

# A Shaping of the Intellect: McDowell's Self in *Mind and World*\*

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## Abstracts

This paper ventures to propose a McDowellian account of self by articulating a rationale underpinning McDowell's conception of self. The rationale identified and explored is also the one McDowell offers for the objectivity and intentionality of experience, which is the coordinating theme that McDowell explores in *Mind and World*. More specifically, I advocate two theses: (1) McDowell's assurance on the objectivity of experience can be extended to the objectivity of our "intellectual life" and the norms governing our ways of thinking and doing. (2) McDowell's assurance would endorse or, at least strongly suggest, a conception of self in which a self has to be conceived not only as an embodied self in the empirical world, but also as a self with intellectual life in the realm of reasons. This is a kind of hybrid view on self, but the hybrid account McDowell would endorse is much richer than a mere inseparability of one's consciousness and one's body. It is in fact saying that it is impossible to isolate oneself from one's body (hence the empirical world in which it resides), one's personal intellectual life (created by self-decisions in responding to the demands issued by the space of reason and those imposed by the empirical world) and the space of reason created socially and cumulated historically.

**Keywords:** McDowell, objectivity, self

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## I. Introduction

As with many thoughts manifested in *Mind and World*, McDowell's idea of self is both commonsensical and philosophically provocative at the same time.<sup>1</sup> His characterization of the idea is, however, concise and tends to be elusive. Many interesting details of his conception of self are thus not readily apparent, making further philosophical investigations on the matter difficult. This paper aims to improve the situation by manifesting and articulating a rationale underpinning McDowell's conception of self. The rationale I identify is also, as I will argue, the one McDowell proffers for the objectivity and intentionality of experience, which is the coordinating theme that McDowell explores in *Mind and World* to soothe many types of long-lasting interrelated philosophical anxieties.

We live with the belief that our senses enable us to acquire knowledge about the empirical world, a world independent from our thinking. Many philosophical minds, however, struggle to stay peace with this homely content. In *Mind and World*, McDowell endorses a way of seeing experience, which, he claims, would assure the beset philosophers that the reality manifested through and in experience is, as we commonly take it to be, ranged beyond our thinking activity. The focus of such a perspective is on the idea that experience is constitutively involved with conceptual capacities, which are to be identified with those conceptual capacities exercised in self-critical activity of making up one's own mind.

In this paper, I mainly advocate two theses: (1) McDowell's assurance can be extended to those who feel they are unable to embrace the idea that our "intellectual life" and the norms governing our ways of thinking and doing are, in a clear sense, independent from our thinking and doing. (2) McDowell's assurance would endorse, or, at least strongly suggest, a conception of self in which the self not only has to be conceived as an embodied self in the objective world, but also as a self with intellectual life in the realm of reasons, which is also objective.<sup>2</sup> To these ends, I first explicate how McDowell uses his conception of experience to provide assurance of the objectivity of empirical world. Then, I further enhance McDowell's argument for the objectivity to develop for McDowell a vindication of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Mind and World* is the key text for my exploration, but not the only one.

<sup>2</sup> In a sense, McDowell assures us of objectivity in terms of conceptuality. But, the concept of objectivity concerns us and McDowell here is specifically the idea of the independence of mental activity. Moreover, we have no intention to say that objectivity is nothing but the above mentioned independence.

objectivity of one's "intellectual life" and of the norms and the tradition one lives in. Finally, with the observations resulting from my explication of McDowell's objectivity argument, I venture to propose a McDowellian account of self.

## II. The Conceptuality and the Objectivity

Few will dispute that thinking in general and empirical thinking in particular is a conceptual activity. But there is an issue of objectivity concerning whether experience is involved with conceptual activities. It becomes an issue, mainly because the idea of conceptually structured experience easily induces the anxiety that the world manifested through experience would thus seem to become a conceptually structured or projected world and hence cannot be mind-independent. McDowell sees experience as being intrinsically conceptual, but he argues on the contrary, in Lecture II of *Mind and World*, that such a view, when properly construed, should proffer enough assurance for the common sense realism. In McDowell's words, this picture of experience "enables us to acknowledge that independent reality exerts a rational control over our thinking," (1994: 27) and "secures that we can see observational judgments as rationally responsive to the states of affairs they judge to obtain." (2000: 15)

To understand how this assurance works, we need to comprehend what McDowell means by the claim that experience is involved with conceptual capacities. We can identify two aspects of McDowell's conception of experience.<sup>3</sup> First, the conceptual capacities involved in experiences "are capacities whose paradigmatic actualizations are exercises of them in judgment, which is the end—both aim and culmination—of the controlled and self-critical activity of making up one's mind." That is, "we identify the relevant range of capacities by considering their role in" active self-critical thinking. (1998a: 410)<sup>4</sup> The very same capacities exercised in the activity of self-critical thinking can be actualized in the receptivity of sensibility.

