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Rasmus Thybo Jensen

Abstract

McDowell and Merleau-Ponty share a critical attitude towards a certain Cartesian picture of the mind. According to the picture in question nothing which properly belongs to subjectivity can be hidden to the subject herself. Nevertheless there is a striking asymmetry in how the two philosophers portray the problematic consequences of such a picture. They can seem to offer exact opposite views of these consequences, which, given the almost identical characterization of the transparency claim, is puzzling. I argue that a closer look at the *prima facie* puzzling asymmetry dissolves the apparent disagreement and reveals a deeper agreement concerning both the *nature* and the *origin* of the problems haunting the Cartesian picture in question. Both McDowell and Merleau-Ponty argue that on the picture of the relation of between mind and world in question, we lose our grip on the very idea of a perceptual appearance. Furthermore, the two authors regard a certain conception of nature as conceived in the image of science, as one of the crucial elements in making the picture of the mind in question look attractive.

Keywords: Merleau-Ponty; McDowell; Disjunctivism; Intentionality; Cartesianism

Introduction

McDowell and Merleau-Ponty share a critical attitude towards a certain Cartesian picture of the mind. According to the picture in question nothing which properly belongs to subjectivity can be hidden to the subject herself. Nevertheless there is a striking asymmetry in how the two philosophers portray the problematic consequences of such a picture. At first sight it can seem as if they offer exact opposite views of these consequences, which, given the almost identical characterization of the transparency claim, is puzzling. I argue that a closer look at the *prima facie* puzzling asymmetry dissolves the apparent disagreement and reveals a deeper agreement concerning both the *nature* and the *origin* of the problems haunting the Cartesian picture in question. Both authors

argue that the problem we face if we accept the picture of the mind in questions cannot be reduced to an epistemological problem. The problem is not just how empirical knowledge is possible, the problem is a transcendental problem, in the sense of a problem that concern our possibility of making the intentionality of perception and ultimately of thinking intelligible. As we shall see both McDowell and Merleau-Ponty argue that on the picture of the relation of between mind and world in question, we lose our grip on the very idea of a perceptual appearance. Furthermore, I argue, the two authors regard a certain conception of nature as conceived in the image of science, as one of the crucial elements in making the picture of the mind in question look attractive.

When I highlight the similarities between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty this is not because I believe that there are no substantial differences. On the contrary, I highlight similarities because I believe it to be crucial for further exploration of the disagreements that we recognize this background of shared concerns.

1. The Fully Cartesian Picture of the Mind

With Burnyeat McDowell takes it to be one of Descartes' innovations that not only are there truths about how things are in the world around us the notion of truth also finds application to an inner sphere of appearances (Burnyeat, 1982; McDowell, 1998a: p. 239). Every time I see that there is pink cube in front of me it is not only true that there is a pink cube in front of me, there is a further fact about how things seem to me, namely the fact that it seems to me that there is a pink cube in front of me. The idea that there is such a region of facts constituted by how things appear to the subject and that the subject herself has a certain privileged and possibly infallible access to these facts, doesn't in itself amount to what McDowell considers a problematic picture of the mind. To reach the problematic 'fully Cartesian picture of the mind' we have to claim that not only does the subject have a privileged and possibly infallible access to a certain range of truths about her own subjectivity namely truths about how things seem to her, this range of facts is also exhaustive of the truths about her subjectivity as such (McDowell, 1998a: p. 240).

McDowell characterizes this fully Cartesian picture of the mind as one that pictures the mind as 'a realm of reality in which sameness and differences are exhaustively determined by how things seem to the subject, and hence which is knowable through and through by exercising one's capacity to know how things seem to one' (McDowell, 1998a: p. 249). According to this picture all features that belong intrinsically to the mind of a subject are available to be known infallibly by the subject

herself since there is no possible difference within this realm which wouldn't be reflected in a difference in how things appear to the subject, and facts about how things appear are taken to be available to be known infallibly. I shall use the term introspection for the alleged capacity for knowledge about one's own mind understood as a capacity that is independent of one's perceptual capacities to gain knowledge about one's physical surroundings, in the sense that a complete failure of one's perceptual capacities for knowledge doesn't imply a deficiency in one's introspective capacity. Descartes' demon hypothesis is a radical way of illustrating the idea that introspection is supposed to be independent of a capacity for perceptual knowledge, but the idea as such doesn't rely on an acceptance of the possibility of a consciousness existing without a physical body.¹

We can formulate a first version of what McDowell calls the fully Cartesian picture of the mind in terms of what I shall call The Transparency Thesis (TT):

*The Transparency Thesis:*² All intrinsic features of a subject's conscious mind are available to be non-inferentially known in an infallible way via introspection by the subject herself.³

Here I have formulated the TT as involving a commitment to the idea that introspection is an infallible capacity for knowledge, which is in line with how McDowell often portrays the fully Cartesian picture. Applied to the area of sense perception the idea that introspection is infallible is the idea that an exercise of the capacity can never result in a situation where one can judge that it perceptually seems to one that P and be wrong about this in a way that leaves one epistemically blameless (McDowell, 1998c: p. 397). In general McDowell doesn't take the idea of an infallible capacity for knowledge to imply that the capacity always functions perfectly; rather infallibility implies that the subject, unless she is careless or pays insufficient attention, cannot be fooled into thinking that her exercise of a certain capacity for knowledge delivers knowledge in cases where it is in fact defective (McDowell, 2011: pp. 37–40). This is what it means when McDowell says that the idea of an infallible capacity is the idea of a capacity that '*never issues in impostures*' (McDowell, 1998a: p. 232).

