

III

The Evidence of the Senses

13

McDowell and Wright on Anti-Scepticism, etc.*

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On the assumption that we may learn from our elders and betters, this paper approaches some fundamental questions in perceptual epistemology through a dispute between McDowell and Wright about external world scepticism. As explained in Section 13.2, the dispute turns on what McDowell means by claiming that we have ‘direct perceptual access to environmental facts’. On the interpretation offered in Section 13.3 (and further elaborated in Section 13.7), if we do have ‘direct perceptual access’ then the relevant sceptical argument—in each of its two versions—is defused. The sceptical argument fails for other reasons (Sections 13.5 and 13.7); however, these reasons provide materials for defending McDowell’s claim of ‘direct perceptual access’ (Section 13.8).

13.1. The Dialectical Position, and a Simple Sceptical Argument

The external world sceptic argues that we have no knowledge of the external or material world. Putting the sceptical conclusion slightly more specifically: we have no knowledge of *external world propositions*, for instance that here is a hand, that that is a tree, that it rained yesterday, and so forth. How should we respond to such an argument? Whatever the details, the following remark of McDowell’s should be unexceptionable:

We need not pretend to have an argument that would prove that we are not, say, at the mercy of Descartes’s demon, using premises we can affirm, and inferential steps we can exploit, without begging questions against someone who urges sceptical doubts. (McDowell 2008: 379)

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In the terminology of Byrne 2004, the urgent task is to *expose* the sceptic, not *convince* her. That is, faced with a sceptical argument, the missing premise or fallacious step needs to be identified; we do not need to accept, in addition, the ‘tendentious ground rules’ (McDowell 2008: 379) that require us to argue in a sceptic-acceptable manner from sceptic-acceptable assumptions for the conclusion that we do know external world propositions.¹

Sceptical arguments come in a number of forms, but the dispute between McDowell and Wright initially turns on an argument with (in Wright’s formulation) the following opening premise:

[T]here is no way of justifying particular beliefs about the material world save on the basis of the (inconclusive) evidence given by our senses. (Wright 2002: 338)²

As an example of such ‘inconclusive evidence’ Wright gives the following:

My experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face. (Wright 2002: 336)³

Because such evidence is ‘inconclusive’ or ‘defeasible’, in the sense that ‘it is possible to envisage *adding to it* in such a way that the resulting enlarged body of evidence no longer supports the proposition in question’ (Wright 2002: 333, n. 7), the opening premise implies that ‘the canonical justification of perceptual claims proceeds through a defeasible inferential base’ (Wright 2002: 346).⁴ So a more explicit statement of the first premise is:

Our external world beliefs are (only) justified by inference from inconclusive evidence, including evidence that we are having experiences as if such-and-such.⁵

For compactness and ease of comparison with alternatives to come, this will be shortened to:

P1. Our external world beliefs are justified by evidence that we are having experiences as if such-and-such.

¹ For one recent attempt to do just that, see Rinard 2011.

² For comparison, here is McDowell’s version of the opening premise (restricted to the visual case), as it appears in an earlier paper: ‘when I see that things are thus and so, I take it that things are thus and so on the basis of having it look to me as if things are thus and so’ (1995: 396). Wright’s formulation (but not McDowell’s) might be read as concerning *the activity of justifying* beliefs about the material world, as opposed to the evidence on which such beliefs are based; it is clear this would be a misreading.

³ There are good questions to be raised about the standard jargon of ‘experiences as of an *F*’, ‘experiences as if *p*’, and so on. For present purposes we can work with an informal understanding of these expressions. For vividness ‘experiences’ will be assumed to be conscious, in the sense that excludes blindsighters; nothing will hang on this assumption.

⁴ ‘Inference’ is usually used for the sorts of transitions between beliefs that occur during theoretical reasoning; talk of ‘evidence’ suggests inference in this standard sense, and Wright will be interpreted accordingly. Some authors count transitions from experiences to beliefs as inferences—that broader usage is not followed here. Whether perception involves an inference in the narrow sense of this paper is taken up at length later (Section 13.5).

⁵ This should be interpreted as requiring only that inferences from inconclusive evidence figure in the (perhaps distant) aetiology of any justified external world belief. So, for instance, being justified in believing P while having forgotten the evidence on which P was based is not a counterexample.

