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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Edward Ray Falls entitled "A Critique of John McDowell's Theory of Moral Perception." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Philosophy.

Kristina Gehrman, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

A Critique of John McDowell's Theory of Moral Perception

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Edward Falls

August 2021

Abstract

This dissertation examines an argument that John McDowell's view is structurally analogous to Protagoreanism, and that arguments structurally analogous to Plato's arguments against Protagoreanism apply to McDowell's view. Through philosophical investigation, the dissertation shows that Plato's arguments do not perfectly apply to McDowell's view, but that the view nevertheless is unable to address the metastasized problem of constraint. The metastasized problem of constraint arises in at least two kinds of circumstances: situations where cultural relativism is a concern, and situations where there is pressure to adapt to unforeseeable natural developments.

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Introduction

We can readily imagine a way of life that comprises a way of going on, but not of going on well. Wendy Farley describes a toxic way of going on:

In Atlanta, thousands of people drive beautiful cars with fine audio systems on roads so clogged that a twenty-minute drive is expanded to an hour or more. The air is so polluted that many days of the year school children cannot go outside to play. People wear beautiful clothes as they work eighty or so hours a week at a job that exhausts them physically and spiritually. The outward signs of affluence, power, and success conceal the disintegration of health, family life, connections to community, and even a capacity for joy. Equally invisible is the price the rest of the world pays in low-wage labor and poisoned water, land, and air for our affluence. (Farley 2005: 36)

What was true of a way of going on in Atlanta in 2005 was true of ways of going on in other U.S. cities down to the time of the pandemic in 2020-2021, which has done nothing to resolve the inherent toxicity of such a form of life, though it has brought complications and fresh challenges to going on well. Of course, with the example in hand, we can tell the difference between going on well and not so doing. We can tell that such a way of life is toxic. We can tell that because the way of going on still possesses, within it, the relevant resources for going on well. Something internal to the way of going on shapes our perceptions and influences our judgments about such a way of going on, e.g., the recognition that it is not sustainable. Our judgment is constrained by our perceptions, in such instances.

There are other kinds of cases, though. What happens when a way of going on does not possess the internal resources to help us make these kinds of determinations? What happens when the way of going on itself comes into question? For example, within a certain way of going on, social injustice has become recognizable only in rough outline over the past two hundred years. But how has this happened? How has social injustice become recognizable within a way of going on which was (and still is) socially unjust? Emerging technologies and emerging pathogens can give rise to circumstances which might outstrip the resources of current ways of going on. Who would have guessed, before 2020, that it could be a moral question whether to let your children hug their grandparents (due to no fault of the grandparents', that is)? Expert epidemiologists

might have made predictions, but the point is that our general way of going on must be adaptive. Explaining how this works requires an account of the sort of unanticipated friction that a particular way of going on may encounter. The philosophical question raised by such examples is how things beyond the control of a way of going on may exert pressure on that way of going on to change it for the better. I shall call this the problem of constraint.

John McDowell is an influential philosopher for whom the problem of constraint has been a central theme, not only as it relates to value theory but as the problem relates to epistemology more broadly. McDowell's solution to the problem is well known. He thinks it is imperative, a matter of philosophical sanity, to avoid picturing the problem of constraint in such a way as to be seduced by problematic sorts of solutions to the problem. Picturing this problem the wrong way, we can get into a conceptual bind which presses us either to accept an utterly incoherent view of constraint (the Myth of the Given), or to go toward a position which completely abandons constraint altogether, except for the slight constraint of logical consistency (here the image is that of wheels spinning frictionlessly in a void). McDowell disarms the problematic picture of constraint by a series of moves which can be characterized as laying out a third option, the option of quietism. But his quietism rejects the metaphysics, metametaphysics, and epistemology of the problematic picture, not the problem of constraint itself. He accepts that the problem of constraint is a serious philosophical problem, an ethical and epistemological problem, and he offers a solution intended to be compatible with steering clear of other problematic solutions. He expects to steer clear of problematic solutions by jettisoning the picture which gives rise to those solutions in the first place, a certain picture of the mind's relation to the world.

The following is how Charles Taylor has characterized the picture McDowell repudiates:

Descartes in one of his letters declared himself 'assuré que je ne puis avoir aucune connaissance de ce qui est hors de moi, que par l'entremise des idées que j'ai eu en moi.' This sentence makes sense against a certain topology of mind and world. The reality I want to know is outside the mind; my knowledge of it is within. This knowledge consists in states of mind which purport to represent accurately what is out there. (Taylor 2013: 61)

McDowell himself does not exactly use the phrase Inside/Outside picture, but I find it illustrative of McDowell's position. The anxiety aroused by the picture is described poignantly by Virginia Woolf:

I begin to draw a figure and the world is looped in it, and I myself am outside the loop; which I now join—so—and seal up, and make entire. The world is entire, and I am outside of it, crying, 'Oh save me, from being blown for ever outside the loop of time!' (Woolf 1931: 21-22)¹

This Inside/Outside picture gets to the heart of McDowell's project. What McDowell proposes is that we should reject the Inside/Outside picture. Of course, it is also important for him to say what remains when we jettison this Inside/Outside picture, and to explain how the problem of constraint is to be addressed from the point of view of that remainder. What remains when we jettison the Inside/Outside picture? McDowell's answer is: forms of life, and the second nature to which they give rise.

McDowell's theory of ethics involves shifting to a moral phenomenology: responsiveness to moral requirements arises from within a form of life, a shaping of moral perception, or second nature as he calls it. McDowell's view is that moral perception arises from within a form of life. This leads him to say the following kinds of things:

In my picture, actions that manifest virtue are responses to requirements to act that agents confront in the situations they act in, so that if one fails to act as virtue requires, without being prevented, that reveals at least partial blindness to facts about the world. (2013: 52)

But a moral phenomenology presupposes being embedded in a form of life, or a way of being. The problem of constraint raises the concern that a form of life, or a way of being, may itself be broken or defective. We might think of a second nature as equipment. We might then articulate the problem of constraint by thinking about what Heidegger describes in terms of our equipment's potential unhandiness, conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy (cf. Heidegger 1927: 68-69):

¹ The quote from Woolf is given by Maximilian de Gaynesford to characterize much the same picture in de Gaynesford's book on Putnam. Cf. de Gaynesford 2006: 128.

Beings nearest at hand can be met up with in taking care of things as unusable, as improperly adapted for their specific use. Tools turn out to be damaged, their material unsuitable.

A whole way of going on can become (or be realized to have already been) unhandy, or it might at least threaten to do so, as illustrated by the examples mentioned above.

To take an example, consider how technological advances may open the way, as some futurists speculate (and the matter is not completely one of speculation, I aver), to modifications to human abilities which could lend meaning to the notion of a post-human mode of being. Gene editing could lead to offspring with extraordinary abilities. For the sake of simplicity, we can borrow from science fiction to envision what such abilities might look like: enhanced speed and strength, remarkable capacities to heal from injuries, cognitive capacities transcending those humans currently possess, etc. Even current research in prosthetics seeks to improve human performance. In the latter case, it is not a stretch to imagine the moral quandary of someone perhaps wanting to have their natural born limbs replaced with high performance prosthetics. A human way of going on could at least be seen as threatening to fail to give guidance with respect to such cases. The general point (put a bit more abstractly, but it is impossible to make the unknowable future concrete, after all) is that a way of going on is static and backward looking, and is, thus, poorly equipped for the task of providing moral guidance when we consider how reality may intrude, in completely unforeseeable ways. To borrow language from Husserl, we could speak of how, in the face of the possible continuances of experience, “under circumstances, the whole perception, so to speak, *explodes* and splits up into ‘conflicting physical thing-apprehensions’” (Husserl 1913: 332). The point applies, of course, not only to thing-apprehensions, but in the case of moral phenomenology, value-apprehensions as well.

McDowell acknowledges that ethical thinking is “under a standing obligation to reflect about and criticize the standards by which, at any time, it takes itself to be governed,” and he says that “the appropriate image is Neurath’s, in which a sailor overhauls his ship while it is afloat” (McDowell 1994: 81). But there are some questions to ask about this suggestion. Most urgently, we might ask, is Neurath’s image quite compatible with the picture where the appropriate model of constraint is in terms of going on in a mode of absorbed coping? In other words, it seems that the

problem of constraint metastasizes in cases calling for adaptation of the form of life itself, where the form of life itself is, or has, perhaps, become, problematic, e.g., not as in the case of Atlanta circa 2005 where the form of life is perfectly well-equipped to tell us that such a way of going on has become toxic, but as in circumstances such as those where we are forced to consider, say, the question of posthuman options. In the face of the metastasized problem of constraint, McDowell diverts to epistemological coherentism, rather than to moral phenomenology. As I shall eventually explain, McDowell can defend the shift to coherentism, from the epistemological and metaontological point of view, by maintaining that coherentism looks like “wheels spinning frictionlessly in a void” only from the standpoint of someone caught in the grip of the Inside/Outside picture. This anxiety is dispelled when one has been released from the picture.

That is McDowell’s view, in any case. His approach to the problem of constraint, in its metastasized form, follows the line of an anti-foundationalist epistemology and metaontology.

McDowell’s anti-foundationalist epistemology gels with his global metaontological deflationism. As I explain at greater length below, in Chapter Three, section three, metaontological deflationism is the position of someone refusing to take first-order ontological questions seriously. Ontology asks the question, ‘What exists?’ More precisely, ontology asks many existence questions, inquiring “Do x’s exist?” of sundry specific kinds of x’s, such as properties, universals, God, persons, chairs, the self, atoms, numbers, modal properties, mereological sums, and so forth. A deflationist about such first order questions thinks we get all the answers we need to such questions in a superficial way, directly out of linguistic rules or conventions, or a form of life, i.e., a way of going on.

I am prepared to accept something like metaontological deflationism about some first-order ontological questions, but not all of them. And, leaving aside ontological questions, ethical questions are another matter. For some first-order ethical questions, I believe we get, on McDowell’s view, a vicious form of the metastasized problem of constraint, outlined above. McDowell’s metaethics emerges at the level of his anti-foundationalist epistemology. The question of what grounds morality arises for the intellect, McDowell says, when it “can step back from the natural impulse and direct critical scrutiny at it” (McDowell 1995: 153). By ‘natural impulse’ he must mean not only biological imperatives but the socially structured aspect of an

individual's nature, shaped by their training in a form of life (or way of going on). It is the intellect's capacity to step back from its nature, in this way, which connects McDowell's view, remarkably, to a first-order ontology of the mind. He writes:

...freedom of action [is] inextricably connected with a freedom that is essential to conceptual thought.... The point is that something whose physical make-up left no free play in how it manifested itself in interactions with the rest of reality, or something whose physical make-up, although it left such free play, somehow precluded the development of the imagination required to contemplate alternatives, could not acquire reason. (ibid 152-153)

McDowell is committed to a Kantian ontology of the will. The point is reinforced through consideration of what McDowell says across many writings, as I show in Chapter Three. The upshot is that McDowell's view could look incoherent. His quietism seems incompatible with holding a constructive philosophical theory about the nature of the will. But, as I discuss in Chapter Three, this is only an apparent incoherence. Being careful about the distinction between ontology and metaontology, McDowell can consistently help himself to a Kantian ontology of the will, at the level of naïve metaphysics, while adopting a global deflationary stance at the level of metaontology.

The problem is that the global metaontological deflationary stance leads to a position which is thoroughly cut off from any notion of external constraint, and it is some notion of external constraint which is needed to address the metastasized problem of constraint in value theory. McDowell can say that the anxious feeling about coherentist epistemology giving way to an image of wheels spinning frictionlessly in the void is an illusion brought on by a disease, or a trap, i.e., by being held by the Inside/Outside picture. But I shall urge that the metastasized problem of constraint is real, not illusory, and that global metaontological deflationism not only does not help dispel the problem, but in fact vitiates the problem.

On McDowell's view, as I am sketching it here, it is at the Neurathian level that the therapeutic philosophical process must occur which is supposed to free us from the problematic Inside/Outside picture. But, as I will argue, the Neurathian epistemological stance is imbricated with McDowell's global metaontological deflationism, which leaves McDowell's view open to

the problems such as the problem of relativism, and to problems about how to understand the posthuman condition. Both of these problems are instances of what I am calling the metastasized problem of constraint. For instance, McDowell needs, in grappling with the metastasized problem of constraint, to help himself to first-order answers to specific first-order ethical and ontological questions. This goes with the Neurathian image of repairing the raft from the materials at hand. But such answers do not ‘bridge rafts,’ so to speak. McDowell’s view lacks adequate resources to address the problem of relativism. A similar difficulty stems from the problem of adaptation to the posthuman condition, or so I shall argue.

My thesis is that we can see the strength of McDowell’s view by examining a train of argument drawn from Plato’s critique of Protagoreanism in the *Theaetetus*.² The claim examined in this dissertation is that, up to a point, McDowell’s view is structurally analogous to Protagoreanism. Plato’s arguments against Protagoreanism track the sorts of complications stemming from the metastasized problem of constraint sketched above. Plato shows that Protagoreanism restricts truth and reality to the occurring present moment. This temporal aspect of the Protagorean view is its Achilles’ heel. Very roughly, Plato’s refutation of Protagoreanism shows that its temporal aspect leaves it incapable of adequately explaining the fact of our reliance on experts in making decisions about what to do, where the outcome of those decisions lies in the future. McDowell’s view, I shall argue, has a temporal aspect which is structurally analogous to what we find in Protagoreanism. While McDowell’s view does not strictly speaking restrict truth and reality to the occurring present moment, as Protagoreanism does, it limits our sensitivity to constraint by confining it within a second nature determined by a form of life. But form of life does not adequately take the unforeseeable future into account. That is the purport of the examples considered above. A way of going on can break or be discovered to have been all along insidiously defective.

The question addressed by my dissertation, then, is whether Plato’s arguments against Protagoreanism transpose, or even partially transpose, to McDowell’s view. The spirit of such a line of argument, brought against making judgment dependent on a form of life, (or habit,

² For a different version of this dissertation, i.e., a dissertation with a slightly different thesis, see the Conclusion for a suggested course of reading alternative to going straight through the dissertation chapter by chapter.

training, tradition, conventions), which would be heavily indebted to the past, is articulated by Thoreau:

No way of thinking or doing, however ancient, can be trusted without proof. What everybody echoes or in silence passes by as true to-day may turn out to be falsehood to-morrow, mere smoke of opinion, which some had trusted for a cloud that would sprinkle fertilizing rain on their fields. What old people say you cannot do you try and find that you can. Old deeds for old people, and new deeds for new. (Thoreau 1854: 117)

I believe that there is something profoundly significant about the relation between truth and time hinted at in Thoreau's remarks. The whole truth must encompass reality as it is in the past, the present, and the future. Any view purporting to tell us something important about ways of going on, i.e., about ethics, must accommodate our beliefs' (including our value beliefs') susceptibility to correction through advancing experience.

To focus in more specifically on the problem with McDowell's view: his view revolves around the question of the relation of metaphysics, specifically ontology, to theory of perception. McDowell postulates an *incorrigible moral sensibility*. This is not to be mistaken for an *infallible* moral sense. It will require a careful examination of McDowell's theory of perception to explain this point in detail, but to preview, very roughly, McDowell distinguishes between the *actualization* of a conceptual capacity and the *exercise* of that conceptual capacity. He believes conceptual capacities are involved in perception, and his theory of ethics commits him to the view that we perceive *when something is good* (i.e., a course of action), just like we perceive *when something is blue*, or *when something is warm*. With the distinction between actualizations and exercises of conceptual capacities, he allows himself to distinguish between *having an F appearance* and *making an F judgment*. This lets him claim that our perceptual judgments are fallible while the appearances arising from our sensory impressions (including the deliverances of moral sense) are, under the right circumstances, incorrigible. I shall argue that this picture shares a common structure with the Protagorean secret doctrine refuted by Plato. By incarcerating truth and reality in the presently occurring moment of perception, Protagoreanism purports to show that perception is incorrigible.

One way to state the argument of my dissertation, then, is as follows:

1. Protagoreanism has a certain structure, as shown by Plato's arguments in the *Theaetetus*.
2. Plato refutes Protagoreanism.
3. McDowell's view has an analogous structure to Protagoreanism.
4. If two views, X and Y, are structurally analogous, then an argument structurally analogous to an argument refuting Y should refute X.
5. Therefore, an argument analogous to Plato's refutation of Protagoreanism refutes McDowell's view.

I assume premise 4. I argue for premises 1 and 2 in Chapter One. I argue for premise 3 in Chapter Two. Chapters Three and Four drive home the implication, showing that McDowell's view fails to ward off a form of vicious relativism, just as it happens to Protagoreanism, according to Plato's arguments, unless Protagoreanism is given a pragmatist twist—and McDowell's quietism does not permit for a structurally analogous adjustment.

To close this introduction, let me summarize by saying that the novelty and importance of my thesis is twofold: (1) it reminds us that the debate between realists and anti-realists is still relevant to contemporary metaethics (this comes out in examining the structure of McDowell's view, which leads to a form of global metaontological deflationism, which is tantamount to a form of global anti-realism, despite McDowell's protests to the contrary), and, (2) in the context of that debate, it shows the continuing vitality of arguments from classical Greek philosophy.

Chapter One Against Protagoreanism

The aim of this chapter is to isolate and elucidate a line of argument Plato gives, in his examination of Protagoreanism, in the *Theaetetus*. The reason for being interested in Plato's critique of Protagoreanism, as explained in the Introduction, is that it can be transposed for the purposes of criticizing McDowell's view. It can be transposed, as I shall eventually explain, because McDowell's view is structurally analogous to Protagoreanism. The structural similarity rests in their temporal structure. Both views postulate accounts of expertise which would explain expertise while leaving out reference to the real nature of future things. This is a weakness in each account. By leaving out reference to the real nature of future things, these views have trouble with what I am calling the metastasized problem of constraint. Plato's arguments in the *Theaetetus* make it explicit how Protagoreanism fails to deal with the problem of constraint. This chapter will give a presentation of some of Plato's arguments against Protagoreanism which can be seen as structurally analogous to arguments one might bring against McDowell's view.

Protagoreanism may or may not be a view which any real philosopher ever held. It is the product of an exercise of rational reconstruction on Plato's part (cf. *Theaetetus* 169d-e and 171d). My own approach to Plato's text should be taken in a similar spirit to what he says about his reconstruction of Protagoreanism. I shall endeavor to provide a plausible reading of the text, but, in the final analysis, "we have to make do with ourselves as we are, I think, and always say what seems to us to be the case" (171d). It is possible that I am misreading Plato, and that Protagoreanism, as much as I sketch of it here, in this chapter, is my own invention. I think, though, that it is possible to give a detailed characterization of such a view, using Plato's very suggestive text, and to see why some philosophers might find such a view attractive.

In the first section of this chapter, I will provide a rough sketch of how I read the *Theaetetus*. This should suffice to let serious scholars of ancient philosophy judge the extent to which my mark-up is faithful to the text. As I say, not much depends, for purposes of the wider argument in this dissertation, on the interpretive issue, although I would be pleased if my reading seems plausible, even if not fully convincing.

The second section explains what Protagoreans hold, that is, it provides a rather systematic sketch of the metaphysical, epistemological, and value-theoretic structure which is under

scrutiny. To remind readers, I believe that these areas of philosophical investigation are inextricably intertwined. I believe Plato's writings show that he, and even the historical Socrates, if I may speak of such an individual, share such a belief. A philosophical view is, or should be, systematic. (I am not arguing for this claim, merely making it explicit.) Protagoreanism is, thus, a system, or, as I prefer to say, a structure.

The third section details the argument from expertise, from which I later extrapolate to an argument against McDowell's view, which I later argue (see the conclusion to Chapter Two, below) shares important structural analogies with Protagoreanism.

Section One A Reading of the *Theaetetus*

I shall, in this section, offer a synopsis of the discussion in the *Theaetetus*. I begin with a broad outline of the whole text, and then I will zoom in to offer a more detailed summary of key parts of the discussion.

Here is my broad outline of the discussion in the *Theaetetus*. The text begins with some front matter which is of literary and historical value, but which need not detain us (142a-143c). Then the cast is introduced (143d-145c), and, following Socrates' initial attempt to get going a philosophical discussion, which ends in an awkward silence (cf. 146a), Socrates begins in earnest with practicing his midwife's art on Theaetetus (146d). Following is a preliminary examination of Theaetetus' first answer to the "What is knowledge?" question, which is a complete non-starter (146e-147c), along with an explanation of what a philosophical theory should do (147d-148e). Then we get a crucial introduction to the philosophical method which Plato attributes to Socrates in this dialogue, the method of the midwife (beginning at 148e-149a and running to 151d; see Sedley 2004 for an excellent discussion of the method and its significance to interpretation of the entire Platonic corpus). With all this introductory material out of the way, we finally get to the argumentative meat of the dialogue. From here, the parts of the discussion map onto the following scaffold:

- (i) Theaetetus provides his first serious theory (knowledge = perception), which Socrates tells us is like this other view, Protagoreanism (cf. 151e-152c).
- (ii) Socrates reconstructs Protagoreanism, explaining how Protagoreanism is supposed to work (152c-160e).

- (iii) Socrates provides some eristic arguments (see below) against Protagoreanism, which Plato does not intend for readers to take seriously, but which lead to further refinements of the view (162c-165e). This section is preceded, however, by an argument which he does think is serious, though, in this part, he presents it in eristic style (161a-162a), and he has Socrates provide a response to this argument, on Protagoras' behalf (166a-168c).
- (iv) Then the serious, dialectical examination of Protagoreanism is given (169e-183c).
- (v) The next part completes the examination of Theaetetus' first theory (184b-186e).
- (vi) Then there is a remarkable examination of Theaetetus' second serious theory, that knowledge is true judgment (187b) (not false judgment—the advance beyond the first theory, here, is that this answer to the “What is knowledge?” question recognizes the distinction between true and false judgment, whereas Protagoreanism and Theaetetus' first theory failed to account for false judgment). This part of the text is extremely interesting, but it shall not be important to what I am doing, so I will not attempt to analyze the structure of the further discussion. For present purposes, this part of the discussion carries forward to the end of the dialogue.

In the remainder of this section, I will focus on parts (ii), (iii), and (iv) of this outline.

Beginning with (ii), this part has four sub-sections. The first, sub-section (a), is where Plato reconstructs Protagoreanism, suggesting that Protagoreanism incorporates a metaphysical doctrine of ancient pedigree subscribed to by a panoply of important figures in ancient Greek history, ranging from Homer to Heracleitus (152d-153d). The metaphysical doctrine in question is the doctrine that the nature of reality is flux (more on this later). The second sub-section, sub-section (b), presents the metaphysics of flux in greater detail (from 153e-154a to 157a), while the third sub-section, sub-section (c), lays out the upshot of this metaphysics, out of which walks the epistemological and value-theoretic wing of Protagoreanism (though he does not spell out the epistemological and value-theoretic consequences of the view precisely at this juncture). The upshot of the view is that reality is relative to the perceiver (157b) (a more precise formulation of this aspect of the view will be given later—here I am offering only a rough sketch). The fourth sub-section goes over the same ground in finer detail, spelling out the relativistic implication of the metaphysics even more clearly (157e-160e):

...whether one uses ‘be’ or ‘come to be’ of something, one should speak of its being, or coming to be, for someone or of something or in relation to something. (160b)

and

...my perception is true for me—because it’s always of the being that’s mine... (160c).

I elaborate on what this means in section two, below.

The only thing I will note about section (iii), from the outline above, is that here Plato has Socrates offer a good argument against Protagoreanism, but the argument is put in eristic style. The argument is where Socrates gives the ‘pig or baboon’ refutation of Protagoras’ ‘man is the measure’ thesis (161c-d). I say this argument is presented in an eristic style. Plato does not regard eristic argumentation as philosophically rigorous. By ‘eristic argumentation,’ I mean arguments which score points, so far as persuasion (of an ignorant audience) is concerned, but which do not have a philosophical idea behind them. The *Euthydemus* is Plato’s treatise against eristic argumentation. He repeats his critique of this style of argumentation in other dialogues (see, for instance, *Philebus* 14c-17a), as well as here in the *Theaetetus* (164c-d, 167e, and—I explain the following attribution in detail later—172e). But, though the ‘pig or baboon’ refutation is presented in eristic style, there is a philosophical idea behind it, which is why Plato had Socrates go over the same point a second time, dialectically, at 169e-171d. That stretch of text establishes the same objection raised eristically at 161c-d, but here the objection is “put on a firm footing,” as he says (169e).

The dialectical formulation of the argument shows that Protagoreanism, lacking the concession forced from Protagoras in response to the ‘pig or baboon’ argument, is self-refuting. We shall examine this argument carefully below in section three.

The nature of expertise becomes the topic of the next argument (Socrates calls it the ‘third argument’ (172d)—I take him to be counting as follows: first, the ‘pig and baboon’ argument; second, the self-refutation argument; third, the argument from expertise (as I shall call it)). The argument from expertise will also be discussed in section three. I take the self-refutation argument and the argument from expertise as the two stages of Plato’s argument which transpose to McDowell’s view, as discussed in later chapters.

To head off a possible objection to my way of reading this sequence of arguments, let me sketch the full picture, as I take it to be, and then I will sketch what seems like a plausible alternative picture, but one which I refuse to follow.

As stated above, Protagoreanism is a systematic view, what I call a structure. I share what I take to be (i.e., I assume to be) the Platonic belief that epistemological and value-theoretic consequences flow out of one's underlying metaphysical view.³ An adjustment in one wing of the total structure is hardly possible without forcing changes to other aspects of the structure. An important upshot of this is that any argument against Protagoreanism, although it may be explicitly targeting one aspect of the structure, must be targeting the other aspects as well. Unlike Quine's famous picture of the web of beliefs facing the tribunal of experience in layers, with outermost layers which are expendable, and innermost layers which are damn nigh incorrigible (e.g., truth-functional logic), my conception of dialectic has it that the total structure rises or falls together—tear down one part, and the whole thing comes crashing down (and I believe this is Plato's conception, but see the note above—similar remarks apply regarding my attribution to Plato of this conception of dialectic).⁴

So, the argument from expertise, while it does not engage with the metaphysics of flux in an overt or obvious way, may be interpreted in such a way that the argument could not make sense without keeping in mind that the metaphysics of flux is also at stake. This point will be borne out in section three when I go into the details of the argument. For now, my main point is simply that what we have, in section (iv) of the outline, above, is a sequence of arguments which target different aspects of a single structure and do so without separating off those aspects from the other aspects of the structure. This contrasts significantly from an alternative way of construing this section of the discussion.

Such an alternative construal might be to take Protagoreanism as a “moving target.” That is, the suggestion would be that the opponent, the defender of Protagoreanism (whoever that would be—Plato is careful not to ascribe the view to anyone other than the historical Protagoras, though he is even chary about that attribution), keeps changing their conception of the view in order to

³ This is an assumption which I believe can be supported, interpretively, but that would be a monumental task.

⁴ It will be clear by this remark why I am quite unsympathetic to analytic philosophy, and why I believe progress in philosophy is so extremely difficult to make (next to impossible...).

adjust to dialectical pressure from Socrates' arguments, a bit like Proteus from the famous myth. This is an attractive way of reading this section of the text precisely because it attributes to the 'Protagorean' that very feature which Protagoreanism claims is the definitive feature of reality, that is, a lack of structure, i.e., the absence of a real nature.⁵ This absence of a real nature could explain, so this reading would suggest, why it is so difficult to pin down what Protagoreanism says, that is, why we seem to get multiple versions of the view.

But we do not get multiple versions of the view. We see different aspects of a single view. We start with a rough or raw, yet quite inaccurate representation of the view, which is addressed by the 'pig and baboon' argument, as well as by the self-refutation argument (169e-171d). The inaccuracy of this representation of the view is adjusted for by Protagoras' response (we will get to Protagoras' response later). Note that Protagoras' response is sandwiched between the 'pig and baboon' argument and the dialectical formulation of that same argument. Protagoras' argument makes a correction to the misrepresentation of the view, in response to the 'pig and baboon' argument, and the point of delivering the self-refutation argument is to show that Protagoras' adjustment really is needed, or else Plato's reconstruction of Protagoreanism would be guilty of being uncharitable. Socrates speaks, later, of Protagoras' correction to the initial portrayal of the view as a concession on Protagoras' part, but this need not be taken as showing that the view has here *changed*.

Then we get the argument from expertise which targets the epistemological and value-theoretic aspects of the view, showing that the view collapses, for the most part, on the side of epistemology and value theory (172a-179b). Following this is the careful examination of the metaphysical doctrine of flux, which brings about the final, total collapse of Protagoreanism's epistemology as well as of its metaphysical underpinning (179c-183c). Its metaphysical underpinning is that reality is always relative to a momentary occurrence of perception. The corollary epistemological claim, which survives the argument from expertise, is that there can be no false judgment about what appears to me in the moment. Here 'appearance' may be construed very broadly. It applies most directly to sensory awareness, but I see nothing in the text compelling us to suppose that a Protagorean, even at this stage of the discussion (i.e., in the

⁵ I owe conversation with Clerk Shaw for this characterization of an alternative way of reading this stretch of the *Theaetetus*, though I do not mean hereby to suggest that he had in mind precisely the account I sketch here, or that he would necessarily endorse anything close to this as his own preferred way of reading the text.

examination of the doctrine of flux) could not think that so-called propositional attitudes, say, might not also count as appearances. I am inclined to think that any momentary mental occurrence is up for grabs here. In other words, I do not think the argument in the examination of the doctrine of flux hinges on what sort of mental occurrence is in question. What the argument in that section does is refute the claim that there can be no false appearances and no false judgments about those appearances, however we construe ‘appearance.’ I will discuss this more in sections two and three.

I refuse, then, to follow the ‘protean’ or ‘moving target’ reading of Protagoreanism in reading this stretch of the text. Hopefully, readers will stick around until the end to hear some of my reasons why. But, for now, I can give one reason. It seems odd to read Plato as allowing that something like a philosophical view could be usefully, or beneficially, represented, that is, represented well, by characterizing it as having the defining trait of Protagoreanism, that is, by characterizing it as lacking a structure. It seems odd, that is, since Plato thinks Protagoreanism is false. It is more plausible, from an exegetical point of view, to read Plato as supposing that the view does have structure, i.e., a real nature. So, it is more plausible to take up the text with the assumption that there is a unified view, one which gradually displays its manifold aspects or guises as we proceed through Socrates’ examination of it. One danger of the other approach, I will add, is that it could lead us to misconstrue some of the arguments.

For example, someone reading what I call the argument from expertise, with the ‘protean Protagoreanism’ interpretive lens, might be surprised when I say this argument is concerned with reference to the real nature of future things. They might look at this stretch of text and wonder, ‘But where does the text say anything about reference? Is it not about how the virtues of justice and piety are dependent on the legal perspectives of different social groupings or states (i.e., how different states legislate concerning justice and piety)?’ It is about that, of course. But, as I shall explain later, the only way to get traction on justice and piety is to be concerned with the real nature of justice, and the real nature of piety, past, present, and future. Also, for anyone skeptical about the claim that this stretch of the text is going to be about reference, I will simply note the following, from the end of the so-called Digression (but I shall offer an interpretation which integrates the so-called ‘Digression’ with the argument of this section, the argument from

expertise, so that it shall be seen as clearly misleading to label this part of the discussion a ‘digression,’ even if Plato himself is the one responsible for so labeling it):

But on the question of what’s good, no one would be brave enough to have the face to contend that whatever a state thinks to be, and lays down as, useful for itself actually is useful so long as it’s laid down: not unless he’s talking about the word. But that would surely be to make fun of what we’re saying, wouldn’t it?

THEODORUS: Yes, it certainly would.

SOCRATES: Well, let’s suppose he’s not talking about the word, but thinking of the thing to which it’s applied.

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But whatever word it applies to it, that’s surely what a state aims at when it legislates.... (177d-e)

Let me wrap up by quickly summing up this section. I have provided an overall sketch of the *Theaetetus*, giving a rough outline of the dialectical portion of the text. I have zoomed in on three (or four) arguments, in this portion, which specifically aim to refute Protagoreanism. It takes multiple arguments to refute Protagoreanism because Protagoreanism, as Plato makes clear in his treatment of the view, has structure, that is, it has layers, or aspects as I have called them. It presents itself in an exoteric guise, fit for popular consumption by the masses. This guise expresses only the theory’s value theoretic implication, along with some of its epistemological implications. This is the part of the view conveyed by Protagoras’ dictum, ‘Man is the measure of all things,’ as Plato has Socrates explain (cf. 152a, esp. 152c, and 155e). There is also an esoteric layer, or ‘secret doctrine,’ which is the target of the examination of the metaphysical doctrine of flux. The exoteric aspect is merely a symptom of the underlying disorder, this false theory of reality. The line of argument I am concerned with, in this dissertation, is the value theoretic argument, i.e., the line of argument exemplified in the self-refutation argument and the argument from expertise.⁶ But as should be clear, that argument trades on Plato’s disagreement

⁶ In an earlier iteration of a revision of yet an earlier iteration of this chapter, I claimed that the most important argument, for purposes of this dissertation, was the argument from expertise, as I call it. I was mistaken. The self-refutation argument and the argument from expertise go hand in hand, and I treat them accordingly in this iteration

with the more basic position, the underlying metaphysical view. Key premises of the argument from expertise, as shall be seen, depend on the fact that a Protagorean is committed to an ontology which leaves out the real nature of future things. That is why it is crucial to discuss the metaphysical view, i.e., the doctrine of flux, as I do in the next section, before turning to the argument from expertise.

Section Two The Protagorean Metaphysics of Flux

I shall, in this section, be focused on a stretch of text from the middle portion of the *Theaetetus*, from about 152c to 183b.

The most succinct formulation of Protagoras' thesis is at *Theaetetus* 152c:

PT (Protagorean Thesis)

Things are, for each person, the way he [or she] perceives them.