The fully Cartesian picture presents us with a general view of the mind or subjectivity, which basically says that it is necessary and sufficient condition for a feature to belong intrinsically to my subjectivity that I can come to know about it via introspection alone. Understood as a way of delineating what can count as intrinsic to a subject's mind this appeal to introspection doesn't need to come with a commitment to infallibility and in modern attempts to appeal to introspectibility as the

mark of the mental such infallibility is often not assumed (see Farkas, 2008: p. 24). McDowell himself doesn't commit to either denying or confirming the infallibility claim but instead tries to show that even if we accept it, we do not have reason to think of the mind in the way proposed by the TT. In what follows I shall use the term 'the fully Cartesian Picture of the mind' as a general term covering both a conception of the mind that commits to the Transparency Thesis and conceptions, like that of Farkas (2008), that denies infallibility but maintain a commitment to a weaker Introspectibility Thesis:

The Introspectibility Thesis: All features that belong intrinsically to a subject's conscious mind are of a kind that can have instances capable of being known non-inferentially via introspection.⁴

What, according to McDowell, makes the fully Cartesian picture of the mind problematic, is the fact that it, together with a number of reasonable assumptions, implies what he calls the Highest Common Factor Model for perceptual justification; a model, he argues, that not only makes perceptual knowledge problematic, it undermines the very intelligibility of perceptual appearances (McDowell, 1998b: pp. 386, 388; 1996: p. 113; 2009: p. 231).

2. The Argument from Illusion

The Highest Common Factor (HCF) model is a model for perceptual justification that regards the highest possible epistemic value of a perceptual appearance implicated in what I shall term a genuine experience as determined by the highest possible epistemic value that it can share with a mere appearance, i.e., an illusory or even a hallucinatory experience. A genuine experience is an experience which provides the subject an opportunity to know how things are in her surroundings by having things perceptually appear to her as they actually are, i.e., it is a world-revealing experience.⁵ We can illustrate the contrast between genuine experience and non-genuine experience with the contrast between seeing that there is a red cube in front of one and undergoing an illusory experience as of a green cube which is in fact red or undergoing an hallucinatory experience in which it merely seems to one that there is red cube in front of one. In what follows I shall stick to vision as my example. Before I proceed to an exposition of how TT can lead to the HCF-model two important clarifications are called for.

First when speaking of 'a genuine experience' or 'a non-genuine experience', I'm in fact only intending to speak of an aspect of what is the total sensory experience of a subject at a given time or stretch of time.

I'm not laying down any claims about how to individuate for instance a visual experience as a whole. What is in question here are experiences understood as perceptual appearances of things being in a certain way, which, were they taken at face value would issue in judgements saying that things are the way they appear to be. This focus is simply dictated by the starting point of McDowell's discussion, namely the possibility of making judgements about how things appear to one brought into focus by Descartes. A consequence of this way of using the term 'genuine experience' and 'non-genuine experience' is that considered as whole any given experience may contain both genuine experiences and non-genuine experiences in my restricted sense. If I have a cube *in view* (McDowell, 2008: p. 4), this having the cube in view might simultaneously afford a non-genuine and a genuine experience or appearance. If the cube appears as green whilst being red the total experience can be said in this respect to afford a non-genuine experience, but since the actual cube at the same time appears as cubic the experience will also afford a genuine appearance. That we should understand the relevant notion of experience or appearance in this way is clear from the way McDowell points out that an experience as such can afford an 'open-ended manifold' of appearances (McDowell, 1998g: p. 413):⁶

A typical judgement of experience selects from the content of the experience on which it is based; the experience that grounds the judgement that things are thus and so need not be exhausted by its affording the appearance that things are thus and so. (McDowell, 1996: p. 49, n.6)

Second, it is crucial that this understanding of genuine versus non-genuine experience doesn't favour McDowell's disjunctive conception of appearances, in a way that could give a defender of the HCF model reason to object. This is not the case, since even a defender of the HCF model will want to hold on to the distinction between two kinds of perceptual appearances: the ones that afford the subject with an opportunity to know that things are as they seem and the ones that don't. The alternative is to give in to scepticism about perceptual knowledge. What a defender of the HCF model denies is that the knowledge that a genuine perception is said to make available is put within the reach of the subject simply by her having the experience in question. It is denied that the difference between the two kinds of appearances is a difference pertaining to the experiences qua the kind of subjective occurrences they are. In other words what makes for the epistemically relevant difference must be something extrinsic to the experience as such. Someone who denies that an experience could intrinsically be a world-revealing experience, could and presumably would insist that she can still operate with the notion of a

genuine experience as a notion that covers for instance the kind of experiences implicated in an actual seeing of something. On this non-disjunctivist view the subjective occurrence implicated in a seeing that P would be correctly categorized as a genuine experience because of its external, causal origin in the same way that a certain skin burn can be correctly called a sunburn because of its causal origin and not because of its intrinsic properties.

What is the relation between the HCF model and TT? As McDowell indicates a certain version of the argument from illusion with the HCF model as its conclusion becomes close to irresistible once we accept the Transparency Thesis (McDowell, 1998b: 241).⁷ The relevant argument from illusion starts with the basic observation that sometimes we are placed in a situation where the seen object, say a red cube, can appear differently from the way it actually is, say as pink, and that in such cases we may, as we undergo the experience, not be able to distinguish it from one in which we actually would be seeing a pink cube. The argument from hallucination adds that we can even imagine that it could seem to us exactly as if there is a red cube in front of us, under circumstances where no object is present to us. So far, so good. All we have done by now is to recognize the fallibility of our perceptual capacity for knowledge. We have recognized the possibility that even under circumstances where we fully live up to our doxastic responsibility, i.e., where we aren't in the least being careless or inattentive, we can still be fooled into believing that we are in position to know that things are in a certain way because we mistakenly take ourselves to be seeing that that is how things are. I shall refer to this recognition of the possibility of illusions and hallucinations that are subjectively indistinguishable from genuine perceptions as The Indistinguishability Thesis (IT):

The Indistinguishability Thesis: Illusory and hallucinatory experiences can be subjectively indistinguishable from genuine perceptions.