The remainder of the argument purports to show that the inconclusive evidence of the senses is far too weak to support knowledge of the external world. After all, when enjoying a particularly vivid dream with my hands by my sides, or as a hapless, handless brain in a vat, my experience may also be ‘in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face’. If my evidence—or a crucial piece of my evidence—is compatible with my being a brain in a vat, how could I know that I’m not?⁶

Three main ways of resisting the argument may be crudely summarized as follows. According to *explanationism*, given enough sensory evidence that coheres together in the right way, one may know that here is a hand on the basis of an ‘inference to the best explanation’. According to *apriorism*, additional pieces of *non-sensory* evidence are (somehow) available, for example, that one’s senses are generally reliable—the contemporary equivalent of Descartes’s claim that God is not a deceiver. The evidence of the senses taken together with this additional non-sensory evidence allows one to know that here is a hand. And according to *dogmatism*, evidence that one’s ‘experience is in all respects as of a hand . . .’ can allow one to know that here is a hand without assistance from collateral evidence about the reliability of one’s senses or anything else.⁷

Not surprisingly, each of these three positions faces a variety of objections. For the purposes of assessing the Wright–McDowell debate, the details of these positions won’t matter, since it turns out that P1 is the crux.

13.2. McDowell’s Diagnosis, Wright’s Reply, and So On

McDowell’s diagnosis of the sceptic’s mistake is expressed in these passages:

The diagnosis is that this scepticism expresses *an inability to make sense of the idea of direct perceptual access to objective facts about the environment*. What shapes this scepticism is the thought that even in the best possible case, the most that perceptual experience can yield falls short of a subject’s having an environmental state of affairs directly available to her. Consider situations in which a subject seems to see that, say, there is a red cube in front of her. The idea is that even if we focus on the best possible case, her experience could be just as it is, in all respects, even if

⁶ The remainder of the argument might attempt to show that sensory evidence does not support external world propositions over various sceptical hypotheses; alternatively, it might attempt to show that sensory evidence fails to support the negation of sceptical hypotheses. The latter strategy requires closure, but the former doesn’t—see Cohen 1998 for discussion. Although Wright himself does not deny closure, the sceptical argument he develops in his 2002 does not require it. (A closure principle is used in the sceptical argument set out in the appendix to Wright 2008.)

⁷ Some examples of many. *Explanationism*: Russell 1912/97: 22–4; Jackson 1977: 141–7; Vogel 1990; BonJour 2003. *Apriorism*: Wright 2004; White 2006. *Dogmatism*: Pollock 1974: ch. 5; Pryor 2000; Burge 2003. NB the official positions of the authors just cited typically depart in minor (and sometimes major) ways from the rough sketch of the three positions in the text. For example, most of the cited authors are primarily concerned with justification, not knowledge, and many would also deny P1 (see Section 13.6 below). Apriorism and Dogmatism are sometimes labeled *Conservatism* and *Liberalism* (Silins 2008). Neta 2010 argues that certain versions of Conservatism and Liberalism are compatible.

there were no red cube in front of her. This seems to reveal that perceptual experience provides at best inconclusive warrants for claims about the environment. And that seems incompatible with supposing we ever, strictly speaking, *know* anything about our objective surroundings. (McDowell 2008: 378; first emphasis added)

And:

... it constitutes a response if we can find a way to insist that we can make sense of the idea of *direct perceptual access to objective facts about the environment*. That contradicts the claim that what perceptual experience yields, even in the best possible case, must be something less than having an environmental fact directly available to one. And without that thought, this scepticism loses its supposed basis and falls to the ground. (McDowell 2008: 379, emphasis added)

According to McDowell, the sceptic has overlooked the possibility that we have 'direct perceptual access' to environmental facts. And if we do have such access, then P1 is false: the warrant that perceptual experience provides is *not* 'inconclusive'. Can't the sceptic just grant the possibility of 'direct perceptual access' and deny its actuality? Indeed, but this is toothless unless backed by an argument. The sceptic bears the onus of proof—if she can't supply a reason why we do not in fact have 'direct perceptual access', and if this is the most plausible way of explaining our perceptual knowledge, then we may fairly take ourselves to have such access.

Wright does not question, at any rate for the sake of the argument, that we in fact have 'direct perceptual access'. Instead, he replies that the move from 'direct perceptual access' to the denial of P1 is illegitimate:

In brief: whether our perceptual faculties engage the material world directly is one issue and whether the canonical justification of perceptual claims proceeds through a defeasible inferential base is another. One is, so far, at liberty to take a positive view of *both* issues. (Wright 2002: 346)⁸

According to McDowell, in a typical situation in which my hand is plainly in front of my face, I have 'direct perceptual access' to the fact that there is hand before me; as a handless brain in a vat, I enjoy no such access. If this 'disjunctive conception of experience' is correct, there are two very different ways in which it might be true that 'my experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face': I could have direct perceptual access to the fact that there is a hand before me or I could lack such access, for instance by being a handless brain in a vat. But, Wright complains, this is perfectly consistent with P1. McDowell, after all, is not *denying* that I may enjoy an experience in all respects as of a hand either when veridically perceiving or hallucinating. His claim that experiences are 'disjunctive' does not appear to be relevant to the issue of whether my external world beliefs rest on inconclusive evidence about my experiences.⁹

⁸ Wright is here addressing similar remarks in McDowell 1982.

