There is no *must* about it. I might have noticed that my hand looked blue and so have suspected. (1977, p. 41)

Discussing the Müller-lyer illusion, he writes:

Even if I had not measured the lines, or otherwise determined that the lines were equal, I would not have believed that the top line was longer than the bottom; I would, rather, have reserved judgement. This is not because I am familiar with the Muller-Lyer illusion, but is the result of the fact that it is obvious that the ‘wings’ at the end of the lines are going to have a distorting effect. The first time I was presented with the illusion, and before I had measured the lines, I noted that the top line looked longer, but did not thereby believe that it was longer. And this is almost universally the case. (1977, p. 40-41)

This suggests that we do not disbelieve our experience; the disbelief is already in experience.

This applies to other cases of illusion as well. Take the example of the luggage belt illusion. Many of us may have the experience of collecting luggage from a luggage belt at the airport. If you stare at the moving belt for a while, you may feel you are moving but the belt is not moving, although you firmly believe you are not moving. Then the content of your experience is that it looks *as if* you are moving. And the corresponding belief is that it looks as if you are moving. The point here is that a “as if” moving feels different from a real moving. In an “as if” moving experience, you feel there must be something wrong: it can’t be true that you are moving when you are neither moving actively nor in a moving vehicle.

It can be objected that this “*as if*” belief is belief about appearance; not about the truth of, or how things stand in, the world. But this is not true. Experience does not have to be belief about the truth of a physical object. Belief about how an object appears is also belief about the world and is no less important than belief about the way the object is. Our understanding of the way things look contributes significantly to our understanding of the world. Without this kind of belief, no one would be able to understand the point of Müller-lyer illusion. In the case of the stick half immersed in water, the fact that the stick looks crooked leads to our understanding of light refraction. It is thus an important fact that the stick does in a sense look crooked. No one would be able to explain to you the idea of light refraction if the stick doesn’t look crooked to you. Beliefs about appearance also justify other empirical beliefs. Believing that the two lines look as if unequal may lead to the

belief that this would be the same for other observers and tempt one to try this to other people. Different experiences provide different kinds of belief and play different kinds of justificatory role. The way things look is a fact about the world which cannot be dismissed as insignificant. Furthermore, the belief is not just about the appearance, it is also concerned with the truth of the physical world. This is what “*as if*” is doing here.

Having dealt with the case of disadvantaged experience, we shall now go back to the case of everyday life experience. I have said that in this case the coin looks elliptical without really looking elliptical. The subject sees the coin as circular and hence the content of the experience is exactly the content of the belief the subject held about the coin, namely, the coin is circular. But still, if we concentrate on the phenomenal appearance of the coin, we’ll still find the coin looks elliptical. Now the question is: what is that mysterious phenomenal appearance doing here?

It is no longer proper to say that it looks as if the coin is elliptical, because unlike in the case of disadvantaged experience, the elliptical-looking coin does not even look as if elliptical, it simply looks circular. Then what is the belief corresponding to the elliptical look of the coin? The belief is: the way a coin appears from that point of view is to look elliptical in a certain sense. This belief, among other things, tells us how to draw a coin seen from a certain point of view.

7. I shall now conclude the chapter by considering a special case known as the movement after-effect. This is the phenomenon in which, after watching movement in one direction for a while, a stationary object viewed afterwards seems to be both moving in the opposite direction and not moving. Take the example of waterfall illusion. When you stare at a waterfall for a while, and then turn your attention away from the waterfall to a stone, you will get the experience that the stone is both moving and not moving. It is moving in the sense that every part of it seems to be moving; it is not moving in the sense that the whole stone does not seem to be moving. This sounds striking. Fisby thus claims that this “is logically impossible” (1980, p. 101).

This example is used by Crane to argue that experience has a nonconceptual content. Crane makes it clear that he is concerned with “contents, not attitudes” (Crane, 1988). But this case seems to be threatening to doxasticism as well. If there are two conflicting beliefs in experience, how can we identify experience with a single belief? Or, in this case, what really is the belief supposed to be found in experience?

This objection can be very damaging if it really works, since it suggests that the subject cannot even have a belief about the appearance, namely, a belief that it looks that the stone is moving (or not moving). The problem is that the experience cannot suggest any kind of belief, whether about the object or about the appearance.

But the waterfall illusion does not generate a real conflict. Even the subject believes the stone is moving in that particular way, there are no conflicting beliefs or logical impossibility in the strict sense. If we say the stone appears both moving and not moving, then we can say the same thing about the waterfall. The waterfall appears and *is* both moving and not moving in the sense that the water is moving while the waterfall is not moving. And this explains what happens to the later experience of the stone: as an after-image of the experience of staring at the waterfall, every part of the stone appears moving while the stone is experienced as staying still. Hence we have two beliefs here. The first is that every part of the stone is moving; the second the stone is not moving. And these two beliefs do not in fact conflict. The reason is that this is not a logical impossibility. It is perfectly possible that every part of an object is moving while the object itself is not moving. We have seen this in the case of waterfall, as I said above, the water is moving while the waterfall is not moving. There are numerous other examples of this kind in the real world. Imagine a ball keeps rotating on its axis. Every part of the rotating ball is moving, while the ball itself is not. So there is no real conflict between the moving of the parts and the staying still of the whole, and we can certainly have the corresponding two beliefs in one experience.

There is, nevertheless, a sense that the phenomena may threaten doxasticism. While it looks to the subject that every part of the stone is moving, the subject does not believe this is really the case. This takes us back to the disbelief objection. The main reason that one does not believe that every part of the stone is moving is that the way every part of the stone seems to be moving is very strange. It is different from a real look of moving. Hence the content of the experience is that it looks *as if* every part of the stone is moving and this is exactly what the subject believes.

8. Voluntary Belief and Active Experience

1. Conceptualism, while insisting experience is conceptual, does not think experience is itself a belief. And this, as I argued in chapter 4, makes it impossible for experience to justify other beliefs. The reason is that what is not a belief cannot justify a belief. The way out, I suggested, is to see that experience is itself belief. In the last two chapters, I argued for and defended the thesis that experience is doxastic. The point is that the attitude of believing is intrinsic to experience, not something about an experience, or over and above an experience. Experience is not something to be judged; it is itself a judgment or suspension of judgment. Experience is essentially doxastic; it is not a content one may stand aloof from. This would close the gap between experience and belief and explain how experience can justify our belief about the empirical world. The solution, however, does not seem to be available to McDowell.

One of the main obstacles for McDowell and many others to accepting that experience is doxastic is the idea that we should be rationally in control of our beliefs. According to McDowell, we are responsible for what to believe in the sense that this is “something we freely do, as opposed to something that merely happens in our lives”. Hence for McDowell, belief is in “the realm of freedom” (1998, p. 434). He writes:

Of course, a belief is not always, or even typically, a result of our exercising this freedom to decide what to think. But even a belief is not freely adopted, it is an actualisation of capacities of a kind, the conceptual, whose paradigmatic mode of actualisation is in the exercise of freedom that judging is. (1998, p. 434)

The idea that we can decide what to believe is called the voluntariness of belief. And given that experience does not seem to be within our control, it is thus reasonable to think that experience is not belief.

I agree with McDowell that the voluntariness of belief is not to be denied.⁶⁹ But it is my contention that the voluntariness of belief does not undermine the idea that experience is belief. In what follows I shall first explain in what sense belief is voluntary and then establish the voluntariness of belief by arguing that belief is not something *merely* happens to us. Belief is not only an achievement of action, but also essentially action involving. We not only decide how to act to get the belief, but also decide what to believe. I shall then move on to argue that the voluntariness of belief does not imply that we should favour reasoning over experience in deciding what to believe. Experiential belief is an achievement of experiential exploration instead of a decision made by reason. And more importantly, the voluntariness of belief does not undermine the thesis that experience is belief. The reason is that experience is itself a voluntary, active exploration of the world, not a passive receiving of information about the world.

2. To put it crudely, the voluntariness of belief is the idea that we decide what to believe. One of the main challenges to the voluntariness of belief is based on the connection between belief and truth. To believe is to believe the truth, and truth is not up to us, hence we cannot decide what to believe. As Aristotle observes: “it is plain that having thoughts is not the same as supposing; for the former is up to us, whenever we wish...; but opining is not up to us—for it is necessary either to hold falsely or to hold truly” (1984, 427b16-21). A belief is either a true belief or a false belief; and “true and false depend on agreement and disagreement with the facts, and the facts do not depend on us” (1984, 206.35).⁷⁰ Hence, Williams, for example, argues that “beliefs aim at truth”, so we cannot believe as we wish (Williams, 1973).

Even Descartes, who is well known for his view that belief, assent, or judgement is the operation of the will, is negative about the role the will may play in forming a belief or making a judgement and warns us to restrict ourselves to what we perceive clearly. According to Descartes, belief is assent to perceptions, namely sensory perception and pure understanding which are not themselves judgements (1985, p. 204).⁷¹ As Descartes

⁶⁹ When talk about the voluntariness of belief, philosophers very often address themselves to religious belief or moral belief. I shall nevertheless confine myself to factual belief, which is also what McDowell means to talk about when he says we decide what to believe.