We may make the point of the identity even more clear and avoid a possible misconception by considering empirical judgments that are said to be based directly on experience. According to McDowell, an empirical judgment can be made by

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<sup>3</sup> There are more than two points, of course. For example, even though McDowell endorses the view that experiences are completely conceptual, he does not deny the obvious truth that experience is sensory, even though he does not offer any positive characterization of how the conceptual and the sensory can merge together in experience.

<sup>4</sup> See also McDowell, 2005: 1068.

active thinking in terms of simply selecting part of the content of an experience and non-inferentially endorse the content. Such a judgment is an empirical judgment based directly on experience. The former shares at least part of the content of the latter.<sup>5</sup> “[The] grounding need not depend on an inferential step from one content to another. The judgment that things are thus and so can be grounded on a perceptual appearance that things are thus and so.” (1994: 49, n. 6) It should be noted that when a judgment is based directly on an experience, the judgment “does not introduce a new kind of content, but simply endorses the conceptual content, or some of it, that is already possessed by the experience on which it is grounded.” (1994: 48-9) One should be cautious here. When McDowell says that we look for the identification of the conceptual capacities in experiences with those that are exercised in active thinking, he does not thereby commit that active thinking, when it is connected to an experience, changes the content of the experience or brings about some conceptual content into it to make it conceptual. When we connect judgments to an experience, all we have done is endorsed, rejected, doubted, or some how critically assessed the conceptual content *already* contained in the experience.

The second emphasis I intend to point out from McDowell’s characterization of experience can be made explicit by way of a contrast. There is a major difference between experience and active self-critical exercise: it is not, typically, in the control of a subject to decide what is to be experienced; but, in the paradigmatic case of thinking, it is up to the subject itself to decide what to think. In short, thinking is active and experience is passive. In addition, and in relating to the idea of passivity, there is an idea of non-endorsement. In the paradigmatic cases of judgment, we endorse the contents they contain, but, as I have pointed out previously, it is not so in the case of experience. The notion of the passivity of experience contains the notion of non-endorsement. Or, more generally put, experience by itself, though completely conceptual, is yet to be evaluated by active thinking.

The philosophical motivation behind the first point, the identity claim, can be stated from an epistemological point of view as follows. If we wish an experience to serve its justificatory work for empirical thinking, it must be conceived as a reason. A reason is propositionally contentful for McDowell, hence the constitution of it must be involved with conceptual capacities. But for experience to be a justifier of empirical thinking, the conceptual capacities involved in the former must be, at least partly, identical with those involved in the constitution of the latter. For example, the

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<sup>5</sup> The conceptual content of an experience might be, and often is, richer than the conceptual content owned by an empirical judgment directly based on the experience. That is, when a judgment is based directly on an experience, the content of the former is, usually, identical with only part of the content of the latter.

experience of seeing a black table involves two capacities, one of which also partakes in the judgment that there is a black chair and the other in the judgment that there is a brown table. If the identity relation does not hold, neither of the two judgments could acquire the rational link required for its justification being based on experience. This obviously chimes with Sellars' observation that in the order of justification our empirical judgments are indeed, as the traditional empiricism points out, founded on sensory report, but in the constitutional and hence understanding level, sensory reports are, contrary to the traditional empiricism, based on judgments. (Cf. 1965, §38: 300; §19: 275)

The above rationale might convince us of the idea that unless experience is conceptually framed, it would not be eligible of having "a rational control over our thinking." But the idea does not lend much mileage to the objectivity end, which holds that a world manifested in conceptually structured experience is a world that is independent of our thinking and exerts a rational control over our thinking. Our question remains: What is it about experience that enables us to acquire the concept of objectivity?

The answer cannot be based solely on the notion of the passivity of experience. It is a common fact that one does not always have control over one's thinking activity. As McDowell acknowledges: "Of course, a belief is not always, or even typically, a result of our exercising this freedom [the freedom of making up one's own mind] to decide what to think." (1998b: 434) But, the cases in which our thinking is out of our control would give a substantial weight to, or at least motivate, the expectation that what we think of might not be a world independent of our thinking activity. Dreaming and being drunk are common cases in which we, quiet reasonably, take what we think of to be a fanciful world. And we can come up with many others, some of which even happen in daylight with one's eyes open and without exotic chemical substances in the blood.

If one wishes to stick to the thought that the involuntariness of experience is the key to the concept of objectivity, then, for the reason aforementioned, one must in some way distinguish the involuntariness of experience from the involuntariness occasionally found in thinking activity. One might thus hope to recourse to the following remarks of McDowell's when he discusses Sellars' idea that experience contains "claims":

So it is not simply that conceptual episodes of the relevant kind consist in actualizations of conceptual capacities that are involuntary. ... (We have that also with other kinds of conceptual episode; for instance, when one is, as we say, struck by a thought.) In visual experiences, conceptual capacities are actualized with suitable modes of togetherness; this is how

we cash out the idea that the episodes “contain” claims. But they are actualized with an involuntariness of a specific kind; in a visual experience an ostensibly seen object ostensibly impresses itself visually on the subject. Presumably parallel things are to be said about other sensory modalities.” (1998b: 441)

Here the particularity of the involuntariness of, say, a visual experience is characterized in terms of the idea that “in a visual experience an ostensibly seen object ostensibly impresses itself visually on the subject.” But, however germane the characterization is, it cannot deliver the required distinction without committing to question begging. This is so for a simple reason. To use the remark “in a visual experience an ostensibly seen object ostensibly impresses itself visually on the subject” in the characterization of the involuntariness of a visual experience is simply to assume, as the term “ostensibly” suggests, that the experience is about something “external” to the visual experience.

It would be a rush to conclusion to say that an effective distinction cannot be found in the realm of involuntariness to make room for objectivity. But, at this point, it is reasonable and perhaps more productive to reorient our survey from the dimension of passivity back to the conceptual dimension of our cognitive phenomena. And this is the way McDowell clearly proceeds.

As I have said, for McDowell, the conceptual capacities saddled in experience and exercised in active thinking are identical. Thus, the content of an experience could also be a content of active thinking: what is experienced could be considered and reconsidered in thinking. We might call this claim *the identity thesis*. In addition to the identity thesis, there is a view that might be called *the integration thesis*. According to McDowell, the conceptual capacities involved in active thinking, or an experience, cannot be atomistically conceived. The conceptual capacities do not function in isolation; they are seamlessly interconnected with one another. More specifically, conceptual capacities actualized in a given judgment are part of the whole package of conceptual capacities of a thinking self, but the whole range of conceptual capacities are rationally connected with one another. “They are integrated into a rationally organized network of capacities” for active self-critical thinking. (1994: 29) By linking into the network, the active self-critical thinker holds a particular judgment in place such that the judgment can be reassured, modified, or overturned in light of its various rational connections with other judgments.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The conceptual capacities and the capacity of self-critics are essential in McDowell’s demarcation of mere animals and rational animals. Even in the case of sensory experiences taking in external things, a rational animal the ability to ‘step back from an

Now, since whatever conceptual capacities saddled in a given experience are to be found in some self-critical activity, and since the very same conceptual capacities are seamlessly integrated into a larger network of conceptual capacities of active self-critical activity, the conceptual capacities exercised in the self-critical activity go beyond those that are saddled in the experience. Thus, the content of an experience can be considered and reconsidered by the critical subject by way of its rational connections to other conceptual activities. Thereby, the objectivity conclusion is given: "It is this integration that makes it possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, or at least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience." (1994: 31) In virtue of this part-whole integration of the conceptual capacities passively actualized in experience and those actively exercised in thinking, the subject understands that what an experience manifests is part of a thinkable world, a world that ranges beyond what the experience tells.

The part-whole integration makes space for this understanding of objectivity of a thinkable world for a simple reason: the thinkable whole is *independent* of what any given experience can manifest. McDowell uses the word "independent" in a particular manner here. It is not that the thinkable whole can exist in lack of the content of an experience, but that the conceptual content actualized in the experience can be held in place as a part and by means of a conceptual storage, and thus be considered and reconsidered even "if the experience had not occurred." (1994: 36) In this precise sense, McDowell says that what an experience is about can be conceived as part of a world independent of the experience itself.

### III. The Objectivity of a Thinkable World

However, McDowell's idea that the thinkable world is independent of any given experience is not suffice to assure us that the thinkable world is independent of subjective activity in general, for it is yet to be determined that the thinkable world is independent of thinking activity in particular. It seems that McDowell needs more for the assurance of the objectivity. This, however, would not be a serious problem for him, since we can construct a supplemented argument for the needed thesis in the like fashion McDowell works for the objectivity of experiential content. It goes as follows.

Any thought can be thought of. We might say that any thought is subject to

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inclination to flee, elicited from her by an apparent danger, and raise the question whether she *should* be so inclined – whether the apparent danger is, here and now, a sufficient reason for fleeing.' (2005: 1066)

second order thinking, thinking of thought. And it should be admitted that any thinking activity is an actualization of some conceptual capacities. Now it should be clear that the identity thesis and the integration thesis that apply to experience are applicable to thought and higher order thinking. The conceptual capacities involved in a thinking activity and those exercised in some higher order thinking are identical. And those capacities are integrated into a wider network of conceptual capacities of self-critical thinking. That allows us to say that the content of any given thought can be reconsidered in higher order thinking by connecting it to conceptual capacities that are of a wider range than those originally connected to the thought. We may first form a judgment, then rethink, doubt and refine it in a continuant thinking activity. Since a particular thought must be occurring at a given time and we can think of the thought in a later time, the content of a thought can be entertained while the original thought no longer occurs. We might thus gain the understanding that the content of a thought is independent of the thought itself. In general, we can say that thinkable content is something that is independent of thinking activity.

With this argument, McDowell's argument for the objectivity of the content of experience is completed. McDowell reminds us that since what is experienced can be entertained in thought, what is experienced is independent of any experience. Now, since the content of any given thought can be reconsidered in different manners while the original thought no longer exists, what the thought is about is independent of the thought itself, which is a thinking activity. We may say that even though any thought ever occur has to be thought of by some agent, what is thought of is independent of thinking activity. Thus, we reach the conclusion that what is experienced is independent of thinking activity in general.

#### IV. The Objectivity of Intellectual Worlds

My observation on McDowell's argument for the objectivity of the content of experience has an important ramification in regards to the objectivity of our thought. Just as the part-whole integration between the conceptual capacities actualized in an experience and those exercised in active thinking would make one realized that what the experience tells is in a world independent of experience and active thinking, the part-whole integration between the conceptual capacities actualized in a particular thought and those in active thinking generally would render one the understanding that what a thought manifests is part of a "world," which we might call an "intellectual world," a world that is independent of any given active thinking.

McDowell's argument applies to both voluntary and involuntary thoughts, and hence to thought generally. In the cases where we do not exercise our freedom to



decide what to think, such as the case that McDowell described as “struck by a thought,” there is at least a vague inkling that those thoughts exist independently from our thinking. After all, in those cases it is not up to us how to think, but it seems that something is enforced upon us. My observation would give the unfocused sense a more definite content. What we involuntarily think of is part of a world, which is indeed a world independent of any given thinking activity and consisting of various rationally interconnected thoughts. The world of thoughts has rational constraint over our thinking. But, what really makes objectivity here problematic seems to be the cases in which it is up to us to decide what to think. The freedom of thinking is as suspicious as it is precious. The cases of voluntary thinking easily tempt us into thinking that since it is up to us to decide what to think, the contents of thoughts constitute a mind-dependent or projected world. If our previous observation is correct, this belief would be ungrounded. As long as a thought is subject to critical reflection, what is thought of belongs to a world independent from of our thinking activity. We might state the observation in McDowell's terms: this picture of thought “enables us to acknowledge that independent reality exerts a rational control over our thinking.” Here the term “independent reality” refers not specifically to the world manifested through experience, but to the world of our intellectual life (or intellectual history), a life built up by what we think, voluntarily or involuntarily, and the way we think.

It should be noted that in saying that there are objective intellectual lives of individuals, I do not thereby suggest that there is no close relation between the realm of those lives and the empirical world. Viewing us as rational beings does not require seeing us as beings free from natural conditions, and it is plausible that whatever we do and think can also be conceived as physical happenings in the empirical world. However, I do want to suggest that one's intellectual life and the empirical world one lives in are conceptually separated to the extent that in the former there are some episodes and states that we call false or deviant beliefs or judgments, but, of course, in the latter one would call none false or deviant thing.

Before we go any further, a clarification of the term “intellectual world” is required for further discussion. The term used in this paper refers to two kind of rational, objective constrains over the ways we think and act. The first is what I called “personal intellectual history,” which refers to the accumulation of the tracks of what one in fact chooses to think and do. The second is the norms and other things that govern our ways of thinking and acting. The two kinds of intellectual worlds are different but interdependent on each other. In this section, I mainly talk about the “personal intellectual history.” I shall explain the second sense of “intellectual world” and its relation to “personal intellectual history” in the following sections.

## V. The Objectivity of Norms

The objectivity argument articulated in the previous sections also applies to norms and whatever else governs our ways of thinking and acting, as McDowell would conceive them.

According to McDowell, thinking is a faculty of spontaneity: “conceptual capacities are capacities whose exercises is in the domain of responsible freedom” (1994: 12). The domain is what Sellars calls the “logical space of reason.” (1956: 298-9) According to McDowell and Sellars, the logical space of reason is, minimally, a comprehension enabling condition only by means of which can an individual thinker understand what she is thinking of. But more importantly for our present purpose, the logical space of reason is the domain where a thought is placed in rational connections with other intentional states or episodes. Thus, whatever is located in this rational, normative network can be reasons for and must be answerable to other states or episodes in the network. This is why McDowell calls the network the domain of *responsible freedom*.<sup>7</sup>

Our thoughts are located in the domain of responsible freedom; hence we are under a perpetual obligation of criticizing our own thoughts. But, according to McDowell, it is not only our judgments that are subject to criticism in our own terms, the norms that governing our uses of concepts are also subject to self-critiques:

The conceptual capacities that are passively drawn into play in experience belong to a network of capacities for active thought, a network that rationally governs comprehension-seeking responses to the impacts of the world on sensibility. And part of the point of the idea that the understanding is a faculty of spontaneity – that conceptual capacities are capacities whose exercises is in the domain of responsible freedom – is that the network, as an individual thinker finds it governing her thinking, is not sacrosanct. Active empirical thinking takes place under a standing obligation to reflect about the credentials of the putatively

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<sup>7</sup> McDowell’s notion of ‘responsiveness to reasons as such’ is closely related to the notion of ‘responsible freedom’. Both notions are meant to separate rational animals from mere animals. As McDowell says: “The notion of rationality I mean to invoke here is the notion exploited in a traditional line of thought to make a special place in the animal kingdom for rational animals. It is a notion of responsiveness to reasons *as such*.” (2005: 1066) We can make sense of animal behaviors by appealing to some reasons without attributing beliefs to them. But, most of the time, we cannot make sense of rational animals without attributing to them some beliefs.

rational linkages that govern it. There must be a standing willingness to refashion concepts and conceptions if that is what reflection recommends. (1994: 12-3)

It should be clear by now that whatever kind of episode or state to which self-critiques are applicable, the objective status of the kind could be established by means of the thesis of identity and the thesis of integration. Since we are under a perpetual obligation to criticize the space of reason, the rational network, the world-view, and the norms that we live with and govern our way of thinking, they are not our mind's figment or projection.

This argument can be easily extended to the domain of value. In fact, even though value is not an explicit subject of *Mind and World*, the book provides good material, especially that which I have observed so far, allowing us to construe a well-grounded moral realism.<sup>8</sup> McDowell says of ethical thinking that:

Like any thinking, 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. ... Now it is a key point that for such reflective criticism, the appropriate image is Neurath's, in which a sailor overhauls his ship while it is afloat. ... The essential thing is that one can reflect only from the midst of the way of thinking one is reflecting about. So if one entertains the thought that bringing one's current ethical outlook to bear on a situation alters one to demands that are real, one need not be envisaging any sort of validation other than a Neurathian one. The thought is that this application of one's ethical outlook would stand up to the outlook's own reflective self-scrutiny." (1994: 81)<sup>9</sup>

Self-critical activity always presupposes and works from within the world-view that one has. McDowell further reminds us that we are obliged to reflect on the standards that governed our way of thinking. As one reflects on the way of one's thinking, he is reflecting on the norm that implicitly governs his thinking. "The way of thinking, including its implicit standards for self-scrutiny, may have hitherto unnoticed defects, such as parochialism or reliance on bad prejudice." Again, if ethical norms that

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<sup>8</sup> C. Halbig, A. Hansberger and M. Quante have proposed a sketchy suggestion probably along the line of thought I explore here (2000: 85-8).

<sup>9</sup> There is another remark on the same page which might also be helpful for the point made here: "Of course the fact that a thought passes muster so far, in reflective examination of a way of thinking from within, does not guarantee that it is acceptable. The way of thinking, including its implicit standards for self-scrutiny, may have hitherto unnoticed defects, such as parochialism or reliance on bad prejudice." (1994: 81)

govern our ethical judgments are subject to reflective self-scrutiny, those norms, like conceptual norms, can be placed in a wider context. In the wider context, we might acquire the understanding that what norms commend are independent of our acts of obeying of them.

In fact, the possibility of self-critical activity presupposes the objectivity of norm. McDowell has said of empirical thinking that “If the freedom in question were unconstrained, if there were nothing that its exercises are responsible to, that would leave it unintelligible how the performances in question can be cases of making up one’s mind and about how things are, and concomitantly how there can be the actualizations of conceptual capacities that constitute having a belief or a world view.” (1998a: 365) One point of the remark is that were an exercise of conceptual capacities in empirical thinking not understood as being responsible to the empirical world, then the exercise cannot be conceived as an act of freedom and hence a conceptual activity. In short, the world has to have some rational constrain over empirical thinking. But, then, one cannot understand how the empirical can possibly have rational constrain over empirical thinking, unless one sees the world not only as a conceptual world but also as a world independent from empirical thinking. Same thing can be said of the relation between self-critical activity and norms. This shows an additional point of the significance of assuring the objectivity of norms.

Also, it is important to keep in mind that the domain of value (or space of reason in general) that one finds oneself in should not be conceived only individualistically. McDowell says of the merge of world-views that “When the specific character of her [sc. The other thinker’s] thinking comes into view for us, we are filling in blanks in a pre-existing sideways-on picture of how her thoughts bears on the world, but coming to share with her a standpoint in directing a shared attention at the world, without needing to break out through a boundary that encloses the system of concepts.” (1994: 35f) In the process of becoming a member of the space of reason, one shares with others many views on the world in which one lives with others. And it is of equal importance to notice that the domain of value has an indispensable historical dimension. As McDowell stresses, our way into the space of reasons consists in learning a language: “a natural language [...] serves as a repository tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it.” (1994: 126)<sup>10</sup> McDowell’s conception of “the space of

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<sup>10</sup> McDowell makes a similar point in the following remark: ‘the ability to step back from considerations and raise the question whether they constitute reasons for action or belief...is coeval with command of a language’. (2005: 1071) But one must be very

reason" is a topic worthy of a detailed discussion. But for my present purpose, it is enough to point out that the space of reason one lives in is a conceptual store of historically accumulated and collectively constituted wisdom about justification. And since "the tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it," the tradition of wisdom that governs our way of thinking is as objective as the empirical world is.

## VI. The Shaping of the Intellect

The empirical world manifest through concept-involved experience, the personal intellectual life an individual constitutes, and the norms that govern our way of thinking and living are all objective in the sense that they exist independently from any of our particular experience, thoughts, or actions. With these objectivity claims, we can construe a picture of self that is, I claim, what McDowell has in mind, or, at least, strongly suggests by his *Mind and World*. What McDowell has explicitly said in *Mind and World* is that we must not only conceive a self as a thinking self that can accompany all his representations, but also as an objective self, a substantial continuant in the empirical world. In short, a self must be an embodied self in the empirical world. I shall argue that, for McDowell, a self must be not only an embodied self in the empirical world, but also a self with personal intellectual history and a self who resides in space of reason created socially and cumulated historically.

McDowell touches on the issue of self in the context of a discussion of Kant's conception of self. According to McDowell, Descartes, Locke, and Kant all agree with the idea that "in the I think that can accompany all my representations, the reference of the I is understood as reaching into the past and future." (1994: 100) This is in fact Locke's definition of personhood: a person is "a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and consider itself as itself, the same thinking being, in different time and places."<sup>11</sup> McDowell himself also accepts this thesis. However, in addition, McDowell attributes to Kant the following argument: (1994: 99-100)

(1) "I think" in all states of my consciousness does not involve applying a criterion

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careful not to attribute, like Ayers has done (2004: 249), to McDowell the view that the conceptual capacities or the capacities of self-critics are linguistic or semi-linguistic in nature. All McDowell has said is that mastering language is a crucial enabling condition of one's acquiring her *Bildung*, or second nature and rationality.

<sup>11</sup> *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Tom L. Beauchamp (ed.), 1999: 3.27.9.

of identity.<sup>12</sup>

- (2) Hence, the identity of the “I” in all of my conscious states is not substantial, but only formal.
- (3) Thus, the idea of self is either “an idea of substantial persistence,” in which case “we would be committed to understanding self-consciousness as awareness of a Cartesian ego,” or a pure formal idea, *i.e.*, a formal self, a point of view.
- (4) The idea of a Cartesian ego is false.
- (5) Therefore, a self is “the continuity of a mere point of view, not, apparently, a substantial continuant.”

According to McDowell, Kant’s argument has a dubious hidden premise:

(#) “In providing for the content of this thought of a persisting self, we must confine ourselves within the flow of consciousness itself.”

McDowell rejects (#), and says, “If we discard it, we make room for supposing that the continuity of the I think involves a substantial persistence, without implying that the continuant in question is a Cartesian ego.” (1994: 101)

McDowell does not give any explicit explanation or vindication to the idea that “the continuity of the ‘I think’ involves a substantial persistence.” But I propose that the rationale underlines McDowell’s idea here is the same one he proposes for the objectivity of intentionality and norms. Recall that, for McDowell, an empirical thinking is intelligible only as a conceptual activity whose content is understood as situated in a wider context than the thinking activity itself, thus a empirical content, say, the “table” in the empirical judgment “there is a black table,” can be thought of even when the thinking activity no longer exists. In this sense we say that the content of the judgment must be located in a world independent of the judgment itself.

Now, let’s consider the judgment “I sense that the table is in front of him.” Since the judgment is subject to self-critiques, it can be established, by means of the argument previously articulated, that the “I” and the rest content of the judgment is

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12 In a comment on G. Evans’s “identification-freedom,” McDowell make the point even more explicit: “In continuity of ‘consciousness,’ there is what appears to be knowledge of an identity, the persistence of the same subject through time, without any need to take care that attention stays fixed on the same thing. Contrast keeping one’s thought focused on an ordinary object of perception over a period; this requires a skill, the ability to keep track of something, whose exercise we can conceive as a practical substitute for the explicit allocation of a criterion of identity. Continuity of ‘consciousness’ involves no analogue to this—no keeping track of the persisting self that nevertheless seems to figure in its content.” (1997: 361-2) Here, McDowell refers to Evans’s 1982: 362-7.

objective. But before we decide that the referent of "I" is an embodied self, we have to deal with the question of which world the referent of "I" is located. Since, the referent of "I" could be purely non-material or not, it is still questionable whether the referents of "I" and "the table" are in the same world. If the question is not answered, it is not yet conclusive to say that the "I" is an embodied self.

"There is a table in front of him" is an empirical judgment, and, for McDowell, there is no controversy to say that empirical judgments are about things in the empirical world. Thus, the referent of "the table" must be in the empirical world. But are the referents of "I" and "the table" in the same world? I think it is much more reasonable to say that they are. Consider the following perfectly meaningful statement: (P) "I fail to sense it, because I am too far away from it." If the subject is a purely non-material self, then (P) makes no sense—for the subject to have any distance from its object, the subject must have a body. And for (P) to be meaningful, the body must play a crucial role in the sensing activity. Thus, we could say that the self and the table are in the same world, the empirical world. The self must be an embodied self with a body doing the sensing.

Thus, not only the phrase "the table is in front of him" but also the 'I' in the empirical judgment "I sense that the table is in front of him" are understood as located in a wider context—an objective, empirical world—than the judgment itself. Since in the judgment what is experienced is independent of the judgment, and since the subject who takes in the world *via* visual sense is also part of the content of the empirical judgment, the subject must also be conceived as an object in the same empirical world with the rest of the its content. I think this is the rationale behind the following remarks: "We can say that the continuity of consciousness is intelligible only as a subjective take on something that has more to it than consciousness itself contains: on the career of an objective continuant, with which the subject of a continuous consciousness can identify itself." (1994: 101) "The wider context makes it possible to understand that the first person, the continuing referent of the I in the I think that can accompany all my representations, is also a third person, something whose career is a substantial continuity in the objective, empirical world: something such that other modes of continuing thought about it would indeed require keeping track of it." (1994: 102)<sup>13</sup>

Now, we can apply the argument generally to thinking activity, and so carve

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<sup>13</sup> In the following remark, McDowell expresses the same idea: "The fact is that there is nothing for me to mean by 'I,' even though what I mean by 'I' is correctly specified as *the thinking thing I am*, except the very thing I would be reefing to (a bit strangely) if I said 'this body.'" (2007: 350) Here, McDowell in a sense even identifies 'I' with its living body.

out a McDowellian conception of self. The core ideas of the picture I attribute to McDowell are the gems of the following remark: “The capacity to think, considered as including the capacity to consider oneself as oneself, [is not separable] from the capacities whose actualization constitutes a human life.” (McDowell, 2006: 114)

For a thinking activity, such as “I think that killing innocent people is wrong,” the content of the active thinking is understood as situated in a wider context than the thinking activity itself and, in fact, any other thinking activity of mine. Thus, not only the “killing innocent people is wrong” part, but also the “I” in the “I think that killing innocent people is wrong,” are understood as a being in a thinkable world, a world with which “I think” could always accompany. Differently put, the continuing reference of the “I” in the “I think” is subject to various modes of second-order thoughts. The reference of the “I” can also function in “I doubted that I thought,” “I hoped that I thought,” and other modes of self-critical thinking, so the content of “I” must exceed any occurrence of “I think”. “I” can be entertained even if any given “I think” or any first-person thought in other propositional attitudes does not occur.

Thus, the “I” in the “I think” is not only a first person who does the thinking but also a third, embodied, person, something “whose career is a substantial continuity in the objective world: something such that other modes of continuing thought about it would indeed require keeping track of it,” (1994: 102) and a third person with an “intellectual history,” a career with a substantial continuity in the conceptual realm.<sup>14</sup>

“I” is the subject who does the thinking, but could also be an object to be thought of. As an object of thought of, a self is conceived as a substantial continuity in the conceptual realm, and thus it is a third person, on some occasions, in need of criterion of identity to keep track of it. There is no real conflict between the idea that “the flow of what Locke calls ‘consciousness’ does not involve applying, or otherwise ensuring conformity with, a criterion of identity” and the idea that a self needs criterion of identity to keep track of it. And the compatibility has its empirical supports even from a first person perspective. When one keeps one’s own thought focused on a thought or a series of thoughts over a period of time, then one needs no application of a criterion of identity of which person is doing the thinking. But when “flow” of thought is interrupted, there is a possibility of no recall of which person had been entertaining a given thought. In such a case, a criterion of identity of the self in related to the contents of thoughts is required. Thus, occasionally,

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<sup>14</sup> This is not to deny that there might be some intimate connection between a self conceived as an embodied self in the world and a self conceived as a self with “intellectual history.” It is only to emphasize the need for a dimension in which we might conceive of a self.



psychological or other type of continuity indeed matters for the identity of the self even for the subject itself. It can be admitted that every consciousness could be accompanied with "I think," but it is not always the case that they are. Life is full of interruptions, so is our thought.

For the sake of completion, let's take a detour to the notion of action. We not only think, but also act. McDowell says that "intentions without overt activity are idle, and movements of limbs without concepts are mere happenings, not expressions of agency." (1994: 89) Since actions are conceptual, they are subject to self-critiques and hence the argument executed in the previous sections would apply to actions too. So, the "I" in the "I flee" is not only a first person who does the action but also a third person in some objective worlds. I use the plural "objective worlds" because of this. When I decide to act on some reason, my action exhibits what McDowell calls "self-determining" subjectivity. (Cf. 2005: 1066) Since self-determining activities are norm-governed, the subject "I" of those activities, from this perspective, is also subject to normative evaluation, liable to punishment and reward. And since normative evaluation is taken place in the space of reason, the self, a subject who takes the responsibility of what she does, must be located in the conceptual world, which, as I understand it, is the space of reason itself. But, of course, every action is bodily movement and hence must occur in the physical world. Thus, from this perspective, the "I" who act must be conceived as an embodied self, a self located in the empirical world. In addition to the two kinds of objective worlds, the "I," as I have pointed out, must also be located in her personal "intellectual history." After all, different people may in fact choose different ways to act, to form different personalities.

A self is not only a bodily continuant in the empirical world and an agent with psychological continuant in her personal intellectual history, it is also a self in the space of reason, the realm of objective, social, and historical cumulated norms. For McDowell, we cannot conceive of ourselves as rational agents without conceiving of ourselves as beings subject to norms. On the other hand, we cannot conceive norms without conceive them as norms acknowledged by us. As McDowell says, "...subjection to norms should not be an infringement on freedom; we are authentically subject only to norms whose authority we acknowledge. Thus the norms that bind us are our own dictates to ourselves, not alien impositions. But any intelligible case of agency, legislative or any other, whether on the part of an individual or a group, must be responsive to reasons. It makes no sense to picture an act that brings norms into existence out of a normative void. So the insistence on freedom must cohere with the fact that we always find ourselves already subject to norms. Our freedom, which figures in the image as our legislative power, must include a moment of receptivity." (2002: 276) That is, we are agents subject to

norms that we acknowledge. The very notion of self is intrinsically involved with the notion of norm. And, as I have said, norms are socially constituted and historically cumulated, so we have to conceive of ourselves as social and historical beings.

It is time to clarify the relation between the two senses of “intellectual world”: personal intellectual history and social norms. We are subject to social norms; social norms and tradition is the framing condition of the kind of person we could become. One, however, should not be lured into thinking that there is no space of individual personality. In fact, the seed of individual personality is planted in the necessity of individual’s acknowledgement of norms for them to have authority over individual agent. “The norms that bind us are our own dictates to ourselves.” (2002: 276) We may even say that a person’s “intellectual life,” the conceptual track he followed, voluntarily or not, is his individual personality, that is, what makes the person stand out in the realm of reason. What we think and do constitutes the kind of person we are; we shape the kind of person we are in the space of reason. Different people choose different ways to shape themselves. The way one chooses to shape one’s own thought and action constitutes one’s own personal intellectual history and prospects. I suggest that this is the core conviction behind McDowell’s conception of *Bildung* and second nature:

Bubner notes helpfully that the modern concept of *Bildung*, which I approach through Aristotle’s conception of the molding of ethical character, pertains not merely to the inculcation of an approximation to “a socially fixed and pre-given ideal of virtue,” as in Aristotle, but also to the acquisition of an individual personality. (2002: 296)

I find it preferable not to relegate the idea of second nature as suitable to express a modification of Aristotle’s picture, one that makes a proper place for reflectiveness in the personal constitution that results from being brought up into a human community.” (2002: 296)

To conceive a self as a self with an “intellectual history” gives substantial content to the notion responsibility. As I have shown, one’s intellectual history is as objective as the empirical world and the space of reason one lives in. The personal intellectual history, like empirical world and the space of reason, may thus capable of imposing some kind of rational control over our thinking in the sense that our thinking must be answerable to them. This captures part of what we mean in saying that we are responsible to what we think and what we do. And since a self’s personal intellectual history, together with the self in it, is objective, the self thus is also a third person such that other person might be able to identify her as the one responsible to what her has intended and accomplished.

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## VII. Conclusion

When McDowell talks about self, agent or personhood, he mainly tries to dissolve a dubious dualism between 'purely mental' and 'purely material'. The dualism, together with the thought that one needs no criteria to identify oneself, sometimes induces the Cartesian thought that a self is a continuant whose persistence through time would consist in nothing but the continuity of "consciousness" itself.' (McDowell, 1997: 360) Sometimes, the dualism induces a Parfitian type of reductionism which replaces the notion of a substantial ego with a bundle theory of self.<sup>15</sup> And it happens that the dualism has lured Kant into thinking that the self is merely a point of view with absolutely no content in it. Mainly by undermining the dubious dualism, McDowell shows that the above positions are not mandatory. And, as our discussion has shown, he himself would prefer a kind of hybrid view or the compatibilistic position on the idea of self: a self, her consciousness and her body are inseparable from one another. In fact, the hybrid view that McDowell would endorse is much richer than the inseparability of one's consciousness and one's body. That is, it is impossible for one to isolate oneself from one's body (hence the empirical world in which it resides), one's personal intellectual life (created by self-decisions in responding to the demands issued by the space of reason and those imposed by the empirical world) and the space of reason created socially and cumulated historically.

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<sup>15</sup> McDowell's comments on Parfit's thought could be found in his 1997: 363; and Parfit's idea appears in his 1984: 204-5.

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## 智性的陶塑

### ——麥道爾《心靈與世界》中的自我

林 從 一\*

#### 摘 要

經驗的意向性及客觀性是麥道爾《心靈與世界》一書的論述主軸，本文首先探索並界定出麥道爾用以支持經驗的意向性及客觀性的理據，而以這個理據為基礎，進一步建構一個麥道爾式的自我理論。更具體的說，本文進行兩個論證：第一，我們可以將麥道爾對於經驗客觀性的保證，擴展成對於智性生活及規範的客觀性之保證。第二，在麥道爾相關論述中，特別是他為客觀性所提供的理據中，蘊涵了一個關於自我的圖像，而在這個圖像中，自我不僅是一個體現在經驗世界中的自我，同時也必須是一個在理性空間中擁有智性生活的自我。

關鍵詞：麥道爾 客觀性 自我

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