⁹ Wright officially presents his response as requiring a reformulation of one's sensory evidence: 'My experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face' is replaced by '*Either* I am perceiving a hand in front of my face *or* I am in some kind of delusional state' (Wright 2002: 346–7). But this is unnecessary, since

McDowell responds by insisting, in effect, that the disjunctive conception of experience *is* incompatible with P1:

The point of the disjunctive conception is that if one undergoes an experience that belongs on the 'good' side of the disjunction, that warrants one in believing—indeed presents one with an opportunity to know—that things are as the experience reveals them as being. When one's perceptual faculties 'engage the material world directly', as Wright puts it, the result—a case of having an environmental state of affairs directly present to one in experience—constitutes one's being justified in making the associated perceptual claim. It is hard to see how any other kind of justification could have a stronger claim to the title 'canonical'. And this justification is *not* defeasible. If someone sees that P, it cannot fail to be the case that P. So if one accepts the disjunctive conception, one is *not* at liberty to go on supposing that 'the canonical justification of perceptual claims proceeds through a defeasible inferential base.' (McDowell 2008: 378)

To which Wright replies that McDowell fails to address the earlier point, that 'there is an evident gap between direct awareness of a situation in virtue of which P is true and the acquisition of warrant for the belief that P' (Wright 2008: 398). He illustrates the independence (as he sees it) between 'direct awareness' and having any warrant at all, let alone a 'conclusive' one, with the following familiar example:

Driving in Barn Façade County . . . I am directly aware of the barn, its location, the colour of its roof, its approximate dimensions, and so on . . . Yet . . . I [don't] know that there is a barn up the road, of such-and-such approximate dimensions, and with such-and-such a colour of roof . . . Direct awareness of states of affairs that make P true is one thing; warranted belief that P, for one fully apprised of what it takes for P to be true, is something else. (Wright 2008: 398)¹⁰

To sum up the state of play at half-time. The sceptic propounds an argument with the following premise:

P1. Our external world beliefs are justified by evidence that we are having experiences as if such-and-such.

McDowell claims that P1 is false because sometimes we have 'direct perceptual access' to environmental facts, which supposedly entails that our senses do not (solely) supply 'inconclusive' evidence. Wright counters by arguing that the entailment does not go through: direct perceptual access is compatible with inconclusive sensory evidence.

Clearly the resolution of this dispute is going to turn on what 'direct perceptual access' amounts to. For assistance, let us turn to its historical antecedents.

the disjunctive formulation is—or at any rate is intended by Wright to be—necessarily equivalent to the original, and nothing here turns on any hyperintensional differences. Anyone who agreed with the disjunctive formulation of sensory evidence would have no objection to the non-disjunctive formulation.

¹⁰ The elision after 'Yet' simplifies this quotation. Wright is not unreservedly endorsing the claim that he doesn't know there's a barn up the road.

13.3. 'Direct perceptual access'

The two main conceptions of perceptual 'directness' or 'immediacy' are both found in the first of Berkeley's *Dialogues*:

in truth the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately: *for they make no inferences... sensible things* are those only which are *immediately perceived* by sense. (Berkeley 1734/1994: 9, emphasis changed)

The first sentence suggests the following definition:

INFERENTIAL IMMEDIACY: one immediately (directly) perceives that *p* iff one non-inferentially knows that *p* by perception.

On this *inferential* conception of immediacy, the items that are 'directly' or 'immediately' perceived are not *objects*, for example ordinary physical objects like hands or barns, but *facts*, for example that the barn is red. Another fact about this very barn might be indirectly perceived on the same occasion by the same subject: that it needs repainting, for instance. This illustrates why, on the inferential conception, no clear useful sense attaches to speaking of an object like a barn being perceived directly.

In contrast, the second sentence (together with some of Berkeley's examples) suggests a conception of immediacy on which the items that are 'directly' perceived are physical objects like barns or hay-bales.

OBJECT IMMEDIACY: one immediately (directly) perceives *o* iff _____

The blank signals the fact that the intended contrast between 'directly' perceiving a barn and 'indirectly' perceiving it is quite obscure, a point well made by Austin (1962). If object immediacy and inferential immediacy are conflated, this point is liable to be missed, as illustrated by Berkeley's famous example of hearing a coach:

when I hear a coach drive along the streets, immediately I perceive only the sound; but, from the experience I have had such that such a sound is connected with a coach, I am said to hear the coach. It is nevertheless evident that, in truth and strictness, nothing can be heard but sound; and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but suggested from experience. (Berkeley 1734/1994: 38)

Berkeley knows from experience that this distinctive sort of sound is produced by a coach, and hence knows that a coach is passing by inference. So he mediately or indirectly perceives *that a coach is passing*. If the two sorts of immediacy are conflated, the claim that Berkeley indirectly perceives *the coach* can seem irresistible—rather than urgently in need of elucidation.¹¹

¹¹ Disentangling the two sorts of immediacy took some work: see Armstrong 1976, and also Jackson 1977: 6–11. Armstrong also highlights the importance of the quoted passages from Berkeley.