Socrates offers the following *gloss* on PT at *Theaetetus* 152c:

GPT (Gloss on the Protagorean Thesis)

Perception is always of what is [i.e., what *exists*], and free from falsehood, as if it's knowledge.

Here four metaphysical and epistemological factors are evidently active on the scene: perception ('perception'), being ('is'), truth ('free from falsehood'), and knowledge ('knowledge'). The "secret doctrine" is supplied by Socrates as motivation for GPT. As it stands, that is, without the secret doctrine as background, Socrates thinks GPT is a bit "gappy," a mere "hint" issued by Protagoras to the "nondescript masses" (152c).

In this section, I shall briefly consider Socrates' preliminary formulation of the secret doctrine, considered as a metaphysical theory, and then look closely at the detailed account of the correlated theory of perception.

The central claim of Protagoreanism is the following:

of the dissertation. I discuss both arguments more closely in section three, below. For a different version of this dissertation, altogether by-passing any discussion of Protagoreanism, see the Conclusion.

NOTI (Not One Thing by Itself)

Nothing is one thing just by itself. (152d)

A consequence of NOTI is this:

NSA (No Speaking of Anything)

You can't correctly speak of anything either as some thing or as qualified in some way.
(152d)

NSA effectively blocks reference as a factor to be considered relevant together with any of the other factors mentioned above, e.g., perception, truth, knowledge, and so on. NSA puts reference by the board. The claim is that it is not possible to *correctly* refer to anything, either to purported properties, or to such things as purported property bearers. By "correctly" I take it he has in mind the idea that an *incorrect* attempt to refer to these sorts of entities inevitably results in dialectical problems of one kind or another.

The thought, here, is that NSA is the direct consequence of NOTI: without accepting NOTI, there would be no reason to believe NSA. But NOTI, while the central claim of the theory, is not the **root** claim. That is, NOTI, in turn, is a consequence of another claim, which is the core metaphysical doctrine of Protagoreanism. This core doctrine is the doctrine of flux:

F (Flux)

Nothing ever is, but things are always coming to be. (152e)

This core doctrine is Protagoreanism's hypothesis. From a methodological standpoint, dialectical metaphysical investigations always require a hypothesis. Very roughly, a dialectician starts with a hypothesis, holding one (or one set of) beliefs *fixed*, and deduces what follows. The method is, in all essentials, the proper method to employ when playing the game *Clue* (if one wishes to win the game). See *Republic* 510 for Plato's rough statement of how the method might work. I take the following, from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, as a pithy way of stating the method:

After all his running down, Bambridge let it out in the course of the evening, when the farmer was absent, that he had seen worse horses go for eighty pounds. Of course he

contradicted himself twenty times over, but when you know what is likely to be true you can test a man's admissions. (Eliot 1871-2: 239).

Of course, Fred Vincy, the character here testing another's admissions, gets things horribly wrong, Eliot's broader point appearing to be either (i) that we often overestimate our knowledge of what is likely to be true, or our ability to test admissions, or both, or else (ii) that a person with the character of a Fred Vincy, at any rate, is prone to making those kinds of mistakes.

In any case, the method here sketched is more or less what they teach in secondary school, and in freshman science classes in college, as the scientific method, and it is, I suggest (I shall not argue this here), as reliable a method as we are likely to find for the production of knowledge.

Hypotheses are weighed against one another by determining which hypothesis (i) encounters the fewest dialectical difficulties and (ii) is most empirically satisfying (i.e., explains the widest number of phenomena).

So much for the preliminary formulation of Protagorean metaphysics. I turn now to the details of the secret doctrine, i.e., Protagoras' alleged esoteric account of perception.

Socrates explains that the secret doctrine depends on F:

Their starting-point, on which everything we've just been saying depends, too, is this: the universe is change and nothing else. (156a)

He observes that there are, according to Protagoreans, two kinds of change, passive change and active change (ibid). The interaction of a passive change with an active change ("their friction against one another") produces *two* "offspring," or *effects*, as we might say. One effect is the occurrence of a perceptual (or phenomenological) content ("a perceived thing", 156b), and the other effect is the perception itself ("a perception," ibid). Examples of perceptions are listed as follows: "seeings, hearings, smellings, feelings of cold, feelings of heat,... pleasures, pains, desires, fears..." (156b). These are just some instances of perceptions for which "we have names," and the "nameless ones are unlimited in number" (ibid). He explains that the *kinds* of perceptions and perceptual contents are correlated to one another by their common sources, i.e., the *kind* of interaction between active changes and passive changes which naturally generates *that kind or class* of [perception + perceptual content] ("the appropriate *class* of perceived things

shares a *common origin* with *each set* of perceptions: colours of every kind with seeings of every kind, sounds with hearings in the same way” and so on, 156b-c, my italics).

Socrates elaborates on this picture, explaining that, according to the theory, when a perception-and-perceptual-content *bundle*, so to speak, is generated by an interacting pair of passive and active changes, the *bundle* changes more quickly than the causes of the bundle, i.e., the interacting pair of passive and active changes (156c-d). To give an example, consider an eye and a stone. Socrates uses this example in the text. At 182a, he explains that the eye is acted on by the stone, the stone acts on the eye. The idea is that when the eye and the stone “come up against” one another, “then at that moment” (i.e., at the specious present—as Socrates says, “the things which are generated are quicker” than the things which generate, 156d) “the eye has come to be full of seeing,” becoming “an eye that sees” (156e), and the stone “which joined in generating the colour has been filled all round with whiteness,” becoming a white stone “or whatever it is that happens to have that sort of colour” (ibid).

It is important, if the theory is to at all have any chance at seeming coherent, not to be misled by Plato’s manner of expression in this passage. The way he puts it *in these lines* makes it sound like there is, according to the theory, an *intrinsically existing* eye and an *intrinsically existing* stone, neither of which itself is in fact a perception or perceptual content, as such, but each of which is *intrinsically the kind of thing it is*, i.e., an eye or a stone. This would be a mistaken reading. The eye and the stone must, in turn, each themselves be *dependent on interactions between other changing entities* (I show Plato’s argument for this below).

Plato further complicates the point by having Socrates allow, in this phase of the discussion, that some changing entities can endure for periods of time. These are the more stable, “parental” changes, that keep their changes “in the same place” (156c-d). They generate the offspring, the instances of changing entities which the theory is meant to explain, i.e., the ones which change more quickly than the others.

Regardless of whether it makes sense, together with a commitment to F, to hold that some changing entities *stay the same through some time*, there can be no difference in *ontological type* between the slower and the quicker instances of changing entities. That is, the active and passive changes must themselves be regarded, in turn, *as changing entities* having been given rise to, in turn, by an interaction between a pair of active and passive changes. Without this, the theory

instantly implodes, since it would have to posit *intrinsically existent* active and passive changes (e.g., eyes and stones). Such intrinsically existent entities (or events) would be incompatible with NOTI. This incompatibility is shown by his deriving NOTI from the apparatus just described, i.e., the distinction between active and passive changes, and the distinction between slow and quick changes. The derivation is in the section of text at 156e-157b, to which I now turn.

He says, “[w]e must think of the other cases, too,” that is, the cases of the eye and the stone, for example, “in the same way,” that is, these cases, as noted above, must come to be out of the intercourse between some other changing entities (157a). This requires that none of these entities, these things which “act... and are acted on,” e.g., the stone and the eye, can be “taken singly [i.e., intrinsically], as being anything” (ibid). Now he suggests that the theory makes a surprising move. He says:

It isn't true that something is a thing which acts before it comes into contact with the thing which is acted on by it; nor that something is a thing which is acted on before it comes into contact with the thing which acts on it. (ibid)

That is, to be an active change is to be a thing which acts, and to be a passive change is to be a thing which is acted on. The claim, here, is that it is false to say of a thing that it *is what it is* independent of being either an active change or a passive change. Nothing can exist without being one of these two kinds of changing entities. But here Socrates presses the theory to take an even more bizarre twist. It makes the existence of the active and passive changes dependent on *their very own interaction*, not on the interaction of some *prior existent* active and passive changes. This claim has what I think of as a vortical quality, identified by Jan Westerhoff as a distinguishing feature of panfictionalist deflationary metaontology. Westerhoff explains that a fictionalist account has the *vortex property* (as I call it) when “[t]he fiction itself subsumes the distinction between fiction and non-fiction” (Westerhoff 2018: 421). The distinction between *things interacting* and *things dependent on the interaction*, i.e., the distinction between cause and effect, is similarly subsumed in what Socrates here says about the Protagorean secret doctrine's account of active and passive changes, i.e., the parents of perceptions and perceptual contents. These entities are fundamental to the coming to be of perceptions and perceptual contents; but they are also, dizzyingly, fundamental to their own coming to be. For there could not come to be any interaction between the eye and the stone without an existent eye and an existent stone; yet

the theory requires that there cannot be an existent eye or an existent stone without there coming to be an interaction between the eye and the stone.

One might wonder whether Plato is being perfectly fair to the theory, at this juncture. Some of the problems he later unwinds from the theory, in his examination of the flux doctrine, stem, ultimately, from setting up the theory in this way, i.e., so that it possesses the vortex property. The question is whether the theory needs to be set up in such a way. Could it be set up differently, to avoid attributing to it the vortex property? For instance, why does Plato think it is required of the theory that it make the active and passive changes themselves dependent on their own interaction? The following seems like an equally plausible way of setting up the account so that it would be equipped with the *specified sorts of entities*, while avoiding the vortex property: *have each changing entity be the product of some other pair of interacting changing entities*, each of which are, in turn, dependent on the interaction of still another pair of interacting changing entities, and so on, until you have an infinitely ascending ancestral tree of active and passive changes. Plato does not provide any explicit reason, *in the passage we are currently examining*, for rejecting such a way of setting up the account.

Here is the line of thought which seems to lead Plato to think the theory needs to be set up in such a way as to inevitably have the vortex property. That is, the following gets deeper into why he might think the occurrence of active and passive changes must depend on their own interactions, not on the interactions of some other active and passive changes, as suggested by the objector in the previous paragraph with the hierarchically structured ancestral tree model.

In the section where Plato has Socrates critically examine the secret doctrine, Socrates distinguishes place changes from alteration changes:

[SOCRATES:] Tell me: do you call it changing when something moves from place to place or revolves in the same place?

THEODORUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: So let's take it that that's one kind of change. And when something is in the same place, but grows old, or becomes black instead of white or hard instead of soft, or undergoes any other alteration, isn't it proper to say that that's another kind of change?

THEODORUS: Yes, one has to say so.

SOCRATES: So I say that there are these two kinds of change: alteration and movement.
(181c-d)

It is clear, as seen above, that he thinks the parents of perceptions and perceptual contents, i.e., the parents which are active and passive changes, involve slower changes, as opposed to the quicker changes characterizing their offspring, perceptual entities. When describing place changes, that is, changes involving some sort of motion, he distinguishes *movement from place to place* from *movement in place*, and the distinction between slow and quick changes depends on that distinction. He says:

Now anything that is slow keeps its changing in the same place, and in relation to the things which approach it, and that's how it generates. But the things which are generated are quicker; because they move, and their changing naturally consists in motion. (156c-d)

Quicker changes are *generated*, while slower, stable changes, are *generators*. Quicker changes require movement from place to place, while slower changes presuppose movement in place.

So, it is impossible for a generator to be generated by some other generator: x's being generated by another generator, y ($\neq x$), would require that x's movement be from place to place, but then x could not, in turn, be a generator of z ($\neq x$), because generators cannot have movement from place to place, only movement in place.

This argument might still seem not perfectly satisfactory. It could seem that it only pushes the question back without really addressing it. The question is, "Why set theory T₁ up this way?," where theory T₁ posits active and passive changes dependent on their own interactions. Setting T₁ up in this way leads to T₁'s having the vortex property, as seen above. Plato's answer appears to be, "Because theory T₂ has to be set up this other way," where T₂ posits slow and quick processes as dependent on the distinction between the two kinds of motion, movement from place to place versus movement in place. But why accept that T₂ has to be set up in such a way? It seems plausible to suppose that x's movement could be movement in place from the point of view of one context of analysis, while being movement from place to place from the perspective of a different context of analysis.

Of course, a defender of Plato's critique of the secret doctrine could insist, at this point, that it is illicit to appeal to different contexts of analysis, here, *precisely because the key claim at stake is the claim that truth or knowledge is relative to a point of view, i.e., relative to different contexts of analysis*, and it would be circular to appeal to such contextualism or perspectivism in setting up the account (i.e., the secret doctrine) which is supposed to justify such contextualism or perspectivism.

This concludes my presentation of the details of Protagoras' account of perception. Now it is time to consider, more closely, how F, NOTI, and NSA either figure in this account, or walk out of it. The account is premised on F, and it reaches NOTI as a conclusion. NSA is a further implication of NOTI. F requires the theory to postulate as fundamental entities such things as active and passive changes. I have considered Plato's reasons for thinking that this fundamental ontology implies that everything is, to borrow a concept from Buddhism, interdependently arisen. That is, we just considered why Plato would think that even active and passive changes' occurring must depend on their own interactions with each other, in a dizzying feat of ontological bootstrapping. Nothing, on the fundamental ontology forced on us by F, can be *one thing by itself*. Everything is dependent on an interactive relation with something else in order to occur. This is the claim formulated above as NOTI. Plato suggests that NSA follows from NOTI, via an intermediate principle and a consequent methodological proposal. The intermediate principle can be formulated as follows:

RCB (Relativity of Coming to Be)

Things are always coming to be for someone. (157a-b)

Plato sets up RCB as directly following from NOTI. If we just consider the fundamental "entities" required by the theory's ontology, due to NOTI no active change or passive change is intrinsically existent. "Existent," as we shall see later, is a problematic notion, due to F. If we try to work around the constraint of a ban on the term 'existent,' by allowing ourselves 'occurrent entity,' for ease of exposition, we can formulate the idea this way: occurrent entity x only occurs for another occurrent entity y which, in turn, only occurs for occurrent entity x. This expresses the vortex property, noted above. "Occurring" is simply "coming to be," so, in RCB, the formula "coming to be for someone" is supposed to capture the vortical quality characterizing the theory's fundamental entities (bearing in mind how tricky it is here to even speak of

‘fundamental entities’). Once RCB has been teased out of NOTI, Socrates concludes his treatment of the secret doctrine by recommending some methodological constraints on the sorts of terms to be used in talking about the theory’s fundamental ontology. The methodological proposal is to ban any expression which “brings things to a standstill” (157b). Terms such as ‘be,’ ‘something,’ ‘someone’s,’ ‘my,’ ‘this,’ ‘that’ and so on are to be excluded from any discussion purporting to articulate the Protagorean theory. The positive formulation of this proposal is the recommendation to use certain forms of language in expressing the theory’s ideas:

SCB (Speak of [things as] Coming to Be)

Use expressions that conform to the nature of things and speak of them as coming to be.
(157b)

The reason for insisting on this methodological constraint, he explains, is that if we insist on using terms not conforming to the nature of things, i.e., flux and interdependent arising, then we shall inevitably trip into all kinds of dialectical puzzles (or so say Protagoreans): “if anyone brings things to a standstill by what he says, he’ll be easy to refute in doing that” (ibid). Later in the discussion, SCB is the launchpad to Plato’s argument against the metaphysics of flux (this is the argument we will not consider because it is not salient for the purposes of this dissertation). Part of that argument involves showing that NSA is the direct consequence of SCB, i.e., that even though SCB, as a methodological proposal, may sound reasonable enough, and feasible to implement, actually it is not. For now, the take-away is that there is a clear line from F to NSA, and NSA effectively *renders reference, truth, and reality explanatorily neutral* from the standpoint of Protagoreanism, unless these notions are restricted to what is presently appearing or coming to be for someone.

That completes my take on Protagoreanism’s metaphysical underpinnings. It was necessary to consider these matters because they are relevant to the argument, later, that Protagoreanism and McDowell’s view are structurally analogous. Also, key formulae discussed above are relevant to the discussion in the next section, which focuses on the stages of Plato’s argument which I argue are transferrable to the task of examining McDowell’s view.

Section Three The Self-Refutation Argument and the Argument from Expertise

I claim that Plato effectively refutes Protagoreanism with the self-refutation argument. A version of this argument transposes to McDowell's view, as I argue in Chapter Four. The Protagorean responds to the self-refutation argument by making, as I will call it, a proto-pragmatist adjustment, offering a restricted form of the basic Protagorean view. Plato gives the argument from expertise to show that the proposed restrictions are incoherent. I discuss the argument from expertise, below, for its intrinsic interest. But, as I shall later discuss, the option of a proto-pragmatist adjustment does not lie open to McDowell because of his quietism.

This self-refutation argument, as the name suggests, shows that Protagoreanism, in opening the door to a global relativism, ends up refuting itself. This argument, I take it, shows why no form of global relativism is defensible (it is a 'dismal slough,' as Tom Tillemans says; cf. Tillemans 2011 and Tanaka 2016). Very roughly, here is how I paraphrase the argument:

- (1) Everyone who believes in expertise believes there can be both true and false judgments (i.e., the non-expert about X is more likely to have a false judgment about X than the expert about X).
- (2) Protagoras' 'man is the measure' remark implies that there can be only true judgments, no false judgments.
- (3) By (2), the judgment held by everyone who believes in expertise must be true.
- (4) The judgment held by everyone who believes in expertise implies that (2) is false.
- (5) Therefore, Protagoras' 'man is the measure' remark commits him to a self-refuting thesis: the thesis that there can be only true judgments is self-refuting because it implies that the judgment that 'the thesis that there can only be true judgments is false' must be true. That is, it implies, if it is true, that it itself must be false.

Protagoras' correction to Socrates' representation of the theory, in response to the self-refutation argument, acknowledges the existence of expertise with respect to the good and the bad, i.e., with respect to what is advantageous or beneficial. That is, the view acknowledges the possibility of distinguishing between good and bad. Yet it insists on relativism with respect to justice and piety, that is, it still denies the existence of expertise with respect to justice and piety. In other words, the Protagorean is committed to the claim that the virtues of justice and piety are relative to whatever each individual state legislates about "what's just or unjust, in conformity with

religion or not” (172a).⁷ The argument from expertise aims to show that judgments concerning justice and piety are integrally related to judgments concerning good and bad, so that it is incoherent to allow for expertise concerning the good while denying expertise concerning justice and piety. On the way of reading Plato’s argument from expertise advocated here, the so-called Digression (172c-177c) is at the center of the argument from expertise. Plato clinches the argument from expertise from 177c to 179b.

In the argument from expertise, Plato can be taken as addressing a proto-pragmatist view. The claim that there is no expertise concerning justice and piety is a restricted form of GPT, the claim that

Perception is always of what is [i.e., what *exists*], and free from falsehood, as if it’s knowledge (see above, section two).

This amounts to adopting a deflationary stance toward truth, at least for judgments concerning justice and piety. Since every such claim is true, i.e., free from falsehood, truth in effect cancels out, like Wittgenstein’s beetle in the box. The trick, then, for the Protagorean, as for modern day pragmatists, is to hold together such a deflationary stance toward truth with the concession, concerning the good, that there can be expertise concerning judgments about the good and the bad. The argument from expertise drives the Protagorean (at any rate) against the wall by showing the incoherence of conceding expertise concerning good and bad while attempting to dispense with recourse to anything like the distinction between true and false judgments.

What the argument from expertise does, then, is to show that the implications of the self-refutation argument (sketched above in section one) extend from judgments concerning good to judgments concerning justice and piety.

It will be recalled that the strategy employed by Protagoras, in his response to the self-refutation argument, is to attempt to substitute pragmatic value for truth. Whatever is valued as good and bad by the perceiver (which is a matter of the perceiver’s preference, or a matter to be decided by the state in which the perceiver lives, as it goes on to say in the section we are considering)

⁷ See Sedley 2004: 64-65, especially n. 16, on the relevance of the argument in this section to justice and piety. I omit discussion of ‘fair’ and ‘foul,’ associated with aesthetic judgment (the passage at 172a begins by mentioning the trio of opposite pairs—“admirable or dishonourable, just or unjust, in conformity with religion or not,” in McDowell’s translation).

should function as an Ersatz form of truth. Let us look more closely, then, at how this Protagorean/pragmatist response to the self-refutation argument is supposed to work. Then we will look at how this bears on the details of the Digression, and the argument from expertise.

Protagoras defines a ‘wise’ person, that is, an expert, i.e., someone possessing specialized knowledge in a particular field, as “anyone who can effect a change in one of us, to whom bad things appear and are, and make good things both appear and be for him” (166d). Here Protagoras explicitly replaces truth with value, converting the valuable (i.e., the appearance of good things) into an Ersatz form of truth, as pragmatists do. He asks us to consider an example raised by Socrates in an earlier section of the dialogue: the example of how food tastes to a sick person contrasted with how the same food tastes to a healthy person.

Socrates healthy and *Socrates ill* are affected differently by the same wine because Socrates healthy is intrinsically different from Socrates ill, according to the example Socrates discusses with Theaetetus when showing him what a debater would do with the *knowledge is perception* theory (159b-160b). The secret doctrine suggests that the difference in perceptions, in the two cases, that is, the wine’s tasting sweet and bitter, respectively, is due to the distinctive motions of the interacting factors, i.e., the wine and Socrates healthy, in the one case, and the wine and Socrates ill, in the other. Protagoras suggests that there is no way to develop a way of talking about expertise based on any kind of truth or reality independent of the individual perceiver and perceived, when thinking about this example. It is not possible to make either Socrates healthy or Socrates ill wiser or more ignorant, with respect to any intrinsic truth or reality of the wine’s tasting sweet or bitter, because all the truth or reality there is to the wine’s tasting sweet or bitter is contained in its *being perceived as such*, according to the secret doctrine (166e-167a), that is, according to RCB. There is nothing more to how the wine tastes over and above its being perceived a certain way from a certain perspective. But, Protagoras insists, there is still sense to the idea of one of the two conditions’ being better than the other (167a). Since that is so, it is feasible to talk about expertise in terms of the capacity to bring about either of the relevant conditions by affecting the motions responsible for the conditions’ arising. That is, the expert can alter the state of Socrates healthy, or Socrates ill (What about the wine!?), to effect a change from tasting bitter to tasting sweet, whichever is supposed to be “better.” Protagoras maintains that there can thus be expert doctors, expert gardeners (here he remarkably suggests that

gardeners alter how things appear to the plants!), and expert sophists (i.e., expert teachers of the art of persuasion) (167c).

This institutes a pragmatic criterion for whether someone possesses expertise. The expert is someone who can effect a change from worse to better. This criterion ignores intrinsic truth and reality because, by the terms of the secret doctrine, there could not possibly be any change effected from having less to having more intrinsic truth or reality. There could not be any change from less to more intrinsic truth or reality because there is no intrinsic truth or reality. As noted above, there is no more to the truth and reality of a perception than what it contains in the moment in which it occurs. The criterion substitutes experience of the valued (i.e., of whatever is regarded as “better”) as an Ersatz to do the work which a more objectivist theory of truth and reality might have sought to have done by reference to intrinsic truths, i.e., by reference to the real natures of things.

So that is the Protagorean response to the self-refutation argument. The concession that there can be expertise concerning the good and the bad amounts to instituting a pragmatic criterion, which goes hand in hand with adopting a deflationary stance toward truth and reality. In pressing against the Protagorean’s insistence that there still cannot be expertise concerning justice and piety, the argument from expertise ultimately targets this notion of a pragmatic criterion, i.e., it calls into question the Protagorean’s deflationary stance toward truth and reality, which, as we can see, the Protagorean attempts to hold onto even in the face of the self-refutation argument (so that the concession that there can be expertise concerning the good and the bad turns out to be no concession at all).

Now we can turn to the argument from expertise. I begin with a sketch of the thought that is behind the argument from expertise, and then we will look closely at the crucial step needed for the argument to work, the step provided by the Digression.

The argument from expertise proceeds by the method of dialectic. To pinpoint the real nature of whatever is useful, advantageous, beneficial, i.e., “better,” it is crucial to identify “the whole class in which what’s useful belongs” (178a). Whenever enquiring into large classes, for the purpose of pinpointing the nature of a real thing, Plato the dialectician begins with some large nature, or structure (or we could call it a natural kind) which cuts reality dialectically, i.e., which

lays a dyadic grid onto everything real and compels a “Yes” or “No” answer to the question, “Is it this, or not?” (cf., for instance, the dialectical investigations of the real natures of anglers, sophists, and statesmen, in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*). The large nature he starts with, in the enquiry into the nature of the useful, is *time*.

Time, or the class of all times, can be divided dualistically into the non-future and the future. Is the useful in the class of non-future times, or in the class of future times? Or, framed in terms of “Yes” or “No,” the procedure is to ask of each subdivision of time whether the class of useful things belongs to it, or not. The answer, as Plato suggests, is that “[w]hat’s useful is surely something to do with the future” because legislation, which lays down laws for the future, is carried out “in the belief that they’re [i.e., the laws are] *going to be* useful” (178a, italics added). The argument from expertise takes the pragmatic criterion to task for not being capable of providing authoritative judgments about what is going to be useful. The reason why the pragmatic criterion fails, in this regard, is that it attempts to segregate what is valuable, i.e., the good, from (intrinsic) truth and reality. In the case of Protagoreanism, the way it does this is to effectively incarcerate truth and reality, restricting truth to the specious present. As Plato writes:

Protagoras, you and your followers say that a man is the measure of all things which are white, heavy, light, or anything of that sort; because he has in himself the authority for deciding about them, and when he thinks they’re the way he experiences them, he thinks things which are true for him and things which are [i.e., exist, i.e., are real] for him.
(178b)

By relativizing truth and reality to appearances, the Protagorean secret doctrine neutralizes the relevance of expertise, or authoritative judgment, by restricting such expertise, or authority, to the confines of the present moment, i.e., to the non-future. But, Plato writes (178c), “Protagoras (we’ll say), what about the things which are going to be, in the future?”

For the pragmatic criterion to appeal to anything like knowledge of what is useful, i.e., what is going to be useful *in the future* (the class of useful things overlapping with the class of future things), it must overstep the bounds of the Protagorean view.

This is all to sketch the thought that is behind the argument from expertise, that is, the opposition between Plato’s way of thinking and the way of thinking to which Protagoreans are driven by

their commitment to a metaphysics of flux. One thing that is missing from this sketch, however, is the crucial link between knowledge of what is useful, on the one hand, and justice and piety, on the other. The argument from expertise is supposed to show that relativism about justice and piety will not work. To elucidate the argument using the above sketch of the thought behind the argument, we will need to see evidence for such a link, in Plato's thinking, between wisdom (knowledge of what is useful, or we can also say knowledge of the good), on the one hand, and the so-called virtues of justice and piety. I say 'so-called' to specifically call into question the allegation that what we are dealing with here is a plurality of virtues, rather than just one virtue thought of in different ways.

To show such a link exists, I follow Penner's treatment of the thesis of the unity of virtue (cf. Penner 1973). This is the thesis that when Socrates said 'Virtue is one,' he meant it literally (Penner 1973: 35). Against the more common interpretation of Socrates' thesis as meaning something like

- (1) A person is brave if and only if they are wise
 - If and only if they are temperate
 - If and only if they are just
 - If and only if they are pious,

Penner reads Plato's Socrates as asserting the stronger thesis that

- (2) Bravery = wisdom = temperance = justice = piety (cf. *ibid* p. 36).

As Penner and Rowe note (Penner and Rowe 2005: 83 n. 41), this approach to thinking about virtue is "in line with that (other) well-known Socratic dictum 'virtue is knowledge,' around which several Platonic dialogues, e.g., *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, and *Laches*, are constructed." But what is the relevance of what Plato does in all these other dialogues to what is going on in the *Theaetetus*? This question presses us into exegetical territory that is, for reasons indicated above, which I repeat below, irrelevant to the purposes of this dissertation. Yet, following Penner throughout here (if only for the sake of consistency), the *Theaetetus* belongs with those writings in which "the main character (often, but not always, Socrates) speaks for the views of Plato" (Penner 1992: 124) as opposed to speaking for the historical Socrates. Penner has argued, however, that Platonic ethics is continuous with Socratic ethics because the Form of the Good, a key metaphysical postulate in, for instance, the *Republic*, is simply the Form of Advantage, i.e.,

of that greater advantage of the just human being which is that human being's greater happiness (cf. Penner 2007e: 93). The claim that the just human being finds greater advantage than the unjust human being is, of course, the cornerstone of Socratic ethics. As Penner observes, the claim that Socratic ethics and Platonic ethics are continuous depends on there not being too much weight placed on any "surplus metaphysical value of the Form of Advantage," i.e., nothing crucial about the "metaphysical, theological, moral or mystical overtones" which Plato adds in speaking of the Form of Advantage, as opposed to "benefit or advantage pure and simple," which "according to Aristotle" is "to be found in Socrates" (ibid).

My aim here is not to defend any view about the interpretation of Plato's writings. The goal is to extract an interesting argument which has application, later, in the discussion of McDowell's view. To the extent that the argument thus extracted is plausibly an argument Plato could have had in mind, all the better. I am, particularly, not invested in the debate whether the philosophy Penner extracts from Plato's writings and ascribes to the 'historical Socrates' is in fact a view that may have been held by the historical Socrates. This question does not interest me. So, the question of the continuity between Socratic and Platonic ethics can be regarded as a moot point, for current purposes. In any case, even Penner would agree that at some time during his career, Plato subscribed to a view with at least metaphysical, theological, and mystical overtones (not moral overtones) (see Penner 1987). For the purposes of selling the idea that the argument from expertise is at least plausibly an argument Plato could have had in mind, I shall assume (not a wild assumption, I aver) that the author of the *Theaetetus* was at least still tempted by those metaphysical, theological, and mystical ideas. It becomes difficult to make sense of the so-called Digression if we ignore these religious elements of Plato's (middle period) philosophy (if I may lump together as 'religious elements' the peculiar metaphysics, theology, and mysticism characteristic of certain exciting passages in Plato's corpus). When we see the central role played by these religious elements in the Digression, and then how these fit together with the doctrine of the unity of virtue in driving home the argument from expertise, it will not be a surprise that modern philosophers have generally ignored the Digression (as mentioned above).

The Digression is a lookbook for the concept of apotheosis, which arose to great importance in Christian ascetic theology, significantly with Origenists such as Evagrius of Pontus, as well as

the Cappadocians, such as Gregory of Nyssa (see, for instance, Corrigan 2009, Ramelli 2015).⁸ Plato has Socrates set up a contrast, familiar to modern philosophers who still religiously teach the *Apology* in freshman Philosophy courses even while they ignore the concept of apotheosis, the contrast between those who care for their belongings and the city's belongings, as opposed to those who care for their own greatest good (cf. *Apology* 36c-d). In the Digression, the latter sort are the philosophers, and they are contrasted with those who "are always short of time when they speak, because they're hurried on by the clock; and they aren't allowed to make speeches about anything they please, but the opposing counsel stands over them, equipped with compulsion in the shape of a document specifying the points outside which they may not speak..." (*Theaetetus* 172e).⁹ The non-philosophers are concerned with business and politics, with their careers and making money. In short, they seek to find the Good, or advantage, their greatest good, i.e., happiness, in "this region here" (cf. 176a). According to the Digression (setting aside the question where else in Plato's writings we may find a similar view expressed), it is not possible to destroy evil in "this region here." That is why a person's greatest good consists in escaping "from here to there" (176a), and the only way to do that is to become god-like, to become as much like a god as it is possible for a human being to be, which, here, he says means becoming as just as it is possible to be. That is because "A god is by no means and in no way unjust, but as just as it's possible to be, and there's nothing more like a god than one of us who has become as just as possible" (176c). It is clear, also, from what he says a little later, that he has in mind something analogous to the Pythagorean doctrine of reincarnation, which of course shares resonances with South Asian karma theory (cf. 177a; Plato's fascination with something like this account of the afterlife is well known; also, see, for instance, Obeyesekere 2002).

While I am sympathetic to attempts to naturalize Platonic ethics, it probably gives the best reading of the argument from expertise to take the role of the concept of apotheosis just as seriously as Penner wants us to take the idea of the unity of virtue. (We can step back from taking it so seriously, later.) What we get, when we put together these ideas, the unity of virtue, and apotheosis as the goal of the good life, is a clear picture of what ethical expertise must amount to: it must amount precisely to knowing what is useful, or advantageous, namely,

⁸ I am not using the word 'apotheosis' in any special sense. Readers without any background in theology or religion should nevertheless be familiar with what the word means. It simply means 'becoming godlike' or 'becoming god.'

⁹ Plato would have detested writing for the modern academic milieu as much as I do.

whatever is conducive to becoming godlike. So, even the so-called virtues of justice and piety require something like the concession that there is expertise with respect to the good and the bad. Given the unity of virtue, there must be expertise with respect to piety and justice, because the wisdom acknowledged by the Protagorean, concerning the good and the bad, is, by the unity of virtue, justice and piety and temperance and courage. This contradicts the claim that there is no expertise concerning justice and piety.

We can look to (RCB), discussed above in section two, for the error theory explaining why Protagoreanism ends up with this contradiction. By the Digression's account of the ethical importance of apotheosis, knowing what is useful or advantageous must be knowledge of what is going to be useful *in the future*, in a quite literal sense: apotheosis is useful to an immortal soul after the person-whose-soul-that-is dies. I cannot think of anything more 'in the future,' for myself and for anyone reading this, than the time after we die. That is where the useful is 'located,' so to speak, for the author of the Digression, keeping in mind that the Digression is a part of the argument from expertise. Protagoreanism, by attempting to restrict expertise with respect to the good and the bad to the present appearance, leaves out precisely what virtue aims at, the useful or advantageous. Protagorean expertise concerning the good and the bad aims in the wrong direction. Thus, in undermining the thesis that there is no expertise concerning justice and piety, the argument from expertise simultaneously damages the Protagorean response to the self-refutation argument, that is, the appeal to a quasi-pragmatist criterion for whether someone possesses expertise concerning the good and the bad.

Here the point can be phrased in terms of the principle of real reference and the notion of the desire for the real Good. When I want to be just, or pious, I want whatever justice or piety really is, even if that is not what I think it is. Protagoreanism disagrees with the principle of real reference because, by (RCB), there is nothing for justice or piety to be other than what I presently think they are, i.e., how they appear for me now. This is equivalent to restricting my aim to what presently appears and leaving out the future. My thinking 'justice is such and such' makes justice appear a certain way to me (again, allowing for a broad construal of 'appear'). By distinguishing the virtues, e.g., separating justice and piety from wisdom with respect to what is advantageous, one follows Protagoreanism into the error of allowing that justice and piety could be nothing more than what I think they are (or, more precisely, what a particular state thinks or

legislates them to be). When we realize, as Plato tries to get us to, that what is advantageous or useful is always part of the future, not of the non-future, we can see that what desire for the real Good aims at, i.e., the advantageous or useful, is always something lying beyond the limits of how we presently think of it or conceptualize (or just describe) it. It is something which could never be fully taken up in a concept, or conceptualization, because it exists in the future, not the non-future. The present appearance (which is determined by conceptualization, though it can also be determined by training, habit, education, and so forth), on the other hand, exists in the non-future. To sum up the argument from expertise, then, we could say that it is as simple as saying: you were looking for this thing, wisdom of how to get advantage (=piety=justice and so on), over here, in this (i.e., in the non-future), but it is really over there, in that (i.e., in the future). Here it would be helpful if someone were to draw a picture of a finger on the hand of someone standing off from both the present and the future, pointing back and forth between the two. To go back to the dialectic method: the argument lays a dyadic grid onto everything real and compels a “Yes” or “No” answer to the question, “Is it this, or not?” The dyadic grid, in this case, is the opposition “future” and “non-future.” The question is whether the useful deals with the future or the non-future. For the non-future (e.g., the present moment), the answer is “no”; for the future, the answer is “yes.”

Conclusion

That is Plato’s argument from expertise against Protagoreanism. I maintain that the argument extends to any view which, like Protagoras’ view, separates value from truth, and does so in such a way as to leave out the real natures of future things. Views which seek to downplay, eliminate, or otherwise neutralize the significance of truth and reality tend to have the relevant kind of structure to get into dialectical trouble trying to provide a plausible account of expertise. In Chapter Three and Chapter Four, I shall concentrate on showing that McDowell’s view gets into this kind of trouble.

But before turning to that discussion, I want to consider a serious objection to McDowell’s view. The objection is raised by Tyler Burge. In Chapter Two, I will consider more carefully how McDowell’s work relies on Sellarsian (and, ultimately, Kantian) epistemology, and then I will consider Burge’s argument against Sellarsian (and other) types of views about perception, as well as McDowell’s reply to Burge. What we will find, in this discussion, is that McDowell’s

epistemological theory, specifically his account of the role of perception in knowledge, is profoundly cut off from any conception of external constraint. My claim, ultimately, shall be that without recourse to some conception of external constraint, a view becomes incapable of addressing the problem of relativism in value theory.

Chapter Two Perceptual Incorrigeability

In this chapter I shall show that McDowell's theory of perception hinges on the claim that our perceptual capacity is incorrigible, and I shall argue that McDowell's account of perception is thus structurally analogous to Protagoreanism because the Protagorean claims that *how things appear to one* amounts to an incorrigible perception arising in the specious present moment.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section one, I shall consider McDowell's critique of Sellars's interpretation of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic. This provides crucial background for understanding McDowell's account of how conceptual capacities are involved in perception. Section two considers Tyler Burge's critique of Sellarsian views, which takes in McDowell's account of perception. Section three presents McDowell's response to Burge's critique. Even though McDowell criticizes Sellars, McDowell's complaint is that Sellars' reading of Kant, and Sellars' own epistemology when it comes to the limits of explaining the phenomenological features of perceptual content, only sin against Sellars' own better lights, as McDowell takes these to be. In the conclusion to the chapter, building on the results in section three, I argue that McDowell's theory of perception has the same structure as Protagoreanism.

Section One McDowell on Sellars on Kant on Conceptual Capacities in Perception

McDowell believes that much modern philosophy, especially much of what is wrong with modern philosophy, can be explained by the idea that a certain picture of the mind's relation to the world has, as Wittgenstein says, *held us captive*. McDowell describes this picture as leading to the peculiarly modern anxiety that there is "a difficulty about the capacity of our mental activity to be about reality at all" (McDowell 2000: 243). McDowell calls this a "transcendental anxiety" (ibid). I discussed the picture he is worried with, in the Introduction. It is the picture which, as mentioned there, Charles Taylor calls an Inside-Outside picture, which "portrays our understanding of the world as taking place in a zone, surrounded by and (hopefully) in interaction with a world, which is thus seen as playing the role of Outside to its Inside" (Taylor 2002: 106; see McDowell 1994: 26). McDowell explains that people caught in the grip of this picture fail to recognize the nature of the kind of anxiety which troubles them, mistaking a transcendental anxiety for an epistemological anxiety (McDowell 2000: 243-44). He says that they have merely "a vague inkling that thought's hold on reality is coming into question" (244).

He approvingly cites Rorty's comment that analytic philosophy's "concern about how language hooks on to reality" is a "late-coming counterpart to an anxiety about how thought hooks on to reality" (ibid, citing ch. 6 of Rorty 1979).

McDowell traces the source of this transcendental anxiety back to two thoughts which synergize to create, as he says, employing a Wittgensteinianism, a "conceptual bind" (246). The two thoughts are (cf. McDowell 2000: 246-7):

Empiricism

This is the thought that empirical content depends on answerability to impressions.

and

The Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument

This says that impressions could not be the kind of thing to which something could be answerable, because the idea of an impression is the idea of a natural phenomenon, and, as Sellars points out, the logical space of reasons cannot be identified as the logical space of nature.

We can better understand the nature of the problem McDowell finds here if we look at his characterization of one possible approach to solving it. McDowell pointedly contrasts his own resolution to the "conceptual bind" with that of Donald Davidson (cf., for instance, Davidson 2001). He describes Davidson's coherentism as remaining trapped within the problematic picture, "with a reality outside the boundary impinging inward on the system" (McDowell 1994: 34) but not in a way which could count as making the system of beliefs *answerable* to impressions, in the sense of answerability which involves the giving and taking of reasons. Davidson's "perfectly correct point," McDowell suggests, is that any "impingements across such an outer boundary could only be causal, and not rational" (ibid).¹⁰ Davidson's view forces him to relinquish empiricism, McDowell argues: such "impressions could not constitute a tribunal" (cf. McDowell 2000: 246), alluding to Quine's famous remark about the web of beliefs answering to

¹⁰ I make no exegetical claim, here, pertaining directly to McDowell's reading of Davidson. That is, it is not pertinent to the argument whether McDowell's reading of Davidson is accurate; it only matters whether I am accurate in ascribing to McDowell the reading that I do. The same point applies later when it comes to McDowell's reading of Sellars (and I need hardly add that it applies also to the question of Sellars' reading of Kant).

“the tribunal of experience” (Quine 1961: 41). They could not constitute a tribunal, according to the thought of the epistemic naturalistic fallacy argument, because such an idea of impressions, i.e., as brute natural causes, “does not fit in the logical space of reasons” (McDowell 2000: 245). The kinds of things which could impinge on the outer boundary of the web, to use Quine’s metaphor, are not the right sorts of things to find bound up in (or crawling about on) the web.

The argument McDowell ascribes to Davidson, to quickly restate it, is:

- (1) Empirical content depends on answerability to impressions (this premise is supported by **Empiricism**, see above).
- (2) Impressions could not be the kind of thing to which something could be answerable, because the idea of an impression is the idea of a natural phenomenon, and the logical space of reasons cannot be identified as the logical space of nature (this premise is supported by **The Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument**, see above).
- (3) **Empiricism** imposes a requirement for there to be empirical content to our judgments, but **The Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument** ensures that this requirement cannot be met. (this premise is supported by putting together the first two premises; cf. *ibid* p. 244)
- (4) Therefore, we must give up either **Empiricism** or **The Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument**. (McDowell says, “Dislodging either of these two thoughts would in principle lift the spell” p. 246)

McDowell insists that Davidson’s next step is to merely “order [us]... *ex cathedra*, to repress this rather than that bit of” the conceptual bind (p. 248). More specifically, he says Davidson recommends that **Empiricism** be dropped. The problem with this, McDowell urges, is that it is purely arbitrary and “does nothing to help” a person captivated by the “spell,” that is, someone caught in the grip of transcendental anxiety.

So much for McDowell’s characterization of the disease (or enchantment, or demon—McDowell uses all these metaphors) which grips or afflicts modern philosophy. Now for the cure.

McDowell’s cure involves dismissing **The Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument** by acknowledging, while explaining away, its attractiveness (cf. *ibid* p. 248). In other words, what

McDowell needs to show is that impressions *could* be the kind of thing to which something could be answerable, because the idea of an impression belongs to the logical space of reasons.

In the rest of this section, I shall focus on how McDowell seeks to defend the idea that an impression belongs to the logical space of reasons. The tension in McDowell's thought will be between making this claim while retaining Sellars' critique of the Given. To manage this tension, McDowell ends up having to maintain that Sellars is right while also being wrong. That is, McDowell finds, in Sellars' reading of Kant, an endorsement of The Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument, i.e., the claim that an impression cannot belong to the logical space of reasons because the idea of an impression is the idea of a natural phenomenon. So, the discussion will lead into an examination of McDowell's criticism of Sellars on a superfine point of Kant interpretation.

McDowell's view involves getting a proper measure of the bounds of conceptual processes in the formation of our experiences and judgments. I begin by looking at his development of a metaphor by Peter Geach. Then I turn to McDowell's assimilation of Sellars' view as exemplified in McDowell's criticism of Sellars' reading of a point in Kant's first Critique.

First, McDowell extends an analogy by Geach: "Geach shows how to model acts of judgment on declarative utterances, and we can model experiences on acts of judgment" (250). A "grammatically structured form of words" must have a "semantical or logical togetherness," according to Geach, to "give expression to" a judgment (ibid). By pressing the analogy one step further, an *experience* must likewise possess a logical or semantic shape or structure to be conveyed in a judgment. The *representational isomorphism* between utterances and judgments makes it possible to model acts of judgment via speech acts, and, likewise, the representational isomorphism between experiences and acts of judgment makes it possible to model experiences via acts of judgment. What McDowell thinks this does for us is that it enables us to see how experiences could be *actualizations* of conceptual capacities without being *exercises* of conceptual capacities. By virtue of the *isomorphism of representational structure*, between experiences and acts of judgment (as between acts of judgment and speech acts), we become able to see that experiences and judgments belong to the *same kind of psychological capacity*. McDowell writes: "But once we have thus identified the relevant kind of capacity, we can countenance cases in which capacities of that very kind are not exercised, but are nevertheless

actualized, outside the control of their possessor, by the world's impacts on her sensibility" (251).

Actualizations of conceptual capacities differ from exercises of conceptual capacities, in McDowell's account, because actualizations do not resolve into the elements of responsible agency required for exercising capacities: "Judging is making up one's mind about how things are, as forming an intention is making up one's mind about what to do" (ibid), but "there is no spontaneity in perceiving" (ibid), that is, it "is not up to one how things, for instance, look to one" (ibid). I can decide that the ball looks blue to me, but I do not get to decide that the ball *shall* look blue to me. Nevertheless, "looking blue to me" is the structural core of either type of mental occurrence.

McDowell urges that recognizing this structural core, or isomorphism, at the heart of both experiences and judgments is the quintessence of Kant's theoretical philosophy. Since Sellars' distinction between the logical space of reasons and the logical space of nature ultimately rests on Sellars' reading of Kant *on this very issue*, seeing this structural isomorphism clearly gives us what is required to dislodge the Epistemic Naturalistic Fallacy Argument. This argument is meant to exclude the idea of a Given, which is "[t]he idea [that] an impression can be both... a kind of natural happening and an idea that belongs in the logical space of reasons" (247).

McDowell's distinction between actualizations and exercises of conceptual capacities is supposed to avert the danger of thinking of impressions as a Given. It is supposed to show that although impressions *are* natural occurrences, as evident by the fact that we are caused to have them via interactions with the natural environment, their epistemic significance depends on their structural isomorphism with conceptual judgments which solidly places impressions in the logical space of reasons.

It is important to observe that *McDowell thinks Sellars himself, in reading Kant as having a need for things in themselves operating on sensibility, swerves inconsistently against the tenor of his own thought*. This alleged inconsistency, on Sellars' part, is supposedly manifest in Sellars' reading of Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic. While my aim is not to contribute either to Sellars or Kant exegesis, in the following, it shall be necessary to get down in the bushes with McDowell on this, to see what he thinks he sees.

According to McDowell, Kant needs only one appeal to sensibility, but McDowell thinks Sellars thinks Kant requires two distinct appeals to sensibility (McDowell 2005: 98). McDowell thinks Kant's transcendental idealism demands exactly one appeal to sensibility, in the form of positing intuitions "already shaped by capacities that belong to the understanding" (ibid). Intuitions, here, are the impressions discussed above, which are actualizations of conceptual capacities, i.e., they contain isomorphism of representational structure with judgments. That is, they are *already shaped* by conceptual capacities. This is the account of intuitions which McDowell finds in the "clue" of Kant's Transcendental Deduction (cf. McDowell 2005: 94; see the *Critique of Pure Reason* A79/B104-5): "intuitions—cases of sensory consciousness of objects—have logical structure, and they are the same as logical structures possessed by judgments" (94). This is the move by which McDowell thinks Kant secures the "objective validity" of the categories. That is, *this is the move by which* thought hooks onto (phenomenal) reality (McDowell strongly downplays the qualifier 'phenomenal', as I discuss later).

To explain the interpretive question, in Kantian exegesis, a bit more, let me briefly sketch what James Conant (2017) calls the "layer cake conception of human mindedness" which is at stake here (McDowell speaks of the "two-ply" picture of observational knowledge, cf. McDowell 2009b: 233). Conant remarks that the view that our sensible receptivity "represents a self-standingly intelligible aspect of our nature" is "a deeply rooted assumption... that has controlled much modern philosophical thought about the nature of human cognition" (Conant 2017: 120). This conception of our sensible receptivity as self-standing, i.e., not dependent in any way on the operation of conceptual capacities, is what generations of commentators on Kant's first Critique assumed Kant held in common with Hume, as Conant remarks:

The tendency among many commentators on Kant is to think that Kant's criticism of Hume is of such a sort that it is compatible with Hume and Kant agreeing on the following point—let's call it the point of putative agreement between Hume and Kant: the form of consciousness which Hume takes to be initially available to us through the exercise of our sensory faculty is not sufficient to give us objectively valid representations of objects, but it is a form of consciousness that we could enjoy even if objectively valid representations of objects were impossible for us—merely subjectively unified consciousness is a self-standingly intelligible form of consciousness. (2017: 130)

This picture of Kant's view leads to the layer cake conception of the human mind (cf. Conant 2017: 120-121). Self-standing receptivity provides a bottom layer of consciousness, consisting of an inchoate buzz of sensation, which then gets shaped or structured top-down, as it were, by the top layer of conceptual processes. The point is that, on this reading of Kant, there would be a manifold of appearance initially available through sensibility, on Kant's view, quite analogous to empiricist notions of a Given which is epistemically independent of conceptual processes characteristic of higher levels of cognitive functioning. The interpretive question is whether this picture of Kant's view accurately fits Kant's picture of human cognitive functioning. In the B edition of the Transcendental Deduction, at B160n, Kant distinguishes between the contents of two types of representation: space "as object" and space as "mere form of intuition," and he ascribes a unity to the representation of space as an object, not contained in the representation of space as mere form of intuition, which "merely gives the manifold" (Kant 1781/1787: 261). He indicates, moreover, that space (and, presumably, time as well), represented as object, "presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible" (ibid). Opponents of the layer cake interpretation of Kant's view, for instance, McDowell, may cite this passage as support for the view that sensible receptivity is not self-standing, reading it with emphasis on the part about a *conceptual synthesis being required for a unified representation of space as an object to become possible*, making hay of the thought that there could not even be consciousness of colors without consciousness of spatial extension (for further discussion of this debate about the interpretation of Kant, cf., for instance, Alison 1983, Guyer 1987, Falkenstein 1995).¹¹

McDowell thinks Sellars is, against his better angel, partial to the layer cake conception of Kant's view. For Sellars, according to McDowell, there must, in addition to the Transcendental Deduction's construal of intuitions, be another construal of intuitions functioning as "what [Sellars] calls 'sheer receptivity' (*Science and Metaphysics*, p. 4)—that is, sensibility functioning

¹¹ The tight connection between consciousness of color and consciousness of spatial extension, in philosophers' beliefs, is widely attested. For instance, David Armstrong writes: "(3') For all particulars, x, if x is red, then x is extended. (3') is true. Indeed, ...it appears to be a necessary truth. (If the case of visual points is thought to falsify (3') then 'extended' may be taken in the minimal sense of 'spatial'.)" (Armstrong 1978: 60). I take instances of synaesthesia, e.g., where people may hear colors, as a positive counterexample to this widely held prejudice that colors are inextricably imbricated with spatiality, at least where the level of phenomenological awareness is concerned (assuming that people can hear sounds without being well able to spatially locate them, as I think sometimes happens—it does in my experience, anyway). But this is a matter to be addressed, I believe, by *psychologists*, not by philosophers, and certainly not by philosophers sitting in armchairs.

independently of the understanding” (McDowell 2005: 98, parentheses in original). This secondary Sellarsian construal of intuitions is the element in Sellars’ thinking which McDowell regards as out of step with, and even betraying, Sellars’ own best ideas. The notion of sheer receptivity sucks us back into the grip of the Inside/Outside picture, McDowell thinks. It seems to concede to the idea of a requirement of purely external constraint which that picture, according to McDowell, illicitly foists onto how we think of what is involved in answerability to impressions. Locked within the Inside/Outside picture, the temptation is to suppose that answerability to impressions is answerability to *something fully beyond the scope of* conceptual capacities, whether such capacities are thought of as being merely actualized or as being actively exercised (see above, the point borrowed from Geach). In other words, McDowell absolutely rejects the notion that intuitions, or impressions, possess what is sometimes called *nonconceptual content* (see McDowell 1994, Lecture III).

The reason why Sellars posits the need for an appeal to sheer receptivity, McDowell explains, is because genuine external constraint must, Sellars thinks, occur “by way of impacts on our senses from... genuinely real items” (McDowell 2005: 99). Sellars does not think, however, that the ordinary objects of phenomenal reality, or “the manifest image” in Sellars’ timeless phrase (cf. Sellars 1962: 6), are genuinely real items: “Sellars thinks the ordinary objects that seem to be present to consciousness in perceptual intuitions are *strictly unreal*” (McDowell 2005: 98, my emphasis). Sellars adopts this view in the name of ‘scientific realism’ (ibid). McDowell suggests that, for Sellars, what genuinely exists “are the constituents of the *scientific image*” which are “swarms of elementary particles or something of the sort” (McDowell 2005: 99, my emphasis).

McDowell’s critique of Sellars, as I understand it, is an instance of his “out-Sellarsing” Sellars in resisting any form of the Myth of the Given. McDowell’s criticism of Sellars, as a reader of Kant, amounts to the following. At the very point where Kant himself steps free of the Myth of the Given, in his conception of sensibility as conceptually structured (on McDowell’s reading), Sellars insists on construing Kant himself as having need of a conception of sensibility (the layer-cake or two-ply model) which gets the Given back into the game. McDowell’s criticism of Sellars, on this point, is thus driven by McDowell’s commitment to Sellars’ leading idea, the rejection of the Myth of the Given.

The Sellarsian model of cognition as involving a picture where conceptual capacities are deeply involved in perception has come under fire in Burge's work on perception, and McDowell has a running debate with Burge about the nature of our perceptual capacity. I shall examine, in the next section, Burge's critique of Sellarsian views (among other, similar views). This will be necessary background for a discussion of McDowell's response to Burge, in section three. It is by looking at McDowell's response to Burge, I claim, that we get a clear indication of how McDowell is committed to the idea that our perceptual capacity is incorrigible. It is, of course, on this incorrigibility claim that I hang the argument for a structural analogy between McDowell's view and Protagoreanism, in this chapter's conclusion.

Section Two Burge's Critique of Sellarsian Views

McDowell's view, along with Sellarsian views generally, fits Burge's characterization of what Burge calls Individual Representationalist approaches to perceptual representation. In this section, I shall briefly sketch Burge's critique of Sellarsian views (here taking 'Sellarsian views' more in the sense of McDowell's own view; as seen in section one, above, McDowell may think Sellars opens the way to this sort of view, even if not perfectly entering into it himself, a bit like Moses leading the children of Israel to the Promised Land yet being unable to himself cross over). I shall consider McDowell's response to Burge in section three.

Burge has leveled an impressive critique at Individual Representationalist views (cf. Burge 2010). I begin by reviewing Burge's characterization and criticism of Individual Representationalism. Burge's main charge against Individual Representationalist views is that they are out of touch with the science of psychology, specifically the psychology of perception. An aspect of this criticism is that Individual Representationalism fails to deliver a believable account of the psychological capacities not only of small children and non-human animals, but even of ordinary adult humans.

Burge characterizes Individual Representationalism as a "syndrome" of answers to constitutive questions about perceptual representation. "There are many positions within this syndrome," and most "fall into one of two families" (Burge 2010: 13). The views of Russell, Moore, Broad, Price, Ayer, Schlick, early Carnap, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, James, and C. I. Lewis are all instances of what he calls "first-family" views (cf. p. 16). For instances of "second-family" views, he lists Frege, Cassirer, Dummett, Strawson, "Kripke's Wittgenstein," and Sellars and

Sellarsians (18). The key idea which unites all views in the syndrome is the assumption that “objective empirical representation of physical environmental particulars” must be “derived from, supplemented by, or embedded in other sorts of representations available in the individual’s psychology” (13). These other sorts of representations need to represent some constitutive conditions for veridical perceptual representation. Such constitutive conditions will involve modal claims, and Burge observes that for most Individual Representationalists these modal claims will be “regarded as conceptual, in a fairly strong sense of ‘conceptual’” (ibid). Due to having this feature, Individual Representationalists are committed to the claim that objective representation of the environment can be explained purely by virtue of an individual’s having within themselves representations which “incorporate within themselves” the kind of modally articulated conditions on objective representation just mentioned (ibid). These explanatory representations are supposed to be “constitutive preconditions for objective representation” (ibid). The preconditions are compensatory: “The syndrome maintains that there is an inherent insufficiency in empirical representation of ordinary particulars in the environment as having ordinary specific physical attributes” (ibid). This picture can be traced back before the twentieth century, and *perhaps* one of its most eminent spokespersons, in the Western tradition, is none other than Kant. According to Kant, without the cognitive contribution of *a priori* forms of intuition and categories of the understanding (Kant’s own articulation of what *constitutive preconditions for objective representation* must be like), *raw* empirical representation would be as bad as “a swarm of appearances [filling] up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it” (A 111).¹²

Burge treats *representation* as a natural kind. It is “distinctively instantiated in perception, language, and thought” (9). He thinks that this kind, *representation*, has been obscured, in Western philosophy at least, by the influence of Individual Representationalist approaches. Individual Representationalism typically hyper-intellectualizes the constitutive requirements on perception (13). Evidence that these requirements are hyper-intellectualized in such accounts is the fact that, for such views, representations of constitutive preconditions for objective representation are available, at least in principle, to individuals’ consciousness or use (14).

¹² By the way, this quote from Kant, in my opinion (for what it is worth), militates in favor of the two-ply model of sensibility, in Kant’s view, against McDowell’s preferred reading of Kant. Rumor has it that Burge possesses a lengthy, unpublished manuscript commenting on Kant’s first *Critique* which reads Kant quite against the grain of standard interpretations. I look forward to the publication of this work.

Think, for example, of the *point* of Kant's arguments in the Transcendental Aesthetic and Transcendental Analytic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's view (on a broadly standard interpretation) fits Burge's characterization of second-family Individual Representationalism. Second-family views maintain "that the individual makes representation of the physical environment possible by employing supplementary representation of *general constitutive preconditions* or principles of objective representation" (ibid). This contrasts with Burge's characterization of first-family views, which bear more of a resemblance to the type of view espoused by British empiricists. Burge says that, on first-family views, "the individual builds representations of the physical environment from more primitive representational material, which represents elements, including particulars, that are preconditions for objective representation" (ibid). The *particulars* Burge mentions are not ordinary particulars in the physical environment, but "subjective or proto-objective" entities (ibid). A paradigmatic example of a theory postulating such entities is the classical theory of sense data, various versions of which are defended in the early twentieth century by Russell, Moore, the Logical Positivists, and so on.

Second-family philosophers, especially Sellars and Sellarsians, understand their view as a radical shift away from first-family views, Burge suggests, and he agrees that the "mid-century shift from first- to second-family views constituted a major turn in philosophy" (18). He maintains that the second-family focus on patterns of activity, characteristic of the type of holism advanced by proponents of second-family views, was much more instructive about the nature of representation than the first-family focus on phenomenological appearances (ibid). Nevertheless, he argues that the "second-family is more similar to the first than its members realized" (ibid). The key commonality for all Individual Representationalist views is their commitment to the following claim: "The simplest-seeming empirical representation depends on *the individual's* capacity to represent *further* matters" (19). For instance, the kinds of "capacity to represent further matters," according to first-family views, can include any of the following:

- (a) capacity to use quantificational apparatus to describe relations between sense data and their causes in the environment
- (b) capacity to represent bodies as possible patterns of sense data, relying on counterfactual concepts

- (c) capacity to represent invariant patterns or laws governing occurrences of sense data or phenomenal entities
- (d) capacity for “phenomenological recognition of mental acts or events that bestow objective meaning on otherwise neutral phenomenological material” (19).

Second-family views similarly posit *further representational capacities* required as general conditions on the representation of physical particulars, including the following:

- (e) capacity to use the concept of objectivity
- (f) capacity to use seems/is or appearance/reality distinctions
- (g) capacity to apply the concepts of truth and falsity to beliefs or sentences
- (h) capacity to track bodies “through a comprehensive spatial order” (ibid)
- (i) capacity to use individuation and reidentification principles
- (j) capacity to represent causality (causal relations, causal laws)
- (k) capacity to be self-consciously aware of oneself as a representing being
- (l) capacity to unite representations into a single, coherent theory, represented as one’s own
- (m) capacity to use quantification, identity, sortal predicates, and similar linguistic devices
- (n) capacity to represent public criteria of correct linguistic usage (ibid).

An important feature of second-family views, distinguishing them from first-family views is the tendency to approach “perceptual belief through the lens of requirements on linguistic use or communication” (18).

To illustrate what Burge has in mind in saying that second-family Individual Representationalism imposes further representational capacities, it is instructive to consider in more detail Burge’s analysis of a specific view which he classifies as an instance of second-family Individual Representationalism, despite its being anomalous in certain respects (i.e., it does not perfectly align with a characteristic feature of Individual Representationalism, as discussed below). The view in question is due to Wittgenstein’s work.

Burge comments specifically on Kripke’s interpretation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy. Burge argues that “Kripke’s Wittgenstein” uses Individual Representationalist ideas, but, interestingly, it does not require *further* representational capacities to belong *to the individual*. It is enough for the “further, higher-level capacities” to belong to the individual’s linguistic community (129).

The further, higher level representational capacities, here, are capacities to represent general preconditions of objectivity which make it possible to “represent definite properties and objects in the environment by ostensibly elementary empirical means” (128). Since these capacities are capacities to represent general preconditions of objectivity, “the view is in line with the second-family forms of Individual Representationalism” (ibid). Nevertheless, the view is also *out of line* since it does not attribute the further representational capacities to the individual (cf. 129). Burge describes the view’s account of objectivity as follows:

According to Kripke, Wittgenstein holds that to be counted as having psychological states with definite representational content regarding a physical world, or regarding anything else, an individual must be in communication with other language users. Or, at least, the individual must be ‘taken into the community’ of language users. Their dispositions to respond linguistically provide a check on the individual’s own dispositions and yield a *surrogate objectivity*. (129, my italics)

Burge thinks “Individual Representationalism has things backwards” (22). Objective perceptual representation is more basic than any form of further representations required by first- and second-family views. Objective representation of particulars in the physical environment precedes representation of sense data or phenomenological appearances (23). General preconditions of objectivity are not required to objectively represent particulars in the physical environment (ibid). Moreover, both forms of Individual Representationalism fail to take account of non-human animals’ and very young children’s abilities to objectively represent physical particulars. These doctrines are *empirically refuted*, Burge argues, by the relevant sciences. It is, rather, objective representation of physical particulars which is primitive, as a representational capacity, and many higher representational abilities, like the capacity to form perceptual belief, depend on the objectivity already involved in primitive forms of perceptual representation. Burge’s position rests on a closely argued case laid out in chapters eight, nine, and ten of *Origins of Objectivity*.

As he says, this “is the heart of the book” (xiii). He relies on “perceptual psychology (mainly vision science), physiological sensory psychology, developmental psychology, animal psychology, ethology, and zoology to provide an account of how human sense perception of the physical world is related to sensory capacities of many other organisms,” from amoeba to apes

and dolphins (xiii).¹³ Individual Representationalism is out of touch with the science of perception. Anti-individualism, Burge's antidote to Individual Representationalism, is "informed by reflection on empirical knowledge in perceptual psychology, physiological psychology, and ethology" (11).

Burge's criticism, in summary, is that (i) Individual Representationalist views are out of touch with the science of perceptual representation, (ii) they are refuted because they fail to properly account for non-human animals' and very young children's abilities to objectively represent elements of their physical environment, and (iii) they overintellectualize ordinary adult humans' abilities to form such representations.

McDowell defends a Sellarsian account of perception against Burge's critique (cf., esp., McDowell 2011). McDowell invokes a conception of perceptual incorrigibility in responding to Burge's critique, which, as I will show in the conclusion, following the next section, is structurally analogous to the Protagorean commitment to incorrigible perceptions. First, though, I shall consider McDowell's response to Burge's critique of Sellarsian views.

Section Three McDowell's Response to Burge

Let us begin considering McDowell's response to Burge with a very brief sketch of what McDowell takes to be the salient points of Sellars' account of perception and the relation of perception to epistemology.

McDowell characterizes Sellars' account of perception as a theory of observational knowledge where observational knowledge is simply "knowledge one has through the operation of perceptual capacities" (McDowell 2011: 11). He says that "[s]omeone who knows something by observation, according to Sellars' conception, must be self-consciously aware of the authority with which she speaks if she expresses what she knows..." (12). Such first-personal authority is supposed to be cashed out, McDowell thinks, in terms of being able to "vindicate the authority with which [one] speaks by saying something like 'I can tell a green thing when I see one'" (ibid). McDowell emphasizes that the kind of knowledge with which Sellars is concerned is only

¹³ Burge delineates a range of psychological capacities possessed by different kinds of animals. Some have sensory capacities which are non-perceptual, others are genuinely perceptual, and still others have a capacity for judgment which stops short of inferential reasoning. For further discussion of the different kinds of psychological capacities possessed by different kinds of animals, and the relevance of such distinctions for animals' ethical status, see Garthoff 2020.

one species of the genera, the species comprised of “acts of reason” (15), any instance of which is conceived “as a potentially self-conscious standing in the space of reasons” (16-17). This makes Sellars’ conception of knowledge, McDowell thinks, “epistemologically *internalist*” (17), by contrast with Burge’s approach which, he argues, is a form of “epistemological *externalism*” (18). The difference boils down to whether it is necessary for a subject to have cognitive access to the warrant for their own beliefs. Sellars’ position, on McDowell’s reading, is that such access to the warrant *is* necessary, whereas Burge, as McDowell quotes, says that *perceptual entitlement* is “a species of warrant that... ‘need not be fully conceptually accessible, even on reflection, to the warranted individual’” (McDowell 2011: 19; quote is from Burge 2003: 504).

McDowell sees this difference between Burge’s and Sellars’ theories as stemming from a difference in theoretical goals. Whereas Sellars is interested in accounting for a specific kind of knowledge, instances of which are conceived as actualizations and exercises of rational, conceptual capacities, Burge, on the other hand, is “calling for a general account of perceptual warrant as such, an account suitable for all cases of perceptual knowledge” (McDowell 2011: 20). Just because internalism is wrong in an account that is supposed to fit perceptual knowledge in general, McDowell argues, it does not follow that it must be wrong in an account of a specific kind of perceptual knowledge. As McDowell says, “If our concern is with a species, we do not have to restrict ourselves to things that are true of all instances of the genus of which it is a species” (20-21).

To restate McDowell’s argument a bit differently, it is presumably supposed to simply point out that it is a mistake criticizing Sellars’ account of *adult human* perceptual epistemic capacities for not additionally being an account of the kinds of perceptual epistemic capacities possessed by non-human animals and non-adult humans.

As far as this goes, I would defend Burge by arguing that approaching the genus, primarily, and taking what we learn about the genus as shedding light on the species, makes better methodological sense, at least from a scientific standpoint. But let us continue with looking at McDowell’s response, for there is more to McDowell’s argument than simply pointing to the distinction between genus and species.

Burge’s objection to Sellars, and other second-family Individual Representationalists, to reiterate, is directed against the idea that the “simplest-seeming empirical representation depends

on *the individual's* capacity to represent *further* matters” (Burge 2010: 19, quoted above). Burge argues that second-family views maintain “that the individual makes representation of the physical environment possible by employing supplementary representation of *general constitutive preconditions* or principles of objective representation” (ibid). Burge’s worry is that, by insisting on such further representational capacities, second-family views set an unrealistic bar to be met by ordinary adult human perceivers. As McDowell puts it:

...[Burge] argues that there is an implausible intellectualism in holding that warrant is internalized like that...[i.e.,] in holding that, to put the idea in Sellars’s terms, a bit of perceptual knowledge had by a rational subject is, just as such, a potentially self-conscious standing in the space of reasons. Burge thinks that would imply a level of conceptual sophistication, in the content of a subject’s self-consciousness about her own perceptual knowledge, that it is implausible to attribute to ordinary rational subjects, adult human beings who are no more than ordinarily intelligent and reflective. (McDowell 2011: 24)

So, Burge’s critique of Sellarsian accounts does not hinge on the worry that they leave out non-human animal and non-adult human perceivers. The real worry is that such accounts are implausible even for ordinary adult humans. They require ordinary adult humans to accomplish feats of conceptualization which even *highly trained philosophers* may sometimes find daunting. As McDowell explains:

What warrants one in holding the perceptual state to be a seeing...? One would need to argue that, though the warrant provided by the perceptual state is defeasible, it is not defeated on this occasion. That would require working with some notably sophisticated concepts: defeasible warrant, defeating conditions, considerations that warrant one in discounting the possibility that one’s perceptual warrant is defeated in the present circumstances. And Burge insists—plausibly enough—that we should not credit ordinary adult human beings, who may be only minimally articulate and reflective, with the ability to deploy conceptual equipment of that level of sophistication. (28-29)

The challenge for the defender of a Sellarsian account of perceptual knowledge, then, is to show that such an account does not unreasonably hyper-intellectualize perception as a capacity for knowledge.

McDowell says, at this juncture, that “Everything turns here on the assumption that the warrant a perceptual state provides for a belief cannot guarantee the truth of the belief” (30). He says that Burge makes this assumption. Perceptual states can provide only *defeasible warrant* for beliefs, according to Burge (McDowell 2011: 34-36; cf. Burge 2003). On Burge’s view, “[p]erceptual warrant is in itself neutral as to whether a belief it warrants is true or not,” as McDowell puts it (36).

Assuming McDowell’s understanding of Burge is sound (it seems to me to be, at any rate), there is something, on Burge’s account, the semantic content of a perceptual state, which *is what it is* independent of the reality the perceptual state purports to represent. While perceptual states are not, on Burge’s account, belief-relative or concept-relative entities, they *are* relative to the normal operation of well-functioning psychological capacities. That is why perceptual states can provide only defeasible warrant for beliefs: it might turn out that an individual’s psychological capacities were not functioning well or normally in such and such circumstances. In instances where an individual’s psychological capacities are not functioning well or normally, the semantic or representational content of the perceptual state may diverge from the reality it would, otherwise, be taken as representing.

The defeasibility of perceptual warrant, on Burge’s view, is the reason why, as McDowell explains, Burge thinks “that in justifying a perceptual belief, one would need to place an invocation of the warrant provided by a perceptual state in the context of a sophisticated argument, directed at showing that one is warranted in discounting that possibility” (36). McDowell argues that this assumption about the defeasibility of perceptual warrant rests on a mistake about fallibility which *pervades modern epistemology*. The opposing view, which McDowell champions, is that a perceptual state *can* warrant a belief in a way that *guarantees* its truth (cf. 31). He writes:

If a perceptual state makes a feature of the environment present to a perceiver’s rationally self-conscious awareness, there is *no* possibility, compatibly with someone’s being in that state, that things are not as the state would warrant her in believing that they are, in a belief that would simply register the presence of that feature of the environment. The warrant for belief that the state provides is indefeasible; it *cannot* be undermined. (31)

McDowell's argument against Burge, then, is that Burge's assumption about the defeasibility of perceptual states rests on a mistaken conception of the *fallibility* of the capacity of perceptual judgment. McDowell urges that the capacity in question is the capacity of a *non-defectively exercised* perceptual capacity to generate a state which warrants a belief. Burge, on the other hand, insists that even a non-defective exercise of that capacity can only produce an experience which "itself cannot provide better than inconclusive warrant for belief" (36).

McDowell offers the example of the capacity to sink eight-foot putts in golf. Even the best golfers fail to sink such putts, sometimes, but this does not show that, *when they properly exercise their capacity to sink an eight-foot putt*, that is, when they possess the capacity and are golfing in the right conditions to do so, *they still might not be able to do it*. This would amount to denying that there even *exists* such a capacity to sink eight-foot putts.¹⁴ This example is supposed to show that perception, if it occurs under ideal conditions, cannot provide defeasible warrant for perceptual beliefs, which would be like someone who is able to sink an eight-foot putt missing the putt. Without getting too distracted with McDowell's example, it is probably worth saying that even someone who is able to do something can mess up at it, sometimes. The example does not drive McDowell's point home in the way he seems to think it does. Again, as a reminder to readers, my aim here is not to weigh in on the McDowell-Burge debate. The aim is to show that McDowell, in his response to Burge, commits himself to the view that perception is incorrigible, which provides the jumping off point for the argument that McDowell's view is structurally analogous to Protagoreanism.

Back to McDowell's response: McDowell's error theory, to account for why so many modern philosophers join Burge in leaping from the general fallibility of our capacity for perceptual judgment to the general defeasibility of that capacity's epistemic warrant, is that epistemologists

¹⁴ McDowell quotes Sebastian Rödl's critique of the argument from illusion, to support this point (cf. 42-43, and Rödl 2007: 157-8): "The argument [from illusion] is: Whenever I seem to know something [on the basis of perceptual experience], I might have been fooled. Had I been fooled, I would not have known that I was. I would not have been able to tell my situation apart from one in which I am not fooled. This shows that my grounds do not place me in a position to exclude that I am in such a situation. They do not enable me to exclude that I am fooled.— The argument supposes that, had I been fooled, I would have believed the proposition in question on the same grounds on which I believe it now that I am not fooled. This straightforwardly entails that these grounds do not establish the truth of what I believe and therefore do not provide me with knowledge. But when I know something on the ground that, say, I perceive it to be the case, then I would not, had I been fooled, have believed it on this ground, for, had I been fooled, I would not have perceived it to be the case. Hence, when I am not fooled, my grounds exclude that I am fooled; when I perceive how things are, I am not fooled with regard to how they are" (Rödl 2007: 157-8; quoted at McDowell 2011: 42-43).

who make the mistake fail to distinguish *general properties of a psychological capacity* from *properties of single instances of exercising the capacity*. Fallibility is a general property of perception as a capacity for knowledge. To recognize the fallibility of the capacity is to acknowledge that, under certain conditions, an attempted exercise of the capacity can be defective, i.e., it can fail to be an exercise of the capacity. In cases where there is a failure to exercise the capacity, the capacity is not exercised (says McDowell). So, fallibility has nothing to do with the properties of an exercise of the capacity. When the capacity is exercised (contrast with failed attempts to exercise it which strictly do not count as exercises of the capacity), it produces results which are infallible. Or so McDowell's argument goes.

McDowell supports this with **the example of the experimental subject** (cf. McDowell 2011: 45-53). This is a subject who is told that the experimenters will be tinkering with the lighting so that the subject will be unable to accurately determine certain shades of color; moreover, the subject will not be able to tell when the lighting is being modified. McDowell extends the example to cases where the subject knows, in advance, that the lighting will be tinkered with only a small percentage of the time. The point of the example is supposed to be that, in this sort of case, the interference of the psychological experiment blocks all occurrences of the subject's perceptual states from being exercises of perception as a capacity for knowledge, even the occurrences in which the lighting is unmodified. What this shows, I take it, is that the rational factor in perceptual knowledge is not taken into account by a theory focused only on purely (first nature) naturalistic features of the capacity. McDowell says:

It is a fine thing to know how the perceptual systems of human beings and other animals do their work. We could not have our capacities for perceptual knowledge if we did not have perceptual systems whose operations are a topic for that kind of inquiry. But knowing how perceptual systems work is not a substitute for getting straight about perception as a self-consciously possessed and exercised capacity for knowledge. (56)

This contradicts Burge's insistence that where second family Individual Representationalists go wrong is in ignoring the relevant work in empirical psychology (55; cf. Burge 2010).

McDowell's argument is that we can know everything there is to know, so far as empirical psychology goes, about the first nature naturalistic facts, and still lack a proper account of

perception as the exercise of a capacity for knowledge, i.e., a capacity of adult humans, which, in McDowell's view, is a second nature achievement.

The point I want to stress, taken from McDowell's response to Burge, is that, for McDowell, (adult human) perceptual capacity is incorrigible. This is distinct, as explained above, from the claim that the capacity is generally infallible. Clearly the capacity is not infallible. But McDowell's claim is that individual exercises of a normal adult human perceptual capacity, under ideal conditions, provide indefeasible warrant for perceptual beliefs. In other words, such exercises of our perceptual capacity are not open to correction, i.e., they are incorrigible.

Conclusion

My claim is that McDowell's view, in postulating incorrigible perceptual states to account for exercises of perceptual judgment, advances a view structurally analogous to the Protagorean secret doctrine positing incorrigible appearances, i.e., appearances about which *the one being appeared to thus and so* could not be mistaken.

McDowell's entire philosophical approach is designed to sidestep the debate between realists and their critics (their critics being, for example, pragmatists, instrumentalists, etc.). His approach commits his theory of moral psychology to a theory of moral perception structurally analogous to the Protagorean account of perception. For present purposes, we are examining the details of his theory of perception. The argument of the current section is that McDowell's theory of perception is structurally analogous to the Protagorean account of perception. I shall first home in on the feature of Protagoras' view to which McDowell's view presents an analogous structure. Then I shall discuss this analogous structure in McDowell's view. The relevant aspect of the Protagorean secret doctrine, as I shall explain, is the claim that *things are as they seem*, i.e., the claim of perceptual incorrigibility. The analogous aspect of McDowell's view, I shall claim, is McDowell's idea that non-defective exercises of perceptual capacities provide conclusive, non-defeasible warrant for belief.

To demarcate the aspect of the Protagorean secret doctrine which matters here, I want to review the discussion from Chapter One, section two. There I state the Protagorean thesis, found at *Theaetetus* 152c:

PT (Protagorean Thesis)

Things are, for each person, the way he [or she] perceives them.

Then I submit the following *gloss* on PT at *Theaetetus* 152c:

GPT (Gloss on the Protagorean Thesis)

Perception is always of what is [i.e., what *exists*], and free from falsehood, as if it's knowledge.

As we saw in that section, Plato considers the Protagorean's view as also involving the claim that origination of the quality of whiteness, say, arises from an interaction between an eye and, say, a rock. What GPT implies is that, for the eye (say), the whiteness thus arisen exists and is free from falsehood. In other words, the only mistake which could arise about it would be the mistaken belief that it is other than that, i.e., other than an occurrence of whiteness.

Let me transpose this Protagorean doctrine into terms relatable to the conversation with Burge and McDowell:

Transposed Protagorean Example

The perceptual state of *being appeared to as of whitely* is always true, i.e., the having of the phenomenal content, an appearing *as of white*, is always true.¹⁵

It is notable that, whatever may be lost in translation, the picture suggested by the transposed example does not perfectly mesh with either of McDowell's or Burge's views. Neither of them would find it intelligible to apply the predicate '*is true*' directly to a phenomenal content. For Burge, the concept of truth only applies at the level of propositional thought, and McDowell

¹⁵ Here I do not claim that the transposition is fully free of distortion, but I claim that it is a structurally valid transposition, i.e., it does not lose any of the important structure of the view. The conception of structure on which I am relying is a variant of that articulated by Ladyman and Ross in their defense of structural realism in philosophy of science. They argue that the structural content of our scientific theories is what realists should emphasize (cf. Ladyman and Ross 2007). They articulate the notion of structure in terms of the part of a theory's content which is retained across theory changes and paradigm shifts (cf. *ibid* 93 ff). Just one instance they give of such structural content is "the mathematical expression of the increasing approximation of Lorentz transformations to Galilean transformations in contexts where a body's velocity is very small relative to the velocity of light in a vacuum, or where the body's velocity tends to infinity" (Ladyman and Ross 2007: 94-95). My use of the notion of structural content does not perfectly align with their view because I am here proposing to speak of the structural content of GPT though there is no *mathematical* content there, and their view is that structures are mathematical in character.

would essentially agree, speaking of judgments as exercises of conceptual capacities. But the point, for now, is that the Protagorean position effectively cancels out truth from having any important role in a theory of the epistemic significance of perceptual states and their contents. Since every perceptual state is true on the Protagorean view, perceptual states are incorrigible, and truth and reality do not really factor into their epistemic significance.

Now, once more, it is important to keep in view McDowell's endgame. His goal, as suggested above in section one of this chapter, and as I shall also discuss in Chapter Three, is to cancel the Inside/Outside picture of the mind's relation to the world. One end this serves, as I will point out in the next chapter, is to make his Kantian ontology of the will *safe* by deflating any pretension that it is a piece of foundational metaphysics. But what this amounts to, i.e., what repudiating the Inside/Outside picture comes to, I say, is the neutralization of mind-independent reality for the purposes of thinking about ontology, specifically, for the purposes of thinking about acts of will.

Thus, both views render reality, i.e., reality on a metaphysical realist construal of reality, neutral or null for the purposes of evaluating perceptual states' epistemic contribution. There is no need, on McDowell's account, to even evaluate the non-defective activations of our perceptual capacities. They are reliable, or in the Protagorean sense "true," in just the way in which Protagorean perceptual states are incapable of diverging from what is. This status renders them immune to epistemological suspicion, that is, they are effectively incorrigible. Defective activations of perceptual capacities, on the other hand, are recognized as such, on McDowell's account, via a circumlocutionary appeal to processes belonging to the order of second natural facts. This appeal effectively blocks *reality* from counting as a factor for purposes of explaining the perceptual state's failure to provide conclusive warrant for belief. "Reality" *in a sense* is involved in McDowell's vague account of the relation between first and second nature. But, without spelling out precisely the nature of this relation, McDowell's view should remain dissatisfying even to those revulsed by the Inside/Outside picture.

Yet the situation is worse than this. McDowell's account is not merely unsatisfyingly vague, though, as I will suggest by the end of the next chapter, even this vagueness is culpable to the extent that it is merely an eristic move to safeguard questionable first-order metaphysical claims, which are, in turn, in the service of a questionable metaethical project, i.e., the project of securing a "special moral sense" of 'ought' (more on this in the Conclusion to this dissertation).

McDowell's view is, ultimately, defeasible because it is unable to address the metastasized problem of constraint, or so I argue in Chapter Four.

Chapter Three Second Nature Naturalism and Global Metaontological Deflationism

The thesis of this chapter is that McDowell's philosophical quietism is equivalent to a form of global metaontological deflationism, distinct from pragmatist-leaning forms of global metaontological deflationism. Preliminary to arguing for this claim, I will briefly explain McDowell's ethical naturalism. His ethical naturalism has two components: (i) the distinction between first and second nature, which is crucial to McDowell's overall philosophical project, and (ii) an appeal to moral phenomenology. With an exposition of his ethical naturalism in hand, I turn to show that his philosophical quietism is equivalent to a form of global metaontological deflationism.

In the rest of this preamble to the chapter, as a reminder to the reader, I will review McDowell's philosophical project, to be elaborated in sections one and two.

McDowell's position represents one of two types of approaches to ethical naturalism. One type of approach precisely fits G. E. Moore's conception of naturalistic ethics. Moore takes it that naturalism considers "goodness to consist in a relation to something which exists here and now," regarding ethics as "an empirical or positive science" such that "its conclusions could be all established by means of empirical observation and induction" (Moore 1903: 39). The second type of approach to ethical naturalism, represented by McDowell's view, tries to root ethical facts in a layer of "something existing here and now, established by means of empirical observation and induction," but, on top of this "first natural" layer, McDowell's approach overlays a second layer. The first layer is merely the soil, so to speak, out of which ethical facts supposedly grow. This second layer of ethical facts, this "second nature," figures in McDowell's view as an acquired ethical outlook accounting for moral action.

After presenting, in section one, McDowell's account of first and second nature, I shall, in section two, elaborate on his moral phenomenology, his ground level (so to speak) account of ethics. Here I situate his project vis-à-vis Wittgensteinian quietism, and then I shall, in section three, argue that his quietism is a form of global metaontological deflationism.

Section One Distinguishing First and Second Nature

McDowell's view hinges on the contrast between non-naturalism and naturalistic reductionism in metaethics. Both *non-naturalism* and *naturalistic reductionism* presuppose a picture of the mind's relation to the world, a picture that, as Wittgenstein puts it, has held us captive (*PI* §115; cf. Taylor 2013). Once we stop thinking about the mind-world relation from inside this imprisoning picture, an option becomes available which has none of the negative consequences of either of the two extreme approaches, non-naturalism or naturalistic reductionism. The negative consequences of these approaches are, McDowell implies, supposed to be:

Consequence of Non-naturalism

The mind's *doing what it does*, which is *sui generis* (as McDowell, along with a host of Sellars' disciples, take it), comes to appear as quasi-magical or a supernatural mystery.

Consequence of Naturalistic Reductionism

There are no resources to explain the mind's *doing what it does*, i.e., something vital is lost.

Here among the list of *things that a mind does* we might include, at least, the following: making meanings, holding values, freely performing an action, grasping concepts, forming beliefs, perceptually experiencing a shade of green, and so forth.

The new option, which supposedly becomes available when we escape the allegedly problematic picture, I call McDowell's second nature naturalism (for reasons which shall eventually emerge). Second nature naturalism purportedly enables us to explain the mind's doing what it does without loss (i.e., without reduction) while not rendering the mental utterly magical or supernatural (i.e., non-natural). In other words, it is supposed to steer a middle way between the consequence of non-naturalism and the consequence of naturalistic reductionism. As I will argue later, in section three, although McDowell does not state his view this way, what it comes to is a deflationary metaontological stance toward both positions. As I understand such deflationary stances (and here I am being somewhat critical, in attempting to state McDowell's view as plainly as possible), this amounts to taking either position, naturalistic reductionism and non-naturalism, either seriously or non-seriously (i.e., accepting or dismissing it) whenever so required by one's argumentative context. The defense of one's own position in a certain context

might require a non-naturalist stance (e.g., a firm commitment to a non-natural ontological posit such as a Kantian free will) or defending one's position might require a naturalistic reductionist stance (e.g., when defending against charges of idealism, one might wish to insist that second nature, for instance, is grounded in first nature). In other words, McDowell's proposed middle way amounts to speaking out of both sides of one's mouth (if I may put it so bluntly without being uncharitable). I do not mean this characterization of McDowell's position to count as an actual argument against his view. I am simply trying to make the view as intelligible as possible, particularly keeping in mind readers who may already feel unsympathetic to the view and who might object to leaving the position stated too much in McDowell's own terms. Since I understand such a critical perspective on McDowell's view, and I do not ultimately object to the critique (I officially argue in support of something like this criticism below in the Conclusion to this dissertation), I am content to here state his view, roughly, in this way. I do caution readers, though, that I have not argued yet in favor of this way of characterizing his position. Please continue reading, and the argument will come.

Reverting to rhetoric more sympathetic to McDowell's view, we can conclude, then, that second nature naturalism is intended as a middle way between the extremes of non-naturalism and naturalistic reductionism, not only in metaethics but in philosophy of mind. That is, in avoiding the Scylla of non-naturalism, realist metaethics need not, McDowell avers, fear naturalistic reductionism as a threatening Charybdis. McDowell dubs the Charybdis of naturalistic reductionism the error of "scientism." The scientific outlook gives expression to what McDowell characterizes as "bald naturalism" (cf. McDowell 1994: xxi-xxiii, 67, 73, 76-7, 88-9, 108). Bald naturalism as found in contemporary philosophy of mind, on McDowell's view, purportedly involves a subtle epistemological error, akin to the sort of mistake characterized by Sellars as believing in the Myth of the Given. Bald naturalism, in philosophy of mind, refuses to acknowledge a divide between the Sellarsian "logical space of reasons" and, as McDowell describes it, the space of natural-scientific understanding (1994: xxiii). Let me elaborate on McDowell's point, here.

The idea is that the type of relations mediating transactions *within* the logical space of reasons is spontaneous, whereas the type of relations concerned with transactions in the space of natural-scientific understanding is law-governed. In philosophy of mind, it becomes necessary to account

for interactions between the two kinds of space, and this is where bald naturalism falls into error, according to McDowell. Bald naturalism mischaracterizes the Sellarsian contrast: rather than a contrast between spontaneity and law-governedness, bald naturalism takes the contrast as follows. Transactions in the space of reasons, on Sellars' view as McDowell reads it, involve relations which are intellectual and *can* involve causal determination, whereas the type of relations concerned with transactions in the space of natural-scientific understanding is brute and *must only* involve causal determination (cf. McDowell 1994: 34-36). Thinking of a Venn diagram, the space of natural scientific understanding is subsumed by the space of reasons.

It is important to see, however, that McDowell thinks there are two faulty pictures in play when we move from something like a Sellarsian view to the naturalistic reductionist stance. The naturalistic reductionist stance is worse than Sellars' view, but, as discussed in Chapter Two, section one, McDowell finds Sellars' picture problematic, too. Sellars' contrast, while it gets onto something right, is itself an erroneous conception of mind-world relations. McDowell criticizes Sellars for slipping into naturalistic reductionism at the limits of Sellars' own account of the relation between concepts and perceptual content (see McDowell 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2005; also see Pippin 2013, and see above, Chapter Two, section one). On this way of looking at it, bald naturalism, i.e., naturalistic reductionism, which is the second inaccurate picture, is perhaps only a degradation of the Sellarsian picture, the first inaccurate picture.

In any case, naturalistic reductionism is far worse than Sellars' picture, according to McDowell. Yet the underlying structure of both pictures, the Sellarsian picture and naturalistic reductionism (and here we might speak of a third picture, underlying both Sellars' picture and that of naturalistic reductionism), is the "*Ur*-faulty picture" as it were, which has held us captive since the dawn of modern science:

The contrast Sellars implicitly appeals to was not available before modern times. This can help us understand why modernity brings with it a new tone, distinctively panicky and obsessive, for philosophical reflection about knowledge. (1999: 257)

The reason why, according to McDowell, the bald naturalistic picture goes wrong is that it intuits the "specialness" of the mental but attempts to explain the mental in terms of only the resources available in the space of naturalistic understanding (1999; also see 1994, 1997). Reductionists attempt to account for the transactions in the space of reasons as if they were reducible to merely

law-governed processes. At the limit, such processes are conceived as involving mere brute causal relations. Going back to the Venn diagram, the naturalistic reductionist inverts the schema, allowing that the space of reasons is subsumed by the space of natural-scientific understanding.

McDowell urges that once we see the contrast between the space of reasons, and the space of natural-scientific understanding, and see it *clearly* as it is, i.e., with the space of natural-scientific understanding subsumed by the space of reasons, we can get a proper estimate of the distinction between second nature, i.e., the agglomeration of dispositions instilled in human beings via a process of education, and first nature, i.e., naturalistic facts about human beings (i.e., biological, psychological, and neurological facts—descriptive, not prescriptive).

According to McDowell, an acquired ethical outlook, including the moral perceptions inculcated by a sound moral education, comprise our second nature, which is not to be confused with our first nature, consisting of the natural historical facts about human beings (cf. Hacker-Wright 2009). The acquisition of a second nature is influenced by factors and conditions determined by our first nature, as McDowell advises:

Second nature could not float free of potentialities that belong to a normal human organism. This gives human reason enough of a foothold in the realm of law to satisfy any proper respect for modern natural science. (McDowell 1994: 84)

But, for McDowell, a proper respect for modern natural science should not be mistaken for, or be allowed to lead to, a reinstatement of the faulty picture of the relation between mind and world. On this point, I find Charles Taylor characterization of McDowell's view helpful:

A crucial feature of this view is that it portrays our understanding of the world as taking place in a zone, surrounded by and (hopefully) in interaction with a world, which is thus seen as playing the role of Outside to its Inside. This deep and powerful image raises the issue of the boundary. Inside and outside have to interact; this is indeed implicit in the very idea of knowledge: what goes on in the inner zone is meant to be in some way at least partly modeled on what exists outside. (Taylor 2002: 106)

The Inside/Outside picture, as Taylor calls it, prompted traditional empiricists to invent the Myth of the Given. The Given would be a peculiar hybrid epistemological and metaphysical entity,

able to permeate the boundary between the inner and outer zones by virtue of its hybrid nature. Sellars called the Given “a mongrel resulting from a crossbreeding of two ideas” (cf. Sellars 1956: 210-211). The first idea is that there are “inner episodes” occurring in all sorts of animals whose cognitive capacities have evolved to a specific level of sophistication, including human beings. Such inner episodes can occur “without any prior process of learning or concept formation.” The first idea is clearly borrowed from the space of natural scientific understanding. But, as Sellars goes on to explain, the notion of the Given attempts an illicit fusion between the first idea and a second idea. The second idea is that such inner episodes “are non-inferential knowings... providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions” (ibid). This idea is drawn from thinking about mental operations in terms of the space of reasons.

In Chapter Two, I examined McDowell’s critique of Sellars’ view. For all his criticism of Sellars, though, the influence of Sellars’ rejection of the Given is critical for understanding how McDowell thinks of the problematic arising from the Inside/Outside picture, and for understanding his quietism as a way out of that problematic. Quietism is a difficult view to characterize. For McDowell, it amounts to simply rejecting the Inside/Outside picture along with everything that entails, i.e., the entire philosophical problematic brought about by taking the Inside/Outside picture seriously. As I have suggested (and as I argue below in section three), what it amounts to is a form of deflationary metaontological stance, adopted for the sake of (as critics might well suppose) having one’s cake and eating it too.

Before examining McDowell’s invocation of quietism in greater detail, though, I want to present a clearer account of McDowell’s ground-level or first-order account of ethics, to show how the notion of second nature figures in his view.

Section Two Moral Phenomenology and Wittgensteinian Quietism

McDowell proposes a moral phenomenological conception of so-called ‘practical wisdom.’¹⁶

Practical wisdom, on the McDowellian reading of Aristotle, is a matter of sensitivity to normative demands arising within a given situation. “The ethical” consists, McDowell writes, in “a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them” (1994: 82; cf. McPherson 2020: 26). The capacity to sense such

¹⁶ I personally do not believe in such a thing as practical wisdom. I think we are all alike on a ship of fools. But I consign myself to this single remark about my pessimism, what I really think about ethics.

requirements is produced by one's upbringing in a society (cf. Hacker-Wright 2009: 422, and see below, chapter four). McDowell writes:

Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics. Such initiation is a normal part of what it is for a human being to come to maturity.... (McDowell 1994: 84)

Sensitivity to normative requirements, on this picture, is what McDowell calls "second nature" (see, for instance, 1994: 85). Second nature is a system of habits of response instilled by one's upbringing. David McPherson underscores the fact that, for McDowell, language is critical to the account:

It is through acquiring conceptual capacities that our eyes are opened to the space of meaning, including ethical demands that are regarded as being 'there in any case.' Language enables the possibility of having a 'world' (as opposed to a mere 'environment,' as with non-rational animals) that is open to understanding in light of the meanings that arise for us within it. (McPherson 2020: 29)

What McDowell proposes is a moral phenomenology. As Joseph Schear writes,

...McDowell has long sought to protect Aristotle's teaching about virtue and practical wisdom from various excessively rationalistic and intellectualized deformations he believes it has suffered in the hands of other commentators. His effort to make this teaching safe is offered in the name (following David Wiggins) of a 'careful and sensitive moral phenomenology.' (Schear 2013: 2)

It is not evident that moral phenomenology has for long existed as a self-conscious tradition of moral philosophy in the West. To better introduce the idea of a moral phenomenology, I will take some time to consider how the idea has been articulated in recent literature on Buddhist philosophy, where it has been argued that some Buddhist philosophical traditions take a moral phenomenological approach to ethics.

Jay Garfield uses the term ‘moral phenomenology’ to describe Buddhist approaches to ethics, particularly Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (cf. Garfield 2010/2011, 2011, 2016, 2019a). A distinctive phenomenological action theory can be separated out from Buddhist ethics’ particular philosophical contributions (e.g., specific meditation techniques, emphases on specific virtues, distinctive psychology, metaphysics, and epistemology), and it is evident that this action theory overlaps extensively with Western phenomenological action theories. Without going deeply into the Buddhist philosophical contributions, we can still learn from Garfield’s work on moral phenomenology. Garfield’s comments elucidate the motivation behind the project of moral phenomenology, East and West:

When I use the term ‘moral phenomenology,’ I have in mind an approach to ethics in which the principal object of concern and of moral evaluation is the way one experiences the world, including oneself, other moral agents, and especially other moral patients. This contrasts with assessing dispositions to act, motivations for actions, or the consequences of actions as basic moral goods, or with any focus on an agent’s own well-being. When we approach ethics phenomenologically, we aim to foster ethical growth not by instilling a sense of duty, teaching people to focus on the consequences of their actions, or accustoming them to do things, but by training people to see themselves and others in a better way, with the confidence that the experience will not only be more accurate but also yield more effective engagement with the world in a host of situations. (Garfield 2019a: 192-193)

Garfield explains the importance of perceptual experience, from a moral phenomenological standpoint, as follows:

Perceptual processes... [constitute] the affective and conative horizon of confusion, attraction, and aversion that grounds all other immorality. That is why moral phenomenology is the most important level of moral intervention and the most important locus of moral practice.... (Garfield 2019a: 200)

Buddhist ethics emphasizes a body of techniques designed specifically with the type of moral intervention here described in view, a moral intervention at the level of perceptual processes. The reason why such a moral intervention is necessary, Garfield argues, is that perceptual processes drive our conscious behavior, speech, and thought (cf. *ibid.*). This claim, he says, is empirically

confirmed, by research into *implicit bias*. Implicit bias “operates at the level of perception—before we engage in any conscious deliberation or engage our explicit beliefs, we have committed ourselves to wrong view and the roots of wrong action in our spontaneous perceptual engagement with the world” (ibid).

The aim of Buddhist meditation practices and related techniques of training in Buddhist path literatures, specifically in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, is a transformation of perception. Garfield explains how such a transformation is supposed to impact ethical action:

This transformed perception and skilled engagement reduces the sense of being at the center of the universe and dislodges the pathologies of egoistic attraction and hostile aversion, allowing one to become less atavistically reactive and more humanely responsive. (Op. cit. 194)

The picture here is of a training regimen starting with perceptual experiences with shape A and ending with perceptual experiences with shape Ω , subordinate to the idea that perceptual experiences are the input side of ethics. As indicated in the remark quoted above, perceptual processes, in Buddhist psychology, encompass affective and conative processes. The end result of the Buddhist training regimen is described by Garfield as involving a mode of action described as spontaneous, which fits how Western phenomenologists describe embodied agency.

Garfield explains that this mode of action presupposes a non-Davidsonian framework for understanding action. In the context of a response to a critique by Bronwyn Finnigan (cf. Finnigan 2011), Garfield focuses on the example of *kendo*, an example also considered, as he notes, by Finnigan with her co-author Koji Tanaka in Finnigan and Tanaka 2014. Garfield reviews Finnigan and Tanaka’s statement of the difficulty that arises trying to understand, within a Davidsonian context, the kind of spontaneous action involved in instances of embodied agency, such as the kind of action involved in Asian martial arts. Finnigan and Tanaka write:

[A]n *action* is something more than a bodily movement that just happens. It seems that something goes on in our mind that directs our action. In order for us to say that we *acted*, we have to be able to say that we thought about it in this way or that.... So, based on the beliefs (knowledge, memory, desires) we have at the time, we *deliberate* on the

best course of action and that is what we do. (Finnigan and Tanaka, quoted by Garfield 2011: 180)

Finnigan and Tanaka express qualms over whether it is fair to account for the sort of movements involved in martial arts as actions involving a process of deliberation. As Garfield phrases the question, "...if to act is to think, how is it possible to act appropriately in the martial arts, if that is to act without thinking?" (ibid). And he notes, Finnigan and Tanaka respond:

There is a ready-made answer to this question. The answer is: training. (Finnigan and Tanaka, quoted by Garfield ibid)

Garfield elaborates on their answer:

We act when our behavior satisfies an appropriate description, has an appropriate context in an evaluative matrix, and has been brought about through an appropriate training regime. (181)

The crucial point, for Garfield's purposes, is that

Such an account of action and its explanation is non-Davidsonian, and makes no reference either to deliberation or to *cetanā*-intention. (181)

Garfield sums up:

Our movement is an action in *kendo* because we have been trained to do this in this circumstance, because it is what the ancient sword-masters did, because it is elicited in this appropriate circumstance, not because we had an intention and a set of beliefs or because we deliberated regarding the best way to actualize that intention, even unconsciously. This is spontaneous action. (181)

Garfield concludes his treatment of Finnigan's views on Buddhist resources for accounting for ethical agency by arguing, based on the admissions in Finnigan and Tanaka 2014, that she would, after all, agree with the conception of spontaneous action postulated by Buddhist moral phenomenology, a conception of action which does not fit the Davidsonian framework:

And so, I presume, she would agree that a moral agent's actions can also be assessed in normative terms appropriate to the matrix of training, and to the circumstances of

elicitation [affordances for action?], and not in terms of her *intentions, representations, deliberations, or choices*. Moral psychology can be non-Davidsonic just as action theory can be. (181, my brackets)

Speaking here of a movement's being *elicited in an appropriate circumstance*, rather than its being intentional or driven by a process of (conceptually guided) deliberation, fits closely with how Western phenomenologists approach action theory.

Hubert Dreyfus, a prominent exponent of phenomenology, acting as an ambassador to Anglophone philosophers on behalf of the continental phenomenological tradition, says:

Existential phenomenologists such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty point out that access to an independent thinkable world requires as its background a familiar graspable world that, so long as we are absorbed in it, is operative as a field of forces, but which vanishes when we try to think it. (Dreyfus 2013: 16)

Dreyfus explains that, for phenomenologists, agents engaged in absorbed coping are merged with

...a familiar field of relevant affordances directly soliciting our responses. (17)

Absorption in the field of affordances is described by Dreyfus, in terms similar to Garfield's, as nonconceptual and nonintentional, including the absence of distance between the agent and the world, and even a disappearance of the 'I' of the agent (cf. *ibid*, esp. p. 28). Dreyfus says that

In general, the absorbed copier is directly drawn by each solicitation in an appropriate way: the chairs draw him to sit on them, the floorboards to walk on them, the walls may draw him to hang pictures on them, the windows to open them, and the door may draw him to go out. (18)

This account of absorbed coping, or spontaneous action, hinges on the claim that there is a nonconceptual perceptual response to affordances, or circumstances of elicitation:

To perceive an affordance *qua* affordance (absorbedly), then, *just is* to be responsive to its normative pull. And in order to resist the pull of an affordance, an agent must leave her absorbed state, and switch into a detached, calculative or explicitly self-aware (Dreyfus would say, thereby inferior or inexpert) mode of interaction with the world. That is why, although the rabbit's activity is intentional in the sense that it has

experiential content, the agential credit, so to speak, for its movements is due entirely to the inexorable pull of the hole in the wall through which it darts. (Gehrman 2016: 599, italics in original)

Dreyfus points out the ways in which McDowell's work echoes authors like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (cf. Dreyfus 2013: 15). But, in a well-known exchange between Dreyfus and McDowell, Dreyfus accuses McDowell of failing to do justice to the phenomenon of absorbed coping. Dreyfus writes:

...for McDowell, as minds we are always nonetheless *distanced* in the sense that we are never *merged* with the world. We always stand over against it bringing our subjective perspective to bear on an independent objective reality. (Dreyfus 2013: 17)

McDowell has responded to Dreyfus' accusation (in my judgment, McDowell makes an overwhelming case showing that Dreyfus fails to adequately engage with McDowell's work). Some of McDowell's remarks, in his summary of his response, are worth quoting to show that McDowell's moral phenomenology fits squarely with the non-Davidsonian action theory promoted by phenomenologists, East and West:

...I agree with Dreyfus and Merleau-Ponty that the world of the absorbed copier—in fact the world of agents in general, whether they are acting reflectively or not—is richly populated with solicitations to act. (McDowell 2013: 52)

I did not use the term 'solicitations,' but it would have been appropriate in setting out the picture I was trying to give. In my picture, actions that manifest virtue are responses to requirements to act that agents confront in the situations they act in, so that if one fails to act as virtue requires, without being prevented, that reveals at least partial blindness to facts about the world. (52)

...I deny: that our conceptual capacities are, just as such and in all their actualizations, distanced. (53)

I would not dream of disputing that there is an important difference between absorbed coping, on the one hand, and, on the other, acting in response to deliberation about what to do, or reflectively adjusting one's thinking to experience. (53)

With this much of a sketch of phenomenological action theory, we are in position to better appreciate the connection between McDowell's account of second nature in his first order theory of ethics, and his commitment to quietism.

To escape the Inside/Outside picture, McDowell ultimately recommends quietism. To elucidate this recommendation, it will be useful to briefly review his conception of the *opposite* of quietism, which he refers to as "constructive philosophy." McDowell distinguishes between two kinds of platonism (he uses the lower-case "p"): a rampant platonism, of which he is critical, and naturalized platonism, the view he himself defends (and ascribes to Wittgenstein, although he is aware of the incongruity in ascribing, to *this* philosopher, any form of "platonism"). Rampant platonism is a form of constructive philosophy, for McDowell. In rampant platonism, the rational structure, or "space of reasons," within which meanings and values become available, is "independent of anything merely human" (McDowell 1994: 92). He says that such a dualism is characteristic of "ordinary philosophical worries" about bringing "subject and object back together" (ibid 86). In other words, rampant platonism presupposes the Inside/Outside picture of the relation between mind and world. According to McDowell, the usual business of "constructive philosophy" is to attempt to bridge the gap between "here" and "there." In modernity, the dualism that constructive philosophy usually seeks to bridge is the dualism of nature and norms (cf. ibid 93):

Ordinary modern philosophy addresses its derivative dualisms in a characteristic way. It takes its stand on one side of a gulf it aims to bridge, accepting without question the way its target dualism conceives the chosen side. Then it constructs something as close as possible to the conception of the other side that figured in the problems, out of materials that are unproblematically available where it has taken its stand... Phenomenalism is a good example of a philosophical construction with this traditional shape; it aims to overcome anxiety about a gap between experience and the world by constructing the world out of experience, still conceived in just the way that gives rise to the anxiety. (94)

Naturalistic reductionism in metaethics gives another instance of constructive philosophy, in McDowell's view. Naturalistic reductionism sees ethical inferences as grounded in naturalistic facts. Here a specific conception of 'naturalistic facts' is presupposed. This presupposition imports a dualistic structure typical of constructive philosophy: the relevant dualism is the divide

between nature and normativity. Nature, on this Inside/Outside conception of things, is disenchanted (McDowell speaks of nature, so conceived, as a “realm of law”; cf. *ibid* 73). This invokes the picture, which Kant presupposes, of a basic incompatibility between free will (“spontaneity” as McDowell prefers to say) and nomological necessity. Moral normativity, then, on such a conception of nature, stands away on the other side, apart from nature, and the task for constructive philosophy is to bridge the distance, to recover (rational and moral) normativity from within the domain of disenchanted nature.¹⁷ The approach taken by bald naturalist forms of ethical naturalism is to attempt to construct normativity reductionistically “out of materials that are unproblematically available where it has taken its stand,” that is, from within the conception of the domain of disenchanted nature. What this will look like is an appeal to reason where “we are suspending judgement on whether reason requires virtuous activity.” (1995: 151).

Here McDowell seems to target a sort of view closely related to Philippa Foot’s ethical naturalism. According to McDowell, when the neo-Aristotelian of this sort affirms that “the good for human beings is a life of activity in accordance with the virtues,” the good of such a life must be recognizable as such from within the domain of disenchanted nature (cf. McDowell 1995: 150). The rational force of the inference (i.e., the inference that doing such and such constitutes the good for human beings) does not reside in “reason in its own right,” but derivatively, via an independent appeal to bald naturalistic facts (*ibid* 151). As McDowell characterizes this sort of reading of Aristotle’s ethics, it “credit[s] him with an idea of the choiceworthy life that is related in some suitable way to the idea of an optimal combination of component goods” (2009a [1995]: 25).¹⁸ The catch is that the component goods must be “established without presupposing the distinctive conception of worthwhileness in action that is supposed to be validated” by the component goods (*ibid*). Reductionistic ethical naturalists have sought such *external validation* by appeal to naturalistic facts, specifically certain biological facts, e.g., about the nature of rational animals. But, McDowell urges,

¹⁷ McDowell writes: “The impetus to the approach is that one finds a spookiness in norms if they are conceived platonistically. This reflects looking at norms from nature’s side of the duality of norm and nature; nature is equated with the realm of laws, and that poses the familiar threat of disenchantment. Now any [rampant] platonism has the effect that norms are on the far side of a gulf, and that sets a philosophical task with a familiar shape....” (*ibid* 94).

¹⁸ This description seems to fit Hursthouse’s view, which follows Foot. See Hursthouse 1999, esp. ch. 9-10 (pp. 192-238).

Aristotle evidently wants the point of a bit of virtuous behaviour to be intrinsic to it, and it is hard to make this cohere with the idea that the worthwhileness that a virtuous agent sees in such behaviour is to be authenticated in this external way: that is, by arguing that it is a good plan to cultivate the states of character that such behaviour would manifest, on the ground that acting out those states of character is likely to secure a life that would come out best by standards that are independent of a specific ethical outlook. (ibid 27)

As McDowell explains, the relations that constitute normativity “are not visibly there, as such, in nature as the paradigmatic natural sciences depict it”; yet the reductionistic ethical naturalist believes (or hopes) that “we can reconstruct the structure of the space of reasons out of conceptual materials that already belong in a natural-scientific depiction of nature” (1994: 73). But this cannot be done, McDowell thinks.

The reductionistic ethical naturalist’s sort of naturalism, i.e., bald naturalism, stands in stark contrast with traditional non-natural approaches to explaining the relation between nature and normativity, which do not so much satisfactorily explain anything as merely dogmatically assert that we have some sort of inscrutable cognitive access to norms of rationality and values. This is the sort of approach that McDowell associates with rampant platonism.¹⁹ In McDowell’s view, it is rampant platonism that is absurdly out of touch with nature. The middle way between bald naturalism and rampant platonism is what McDowell calls naturalized platonism. This is a frame of mind in which we “no longer seem to be faced with problems that call on philosophy to bring subject and object together” (1996 [1994]: 86). It is a “naturalism of second nature” not “shaken by any temptation to lapse back into ordinary philosophical worries about how to place minds in the world” (ibid). For a naturalism of second nature, the idea that normativity and rationality are the products of enculturation, arising only within a “formed evaluative outlook,” ensures “that the autonomy of meaning is not inhuman,” eliminating “the tendency to be spooked by the very idea of norms or demands of reason” (ibid 94-95). The problem of a dualism of nature and normativity is not solved, but dissolved, from the point of view of a second nature naturalism.

¹⁹ The view he here describes captures the approach to metaethics taken by such realists as G. E. Moore, and, more recently, e.g., Russ Shafer-Landau (2003), David Enoch (2011), and Erik Wielenberg (2014).

McDowell's description of the result achieved by rejecting the Inside-Outside picture alludes to Wittgensteinian quietism, "the discovery that gives philosophy peace" (86).²⁰

We can situate McDowell's view on one side of what might be the central debate in late twentieth century (and early twenty-first century?) Anglophone philosophy. This debate is characterized as follows by Richard Rorty. Rorty writes that Wittgenstein "came close to suggesting that the so-called 'core' areas of [contemporary analytic] philosophy [which are, according to Rorty: experience, consciousness, and language] serve no function save to keep an academic discipline in business" (2007: 57). Rorty's point is that Anglophone philosophical research programs make no contribution to the culture of our times because "the educated classes" are now not resistant, as they were in Descartes, Hume, and Kant's day, to "the secularization of moral and political life" (*ibid* p. 55). Instead of contributing to culture, contemporary Anglophone philosophy, in its professionalized form, has become tedious and pointless from the point of view of intellectuals who have "either abandoned their religious faith or found ways of rendering it compatible with modern natural science" (*ibid* p. 56). In response, according to Rorty, contemporary analytic philosophers have sought to justify the continued existence of philosophy as an independent academic discipline by attempting to develop armchair research programs, in imitation of Kant, who, e.g., having never been anywhere outside of Königsberg, offered rather ambitious lectures in cultural anthropology. Naturalism, in this context, is comprised of relating atoms of experience to physical particles, allowing "philosophers in Anglophone countries [to shove] social philosophy, intellectual history, cultural criticism, and Hegel out to the periphery" (*ibid*). Rorty reports Brian Leiter's division of "the Anglophone philosophical world into 'naturalists' and 'Wittgensteinian quietists'" (p. 57), and Rorty agrees with Leiter's characterization of the two camps. Naturalists believe that the problems which have concerned analytic philosophers for the past hundred years or so are real. That is, problems about the nature of the mind, knowledge, action, reality (specifically ontology),

²⁰ The quote is from *Philosophical Investigations* §133. McDowell points out that Wittgenstein's quietism has been interpreted by Crispin Wright and Saul Kripke as implying a constructive philosophical counterpart (see McDowell 1994: 92). On this kind of reading, Wittgenstein reconstructs the requirements of reason "out of independent facts" about societal practices, or even a kind of social pragmatism (cf. *ibid*; also see Tillemans 2016: 11). McDowell rejects this interpretation of Wittgenstein, but his rejection of it only raises the urgency of asking about the extent to which there is a constructive philosophical counterpart implied by McDowell's (Wittgenstein's?) own view. See comments on Rorty, immediately following.

morality, and so on are not illusory and deserve to be taken seriously. The Wittgensteinians disagree. They seek, through a kind of therapy, to dissolve philosophical problems.

This distinction between naturalists and Wittgensteinians is quite rough, and perhaps does not altogether accurately capture the current state of play in Anglophone philosophy construed either as an academic discipline or as a cultural formation. Still, I think Rorty *accurately portrays* a contrast which we see developed in McDowell's critique of naturalistic reductionist ethical naturalism. "Do you mean to say that McDowell thinks problems about the nature of the mind, knowledge, action, reality (specifically ontology), morality, and so on are illusory and do not deserve to be taken seriously?" I seem to hear someone ask incredulously (incredulous because McDowell clearly expends a lot of energy on these very topics, and he appears to be quite serious in what he is doing). Response: I think he thinks the *illusion* that there is a problem is itself a non-illusory problem and does deserve to be taken seriously. This creates the impression that he himself takes the first-order problems seriously. He takes seriously the problem of the illusion that there are first-order problems because, in taking the first-order problems seriously, naturalistic reductionists lose their grip on sanity and common sense. Or so I think McDowell would say.

As I have said, quietism is a difficult view to characterize. I shall argue next, in section three below, that where metaethics is concerned it is possible to characterize McDowell's quietism as a specific form of global metaontological deflationism. My claim, ultimately, shall be that McDowell's deflationism leaves his view with no recourse to any notion of external constraint. As explained above in the Introduction, the problem of constraint suggests that to secure objectivity, in values, it is necessary to ground values in a reality external to any specific way of going on, i.e., second nature or form of life. Without recourse to external constraint, a view simply becomes incapable of addressing the problem of relativism in value theory.

Section Three What Metaontological Deflationism Has to Do with It

The thesis of this section is that McDowell's philosophical quietism is a form of metaontological deflationism.

I say more about metaontological deflationism below, but, roughly, it is simply the position of someone refusing to take first-order ontological questions seriously. Ontology asks the question, 'What exists?' More precisely, ontology asks many existence questions, inquiring "Do x's

exist?” of sundry specific kinds of x’s, such as properties, universals, God, persons, chairs, the self, atoms, numbers, modal properties, mereological sums, and so forth. Metaontology, following the meaning of the prefix ‘meta’ in ‘meta-ethics,’ asks whether the first-order questions have objective answers (cf. Manley 2009: 1, n. 1; also see Chalmers 2009). That is all I have in mind by speaking of metaontology and ‘first-order’ ontological questions. To better characterize ontological questions and metaontological deflationism, it will be useful to invoke David Chalmers’ metaphor of the ontology room. The ontology room is a place where existence assertions are taken and examined with gravitas. The metaphor presupposes Chalmers’ distinction between *ontological existence assertions* and *ordinary existence assertions* (cf. Chalmers 2009: 81ff). An existence assertion either affirms or denies the existence of certain entities. *Ordinary* existence assertions are pedestrian statements which nobody in their right mind who understands English (say) would dispute, like “Earth has a moon.” *Ontological* existence assertions, on the other hand, are substantive claims in the contexts of first-order ontological disputes. For example, “A table is nothing more than a collection of simples arranged table-wise.” Ontological existence assertions are, for purposes of the metaphor, existence assertions made inside the ontology room, and ordinary existence assertions are made outside the ontology room.

McDowell engages with ontological existence assertions when he deals with the intersection of metaethics and philosophy of mind. His first-order ethics commits him to a Kantian ontology of the will. One might reasonably object: “Explain to me how this is quietism.” ANSWER: He engages with the assertions, which are first order, by not letting them rest at the first order but by forcing them to jump up to the second order or meta-level where they can be deflated. The deflationary action is the quietist trick (to put it, again, in not altogether charitable terms).

For McDowell’s metaethical project, then, he needs to resist ontological existence assertions which would cancel this Kantian ontology. A specific target is naturalistic reductionism in philosophy of mind. McDowell’s maneuver against the reductionist’s ontological existence assertions (or denials, as the case may be) is to insist that the conversation turn out of the ontology room, so to speak. McDowell’s concern to connect a Kantian ontology with ordinary existence assertions may appear strange, but his quietism is the key to his argumentative strategy. Since the switch from ontological existence assertions to ordinary existence assertions is the

modus operandum of metaontological deflationism, my claim is that McDowell's defense of Kantian existence claims via quietism gives an instance of metaontological deflationism. On my interpretation of his quietism, he is committed, specifically, to a global form of metaontological deflationism. By 'global' I simply invoke the familiar 'local/global' contrast (cf. Cortens 1999).

Let me begin by explaining the connection between McDowell's quietism and (first-order) ontology. When McDowell discusses naturalistic reductionism, in metaethics and in philosophy of mind, I interpret him as considering a view which amounts to a form of ontological reductionism, even though McDowell never comes out and says anything specifically about ontological reductionism, or deflationism, in his discussions of quietism. For purposes of the present discussion, I accept the following rough sketch, by Mark Siderits, of how to understand ontological reductionism:

Suppose that the users of a given discourse regularly refer to things of kind *K*. There are three possible views one might take with respect to the ontological status of *K*s. One might be a non-reductionist about *K*s, holding that things of this sort belong in our final ontology—that the *K*s will be among the items that must be mentioned in any complete theory about the nature of reality. Or one might be an eliminativist about *K*s, holding that belief in the existence of *K*s within the discourse community is wholly the product of the acceptance of a false theory. Finally, one might be a reductionist about *K*s, holding that while *K*s may be said in a sense to exist (*pace* the eliminativist), their existence just consists in the existence of things of a more basic sort, things of which the *K*s are composed, so that (*pace* the non-reductionist) *K*s do not belong in our final ontology. (Siderits 2003: 9)

With these definitions in hand, we can see what McDowell thinks is at stake in his debate with naturalistic reductionism, and we can put his argument against naturalistic reductionism in terms which he himself does not use, but which might shed further light on his view. For McDowell, the existence of spontaneity, i.e., the free exercise of human conceptual capacities, i.e., *the very existence of second nature itself*, is what is at stake. The naturalistic reductionist commits two errors, McDowell thinks: first, the reductionist treats second nature as ontologically derivative; second, the reductionist fails to see that (bald) naturalism lacks the resources from which to

derive second nature. That is, in McDowell's view, while the reductionist aspires to be a reductionist, she can, after all, only be an eliminativist.

The force of McDowell's critique of naturalistic reductionism is with his implicit characterization of *what is (purportedly) lost* by naturalistic reductionists. McDowell thinks what is lost by reductionism is an adequate conception of spontaneity. The Kantian ontology of the will is connected, in Kant's philosophy, with so-called things-in-themselves. Spontaneity is the source, on his account, *as in the accounts of some more non-naturalistically inclined Kantian metaethicists*, of our ability to continue, as G. E. M. Anscombe puts it, to speak the word 'ought' "with a special emphasis and a special feeling" in disenchanting contexts (1958: 26, 30-31).²¹ The Kantian fixation on an integral connection between the moral 'ought' and a libertarian conception of *free will* reminds us of the religious core of Kantian thought. Philosophers have attributed the invention of libertarian free will, and even of *the will*, to St. Augustine, as a purported solution to Western monotheism's theodicy problem (see Plantinga 1977; also cf. Garfield 2014).²²

McDowell's argumentative strategy, then, implements quietism as a way of undercutting reductionism. He suggests that if we simply drop the picture of a split between the logical space of reasons and the space of naturalistic understanding, the naturalist's temptation to aspire (and fail) to be a reductionist will disappear.

To see why McDowell thinks this could work, we need to get clearer about metaontological deflationism. I am going to sketch Kit Fine's distinction between ontology and metaphysics, to build a conceptual framework for getting a better handle on what deflationists intend to accomplish.

According to Fine, traditional metaphysicians have made a misguided distinction between ontology and metaphysics: according to this misguided distinction, ontology is concerned with *what there is*, and metaphysics proper is concerned with *the nature of what there is* (Fine 2017:

²¹ There are other philosophers who, like McDowell, wish to conserve the moral ought's "specialness" while remaining within the auspices of a naturalistic outlook. Included here: Charles Taylor (2003), Fiona Ellis (2014), and David McPherson (2020).

²² It seems clear that Augustine was not the first Christian thinker to approach the problem of evil from a vantage focused on the issue of free will. Origen probably deserves credit for the strategy, even if his account is deemed unorthodox by Church authorities. See Origen, *De Principiis [On First Principles]* (cf. translation, for instance, by Butterworth 1966).

98). This traditional metametaphysical model is erroneous, according to Fine. In its place, he substitutes a distinction between *foundational metaphysics* and *naïve metaphysics*. Foundational (or critical) metaphysics concerns itself with the issue of “what, in reality, is or is not the case” (ibid). Naïve (or pre-critical) metaphysics is *not* concerned with questions of reality (ibid 101), though it is concerned with *what* exists, specifically, with the question of what that is like, i.e., the nature of what exists regardless of whether it is real. But (and here is where Fine’s picture differs from the traditional account) naïve metaphysics is independent of foundational metaphysics. Fine writes: “we are able, by and large, to pursue questions concerning the nature of things independently of any consideration of whether they are real” (101).

Notice how Fine’s conception of naïve metaphysics relates to the distinction, drawn above, between ordinary existence assertions and ontological existence assertions. Fine’s view, I take it, is that naïve metaphysics provides us with a way of handling ontological posits as if they involved merely ordinary existence assertions. That is, naïve metaphysics is business conducted outside the ontology room, without contesting heavy ontological existence assertions. Outside the ontology room, there is living space for all kinds of ontological posits, and the aim is to think about what those posits are like, their natures, not to question whether the posits are real.²³ The question of reality is for inside the ontology room. It is the business of foundational metaphysics. To be clear: Fine suggests that the long-term goal will be to integrate naïve and foundational metaphysics. He does not castigate foundational metaphysics as such, but merely seeks to remove the illusion that naïve metaphysics, as a theoretical endeavor, is inferior or dependent upon foundational metaphysics.

Now here is how I understand global metaontological deflationism.²⁴ Global metaontological deflationism is the project pursued by thinkers who totally reject foundational metaphysics. The claim a global metaontological deflationist wants to make is this:

²³ The move is, incidentally, quite reminiscent of Husserl’s conception of phenomenological methodology. Cf., for introductory discussion of Husserl’s view, Zahavi 2003, Smith 2013.

²⁴ The views of a wide range of contemporary deflationists lie close to one another. See Karen Bennett’s list of “neo-Carnapian naysayers”: Hilary Putnam, Eli Hirsch, Alan Sidelle, Stephen Yablo, Amie Thomasson, and “of course, Carnap himself” (Bennett 2009: 38, n. 2). Cf. Putnam 1987, 1990, Hirsch 1993, 2002, 2009, Sidelle 1989, 1998, 2002, 2007, 2016, Yablo 1998, 2000, 2001, 2009, Thomasson 2007, 2009, 2015, and, of course, Carnap’s classic “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology” in *Meaning and Necessity* (1950). Also cf. Blatti and Lapointe 2016. Bennett’s own view is also a form of dismissivism, as she calls it, but it is not a form of deflationary account of

Global Metaontological Deflationism

Altogether rejecting foundational metaphysics, we keep naïve metaphysics in place.

This is the move I spoke of earlier, in section one, which is supposed to allow deflationists to talk out of both sides of their mouths, resisting the urge to take ontological assertions too seriously, while yet not relinquishing them entirely.

To see why a McDowellian might feel the urge to avail themselves of such double-talk, return to the example considered in the Introduction. Gene-editing opens a range of possibilities for which our way of going on is ill-equipped to guide us in the kind of reflexive manner expected from a moral phenomenology. Simply looking at the question whether to make humans with remarkable abilities (e.g., darkvision, supercomputer brains, wings, or whatever) does not trip us into a net of affordances subtly cuing us in on what we should do. While such a net of affordances provides constraint in situations for which the way of going on is well-equipped (e.g., looking at life in circa 2005 Atlanta and judging it to be toxic), it has nothing to offer in the face of the posthuman given as a live option. Here the problem of constraint metastasizes. A form of life supplies constraint for situations to which it is suited, but in the face of the unknown, of reality, it breaks down. Here, McDowell acknowledges, we jump out of the mode of absorbed coping to find ourselves at sea—on Neurath’s raft, the McDowellian will say. This is where the role of Kantian

truth. Bennett’s epistemicist dismissivism presupposes that there is a fact of the matter about first-order ontological disputes, and that such disputes are not merely verbal. On her view, the problems are simply epistemically intractable: of any claim at stake in such a dispute she believes “there is little justification for believing either that it is true or that it is false” (Bennett 2009: 42). It is worth noting, I believe, that Thomasson, who defends an explicitly Carnapian form of deflationism, describes late twentieth century versions of deflationism (influenced mostly by the work of Hilary Putnam) as having taken an “unfortunate turn” (cf. Thomasson 2015: 56-63). Some Western commentators on Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy say Madhyamaka is metaontological deflationism. For instance, Tom Tillemans writes: “Grand scale dualities like appearance and reality, or ontology in general—and hence most analytic metaphysics—will probably have little place for the deflationist, be she Mādhyamika or philosopher of science” (Tillemans 2019: 92). In “The (Two) Truths About Truth” (2011), Graham Priest and Mark Siderits, with Tillemans, argue that deflationism about truth offers the best model for a philosophically promising form of Madhyamaka semantics. On the “semantic interpretation” of Madhyamaka, Mādhyamikas repudiate the existence of “the mind-independent truthmakers called for by a robust correspondence theory” (Siderits 2015 [2003]: 189). As Siderits elaborates, a “robust correspondence” theory of truth involves the doctrine of “metaphysical realism” which has “three key theses: (1) truth is correspondence between proposition and reality; (2) reality is mind-independent; (3) there is one true theory that correctly describes reality” (311). Siderits takes the Mādhyamika as refusing to accept theses (1) and (2) (Siderits 1988: 312; cf. Siderits 2015 [2003]: 187). Tillemans suggests that the distinction between pragmatist and quietist approaches to deflationism can be drawn, in Buddhist philosophy, between different Western commentators’ styles of approach to Buddhist materials. Cf. Tillemans 2016: 9ff, 2019: 87.

spontaneity becomes pivotal to McDowell's project. In deliberating how to restructure the raft, i.e., how to guide and reshape, or construct, the form of life to adapt to a new situation, the McDowellian is inclined to make an ontology of free will central to their philosophical project. The McDowellian, like various other constructivist ethicists with a Kantian orientation, from Sartre to Rawls to Korsgaard (cf. Smith 2013: 373-379 for an enlightening discussion), believes we must acknowledge the ultimate groundlessness of a form of life. The form of life is chosen; in Sartrean language, we are condemned to be free, or, in Korsgaardian terms, we constitute ourselves as agents, in the face of the metastasized problem of constraint. Only, for the McDowellian, the choice becomes less subjective and individualist, becoming the choice of how to modify one's way of going on. All this explains why a McDowellian wants to keep a certain metaphysical outlook in place, i.e., the Kantian outlook. But then they will want to resist another sort of metaphysical outlook, the outlook of the naturalistic reductionist, which undermines that Kantian outlook. The McDowellian move, though, is not to answer the naturalistic reductionist on ontological grounds but on metaontological grounds. By deflating all ontological assertions (even their own Kantian ones) it becomes possible to safeguard a set of ontological assertions against another set, by switching to the other side of their mouth, i.e., by adopting the metaontological perspective and rejecting foundational metaphysics. I will eventually lodge a criticism of this move, arguing that it amounts to a form of dishonest deflationism. But I will not get to this until the Conclusion, and I beg the reader's patience, though I expect readers already unsympathetic to McDowell's project may find it easy to imagine where I am going with this. I want to emphasize, though, that the critique of McDowell's project as a form of dishonest deflationism is not my main criticism in this dissertation. My main criticism (the one I think holds, even after we decide—as we may—that Plato's arguments against Protagoreanism do not perfectly apply to McDowell's view) is that McDowell's appeal to metaontological deflationism renders his view incapable of satisfactorily addressing the metastasized problem of constraint. As for the charge of dishonest deflationism, I am, in fact, uncertain as to how much weight to put on this criticism—but more on that in the Conclusion.

For now, we can make an important distinction between two kinds of approaches to metaontological deflationism: pragmatist approaches and quietist approaches. What the two sorts of approach have in common is their shared commitment to rejecting any attempt to explain the distinction between successful and unsuccessful judgment in terms of external constraint

pictured in terms of a mind-independent reality or intrinsic truths. That is, neither pragmatists nor quietists can solve the metastasized problem of constraint by appeal to, say, the claim that the world has an intrinsic nature or structure, that is, its nature or structure is independent of our concepts, language, cognitive activities, form of life, and so on. Where the two approaches, quietism and pragmatism, diverge is that pragmatists are willing to provide an account devising a surrogate for the non-deflationist's picture of external constraint. Below I shall sketch a recent way of replacing the non-deflationist's picture of external constraint by positing the idea of external constraint as performing a conventionally grounded theoretical role, while otherwise remaining as far from a positive characterization of external constraint as it is possible to be. McDowell's quietism suggests that making even this much of a concession to the realist picture goes too far. McDowell is a die-hard quietist.

To sketch some recent instances of pragmatist deflationism, allowing some role for the notion of external constraint, I want to begin by considering some features of Amie Thomasson's view. Thomasson works within the parameters of Carnap's distinction between internal and external questions. On Carnap's view, internal questions about existence are posed within a linguistic framework, and are typically true or false, either analytically or empirically. Internal questions belong to the mundane world and have easy, sometimes even trivial answers. External existence questions, on the other hand, are posed outside a given framework and concern entities taken from a perspective of absolute generality. Metaphysical questions are typically external questions, Carnap thinks. According to Carnap, the purported answers to external questions are neither true nor false.²⁵ Carnap allows that there can be multiple distinct frameworks, and he thinks that the choice between frameworks is practical, not grounded in facts—there is no such thing as the 'correct' framework. Thomasson's view goes in a similar vein but with a twist. On Thomasson's account, we can give easy ontological arguments, internal to a framework of constitutive linguistic rules, to resolve first-order questions about disputed entities. Easy ontological arguments would be characteristic of business outside the ontology room. Thomasson explicitly and intentionally follows Carnap in tying easy ontological arguments to linguistic frameworks. Thomasson proposes a deflationary account of the term (or concept)

²⁵ See Carnap 1950. Also cf. Chalmers 2009, Price 2009, Thomasson 2015, Sidelle 2016. For discussion of a possible analogy between Carnapian deflationism and Madhyamaka deflationism, in Buddhist philosophy, see Finnigan and Tanaka 2011.

‘exists,’ analogous to deflationary accounts of ‘truth’ and ‘reference’ (Thomasson 2015: 87). Noting that most contemporary ontological disputes focus on whether entities of a certain kind exist, Thomasson suggests an account which deals specifically with kind terms and their application and coapplication conditions.²⁶ Application conditions are “frame-level” rules governing whether reference is established by sortal or categorial terms. They are “frame-level” since “they involve conditions that are *conceptually* relevant to whether or not reference is established, not all the conditions that may be empirically discovered as relevant” (2007: 39-40). Coapplication conditions are rules governing whether a nominative term is to be applied repetitively to pick out one and the same entity (cf. 2007: 40). Application and coapplication conditions are grounded in a conceptual or linguistic framework, but Thomasson claims they *defer to the actual world* as well.

For example, suppose Martians, for reasons of their own, release into the Smoky Mountains about two hundred synthetic black bears, ‘synthetic’ meaning that, through some complex biochemical process, the Martians have managed to produce creatures appearing on the outside to be black bears, but possessing a completely different internal structure, like, for instance, Kripkean tigers (Kripke 1972: 120). On Thomasson’s view, we would say that the black bear population in the Smokies has suddenly increased by about two hundred specimens if and only if the application conditions we associate with ‘black bear’ are fulfilled (Thomasson 2015: 86). In the case we are imagining, surely the application conditions for ‘black bear’ are *not* fulfilled by “very peculiar looking reptiles” (Kripke *ibid*) even if we might be *fooled into believing* the conditions are fulfilled. Thus, the actual world, external to whatever linguistic framework we may be using, has a hand in determining whether a term or concept applies in any given instance.

But what could Thomasson really have in mind with the thought of *the world having a hand* in determining whether a term or concept is applicable? She follows Carnap closely in connecting deflationism with pragmatism: whereas internal questions are framework-relative (cf. Thomasson 2015: 38-39), she writes, “external questions can be given a pragmatic construal according to which they are really asking about the advisability of adopting the new linguistic framework” (2015: 40). Thomasson’s Carnapian’s opponent’s assumption (the Carnapian’s

²⁶ She says that the focus is linguistic to avoid certain controversies about concepts (Thomasson 2015: 85; cf. Thomasson 2007: 38ff).

opponent is, of course, Quine, or Quineans) is that there are *not any given concepts which are non-negotiable*, as it were (cf. Quine 1951). Thomasson, however, imagines that there *are* such *non-negotiable, given* concepts, namely, concepts arising from natural evolutionary processes. These *conceptual givens*, in her view, exercise constraint on the process of pragmatic deliberation. To be clear, these non-negotiable concepts do not run contrary to her deflationism in the sense of corresponding in some deep sense to metaphysical reality. It is not that “they evolved because they are the most metaphysically apt set of concepts—only that possessing these concepts in the relevant environments aided our survival and reproduction” (Thomasson 2015: 43). Thomasson cites research by cognitive psychologist Susan Carey to support the idea that “a handful of basic concepts (including *object* in a sortal sense, *agent*, and *number*) have evolved in humans and other mammals” (*ibid*, my italics).²⁷ For a philosopher like Thomasson, then, the pragmatic explanation of the origin of our concepts/ontology has an evolutionary component which places constraints on the deliberative aspect of the pragmatic process.²⁸

Thomasson’s account seems, despite her repudiation of holism and defense of analyticity, to fit well in the pocket with Quine’s view of external constraint. Quine believes that knowledge of the properties possessed by individual things can be explained by knowledge of scientific discoveries and knowledge of the semantic conventions adopted by a group of language-users (cf. Quine 1948, 1951, 1960). Quine’s ontology acknowledges physical objects and a limited domain of abstract objects: whatever is indispensable to science. None of these objects has an essence. Quine’s anti-essentialism is just the flipside of his commitment to ontological relativity, i.e., the claim that reference is inscrutable. The course of scientific discovery operates to constrain ontological judgments. Unlike the picture suggested by Peter Geach’s view, for instance, Quine is not “allowing us to choose whatever identities—and so kinds of entities—we like (subject [only] to constraints of logic)” (Penner 1987: 213). Ontological relativity merely

²⁷ Cf. Carey 2009; Tyler Burge also cites Carey’s research at crucial junctures in the argument of *Origins of Objectivity* (Oxford 2010); see, for instance, p. 480 n. 82.

²⁸ Catherine Prueitt distinguishes, in Dharmakīrti’s thought, his reliance on karmic imprints (*vāsanās*) at two levels, “one *within* the conventional world, and one *which constitutes* the conventional world” (Prueitt 2018: 315). Carey’s “basic concepts,” and Thomasson’s conceptual given, seem to be analogous to the sort of conceptual structuring involved at the constitutive level which Prueitt thinks is demarcated in Dharmakīrti. It seems clear that karma theory and evolutionary theory comprise distinct paradigms for understanding the origins of conceptual structuring. Prueitt, following Dan Arnold (2012) and Sonam Kachru (2015), frames these as *competing* explanatory frameworks. I am not certain that they are *incompatible* frameworks; it may depend on whether they serve the same ends. I have not yet reached any firm conclusion about this and need to think more about the matter.

entails that more than one theory could be true of the world. There may be no fact of the matter to help us decide, all things being equal, which ontology is better (e.g., *whole rabbits* versus *collections of undetached rabbit parts*). But there is a fact of the matter, for any given ontology, whether the scientific theory which that ontology underpins turns out to be true. While there could, thus, be multiple true ontologies, on Quine's view, there is nevertheless a reality which constrains whether a scientific theory is true, thus making room for us to be able to say of some ontologies that they are false because they underpin false scientific theories (e.g., the phlogiston theory of combustion).

It is possible to raise worries about the intelligibility of Thomasson's account, which, in my view, folds Quine's conception of pragmatism into Carnapian conventionalism. What exactly does it mean for the actual world to "fulfill the application conditions" of a term or concept? Presumably, if we closely examined specimens of Martian pseudo-bears, we would find that they are not bears because their DNA is preponderantly reptilian (or something). But we are still relying on sortal terms, even at the level of DNA (or whatever). We can step back and question whether the application conditions we associate with 'DNA' (or whatever) are fulfilled, and this presumably starts the dog chasing its tail. Wherever do we finally get to the so-called *actual world* fulfilling the application conditions of our language? I am uncertain whether Thomasson's view is intended to be a form of global metaontological deflationism (though I suspect it is), but it is clear that she creates a role for external constraint. The worry is that the notion of external constraint required by her account is incompatible with global metaontological deflationism.

At this juncture, one might suspect that the source of the trouble, for someone like Thomasson, could be in allowing *realists* to set the terms of the debate. That is, Thomasson's deflationary metaontology stumbles by acknowledging, with Quine, that some sort of *external* constraint is required to speak at all of truth in ontology. Alan Sidelle, for instance, resists this realist (or realist-leaning) presumption. Sidelle's move is to simply insist that there are some things which are dependent on convention, and nothing but convention. His suggestion is that the notion of external constraint itself plays a conventional role, in philosophy. Whatever functions to inject external constraint into the system, so to speak, whether it is a notion of evolutionary adaptation, or karma, or stuff (in Sidelle's case), he insists that once we have brought forward the relevant

conventions to explain the phenomena, there *just is nothing else to do*. We have struck bedrock, as Wittgenstein would say—end of the story. Sidelle writes:

In each case we can give answers [to questions about, say, the individuation of material objects], but we suspect that our answers are arbitrary, or just rooted in our rules for the application of various terms where there is no ‘rightness’ to the rules. We can explain the arbitrariness of our rules for ‘cat’ and ‘same cat’ by talking about the parts and properties of cats—flesh and bones, DNA, etc.—and we can explain the arbitrariness of rules for ‘flesh and bones’ by talking about particles—and at each level of discourse, we can find, or construct, another level whereby we describe the features of the world over which the ‘higher level’ identity and modal judgments are laid, and while we are ‘committed’, in a way, to the ‘deeper’ entities in our explanations, this is but momentary.... If you want an answer in English, according to the rules for English governing ‘stuff’ and ‘same stuff’, I can give it to you, but if ‘stuff’ is going to play the philosophical role I am assigning it—basically, the mind-independent matter of the world which, among other things, determines our perceptions—then I can only say that the questions just don’t apply.

(Sidelle 1998: 443)

This is Sidelle performing the Wittgensteinian spade-turning gesture. It is essentially the same move McDowell makes, and Thomasson could perhaps avail herself of this move. The nub, however, is in the tension between claiming, on the one hand, that something (stuff, interactions with an environment over evolutionarily significant periods of time, or whatever) “determines our perceptions,” while at the same time stubbornly refusing to grant metaphysical significance to any explanation as to how that process of determination takes place.

One finds this stubbornness especially in Wittgensteinian quietism (in addition to McDowell, see Cora Diamond’s work; cf., for instance, Diamond 1996). The essential move for quietism is to insist that explanations stop at the conventional or superficial level. Sidelle and Thomasson’s views assign a philosophical role, to the concept of stuff, on the one hand, and the concept of natural selection, on the other. This philosophical role is the role of determining perception, or determining the evolution of some hard-wired concepts, respectively. This gives their views an analogue to the non-deflationist’s notion of external constraint. But it is important to question whether this sort of maneuver is really acceptable.

To press this question, I turn to work on Buddhist Madhyamaka metaontological deflationism, where the division between the two approaches to global metaontological deflationism, a pragmatist approach and a quietist approach, has, in recent years, been crisply articulated and debated by Western commentators on Madhyamaka philosophy.

Tom Tillemans, as a reader of McDowell, is quite helpful, here. Tillemans provides a McDowellian interpretation of Buddhist Madhyamaka metaontological deflationism. Tillemans cites McDowell in several instances in the context of expounding on why it is desirable to dispense with the Carnapian machinery of linguistic or conceptual frameworks in interpreting Madhyamaka Buddhist philosophy (e.g., cf. Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans 2011: 143-145; Tillemans 2019: 87).²⁹ Tillemans sets his reconstructed Madhyamaka against an alternative reconstruction, by other influential Western commentators, according to which Mādhyamikas need a “pragmatic complement to avoid an otherwise incomplete picture” (*ibid*). He cites examples of remarks by Siderits and Garfield as evidence for the tenor of this sort of view, which he fills in as follows (Tillemans 2016: 9ff; cf. Garfield 1995: 89-90; Siderits 2007: 49). The idea is that customary, designated things require justificatory reasons beyond the deflationary basic facts of linguistic behavior and customs constituting the “ground or bedrock beyond which the philosopher’s justificatory quest is misguided” (Tillemans 2016: 12). Tillemans explicitly ties his point to Wittgensteinian quietism. Tillemans poses an argument, which I now wish to consider, against the pragmatic complement which he sees in these other iterations of reconstructed Madhyamaka.

Tillemans objects to the idea that certain ways of conceptualizing objects—e.g., conceptualizing them as tables and chairs, or in terms of personal identity—are somehow deliberately adopted or chosen by us because they are “useful to us in meeting our needs and furthering happiness” (7). The suggestion that such conceptualizations are *chosen or adopted pragmatically* is linked to thinking in terms of conceptual schemes and linguistic frameworks, for Tillemans. The notion of such a link is accepted by other commentators on Madhyamaka, in the Western philosophical milieu, as well (cf., for instance, Finnigan and Tanaka 2011).

²⁹ In a postscript, Tillemans notes an important reason to dispense with frameworks (though not a primary concern for current purposes): “A minimal claim: all-encompassing frameworks are not the way to go. They have long been used to shield dogmas or long-standing beliefs as somehow still ‘true’ *within* a protected context. Nothing is gained by that obscurantism” (Tillemans 2019: p. 93).

Tillemans does not allow for anything like this sort of pragmatic theory. He says that on the sort of pragmatist-oriented reconstruction of Madhyamaka he is arguing *against*, we “carve out our worlds for our own reasons” (8). He continues:

Thus, the components of our world—tables, chairs, chariots, people—are what they are because of a set of largely collective decisions; for the world as we know it, and not another, was somehow found useful to our interests (especially interests conditioned by preexisting social institutions) or was even chosen because of its utility. *And this is not a blind causal process, like an evolutionary acquisition of thumbs or digestive enzymes.* Instead, some brute, unstructured objects, like pieces of wood and chunks of metal, were interpreted as belonging together and thus structured as tables and chairs for strategic reasons. (ibid, italics added)

Tillemans thus indicates that proponents of the pragmatist reconstruction of Madhyamaka, which he is criticizing, would explicitly reject the sort of approach sketched by Thomasson. Yet this leaves the pragmatist approach in even more of a quandary, Tillemans thinks.

Tillemans thinks the pragmatist approach takes a thoroughly social constructionist slant on the origins of conceptual structuring. Tillemans attacks this social constructionist picture of the origins of conceptual structuring in the following way:

Indeed very large scale or exclusive appeals to usefulness and human ends to explain the existence of objects and people would seem to involve a vicious circularity, for in order to determine ends and usefulness to them in human enterprises, we already need to have a world in its broad outlines, with people and many macroscopic objects too. In short, usefulness of carts, tables, and the like to people *presupposes* a context in which there are people, their environments, and their complex interactions with a lot of quite different sorts of objects. If strategies to further human ends were themselves responsible for the genesis of all these entities, their genesis would seem to become unintelligible. (9)

With this, Tillemans invokes a familiar problem arguably faced by any form of global non-realist view. Here I use the term ‘non-realist’ as a neutral way of talking about deflationary, fictionalist, pragmatist, social constructionist, and anti-realist approaches (assuming that all of these terms

carry baggage which needs to be sorted before bringing them into use in any given context).³⁰

The problem for global non-realists is with the intelligibility of global forms of non-realism: if a global non-realist view characterizes reality in terms, say, of conceptual construction, then the question can be articulated thus: “Construction out of what, and by whom?” (see Searle 1995: 190-191; also, cf. Burton 1999; but see below, Appendix, for further discussion of this rebuttal of global non-realism).

For Tillemans, then, the most promising metaontological approach for modern Mādhyamikas is the approach found also in Western philosophers like McDowell and Wittgenstein, which “is to argue that the perspective needed to pursue ontology is unavailable” (230). The perspective needed for ontology, Tillemans argues (as McDowell also argues), is impossibly outside ourselves, outside our conceptual scheme, from which the task would be to evaluate how well our conceptual scheme maps up with underlying reality (*ibid*). The quietist can, Tillemans avers, look peacefully on over “debates on the existence of universals, absences, nonnatural properties, numbers, and the like” (2016a: 7). If the existence of ontologically disputed entities is regarded in a “purely quantificational way,” Tillemans writes, “then it might well become harmless and even obvious that we should accept them” (*ibid*).

What Tillemans means by “purely quantificational” is a deflationary approach to ontological commitment which rejects the Quinean standard of ontological commitment (see Tillemans 2019: 90).³¹ On the Quinean approach, as Thomasson summarizes it: “to decide which ontology to accept we must decide which theories to accept, and we are then committed to all and only those entities we must accept in order to render the statements of the theory true” (Thomasson 2015: 50; cf. Quine 1948, 1951). Tillemans exchanges this for something like the approach to ontological commitment and quantification proposed by Fine (2001 and 2009).

As Fine puts it: “I would like to suggest that we give up on the account of ontological claims in terms of existential quantification” (Fine 2009: 167). Fine proposes that existence be treated as a

³⁰ My use of the term ‘non-realist’ should not be confused with Arthur Fine’s proposal of a “third alternative” between realism and anti-realism about disputed entities in philosophy of science (charmed quarks, phlogiston) (Fine 1984: 97). Fine’s ‘non-realism’ is supposed to refer to a “core position” shared by realists and anti-realists, which follows “the homely line,” as Fine calls it: “it is possible to accept the evidence of one’s senses and to accept, *in the same way*, the confirmed results of science” (*ibid* 95). Fine’s non-realism can be interpreted as a form of deflationism.

³¹ See Fine 2009, Thomasson 2015 for more on sorting out the details of such a “purely quantificational” approach to metaontological deflationism; and see below.

predicate, which leads to the view that existence assertions take the form of universally quantified statements: where ‘I’ symbolizes the predicate *being an integer*, and ‘E’ symbolizes *exists*, the assertion “Integers exist” has, on this view, the logical form

$$\forall x(Ix \rightarrow Ex)$$

(*ibid*). Fine also introduces a reality operator: an object is real if “it is constitutive of reality that it is that way”—symbolized

$$Rx =_{df} \exists \varphi R[\varphi x]$$

where ‘ φ ’ is a second-order metavariable bound by a second-order existential quantifier (2009: 172).

Fine’s notation, here, might look viciously circular, since it includes ‘R’ as a predicate while defining ‘R’ as an operator.³² I think this distinction in logical types, between ‘R’ as a predicate and ‘R’ as an operator is precisely what Fine has in mind, and it could be marked by revising the notation, using boldface ‘R’ for the operator, thus:

$$\mathbf{R}x =_{df} \exists \varphi R[\varphi x]$$

This is not a perfectly good fix, of course, since there is a deeper concern, now, about the strategy of invoking a distinction between logical types. I accept Penner’s general criticism of this sort of maneuver (cf. Penner 1987: 346-349 n. 42, 357-358 n. 52). But this raises issues which I shall not be able to discuss in this context. For now, I believe Fine’s notion is clear enough: he has introduced notation with which to keep track of the metametaphysical difference between first and second order ontological issues, keeping in mind the distinction he draws between naïve metaphysics and foundational metaphysics. The point, then, is that the ‘**R**’ operator is used to express a realist stance toward some entity, a stance which does not take it to be right away “harmless and obvious” that such entities are constitutive of reality (cf. Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans 2011: 147ff). A realist about numbers would, on Fine’s account, express her thesis thus (letting ‘N’ stand for *is a number*):

³² Thanks to John Nolt for this observation in comments on a draft of this discussion of Fine’s notation. There is further discussion of Fine’s proposed operator in the Appendix.

$$\forall x(Nx \rightarrow \exists \phi R[\phi x])$$

(see Fine 2009: 173). This says about all things x in the universe of discourse of naïve metaphysics, that if they are a number, then there must exist a feature, ϕ (again in the naïve universe of discourse), such that the situation of x 's being ϕ (e.g., 'the six are elephants') is a real situation or state of affairs. I take it that the reality predicate is issued from a naïve standpoint, here, and that it would license application of the reality operator, from the metaontologically foundationalist standpoint. On Fine's account, then, quantification is ontologically neutral, and it is possible to mark a distinction between two sorts of stance toward existence assertions: the stance which regards x as merely existing as a matter of course, where x 's existence is a quotidian, trivial affair, and the stance which regards x 's existing as something heavy, a matter of ontological seriousness.

On Fine's view, ontologically neutral existential quantification alone connotes ontological unseriousness; the reality operator adds ontological seriousness.³³ Ontological unseriousness about K s is not incompatible with belief in the existence of K s, but it involves a commitment to the idea that belief in the existence of K s does not require anything more than participation in a form of life. Ontological seriousness about K s entails the start of a "search for one set of reasons and one interpretation too many"—it is the attitude of not being satisfied with "no analysis."

By extending to McDowell's view this reconstruction of a quietist form of global metaontological deflationism, I intend to suggest the following. McDowell's metaethics presupposes a Kantian ontology of the will, but his deflationary metaontology requires that while we accept the existence of spontaneity (i.e., the Kantian will, or, better to say, the Kantian agent), we need not take it ontologically seriously.

As I see it, pragmatist forms of global metaontological deflationism may be incoherent, though I am dubious of our ability to demonstrate such a claim. I concur with the spirit of Tillemans' (and McDowell's) critique of pragmatist forms of global metaontological deflationism. But I do not think Tillemans (or McDowell, for that matter, to the extent he can be interpreted, by his

³³ It is important to clarify that being ontologically serious about K s is not the same as taking the existence of K s literally. I can take the existence of K s literally without believing that any complete, correct, and perspicuous representation of reality will need to contain a word or thought-sign which designates or applies to at least one thing that is a K . So, an attitude of ontological unseriousness with respect to K s does not amount to regarding K s as fictional entities.

frequent snipes at Rorty, as attempting to do so) successfully refute pragmatist global metaontological deflationism. I argue in the Appendix that pragmatist metaontological deflationism is devilishly difficult to refute. I shall not attempt to carry out the refutation in this dissertation. My target is quietist global metaontological deflationism.

Quietists think to dodge pragmatists' problems by shifting the terms of the debate, eliminating the Inside/Outside picture, or foundational metaphysics, altogether. But my point, contra McDowell, for which I shall argue at length in Chapter Four, is that this does not dissolve or remove or dispel (or 'exorcise') the problem. Even in the context of naïve metaphysics, it is reasonable to demand a clear account of external constraint, i.e., a clear account of how second nature is rooted in first nature. In other words, a naïve metaphysical theory of spontaneity is going to look gappy and hand wavy. This is ultimately my main criticism of McDowell. I get to this argument in Chapter Four.

I want to support, now, my claim that McDowell seeks to undercut reductionism, in philosophy of mind, by diverting to quietism, i.e., global ontological deflationism. With McDowell's work, it is possible to dip in and find him making the same kind of move in relation to various conversations. Here I want to focus on his critique of Derek Parfit's reductionist account of personal identity (McDowell 1998 [1997]) (which I take, for current purposes, as within the domain of philosophy of mind).

Parfit's view seeks to explain the thing that Locke famously stresses, in his discussion of personal identity, namely, the continuity of a person's consciousness. The continuity of a person's consciousness, for Locke (as read by McDowell), is the "'inner aspect'.... [of a person's continuing to exist, which] holds together in a single survey some of the specifics of the career, extended in time, of what the subject of this survey conceives as itself" (McDowell 1997: 359). The distinctive feature of Parfit's account is his claim that this inner aspect "should be understood in terms of relations between psychological states and events that are intelligible independently of personal identity" (ibid). That is, the continuity of consciousness can be explained, according to Parfit, without resorting to anything over and above sub-personal psychological phenomena.

McDowell's criticism is, very roughly, that we can know everything there is to know about the sorts of naturalistic facts about human beings of interest to reductionists, and still not understand personal identity, or consciousness.

McDowell's way of framing this criticism is that while Parfit casts his account as anti-Cartesian, *it really is not*. Parfit believes his account escapes the Cartesian paradigm because the account rejects a Cartesian spiritual substance dualism, and, as McDowell agrees, we should reject any view requiring any such ontological posit (360-361).³⁴ But, according to McDowell, Parfit fails to escape the "fundamental Cartesian mistake" (361). More basic than the mistake of positing a spiritual substance or offering a pineal gland hypothesis to explain interactions between an immaterial mind and a material body, the fundamental Cartesian mistake, McDowell tells us, is the mistake of supposing "that truth about the mental can be in view when the subject matter of the inquiry is conceived as framed in the realm of law, and not as framed in a *sui generis* space of reasons" (1999: 267).

The fundamental Cartesian mistake, which the naturalistic reductionist's mistake is an instance of, is, first and foremost, in accepting a picture of the relation between mind and world which encourages the Cartesian and the reductionist alike to suppose they are doing something called foundational metaphysics, and that the relation between mind and world needs to be explained in (heavy) ontological terms. The second, more obvious mistake, is attempting to give an explanation which attempts to squeeze the (erroneously) expected sort of explanation out of resources available only from within the bounds of the inquiry, conceived as framed in the realm of law. In other words, the twofold mistake is (1) in *thinking of* thinking of the contrast between the two spaces as *thinking of* oneself as engaged in foundational metaphysics, not naïve metaphysics, and (2) taking the space of naturalistic understanding, conceived as a realm of law, as belonging to foundational metaphysics.

The first mistake, (1), is the primordial form of mistake underlying all the other Cartesian mistakes (spiritual substance, pineal gland hypothesis, etc.), as well as underlying the purported naturalistic reductionist mistake. McDowell's considered view, I take it, is that foundational

³⁴ While thinkers like Burge and Chalmers have me on the fence about dualism, in philosophy of mind, where consciousness is concerned, I take it as obvious, and as a serious defect of Descartes' own argumentation, that there is no reason to accept substance dualism.

metaphysical inquiries are the offspring of diseased minds. Or, put another way, philosophers do foundational metaphysics only because they are held captive by the Inside/Outside picture, discussed earlier. McDowell's form of quietism consists, thus, in the absolute repudiation of any form of foundational metaphysics.

Conclusion

To recapitulate: In the first part of this chapter, I explained McDowell's second nature naturalism, at some length. In section two, I discussed McDowell's first-order ethical theory, explaining how his view amounts to a form of moral phenomenology. I also situated McDowell's project vis-à-vis Wittgensteinian quietism. I argued, in section three, that there is warrant for construing McDowell's view as a form of global metaontological deflationism. Here I paved the way for the argument of Chapter Four. There I shall claim that McDowell's quietism, i.e., his global metaontological deflationism, renders his view incapable of satisfactorily addressing the metastasized problem of constraint.

Chapter Four The Argument Against Quietism

In this chapter, I offer an argument against McDowell's view. My claim is that McDowell's view has no coherent response to the threat of relativism, and of related kinds of issues, e.g., questions raised by developing technology. Section one explains, drawing on work by John Hacker-Wright, how relativism might arise as a problem for McDowell's view. Section two explains why, given McDowell's commitment to metaontological deflationism, he is not able to give a satisfying response to the problem of relativism, and I will also press the point in connection with the example of human enhancements. The conclusion to this chapter takes stock of where the argument in section two leaves us.

Section One John Hacker-Wright's Pragmaticization of McDowell's View

Hacker-Wright says that McDowell's view "makes trouble for any Aristotelian ethical naturalism that wants to support a single set of moral virtues" (Hacker-Wright 2009, abstract). According to Hacker-Wright, a problem arises for McDowell's approach because there is not just one kind of "formed evaluative outlook" in which a human being may be raised up. Different cultures and historical epochs are, or have been, each characterized by at least some variations on what should count as "the virtues." Hacker-Wright suggests, therefore, that, for a view like McDowell's, this raises the problem of relativism.

Hacker-Wright argues, responding on McDowell's behalf to the threat of relativism, that there is an "invariant core" to the "self-interpretations" involved in shaping the moral outlooks of people in different times and places. The invariant core is anchored in a specific natural historical fact about the natural kind, the organic structure of all normal human beings, though, of course, the point is meant to be taken as, in effect, a point about the essence of humanness, not a statistical generalization.³⁵ Namely, the relevant fact is that human beings take care of their children for

³⁵ I take it that, in the context of Neo-Aristotelian ethical theories, there is no need, in framing Hacker-Wright's discussion of this point, to dwell on the distinction between what is statistically true of most individual humans, and the kinds or essences in question. Someone might think that McDowell is cagey about Aristotelian metaphysics by virtue of his deflationism. That point would pertain to the criticism I discuss in the Conclusion to the dissertation, which I am not going to talk about in this chapter, namely, the worry that McDowell's deflationism is somehow dishonest. If I sound like I'm switching back and forth, in the following discussion, between couching points in terms of individual humans and in terms of the essence of humanness (the "Aristotean categorical," as someone like Foot or Thompson might wish to speak of it), please let it be understood that the relevant Neo-Aristotelian ontological commitments are pertinent and will be properly thematized as the need arises.

many years after infancy. This fact ensures, Hacker-Wright thinks, that beings like us, who take care of their children in this way, could not be, say, Calliclean persons. A Calliclean person, modelled on the figure Plato portrays in the *Gorgias*, would be a purely selfish egoist, a remorseless practitioner of realpolitik. Hacker-Wright's claim is that because human children require being nurtured for an extended period beyond infancy (a first nature fact about human beings), it is ensured that *the* human being acquires his or her self-interpretation as a person in a certain way, through a morally decent upbringing, and "a being who must acquire the arts of personhood roughly in this way *must* as a result see herself in a certain light" (Hacker-Wright 2009: 422). Hacker-Wright thus attempts to provide McDowell with an account of the relation between first nature and second nature.

Hacker-Wright's argument that "we cannot adopt... a 'Calliclean' self-interpretation" (416) goes as follows. Callicleans reason in such a way as to only be always looking out for their own interests. Hacker-Wright thinks that the biological need of human children for long-term care from adult human beings guarantees that there could not be an entire society of Callicleans. The sort of long-term care which is required by human children ensures that no one who reasons only instrumentally could be sufficiently motivated to provide the requisite care. Children who acquire their concept of personhood from the adults who care for them "acquire a non-instrumental investment from their teachers" (423). In other words, the cost of raising a child is not matched by the pay-off. No competent instrumental reasoner would take on the task of caring for and educating a child from infancy to the time when such care is no longer necessary, at least not if he or she knew it would be a task they would have to follow through with. Even if we imagine that the role of care-provider or guardian involves a kind of contract, Hacker-Wright says, "it would seem to be a contract that in fact regularly comes out one-sided, with vast expenditures that regularly do not get reciprocated" (423). Thus, he thinks, we can know that any beings with a biological nature like us must have received a morally decent upbringing, thereby having acquired something similar to, or, as it were, having the same "logical shape" as, *our* understanding of practical reasons. The caretakers of such children must not be merely instrumental reasoners. Therefore, the worry of moral relativism can be dismissed. We cannot encounter a society of *human beings* whose ability to engage in practical reasoning is alien and incongruous to our own. Hacker-Wright's specific proposal has, as an implication, that were human history to take the sort of course a dystopian science fiction author might envision,

wherein, say, human infants' care-providers are homicidal robots, then human beings would effectively cease to exist (even presuming that the robots don't kill them!). This implication is troubling, but it does not damage the view. If anything, it merely underscores the precariousness of a human way of life, of "humanity" as moralists may use the term.

I think something along the lines of this sort of pragmatist move (though I prefer Thomasson's version to Hacker-Wright's) blocks cultural relativism, i.e., relativism at the social level, only if such pragmatism is coherent. I already sketched a broad critique of pragmatic metaontological deflationism in Chapter Three, section three. In the Appendix, I answer several general objections to global anti-realist views; some of these objections attempt to argue that global anti-realists (i.e., global metaontological deflationists) fail to adequately address the problem of relativism. I believe (and argue in the Appendix) that pragmatist views, which are as I understand them forms of global anti-realism (see Appendix), at least appear coherent. I discuss the difficulties for quietist metaontological deflationism in the following section. For now, I simply wish to register that, despite my arguments later, I am still not fully convinced that pragmatic metaontological deflationism is coherent. I suspect it smuggles in a conception of external constraint justifiable only if we accept metaphysical realism. But I cannot make a convincing argument for this.³⁶

For now, the point is that relativism arises for McDowell's view in a way which he cannot satisfactorily address, given his metaontological deflationism. No one can plausibly deny that there are different formed evaluative outlooks, and McDowell's view rules out the appeal to first natural facts made by Hacker-Wright because such an appeal, I am claiming, has the structure of pragmatic metaontological deflationism. Hacker-Wright's proposal is, in fact, a view of exactly the same shape as a kind of view McDowell explicitly rejects, thinking it a form of naturalistic

³⁶ One possible move, at this juncture, is to insist that pragmatists or metaontological deflationists bear the burden of providing argument *against* metaphysical realism. My opinion is that, from a methodological standpoint, neutrality or agnosticism is the safest approach to questions where convincing arguments are wanting on either side. I used to believe that Buddhist Mādhyamikas could provide a master argument, as it were, in the form of mereological analysis, showing that metaphysical realism is incoherent. I discuss this form of argument in "Composition as Identity, the *One With Or Different From* Argument in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8.90-103 (and Elsewhere), and Category Mistakes," scheduled for publication in *Philosophy East and West* 72:4 (October 2022). I do not have in hand a conclusive refutation of this Buddhist master argument, but I suspect it does not work. The suspicion rests in no small part on the way in which Plato dismisses similar arguments as merely eristic and not philosophically significant, in several dialogues, including the *Theaetetus* and *Philebus*. This is, at any rate, a matter for further investigation.

reductionism, namely, the Kripke-Wright interpretation of Wittgenstein. In the remainder of this section I will discuss McDowell's rejection of the Kripke-Wright account, point to how it is equivalent to Hacker-Wright's proposal. Then, in the following section, I will offer a complete statement of the argument that McDowell's metaontological deflationism forces his view to fail with various instances of the general problem, the (metastasized) problem of constraint.

McDowell virtually anticipates and rejects the sort of position developed by Hacker-Wright. In *Mind and World*, McDowell considers readings of Wittgenstein by Kripke and Wright, and he rejects these precisely on the grounds that they sin against quietism (cf. McDowell 1994: 92-93, including note 7). Here McDowell concentrates on linguistic meaning, but his way of handling values is as much a development of his Wittgensteinian resources as of his Aristotelian and Kantian resources (I see a straight line through Aristotle, Kant, and Wittgenstein, in any case).³⁷ McDowell's accounts of linguistic meaning and of moral perception each ground meaning and value (as well as perception) in second nature. So, it is fair to extrapolate that what he says about meaning holds also for value (as well as for perception and knowledge). On the Kripke-Wright interpretation of Wittgenstein's account of meaning, which I claim parallels Hacker-Wright's "McDowellian" account of value, McDowell writes:

If there is nothing to the normative structure within which meaning comes into view except, say, acceptances and rejections of bits of behaviour by the community at large, then how things are—how things can be said to be with a correctness that must partly consist in being faithful to the meanings one would exploit if one said that they are thus and so—cannot be independent of the community's ratifying the judgement that things are thus and so. The most clear-sighted proponents of this sort of reading explicitly embrace this consequence on Wittgenstein's behalf.

I think the consequence is intolerable.... [I]t is out of tune with something central to Wittgenstein's own conception of what is to be done in philosophy, namely, his 'quietism', his rejection of any constructive or doctrinal ambitions. (McDowell 1994: 93)

We examined McDowell's brief for quietism above in Chapter Three, section one. It is in the section of *Mind and World* immediately following the passage just quoted that McDowell

³⁷ The line also runs through Hume, but McDowell neglects Hume.

discusses modern constructive philosophies as attempts to bridge dualistic gulfs which he thinks are falsely superimposed by the Inside/Outside picture. As discussed in the previous two chapters, he thinks the key to breaking free of the Inside/Outside picture is to get things into view from the perspective of second nature, or *Bildung*. He says:

Of course the category of the social is important. *Bildung* could not have its place in the picture if that were not so. But the point is not that the social constitutes the framework for a construction of the very idea of meaning: something that would make the idea safe for a restrictive naturalism, the sort that threatens to disenchant nature. Wittgenstein says, ‘Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting, are as much part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing’. By ‘our natural history’, he must mean the natural history of creatures whose nature is largely second nature. Human life, our natural way of being, is already shaped by meaning. 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. (McDowell 1994: 95)

This confirms what I have said about McDowell’s conception of the relation between first and second nature, that it is intentionally vague, and that this vagueness is attributable to his quietism. Until the connection between natural history and nature as the realm of law is *drawn more tightly*, this type of move, in the domain of philosophical debate, is not acceptable. The move to ground disputed first order claims, in ontology, ethics, and so on, on a deflationary stance, is not in keeping with the spirit of an honest deflationism. But this is a criticism I discuss in the Conclusion, not in this chapter. The argument of this chapter is that McDowell’s view does not address relativism or problems with new technologies, instances of the metastasized problem of constraint. The argument of this section is that McDowell cannot avail himself of Hacker-Wright’s proposal because it ties first nature to second nature in a way that would be incompatible with McDowell’s quietism, i.e., his form of metaontological deflationism. As indicated by the quotes above, where McDowell expresses his rejection of the Kripke-Wright interpretation of Wittgenstein, his quietism forces him to adopt a vague account of the relation between first and second nature, and the vagueness of how the relationship is drawn rules out his acceptance of Hacker-Wright’s approach.

Before concluding this section, let me resolve what might be for some readers a lingering doubt. Some might still suppose that McDowell could rightly avail himself of something like Hacker-Wright's proposal, since McDowell does explicitly link second nature and first nature, even if he is consistently vague in his pronouncements about the relation between second nature and first nature. Allowing that my skeptical reader is not fully convinced by my argument that McDowell's metaontological deflationism, i.e., his quietism, undercuts a plausible appeal like Hacker-Wright's, say, to first natural facts in accounting for second nature, let me try to reframe a point already made in Chapter Two. There, in McDowell's response to Burge (Chapter Two, section three, above), we saw that he leans forcefully into the Sellarsian repudiation of the Myth of the Given. Here is an argument, then: One might have supposed that the sort of account of first natural facts provided in an interpretation such as Hacker-Wright's must rely on some empirical observations about human children and how they are reared. Such empirical observations must, on McDowell's view, depend on second nature. Even our perception of colors is conceptually structured, after all. So, the account of first nature must rely on evidence which is epistemically dependent on second nature. Therefore, first nature does not, in McDowell's view, play the kind of epistemological grounding role for second nature which Hacker-Wright intends (and such as one also finds intended in the Kripke-Wright quasi-behaviorist interpretation of Wittgenstein). Here we have an instance of the vortical quality, noted in Chapter Three, section three (and see the Appendix), characteristic of global metaontological deflationism. Global metaontological deflationists must bootstrap empirical knowledge, i.e., scientific knowledge of the sort characteristically comprising what we might want to say about first nature. As I have suggested, while it is difficult to refute this sort of bootstrapping move, it is also difficult to make it seem plausible. So, to my still skeptical reader, I submit that McDowell cannot convincingly appeal to first nature in the way that he tries to do, and in the way which Hacker-Wright tries to help him to do. McDowell's lack of recourse to first nature stems from his repudiation of the Given and his global metaontological deflationism, discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

That concludes the main point of this section. I agree with Hacker-Wright that McDowell's view faces the problem of relativism, as spelled out by Hacker-Wright (as discussed above), and I have argued that McDowell could not accept the patch to his view proposed by Hacker-Wright because Hacker-Wright's proposal would be incompatible with McDowell's quietism. In the

next section, I discuss how the argument against McDowell's appeal to the Neurathian raft metaphor, his preferred solution to the metastasized problem of constraint, should go.

Section Two Arguing Against Quietism

The problem of relativism, discussed in the previous section, is an instance of a general problem, what I called, in the Introduction, the metastasized problem of constraint. In the Introduction, I discussed McDowell's preferred way of addressing the problem of constraint when it arises in such a general form. His preferred solution is to appeal to the Neurathian image of repairing one's raft using materials and resources at hand. The point of the metaphor is supposed to be that the inhabitants of a form of life are also its artificers, and that the artificers are locked-in to the value scheme or conceptual scheme, or paradigm, which they have been given by their second nature when faced with deliberation about how to make modifications to the 'raft' they are on, e.g., when forced to adapt to new situations, or unexpected encounters. This understanding of the metaphor is precisely what was called into question by our imaginary skeptical reader at the end of the previous section. The interpretation of the image as involving repairs to the raft with only second nature materials depends on the argument I have been developing over the course of the previous chapters. McDowell, I claim, cannot appeal to anything other than second nature given his commitment to the repudiation of the Given and his global metaontological deflationism. (See the end of section one, above.) In this section I will spell out how the metastasized problem of constraint capsizes the Neurathian raft. For this, I will articulate an argument.

The argument is this. Through events occurring beyond one's control, one's form of life comes into question. Recall, here, the Heideggerian trope of a tool becoming unhandy: a form of life may (I see no reason why not) be plausibly construed as equipment, and Heidegger's point is that equipment can become broken in a set of circumstances (see the Introduction, above). When one's equipment becomes thus unhandy, one's mode of being, as Heidegger might say, becomes distant with respect to that equipment (e.g., a hammer may appear as an alien thing, merely 'present-at-hand,' quantifiable but meaningless). McDowell, similarly, envisions a way in which one might skeptically distance oneself from one's form of life, for example, with his Myth of the Rational Wolf (see McDowell 1995). This sort of skeptical distancing is precisely what the image of Neurath's raft presupposes. As one skeptically distances oneself from the form of life itself to make necessary revisions or adaptations to the form of life, one is supposed to still be able to consult with one's form of life, as one goes through the process of revision or adaptation,

so that the revision does not turn into a radical departure from what one had to begin with. But nothing from beyond the form of life can function as a source of constraint in deciding whether a revision or adaptation really is a good revision or adaptation, on pain of violating one's strongly held commitment to quietism (i.e., metaontological deflationism and repudiation of the Given). Since one is unable to consult any fact or content from beyond the form of life (first natural facts about an organism's organic structure or its interactions with its environment, for instance, cannot figure in the revision process, on pain of incompatibility with quietism, as explained in the previous chapters and in the previous section), one faces this problem: there is nothing to distinguish, on the one hand, having merely changed one's mind about some (second nature) features of the form of life, from, on the other hand, having made an accurate or good judgment about what really is a good revision or adaptation. Without being able to distinguish these things, i.e., merely changing one's mind versus making a good revision, one lands in a view which not very many ethicists will find plausible as a good value theory.

The point is that there is a difference between merely making a change in the form of life in response to pressure (in McDowell's case, one hardly knows what to say about whence comes such pressure—see below), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, making a good change in the form of life, or one that is well-adapted. Instances of what we might think of as external pressure might be, e.g., pressure arising from an encounter with another formed evaluative outlook as in the problem of relativism (discussed in the previous section), or from the emergence of, say, changes in the organic structure of human beings. I will focus, in the rest of this section, on an example of the latter form of pressure. The example is taken from science fiction and gives an instance of the general problem of constraint and shows that there is a difference between failing and succeeding to make an accurate or good judgment about what really is a good revision or adaptation of the form of life. It shows, moreover, that the key to explaining this difference is an appeal to factors from beyond the form of life (e.g., first natural facts about an organism's organic structure or its interactions with its environment). I discuss this example in the remainder of this section, to support the claim that there is an important difference between merely changing one's mind and making a good (or successful) revision to one's form of life.

For convenience, I will not invent a case whole cloth, but I will borrow a familiar example from a classic of the science fiction genre, Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Paul "Muad 'Dib" Atreides is the result of the Bene Gesserit's breeding program, designed to bring about a modification to the human genome, by rather old-fashioned means (as opposed to more invasive techniques such as, say, technologically achieved gene editing). A key factor in the story is how human beings, in Herbert's 'world,' interact with the spice, *mélange*, which can only be found on the planet Arrakis (Dune). Paul is the product of a centuries long breeding program. When he takes the spice, he demonstrates that he is what the Bene Gesserit had been seeking to create: the Kwisatz Haderach, a being who can apprehend not only the past, but also the future (an aspect of the example which makes it nice for current purposes). I suggest that Paul Atreides is best understood not as an enhanced human, but as a being who is transitional to the posthuman condition. His son, Leto II, possesses not only his father's abilities, but clearly transcends the human condition in his decision to abandon ordinary human biology by willingly undergoing a further transformation involving the formation of a symbiotic relationship with larval sandworms. The sandworm larvae cover his body, giving him super-strength, super-speed, and invulnerability (thus receiving a 'bioware upgrade'), though the symbiosis gradually (over thousands of years) transforms him into a sandworm. (He is literally called "God-Emperor of Dune" harking to the fact that in the religion of the natives of Arrakis, the sandworm is regarded as God incarnate.) Leto II operates outside the bounds of anything recognizable as morality, but (why not?) it seems clear that he is operating according to a distinct, posthuman form of life. The comparison with his father is of interest for our argument, however, because Paul is transitional. In saying that he is transitional, let me be clear: he possesses (at least as I interpret Herbert's novels) the same first natural capacities as Leto II prior to Leto II's decision to further transform his own first nature by entering into symbiosis with the sandworm larvae. So, in saying Paul is transitional I do not mean to suggest he represents a distinct, third form of life from the human form of life and Leto II's quite distinctly posthuman form of life. The point is that Paul's first natural facts change, but (as I read the novels) he retains enough of his second nature to qualify as transitional, whereas Leto II retains of the human life neither first nature nor second nature (or not much thereof, anyway).

Given the variability between interpretations of Herbert's novels, I shall not go any deeper into this, but one might argue, I claim, that Paul fails to generate the new form of life his altered

organic structure requires, and so he meets a tragic end (again, depending on how one reads *Dune Messiah*), wandering blind in the desert as a kind of fusion of Oedipus and John the Baptist. Or one might say, if I am correct in reading Paul as having retained some significant part of his second nature, that at least from Paul's own perspective his end might be plausibly construed as tragic.

The point is that, so far as I can tell, there are not sufficient resources in our current form of life to accommodate the abilities of a Kwisatz Haderach. The only options for someone with such abilities would, plausibly, have to be either to adopt something like the tragically fatalistic stance of Muad 'Dib in *Dune Messiah*, or else fully transcend the human condition, as Leto II does. Such a transition to a posthuman condition need not fully jettison every part of the human form of life—Leto II still appreciates Bach, after all. But it is plausible that the human form of life would need to be radically reworked, at this point, to accommodate radical new abilities, including new cognitive capacities.³⁸ Such a transformation of a human organic structure, I claim, would require at least some modification to one's form of life (i.e., to one's second nature). One's way of going on could not possibly be the same as it had been before if one woke up with the ability to know the future! A great amount of human anxiety is due precisely to our lack of such an ability. This is not to say that anxiety could not be replaced by a rather formidable type of dread.... But, in any case, it would not make much sense to expect a person to simply keep going on as usual, under such circumstances. Such a transformation would completely explode (in the Husserlian sense) our usual way of going on, or so I think.³⁹

A McDowellian could not appeal to the image of Neurath's raft to explain how a process of repair to the form of life might be undertaken, in such a case. There simply are not resources in our existing form of life to cope with such a mode of being. God-like cognitive capacities call for a god-like form of life. As I said, there would not have to be a complete expulsion of elements

³⁸ It bears mentioning that, in all traditions of Buddhism, the Buddha is genomically human, yet clearly transcends ordinary human capacities and is also karmically special, so that it makes sense to suggest that while some Buddhists may wish to say the Buddha was merely a man, at least according to traditional Buddhology it is plausible to characterize the Buddha as posthuman.

³⁹ Here let me remind the reader of the Husserlian notion of 'explosion' invoked above, in the Introduction, to characterize the effect of the sort of coerced adaptation here under discussion. As explained previously, Husserl remarks that in the face of possible unanticipated continuances of experience, "the whole perception, so to speak, *explodes* and splits up into 'conflicting physical thing-apprehensions'" (Husserl 1913: 332). Why restrict the point to thing-apprehensions? As I suggested in the Introduction, the point seems to transpose well enough to McDowellian value-apprehensions.

from a human form of life, in fashioning a god's form of life. But surely factors from beyond the form of life itself would have to be taken into account. A human form of life has nothing (really) to tell us about what it would be like to, say, know the future. We can create fictitious natural histories, of course, but I do not believe we should seriously think that something like, say, Herbert's stories could give guidance on *what to do if you take mélange and develop a prescient perceptual capacity*, or whatever. We cannot really know what a posthuman condition will be like. That is the point. Our existing form of life will have to be modified if there occurs a radical alteration in human organic structure due to interactions with changing environmental factors. There is no way to rule out such a possibility, and it is a plausible possibility, especially given developing technologies.

McDowell's view leaves us incapable of assessing, then, whether our current second nature, or some radically different second nature, would be a good fit with what our first nature could become. The image of Neurath's raft can allow that we might make adjustments to our second nature, but it has no way of distinguishing between adjustments which really succeed, which really constitute changes to the form of life (second nature) which are good for organisms with such a form of life (first nature), or whether the adjustments are merely changes, differences in form of life (second nature) riding along with the organisms' altered form of life (first nature). One might put the point in terms of external and internal reasons, relating the argument to McDowell's critique of Bernard Williams. An internal reason would be the stuff of the Neurathian raft, purely second nature material, while an external reason would be the kind of external pressure envisioned in the example, an alteration of an organism's biological structure caused by its interaction with its environment. Here my argument takes Williams' side of the debate. Here is how McDowell characterizes Williams' position: "As Williams describes his position, the external reasons theorist must envisage a procedure of correct deliberation or reasoning that gives rise to a motivation, but is not 'controlled' by existing motivations, in the way that figures in the account of internal reasons; for, if the deliberation were thus 'controlled' by existing motivations, the reason it brought to light would simply be an internal reason" (McDowell 1995c: 99). Applying this to the example, Paul's deliberation is controlled by existing motivations, while Leto II, in the moment when he decides to embrace the sand larvae (in *Children of Dune*), illustrates what it could look like to undergo a deliberation giving rise to a

motivation not controlled by existing motivations, *pace* McDowell's insistence that such a process cannot be plausibly envisaged.

The point might be made, similarly, with different examples, including examples dealing with the issue of relativism, discussed in the previous section. The conclusion is that McDowell's quietism does not give us a way of making a case for the claim that there is any difference between Muad 'Dib's approach to the situation (i.e., the change from a human organic structure) and Leto II's approach to the situation, which involves embracing a post-human condition and drastically departing from a human form of life. One meets a tragic end, as judged by the standards of a human form of life. But it is difficult to know what to say about the other, Leto II, unless one consults something beyond a human form of life, namely, the first natural facts about Leto II's organic constitution together with the posthuman form of life (second nature) Leto II has fashioned for himself.

Putting the point in terms of relativism, the problem is that someone might, through an encounter with someone with a radically different form of life, find one's own form of life in question and, via the epistemological coherentist process McDowell recommends, come up with the conviction that one must revise one's form of life to align with the different form of life.⁴⁰ Then the problem would be that the person would have to face the question: "But is this different form of life *really* better than my old one?" It is not clear how a quietist can satisfactorily answer such a question. The most that could happen is that one might then risk a further oscillation, letting the newly adopted form of life fall into question, followed by possibly switching back or jumping on to yet another form of life (second nature). The situation, for the McDowellian, thus turns into something like a vicious regress. With the McDowellian's resources, there would be no way to

⁴⁰ I do not believe an encounter with, say, members of QAnon gives a good example of this sort of case because I find it implausible to treat different lifestyles and different webs of belief as constituting different forms of life. It probably uncharitably handles McDowell's view to take him as committed to such a view. This point makes me have qualms about appealing to the problem of relativism to drive home the point about the metastasized problem of constraint. Differences in form of life would need to emerge from differences in organic structure. McDowell pays lip-service to this point, but by keeping to a vague account of the relation between first and second nature, he leaves himself with no way to nail down the point. That could be the point of appealing to relativism in arguing against his view, but I worry that in making such an argument we might accidentally reinforce the McDowellian view in allowing that different lifestyles do amount to different forms of life. This note potentially undermines some of the discussion in section one of this chapter, but I do not know what to do about this. See comments below in the conclusion to this chapter.

distinguish merely changing one's mind, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, accomplishing a genuine improvement in one's form of life.

Conclusion

The argument of this chapter has been that McDowell's view faces the metastasized problem of constraint, in the instance of relativism, and in (speculative) futurist types of cases. Such cases can call a form of life into question. The response to the question is to face the challenge of deciding how best to adapt one's form of life. McDowell's quietism precludes properly accounting for how one would decide this. His account (i.e., epistemological coherentism, the image of Neurath's raft) supplies a description of how one might decide to make some changes but providing such a description does not amount to an account of how best to make such changes.

As always in philosophy, though, the dialectical wheel keeps turning. I cannot think of any way to categorically demonstrate that the metastasized problem of constraint *is* catastrophic for McDowell's view. I do not (yet) know how to conclusively show that McDowell is wrong, that in an experience of novelty there *must* be something which utterly escapes understanding when we resort to the Neurathian strategy. That is, McDowell or his defenders may come back with yet another version of the appeal to coherentism, a version that is *coherent*. I acknowledge this possibility because, even now, I feel the draw of yet another version of the defense of McDowell's position.⁴¹

Alas, we are not, after all, like the people Plato describes as "people who have been brought up in philosophy and other such pursuits" (cf. *Theaetetus* 172c ff) since we do not have a limitless fund of time (and energy) to pursue the conversation further. One also worries about appearing to lack the intellectual virtue of firmness (cf. King 2021) in continuing to waver back and forth on the question whether McDowell's view is ultimately defensible. I shall, therefore, somewhat arbitrarily stop the wheel, at this moment, and come down on the side of maintaining that the metastasized problem of constraint is fatal to McDowell's view (perhaps free people will start the wheel spinning yet again, in some other venue).

⁴¹ As I explain in the Appendix below, I have searched, for twenty years, for an argument that categorically demonstrates global anti-realism to be incoherent. In the Appendix, I examine what I take as some of the strongest contenders to be such an argument, and I find each one wanting.

The argument presented in this chapter is, I aver, analogous to the argument from expertise used by Plato to refute Protagoreanism, discussed in Chapter One. It will be recalled, at this point, that one way to state the argument of this dissertation has been thus:

1. Protagoreanism has a certain structure, as shown by Plato's arguments in the *Theaetetus*.
2. Plato refutes Protagoreanism.
3. McDowell's view has an analogous structure to Protagoreanism.
4. If two views, X and Y, are structurally analogous, then an argument structurally analogous to an argument refuting Y should refute X.
5. Therefore, an argument analogous to Plato's refutation of Protagoreanism refutes McDowell's view.

Chapter One set up premises 1 and 2; Chapter Two set up premise 3; and the "argument analogous to Plato's refutation" has been given here, in Chapter Four, with Chapter Three laying the groundwork for the current chapter's argument. In this chapter I have argued that due to the unforeseeability of the future (anticipating the future is a central element in Plato's argument from expertise against Protagoreanism), McDowell's view breaks down. It fails because of his global metaontological deflationism. When called on to account for the process of revision and adaptation of a human form of life, e.g., in the face of possible future changes to human organic structure, McDowell's view provides no standard whereby successful adaptation could be distinguished from unsuccessful adaptation.

Conclusion Reconsidering the Comparison with Protagoreanism, and Honest Deflationism

I have argued in this dissertation that John McDowell's view is structurally analogous to Protagoreanism, and that arguments structurally analogous to Plato's arguments against Protagoreanism apply to McDowell's view. One way to state the argument of my dissertation, to reiterate, is as follows:

1. Protagoreanism has a certain structure, as shown by Plato's arguments in the *Theaetetus*.
2. Plato's arguments refute Protagoreanism.
3. McDowell's view has an analogous structure to Protagoreanism.
4. If two views, X and Y, are structurally analogous, then an argument structurally analogous to an argument refuting Y might refute X.
5. Therefore, an argument analogous to Plato's argument from expertise refutes McDowell's view.

Chapter One argued for premises 1 and 2. Chapter Two made the case for premise 3. Chapters Three and Chapter Four drove home the inference to 5. Now I am going to, in the spirit of the Conclusion to Chapter Four, above, discuss why the analogy breaks down and this argument does not work, and then I will suggest an alternative way to read this dissertation and still take away a plausible critique of McDowell's view (see note 1 above in the Introduction).

Here is how the analogy breaks down. Plato deploys three arguments against Protagoreanism, each argument performing a distinct dialectical function. What we find in Plato's debate with the Protagorean is something like the following pattern:

- Plato gives the self-refutation argument which raises a serious problem for a view with the structure of Protagoreanism.
- The Protagorean restricts the view and offers a proto-pragmatist response to the self-refutation argument.
- Plato shows that the restrictions suggested by the Protagorean do not hold (this is the argument from expertise).

- Then Plato shows that the alleged pragmatist response to the self-refutation argument does not work because it depends on a metaphysical doctrine refuted by Plato's argument against a metaphysics of radical flux.

The problem with the strategy, suggested in my dissertation's argument, outlined above, is that the dialectic between McDowell's approach and the metastasized problem of constraint does not fully track the dialectic between Plato's arguments and the Protagorean's defensive maneuvers. Here is how the McDowellian dialectic goes:

- McDowell deploys strategies for dealing with the problem of constraint while dispensing with the notion of external constraint, committing him to a form of epistemological coherentism, i.e., the image of Neurath's raft.

Since epistemological coherentism does not depend on any unique metaphysical doctrine, because coherentism, i.e., McDowell's Neurathian stance, is enabled by McDowell's quietism, i.e., his metaontological deflationism, the analogy between McDowell's view and Protagoreanism breaks down. The reason why Plato fully refutes Protagoreanism, in the *Theaetetus*, is that Protagoreanism rests ultimately on an ontological doctrine, the doctrine of flux (see Chapter One, section two). There is no argument analogous to Plato's argument against the flux doctrine to counter McDowell's fall back to metaontological deflationism. As discussed in Chapter Four, McDowell's deflationism effectively allows objective judgments in all domains while simultaneously limiting said objectivity to the confines of a form of life (or way of going on, as I call it in the Introduction). There is no satisfying argument to demonstratively counter this view. In the Appendix, below, I show that a battery of (well-intentioned, as I think) arguments against a range of global anti-realist views are, in the final analysis (my final analysis, in this dissertation, anyway) unsuccessful.

That leaves me in the quandary of finding something to say about an argument which I have laboriously attempted to make, which, in the end, proves to be not fully satisfying. I believe that if we excise the distracting, rather baroque ploy of comparing McDowell's view with Protagoreanism, a simpler argument can be put forward. It goes as follows:

1. McDowell's philosophical quietism (i) commits his view to a form of global metaontological deflationism (ii) especially ill-suited to address the metastasized problem of constraint.
2. A view unable to address the metastasized problem of constraint is defeasible.
3. Therefore, McDowell's view is defeasible.

The support for this argument, such as there is, can all be found by reading selectively in this dissertation, leaving out Chapter One and reading Chapter Two only with an eye to the support the discussion there brings to the argument in Chapter Four. This way of reading the dissertation dispenses with the faulty comparison with Protagoreanism and constitutes, I submit, a more plausible critique of McDowell's view.

In the remainder of this Conclusion, I shall urge that there is another possible avenue of criticism, bearing on McDowell's quietism. I will argue that there is something hypocritical about McDowell's quietism. This is not a charge of inconsistency. The argument grants that the distinction between foundational metaphysics and naïve metaphysics guards against inconsistency, but it insists, nevertheless, that there is an honest way of using such a distinction. This calls for a definition of honest deflationism. The claim shall be that McDowell is a dishonest deflationist.

I begin by stating what I take to be a plausible definition of honest deflationism:

For a deflationary view to be honest, it needs to show, of the relevant item of inquiry, that the choice between rival views about that item is undecidable, and that the question of which view is correct can be bracketed or suspended without loss in other areas of inquiry.

To take an example, consider Platonism in philosophy of mathematics. A textbook account of this kind of Platonism has it that the Platonist believes mathematics is grounded in the existence of some abstract objects. An anti-realist about philosophy of mathematics might offer some alternative account to how mathematics is grounded, one not making the existential commitment to some abstract objects, or the anti-realist might altogether reject the notion that mathematics needs to be grounded in anything. This latter anti-realist approach has a deflationary feel to it. But it would be a dishonest deflationism, I claim, if it could not show that the question of

whether there are the purported kind of abstract objects is irrelevant, not merely to the practice of mathematicians and other scientists on the ground, so to speak, but to the work of any investigator in any area of inquiry, the exception, of course, being metaphysicians working exclusively on the question of the foundations of mathematics. That is, if neither a Platonist's answer, nor a non-deflationary anti-realist's answer, to the question of the foundations of mathematics can be shown to have any bearing whatsoever on any other question, then it is fair to adopt a deflationary stance with respect to the question of the foundations of mathematics. Here, then, we could sincerely echo Daniel Dennett's remark, where he is talking about the question of personal identity, in saying to Platonists and anti-realists alike: "that's another one of your philosophical truths of underwhelming significance" (cf. Dennett 1981).

The point, applied to McDowell's view, is that his view, as I have argued, attempts to use deflationism to undercut both naturalistic reductionism and dualism, in philosophy of mind, and (Footian) ethical naturalism and Moorean non-naturalism, in metaethics (see Chapter Three, above). But it is a dishonest deflationism. While I am sympathetic to the claim that the issues, in these areas, are incredibly complex, possibly too difficult for us to find satisfying theories on the relevant matters, this at best recommends a form of mysterianism, or, more conservatively, counsels a high degree of modesty with respect to how one approaches the relevant issues. It does not amount to a demonstration that the contrasting views comprise equipollent positions. Moreover, I claim further, even were such a demonstration to be had, even such equipollence would not recommend abandoning the search for further evidence which might tip the scales one way or the other, not unless it could be demonstrated that the question were truly one of underwhelming significance. That is, the aspiring deflationist needs to show that what is at stake in the debate between reductionism and dualism, or between ethical naturalism and non-naturalism, is absolutely irrelevant, not only to practice (as McDowell's espousal of moral phenomenology suggests he may think with respect to the case of the debate in metaethics), but to every area of inquiry. I submit that McDowell's efforts in favor of quietism do not go so far as to satisfy this requirement.

Much of the difficulty I encountered, in writing this dissertation, came from trying to level charges of inconsistency against McDowell's view. At times, I had in view something like the alternative avenue of criticism, just sketched, at the same time as having in view the arguments

sketched earlier in this Conclusion. The arguments lay atop one another like documents in a palimpsest, and, during writing, I have often mistakenly conflated them. The arguments are, to reiterate:

- the argument that McDowell's view is structurally analogous to Protagoreanism and is refuted by a line of argument analogous to Plato's refutation of Protagoreanism;
- the argument that McDowell's view fails to adequately address the metastasized problem of constraint (this dispenses with the Protagoreanism argument);
- the argument that McDowell's view amounts to a form of dishonest deflationism.

In attempting to fuse these arguments into a single criticism, during writing, I frequently sought to develop the argument as a demonstration that McDowell's view is incoherent. I would take a demonstration of incoherence as a fatal objection to McDowell's view. None of the arguments, taken individually, amounts to a demonstration of incoherence. The Protagoreanism argument is weak because the analogy breaks down, as explained above. The argument from the metastasized problem of constraint is only as strong as one's conviction that the Neurathian strategy could not accommodate novelty, and, as suggested near the end of section two of Chapter Four, McDowellians seem to be nigh infinitely resourceful. Finally, the claim that McDowell's view comprises a form of dishonest deflationism is not obviously a fatal objection. I can imagine various responses to such a criticism. The most obvious response would be to reject my characterization of honest deflationism. Other strategies, for defenders of McDowell, might be to resist my interpretation of McDowell's quietism as committing his view to metaontological deflationism, or to refuse to admit that the deflationism is dishonest in any objectionable sense. I do not find these latter strategies very compelling. I believe the strongest part of the dissertation is my demonstration that McDowell's quietism amounts to a form of metaontological deflationism (hopefully no one thinks this is a trivial result, thinking the implication of deflationism from quietism was perfectly obvious all along). I would have to see what a rejection of my characterization of honest deflationism looks like before I could say more to address that objection.

So, to sum up, I have provided three arguments, altogether, against McDowell's view. One of these is, by my own admission, problematic, though I believe the parallelism between McDowell's view and Protagoreanism is plausible and interesting, nevertheless. The other

arguments are conditional, depending on where one stops the dialectical wheel and whether one accepts the characterization of honest deflationism I have put forward. As I say, I failed to discover an argument categorically refuting global metaontological deflationism. In the Appendix, below, I elaborate on this facet of the dissertation's shortcoming (a shortcoming measured by what I had set out to do) by examining arguments designed to show that global anti-realist views, generally, are incoherent. I argue that none of these arguments successfully refutes global anti-realism. I take a form of metaontological deflationism such as McDowell's as providing a direct pathway to a form of global anti-realism (if this needs to be said).

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Appendix Defending Global Anti-realism

Global anti-realism is the denial of metaphysical realism.⁴² Metaphysical realism claims that the world has an intrinsic nature or structure, that is, its nature or structure is independent of our concepts, language, cognitive activities, form of life, and so on.⁴³ There are a lot of arguments criticizing global anti-realism. As mentioned above, I have not found a fully convincing argument against global anti-realism. In this Appendix, I will canvas a handful of arguments against global anti-realism and attempt to explain why they are not fully convincing.

While it is not possible to consider every argument against anti-realism out there, I have tried to choose a sample representing what strike me as some of the strongest arguments against anti-realism. I have selected five arguments to look at: three from Paul Boghossian (cf. Boghossian 2006/2007), one from John Searle (cf. Searle 1995), and one from John Nolt (cf. Nolt 2004). There is one additional way into arguing against global anti-realism, which can be referred to as the *burden of proof objection*. Boghossian puts it this way: “we have been given no good argument for believing that all facts are description-dependent, and thus no reason for doubting the common-sense view that many facts about the world are independent of us” (Boghossian 2006/2007: 38). Setting aside whatever may be distracting about this way of putting the point (e.g., the focus on ‘facts’), the basic idea is that realism is obviously the default, ordinary view of practically everyone, and any view which goes against the ordinary view must shoulder the ‘burden of proof.’ While the rhetorical appeal to “common-sense” is not perfectly persuasive, and while there can only be proofs in mathematics, defenders of anti-realism should not shy away from giving reasons for their view.⁴⁴ At the end of the day, though, I do not find the burden of proof strategy helpful because it starts to seem like a purely eristic debate technique of turning

⁴² By “global” I simply mean “all-encompassing,” not “accepted everywhere across the globe.” I drop “global” most of the time, and simply use “anti-realism” but it is important to keep what I am referring to distinct from any of the multitudinous forms of localized (relatively modest) anti-realism which any philosopher may wish to defend.

⁴³ An alternative formulation of realism, which gets to the same point but adds the complication of rejecting global error theory, which is a separate issue, is the following, formulated by Jan Westerhoff, riffing on Michael Devitt: “It is the understanding that there is a world out there—independent of our minds—and that when we speak and think about this world we mostly get it right” (Westerhoff 2011a: 189; cf. Devitt 1997: 41).

⁴⁴ I note that Buddhist Mādhyamikas marshal a battery of arguments against realism, and I discuss some of these elsewhere; see “Composition as Identity, the *One With Or Different From* Argument in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8.90-103 (and Elsewhere), and Category Mistakes” scheduled for publication in *Philosophy East and West* 72:4 (October 2022). Also, see, for instance, Westerhoff 2020. I am unable here to give Westerhoff’s book the attention it deserves.

the argument around against one's opponent. Each side can stubbornly insist that the other side demands too much of a concession and must present evidence for why anyone should make such concessions. In other words, this style of argument quickly runs out of gas and leads to a stalemate (to mix metaphors).

The structure of this Appendix is simple: in (roughly) the first third of the Appendix, I state each argument in turn (in no specific order); then, in the remainder, I respond to the arguments. I submit my sketches of anti-anti-realist arguments, together with my replies, as a kind of diptych (in which it is common for the panels to have scenes in several registers crowded with small figures). It is a lopsided diptych, unfortunately: my sketches of the anti-anti-realist arguments are briefer than my replies.

The first two arguments from Boghossian target anti-realism articulated via the notion of social construction. He focuses, specifically, on the social construction of knowledge, as opposed to the social construction of reality, or the social construction of objects, or whatever else (cf. Hacking 1999). Theorists who accept the social construction of knowledge are interested in the construction of *facts* (cf. Boghossian 2006/2007: 17). Facts are truth conditions, that is, a fact is a description of how the world would have to be for the content of a belief to be true (cf. Boghossian 2006/2007: 10-11).⁴⁵ A belief is a particular kind of mental state with a content that is representational, e.g., the belief that Earth has one unusually large moon represents reality or the world as containing a planet orbiting a moderately sized sun, a planet which itself is orbited by a smaller rocky planetoid which, relative to similar planetary satellites, is somewhat large (or something like that).⁴⁶ Boghossian defines the social construction of facts, then, in the following way: “a fact is socially constructed if and only if it is *necessarily true* that it could only have obtained through the contingent actions of a social group” (18, not my italics). The constructivist picture of knowledge differs from the classical picture of knowledge (which Boghossian traces back to Aristotle, p. 19) in three key respects: objectivism versus constructivism about facts,

⁴⁵ I do not say “*propositional* content of a belief” because, although Boghossian uses the notion of propositions, the notion is dispensable to the way he sets up the discussion. There is no reason to go overboard with ontological commitments. Speaking of truth conditions could be the first step down a road which leads to committing ourselves to a truth-neutral science of logic (for criticisms of formal logic, see Penner 1988; for a different angle of criticism, see Nye 1990, and for a response to this criticism, see Norris 2006: 12-40). But if we refuse to follow down that road, using the notion of truth conditions seems harmless.

⁴⁶ We might also describe reality, or the world, as constituted of such and such objects; here we might also refer to states of affairs. I merely follow Boghossian's way of talking.

objectivism versus constructivism about justification, and objectivism versus constructivism about rational explanation (cf. 22-23). For current purposes, I shall focus exclusively on the first of these contrasts, objectivism versus constructivism about facts. Objectivism about facts is just a form of realism, as defined above. It is the view that “[t]he world which we seek to understand and know about is what it is largely independently of us and our beliefs about it” (22).

Constructivism about facts oppositely holds that “[t]he world which we seek to understand and know about is not what it is independently of us and our social context; rather, all facts are socially constructed in a way that reflects our contingent needs and interests” (ibid).

Boghossian’s argument begins by noting that it is a truism that the existence of plenty of objects and facts, about which we talk, antedates the existence of human beings: “electrons, mountains, dinosaurs, giraffes, rivers and lakes” (38). (I am not sure about giraffes, but the rest of his examples seem right; he could have added stars.) Boghossian then asks:

How, then, could their existence depend on us? How could we create our own past?

Wouldn’t this commit us to a bizarre form of backwards causation, where the cause (our activity) comes later than its effect (the existence of the dinosaurs)? (ibid)

The argument can be restated as follows:

1. Entities of kind *K* antedate human beings. (truism)
2. If *Ks* are socially constructed, then human beings must cause the existence of *Ks*.
(assumed)
3. Suppose *Ks* are socially constructed. (assumption for reductio)
4. Human beings must cause the existence of *Ks*. (modus ponens 2,3)
5. Backward causation is absurd (i.e., a cause must not antedate its effect). (obvious?)
6. Constructivism is absurd. (1, 4, 5)

Let us for convenience call this the *causation argument*. It is perhaps not so obvious that backward causation is absurd, although I think the premise is quite strong. But premise 5 is not where I focus my attention, below, so it need not detain us. There are not any problems with premises 2, 3, and 4. The conclusion, 6, does follow from the premises. The only place where a defender of constructionism (antirealism) can press is premise 1. But is it not surely true that things like electrons, mountains, and stars antedate the evolution of human beings? We will see

that (essentially) this premise is shared by one of Nolt's arguments (his main argument for metaphysical realism, see below). So, as it turns out, the response to both arguments depends on finding a problem with this premise. For now, let us leave it hanging and proceed to Boghossian's second argument.

His second argument charges constructionism with conceptual incoherence. The Standard Model of particle physics defines electrons as "among the fundamental building blocks of all matter" (Boghossian 39). As such, it is part of the very concept of an electron that it not be constructed by us. Boghossian asks: "If we insist on saying that they [electrons] were constructed by our descriptions of them, don't we run the risk of saying something not merely false but *conceptually incoherent*, as if we hadn't quite grasped what an electron was supposed to be?" (ibid, not my italics). In other words, suppose we did construct electrons. Then what we have constructed is something which, by its very nature, could not have been constructed by us. Therefore, the very notion of constructing such a thing is incoherent. Let us call this the *conceptual incoherence argument*.

Before considering the third argument from Boghossian, I want to first consider the argument from Searle. The argument from Searle, like the arguments considered thus far, charges constructionism with conceptual incoherence, albeit a different form of incoherence.⁴⁷ Searle develops an influential account of the institutional construction of facts (Searle 1995). The account relies on the notion of a constitutive rule. Constitutive rules are speech acts with the structure "X counts as Y in C" (cf. 1995: 43ff). The 'X' term denotes a physical object having properties and capable of functions. The 'Y' term assigns to the denotation of the 'X' term a status with accompanying functions going beyond the functions of which the entity, qua physical object, is capable. This assignment of status can occur only in a social context (designated 'C') of "*continued* collective acceptance or recognition of the validity of the assigned function" (45, not my italics). For example, consider money. Apart from the social/institutional context in which money "has its being," so to speak, it is (at best) just bits of paper and metal, sounds,

⁴⁷ Searle addresses two forms of antirealism: not only social constructionism, but also phenomenalist idealism (cf. Searle 1995: 183). Phenomenalist idealism is the view that "all reality consists in conscious states" (183). I am not concerned here with phenomenalist idealism which is not a form of global antirealism.

marks, land (190).⁴⁸ The bits of paper and so forth, in themselves, do not have the functional capacities assigned to them in their numismatic status. The value of money, qua money, is to perform functions, in the context of human societies, of resolving debts and enabling the smooth exchange of goods. These status functions are in no way inherent to the physical properties and powers of the relevant bits of paper and metal. The status functions of money are *imputed* to these physical objects.

Searle's argument against global constructionism underscores the "logical priority of brute facts over institutional facts" (55). Brute facts are facts about the physical objects which serve as the basis of construction (e.g., bits of paper and metal). Institutional facts take the form of constitutive rules. Searle insists:

That hierarchy [i.e., status function *over* another status function, or status function *over* brute, physical functions] has to bottom out in phenomena whose existence is not a matter of human agreement. This is just another way of saying that where there is a status-function imposed on something, there has to be something it is imposed on. If it is imposed on another status-function, eventually one has to reach a rock bottom of something that is not itself any form of status-function. (55-56)

The reason why Searle insists on the logical priority of brute facts is that otherwise we end up either with an infinite regress or circularity (cf. 56, 191). Searle states the reasoning thus:

To construct money, property, and language, for example, there have to be the raw materials of bits of metal, paper, land, sounds, and marks, for example. And the raw materials cannot in turn be socially constructed without presupposing some even rawer materials out of which they are constructed, until eventually we reach a bedrock of brute physical phenomena independent of all representations. (191)

Searle thinks of this as a transcendental argument "in one of Kant's many senses of that term" in which "[w]e assume that a certain condition holds, and then try to show the presuppositions of that condition" (183).⁴⁹ In the case of institutional facts, "a socially constructed reality

⁴⁸ Searle was writing in the 90s. Current day money is typically a more rarified type of physical object: the 'X' term nowadays typically denotes information encoded on computer chips. Since paper bills and metal coins are not (yet) utterly obsolete, I stick with Searle's description.

⁴⁹ I do not attempt to comment on the point about Kant.

presupposes a non-socially constructed reality” (191). Without “an X element that is not itself an institutional construction,” Searle continues, “you would get infinite regress or circularity” (ibid). Let us call this the *regress/circularity argument*.⁵⁰

Boghossian offers an alternative form of regress argument (I chose to present Searle’s argument first because, like Boghossian’s first two arguments, it deals with social constructionism, whereas Boghossian’s regress argument deals with global relativism). The argument is supposed to show that global relativism is self-refuting. Global relativism is distinct from (or is at least a distinct *form* of) social constructionism, considered above. It maintains that facts are ever facts only relative to a scheme or framework (conceptual or linguistic) (cf. Boghossian 2006/2007: 42-52). In other words, there are no *absolute* facts. Global relativism maintains that this holds for all facts, not merely some localized class of facts. The argument, then, goes as follows: there are no facts of the form

P,

only facts of the form

According to a theory/scheme/framework we accept, P

(cf. Boghossian 2006/2007: 54). But now the latter fact cannot be an absolute fact, so the relativist must posit a fact of the form

According to a theory/scheme/framework we accept: according to a theory/scheme/framework we accept, P,

and the same applies to this, in turn—and so we are off on an infinite regress. This regress, if it can be assigned to the global antirealist, *is* clearly vicious (or so I think). By this reasoning, the antirealist does seem committed, as Boghossian observes, to “the claim that we should so reinterpret our utterances that they express infinitary propositions that we can neither express nor understand” (56). The regress here displays the *vortex* property which I mention above in chapter three, section three. As I say there, Westerhoff attributes the vortex property to Madhyamaka

⁵⁰ Searle’s regress/circularity argument is discussed by David F. Burton in his critical appraisal of the Madhyamaka concept of emptiness (cf. Burton 1999: 108). The regress part of the argument is also articulated by Westerhoff in his reconstruction of a global conventionalism which, Westerhoff suggests, a modern Buddhist Mādhyamika philosopher could endorse (cf. Westerhoff 2011a: 192-193).

antirealism, when the latter is construed as a form of panfictionalism. Here is a quick, rough pass at what panfictionalism amounts to: (i) fictionalism in local theorizing about specific kinds of entities involves the idea that while the entities in a relevant domain (e.g., ordinary objects such as trees and baseballs, numbers, properties, ethical properties, causes, possible worlds, and so on) do not exist, they can still be meaningfully spoken of and it is still possible for statements about them to be true or false, and (ii) the fictionalist picture can be extended to all entities whatsoever (cf. Westerhoff 2018: 419; also cf. Yablo 1998, 2000, 2001, 2009; Thomasson 2015). According to Westerhoff, a fictionalist account has the vortex property when “[t]he fiction itself subsumes the distinction between fiction and non-fiction” (Westerhoff 2018: 421). Let us then call Boghossian’s regress argument the *vortex argument*.

I mentioned above that premise (1) of the causation argument is shared by Nolt’s main argument for realism. That is essentially correct, although Nolt focuses on one specific entity which antedates human beings: the cosmos. Nolt’s argument is designed to show that the world has structure that would exist even if human beings and our cognitive activities never did. This is a direct refutation of anti-realism which claims that the world is “so thoroughly structured by our concepts, interpretations or values that *none* of its structure would have existed if we had not” (Nolt 2004: 71, not my italics). Nolt’s argument is simple and clear:

- (1) The cosmos existed and had structure before we existed.
- (2) During some of this time, it was possible that we would never exist.
- (3) Thus, the cosmos has structure that would have existed even if we never had.
- (4) Therefore, the cosmos has structure that is independent of our cognition—i.e., intrinsic structure. (Nolt 2004: 71-72)

Nolt unfolds a careful dialectic explaining the significance of the claim that the cosmos’ structure is independent of “our cognition.” He imagines, first, some rather crude antirealists whose “first impulse” is “to understand world-structure as the structure in which human experience (either individual or collective) warrants belief at a given time,” thus committing themselves to the claim that such structure depends on “the cognitions of ‘*us*’ *actual humans*” (72, not my italics). This result would be absurd because it would make the cosmos dependent “upon the fluctuating evidential states (and perhaps also conceptions of warrant) of the members of the species *homo sapiens*” (73, italics not mine). Were things thus dependent on actual human beings’ fluctuating

evidential states, one wonders how bad it could get. Perhaps the result would not be as bad as “a swarm of appearances [filling] up our soul without experience ever being able to arise from it,” as Kant puts it (Kant A 111).

Nolt infers, nevertheless, that the situation would be extremely precarious, bad enough for us to want to recoil from “such dizzyingly pluralistic and anthropocentric implications” (73). The next stop in the dialectic employs a Peircean strategy to correct for the laxity of this first perspective: “antirealists often idealize, defining world-structure as the structure in which belief would be warranted for us humans *if we could make exhaustive inquiries*” (ibid, original italics). Nolt argues that this fails because it is still implausibly anthropocentric: “some opinions that could never become warrantable *for us humans* might yet be warrantable for beings better situated or cognitively more adept” (ibid, original italics). Even if we widen our “we” to include intelligent creatures of any kind, even extraterrestrials inhabiting regions of spacetime inaccessible to human beings? But, Nolt rejoins, “even if there are extraterrestrials capable of knowing things we can’t, can we not imagine beings of greater sapience still?” (ibid). This leads him to imagine anti-realists who postulate super-ideal inquirers, “omnipresent, invulnerable, never permanently stymied by complexity and never bored” (ibid). The problem with this is that if world-structure depends on the cognitions of such beings, who could exist so far removed from *our* cognitions (i.e., the cognitions of any actual cognitive beings), “the antirealist game is up” (ibid). An essentially God’s-eye perspective has entered the picture. It is thus crucial that the claim being refuted is the claim that “there would be no world-structure without *human* cognition” (ibid). The argument’s strength decreases to the extent that we step further away from the anti-realist’s anthropocentric presumption. It is “still strong if ‘we’ includes sentient earthly animals, and less strong but still credible if ‘we’ includes all sentient life-forms in the universe; for the evolution of life is, to the best of our knowledge, everywhere a relatively late and contingent development” (74). If we go to nonbiological entities, accepting God, or panpsychism, then “the argument becomes more difficult to assess” (ibid). The argument is not intended to handle such entities. It is meant to show not that structure is able to “exist apart from any cognition that there might be,” but only that it is able to exist “without our cognitions—where ‘our’ refers to humans; sentient earthly animals, including humans; or sentient creatures throughout the cosmos” (ibid, original

italics). Due to the argument's emphasis on anti-realists' anthropocentric presumptions, let us call this the *anti-anthropocentric argument*.⁵¹

This completes my inventory of the arguments against antirealism which I try to address in the present Appendix. Will Durant says, with characteristic eloquence, "Refutations never convince, and to pit one half-truth against its opposite is vain unless the two can be merged into a larger and juster view" (Durant 1953: 726). If refutations never convince, then perhaps it is unreasonable to expect rebuttals of refutations to fare any better. Still, ignoring Durant's Hegelian overture, here goes.

Let me begin with the anti-anthropocentric argument. The reason why I start here is that much of the scaffolding needed to respond to this argument will also have application in what I have to say about some of the other arguments. Another reason to start here is that Nolt anticipates a wide range of objections. He develops this argument more fully than the other authors do for any of the other arguments considered here. This makes it easier to see where to place the scaffolding's foundations.

Nolt explains that the obvious anti-realist response to the argument is to reject premise (2) (cf. Nolt 2004: 75). Premise (2) says that during some of the time when the cosmos existed prior to our arrival on the scene, it was still possible that we would never exist. He notes that some

⁵¹ Toward the end of his paper, Nolt riffs on the anti-anthropocentric argument, in effect generating a distinct argument: "When we look at the night sky, for example, we find the stars positioned in arrangements not of our making. These arrangements are among the sorts of things that G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell and others tried to distill out of the flux of interpretation and reify as sense-data—the uninterpreted given in perception. They failed. Such arrangements must be interpreted even to be recognized as sense-data and so cannot be isolated from [the] flux of interpretation. But that does not mean that the way they appear to us is *only* the result, for example, of our engaging in a certain kind of discourse, or even of the kinds of eyes and brains we have. Indigo buntings, beings with alien eyes and strange brains and with whom we have never had any discourse, recognize the same arrangements of stars that we do. (These night-migrating birds guide their flight by the arrangements of the north circumpolar stars, as is known from experiments in planetariums in which the arrangements of the stars—as conceived by us—are simulated and varied.)" (85, original italics). This argument is interesting because it performs a Davidsonian triangulation, yet a very un-Davidsonian triangulation (cf. Davidson 2001 [1991]: 212; also cf. Davidson 2001 [1997]: 124). The argument intersects with a thorny question in Tibetan scholastic philosophy, the question of sense perception across world spheres. Buddhist philosophers need to be able to explain how ghosts, gods, and humans, whose kinds of sense-modalities are very much dependent on their different kinds of embodiment (e.g., what a human perceives as a cup of water, the ghost perceives as a cup of pus), are able to have convergent sensory apprehensions of things in the same world (that is, although the ghost and human apprehend the cup's contents differently, they still apprehend the cup). I discuss this elsewhere, in a paper I delivered at the meeting of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Atlanta, GA, in 2008. But I did not discuss Nolt's triangulation argument, and I do not have anything, now, to say about the triangulation argument other than that it might possibly be a successful approach to refuting global anti-realism.

version of an anthropic principle could defeat premise (2) (cf. 87 n. 9). An anthropic principle would require that it be necessary, in some sense, for us, or beings with cognitive abilities like our own, to evolve. Nolt replies that this would defeat (2) “but in a way that would not help the antirealist” (ibid). He does not elaborate on why this would not help the anti-realist, but I suppose the thought is that anything like an anthropic principle already presupposes the conclusion of the anti-anthropocentric argument, i.e., that the cosmos has intrinsic structure. If the cosmos did not have intrinsic structure, then it would not be possible for it to necessitate the existence of beings like us. I am going to grant the point since my response to the anti-anthropocentric argument does not depend on rejecting premise (2). But before moving on, it is worth noting that only some anti-realists insist on a strict reversal of the order of explanation for our cognition of world-structure—rather than say that structure in the world causes our cognition of such structure, they hold that world-structure is (somehow) dependent on our cognition of structure. This type of anti-realist does indeed fall afoul of the argument that an anthropic principle presupposes structure. But another kind of anti-realist thinks that structure and cognition of structure are *mutually dependent*. This type of view has other problems (at the very least, it certainly exhibits the vortex property), but it does not have to worry about any anthropic principle presupposing *intrinsic* cosmic structure.

In addition to the obvious anti-realist response, rejecting premise (2), Nolt considers anti-scientific responses and a determinist response, as well as responses which some prominent anti-realists might reasonably be expected to give, namely, Hilary Putnam and Nelson Goodman. There is no need to look at each of these possible responses since the response I wish to develop is different. Nolt also considers a response, suggested to him by Richard Aquila in conversation (cf. Nolt 80-81 and 88 n. 26). This latter response involves accepting the entire argument but consistently reinterpreting it all in an anti-realistic way. Since my response focuses on how we interpret a premise of the argument, my response could be confused with the type of response suggested by Aquila, so Nolt’s reply to Aquila’s “reinterpretation” response is worth pausing to consider. “Any sentence can be reinterpreted to mean anything; but this Alice-in-Wonderland game quickly becomes tedious and puerile,” Nolt writes (80). He thinks that the proposal to reinterpret the entire argument, through an antirealist lens, is “merely an irrelevant change of subject” (ibid). He insists that the “sense in which the antirealist understands my words must be a reasonable analysis of the sense that I gave them” (ibid). He then proceeds to consider a “non-

frivolous way for an antirealist to reinterpret the argument” by understanding the argument’s assertions in terms of assertibility conditions rather than truth conditions. Such a reinterpretation would involve prefixing each assertion with a qualifying phrase such as “Judged by the criteria of rational acceptability, we are warranted in accepting that...”. This would yield, for the conclusion of the argument: “Judging by the criteria of rational acceptability, we are warranted in accepting that the cosmos has intrinsic structure.” The problem, though, is that the anti-realist *denies* that the cosmos has intrinsic structure. The assertion that there is intrinsic cosmic structure is not rationally acceptable by the anti-realist’s criteria. Therefore, if they insist on playing the reinterpretation game, one way to construe their position is then as a form of hypocrisy, which is how Nolt argues against the move. Another way to construe the position is that they must both hold that the assertion of intrinsic cosmic structure *is* rationally acceptable, and that it *is not* rationally acceptable, which is contradictory (ibid).

My response might be misunderstood as riffing on the reinterpretation response. I do not suggest reinterpreting every assertion in the argument, nor do I propose to grant the whole thing. What I propose is that premise one begs the question against the anti-realist precisely because premise one presupposes a realist interpretation, which is precisely the issue which is at stake for the argument. I can illustrate this by reconsidering Fine’s rejection of the Quinean standard of ontological commitment, discussed above in Chapter Three, section three. Fine says he “would like to suggest that we give up on the account of ontological claims in terms of existential quantification” (Fine 2009: 167). He points out that in the case of commitment to integers, it is “a commitment to each of the integers not to some integer or other” (ibid). In the statement, “Integers exist,” what is expressed is the claim that every integer exists, not that there is an integer. Fine thus proposes that existence be treated as a predicate, and that existence assertions should be understood as taking the form of universally quantified statements: where ‘I’ symbolizes the predicate *being an integer*, and ‘E’ symbolizes *exists*, the assertion “Integers exist” has, on this view, the logical form

$$\forall x(Ix \rightarrow Ex)$$

(Fine 2009: 167). Fine also introduces a reality operator: an object is *real* if “it is constitutive of reality that it is that way”—symbolized

$$Rx =_{df} \exists \phi R[\phi x]$$

where ‘ φ ’ is a second-order metavariable bound by a second-order existential quantifier (2009: 172). Fine’s notation, here, might look viciously circular, since it includes ‘R’ as a predicate while defining ‘R’ as an operator.⁵² I think this distinction in logical types, between ‘R’ as a predicate and ‘R’ as an operator is precisely what Fine has in mind, and it could be marked by revising the notation, using boldface ‘R’ for the operator, thus:

$$\mathbf{R}x =_{df} \exists\varphi\mathbf{R}[\varphi x]$$

This is not a perfectly good fix, of course, since there is a deeper concern, now, about the strategy of invoking a distinction between logical types. I accept Penner’s general criticism of this sort of maneuver (cf. Penner 1987: 346-349 n. 42, 357-358 n. 52). But this raises issues which I shall not be able to discuss in this context. For now, I believe Fine’s notion is clear enough: he has introduced notation with which to keep track of the metametaphysical difference between first and second order ontological issues, keeping in mind the distinction he draws between naïve metaphysics and foundational metaphysics. The point, then, is that the ‘**R**’ operator is used to express a realist stance toward some entity, a stance which does not take it to be right away “harmless and obvious” that such entities are constitutive of reality (cf. Priest, Siderits, and Tillemans 2011: 147ff). A realist about numbers would, on Fine’s account, express her thesis thus (letting ‘N’ stand for *is a number*):

$$\forall x(Nx \rightarrow \exists\varphi\mathbf{R}[\varphi x])$$

(see Fine 2009: 173). This says about all things x in the universe of discourse of naïve metaphysics, that if they are a number, then there must exist a feature, φ (again in the naïve universe of discourse), such that the situation of x ’s being φ (e.g., ‘the six are elephants’) is a real situation or state of affairs. I take it that the reality predicate is issued from a naïve standpoint, here, and that it would license application of the reality operator, from the metaontologically foundationalist standpoint. On Fine’s account, then, quantification is ontologically neutral, and it is possible to mark a distinction between two sorts of stance toward existence assertions: the stance which regards x as merely existing as a matter of course, where x ’s existence is a quotidian, trivial affair, and the stance which regards x ’s existing as something heavy, a matter of

⁵² Thanks to John Nolt for this observation in comments on a draft of this appendix.

ontological seriousness. Andrew Joseph Cortens' definition of ontological seriousness provides a helpful terminological regimentation here. He says that

we can say that someone is *ontologically serious* about entities of type *K* (or about *Ks*) if and only if he claims, or believes something which entails, that any complete, correct, and perspicuous representation of reality will need to contain a word or thought-sign which designates or applies to at least one thing that is a *K*. Let us further say that someone is *ontologically unserious* about *Ks* if he thinks that an ontologically serious view of *Ks* is inappropriate. (Cortens 1999: 39-40)

On Fine's view, ontologically neutral existential quantification alone connotes ontological unseriousness; the reality operator adds ontological seriousness. Ontological unseriousness about *Ks* is not incompatible with belief in the existence of *Ks*, on Fine's view, but it involves a commitment to the idea that belief in the existence of *Ks* does not require, additionally, belief in a world "out there, independent of our minds," such that there could be any complete, correct, and perspicuous representation of it. Ontological seriousness about *Ks*, on Fine's view, entails realism.

Making these distinctions, I understand premise (1) of the anti-anthropocentric argument as requiring an occurrence of the reality operator, interpreting Nolt's words with *exactly the sense* Nolt gives them. The problem is that the legitimacy of occurrences of the reality operator is precisely what is in question between realists and anti-realists. It begs the question to use an argument against anti-realism that starts with a first premise which must invoke the reality operator. In short, it begs the question against anti-realism to insist that the cosmos has intrinsic structure.

Since the causation argument relies on a premise which is essentially equivalent to premise (1) of the anti-anthropocentric argument, the same response applies to both arguments.

I want to next consider the vortex argument. We see a similar series of dialectical inflections in this argument as in the anti-anthropocentric argument. The argument presupposes that anti-realists must employ something like a logic of fiction to articulate their view. The premise of the argument is that anti-realists must say that there are no facts of the form

P,

only facts of the form

According to a theory/scheme/framework we accept, P

where the qualifying phrase “according to a theory/scheme/framework we accept” works basically like a story operator. We can reformulate the argument as follows:

- (1) There are no bare facts of the form P, only contextual facts of the form $S_{\text{conceptualframework}}P$.
- (2) Since $S_{\text{conceptualframework}}P$ is a fact, it must be either a bare fact or a contextual fact.
- (3) Since there are no bare facts, it must be a contextual fact of the form $S_{\text{conceptualframework}}(S_{\text{conceptualframework}}P)$.
- (4) Since $S_{\text{conceptualframework}}(S_{\text{conceptualframework}}P)$ is a fact, it must be either a bare fact or a contextual fact.... And so on, ad infinitum.

The response to the vortex argument is like the responses to the anti-anthropocentric and causation arguments. The first premise presupposes the stance of realism. It states how an anti-realist’s view would have to be formulated from a realist’s perspective. The anti-realist might put the point differently:

Bare facts do not exist

which, using Fine’s metaontological framework, is best expressed by the following:

$$(1^*) Ba \rightarrow \sim Ea$$

where ‘B’ stands for ‘___ is a bare fact’, the domain of discourse is the universe of entities postulated by naïve metaphysics, and ‘a’ denotes some individual in the domain of discourse. The entity denoted by ‘a’ could not be a bare fact because the entities postulated by naïve metaphysics, in Fine’s framework, may be construed as contextually dependent entities. This shows that the vortex argument, like the arguments previously considered, begs the question in premise (1) by saddling the anti-realist with a formulation of the claim which the anti-realist would find unacceptable. The anti-realist should prefer the formulation in (1*) which does not start up an infinite regress.

It might still be objected that this response does not properly address the disturbing feature displayed by the realist’s formulation of the same facts, namely, the vortex property. The anti-realist stance has this property, and what is disturbing about it is that the distinction the anti-

realist wants to draw between bare facts and contextual facts breaks down *in Vorticis*. If this does not exactly generate a regress, there is still certainly something disconcerting about it.

But what? What is problematic about the vortex property? A mirror vortex is a familiar occurrence, e.g., a photo or movie still of someone standing between two facing mirrors, capturing the images in the mirrors receding infinitely.⁵³ The effect can be somewhat dizzying. But it does not entail a contradiction or anything impossible. I doubt this will fully satisfy fans of the vortex argument. Nevertheless, I have fully addressed the only argument currently to be found in the vicinity. I leave it to critics of anti-realism to sharpen and clarify the intuition motivating the argument.

Perhaps the vortex property rests on a deep presumption that anti-realism is incoherent. The conceptual incoherence argument offers one way to articulate such a thought. The claim suggested above in response to the anti-anthropocentric argument, that ‘antirealists can agree that the cosmos (with structure which does not depend on human cognition) exists’ probably strikes many realists as imbricated in exactly the sort of basic incoherence posited by the conceptual incoherence argument. The example used by Boghossian in stating the conceptual incoherence argument is of the same metaphysical type as an intrinsically structured cosmos: an electron is (as is the cosmos) the type of object which a fundamental ontological theory might posit. Here I use ‘object’ generically to cover any sort of countable entity, including numbers, events, collections, properties, and relations (cf. Cortens 1999: 33). Fundamental ontology is concerned with what there is, that is, it is concerned with theorizing the fundamental level of reality, or ultimate reality. Jonathan Schaffer defines fundamentalism thus:

The fundamentalist starts with (a) a hierarchical picture of nature as stratified into *levels*, adds (b) an assumption that there is a bottom level which is *fundamental*, and winds up, often enough, with (c) an ontological attitude according to which the entities of the fundamental level are *primarily* real, while any remaining contingent entities are at best derivative, if real at all. (Schaffer 2003: 498)

For example, the physicalist maintains that microphysical theory describes the entities of the fundamental level on which all else supervenes. A monist, on the other hand, holds that the

⁵³ There is a famous picture of Gilles Deleuze in a mirror vortex.

whole is prior to its parts, and thus views the cosmos as fundamental (cf. Schaffer 2010). Anti-realists, then, maintaining that our cognition is primarily real, with everything else derivative, lapse into incoherence when they affirm the existence of the cosmos (or electrons). Such entities are primarily, i.e., *intrinsically*, real. The anti-realist's view has everything backwards, on this line of argument: it would have primarily real entities be dependent on merely derivative entities. On such a view, the concept of fundamentalia, i.e., primarily real entities, becomes incoherent. Not every realist is committed to the kind of ontological fundamentalism discussed by Shaffer, but I suggest that the conceptual incoherence argument does presuppose ontological fundamentalism.⁵⁴

One way to object to the conceptual incoherence argument is to treat it as a *modus tollens*. If realism is true, then some class of entities (whether electrons, the cosmos, or whatever) must be fundamental; the concept of a fundamental entity is incoherent; therefore, realism is not true. A similar line of argument could be taken to undermine the very project of fundamental ontology. Why accept the hierarchical picture of nature as stratified into levels (cf. Thalos 2013)? Or even if we accept the hierarchical picture, why accept the assumption that there is a fundamental level, that it all must bottom out, ontologically speaking? If there are no levels, then there is no fundamental level. Regardless of what we think about levels, there still might be no fundamental level (i.e., it is logically conceivable that there is no *fundamental* level, even *with* levels; for instance, cf. Schaffer 2003).

Boghossian insists that to be an electron is to be one of "the fundamental building blocks of all matter" (see above). This is supposed to be an instance of a conceptual truth: it is how electrons are defined. To say anything different about electrons is supposed to commit one to a conceptual incoherence. But if ontological fundamentalism is false, then no vicious error is involved in saying something incompatible with that supposed conceptual truth. It does not matter that some people might have thought electrons were fundamental entities. If fundamentalism is false, then

⁵⁴ A separate avenue to criticizing the conceptual incoherence argument is to resist the notion of incorrigible mental states altogether. I endorse this rejection of incorrigible mental states. See Penner 1987, specifically his critique of Plato's equal sticks and stones argument for the existence of the Forms, for one approach to resisting the notion of incorrigible conceptual states. The point, applied to the argument in question here, is that the conceptual incoherence argument employs a false philosophy of mind and a false epistemology in arguing against anti-realism. But I also think the argument presupposes fundamentalism, and that it goes wrong in the way described in the body of the text above, even for philosophers amenable to incorrigible conceptual states.

there is nothing wrong with conceiving of electrons differently. There is no ‘incoherence,’ only a dispute about the real nature of electrons. This point relies on what Penner and Rowe call the principle of real reference (cf. Penner and Rowe 2005) and no realist should balk at the spirit of such a principle, at any rate.⁵⁵ Even realists should not be enthusiastic to endorse the conceptual incoherence argument. No one thinks reality can be defined into existence.

Taking stock: I have replied to the anti-anthropocentric argument, the causation argument, the vortex argument, and the conceptual incoherence argument. This still leaves only the regress/circularity argument. To find a reply to the regress/circularity argument, I propose to start by considering what makes an infinite regress vicious (when and if it is vicious). This question is explored by Ricki Bliss in her examination of reasons for taking infinite regresses of grounds to be vicious rather than benign (cf. Bliss 2013). Bliss considers five kinds of account of the viciousness of such infinite regresses: (1) such regresses harbor contradictions, (2) such regresses are ordered by a dependence relation that transmits a property, (3) such regresses are generated by theories that aim at being reductive but fail, (4) such regresses are not theoretically virtuous, i.e., they are ontologically extravagant, and (5) such regresses are generated because we are seeking an explanation for a proposed phenomenon but fail to arrive at the desired explanation (cf. Bliss 2013: 400-401). Bliss offers compelling reasons to reject accounts (1), (2), and (4). There is no need here to review her arguments against these prospective analyses.⁵⁶ I want to consider her accounts of (3) and (5), though, beginning with the latter (for reasons which will emerge).

In articulating (5), Bliss relies on John Passmore’s analysis. Passmore argues that “it is the first step in the regress that counts, for we at once, in taking it, draw attention to the fact that the alleged explanation or justification has failed to advance matters” (Passmore 1961: 31; quoted by Bliss, 2013: 410). The example Passmore considers is taken from Ryle’s analysis of intelligent action. Ryle suggested that if intelligent thought is temporally presupposed for an intelligent action to be performed, it would be impossible for any intelligent action to ever be performed (cf.

⁵⁵ Some realists might, of course, reject the philosophy of mind and philosophy of language built into the principle of real reference.

⁵⁶ As I argue in detail, below, (1), (2), and (4) do not at all fit Searle’s project of establishing the logical priority of physical things. The only accounts of the viciousness of infinite regresses, considered by Bliss, which are relevant to a discussion of Searle’s argument are (3) and (5). I address these below.

Ryle 1949: 30; Bliss 2013: 410ff). Prima facie, it appears that Ryle invokes merely a temporal regress, but Passmore argues that more is involved. As Bliss explains:

The regress gets its legs when we understand it to be generated because we are seeking to explain something about the nature of intelligence itself. Passmore believes that the regress gets going because we are seeking a *constitution-explanation* of intelligence. (Bliss *ibid* 411)

The problem with the regress, on this account, is, as Bliss says, that “we invoke the very phenomenon under investigation—intelligence—to explain the phenomenon under investigation—intelligence” (411). The problem with the regress, then, is that it involves explanatory circularity. Bliss illustrates how this elucidates the viciousness of several famous instances of vicious infinite regresses. A Bradley regress, for instance, arises in the context of the question of how states of affairs are formed by universals and particulars. As Bliss explains, if F and a are merely contingently united to form the truth Fa , then anything other than a might have been F , and a could have been G or been characterized in some other way. An account is required to explain the unity of F and a in the state of affairs, Fa . Suppose an instantiation relation is invoked to explain the phenomenon: a instantiates F by R (R denotes the instantiation relation). Now the question comes up, how does R itself relate to a and F ? This leads to the proposal that R_1 relates R to a and F ; and this leads to an infinite regress because, for each R_n , a further relation, R_{n+1} is required to explain the relation of R_n to everything that came before. According to the Bliss-Passmore analysis, a Bradley regress is indeed vicious because at each stage (starting with the first stage) of the regress, the *explanans* and *explanandum* are each instances of the same phenomenon: the instantiation relation is invoked to explain the unity of a state of affairs, but the instantiation relation is itself a unity, and its unity in turn demands explanation. As Passmore puts it (quoted above), the explanation has failed to advance matters (cf. Bliss 2013: 412).

Now I think we can understand why Searle presents the regress/circularity argument as showing anti-realists committed to “infinite regress *or* circularity” (my italics). Perhaps the intuition underlying Searle’s reasoning is something along the lines of the Bliss-Passmore analysis of why (some) infinite regresses are vicious. The alternatives, to (5), are to interpret his understanding of the regress’ viciousness in terms of one of the other prospective analyses, or else find a further

analysis of why infinite regresses of grounds are vicious. I will explain why taking the Bliss-Passmore analysis on board cancels the force of Searle's argument, but first let us consider, briefly, what could be said in favor of reading the argument through the lens of one of the other analyses. As noted above, none of the other prospective analyses properly fits Searle's project of establishing the logical priority of brute facts, i.e., the priority of physical things. Searle's theory of social construction is well-suited, however, to his overall project of defending Searle's favored doctrine of biological naturalism. Biological naturalism involves the claim that consciousness causally supervenes on brain processes (cf. Searle 1992, 1993; also cf. Corcoran 2001). It seems likely, then, that analysis (3), which says that vicious infinite regresses are generated by theories that aim at being reductive but fail, presents the *best fit* for understanding Searle's argument. Bliss discusses suggestions by Daniel Nolan and Karen Bennett that infinite regresses are vicious when they involve "a failure of reductive explanation" (Bliss 2013: 409; cf. Nolan 2001, Bennett 2011). But, as Bliss argues, Nolan's and Bennett's analyses do not get at what is interesting about the relation between viciousness and reductive explanation failure: "After all, there are many ways in which a reductive analysis can fail that are not going to be involved with the generation of vicious infinite regresses" (409). The interesting thing to understand is how the viciousness of a regress is involved in characterizing a failed reductive theory, and this is elucidated by the Bliss-Passmore analysis.

It is clear how the analysis could seem to apply to Searle's worry about an infinite regress of socially constructed bases of construction: physicalist reductionism seemingly fails if we never reach a rock bottom of non-constructed, fundamental physical entities. But we must stop and ask: does the Bliss-Passmore analysis truly render a "vicious" verdict in the case of Searle's regress? Or is the regress benign? The answer depends on what Searle's theory of social construction truly explains. It does not explain how socially constructed realities are grounded in physical realities, nor could it do so, even setting aside the infinite regress. Recall Searle's account of constitutive rules: a constitutive rule is a speech act with the structure "X counts as Y in C" (Searle 1995: 43ff). This structure is neutral as to the status of the denotation of the X term: it could be either another socially constructed reality, or a brute fact. The point is that the possibility of the X term's denoting a brute fact is a late add-on; it does not factor into whether the account of this structure explains the phenomenon to be explained. The phenomenon to be explained is the imputation of a status function in the Y term, on a basis of imputation, i.e., the

denotation of the X term, where the referent of 'X' does not intrinsically possess the capacity to perform the status function so imputed. It does not matter whether the X term denotes another socially constructed reality or a brute fact. In either case, what 'X' denotes is something which *lacks* the capacity to perform the status function attributed in counting X as Y. Therefore, the regress is not vicious. We are seeking to explain how something which does not intrinsically possess status function F comes to have the capacity of that function (e.g., how bits of paper and metal can come to facilitate exchanges of goods and debt removal) via a process of social agreement. Even if bits of paper and metal happen to be social constructs, the explanatory value of the constitutive rule holds. Its holding when applied to cases where the X term denotes something socially constructed is literally built into the theory's design by Searle himself. More importantly, the phenomenon to be explained (*having* status function F) is explained, in the account, by a distinct phenomenon (something which does *not have* status function F, occurring in the context of a specific type of speech act). The regress does not register as vicious on the Bliss-Passmore analysis.

These considerations about Searle's specific account generalize to forms of the regress/circularity argument not anchored in his unique philosophical project (cf., for instance, Burton 1999). While the regress must be acknowledged by anti-realists, there is no reason not to presume the regress benign.

This Appendix will have succeeded if it dispels any presumption that one or more of the arguments discussed here shows decisively that anti-realism, as a metametaphysical view, is a complete non-starter. As mentioned at the start of the Appendix, I have not, in this Appendix, addressed one other serious source of worry about anti-realism, the worry that it involves moral and epistemic relativism. Of course, that issue is taken up in the body of the dissertation.

Vita

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