⁷⁰ Aristotle claims that “to perceive is not up to us—for it is necessary for the object of perception to be there” (1984, 417b25-26). And this is in contrast with having a thought: “to have thought is up to us, whenever we want to” (ibid. 417b24-26; 427b16-21). But this is not to say belief is up to us.

⁷¹ Note that the way Descartes uses the term ‘perception’ is very different from the way we use it today.

understands it, there are limitations on the understanding, while the will has no limitations. I can thus not only decide what to act, but also what to assent. And this is why we make mistaken judgements. We fall into error “only when we make judgements about things which we have not sufficiently perceived” (1985, p. 204). Thus, for Descartes, error arises from the relations between the will and the understanding. It is because “the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect” that error arises (1996, p. 40). “In this incorrect use of free will may be found the privation which constitutes the essence of error” (1996, p. 41).

It follows from this account that the avoidance of error is in my own power. According to Descartes: “If, however, I simply refrain from making a judgement in cases where I do not perceive the truth with sufficient clarity and distinctness, then it is clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error” (1996, p. 41). For Descartes, the kind of free will we have is actually the freedom of avoiding error by refraining from “believing things which are not completely certain and thoroughly examined” (1996, p. 41). Hence Descartes claims: “We have free will, enabling us to withhold our assent in doubtful matters and hence avoid error” (1985, p. 194). We see for Descartes, the action of the will is actually the source of error. And the freedom of the will is to refrain itself from jumping to a judgement which is not based on “sufficient clarity and distinctness”.

Hence, it seems, with the understanding that beliefs aim at truth and truth is not up to us, we should deny that belief is voluntary, if the voluntariness of belief is to be understood as believing as one wishes or to assent to something that is not well-supported by one’s understanding of the matter.

But what McDowell means by saying that we should decide what to believe is not that we should believe randomly or freely whatever we want to believe. What he means is a rational control on what to believe; truth is not something which simply occurs to us. Hence we need to have some control over belief exactly because belief aims at truth. Truth certainly is not up to us, but we can decide what the truth is by finding it out.

When McDowell says belief is up to us, he is not saying we can believe at will. His idea is that belief is subject to rational control. This is the idea of the freedom of reason. For McDowell, we need to decide what to believe exactly because this is the right way of getting at the truth. According to this understanding of freedom, what we are free to do is not to refrain from believing but to make belief subject to our rational control. In this sense, McDowell’s freedom is the freedom of deciding what to believe. For McDowell, the realm of freedom is to be identified with the space of reasons, not the act of the will, and we can decide what to believe through the power of reason. As Owens puts it, for McDowell, belief is subject to “reflective control” (2000, p. 5). McDowell writes:

This freedom, exemplified in responsible acts of judging, is essentially a matter of being answerable to criticism in the light of rationally relevant considerations. So the

realm of freedom, at least the realm of freedom of judging, can be identified with the space of reasons. (1998, p. 434)

Hence for McDowell, the realm of freedom is the act of reason, not the act of will.

The idea that belief is the act of reason can also be found, for example, in Burge and Korsgaard. According to Burge,

Beings who have reasons must sometimes be in continuing, uncoopted control of some events, in the sense that the events are a direct guided product of the reasoner's central rational powers. Events guided by reasons issuing from a thinker's uncoopted central rational powers (from the thinker *qua* individual) are acts, as are the guiding events. (1998, p. 251).

The idea that belief is the act of reason is the idea that we decide what to believe through the power of reason. This is what McDowell calls the freedom of reason. This is essentially a Spinozan-Kantian notion of freedom. Spinoza says, "I call him free who is led by reason alone" (1985, p. 584). Spinoza thus criticizes the Cartesian idea of the freedom of the will in a very radical way. He points out, "The will cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary one":

The will, like the intellect, is only a certain mode of thinking. And so...each volition can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined by another cause, and this cause again by another, and so on, to infinity...And so...it cannot be called a free cause, but only a necessary or compelled one...(1994, p. 105-6)

Spinoza actually denies any kind of freedom. According to Spinoza, "men are deceived in that they think themselves free", and this is because "they are conscious of their actions and ignorant of the causes by which they are determined" (1994, p. 137). Hence, "In the Mind there is no absolute, or free, will", "there is no volition, or affirmation and negation, except that which the idea involves insofar as it is an idea" (ibid., p. 146-7). For Spinoza, "The will and the intellect are one and the same" (1994, p. 147).

For this reason, McDowell claims: "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, p. 5). Hence the idea of the freedom of reason is the idea that reason decides or necessitates what to believe.

Truth is not up to us. But we can decide what the truth is by making rational explorations. To decide what to believe is to decide what the truth is, what the fact is, what

the world is like. This is what McDowell means by saying that we can decide what to believe.

There is also another sense that belief is voluntary. We can decide to take the right action to explore the truth, although we cannot decide to believe randomly and freely. In this sense, we have duties and obligations about our beliefs, and ignorance or error is a fault. We are in a sense responsible for our ignorance or error. For this reason Stuart Hampshire is not completely right in saying that, while we may well say that someone is responsible for her own actions, “it may seem exaggerated” to speak of someone as responsible for her beliefs (1982, p. 155). Hampshire claims that “It would seem logically absurd to prohibit by law the holding of certain beliefs, if having the beliefs was distinguished from expressing them” (1982, p. 155). But we should note, in many cases, holding a belief is connected with consequential actions, and is in that sense connected with responsibility. Medical accidents, for example, are very often results of misjudgements of the surgeries.

For this reason ignorance can be considered as a fault. Locke states unequivocally “Assent is no more in our Power than Knowledge” (1975, p. 717). But this does not mean we are not responsible for our ignorance. “Yet we can hinder both knowledge and Assent, by stopping our Enquiry, and not employing our Faculties in the search of any Truth” (ibid.). The duties and obligations are not only in the practical realm, but also in the epistemic realm.⁷² As Cottingham puts it nicely:

what we want is not just that we should be passively led to the truth, but that we should play an active role in searching for that truth, in scrutinising the candidates for truth, in devising procedures for eliminating the faulty candidates and establishing why the sound candidates are reliable. In short, we want a methodology of inquiry that is within our control as epistemic agents. (2002, p. 352)

Belief is then voluntary in two important senses. First, belief is a result of valuing and revaluing different evidence we may have about the matter. It is rational and self-examining. Second, belief is an achievement of action which may involve choice and decision, although it is not an action of free will. We cannot decide what to believe randomly and freely, but we can decide what to do to get the right belief. Belief is an achievement because we can decide how to act to get at the right belief.⁷³

3. It can be objected that, as a matter of fact, belief is something *merely* happens to us.

⁷² For this reason I agree with Owens that Locke admits “an element of freedom in thought” (Owens 2000, p. 89).

⁷³ It is in this sense, I think, Chignell says that Kant “is an *indirect* voluntarist about conviction...because he thinks that there are things we can choose to do that will, in the long run, have the effect of producing convictions in us” (2007, p. 37).

Hume is well-known for holding this view. According to Hume, “beasts are endow’d with thought and reason as well as men” (2000, p. 118). A dog learns how to please its master; it believes, on the basis of experience, that running when summoned will bring reward and avoid punishment. Such “experimental reasoning” is something we have “in common with beasts” and “is nothing but a species of instinct or mechanical power, that acts in us unknown to ourselves” (1999, p. 168). According to Hume, “nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as to breath or feel” (2000, p.123). Hume thus rejects the idea that belief is subject to reason. He allows that beliefs are governed by the sort of biological norms that apply to the process of breathing, or the workings of the human heart. Hume is right in saying that belief “depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure” (1999, p. 124).

Williams also cite this as an argument against the voluntariness of belief, adding that this is not a contingent fact, given that beliefs aim at truth. We have seen in the last section that beliefs’ aiming at truth does not undermine their voluntariness. Hence, if belief is something merely happens to us at all, it can only be a contingent fact. Therefore what we need to examine now is whether it is true that belief is something which merely happens to us.

The idea that belief is something which merely happens to us implies that we can neither decide what thought to have, nor when to have a thought. Nietzsche famously says “a thought comes when ‘it’ wants, and not when ‘I’ want” (2002, §17). In the same vein, Galen Strawson claims that “most of our thoughts—our thought-contents—*just happen*”. They are “not actions” at all (2003, p. 228-9).⁷⁴ He writes:

No actual natural thinking of a thought, no actual having of a particular thought-content, is ever itself an action. Mental action in thinking is restricted to the fostering of conditions hospitable to contents’ coming to mind. The coming to mind itself—the actual occurrence of thoughts, conscious or non-conscious—is not a matter of action. (2003, p. 234)

According to Strawson, “Contents occur, spring up—the process is largely automatic. Even when our thoughts are most appropriate to our situation and our needs as agents, action and intention need have little or nothing to do with their occurrence” (2003, p. 229). For Strawson, belief is not itself an action and, therefore, we cannot decide what to believe. Strawson thinks “the role of genuine action in thought is at best indirect. It is entirely *prefatory*, it is essentially—merely—*catalytic*” (2003, p. 231). What he has in mind is the kind of action like “setting one’s mind at the problem” or “to shepherd or dragoon one’s

⁷⁴ Barnes makes a similar point when he says that “sometimes thoughts...force themselves or are forced upon us” (2006, p. 38).

wondering mind back to the previous thought-content in order for the train of thought to be restarted or continued” (2003, p. 231-2).