This suggests two initial interpretations of McDowell's claim that we enjoy 'direct perceptual access', or DPA for short. First:

Inference-DPA: we are in a position to non-inferentially know external world propositions by perception.

And second:

Object-DPA: we perceive material objects (e.g. barns) 'directly.'

Now what *is* DPA, the thesis urged on us by McDowell? From Section 13.2 it should be fairly clear that, according to Wright, DPA is *object*-DPA. Wright's example of the barn is supposed to be a case of 'direct perception', but it is obviously not a case of being in a position to non-inferentially know that there is a barn there, because it is not a case of being in a position to know at all. Rather, as Wright says, it is a case where 'I am directly aware of the barn.' And at one point Wright characterizes DPA as 'direct realism' (2008: 400), which of course is the traditional label for object-DPA.¹²

If Wright's interpretation is correct, then McDowell's reply to the sceptic is wholly unconvincing, just as Wright says. Whatever 'I am directly aware of the barn' means, exactly, it is supposed to be a referentially transparent context. Take what the direct realist will regard as a paradigm case of being directly aware of a red building: I am looking at a red building in daylight, and am able to identify it as such. We may suppose that (unbeknownst to me) the red building is a barn. Because 'I am directly aware of —' is referentially transparent, it follows that I am directly aware of the barn, even though I do not know that there is a barn there. So the claim that I am directly aware of the barn is not in the first instance an *epistemological* thesis. In particular, it does not entail anything of interest about whether I have *evidence* for the hypothesis that there is a barn there. That I am directly aware of the barn is compatible with the view—propounded by Wright's sceptic—that my evidence is that 'my experience is in all respects as of' a barn.

But this interpretation of McDowell is not very plausible, for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most persuasive is that McDowell is quite careful never to talk of 'direct perceptual access' to objects like barns—the items to which we enjoy such access are always *facts*.^{13, 14}

Still, there is no doubt that one way of motivating scepticism is fueled by the denial of object-DPA; a brief detour to examine this further will not go amiss.

¹² See also Wright 2002: 340, and: 'Twentieth century direct realism... in the spirit that informs John McDowell's *Mind and World* and Hilary Putnam's Dewey Lectures...' (Wright 2004: 174). Occasionally 'direct realism' is used (ill-advisedly) to label the conjunction of Inference-DPA and Object-DPA; however, this is not Wright's usage, since his objection to McDowell is, in effect, that one may *accept* direct realism but *reject* Inference-DPA.

¹³ Wright does speak indiscriminately of being directly aware of objects, properties, and 'states of affairs' (Wright 2008: 398). This might well be intended as a concession to McDowell—for the sake of the argument, assume that anything whatever can be 'directly perceived'.

¹⁴ Another reason is that the terminology of 'access' suggests something epistemological. And yet another is simple charity: better an enlightened McDowell than a muddled one. On the alternative 'inferential' interpretation, to be developed below, McDowell has some genuine insights.

13.4. Scepticism and the ‘Lockean conception’

The classic metaphor that encapsulates the epistemological problem with indirect realism is of course the ‘veil of perception’ (Bennett 1971: 69), echoed by Wright when he characterizes ‘the Lockean conception of experience [i.e. indirect realism] as a kind of veil, draped between the subject and the external world’ (2002: 341). According to Locke, it is the ‘actual receiving of ideas from without, that gives us notice of the existence of other things’ (1689/1975: XI. xi. 2), and the problem is supposed to be how the reception of ideas could do that. Notoriously, it was Locke himself who drew attention to the difficulty. In his commentary on Malebranche he asks rhetorically: ‘how can I know that the picture of any thing is like that thing, when I never see that which it represents?’ And according to Locke, he can’t: concerning ‘the idea of a horse, and the idea of a centaur . . . whether the one or the other be the true representation of any thing that exists, that, upon his principles, neither our author nor any body else can know’ (1824: sect. 51).¹⁵

Ironically, the quotation from Locke shows why the main problem with indirect realism is not epistemological. The distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ object perception is not explicitly in Locke, and the quotation imputes to Malebranche the view that objects like horses are *not* perceived, rather than being perceived ‘indirectly’.¹⁶ If the indirect realist can do no better than this, then scepticism is the least of her worries. The defects of a theory that holds that we do not *see* horses or barns are not best brought out by claiming that the theory makes *knowledge* of horses and barns impossible to attain. Supposing the epistemological problem to be somehow solved, there is still the stubborn fact that we do actually see horses and barns, on occasion.