Unless we have already decided that knowledge about a certain subject matter requires that the subject can come to know about the subject matter in an infallible way, we are not yet faced with any sceptical problems. However, if we now add TT it immediately follows that it cannot be intrinsic to the experience implicated in my seeing a red cube that this experience reveals to me that there is a red cube in front of me. How come? I'm obviously not infallible when it comes to knowing whether I'm actually seeing or whether it merely seems to me that I'm seeing a red cube. This is what the possibility of illusions and hallucinations illustrates. This fallibility rules out that it can be an intrinsic feature of my genuine experiences that they are revelatory of how things are, if it is also true that all intrinsic features of my experience

are available to be known by me in an infallible fashion. Had the revelatory character of the experience been an intrinsic feature I ought, *ex hypothesi*, to be able to know infallibly whether I am having a genuine experience or whether I am merely undergoing an illusory or hallucinatory experience. In other words it ought to be impossible that I could ever face an impostor that would not be immediately revealed as such as soon as I attended properly to the experience.

In effect what we are faced with here is an inconsistent triad where a denial of any one of the three propositions would give us back consistency:

Proposition 1: All intrinsic features of a perceptual experience are available to be known by introspection alone (follows from TT)

Proposition 2: It can be an intrinsic feature of a perceptual experience that it is world-revealing.

Proposition 3: It is not possible to know by introspection alone that a perceptual experience is world-revealing (follows from IT).

If we want to hold on to both TT and therefore Proposition 1 and to IT and therefore Proposition 3, we have to claim that the difference between genuine experiences and non-genuine experiences is extrinsic to the experiences. Using this inconsistent triad to explicate why a defender of the TT must deny Proposition 2 on pain of giving up IT makes it clear that this indirect consequence of the fully Cartesian picture of the mind is not dependent on an acceptance of the infallibility claim. Proposition 1 not only follows from TT it also immediately follows from the Introspectibility Thesis.

With the conclusion that being a genuine experience must be an extrinsic feature of any experience implicated in a genuine experience we have reached the Highest Common Factor model. TT in conjunction with IT implies that the highest possible justificatory value that can attach to an experience implicated in a genuine experience by virtue of its intrinsic features is settled by the value carried by an experience that falls short of being world-revelatory. If I see that there is a red cube in front of me it cannot be intrinsic to this experience that it is a seeing, i.e., that how things are is available to be known on the basis of how they perceptually appear to be, since I cannot know infallibly that the appearance is of the genuine kind. On this picture all the subject has to go on via her experience, even under the most fortunate circumstances, is the intrinsic feature of the experience that it seems to be a case of seeing that there is a red cube there, something that would also be available had the experience been an indistinguishable hallucinatory experience. This places us in the

familiar Cartesian predicament. Our experientially given starting point is thought of as something which could be available even in a case where there is no object to be perceived.⁸ In the next section I present the way McDowell tries to block the argument from illusion via his so called disjunctive conception of experience.

3. McDowell's Disjunctive Conception of Experience

McDowell's disjunctive conception of perceptual appearances is an attempt to show that one can accept the Cartesian idea that the way things appear to a subject constitutes a realm of facts to which the subject has a privileged and possibly infallible access, and furthermore accept IT, without thereby being forced to accept the HCF model. Instead of regarding the retreat to appearances as a retreat to a realm of facts that is self-disclosed and self-enclosed, perceptual appearances are to be understood disjunctively. Whenever we have a case of a perceptual appearance, such an appearance is either constituted by a worldly fact making itself manifest to the subject, or it is a mere appearance, i.e., after an illusion or a hallucination. Here is how McDowell formulates his disjunctivism:

Short of the fully Cartesian picture, the infallibly knowable fact – it seeming to one that things are thus and so – can be taken disjunctively, as constituted either by the fact that things are manifestly thus and so or by the fact that that merely seems to be the case. (McDowell, 1998a: p. 242)

We can formulate disjunctivism as the following thesis:

The disjunctive account of perceptual appearances ('disjunctivism'): Whenever you have a perceptual appearance, then this experience is qua experience, i.e., solely by virtue of features that belong intrinsically to the experience, either a case of a genuine experience or it is a mere seeming to undergo such a genuine experience, i.e. it is an illusory appearance or a hallucinatory appearance.⁹

What the disjunctive account makes apparent is that there is no valid inference from IT and the idea of an infallibly knowable realm of facts concerning how things seem to one, to the conclusion that our perceptually given epistemic starting point is limited to that which could also be available in the case of an illusion or a hallucination. As we have seen the inference can go through if we add TT. However, the *possibility* of an epistemic retreat to appearances available both in cases of illusions

and in cases of actually seeing, doesn't in itself establish the *necessity* of re-establishing our contact with the world from an in principle world-impooverished experience.

McDowell sometimes presents his disjunctive account as a way of showing that the HCF model isn't an obligatory reading of the fact that both when one is seeing that P and when one merely seems to be seeing that P one can truthfully say that it appears to one as if P (McDowell, 1996: p. 113). In fact he also makes a much stronger claim. Not only does he claim that the disjunctive model makes it intelligible how experience can be intrinsically world-revealing, he also claims that the HCF model makes the very idea of perceptual appearances unintelligible.

4. McDowell's Negative Transcendental Argument

For McDowell the problem with the HCF model is not just that it embarrasses us epistemologically. What is at stake is not just whether we can have knowledge about the world but, as McDowell puts it, the very idea of 'subjectivity as a mode of being in the world' (McDowell, 1998a: p. 242). This is where we find what I shall refer to as McDowell's *negative transcendental argument*. He argues that that unless we can make sense of what he takes, I think rightly, to be a completely natural and intuitive idea of perceptual experience, namely as at its best making aspects of objective reality immediately present to us and thereby available to be known non-inferentially (McDowell, 2010: p. 245), we will fail to make sense of experiences so much as seeming to make reality present to us (McDowell, 1996: p. 112, n.2; 1998a: p. 243; 1998b: p. 389; 1998c: pp. 409–10; 2009: p. 230). The argument isn't spelt out in great detail, but the basic idea is the following: if we are to make sense of the idea of an experience as merely seeming to be a seeing, we need an intelligible conception of what it is the experience merely appears to be. Here is how McDowell formulates the basic idea:

Experiences in which it merely looks to one as if things are thus and so are experiences that misleadingly present themselves as belonging to that epistemically distinguished class. So we need the idea of experiences that belong to the epistemically distinguished class if we are to comprehend the idea that experiences have objective purport. If one acknowledges that experiences have objective purport, one cannot consistently refuse to make sense of the idea of experiences in which objective facts are directly available to perception. (McDowell, 2009: p. 230)

With this negative transcendental claim McDowell claims to have pinpointed the often unrecognized radical character of modern scepticism which since Descartes has occupied philosophers. The fully Cartesian picture not only makes empirical knowledge unattainable, it undermines the very idea of perceptual appearances, because it cannot make sense of the possibility of direct, perceptual confrontation with how things are. With his disjunctive account McDowell claims to have provided a way out of this Cartesian predicament.