Strawson seems to ignore the fact that belief is based on reason. Belief, typically, is not something which simply occurs to us, it is supported by various evidence and understanding. For this reason it is essentially rational. This is the first sense of the voluntariness of belief I mentioned at the end of the last section.

Moreover, action may also play a more important role in producing belief. This is concerned with the second sense of the voluntariness of belief. Suppose I am walking on the street and see someone who looks like one of my friends, from behind. I am not yet sure she is really my friend. So I try to catch up with her. When I get near enough, I see it *is* my friend. In this case, my belief that she is my friend is an achievement of my action of trying to catch up with her. It is essential (if I would not overtake her without trying) to the formation of my belief; not just prefatory or catalytic. And the same goes for inferential belief. The procedure of making an inference is no doubt an action. This means not only that belief is an achievement of action, it is actually action involving.

Strawson would disagree with this. He writes:

So too, all the cognitive work that thought involves, all the computation in the largest and most human sense, all the essential content-work of reasoning and judgement, all the motion or progress of judgement and thought considered (so to say) in its contentual essence—the actual confrontations and engagements between contents, the collaborations and competitions between them, the transitions between them—is not only not a matter of action but also non-conscious or sub-experiential. It is not itself a phenomenon of consciousness, however much it is catalysed by conscious primings. Rather, the content outcomes are delivered into consciousness so as to be available in their turn for use by the catalytic machinery that is under intentional control. (2003, p. 234)

This is where I disagree. Thinking or reasoning is a conscious activity. It is not usually the case that one solves a mathematical problem unconsciously. This is the same for the example I mentioned above. I do not consciously decide to catch up the person and then unconsciously do the catching up. The action of catching up is mostly a conscious action. I focus on my friend and try to speed up.

Strawson remarks: “In many respects thinking is like seeing. Opening one’s eye, turning one’s head in the direction of X, concentrating on the scene in the attempt to pick out X—all these things can be a matter of action, but seeing X can’t be” (2003, p. 237). But what is problematic is exactly this sharp distinction between looking and seeing, reasoning and judging. We see when we look. Or, we only see because we look. In the same vein, we

judge when we reason, or, we only judge because we reason. There is no clear-cut distinction between the action and the achievement.

Isn't it, though, true that sometimes a thought just occurs to one? This is in fact true. But this is usually regarding something of one's concern. It is seldom the case that a thought suddenly occurs to someone who has never heard of anything relevant or has never cared about it. It is true that when it occurs, the necessary background is simply given, not controlled. In this sense, the relevant belief just happens. But it does not happen as a matter of pure chance. The element table may occur to a chemist who has been thinking hard about it for a long time. But it is very unlikely that it would suddenly occur to someone spending the whole of her life on farm work and has never heard of anything about chemistry.

Hence belief should not be understood as something *merely* happens to us. First, belief is rational and is based on evidence and understanding. Second, belief is not only the result or achievement of one's action, but also essentially action involving. Different kinds of belief involve different kinds of action. We get experiential belief (that is, experience) by looking (or listening, touching, etc.), and inferential belief by reasoning. We judge the road condition by looking when we are driving and judge how much 988+988 is by reasoning.

4. The voluntariness of belief does not entail that, in deciding what to believe, we should privilege reasoning over experience.

The voluntariness of belief, for some, is the freedom of reason that exhibited in its control over experiential belief. For McDowell, reason is superior to experience and saves us from the fallibility of experience. Hence the freedom of reason is the freedom of doubting or disbelieving one's experience. In the same vein, Martin writes: "For us, there will always be the possibility that a conflict between how things appear and how one antecedently believes things to be will result in one's retaining one's prior beliefs" (1993, p. 83).

This idea is nicely expressed by Korsgaard:

A lower animal's attention is fixed on the world. Its perceptions are its beliefs and its desires are its will. It is engaged in conscious activities but is not conscious *of* them. That is, they are not the objects of its attention. But we human animals turn our attention onto our perceptions and desires themselves, onto our own mental activities, and we are conscious *of* them. That is why we can think *about* them.

And this sets us a problem no other animals have. It is the problem of the normative. For our capacity to turn our attention onto our own mental activities is also a capacity to distance ourselves from them, and to call them into question. I perceive, and I find

myself with a powerful impulse to believe. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I believe? Is this perception really a reason to believe? I desire and I find myself with a powerful impulse to act. But I back up and bring that impulse into view and then I have a certain distance. Now the impulse doesn't dominate me and now I have a problem. Shall I act? Is this desire really a reason to act? The reflective mind cannot settle for perception and desire, not just as such. It needs a reason. Otherwise, at least as long as it reflects, it cannot commit itself or go forward. (1996, p. 92-3)

The crucial idea is that the criterion of truth is not in the senses. Hence the stoic criticism of the Old Academy seems to apply to this idea of the freedom of reason as well. According to the Stoics, the Old Academy maintained that the "criterion of truth was not in the senses...although it took its start from the senses: the mind was the judge of things. They believe that this was the only faculty deserving our trust, because it alone discerned what was always simple, uniform, and same as itself" (Cicero 2006, 1.30). Knowledge, for the Old academy, existed only in the conceptions and reasoning of the mind (Cicero 2006, 1.32).

Like the Old Academy, McDowell seeks warrant of knowledge in reason. Particularly, for McDowell, this is how we can guard against the fallibility of experience. Hence what McDowell means by the freedom of reason is actually a freedom relative to experience: one is free to believe according to one's reason, without being constrained by one's experience. We actively decide what to believe by exercising the freedom of reason while passively receive whatever we get in experience. Observational belief is decided by reason, not by experience. This idea of the freedom of reason echoes Locke's rationalist canon that "Reason must be our last Judge and Guide in everything", which is not readily convergent with his empiricist convictions (1975, p. 704).

But is it true that we should or do privilege reason over experience in deciding what to believe?

According to McDowell, "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" (1994, p. 11). What McDowell has in mind here is the case of familiar illusions: "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, p. 11n.).

I argued in chapter 7 that in the Müller-Lyer illusion, the two lines do not look unequal to someone in the know. But we can agree the two lines do not look equal either. Then the freedom of reason consists in its being able to decide that the two lines are equal, although they do not look equal. Yet in what sense is this judgement a free choice of reason?

McDowell's point is that the subject makes the judgement by using the power of reason. Then we need to ask what kind of power of reason is exercised in this particular case. To get a clue, we need to ask what makes someone in the know judge that the two lines are equal when they do not look equal. First, it is the present experience of the Müller-Lyer diagram which reminds the subject that there is something "illusory" in it. One's reason for judging the two lines as equal is to be found in the present experience, not anywhere else. It is the experience of this typical kind of diagram which gives one the reason to judge that the two lines are equal. Second, it is one's previous experience of the real length of the two lines of a Müller-Lyer diagram (by looking at the two lines themselves or by measuring the two lines with a ruler) which gives her the reason for judging that the two lines are equal. Hence all the work is done by experience, past or present. There is no mysterious power of reason in it. What are behind the reason McDowell talks about are just previous experiences.

Moreover, previous experience cannot guarantee the subject gets the right judgement. Maybe in this case, one line *is* longer than the other. As Descartes warns us, there is a danger of going wrong if we misuse our previous experience. And to get the right judgement, the subject has to *do* something, not just *think* about it. She needs to either cover the wings and look at the two lines themselves, or, acting more carefully, measure the two lines. In any case, it is experience, not reason, decides what to believe.

It is not safe to rush to the judgement that the two lines are equal without doing any further exploration. The reason is that what the present experience can tell the subject is only that the two lines might not be the way they look; it does not say whether the two lines are equal. And the judgement the subject can make about the two lines is limited by what the present experience can tell her. To know more about the two lines, she needs to conduct further explorations and have more experiences. What we believe can only be what we experience.

The same goes for Martin's claim about "the possibility of disbelieving one's senses". Martin writes:

If Austin had been convinced that there just could be no pigs in his area of Oxford, then he might have become convinced that his eyes were deceiving him, and in that case his experience would not have settled the question for him, but would have just convinced him that he was suffering from an illusion or hallucination. Alternatively, he might have had reason to believe himself subject to hallucinations anyway, and so come to distrust his senses while remaining agnostic about whether there could have been pigs in the area. (2002, p. 390; see also 2006, p. 403)

But it would be a strange thing if one doubts one's experience simply because one is, for independent reasons, convinced that things should be the other way round. It is not clear

that there can be any reason for believing or disbelieving there are pigs around which is stronger than the fact that one sees that there are pigs around. And to judge one's own experience as a hallucination, one must have independent reasons for believing that one's experience is hallucinatory, say, when one approaches the hallucinated object, the object recedes.

People seem to be too ready to believe that the content of experience can be rejected by previous belief, even when what one has is a true experience. Smith writes:

Sometimes we just do not 'believe our eyes' (or ears, etc.). To cite a by now standard example, a seasoned traveller in the desert, who is mistakenly convinced that there is no oasis ahead, may discount the actual appearance of one as a mirage. (2001, p. 287)

But what if the traveller approaches the oasis and really sees the oasis is in front of her? As Smith himself admits: "it is easy to over-estimate the impeding effect that thought can have on perceptual experience's doxastic force" (2001, p. 291).

We can understand this by examining the case of hasty judgment. We can make both hasty inferential judgments and hasty experiential judgments. A hasty inferential judgment is based on invalid reasoning. Hence one is blamed for hasty inferential judgment because one reasons invalidly. To get the result of $988+988$, one needs to do some kind of calculation. And once one finishes the calculation, one ends up with the result and a belief about this. There is no room for free decision. One has to follow the rule. If one is blamed for a wrong calculation, for making a careless mistake, one's mistake can only be in not following the rules correctly. But one cannot be blamed for believing what one gets from the calculation as the result of calculation.

This is the same for hasty experiential judgment. A hasty experiential judgement is based on a hasty experience, not on a hasty judgement of experience. In this case, one is blamed for, say, not looking carefully. To see the point, we only need to reflect on what we usually do when we want to correct a hasty experiential judgement. Do we try to think more carefully, or do we look more carefully? The answer is obviously the latter. Hasty experiential judgement is corrected by more careful observations. So a more careful experiential judgement is a more careful observation. Reason does not play a role as a free arbiter. Reason only plays a role in the sense that it makes one become suspicious and try to do more careful observations.

It can be objected that sometimes we can't see clearly and have to rely on reason to get things right. But if we can't see clearly, reason won't be of any help, since reason concerning observational belief can only be based on observation, that is, experience. This does not mean we have to make a wrong judgement when we cannot see clearly. As Descartes makes it clear, the limitation of perception (with understanding included) can

only explains ignorance, but not error. And if we make a judgement beyond what we get from experience (in the name of reason), then we may go wrong. This is how the will extends its power beyond perception and creates error.

Moreover, if we find we cannot see clearly, we still need to rely on our senses to decide what to believe. If we cannot see clearly in a dim light, we may try to improve the light conditions in order to see more clearly. If we cannot tell by hearing if it is a car or motorbike, we may try to look at it. Even in the case of false experience, what is to be judged and re-examined is not the looking or appearance. It is the world or the object of experience which is to be re-examined, not the experience. And to re-examine the object of experience is to have another experience of it, say, by looking more carefully.

Hence Cowley is right when he writes: "Hypothesis and theory remain idle till someone confirms or fails to confirm a prediction, and this is done almost always by seeing with his eyes" (1968, p. 5). And one's only reason for believing something is observation: "If I ask him how he knows what he describes did happen, his only answer can be 'I saw it'" (1968, p. 7). In fact, it is only for this reason that knowledge by testimony is possible. As Cowley remarks: "It is only because I believe that others actually see (are conscious) too that I accept numerous experimental findings which I have not myself made" (1968, p. 11).

It is true that we sometimes turn to reason when we cannot decide by senses. But this is the case only when we are prevented from using our senses properly, and reason, in any case, can never decide what to believe about empirical world without starting from observation. It can never be used as the tribunal of the senses. As far as observational beliefs are concerned, it is experience, not reason, decides what to believe. Hence, Austin observes:

If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence, and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more evidence that it's a pig, I can now just see that it is, the question is settled. (1962, p. 113)

We may distinguish two kinds of beliefs, experiential beliefs and inferential beliefs. The former we get directly from experience, while the latter from inference. In neither case, can we have a belief by deciding what to believe through reason, which is supposed to be over and above the experience or inference. Of course reason plays a role in both cases. Suppose we see two Tony Blairs in a conference room. We may wonder what happens and try to explore further. Suppose we do some calculations and end up with the result that someone is 2cm tall, then we will become suspicious and decide to do the calculation again. But in neither case can reason, which is supposed to be external to experience or inference, decide what to believe.

Experiential belief is an achievement of empirical exploration; it is not decided by the freedom of reason.

5. I have argued that, in the case of perceptual experience, it is not up to reason to decide what to believe. There is no room for reason in experiential judgment in that once we have the experience we cannot help having the relevant belief. We thus need to guard against the idea that reason, conceived as something over and above experience, can work as the tribunal for experience.

As I mentioned above, the idea that reason is the criterion of truth can be found in traditional empiricism as well as in rationalism. In his reply to scepticism, Hume observes:

These sceptical topics, indeed, are only sufficient to prove, that the senses alone are not implicitly to be depended on, but that we must correct their evidence by reason, and by considerations, derived from the nature of the medium, the distance of the object, and the disposition of the organ, in order to render them, within their sphere, the proper criteria of truth and falsehood. (1999, p. 200)

This is closely related to the idea that reason can decide the truth a priori, that is, independent of experience. We find this idea in Kant:

A new light flashed upon the mind of the first man (be he Thales or some other) who demonstrated the properties of the isosceles triangle. The true method, so he found, was not to inspect what he discerned either in the figure, or in the bare concept of it, and from this, as it were, to read off its properties; but to bring out what was necessarily implied in the concepts that he had himself formed a priori, and had put into the figure in the constitution by which he presented it to himself. If he is to know anything with a priori certainty he must not ascribe to the figure anything save what necessarily follows from what he has himself set into it in accordance with his concept. (1929, Bxi-Bxii)

And this, according to Kant, applies to natural sciences as well. He is impressed with the fact that before scientists conduct an experiment, they usually “know” the result through pure reason. Hence pure reason constrains nature “to give answer to questions of reason’s own determining” (1929, Bxiii).

This might be true. Yet the answer is from experience, not from pure reason. Take the example of Galileo’s well-known experiment. When Galileo dropped the two balls with different weights from the tower, he anticipated that the two balls would hit the ground simultaneously. What he needed to do is only to prove that he was right in his reasoning

about free fall. But what if it turned out that the heavier ball did hit the ground first? Then what Galileo needed to do was most likely to re-examine his reasoning.

The idea that the development of science is not based on experience can also be found in Popper. When talking about knowledge, Popper always means scientific knowledge. He makes it clear that he dissents from the belief that “one should study the problems of the theory of knowledge in connection with our knowledge of an orange rather than our knowledge of the cosmos”. The reason is that “our Western science...did not start with collecting observations of oranges, but with bold theories about the world” (1998, p. 8). And scientific knowledge, for Popper, is not derived from observation: “All science is cosmology, I believe, and for me the interest of philosophy, no less than of science, lies solely in its bold attempt to add to our knowledge of the world, and to the theory of our knowledge of the world” (1998, p. 7). Hence according to Popper:

The rationalist tradition, the tradition of critical discussion, represents the only practicable way of expanding our knowledge—conjectural or hypothetical knowledge, of course. There is no other way. More especially, there is no way that starts from observation or experiment. (1998, p. 23-4)

He thus claims: “We do not know, we only guess” (1998, p. 24).

Popper is not saying that observation and experiments make no contribution to knowledge. It is just that “the significance of observations and experiments depends entirely upon the question whether or not they may be used to criticize theories” (1998, p. 24). But if conjectures are rejected by observational evidence, then experience is still the tribunal of thought, albeit in a negative sense. Hence there are two reasons to insist that scientific knowledge is based on experience. First, hypotheses have to be based on experience. Second, to testify or reject hypotheses, we have to rely on experience.

The difference between everyday empirical knowledge and scientific knowledge is that the object of the former is easier to experience while that of the latter is not. It is easier to decide how tall the person in front of you is by measuring her height than to decide the size of the sun by measuring it. It is this difference which makes Popper believe that “truth is often hard to come by, and that once found it may easily be lost again. Erroneous beliefs may have an astonishing power to survive, for thousands of years, in defiance of experience, with or without the aid of any conspiracy” (2002, p. 10). But we need to note that the difficulty in finding scientific truth is exactly due to the fact that scientific truth is not so easy to be discovered by experience. This actually shows that experience is the way of getting at empirical knowledge.

6. The voluntariness of belief does not undermine the thesis that experience is belief. The reason is that experience is a rational active exploration of the world and is in this sense voluntary.