This problem can be illustrated by a well-known passage of Moore’s, in which he attempts to explain what he means by ‘sense-data’ by inviting the reader ‘to look at his own right hand’:

If he does this he will be able to pick out something . . . with regard to which he will see that . . . it is a natural view to take that that thing is identical, not, indeed, with his whole right hand, but with that part of his surface which he is actually seeing, but will also (on a little reflection) be able to see that it is doubtful whether it can be identical with the part of the surface of his hand in question. Things of the sort . . . are what I mean by ‘sense-data.’ (1959: 54)

Ecumenically defined in this fashion, sense-data could turn out to be identical to parts of the surfaces of material objects, and indeed that is one of the options Moore goes on later to consider. But he also considers two other options, one of which is indirect realism: the sense-datum to which Moore directs the reader’s attention is ‘*not . . . itself* part of the surface of a human hand’ (1959: 55). Suppose that this second option is right: the

¹⁵ This is sometimes cited in support of the (minority) interpretation of Locke as a *direct* realist.

¹⁶ At one point in the *Essay*, Locke (speaking for himself) says that ‘the mind . . . perceives nothing but its own ideas’ (1689/1975: IV. iv. 3). Admittedly, in other places he seems happy to grant that we perceive external things.

object that one might naively have taken to be part of the surface of one's right hand is in fact not part of its surface—moreover, it is not a physical object at all. Once one arrives at this position, it is hard to imagine how one could nonetheless *see part of the surface of one's hand*. This is just an instance of a standard procedure we employ to conclude that we *don't* see such-and-such: visually attend to the best candidate for being such-and-such, and convince yourself that it is not in fact such-and-such.

It does not help to insist that the presence of the sense-datum is caused by the presence of the hand, because seeing a manifestation or effect of *X* is not sufficient for seeing *X*. Seeing a vapour trail in a 'Wilson cloud-chamber' (an example from Austin 1962: 18) is not a way of ('indirectly') seeing an alpha particle—they are far too small to see. A temptation to think otherwise derives from conflating the object and inferential versions of indirect perception, because the cloud-chamber *is* a case of the latter—'we see something from which the existence (or occurrence) of something else can be inferred' (Austin 1962: 17).

Although this objection to indirect realism is floating on the surface of Moore's text, he does not pursue it, raising instead the usual epistemological worry about 'how we can possibly know' anything about the alleged item of which 'this sense-datum is an appearance or manifestation' (1959: 57).

Bennett's 'veil of perception' metaphor, then, is even better than he might have hoped. A veil is not necessarily a veil of ignorance—one might have all sorts of clues as to what lies behind it. But the whole point of a veil is to prevent anyone from *seeing* what lies behind it. The Lockean conception arguably prevents us from knowing that we have hands; the case that it prevents us from *seeing* our hands is even more compelling.

If scepticism is to be anything more than a shallow confusion, its appeal should not be traced to the Lockean conception. Fortunately McDowell does not make that mistake.

13.5. P₁ and Inference-DPA

With the Lockean conception firmly out of the way, let us return to Wright's sceptical argument, and McDowell's claim that we enjoy 'direct perceptual access' to environmental facts, or DPA.

Recall the first premise of the sceptical argument:

P₁. Our external world beliefs are justified by evidence that we are having experiences as if such-and-such.

A sensible (non-Lockean) sceptic will concede that the 'good case' (a situation in which the subject's eyes are working perfectly, her hand is held up in front of her face in broad daylight, etc.) is entirely devoid of sense-data, or anything else that might be 'draped between the subject and the external world'. According to the sensible sceptic, in the good case the subject sees her hand, and is able to refer demonstratively to it

(‘That is a hand’, and the like). But, the sceptic will maintain, these concessions are not in conflict with P_1 . And once P_1 is secured, the sceptic goes on to argue that in the good case the subject’s sensory evidence is not strong enough to support knowledge that she has hands.

Section 13.3 set out the evidence that McDowell’s DPA is (to a first approximation) *inference-DPA*:

Inference-DPA: we are in a position to non-inferentially know external world propositions by perception.

And inference-DPA is incompatible with P_1 , since that premise (on its intended reading) implies that we are only in a position to *inferentially* know facts about the external world, specifically by inference from sensory evidence, for instance that ‘my experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face.’¹⁷ Thus, *pace* Wright (2008: 395), McDowell does not dismiss scepticism by loftily refusing to take it seriously: he directly engages the sceptic’s case, finding fault at the very first step.

Of course, denying a premise of the sceptical argument on the grounds that DPA is true is all very well, but some argument for DPA must be given. McDowell offers a transcendental argument, which he summarizes as follows:

The argument aims to establish that the idea of environmental facts making themselves available to us in perception must be intelligible, because that is a necessary condition for it to be intelligible that experience has a characteristic that is, for purposes of this argument, not in doubt.

The relevant characteristic is that experience purports to be of objective reality. When one undergoes perceptual experience, it at least appears to one as if things in one’s environment are a certain way. (2008: 380)

According to McDowell, if experience purports to be of objective reality, then it follows that DPA is possibly true. And since (we may assume) the sceptic has no objection to the claim that DPA is actually true if it is possibly true, if the transcendental argument succeeds the sceptic’s game is up.