5. McDowell's Diagnosis

If it is not the very idea of a subjective sphere of appearance to which the subject has privileged access which forces TT or the Introspectibility Thesis upon us from where does the attraction of these theses then stem from? McDowell diagnoses a crucial part of the attraction as stemming from the idea that the relation between mind and world must be susceptible to the kind of explanations provided by natural science (McDowell, 1998a: p. 243; 1998b: p. 393; 1998f: pp. 336–7). If we accept the view that the natural world can be exhaustibly explained by natural scientific means, i.e. what McDowell calls scientific naturalism, and furthermore accept that causal interaction between mind and world is possible, then it is natural to think that the mind must be a self-standing realm of reality. This is so because natural scientific explanations are characterized by a conception of the items to be explained as standing in merely causal relations to one another and such causal relations are thought of as external to the items placed in such relations. If we want to maintain that a perceptual appearance as of an object implicated in a genuine experience is caused by the perceived object perceived then we must, according to scientific naturalism, understand the object as external to the experience. Here we find a motivation for the idea that an appearance cannot be intrinsically world-involving that does not depend on TT or the Introspectibility Thesis. When this pressure on the idea of an intrinsically world-involving experience stemming from an 'objectifying mode of conceiving reality' (McDowell, 1998b: p. 393) is combined with the otherwise innocent Cartesian idea of an inner realm of facts about appearances it becomes natural to think of the features that can belong intrinsically to the experience as the very same that can be known via introspection, i.e., without knowledge about the distant causes of one's appearances.

What I want to do in the remaining sections of this paper is to reconstruct some of Merleau-Ponty's arguments against the fully Cartesian picture of the mind, in order to demonstrate that not only does Merleau-Ponty share McDowell's diagnosis concerning the role of scientific naturalism, he also provides his own version of the negative transcendental argument.

6. The Transparency Thesis in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*

In Merleau-Ponty TT shows up as a commitment of a certain conception of consciousness that falls under his umbrella term intellectualism.¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty formulates the intellectualistic conception in question as one that demarcates the mind as an area of being where the distinction between appearance and reality finds no foothold because how things appear coincides with how things are (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. 308, 396). We can read it as an expression of a version of TT when Merleau-Ponty writes that according to the intellectualist view nothing can be in consciousness without it being known to the subject and everything that the subject knows with certainty belongs to consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 351). However, when we, coming from McDowell's discussion of the Cartesian picture of the mind, look further into Merleau-Ponty's treatment of TT in *Phenomenology of Perception*, we are confronted with an interpretative puzzle. In the passages where Merleau-Ponty most explicitly expounds and criticizes the view of the mind as self-transparent, he apparently regards it as implying the exact opposite of what McDowell's criticism was aimed at. Whereas McDowell took TT in conjunction with IT to imply the impossibility of an intrinsic difference between genuine and non-genuine experience, Merleau-Ponty apparently claims that such an intrinsic difference is a corollary of TT. As we have seen we have reason to believe that the conjunction of TT and IT provides a strong motivation for the HCF model. In contrast, Merleau-Ponty portrays TT as implying exactly a denial of IT and as a consequence of the Highest Common Factor view. Here is one such passage from Part Two (II: Space) where Merleau-Ponty puts forward a line of argument on behalf of the intellectualistic approach to illusions and hallucination:

It has often been said that consciousness, by definition, does not allow for the separation between appearance and reality, and this was understood in the sense that, in terms of self-knowledge, appearance would be reality. If I think I see or sense, then I see or sense beyond all doubt, whatever may be true of the external object. Here reality appears in its entirety, to be real and to appear are one, and there is no other reality but appearance. *If this is true*, then it is impossible for illusion and perception to have the same appearance, for my illusions to be perceptions without an object or for my perceptions to be true hallucinations. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308, my emphasis; referred to herein below as 'Passage 1')¹¹

The putative implication here spelled out in the sentence beginning with 'If this is true' seems groundless. There seems to be nothing inherent in

TT that could rule out that genuine perception and illusions could have the same appearance, and in fact this seems to be exactly what Merleau-Ponty implies when he speaks of the subjects' certainty that she sees or senses as a certainty that is independent of what 'may be true of the external object'. Here the scope of the certainty implicated by TT seems to be exactly the scope Descartes thought could be maintained even while under the threat of the deceiving demon. Descartes sometimes distinguished between two senses of 'seeing', one which is factive and implies that the subject has eyes that are open for the occasion, and another which applies 'to the actual sense or awareness of seeing' which when self-ascribed on the basis of experience rules out the possibility of error but which is compatible with one not having a physical body at all (Descartes, 1984–85: vol. I, 195, *Principles of Philosophy*). It is this latter non-factive sense of seeing that Descartes also characterizes as cases of it seeming to one that one is seeing or as a thinking that one is seeing (Descartes 1984–85: vol. II, p. 20, *Metaphysical Meditations*), using his broad notion of a thought understood as 'everything which we are aware of as happening within us, in so far as we have awareness of it' (Descartes 1984–85: vol. I, p. 195). It seems to be this broad Cartesian notion of thought that Merleau-Ponty has in mind when he refers to the thought of seeing providing a certainty that is independent of how things are with the external object (see also Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. 394–5). How come Merleau-Ponty then, on behalf of the intellectualist, proceeds straight to the conclusion that IT must, on assumption of the transparency view, be false?

We can begin to make sense of what considered in isolation is a non sequitur, once we bring in the dialectic context in which the relevant passages occur. If we look more closely at the way Merleau-Ponty spells out the line of thought that leads the intellectualist to a denial of IT, we see that it is not based on a commitment to TT alone. Rather the intellectualist position comes about as a recoil from what Merleau-Ponty characterizes as an empiricist conception of perception, which the intellectualist realizes will lead to an extreme scepticism comparable with the one McDowell argues is the consequence of the HCF model. We can see that it is, at least in part, such a realization that drives Merleau-Ponty's intellectualist when we take the sentence that follows Passage 1 into consideration:

The truth of perception and the falsity of illusion must each be marked by some intrinsic characteristic, *for otherwise* we would never have a consciousness of a perception or an illusion as such, given that testimony of the other senses, of later experience, or of other people – which would remain the only criterion of differentiating them – has become itself uncertain. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308, my emphasis)

Here the idea that there must be some criteria by which the subject can distinguish genuine perception from non-genuine perception from the inside isn't motivated by an adherence to TT alone, but rather TT, understood as implying the possibility of such an internal discrimination, is regarded as necessary because, the intellectualist believes, without it no possible evidence will be able to take us beyond a basic uncertainty that would accompany any possible perceptual appearance. That it is such an understanding of the dialectic situation which, according to Merleau-Ponty, drives the intellectualist to the conviction that Transparency must rule out Indistinguishability is also indicated when he, later in Part Two of *Phenomenology of Perception* (III: The Thing and the Natural World), returns to the conception of consciousness as self-transparent:

The *cogito* teaches us that the existence of consciousness merges with the consciousness of existing, that there can be nothing in it of which it is unaware, that reciprocally, everything that it knows with certainty it finds in itself, and that *consequently* the truth or falsity of an experience must not consist in its relation to an exterior reality but must be read in it as intrinsic denominations *without which it would never be recognized*. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 351; the last two emphases are mine; referred to herein below as 'Passage 2')¹²

Here again the intellectualist apparently jumps directly from TT to a denial of IT (*consequently*). However, the dialectic situation that makes it seem to the intellectualist that the conclusion that is being jumped to simply has to be true is indicated by the conditional expressed with the 'without which': if the possibility of such an internal discrimination is denied, the subject would never be in position to recognize herself as undergoing a genuine experience and so would never be in position to know anything about the empirical world on the basis of perception.

On the reading I am proposing Merleau-Ponty's intellectualist and McDowell's proponent of the argument from illusion via Transparency shares the, I believe correct, assumption that TT in conjunction with the idea that the world-revealing character of a genuine experience is intrinsic to the experience entails a denial of IT. The proponent of the argument from illusion takes this entailment to be a reason to deny that it is intrinsic to any experience that it is world-revealing, because a denial of IT would amount to a commitment to the claim that we can infallibly know whether we are undergoing a genuine or a non-genuine experience. The intellectualist on the other hand regards the denial of the intrinsically world-revelatory nature of any experience to be disastrous and therefore sees herself forced to deny IT. What both these approaches do not consider is the possibility of holding on to both intrinsically world-revealing

experiences and Indistinguishability by denying Transparency, which is the option disjunctivism offers. Again we can display the dialectic situation in terms of the inconsistent triad spelled out above: The disjunctivist denies Proposition 1; Merleau-Ponty's Empiricist and the McDowell's proponent of the argument for illusion denies Proposition 2; and Merleau-Ponty's intellectualist denies Proposition 3. Merleau-Ponty himself explicitly denies Proposition 1 and like the disjunctivist he holds on to Proposition 2 and Proposition 3. It is an interesting question whether this means that Merleau-Ponty's alternative to both Empiricism and Intellectualism is committed to a disjunctive account of perceptual appearances; a question I shall save for another time.

7. Empiricism and the Highest Common Factor model

Immediately after Passage 1 Merleau-Ponty portrays the problem with the alternative empiricist as residing in the fact that it now becomes possible that any appearance, independently of how distinct and clear it is, can be a case of a deceiving appearance (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308). It is because of this consequence that Merleau-Ponty concludes that we have made *the phenomenon of truth* impossible (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308). This can sound as if it is simply the acceptance of IT and not the HCF model which according to Merleau-Ponty creates the problem. If this was the case it would mark a significant difference between Merleau-Ponty and McDowell's analyses and it would challenge my suggestion that we can understand Intellectualism as a recoil from a position committed to the HCF model. However, when we look more closely at Merleau-Ponty's diagnosis of the problems of empiricism we find reasons to believe that it is not IT alone which according to Merleau-Ponty leads Empiricism into Skepticism.

In Passage 1, TT, understood as implying a denial of IT, is said to rule out the problematic position according to which (a) illusion and perception can 'have the same appearance' and (b) our illusory experiences are 'perceptions without an object' and our perceptions are 'true hallucinations' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308). Claim (a) is a formulation of IT but Claim (b) goes further than IT and makes a claim about how we should understand the relation between genuine and non-genuine experiences. The view that our truth-revealing perceptions can be just as well characterized as veridical hallucinations and that our hallucinatory experiences qua experiences are the same as truth-revealing perceptions is nothing but the view that there is no intrinsic difference between what I have called genuine experience and non-genuine experience. The position that is said follow from TT is one according to which '[a] true perception (*perception vraie*) will be, quite simply, a genuine perception (*vrai*

perception)’ and ‘[i]llusion will not be a genuine perception’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308, see also Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 351).¹³ Merleau-Ponty’s intellectualist takes Claim (a) and Claim (b) to be equivalent but when Merleau-Ponty states what he takes to be the *new* and *valuable* in intellectualism he emphasizes its denial of Claim (b): ‘the essential difference that it establishes between perception and hallucination’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 352; cf. p. 310).¹⁴ Consequently both the intellectualist and Merleau-Ponty shares with the disjunctivist a denial of a the view that there is no intrinsic difference between genuine and non-genuine experiences, but in contrast to both the disjunctivist and Merleau-Ponty the intellectualist thinks it necessary to claim there must be some introspectible intrinsic feature of any given experience that can allow us to tell whether it belongs to the genuine or the non-genuine kind in an infallible way.

That it is not a commitment to IT on its own that, according to Merleau-Ponty, gets the empiricist model into trouble is further indicated when he states it as a genuine insight of intellectualism that the relation between perception and its object consists in more than a merely external relation (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 392). Empiricism starts with a conception of nature as consisting of items that exist *partes extra partes* and consequently only allows for external, merely causal relations between items in the natural world (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 75). This ‘naturalism of science’ (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 56) holds that the only conceivable type of being is the one defined by scientific method (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 55) and as such it coincides with the position McDowell refers to as scientific naturalism. Accordingly the relation between the appearance implicated in a genuine experience and its physical object must be external if we are not to deny appearances a place in the natural world. The empiricist conceives of the appearance or impression of seeing as a result of the irritation of certain sections of the nervous system and hallucinations are to be explained by irritation of the parts of the brain that are involved in a normal seeing (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 351). For the empiricist our apparently immediate awareness of seeing can be no more than a mere impression of seeing, which she conceives as a passive noticing of a self-enclosed mental event (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 395). The event is closed upon itself in the same sense that the facts about appearances are self-standing according to the fully Cartesian picture described by McDowell: the occurrence of the event is compatible with the non-existence of the ostensibly seen object. Here we see a motivation for the HCF model that lines up with the motivation for what McDowell calls the modern physicalistic version of the idea of the mind as a self-standing realm, where the mind is placed literally in the head (McDowell, 1998a: p. 250); a motivation which is not as such dependent on a commitment to TT or the Introspectibility Thesis.¹⁵ The result is, according

to Merleau-Ponty, that our perceptual evidence, what he also refers to as the *phenomenon of being* or the *phenomenon of truth* (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. 418, 308), is degraded to the level of a mere appearance (*simple appearance*: Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. 418, 401). We should now be able to see how, according to Merleau-Ponty, the crucial problem with the empiricist alternative is not the mere acceptance of the IT, but rather the fact that we have accepted a model of experience that compels us to accept the HCF model.

8. Merleau-Ponty's Negative Transcendental Argument

Judging from Passage 2 and the sentence quoted above that immediately follows Passage 1 one could easily be lead to think that the problem Merleau-Ponty sees with the HCF model is a strictly epistemological problem. He speaks about how all our appearances without the possibility of a direct awareness of them qua genuine perception and qua illusions would be haunted by an irrefutable uncertainty. There is however plenty of evidence that Merleau-Ponty shares what he presents as the neo-Kantian intellectualist Lachiéze-Rey's diagnosis of empiricism: The problem with empiricism is not just that it lands us in scepticism with regards to the possibility of empirical knowledge, but more radically that it makes it unintelligible how our thinking could have a 'hold on things'; on the empiricist picture all we would have is the 'illusion of thought' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 389, p. 16). However, for Merleau-Ponty this problem is not isolated to empiricism but is inherited by Intellectualism.

The most explicit statement of Merleau-Ponty's general verdict comes shortly after Passage 1 quoted above:

To say that, in consciousness, appearance and reality are one, or to say that they are separated, is to render impossible the consciousness of anything, even as appearance. (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 310)

The view that takes appearance and reality to coincide in consciousness is Intellectualism. The view that is said to separate them is Empiricism. Both of these will, according to Merleau-Ponty, not only undermine the idea of empirical knowledge but the very idea of consciousness of anything whatsoever. Merleau-Ponty's conclusion here parallels that of McDowell and his argument for thinking that empiricism cannot entitle itself to the notion of appearances is structurally similar to McDowell's negative transcendental argument.

Merleau-Ponty argues that we can only makes sense of our talk about illusions because we have recognized illusions as such and that such recognition in turn could only take place in the name of experiences which

at the very same moment attest to their own truth (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. lxxx) and through which we possess truths (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 309). He further claims that the Cartesian thought about a seeing which restricts itself to the claim that it seems to me that I see, implies that we have had the experience of an authentic or actual visual experience in which the certainty of the object was encompassed (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 394). Why couldn't a sceptic simply respond that just because we need to have had experiences where we indeed took it for granted that they presented us with a real object, this doesn't show that we were entitled to take it for granted? The mere fact that we need to have actually had unquestioned experiences in the name of which we saw ourselves entitled to dismiss certain other experiences as illusory in order for us to have a meaningful concept of illusion, doesn't yet show us that these unquestioned experiences would have to be really truth-revealing. Let us look closer at Merleau-Ponty's argument here. The basis of the argument is the thought that the withdrawal to claims about appearances is basically a redraw to a merely hypothetical statement, i.e. to a statement about what is possible or probable (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 394). To state about an actual experience of mine that it appears to me as a seeing of a red cube, is to state that things appear to me just as they would if I would in fact be seeing a red cube in front of me. In other words it is to state that judging from its appearance alone this experience might be a case of seeing.¹⁶ However, in order to be able to meaningfully make such a statement about an actual experience, I must presuppose knowledge about what it would be like if I was actually seeing. The question is now where such knowledge could come from if not from an actual experience of seeing. The problem is that on the empiricist picture we are supposed to make sense of what McDowell calls the most perspicuous of all phenomenological facts (McDowell, 1998a: p. 243), namely the fact that perception presents itself as presenting me with the world itself, while at the same time claiming that no experience could in reality constitute such a direct presentation of how things are. What we see here is how Merleau-Ponty, like McDowell, makes the negative transcendental claim that without an intelligible notion of a genuine experience which is in fact as it seems, namely a case of being directly presented with how things are in the world, we will be unable to make sense of ourselves as undergoing experiences which resemble such world-revealing experiences.

If we turn to intellectualism we will see that it fares no better. After presenting the intellectualist's position in Passage 1 Merleau-Ponty is quick to point out some unfortunate consequences of its forced marriage between Proposition 1 and Proposition 2. The basic problem is that illusions and hallucinations, as interruptions of the alleged absolute self-transparency of consciousness, are on this account rendered

inconceivable or *unthinkable* ('impensable': Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 352, see also Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 47, n. 53). It is in this context we find a version of the argument of illusion in Merleau-Ponty, now turned against the intellectualist's claim about complete transparency: an illusion does not present itself as what it is, but on the contrary 'essentially' presents itself as what it is not, namely as a world-disclosing perception (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 308). But if this is an intrinsic feature of the illusion qua conscious experience and if the mind is utterly transparent to itself, then this feature ought to be immediately accessible to the subject undergoing the illusion and it becomes a serious question how illusions could ever mislead us.¹⁷ Here a defender of TT could retreat and simply deny that it is intrinsic to an illusory experience that it is illusory, what is intrinsic to the illusory experience is that seems to be a genuine experience, something it shares with genuine experiences, and something which can be known by reflection alone. The problem with this is that it lands us in exactly the position intellectualism was trying to escape, namely a position similar to the empiricist position which makes the relation to the object in genuine perception a merely external relation.

Empiricism renders the idea of an experience as even purporting to be revelatory of how things, i.e. making 'a claim to objectivity' (*pretention à l'objectivité*: Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 249), unintelligible, because it denies the possibility of an experience that in fact is as it presents itself as being namely an openness to how things are. Intellectualism fares no better when it makes the idea of an illusory experience unintelligible. Since the intellectualism in question is committed to both TT and to the idea that the world-revealing character of a perceptual appearance is intrinsic to the experience, it follows that our knowledge about empirical object must be just as absolute and infallible as the knowledge we have about appearances (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. 308, 352, 394). But if it is in principle impossible for any object to appear differently than it actually is, we no longer have the means to make a distinction between how the world is represented as being and how it actually is. The distinction between appearance and reality has lost its sense, and without it the idea of appearance becomes non-sensical. The Intellectualist's idea of Transparency ends up in an absolute idealism, where the idea of the mind-independence or the aseity of the object is undermined (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. lxxix, 242, 394). We lose our grip on the notion of the world as that which prescribes our cognition its goal and thereby gives content to our notion of truth (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. lxxxii). To use an expression from McDowell our thoughts are left in a frictionless spinning in the void and so are no longer recognizable as thoughts directed towards the world.¹⁸

Conclusion

I have argued that despite a certain asymmetry between the way that Merleau-Ponty and McDowell set up their critique of the idea of the mind as utterly transparent to itself, they share a fundamental critique of the idea that it cannot be intrinsic to an experience that it is world-revealing as well a diagnosis of how that idea could come to seem unavoidable. They both regard the idea of nature as consisting in items that must ultimately be understood as merely causally related with no internal connection between cause and effect as a driving force behind the attractiveness of the idea that experiences can only be considered as externally related to the world. Furthermore they both present arguments in favour of a certain negative transcendental claim, namely the claim that if we accept that the world-revealing character of experience is an extrinsic feature of the experience, then we will lose our grip on the notion of appearances. I have left it open to what extent we should regard Merleau-Ponty's positive account of the relation between experience and world as involving a commitment to a disjunctive account of appearances, but I hope to have shown why we have reason to believe that this question is exegetically fruitful and why we have reason to hope that an answer to the question might contribute to the ongoing evaluation of the virtues of the disjunctive account.

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Notes

- 1 Farkas, who defends an internalist view of the mind that is avowedly Cartesian, presents the idea of a capacity for knowledge that gives privileged access to one's own mind (introspection) via an appeal to the idea of that

- which available to be known even under the assumption of the demon hypothesis, but her position remains neutral on physicalism (Farkas, 2008: p. 15).
- 2 This transparency should not be confused with what is sometimes called the transparency approach to self-knowledge, where the claim is that we can gain knowledge about our own mental life by attending to or thinking about the objects of our thoughts and experiences. For instance Harman's transparency claim for perception implies that whenever we try to attend to an intrinsic feature of our experience we will at most manage to attend to features of the object of our experience, and so amounts to a thorough dismissal of the possibility of introspection in the sense of the Transparency Thesis (Harman, 1990).
 - 3 In discussions about disjunctivism an understanding of the distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic *features, properties* or *nature* of mental states and occurrences is often presupposed without much explanation. McDowell frames the discussion as one that concerns what belongs to the 'intrinsic nature of inner states and events' and more specifically whether some such states and events have an 'intrinsic involvement with the world' (McDowell, 1998a: p. 250). Weatherson and Marshall (2012) discuss three common notions of intrinsicality. Of these the idea of intrinsic properties as the properties that do not differ between duplicates seems the most relevant for the present debate, in particular given the use of the argumentative strategy Blackburn calls 'spinning of the possible worlds' by many of the people who are committed to what McDowell argues is a problematic Cartesian picture of the mind including Blackburn and externalists such as Putnam (McDowell, 1998a: p. 248; McDowell, 1998d).
 - 4 McDowell uses 'the mind', 'subjectivity' and 'the inner states and event' interchangeably in his 'Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space' (McDowell, 1998a). I use the term 'conscious mind' here, so as not to rule out there could be non-conscious mental states or events that are not accessible to introspection. The fully Cartesian picture of the mind is not supposed to be restricted to perceptual or sensory experiences but includes all conscious states or occurrences in a subject's life. Descartes himself seems to have counted even standing states such as a desire to know more and an unwillingness to be deceived amongst the things he could be certain about even under the threat of the omnipotent and deceiving demon (see Farkas, 2008: p. 42), but for the comparative purposes of this paper it is irrelevant whether the historical Descartes was committed to the fully Cartesian Picture.
 - 5 Since veridical hallucinations are possible we have to add a qualifier to the characterization of genuine experience given in the text: Genuine experience provides an opportunity to know in the normal way or in the most basic way possible for veridical appearances.
 - 6 McDowell sometimes makes the contrast between what I call genuine vs. non-genuine experience in terms of deceptive and non-deceptive appearances, where a non-deceptive appearance isn't necessarily deceiving the subject, since she could be aware of its illusory character (McDowell, 1998b: pp. 385–6).
 - 7 McDowell doesn't explicitly mention the argument from illusion here, but as we shall see the connection is tight. For McDowell's explicit discussion of the argument from illusion see: McDowell, 1998b: pp. 241, 381–2, 385–6, 389, and McDowell, 1998c: p. 407, n. 17. What McDowell refers to as a version of the argument from illusion covers both what I call the argument from illusion and the argument from hallucination. In this context he sometimes speaks of

the possibility of an illusion of perceptual presence referring to the possibility of hallucinations (McDowell, 1998a: p. 248).

- 8 I have presented the HCF model in a way that makes an externalist position that tries to sidestep the sceptical worries by claiming that the justificatory power of an experience isn't fully determined by its intrinsic features committed to the HCF model. I prefer to state the HCF model in terms of the epistemic value of intrinsic features of an experience, since it makes it clear that if McDowell is right in his claim that a commitment to HCF undermines the very idea of appearances then this is not just a problem for someone already committed to internalism, but also for an externalist. See Soteriou (2009) for a different reading of the HCF model. McDowell, just like Merleau-Ponty, is committed to a version of the KK-principle (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 402; McDowell, 1998e: p. 419, n. 10).
- 9 In order to understand why illusionary experiences land on the 'bad disjunct', it is important to keep in mind that I use genuine and non-genuine experience about perceptual appearances and that an experience in its totality will most often if not always afford more than one appearance.
- 10 Besides from Husserl (at least in his middle period), his own supervisor Brunschvicg, and the classical cases of Descartes and Kant, some central authors amongst his contemporaries whom Merleau-Ponty regard as having strong intellectualistic tendencies are Alain, Lagneau and Lachièze-Rey. When I speak about intellectualism and the intellectualist in what follows I have in mind only the kind of intellectualism that is committed to TT. The two author's Merleau-Ponty discusses the most when he engages with the intellectualist TT are Alain and the Neo-Kantian Lachièze-Rey.
- 11 The putative implication is also stated when Merleau-Ponty writes: 'The transparency of consciousness entails the immanence and the absolute certainty of the object' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012 p. 308).
- 12 It is in the context of this passage that Merleau-Ponty discusses Alain as a proponent of the intellectualist approach to hallucinations that he criticizes, but it is in the later Cogito-chapter that he engages most directly with an intellectualist whom he regards as committed to the understanding of TT that implies a denial of IT, namely Lachièze-Rey.
- 13 In his German translation Rudolf Boehm helpfully notes that 'perception vrai' here means something like a perception that announces a truth (*eine 'Wahres bekundende Wahrnehmung'*) and 'vrai perception' means a genuine perception (*eine 'echte Wahrnehmung'*) (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: p. 342).
- 14 Here Donald A. Landes translates 'la différence de nature' (Merleau-Ponty, 1996: p. 394) as 'the essential difference' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 352).
- 15 Sometimes Merleau-Ponty portrays the Skepticism that Intellectualism seeks to overcome as implying a denial of Transparency (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 310). This makes sense once we work with the idea that Transparency implies a denial of IT. However, Merleau-Ponty also sometimes presents what I take to be the empiricist's notion of impressions as self-enclosed psychic events as coming with a commitment to what he also presented as Descartes' view, namely the idea that our knowledge about the appearance of seeing is certain whereas our knowledge about the objects of our seeing is uncertain (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: pp. 394-5). When it comes to the idea that the relation between appearances and worldly objects must be external the intellectualism that takes TT to imply a denial of IT, might be seen as responding just as much to Descartes' realism as to Empiricism.

- 16 This is not the only possible interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's claim that the certainty an appearance should be understood as a 'certainty of a possibility' (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: p. 394). Romdenh-Romluc interprets Merleau-Ponty as proposing a deflationary account of 'appearance' talk, which ultimately denies what McDowell sees as the innocent Cartesian picture of the mind, i.e. the idea that there is are facts about how things perceptually appear to us (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011: pp. 162–5). If Romdenh-Romluc is right this would imply that Merleau-Ponty cannot be a disjunctivist about perceptual appearances. Another way it could turn out that Merleau-Ponty's view differs from disjunctivism is if we take his emphasis on the first personal, experiential difference between actual hallucinations (as opposed to the philosophers' perfect hallucination) and genuine perceptions, to imply a denial of the IT; a conclusion I believe we should resist.
- 17 When reconstructing McDowell's negative transcendental argument in his Stanford Encyclopedia entry on 'Disjunctivism', Soteriou (2009) interestingly attributes exactly this argument against the Transparency Thesis to McDowell. I'm not convinced that this argument is to be found in McDowell's work but if Soteriou is right this might just make the similarity between McDowell and Merleau-Ponty even greater than what I argue here.
- 18 It might seem that Merleau-Ponty's Intellectualism takes us far beyond the intellectual landscape mapped out by McDowell, but in fact a similar position shows up when McDowell refers to a line of reasoning presented by Robert Nozick. Nozick claims that the internalist requirement that anything that is of significance for my epistemic warrant must be available for me to be known can only be satisfied via a reduction of 'external' facts to mental facts (McDowell, 1998b: p. 391, n. 40). It is exactly such a reduction of the external world to the immanence of consciousness which according to Merleau-Ponty is the unacceptable consequence of intellectualism. In McDowell's analysis of the dialectics of modern epistemology externalism about justification can be said to play a role similar to the one played by intellectualism in Merleau-Ponty's analysis: both externalism and intellectualism are diagnosed as desperate attempts to overcome the shortcomings of the HCF model.

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