First, experience is an active exploration of the world. Seeing as believing is a kind of achievement. One won't be able to see if one doesn't bother to open one's eyes. People may say one doesn't need to bother to open one's eyes. There is no real effort in it. But an achievement is an achievement, no matter how easy it is for one. Someone might be very keen on mathematics and just enjoys it and finally becomes a distinguished mathematician. She never feels there is an effort in it. In fact, she might sometimes need to make an effort not to work too much on maths. But that doesn't mean it is not an achievement to become a mathematician. There is a kind of talent in it, but still you need to work on it in the right way. This is what we call achievement. In this sense Aristotle is not completely right in saying this: "to perceive is not up to us—for it is necessary for the object of perception to be there" (1984, 417b25-26). While it is necessary for the object of perception to be there, it is also necessary that one takes the action to look at it. Hence Barnes is correct when he says: "when an object of perception is in the vicinity, it is still up to me whether I perceive it or not: I may open or shut my eyes, stop or unblock my ears, stick out or hold my tongue" (2006, p. 25).

Second, experience is rational. It is important to note that in arguing against the freedom of reason, I am not denying that reason plays a role in empirical knowledge. I do not mean to suggest that belief is not rational. Particularly, when I say observational belief is not decided by reason, I am not saying it is the kind of thing we share with other species of animals. Hence Hume is wrong in separating "an act of the sensitive" and "the cogitative part of our natures" (2000, p. 123).

We don't need to deny the rationality of belief in order to bestow experience a role of tribunal in belief formation. Observational belief is rational, though not decided by reason, which is over and above experience. The reason is that experience is itself rational. Even when things go wrong with experience, there is no necessity to turn to reason which is supposed to be something over and above experience. It is very common among both philosophers and lay people to regard reason with a kind of reverence while remaining sceptical about experience. But once we realize conceptual capacities, or reason, are already in experience, we should have good reasons to regard experience with at least equal reverence.

9. Justification without Inference

1. We have now established that experience is belief. This solves the problem we encountered in chapter 4. Experience can now meet the doxastic criterion of justification and thus play a justificatory role in empirical knowledge. Then the question is: does experience as belief need to be justified?

We seem to have good reasons to give an affirmative answer to the question. First, human belief is typically a rational state. One holds a belief, mostly, if not always, because one is justified in holding the belief. Hence like any other beliefs, experience needs to be justified. Second, it is required by the justificatory role we bestow to experience that experience itself be justified. As I mentioned in chapter 4, the doxastic criterion of justification, while being essential, is not sufficient. In order for experience to be able to justify other beliefs, it has to be itself justified. The justifier has to be in a better epistemic position in order to justify other beliefs. Only a justified belief can justify other beliefs. Hence for experience to be able to justify other beliefs, it has to be itself justified.

It is important to note to justify experience is to justify that we should experience the world in a certain way. To have experience is, among other things, to make judgement. We may experience the world either in the right way or in the wrong way. Hence we need to be justified in experiencing the world in a certain way. It is thus important to distinguish justifying experience from justifying a belief about experience.

It is very easy to ignore the difference between justifying experience and justifying a belief about experience. This is especially the case when experience is understood as nondoxastic but has a truth value. If experience has a truth value, then we may feel it needs to be justified as true. And if experience is nondoxastic, then there is no point of justifying it as

being a certain way, since experience, on this understanding, is just the way it is, there is no need to be justified in experiencing the world in a certain way. Hence, for nondoxasticism, to justify experience as true is not to justify that one should experience in this particular way, but to justify that we take the experience as true, which is to say, to justify that a belief about the experience is true. For nondoxasticists, “justification of experience” is actually short for “justification of belief about experience”.

The distinction between justifying experience and justifying belief about experience is clear once we understand experience as doxastic. Just as we need to be justified in believing that P, we need to be justified in experiencing that P. To have, say, a visual experience is not just to have things look to one in a certain way; it is also to judge that this is really the way things are in the world. Hence when one sees things in a certain way, one needs to be justified in seeing things in that particular way. Of course, given all the justification, one may still be wrong in experiencing things in a certain way. We then need to make judgement about the judgement we make in experience, or, hold a belief about the belief we hold in experience. The justification of this further judgement or belief is based on further evidence of the situation. It will not change the experience and hence cannot justify the experience; it only changes the way we judge the experience. This is the justification of belief about experience.

If experience needs to be justified, we then face the following challenge: how can experience be justified if it is supposed to be the starting point of knowledge? This is the challenge I shall deal with in this concluding chapter.

2. Chisholm’s solution to the above-mentioned challenge is that there is self-evident knowledge that does not need justification and experience is exactly knowledge of this kind. Chisholm claims, “statements as ‘I am now appeared to in a way which is blue’, when intended noncomparatively...are statements which cannot express any error or mistake” (1957, p. 65). First, according to Chisholm, “there are ways of being appeared to—ways of sensing—that are such that being appeared to in those ways is self-presenting” (1982, p. 10-11). Second, “the presence of a self-presenting property is ‘indubitable’” or evident to the subject who has them (1982, p. 11). According to Chisholm, “the self-presenting would seem to be the closest we can come to that which constitutes its own justification” (1982, p. 25). Thirdly, “the self-presenting...may be said to justify that which is not directly evident” (1982, p. 25). In this way, “the self-presenting constitutes the *basis* or *foundation* or *grounds* we have for the other things we know” (1982, p. 26). Fourthly, appearance is one kind of self-presenting properties which “*present themselves* to the subject who has them” (1982, p.

9-10).⁷⁵ Hence, the conclusion is, experience is self-evident and can thus be used as justification of other beliefs without itself being justified

Chisholm takes care to distinguish the expression “being appeared redly to” from the expressions “being appeared to by something that is red”, “being appeared to in the way one is normally appeared to by things that are red”, and “being appeared to in the way in which one believes that red things normally appear”. According to Chisholm, the expression “being appeared redly to” has a kind of “*noncomparative* sense” in its use (1982, p. 16), that is, not comparative to the truth of the world. The idea is this. What one is appeared to is a self-presenting property, while what appears is the external object. As Chisholm well recognizes, “It is the object of perception that appears.” What Chisholm is interested in is “what one is appeared to” instead of “what appears”. And he thinks what one is appeared to is a kind of self-presenting property which needs no justification or is self-justified.

The distinction between “what one is appeared to” and “what appears” is very dubious. As I argued in chapter 6, there is no distinction as such. “What one is appeared to” is just “what appears”. It is true that when an object appears in one’s experience, it has to appear in a certain way. And it is the way an object appears that is called appearance, or, to use Chisholm’s terminology, “what one is appeared to”. But this is not to say appearance is something that can be separated from the object that appears. One cannot be appeared to the way an object appears without being appeared to the object.

More importantly, the distinction made by Chisholm does not really help to explain how experience can justify knowledge about the world. It is not clear that we can have knowledge of “what appears” by having knowledge about “what one is appeared to”, which is supposed to be different and separable from “what appears”. Chisholm’s reply to the question is that “perception is, essentially, the indirect attribution of a property to a thing, the thing being considered as the thing that is appearing in a certain way” (1982, p. 15). He writes: “if a person is appeared redly to, then it is evident to him that there *is* something that appears red to him—provided he considers the question whether something is appearing red to him and provided he has no reason to suppose that it is *not* the case that something appears red to him” (1982, p. 17-8).

Hence for Chisholm, “Being appeared to”, though it allows the possibility that nothing is there appearing, has an objective significance. He claims, “Being thus appeared to puts one in contact, so to speak, with external reality. And such initial contact, it would seem, can only be *via* appearances” (1982, p. 18). Then what Chisholm has here seems to be self-evident knowledge of appearance which is supposed to be the foundation of knowledge of the external world behind the appearance.

The problem is that Chisholm’s self-presenting experience is not concerned with the

⁷⁵ Other examples of these Cartesian properties Chisholm lists are feeling and thinking. But unlike Descartes, who includes sensing in thinking, Chisholm considers appearance as something other than thinking (1982, p. 10).

truth of the world. It may be evident that I am appeared to redly by X and yet it is false that X is red. Hence even if it is justified that I am appeared to redly, it is still not justified that what appears is really something red. It is exactly this idea Sellars is trying to get at in his complaint about Chisholm's idea of "direct apprehension":

How is 'direct apprehension' to be understood? If the apprehending is distinguishable from the apprehended, is it not also 'separable'? Might not apprehending occur without any fact being apprehended? If so, an 'apprehending that-p' might not be an apprehending of the fact that-p...Of course, 'apprehend', like 'see', is, *in its ordinary sense*, an achievement word. But does this not mean that, as in the case of 'see', there is a place for 'ostensibly apprehending', i.e., *seeming to apprehend*, a concept which does not imply achievement? (1975, p. 128)

For Sellars, a "direct apprehension" of a "fact" cannot be non-inferential knowledge because it is not knowledge at all:

Now the distinction between *seeing* and merely *seeming to see* implies a criterion. To rely on the metaphors of 'apprehending' or 'presence of the object' is to obscure the need of criteria for distinguishing between 'knowing' and 'seeming to know', which ultimately define what it means to speak of knowledge as a *correct* or well-founded *thinking* that something is the case. (1975, p. 128-9)

Hence Sellars concludes, "The notion of a non-conceptual 'direct apprehension' of a 'fact' provides a merely verbal solution to our problem" (1975, p. 129).

Chisholm's response is that a justified belief need not to be a true belief (1982, p. 3). This might be true. But as Chisholm himself well recognizes, to justify one's belief is to justify it as true (*ibid.*, p. 4). And when Chisholm says appearances are self-justified, he is not saying they are justified as true, since they are only considered in a noncomparative sense. Then if appearances are not justified as true, this means they are not justified at all.

Chisholm's self-evident theory understands the justification of experience as justifying that I am *here now* having *this* experience. But to justify experience is to justify the truth of experience, i.e., things are the way as I experience them, and to justify the truth of experience is to justify the truth about the world. Hence experience cannot be self-justified in the way Chisholm suggests. The given as Chisholm understands it is not supposed to be about the truth of the world and hence cannot really be justified. A self-evident experience is not about the truth of the world. Experience understood in this way is only self-evident in a non-comparative sense, and cannot be used to justify other beliefs which have to be understood in comparative sense. What we need to do is to show that experience can be

justified as true and can thus justify other beliefs.

As I noted in §1, to justify experience is to justify that this is the right way to experience the world, namely, the world is the way we experience it. But for Chisholm, experience does not need to be justified in this way. Experience as experience is always right. Understood in this way, not only that experience is not always the way the world is, but also that experience does not aim to be the way the world is. Hence there is no need to get experience right, or to make experience a true experience. This is obviously a mistaken picture of experience. To have experience is not to “be appeared to” passively, it is to figure out actively what the world in front of one is like. It is an effort to understand the world in the right way. And this effort needs to be guided by its justification.

3. What we need to do is to justify experience in a “comparative” sense, namely, the world is really as we experience it. This, as Sellars understands it, is to justify experience as veridical.

The idea can be explained in terms of the distinction between “ostensible seeing” and “seeing”. Ostensible seeing, according to Sellars, is a class of experiences which has seeing as its veridical member (1956, §7). Or, as McDowell puts it, “Ostensible seeings are experiences in which it looks to their subject as if things are a certain way”, while “Seeings are a singled-out subclass of ostensible seeings” which are veridical (2009, p. 9-10). For Sellars and McDowell, a subject sees P if it looks to the subject that P and it is really the case that P, it doesn’t matter if the subject believe is it is really P that is there to be seen. Sellars writes:

If I make at one time the report “X looks to be green”—which is not only a report, but the withholding of an endorsement—I may later, when the original reasons for withholding endorsement have been rebutted, endorse the original claim by saying “I saw that it was green, though at the time I was only sure that it looked green”. (1956, §16)

Similarly, McDowell claims:

Seeing that P is not the same as acquiring the belief that P in a visual way, though no doubt usually people who see that P do acquire the belief that P, and no doubt if that were not so it would not be possible for there to be such a thing as seeing that P. The difference between seeing that P and visually acquiring the belief that P can be brought out by noting that one can realize later that one was seeing that P, though one did not know it at the time and so did not at the time acquire the belief that P. (2003, p. 680)

McDowell does not seem to think ostensible seeing needs to be justified as seeing. As I mentioned in chapter 4, for McDowell, “unless there are grounds for suspicion”, we take ostensible seeing as seeing “by a sort of default” (1998, p. 439). But this may also suggest a way of justifying: if we have no reason not to take an ostensible seeing as seeing, then we are justified to take the ostensible seeing as seeing. In contrast, if we do have a reason not to take an ostensible seeing as seeing, then we are justified not to take the ostensible seeing as seeing. In either case, this seems to suggest a justification by inference. The reasoning goes as follows. (1) I ostensibly see that P; (2) There is no ground for suspicion; (3) I actually see that P.

If we agree that the truth of experience is justified in this way, then we seem to have to agree that experience is justified inferentially. But if we bear in mind the distinction between the justification of experience and the justification of belief about experience, we will realize that what McDowell is talking about is actually the justification of belief about experience, not the justification of experience.

Like McDowell, what Sellars is actually doing is also to justify belief about experience. Again, as mentioned in chapter 4, for Sellars, in order to endorse the content of experience, we need to justify that the relevant experience is veridical. This may give the impression that he is interested in justifying experience. But what Sellars is interested in is justifying a judgement about experience. The justification will not change the way one experiences the world, it only changes one’s judgement about one’s experience. Sellars’s real concern is to justify the basic belief which is an endorsement of the content of experience. And to justify basic belief, we have to justify that the relevant experience is veridical.

For Sellars, to justify experience as veridical is to make an inference from the belief that the experiential conditions are normal. Hence, in experience, the subject does not infer, say, that there is a red apple in front of him. On the contrary, “he is inferring from the character and context of his experience that it is veridical and that there is good reason to believe that there is indeed a red apple in front of him” (1975, p. 130). The idea is that, while experience is not inferential, basic belief which, for Sellars, is an endorsement of the content of experience, is based on the understanding of the character and context of the experience and has to be inferential. Thus, according to Sellars, the justification of an observational belief is in fact an inferential justification. And the reason that such beliefs give the appearance that they are self-justifying is that their justification “has the peculiar character that its essential premise asserts the occurrence of the very same belief in a specific context” (1975, p. 130). As Sellars understands it, the subject infers from the character and context of his experience that the experience is veridical and can thus judge that an ostensible seeing is indeed a seeing. Basic beliefs are thus not non-inferential. There is neither self-evident knowledge, nor non-inferential justification.

Sellars is right in saying that the basic belief which, for him, is a judgement about the judgement in experience, is inferential. This is true even if we consider experience as doxastic. From a doxasticist point of view, the inference, for example, goes like this. (1) I believed (saw) the tie is blue; (2) The lighting condition was normal; so (3) The tie was indeed blue and my belief was correct. Or, alternatively, (1a) I believed (saw) the tie is blue; (2) The lighting condition was not right; so (3) The tie was actually green and my belief was wrong. But it does not follow that there is no non-inferential justification or non-inferential knowledge. Particularly, it does not follow that the justification of experience has to be inferential. To see this we need to shift our focus from the justification of belief about experience to the justification of experience itself.

4. What is it to justify experience? To justify experience is to justify that the subject experiences the world as it is: that the world is the way the subject experiences it. In other words, to justify experience is to justify the judgement one makes in one's experience.

There are then two aspects of experience that need to be justified. First, one needs to be justified in experiencing the world under certain descriptions. This is not so difficult if we understand experience as conceptual, namely, experience is an exercise of the conceptual capacities we may possess. If experience is conceptual, then we are justified in experiencing the world under certain descriptions by the conceptual capacities exercised in experience. It is thus McDowell's suggestion that the reliability of my being able to "tell a green thing when I see one (in the right conditions of illumination)" needs no evidence or justification. "It is held firm for me by my whole conception of the world with myself in touch with it, and not as the conclusion of an inference from some of that conception" (2002, p. 101).⁷⁶

Experience cannot be what it is without interpretation; it is *itself* an interpretation. This is the idea we find, for example, in Wittgenstein. According to Wittgenstein, the mind set is already in experience. This is why we may see the same thing in different ways. As Wittgenstein puts it, we "see an object according to an *interpretation*" (1953, p. 200).

This is even true for what Wittgenstein calls "picture objects". When we see an illustration, "we interpret it, and see it as we interpret it" (1953, p. 193). This can be done by following certain directions. But mostly, it is so natural that we see a picture or a real object as something that we don't realize that we see it *as* something, we feel that we just see this something. Wittgenstein remarks: "I should not have answered the question 'What do you see here?' by saying: 'Now I am seeing it as a picture-rabbit'. I should simply have described my perception: just as if I had said 'I see a red circle over there'" (1953, p. 194-195).

⁷⁶ See p. 75, no. 27.

Thus, seeing a picture object is just like seeing a real object. The interpretation is already in the seeing, not something we use to describe the seeing. Hence Wittgenstein continues: “It would have made as little sense for me to say ‘Now I am seeing it as...’ as to say at the sight of a knife and fork ‘Now I am seeing this as a knife and fork’. This expression would not be understood” (1953, p. 195). And seeing a real object is so naturally interpretation involving that it seems to happen automatically. As Wittgenstein puts it: “One doesn’t ‘take’ what one knows as the cutlery at a meal for cutlery; any more than one ordinarily tries to move one’s mouth as one eats, or aims at moving it” (1953, p. 195).

This conceptualist solution explains why we are justified in experiencing the world in a certain way. I am justified in seeing a lamp as a lamp simply because I exercise my conceptual capacities in experience. My conceptual capacities inform the way I experience the world. But what I experience cannot be inferred from my conceptual capacities; I experience what I experience, namely, the world. Hence the way I experience the world is informed but not decided by my conceptual capacities. This aspect of my experience is thus justified without inference.

However, this is not all we need to do in order to justify experience. There is another aspect of experience that needs to be justified, namely, the truth of experience: what needs to be justified is not only that experience has certain content but also that the world is indeed the way we experience it. To justify experience is not just to justify that I am here and now having a certain kind of experience, it is also to justify the judgement we make in experience. It is the justification of this second aspect of experience I shall now focus on.

5. To have experience is, among other things, to make judgement about the world. Then what affects the judgement one makes in one’s experience? Or, what changes the way one experiences the world?

It can be suggested that it is the experiential conditions which influence the judgement one makes in one’s experience. This is well recognized by the Stoics. For the Stoics, there are judgements in the senses and “Their judgments are so clear and certain”. The Stoics also agree that optimum conditions warrant the judgment we make in experience. Hence, we “alter many conditions until our vision itself provides the warrant for its own judgment” (Cicero 2006, 2.19). It is nevertheless important to note that, for the Stoics, “our vision itself provides the warrant for its own judgment”. This means that it is experience, not the experiential conditions, which justifies experience. What we need to do is to alter experiential conditions to the optimum so that experience justifies itself. The idea is that the truth of experience is warranted when the experiential conditions are optimum.

Apart from the external experiential conditions, we may also add that the internal experiential conditions are at least no less important. The subject has to function well in

order to experience the world in the right way. It is a basic condition that the person should not be insane or drunk. That's part of the reason that people who have consumed alcohol are not allowed to drive.

Hence, we may say, one important way of justifying one's experience is to make sure that the experiential conditions are optimum. Or, as we might put it, we arrange experiential conditions in such a way that experience is in a position to justify itself. If this is all we need for justifying the truth of experience, then we can say experience is justified without inference, or that experience is self-justified.

But we need to see that experiential conditions are not the only thing that matters for the truth of experience. First, the truth of experience does not always go together with optimum experiential conditions. We may have true visual experience in the dark while having false visual experience in broad daylight. Even when both the external and internal experiential conditions are satisfied, it is still not guaranteed that the relevant experience is true. In fact it is not always easy to decide what normal conditions are supposed to be or how normal is normal. Second, we are sometimes amazingly good at adjusting to adversary experiential conditions. If someone wears a pair of glasses which makes the objects look upside down, then in a while the subject will adjust to this and see the object as in the right direction. In any case, abnormal experiential conditions do not always prevent the subject from having a true experience. A hallucinating subject, with the understanding that she is hallucinating, may experience her hallucination as hallucination and hence have a true experience.

What is important here is thus one's understanding of one's experiential conditions, not just the experiential conditions themselves. It is one's understanding of one's experiential conditions which justifies one's experience.

If the truth of experience is justified by one's understanding of one's experiential conditions, then we don't need to go very far to find the justification. One's understanding of one's experiential conditions is part of one's experience in that one experiences the world in the light of one's understanding of one's experiential conditions. This is true whether one's understanding of the viewing conditions is correct. Hence, again, experience is justified without inference.

In most cases the clue of the experiential conditions is already part of what one experiences, that is, the character and context of the experience are part of the object of the experience. When one has an experience, one is aware of the character and context of one's experience as well. Hence one obtains one's understanding of one's experiential conditions when one has the experience. Take Sellars' example of looking at a tie in a green-lighted room. The tie looks greenish in the room. Sellars's idea is that Jones becomes doubtful about this only when he is told that the room is green-lighted and this makes everything look greenish. But the clue is part of the object of the experience and the subject should be

able to aware of this even if he is not told about the light condition in the room. In this case, the justification of one's experience is part of one's experience, or, is exactly the experience itself. To see the point, we need to realize that experience is experience of the whole thing, including not only the particular object we are interested in but also everything else surrounding it. For this reason, one can get the clue about the viewing conditions of the experience when one has the experience and can thus see things in the light of one's understanding of the viewing conditions.

It is to be admitted that sometimes the clue of the viewing conditions is not so easy to be found in the object of experience. Suppose in the above-mentioned example the false light is partial, not global, that is, the false light is only on the tie, not anything else in the room. Then one either gets to know about the lighting conditions from other resources, or knows nothing about the false light. In either case one's experience is still justified by one's understanding of the viewing conditions in that one still sees things in the light of one's understanding of the viewing conditions. First, one experiences the world in the light of one's understanding of the experiential conditions whether one obtains the understanding from the current experience or somewhere else. Second, to say one's experience is justified by one's understanding of one's experiential conditions is not to say one's understanding has to be correct. One's understanding of one's experiential conditions may be falsified by later discovery, but that is not to say there was no understanding of the experiential conditions when one is having the experience. A mistaken understanding of the situation is still an understanding and can justify the belief one holds in one's experience.

In either of the cases mentioned above, one's experience is justified by one's understanding of the viewing conditions. The justification is a justification without inference, since the experiential belief is not inferred from the understanding of the viewing conditions.

This is the same for one's understanding of one's internal experiential conditions. One experiences the world in the light of one's understanding of one's own situation as well. Here again, there is no requirement that one's understanding of one's situation be correct. Although, as it has been well recognized, one's understanding of one's own condition is normally correct. A normal subject is normally able to distinguish herself from an abnormal subject. As the Stoics point out correctly, "If things are such that it makes no difference whether one's impressions are those of an insane or sane person, who can be sure of his own sanity? Trying to achieve this result is itself a sign of no slight insanity!" (Cicero 2006, 2.54). The point is that while it is true that an insane person cannot tell that she is insane, a sane person is able to tell that she is sane. Hence, we should not use "the examples of dreamers, madman, and drunkards" when "looking for the criterion of someone serious, constant, strong-minded, and wise" (Cicero 2006, 2.53).

Even Descartes finds it hard to deny this. Talking about one's "inability to distinguish

between being asleep and being awake”, Descartes remarks:

For I now notice that there is a vast difference between the two, in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions of life as waking experiences are...when I distinctly see where things come from and where and when they come to me, and when I can connect my perceptions of them with the whole of the rest of my life without a break, then I am quite certain that when I encounter these things I am not asleep but awake. And I ought not to have even the slightest doubt of their reality if, after calling upon all the senses as well as my memory and my intellect in order to check them, I receive no conflicting reports from any of these sources. (1996, p. 61-2)

It is important to note that normal subjects include those having physical diseases that may affect their experiential ability. A patient with high blood pressure may feel dizzy and see things turning around in front of her. She nevertheless won't experience things in front of her as turning around, but will rather experience herself as having some medical problems.

In any case, even when one's understanding of one's own situation is not correct, it still justifies one's experience in that one experiences the world in the light of it. And again, this is a justification without inference.

Thus as far as the understanding of the external and internal experiential conditions are concerned, the justification of experience is not inferential.

6. The understanding of the experiential conditions should not be understood in the narrow sense. It is not just concerned with things like lighting conditions; so many aspects of experience are relevant here.

What justifies one in seeing a coin from a particular point of view as circular instead of elliptical? What justifies one in seeing a shadow as a shadow instead of a dark-coloured area? What justifies one in seeing a mirror image as a mirror image instead of another "I"? What justifies one in seeing the parallel roads from far away as parallel instead of converging? What justifies one in seeing a stick half-immersed in water as seemingly bent instead of bent?

All these have to do with one's understanding of one's experiential conditions. One is justified in seeing a coin from a particular point of view as circular by the understanding that one is looking at the coin from a particular point of view. One is justified in seeing a shadow as a shadow instead of a dark-coloured area by the understanding that sunlight is prevented from shining on this area by a tall building. One is justified in seeing a mirror image as a mirror image by the understanding that what one sees is "in" the mirror. One is justified in

seeing the parallel roads as parallel instead of converging by the understanding that one is looking at the roads from far away. One is justified in seeing a stick half-immersed in water as straight instead of crooked by the understanding that the stick is half immersed in water.

Strictly speaking, in all the above-mentioned examples, it is not the understanding of the viewing conditions but the understanding of the *meaning* of the viewing conditions that influences the way one experiences the world. One sees an elliptical looking coin from a certain point of view as circular because one understands that's the way a circular coin looks from that particular point of view. This is what I call the engaged meaning of appearance. An object gains its engaged appearance while the appearance gains its engaged meaning. The experience is thus an engaged appearance, namely, an appearance with an engaged meaning. In this way the understanding of the situation informs the way we experience the world.⁷⁷

Generally speaking, the way we experience the world is justified by our background understanding of the whole situation. This means background understanding plays a crucial role in experience. The more experienced the subject is, a better position she is in to justify her belief. Plato thus observes that someone is wiser than others in particular aspects:

...there is no one in the world who doesn't believe that in some matters he is wiser than other men, while in other matters, they are wiser than he. In emergencies – if at no other time – you see this belief. When they are in distress, on the battlefield, or in sickness or in a storm at sea, all men turn to their leaders in each sphere as to God, and look to them for salvation because they are superior in precisely this one thing—knowledge. And wherever human life and work goes on, you find everywhere men seeking teachers and masters, for themselves and for other living creatures and for the direction of all human works. You find also men who believe that they are able to teach and to take the lead. (1997a, 170a-b)

Experience is permeated by one's background understanding. The more experienced the subject is, the more judicious she is in experiencing the world.

Background understanding covers a wide range of aspects of experience. For example, one's understanding of the context of a conversation influences the way one understands one's interlocutor. Suppose you give someone a suggestion and she says: "This is gold". With your understanding of the context of the conversation and your understanding that people may speak different accents and dialects, or even just accidentally make strange pronunciations, you are well justified in hearing her as saying "This is good", although realizing her pronunciation is strange. Your understanding of the context justifies your

⁷⁷ See chapter 7, §5.

hearing her in this way, which is the correct way, that is, this is indeed what she intends to say. You are giving someone suggestions and it is reasonable that she says “This is good”. In contrast, if you are asking someone what her ring is made of and she says “This is gold”, then you would have no reason to believe she is saying “this is good”.

It is to be admitted, however, that experience can be true in different senses, and they are justified in different ways. In the above example, if the question is what the person intends to say, then the true experience is that she intends to say “this is good”. If the question is how the person pronounced the word “good”, then the true experience is that she pronounced it as “gold”. Suppose someone experiences the person as saying “this is cold”. Then she is mistaken in both senses.

Here, again, we need to make a distinction between the justification of experience and the justification of belief about experience. Suppose after saying “this is good”, the person continues to elaborate how much she would benefit from following your suggestions or express her gratitude to your suggestions, then you are justified in believing your former experience of hearing her as saying “This is good” is true. This is the justification of belief *about* experience, not the justification of experience. And in this case, as Sellars rightly observed, the justification is inferential.

Similarly, your experience of seeing a motionless duck as a duck may be justified by the background understanding that there is a pond around and you see some duck feathers nearby. This justification is not inferential because you see the motionless duck as a duck in the light of the background understanding you have. In contrast, your belief that the experience is a true belief can be justified by your later experience of seeing the duck quacks and runs away when you approach it. This justification is inferential in that you infer from your later experience that the early experience must be true. Your later experience of seeing the duck quacking and running away justifies your belief about your earlier experience of seeing it as a duck, not a decoy duck. But this is not to say later experience justifies earlier experience. Experience is an event. Later experience does not justify earlier experience because earlier experience does not exist anymore when the subject is having the later experience; and when the subject is having her earlier experience, her later experience is not yet available for doing the justification.

Background understanding influences the way we experience. This, nevertheless, does not mean experience needs to be justified by inference. Justification of experience is justification without inference. First, although background understanding influences the way we experience, it does not decide what we experience. To say experience is justified by one’s background understanding is not to say that one can infer the content of one’s experience from the background understanding. After all, one has to have the experience, and it is what one experiences decides what one believes. Background understanding influences or informs the way one experiences, but what one has in experience is what one

experiences, not something inferred from one's background understanding. Second, one experiences the world in the light of one's background understanding. Experience in this sense is actually self-justified. This is not to say experience is self-presenting or self-evident. To see that experience is self-justified we need to see interpretation, rationality or critical ability is already functioning in experience.

For an inferential justification, the belief justified is entailed by the premises of the inference. There is nothing else you need to do except for accepting the conclusion drawn from the premises. For a non-inferential justification like the justification of experience, the resulting belief, namely, experience, is not something that can be derived from the background understanding that justifies the experience. The reason that experience is not derived from the background understanding is that the background understanding is not separated from experience, it is part of what experience is. We see things in the light of our understanding of the situation.

Wittgenstein says there are many ways of seeing a triangle. And the reason that we see a picture in a certain way is that we are brought up in a certain way. As he puts it, "custom and upbringing have a hand in this" (1953, §201).⁷⁸ Hence experience is a learned ability. "It is only if someone *can do*, has learnt, is master of, such-and-such, that it makes sense to say he has had *this* experience" (1953, §209). Similarly, Merleau-Ponty observes:

The light of a candle changes its appearance for a child when, after a burn, it stops attracting the child's hand and becomes literally repulsive. Vision is already inhabited by a meaning (*sens*) which gives it a function in the spectacle of the world and in our existence. (2002, p. 60)

7. Experience is justified without inference. In this way experience remains the foundation of empirical knowledge while being justified as true. We can agree with Sellars that non-inferential knowledge, like inferential knowledge, presupposes knowledge of other facts. And the foundation of our empirical knowledge are not "self-authenticating...unmoved movers" (1956, §38). But we need to note that all the presupposed knowledge of other facts is already in experience in that we experience the world in the light of this background understanding. And it is exactly for this reason that experience can be itself empirical knowledge and provide sound foundation for inferential knowledge. Otherwise we will not be able to understand the "difference between *inferring* that something is the case and, for example, *seeing* it to be the case" (1956, §1).

We cannot even say that there is a coherentist story within the domain of experience.

⁷⁸ McDowell may in a sense agree with this—when he says that experience is conceptual in the sense that we see things as such and such. But still, he thinks that this conceptual experience is again a picture to be judged.

We don't balance the results of different experiences and decide what to believe in order to achieve coherence. We optimise the way we experience and trust that one only.

It is thus important to note that some experiences are in a better position than others to decide what we should eventually believe. Take the example of Müller-Lyer diagram. In judging the comparative length of the two lines in the diagram, the experience we have when looking at the diagram is less reliable than the experience we have when looking at the two lines by covering the wings, while the latter, again, is less reliable than the experience we have when measuring the two lines. This last experience is more basic because when you doubt the result you get by measuring, the only thing you can do is to measure it again. This is not to say you cannot contradict the result just by looking at it. If the result you get by measuring a 2cm line is 10cm, you can certainly know there is something wrong before re-measuring it. But to get the right result, you still need to measure it again. And more importantly, you don't *have to* appeal to other experience in order to get the right result. The experience is the best or most reliable way (not necessarily the most convenient way) of getting the right result. That is, the best way of justifying one's belief about the experience is to repeat the experience.

Experience is sufficiently justified when one experience the world in the light of correct background understanding. Correct background understanding is what we call background knowledge. True experience which is supported and hence justified by background knowledge is sufficiently justified true belief, namely knowledge. This gives us Gnosticism, namely the idea that experience, in so far as it is the source of knowledge, is itself knowledge. Not only that experience can be sufficiently justified, but also that it can be justified non-inferentially. This gives us foundationalism. Experience is the foundation of knowledge in that it is the part of our knowledge system which supports the other parts of the system and does not need to be supported by the latter in the same way.

Experience is the foundation of knowledge not in the sense that we see the world with naked eyes. Experience as a whole is an active, rational exploration of the world, not a passive receiving of pieces of information. Experience is a dynamic process; not a static picture. It is exactly for this reason that experience is the rational foundation of empirical knowledge. Experience is the foundation of knowledge not because it is infallible or incorrigible, but because it is rational. There is no incorrigible error in experience. We do make mistakes in experience, but we can also correct the mistakes in experience and by experience.

People may think this is a weak version of foundationalism in that the foundation is not a purely independent foundation. But I would say this is a strong version of foundationalism. The foundation is solid exactly because it is dynamic. While Descartes understands knowledge as an edifice built upon a secure foundation, I think our knowledge system is more like a plant than a building. Experience is more like the root of the plant. It

provides the whole plant with nutrition. But the root of the plant is also part of the plant and nourished by the other part of the plant in an important sense. If we cut the trunk and remove the leaves of the tree, the tree will be damaged and the root may not survive either.⁷⁹ In this sense, the root is also dependent on the other part of the plant. But still, it is the root. The root is not dependent on the other parts of the plant in the same way the other parts of the plant is dependent on it.

Experience gives knowledge. The fact that we may make mistakes in experience does not make us distrust experience but only makes us try to improve our experiential ability. Sometimes experience does not provide a satisfactory answer, but it will if we try harder. Sometimes we try our best to see clearly, but still we cannot. This is not a case where experience fails us; it is that we fail to get the right experience. Or, the experience fails us only in the sense that it is not the right experience we need in order to know what we want to know. There is something we don't seem to be able to know through experience, but may be possible in the future.

If there is something we can never know through experience, then all we have is merely speculation. We have to admit there is an unbridgeable distance between us and the truth in this case. Experience is, in any case, *the only thing we can rely on* in obtaining knowledge of the empirical world. If we cannot get the right experience, then we cannot achieve knowledge. But there is nothing wrong with it; we are not supposed to have knowledge of everything. The point is, if we obtain experience, we obtain knowledge. Experience is, in the end, all we have. So, if we have knowledge at all, it will not and cannot transcend experience. The limit of experience is the limit of knowledge.

⁷⁹ This is closer to Reid. Reid remarks, "In this tree of knowledge, perception is the root, common understanding is the trunk, and the sciences are the branches" (Reid 1997, p. 174).

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