Now, in line with McDowell’s sage assessment of the dialectic mentioned at the start of this paper, the transcendental argument does not attempt to ‘prove that we are not, say, at the mercy of Descartes’s demon . . . without begging questions against someone who urges sceptical doubts.’ However, it comes uncomfortably close. The sensible sceptic will concede that experience *does* purport to be of objective reality, so if the transcendental argument succeeds by her own lights the sceptic will be forced to *withdraw her assertion of* P_1 . Admittedly, she will not be forced to *assert not- P_1* , agree that DPA is actually true, or agree that she has a hand, but if we can show the sceptic without ‘begging questions’ that she has no reason to endorse P_1 that is already impressive enough.

¹⁷ Of course, since DPA implies that we are in a position to know external world propositions, and everyone will concede that if we are in a position to know then we do know, DPA is also incompatible with the *conclusion* of the sceptical argument. So the sceptic will not be impressed, but that is no objection—see below.

McDowell is in danger of not taking his own advice on how best to answer scepticism. It would certainly be interesting if we could undercut one of the sceptic's premises *by her own lights*. But we should not be trying to do *anything* by the sceptic's own lights—we should simply be trying to diagnose the flaw in the sceptical argument. (As Davidson once said in another connection, 'all by our own lights, it goes without saying' (1970: 97).)

Let us then pass over McDowell's ambitious transcendental argument, and see if P1 might be subject to simpler objections.

P1 has certainly enjoyed widespread appeal, as Bennett's endorsement illustrates:

I share with Locke and Berkeley and Hume the belief that one's evidence for what is objectively the case consists in or rests ultimately upon facts about one's own sensory states. (Bennett 1971: 64)

But on slightly closer examination P1 looks considerably less attractive. Consider the elementary empirical observation that small children and many non-human animals have plenty of perceptual knowledge, and that there is little reason to credit them with the conceptual resources necessary to have beliefs about how things perceptually appear.¹⁸ Many 3-year-old children, for instance, despite having copious amounts of perceptual knowledge, show little or no understanding of the distinction between veridical and illusory perception (Flavell 1986).¹⁹ And without beliefs about perceptual appearances, there is no question of any inference from such premises as: 'My experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face.' If some animals and children have perceptual knowledge without inference from premises about experiences, then there is no reason why we should be an exception.²⁰

Reinforcement should not be needed, but anyway it can be supplied by modern computational theories of vision, which are in the business of explaining perceptual knowledge. Marr's classic text *Vision*, for instance, begins by characterizing the topic of the book as 'the process of discovering from images what is present in the world, and where it is... knowing what is where in the world' (1982: 5). And by 'image' Marr means (roughly) photoreceptor activity, not a 'mental image' or anything of that sort. Given such-and-such photoreceptor activity, how does the subject come to know that there is red cube before her? The progress science has made toward answering that question

¹⁸ Of course this point is not new. For instance: 'There is nothing odd in the hypothesis of beings which are aware of objects, but not of their own awareness; it is, indeed, highly probable that young children and the higher animals are such beings' (Russell 1921/95: 93–4). More recently it has been emphasized by Burge (2003).

¹⁹ Chimps might do better than children in this respect (Krachun *et al.* 2009). For critical discussion of this and other relevant experiments on animals, see Lurz 2011: ch. 3.

²⁰ It might be replied that these issues about the psychological reality of inferences are irrelevant to P1, properly interpreted:

The other main ground for rejecting the assumption [of justifying an *inference* based on *sense-experience* or "*the evidence of our senses*"] (Jackson 1977: 151) has been that, as a matter of evident psychological fact, we don't usually form beliefs about how things look and feel and then form beliefs about how they are... It seems to me, however, to carry little epistemological weight. What is at issue is how we *justify* our perceptual beliefs, not how we *arrive* at them.... (Jackson 1977: 152)

is one of the crowning achievements of contemporary cognitive science. In fact, it is probably no exaggeration to say that the kind of human knowledge that is best understood is perceptual (in particular visual) knowledge; knowledge of mathematics, of the unobserved, of one's own mind, and so on, remaining quite poorly understood. And although computational theories of vision lean heavily on something like 'subpersonal inference', they have no place at all for any inference from premises about experiences.

Naturally none of this will impress the sceptic, since she will view any empirical claims about the external world as 'begging questions', but this is irrelevant since we are not trying to impress the sceptic. What's more, none of this will impress McDowell, who thinks there is an important distinction between perceptual knowledge enjoyed by self-aware language-using humans and that enjoyed by those who are not at home in the 'space of reasons', such as bonobos and small children.²¹ But we are not trying to impress McDowell either.

Despite the weight of tradition, P₁ is really not very credible, and no sophisticated transcendental argument is needed to show this. Does this mean that Wright's sceptic should pack up and go home? Not yet.

13.6. A Subtler Sceptical Argument

In fact, P₁ has been under a cloud for some time. Many epistemologists are at pains to distance themselves from the view that one's beliefs about one's environment are the

(Cf. McDowell 2011: 25–6.) However, the issue here is *not* primarily how we *could justify* our perceptual beliefs, but rather how they *are justified*, whether or not we bother to engage in the activity of justifying them. And this means that the genesis of our perceptual beliefs cannot be ignored. Suppose when challenged I justify my belief in P by citing evidence E that in fact supports P; that does not show that my belief in P was justified: perhaps it was not formed on the basis of E, but was instead a lucky guess. (See also n. 2 above.)

²¹ See, in particular, McDowell 2011. There McDowell defends the claim that 'the warrant by virtue of which a belief counts as knowledgeable is accessible to the knower; it is at least potentially known by her ... As Sellars puts it, she occupies a position in the space of being able to justify what one says' (2011: 17). As Burge (2003) complains, that would appear to disbar pre-linguistic children and non-human animals from the club of knowers, yet they surely have much perceptual knowledge, in particular. McDowell responds to Burge's complaint by saying that another account is required for their perceptual knowledge:

giving a special account of the knowledge of rational animals is consistent with regarding perceptual knowledge in rational animals as a sophisticated species of a genus that is also instantiated more primitively in non-rational animals and pre-rational human children ... If our concern is with species, we do not have to restrict ourselves to things that are true of all instances of the genus of which it is a species. (2011: 20–1)

The problem is that this completely fails to counter the complaint in its most powerful form. McDowell rightly says one might give quite *different* accounts of how two sorts of animals, S and S', have feature F. For instance, the accounts of how S and S' are camouflaged might be different: S has the mottled colouring of bark, while S' has the solid colouring of leaves. (Perhaps bark-camouflage is a 'sophisticated species' of the genus *camouflage* 'that is also instantiated more primitively' in animal S'.) But in the case at hand the account of why one animal has feature F *also* appears to apply to the other. The perceptual case is precisely *not* analogous to the camouflage example—we *share* the same basic perceptual apparatus with children and some other primates.

result of an inference from premises about one's experiences. Here is an old example, from Pollock's *Knowledge and Justification*:

we do not *infer* that there is a book before us because we are appeared to bookly—we simply *see* that there is a book before us. (1974: 58)²²

Still, Pollock and many following him think that the traditional view, as expressed by P₁, is essentially right about the epistemological significance of experience. Granted, if I have an experience of a book held up in front of my face and thereby believe that there is a book before me, this may not be the result of inference from a premise about my experience—as a small child, I may have no beliefs about my experience at all. Nonetheless, if there is the appropriate sort of 'transition' from my experience to the belief that there is a book before me, then my belief is justified exactly as it would be if I *had* inferred it from the corresponding piece of evidence about my experience.²³

But if this is correct, then the sceptical argument is reinstated. The sceptic can replace the original premise:

P₁ Our external world beliefs are justified by evidence that we are having experiences as if such-and-such.

with something along the lines of:

P₁' Our external world beliefs are justified *by having* experiences as if such-and-such.

where this is understood to imply that such beliefs are justified exactly as the inferential conception (expressed in P₁) says, even though no inference is needed. Thus the advantage of P₁' over P₁ is that of theft over honest toil: all the epistemic benefits without the bother of inference. The rest of the sceptical argument then proceeds as before. (See also Wright 2002: 341.²⁴) And, again as before, there are three main ways of resisting the argument while conceding the first premise: *explanationism*, *apriorism*, and *dogmatism*, all suitably adjusted to remove any commitment to inference.

²² Other examples include Russell (at any rate going by the quotation in n. 18); Quinton 1973: 190–1; Jackson 1977: 152; Audi 1998: 34; Pryor 2000: 519; Huemer 2001: 55–7, 94–5; White 2006: 534–5. One reason often given (e.g. by Pollock) for doubting that perception involves an inference from a premise about experience is that introspection testifies otherwise for adult humans: 'When I see a book on my desk, my thought is simply, "There is a book"' (1974: 57). Since it is well established that we are quite bad at determining why we believe what we do, this argument is unconvincing. For an example of a contemporary philosopher who appears to hold the inferential conception, see Schiffer 2009: 198 (and also the incredulous reaction in Williamson 2009: 358–9).

²³ Putting Pollock's idea in terms of a counterfactual is only a first approximation (the very act of inference might have side effects that destroy or weaken my justification for believing that there is a book before me), but further precision is not necessary here.

²⁴ Wright has two replies to McDowell, which he does not clearly separate. The first reply is the one given earlier, that direct realism is compatible with P₁. The second reply is essentially the current one, that P₁ can be replaced by P₁', or as Wright has it, 'my warrant for 'Here is a hand' consists in my being in a state which is subjectively indistinguishable from a delusion of a hand' (combining quotations from pp. 343 and 344 of Wright 2002).

Does McDowell have a response to this revised sceptical argument? He does: as argued in the following section, a more accurate rendering of DPA is incompatible with both P_1 and P_1' .

13.7. P_1' and DPA

So far we have interpreted McDowell's DPA, that we enjoy 'direct perceptual access' to environmental facts, as:

Inference-DPA: we are in a position to non-inferentially know external world propositions by perception.

And while Inference-DPA is incompatible with P_1 , the first premise of the simple sceptical argument, it is compatible with the first premise of the subtler sceptical argument:

P_1' . Our external world beliefs are justified *by having* experiences as if such-and-such.

Since DPA is McDowell's only weapon against the sceptic, if DPA = Inference-DPA, then the subtler sceptic has nothing to fear.

In fact, McDowell's DPA is incompatible with P_1' , so the equation 'DPA = Inference-DPA' needs revision. According to P_1' , our external world beliefs are justified *exactly as if* they are the result of inference from (non-entailing) evidence about our experiences: P_1 is right about that, but wrong that an actual inference is involved. So a proponent of P_1' (or P_1) will agree with Burge that '[i]t is a fundamental feature of perceptual *warrant* . . . that it allows that an individual can be fooled while retaining warrant' (2003: 536). In a 'bad case', a situation in which the perceiver suffers an illusion or hallucination, with a consequent false perceptual belief, the perceiver has an experience as if such-and-such, just as she does in the corresponding good case. If P_1' is true, her belief is justified exactly as it is in the good case. However, McDowell explicitly rejects Burge's assumption (2011: 30), and so denies P_1' .

On McDowell's view, in the good case one knows by perception that, say, there is a red cube in front of one. But there is no corresponding bad case in which one's perceptual belief that there is a red cube in front of one is justified. (No doubt one's belief in bad cases is *blameless*, but that is quite a different matter.) As we can put it: in the good case, one's justification for believing that there is a red cube before one is *conclusive*.

On the alternative Burgean view, on which one's justification is *inconclusive*, some bad cases are like the predicament of an unlucky detective—at least as characterized by orthodoxy about justification. In the 'good case', the detective knows that OJ is the murderer on the basis of compelling evidence: motive, opportunity, bloodstained clothing, and so on. In the 'bad case', the unlucky detective's evidence is misleading: OJ was framed. Still, in the bad case (as orthodoxy has it) the detective's belief is justified exactly as it is in the good case.

A better approximation to McDowell's DPA, then, is the conjunction of Inference-DPA and:

Conclusive-justification: Our justification for (some) external world beliefs is *conclusive*.²⁵

So, given that DPA = Inference-DPA and Conclusive-justification, McDowell denies P1' just as he denied P1: the falsity of both follows from DPA. But without hoeing the hard row—defending McDowell's transcendental argument for DPA—what's wrong with P1'?

P1' marks a curious turn in epistemology, which may be traced to the influential chapter 3 of Pollock's *Knowledge and Justification*. In that chapter Pollock, after dispatching alternative positions, arrives at the conclusion that:

... statements about the way things appear to us constitute prima facie reasons for judgements about how they are. For example, 'I am appeared to redly' constitutes a prima facie reason for me to believe that there is something red before me. (Pollock 1974: 57)²⁶

So, if someone realizes that she is being 'appeared to redly' and thereby concludes that there is something red before her, then (absent any reason for thinking otherwise) her belief is justified. Pollock then notes an immediate problem:

[I]t is simply false that in making perceptual judgments we generally have any beliefs at all about the way things appear to us ... (1974: 57; see also the quotation in the previous section)

According to Pollock, the 'above difficulty' has a simple solution:

Rather than say that it is my *thinking* that I am appeared to redly which justifies me in thinking that there is something red before me, why not simply say that it is my *being* appeared to redly that constitutes the prima facie reason? (1974: 59)

Pollock is in effect suggesting:

1. If one justifiably believes that p by inference from the evidence that one has an experience as if p, then a suitable non-inferential causal connection between the experience and the belief would also yield an equally-well justified belief that p.

(1) is an instance of a more general claim:

2. If one justifiably believes that p by inference from (causally efficacious) evidence E, then a suitable non-inferential causal connection between E and the belief would also yield an equally-well justified belief that p.

Pollock defends (a close enough approximation to) (2) on the basis of examples such as the following. I believe that my dog is ill because he has a glazed look in his eye.

²⁵ Note that Conclusive-justification and Inference-DPA are independent. Clearly Inference-DPA does not entail Conclusive-justification. To see the converse fails, suppose one knows external world propositions by inference from a premise concerning one's *factive* mental state (say, that one sees that one has a hand). