Dewey, Continuity, and McDowell

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Keynote address at the Harvard/MIT Graduate Philosophy Conference, March 2006. To appear (with minor changes) in *Normativity and Nature*, edited by David MacArthur and Mario de Caro, Columbia University Press.

1. Introduction

John Dewey's voluminous output includes substantial work in metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science. Within analytic philosophy, the implicit conclusion drawn for some decades now has been that Dewey is not especially relevant or useful in these areas. He is seen, I suspect, as well-meaning but woolly-minded, and as just not grappling effectively with the issues that are most alive to us now. I argue here for the contemporary relevance, as well as the intrinsic merit, of some of Dewey's ideas on these topics.

The area I will look at is general discussions of the relation between "mind and world." Here I primarily have in mind questions about representation, belief, and knowledge, as opposed to the overtly metaphysical side of the mind/body problem.

Dewey sought to assert "continuity" between mind and world. This was his response to a number of famous "dualisms" in philosophy. As the term suggests, Dewey's is a "no gulf" view of the relation between mind and world, a denial of problematic separation. But this does not mean that he refused to see a problem, and baldly asserted

that the mind is in straightforward contact with the world at large. There is more to his treatment than that. In this case and others, Dewey's analysis took the following form. Where we see a traditional philosophical "gulf" (mind and matter, thought and world, fact and value), there tends to be a real distinction present, that has a kind of functional significance. But events in the history of philosophy, in interaction with the history of science and politics, will have led to this distinction acquiring a distorted philosophical role, one in which it poses a problem of the form of a gulf or dualism. Attention to the functional significance of the distinction, and the history, enable the problem be partially solved and partially dissolved.

Some parts of recent philosophy have also sought to develop a treatment of the relation between mind and world that breaks with the usual forms taken by philosophical theory in this area. One example is John McDowell, in *Mind and World* (1994). McDowell makes philosophical claims about perception, content, reasons, and norms; but he also engages in criticism of the way these problems are usually set up and addressed. This includes criticism of familiar forms of philosophical naturalism. McDowell's positive view is naturalistic in a sense – it involves a reconceptualization of what is natural to humans. But much of the mindset associated with the naturalistic tradition in recent philosophy is rejected.

Dewey is normally associated now with "pragmatism." But from about 1925 on, his preferred term for his outlook was "naturalism." Dewey's naturalism is not mainstream contemporary naturalism, the naturalism of people like Fodor, Goldman, and Philip Kitcher. It is a distinctive view. I think that mainstream contemporary naturalism is philosophically viable. But one criticism of mainstream naturalism that should be taken seriously is the claim that it is too comfortable with the terms of discussion and problem-framings that originate in more traditional philosophy. In this area, some of the anxieties seen in contemporary anti-naturalism may well be onto something. But rejecting naturalism itself is not the right response to the problem, and in developing a better approach some of Dewey's ideas may provide useful resources. So the aim of this paper is to present parts of Dewey's view as a *useable response* to present-day concerns, including some of those that motivate McDowell.

McDowell will be my sole representative of dissatisfaction with mainstream naturalism. Aside from the significance and influence of his work, McDowell is a good choice because the points of contact between Dewey and McDowell are rich and informative. (For this idea – indeed, for the stimulus to write this paper – I am indebted to discussions with Bharath Vallabha.) Even the relation between the titles of the two key works is provocative: *Experience and Nature* on Dewey's side and *Mind and World* on McDowell's. A case could be made that the two books would be more accurately named with the titles switched, or at least that both books would best be called *Experience and Nature*. We see in both works the attempt to dispose of "dualistic" conceptions of the relation between thought and world. Both, however, regard the familiar philosophical format for systematic treatment of this problem as fruitless. Both trace various philosophical dualisms to a source or root, an ur-Dualism that generates others. In each case we see a careful treatment of experience, but also a reconceptualization of nature, without which the traditional oppositions cannot be overcome. We also see a careful treatment of relation between human and non-human cognition, and the role of culture and language in marking the difference.

The next section will outline some of Dewey's central ideas, in highly compressed form. (The "Dewey" of this paper is Dewey of the 1920s and 1930s, his later period.) The section after that will mount a criticism of some of McDowell's views as presented in *Mind and World*. Section 4 will look at a Deweyan response to some of the particular issues that motivate McDowell.

2. Dewey on Mind and Nature

The place to start, in thinking about Dewey, is with the idea of a problem-solving account of cognition. But the next thing to do is to extend our usual picture of what that involves, "outwards" in two directions. We don't see problem-solving as something that begins with a thinker receiving some input, some "recalcitrant experience," and terminates in cognitive adjustments that resolve the internal puzzle, or even as something that terminates in action. Instead, our treatment starts with the environmental conditions that characteristically *prompt* thought, the conditions that generate what agents experience as

problematic situations. For Dewey, these are typically conditions of variability, uncertainty, and change. At the "output" end, for Dewey, we typically have action, but also the effects of action on the agent's environment. This involves the transformation of the conditions that prompted thought, the conditions that posed the problem. In tracking the state of the world and arriving at effective forms of action, agents use stable features of the world as *resources*; these make it possible to get some purchase on the unstable features.

The simplest, sharpest version of the picture that results is one in which generalizations can be made about both the "before" and "after" conditions. Problems are posed by change and instability, and intelligent action characteristically restores some kind of stability in organism/environment relations. That highly structured view, which is more marked in Dewey's *Logic* (1938) than *Experience and Nature* (1925, 1929), seems suspiciously simple. In *Experience and Nature*, we see definite generalizations on the input side, but not so much on the output side – perhaps that is more reasonable. But what matters more here is the overall "shape" of the account, where it begins and ends, especially the idea that action is directed at transforming the prior state of external conditions, and the idea that we might give a philosophical account of the characteristic form of those changes.

Dewey gave his problem-solving account of intelligence a naturalistic basis in a combination of biology and psychology, especially nascent social psychology. He also drew in detailed ways on anthropology. From biology, Dewey took the idea of continuity between human cognition and a larger class of organic responses in animals. This larger class of adaptive responses displays, as a shallower precursor, some features of the general pattern seen in problem-solving, as outlined above.

The link to biology is also used to support Dewey's insistence that our epistemic commerce with the world develops out of various kinds of non-epistemic commerce with it, and remains embedded within this larger context of interaction. Our contact with the world is not restricted to thinking and knowing about it. In *Experience and Nature*, that view is initially defended on the basis of what Dewey takes to be everyday facts about experience, but it is also given a biological underpinning.

From social psychology, Dewey took the idea of a theory of communicative and cooperative action, and argued for the primacy of this viewpoint in developing a theory of meaning. If we want to know what meanings are – what sort of involvement representations have with their objects, how finely meanings should be divided, whether meaning is a unified phenomenon – we look to what sorts of properties figure in a theory of communicative action. If we marry this perspective with the idea that meaning and representation are essential to genuine thought, the combination yields a social theory of mind.

If we imagine looking down on a world, and isolating the mental parts of it, for Dewey these are the parts of the world in which living agents engage in problem-solving with the aid of a socially sustained linguistic medium of representation. Such activity has, for Dewey, a distinctive causal profile that features, as a significant variable, a sort of "extendedness" or "reach." The precursors of thought in non-human animals involve a low-level and comparatively "shallow" pattern of adjustment and transformation of environmental conditions. With the advent of language, the causal reach of these capacities is greatly extended and focused. What results, human intelligence, is not just something we can see as useful for us; viewed as part of nature at large, it is a causal factor of an unprecedented kind.

That concludes my outline of Dewey's naturalistic view of mind-world relations. Dewey also gives a theory of how traditional philosophy has responded to these facts. This is a charting of a long historical process of, roughly speaking, understandable distortion of those facts, via their interaction with the development of social and economic conditions in the West from ancient times to the present. This process yields the familiar problems of modern philosophy.

A large proportion, in terms of sheer pages, of Dewey's work is concerned with charting this history, over and over, from many angles. His method involves a particular kind of historical narrative, one with little explicit role for individuals in directing key changes, as opposed to the role played by general social and economic factors. Much of the narrative itself is inessential here. But the contribution that a story of this *kind* makes to the overall package of ideas is important. So I will give a highly compressed sketch of the narrative.

The story starts in classical Greek thought, and its relation to social conditions. Knowledge as an activity is seen as the domain of a leisured class. Accordingly, knowledge is seen as a matter of contemplation; there is a devaluation of practical experimentation and craft. For Dewey, though, it is in some ways an *inescapable* fact that knowledge involves use of the stable to deal with the unstable. This fact makes its way into Greek thought in the form of a distinction in kinds of being; the unchanging is regarded as superior and more real.

As I understand the argument, Dewey describes two factors at work here. One is the treatment of knowledge in isolation from its context within our larger non-epistemic traffic with the world. That makes it possible to treat the epistemic roles of various things as reflecting their degree and kind of reality. The second is the forcing of the naturally different epistemic roles of the changing and the stable into a framework that treats knowledge as matter of contemplation. Knowledge becomes contemplation of the unchanging, and the unchanging acquires a superior kind of reality.

We then jump forward to a profound shift in social conditions, associated with the rise of capitalism and early modern science. This produces a transformation in actual epistemic practice – in knowledge and methods. In particular, we see a new emphasis on individuality, innovation, experiment, and methods continuous with craft practice. We also see the discovery of the enormous power of a focus on the mechanical structure of nature – for Dewey, on mechanical *aspects* of natural affairs. But there is a failure to make corresponding shifts on the philosophical side, which would properly accommodate the new practices of knowledge-gathering. The result is a retention of the idea that the objects of knowledge are the genuinely real, in combination with a new conception of what is known and knowable. What has turned out to be knowable is the mechanical order, so the things apparent in ordinary experience (colors, everyday objects, values) become philosophically problematic. The problem of mind/world relations is also exacerbated by the subjectivist side of modern philosophy, which is an exuberant distortion of the genuinely new and important role for individuality and innovation in the modern period.

So for Dewey, the standard problems of modern philosophy are largely products of a philosophical inheritance from the Greeks, combined with a new context of actual epistemic practice. In particular, the Greeks were responsible for

> ...the introduction into nature of a split in Being itself, its division into some things which are inherently defective, changing, relational, and other things which inherently perfect, permanent, self-possessed. Other dualisms such as that between sensuous appetite and rational thought, between the particular and universal, between the mechanical and the telic, between experience and science, and between matter and mind, are but the reflections of this primary metaphysical dualism. (*EN* 123-4)

The argument is not that all these *distinctions* stem from the primary dualism. These are all decent, free-standing distinctions, properly understood. They have their place in real aspects of experience and our ongoing attempts to deal with it. The argument is that the appearance of a philosophical *problem* around them stems in each case from the "primary dualism."

Dewey's narrative and the associated arguments are often interesting and plausible. But to accept the diagnosis as a whole is to deny that at least many of those philosophical problems have a "life of their own," originating in genuinely puzzling aspects of experience and how the world works. It is also important that even if one has a deflationary attitude to many or all of these problems, this attitude does not *require* a "primary dualism" at the root of them all. So although some parts of it have particular force and relevance, I won't try to make Dewey's millennium-spanning diagnosis do much philosophical work in this paper. The point that Dewey thinks we have *reached*, via this road, is important here, however. In the case of the relation between knowing mind and external world, we are left with a picture in which, according to Dewey, the aspiring knower is supposed to hope for the existence of some strange *sui generis* relation of copying, linking a private inner state and an external condition. The mental state at one end seems to be not of the natural world in both its composition and activities; both the constitution and the *point* of the prized copying relation are obscure.

What does restoring the right perspective involve? For Dewey, it does *not* require fashioning a direct naturalistic answer to the questions bequeathed to us by the

philosophical tradition. That would be doomed. Further, we cannot hope that the deflationary historical account will clear away all the inherited confusions by itself, leaving us able to assert what seem to be the relevant pieces of science, in raw form, expecting them to give us a philosophical understanding of the situation. For Dewey – especially the Dewey of *Experience and Nature* – the way out of the problem also involves a *casting* of the naturalistic account in a particular way, a way that involves moves within metaphysics and epistemology.

My emphasis here is quite different from that of Dewey's main champion in recent decades, Richard Rorty (1980). For Rorty, Dewey's diagnostic narrative enables a simple dissolving of a great mass of unwanted philosophic matter. Basic naturalistic facts about people also contribute something of a successor picture, but rather little of this is actually needed. And what is not just unnecessary, but downright unhelpful, is Dewey's foray into systematic metaphysics and epistemology. This, for Rorty, is a lapse into a kind of theorizing that Dewey has completely undermined.

Rorty and I agree on three components that can be isolated in Dewey: the diagnostic narrative, the introduction of information from biology and psychology, and the "M&E" moves that cast the naturalistic material in a particular form. Rorty regards the third as regrettable. Sometimes he writes as if it was simply not there. But in at least one essay, "Dewey's Metaphysics" (1977), Rorty departs from what I see as a misleading interpretive idealization, and instead singles out and *rejects* the substantive metaphysical side of Dewey's later thought. My approach here, in contrast, uses all three parts, and trusts in the sheer dissolving power of Dewey's historical narrative less than Rorty does.

As with the other two components, I will briefly sketch the metaphysical and epistemological framework that Dewey offers in *Experience and Nature*. Dewey insists on the recognition of both "intrinsic qualities" and relations, and each is assigned distinct – rather *too* distinct – roles in his account. In ordinary experience, intrinsic qualities of things can be encountered in a non-epistemic fashion. They are "had" without being known. The business of knowledge is the tracking of relations – sequences, coexistences, patterns. This because of the overall function of intelligence – tracking and utilizing stability to deal with uncertainty. Dewey explicitly rejects attempts to deflate or reduce one or the other metaphysical category; he rejects both the Aristotelian downgrading of

relations, and modern structuralist suspicions of intrinsic qualities. Both are real, and have their different roles in cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of experience.

The role of relations in Dewey's epistemological theory is significant here. First, some standard questions about where the objects of everyday experience can be located in the physical world are resolved, for Dewey, by these ideas alone. For Dewey, the description of the world given to us by modern physical science is a description of relational features of nature in very pure form. That has the consequence that the physical story is *designed to omit* much of what is real. "Physical science does not set up another and rival realm of antithetical existence..." (*EN* p. 136). "[I]t is only with respect to the function of instituting connection that the objects of physics can be said to be more 'real'" (p. 139). Science's intense focus on one set of natural features does not entail rejection of the other. Indeed, Dewey accepts the simple metaphysical argument that relations need positive relata (p. 87). So such things as aesthetic properties, colors, and so on receive an easier ride in this kind of naturalism – probably too easy a ride. This treatment of the characteristic focus of physical description also enables Dewey to adopt (what I interpret as) a form of neutral monism about the mind-body problem in its narrowly metaphysical form.

The idea that knowledge in general has a special concern with relations also has consequences regarding what sort of connection with the external world is *sought* by a knower. As a first pass, we might say that a knower wants to represent facts about relations. But this brings the knower himself into a set of relations with those things. So the knower joins and transforms the relational structure, and this is so even before the new knowledge has issued in actions that result in changes to external affairs by a common-sense causal standard. This move does not imply a collapse into an undifferentiated holistic metaphysics. Most of the possible ways in which a knower might come into a new set of relations with external conditions are empirically idle, insignificant. The ones that are not idle are those that involve new potentialities for action and causal impact on the world. This is why Dewey would reject a general categorial downgrading of "changes" made to relational properties, a categorization as mere "Cambridge change" or similar. (I tackle some of these questions about relations, changes, and control in another paper; forthcoming).

This completes my sketch of Dewey's account of mind and knowledge, of how traditional philosophical problems have arisen, and the proper philosophical framing of a naturalistic view. I do not endorse anything like the whole of this package. For example, I would resist the simple way in which the relational and intrinsic are assigned distinct roles in epistemology, where the intrinsic qualities are "had" and the relations are known. Second, the attempt to use the idea that scientific descriptions focus on relations to make a neutral monist view of the mind available is intriguing, but seems too easy. Third, Dewey does struggle with the need to assert but not over-inflate the idea that changes to the content of knowledge imply changes to the objects known. But Dewey's ideas, even where outdated and imperfect, offer valuable vantage points from which to view philosophical problems, and in many cases offer resources with considerable power. Dewey did succeed in thinking his way outside of frameworks, pictures, and habits whose influence is strong and continuing.

For example, Dewey's naturalistic treatment of the impact of mind and intelligence on the world provides him with the basis for a striking diagnosis and critique of "idealist" philosophies, which I would also apply to some contemporary "social constructivist" views. For Dewey, these are philosophies that recognize, in distorted form, the active function of intelligence, but try to make sense of this role within a view that neglects the causal role that the mind has in the control of action and consequent transformation of real environmental conditions. For Dewey, questions of whether reality is "found" or "made" can be answered by saying that we find the world in one state and, via action, we make it enter another.

Another part of his picture is especially relevant here. For Dewey, ordinary distinctions become philosophical problems not solely through mis-handling. Both ordinary distinctions and their bloated philosophical analogues tend to have a kind of functional significance. One example is the gulf between mind and world. Early in *Experience and Nature* Dewey notes that everyday experience is *of* objects in the world. It takes a definite mental operation to sever experience from nature, and treat the mind as a self-contained domain. This is the conception of experience that troubles philosophy, of course, but Dewey does not merely see it as a misstep. The drawing of a line between mind and nature in the modern period reflects a new pattern in actual epistemic practice.

Thinking of the mind and the physical world as self-sufficient domains turned out to have enormous practical power. "To distinguish in reflection the physical and to hold it in temporary detachment is to be set upon the road that conducts to tools and technologies, to construction of mechanisms, to the arts that ensue in the wake of the sciences" (*EN* p. 10). The problem in philosophy has arisen not by according the distinction between mind and world a special status, but by allowing the distinction to "harden" in a particular way. And the functional treatment of the distinction is one that only makes sense within a view that recognizes the embedding of minds within nature at large.

3. Criticism of *Mind and World*

In this section we turn from Dewey to McDowell. I will focus primarily on some crucial moves made towards the end of *Mind and World*. But I will sketch some background first.

In his first chapters McDowell argues that there are aspects of human reason and belief that cannot apparently be captured by a description of humans in ordinary naturalistic terms. It is assumed that the modes of description and understanding available to a mainstream naturalist involve locating things in a "realm of law," where this is distinct from the idea of realm of cause-effect relations. Via Kant, McDowell sees thought as a combination of receptivity and spontaneity. The understanding is a faculty of spontaneity – an active power and one linked to freedom. This is because belief involves taking responsibility, taking a stand on how things are. So the overall problem can be summarized by saying: "we cannot capture what it is to possess and employ the understanding, a faculty of spontaneity, in terms of concepts that place things in the realm of law" (p. 87).

McDowell's solution to the problem has two elements. One is a detailed treatment of experience, as a passive capacity but one linked to understanding (and hence to spontaneity) in a crucial way. McDowell argues that experiences have conceptual content, a kind of content that gives them genuine justificatory capacities. Much of the subsequent debate has concerned the viability of this idea, but it will not figure much in my discussion.

The second aspect of the solution is a set of meta-theoretic claims. I will break these also into two. First, we have McDowell's isolation of the true source of the problem. "I have now introduced my candidate for that role: the naturalism that leaves nature disenchanted" (p. 85). A genuine resolution of the problem includes a reconceptualization of what counts as natural, for philosophical purposes. This involves the recognition of what McDowell calls "second nature," which is a certain kind of human involvement in practices of judgment, interpretation, and reason-giving, acquired by enculturation and immersion in a tradition. Enculturation or *Bildung* brings us into a condition where we can recognize and work within the "space of reasons."

Lastly, we have the claim that our philosophical treatment of this situation should not take the form of "normal philosophy," featuring the familiar kind of bridging operation between two sets of facts that seem problematically distinct. Second nature is properly understood from a standpoint *within* the set of practices it involves, as opposed to a "sideways-on" standpoint. If a challenge is raised that alleges a "spookiness" or "rampant Platonism" in this picture, the right response is to not to try to rebuild the space of reasons with the minimal tools that mainstream naturalism allows. That is the kind of bridging operation that is no longer needed. "We need not connect this natural history to nature as the realm of law any more tightly than by simply affirming our right to the notion of second nature" (p. 95).

My focus will be on these abstract, partially meta-theoretic aspects of McDowell's view in this section. In the next section I will grapple with some of the particular issues that motivate McDowell's claims about meaning and justification.

Around pages 93-95 of *Mind and World* there is a point of usefully close contact with Dewey. McDowell notes that modern philosophy is characterized by problems that take the form of dualisms. One view of Wittgenstein sees him as uncovering a fundamental dualism, a "dualism of norm and nature", that is the "source of the familiar dualisms of modern philosophy" (pp. 93-94). McDowell says this fits the picture he has been developing, but he then urges that we reject the bridging operations that are the usual response to problems of this kind. These are operations that start out with the materials on one side of the divide, and erect something that more or less passes for the

facts or features associated with the other side. McDowell sees the moves he has made as giving us warrant for treating any such bridging operation as unnecessary.

Here is a key passage:

> The naturalism of second nature that I have been describing is precisely a shape for our thinking that would leave even the last dualism not seeming to call for constructive philosophy. The bare idea of *Bildung* ensures that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman, and that should eliminate the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason. This leaves no genuine questions about norms, apart from those we address in reflective thinking about specific norms, an activity that is not particularly philosophical. There is no need for constructive philosophy, directed at the very idea of norms of reason, or the structure within which meaning comes into view, from the standpoint of the naturalism that threatens to disenchant nature..... We need not connect this natural history to nature as the realm of law any more tightly than by simply affirming our right to the notion of second nature. (pp. 94-95)

To assess these claims, let us first ask what McDowell's theory of second nature is intended to be a theory *of*. It is a description of *our* second nature, a description of a set of skills and habits that are natural to properly enculturated humans. As I read McDowell, these might be described as habits of interpretation, judgment, reflective epistemic responsibility, and sensitivity to relations of entailment and support. In a low-key way, I will refer to this as a "framework" that we use in judgment, reflection, and interpretation. If "framework" seems suspicious then "habits of thought and action" (p. 84) can be substituted in its place. I will argue for the viability and importance of a kind of investigation of these features of us, that McDowell seeks to resist.

For McDowell, the way in which second nature counts as natural to us makes it unnecessary to engage in a philosophical project of locating these features in the world as conceived by science. "The bare idea of *Bildung* ensures that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman." But what does the bare idea of *Bildung* really do? For McDowell, "*Bildung*" is the best available term for a kind of enculturation process in which a person is made sensitive to reasons, and to features of the world that depend on the notion of reason, such as meaning and inquiry. Surely all the *bare* fact of Bildung establishes is that normal processes of enculturation lead to us *finding it natural* to apply the framework, to exhibit certain habits. So one observation that can be made immediately is

that the bare fact of *Bildung* does not preclude the framework we acquire by normal enculturation embodying factual commitments that are false. A process of enculturation *could* surely yield such a thing.

That possibility may not arise in this case; it may well be an error to treat the framework that McDowell has in mind as one that embodies factual commitments. The set of habits and capacities that comprise second nature might be quite different in character. But does not affect the fundamental point, because an analogous question can then be asked about second nature. This is a question about what, as a matter of fact, the framework does for us, what sort of coordination it gives us with each other and with the world at large. This coordination may not go via factual commitments, true or false, but it has some character or other. What difference does it make to us as organisms, that we have this feature, and does how it change our modes of interaction with the rest of the natural world?

To ask this is to take a "sideways-on" perspective toward our second nature, something that McDowell wants to resist. But what grounds has he to resist it? First, we should deflect the possible claim that taking such an approach lands us back in the familiar gulf-bridging projects of modern philosophy. The investigation may be carried out in this way, but it need not. It could be combined with a deep critique of the standard ways in which these problems have usually been generated and addressed in the philosophical tradition. That is, it could be undertaken within an unorthodox naturalism of the kind we see in Dewey. McDowell sometimes associates the idea of a sideways-on perspective with the idea of an "outer boundary" separating thought from reality at large. But the idea of such a boundary can receive a critical treatment within a perspective that is nonetheless comfortable with a sideways-on point of view. Here Dewey's relevance is vivid. Sideways-on need not mean boilerplate-dualistic.

For McDowell, however, there is enough on the table to head off any attempt to undertake a further philosophical investigation of second nature. Drawing still from the passage above: "This leaves no genuine questions about norms, apart from those we address in reflective thinking about specific norms, an activity that is not particularly philosophical. There is no need for constructive philosophy, directed at the very idea of norms of reason, or the structure within which meaning comes into view, from the

standpoint of the naturalism that threatens to disenchant nature." One way to read this passage is to see it as directed specifically against a form of naturalism that is organized around the notion of natural law. If this was so, it would be easy to reply that many naturalists – not just unorthodox ones like Dewey – would deny that laws are central to the scientific outlook, either in general or in the context of understanding human capacities. However, I think it is clear that McDowell aims these points at a bigger target than the specific combination of naturalism plus a law-based philosophy of science. Indeed, later in the book it is not only a philosophical treatment of human enculturation that is resisted by McDowell. He seems averse to *any* kind of systematic theoretical investigation of the matter, of the sort that could threaten to generate philosophical consequences.

> [W]e can regard the culture a human being is initiated into as a going concern; there is no particular reason why we should need to uncover or speculate about its history, let alone the origins of culture as such. (p. 123)

A scientific treatment of the evolution of culture is possible, but for McDowell it is not very "pressing" (p. 123). And it must not become the basis for any sort of systematic third-person account "of what responsiveness to reason is" (p. 124).

This aversion to theoretical investigation, spreading here from systematic philosophy even to neighboring disciplines, is surely a weak spot in McDowell account. It aims to deter, for example, the following kind of inquiry. Suppose we have a philosopher who has taken full heed of the missteps in the tradition, especially the erecting of boundaries between thought and nature, also someone who does not think of science as obsessed with locking events into a structure of laws. What the philosopher wants to do is ask general questions about how the "habits of thought and action" involved in our use of normative concepts relate to other facts about us, and how these habits function as human cognitive tools. When this philosopher says that such an investigation should mesh with what we learn from science, do not think "physics" when he says "science". Instead, think social psychology, a field that overflows with the most startling results almost untapped by philosophy. Think comparative psychology, which has recently become intensely concerned with the ways in which various non-human

animals have *partial* analogues of the key human characteristic of cultural learning, and intensely concerned with how and why the human lineage took an extra step (Tomasello 1999).

McDowell, or others, may think that even within an obsessively non-dualistic framework, there is something impossible or incoherent about a sideways-on investigation of our basic normative and semantic concepts and habits. It is true that some of the features of second nature that McDowell wants to place off-limits from systematic investigation might be said to be truly ground-level, in a way that makes it hard to imagine asking what human life would be like without them. But whether this is granted or not, other elements of what McDowell regards as second nature are far more specific, and cannot receive this protection.

In the key passage quoted earlier, for example, McDowell says that the bare idea of Bildung "should eliminate the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason." But at this point we should insist on a distinction between the "very idea of norms," of any kind at all, and the particular normative framework that includes "demands of reason." Even if it is somehow misconceived and fruitless to try to ask sideways-on questions about what difference is made to our lives by the existence of any normative structure whatsoever, it is a much more specific question to ask what difference is made to our lives by an acceptance of the idea of a *demand* of reason. Here and elsewhere, the structure that McDowell sees us merely asserting our "right" to is far richer and more specific than a minimal skeleton of normative orientation. It includes a particular *way* of configuring our norms of judgment, reflection, and interpretation. Indeed, it is clear that enculturation does in fact give people a framework with this kind of richness.

Another illustration of the substantive character of the inheritance that McDowell would have us affirm our "right" is the framework of psychological description and interpretation that McDowell recognizes. This is especially vivid in McDowell's handling of the cognitive attributes of non-human animals (especially pp. 114-121). As McDowell denies that animals have understanding, he denies that they have experience of the world or beliefs about it. But he is also quick to deny that this forces him to treat animals as automata. He makes what I read as two distinct moves here. First, he says that animals

have a kind of "proto-subjectivity." I assume that this entitles them to weakened analogues of propositional attitudes. A different concession is made, however, with respect to states like pain and fear. Animals can be attributed the ordinary forms of these states, not weakened or scare-quoted analogues. Animals can feel pain and fear because "nothing in the concepts of pain and fear implies that they can get a grip only where there is understanding, and thus full-fledged subjectivity" (p. 120). This two-pronged treatment of animal cognition contrasts with a one-pronged treatment, according to which *all* ordinary concepts of psychological states, including pain and fear, are similarly enmeshed in the rich normative structure in which the concepts of belief and reason live. Suppose for a moment that the one-pronged option was true – that is, a true expression of some of the constraints that govern the habits of thought and action that comprise second nature. (Indeed, it has been suggested to me that this is a fairer expression of McDowell's overall view, as reflected especially in his other works.) Whatever it is that bars the attribution of belief to animals also bars the attribution of fear and pain. On this second view, it is clear that our second nature is shaping the contours of coherent psychological description in quite definite ways, ways that will have downstream consequences in a variety of areas. The same is true, though not quite as vividly, of the two-pronged view as well. My point here is that while it may be true that one or other of these frameworks "feels natural" to us, given our enculturation, as a way of navigating the normative and semantic domain, that surely should not be the end of the story, when questions are raised about its status and role. We can and should ask about how the contours generated by this framework of psychological description relate to the contours revealed by empirical psychology, and we can also ask whether our usual framework of psychological description is the best one for us to use, given our goals in this area.

So McDowell's second nature includes a mix of more skeletal and more fleshed-out elements. And once we focus on the substantive elements, it is evident that asserting our "right" to them cannot be the end of the matter. McDowell might not be interested in sideways-on questions about how our usual normative framework operates in social life, and where various elements of the framework come from, but he cannot claim that any attempt to ask these questions is doomed to devolve into a pointless dualistic oscillation between unacceptable options.

4. Aboutness and Ideals

In section 2 I sketched Dewey's view of the relation between mind and world. In section 3 I criticized some parts of McDowell's. But of course, Dewey and McDowell are focusing their attention on different parts of this huge topic. It is not the case that they are trying to answer exactly the same questions and giving different answers. McDowell's project is guided by subtle features of what he takes to be our core semantic and epistemic concepts, especially normative features. This sort of material plays little role in Dewey's treatment. In part this is because he is more "zoomed out" than McDowell at this part of his story; in part it is because he is not thinking about meaning with anything like the sophisticated armamentarium of late 20th century philosophy. In any case, it can sometimes seem that Dewey is just steamrolling over the subtle features of the landscape that are guiding McDowell's project. So in this section I will try to say more about what an unorthodox naturalism of Dewey's kind would make of some of the key phenomena that figure in the argument of *Mind and World*.

For Dewey the way to approach the phenomenon of meaning is through a theory of communicative behavior. Meaning enters the world when first behaviors, and then persisting artifacts, acquire a role in guiding and stabilizing joint action, especially action directed at other things. The promissory notes Dewey leaves here are huge, but Brian Skyrms' recent work (*Evolution of the Social Contract*, 1996) includes a much more rigorous treatment of this basic idea. In particular, Skyrms' work includes a more rigorous treatment of the relation between cooperative and competitive aspects of the process.

As noted earlier, Dewey committed himself also to the view that communicative interaction of this kind is essential to the existence of genuine thought. This is another point of interesting contact with McDowell, but I will not address it here. My focus instead will be on how an Deweyan approach would treat the distinction between "genuine" meaning and representation, as opposed to more rudimentary kinds of involvement between inner states (or other quasi-representational structures) and the world.

A distinction of this kind is a central feature of McDowell's treatment. McDowell insists on the importance of a particular "demanding" sense of belief, that he thinks is tied to the idea of genuine "aboutness." As McDowell emphasizes in his "Afterword," he does not claim that no simpler forms of directedness or involvement between inner states and conditions in the world could exist, and could figure in theories of various kinds. But he insists that the rich senses of belief and aboutness are real and philosophically distinct. In particular, these semantic concepts are bound up with epistemic concepts of responsibility – with the idea of "taking a stand" on how the world is – and hence with the idea of freedom.

I have already criticized parts of the view that McDowell reaches by following this road. But how do these distinctions and connections, that seem so vivid and important to McDowell, appear from a Deweyan point of view? Are they to be swept aside, treated as unwanted creatures of philosophical fantasy?

For Dewey, the richest and most fine-grained semantic phenomena are seen as arising out of simpler kinds of behavioral coordination and sign use. Verbal behaviors and representational artifacts go from having one-time or haphazard roles in particular episodes of behavioral coordination, to having stable and persisting roles in a community of agents. This is a process in which objects acquire, via their embedding in a behavioral context, a novel kind of causal role, the role of functioning as a representation. For Dewey this is a kind of enriching of the causal powers of ordinary objects; acquiring meaning is acquiring the capacity to affect the course of events in a particular kind of way. This change in causal power is a matter of degree; the new causal roles of things used as representations begin as diffuse and unreliable ones, but once stabilized they can have both longer "reach" and greater focus.

While it is hard to make these ideas precise, the core point is that, for Dewey, there can be more and less "demanding" senses of semantic concepts, but these should be correspond to varieties of semantic phenomena that are empirically different. They should be linked to more and less fine-grained ways in which signs are used in social life. Further, this need not involve merely a continual "ramping up" of the same *kinds* of causal powers. Innovations and qualitative changes can be recognized as real in such a framework.

Here are two examples of such qualitative changes. First, in humans we find not just first-order representation use, but a framework used to talk and think about representations. The empirical phenomenon of language and thought includes the existence of a framework that we use to describe, predict, influence, and manage the representation use of ourselves and others. Secondly, we find the partial entanglement of semantic concepts with, firstly, epistemic concepts, and perhaps also those of responsibility and freedom. Given the causal importance of stabilized representations, it is natural for us to hold people accountable for what they say, for what they overtly "take a stand" on. With this may also come an encouragement of internal attitudes of epistemic responsibility. Thus it may happen that our concepts of belief and aboutness become bound up with ideals of responsibility, and with scripts of justification and normative assessment.

I suggest that McDowell over-states the extent of these entanglements, and they are probably much more mixed and open, more disorderly, than McDowell makes them appear. But from a Deweyan point of view, there is no need to deny that there is *something*, a real phenomenon, here. If real, this phenomenon will have its own empirical features, discernible from sideways-on.

So much of the philosophical heavy-lifting that McDowell wants to engage in with the aid of this material is rejected. But the idea that there is a link between semantic concepts and ideals of justification and responsibility need not be simply steam-rollered or ignored by a naturalism of this kind. These phenomena acquire, when real, a different role in the overall story.

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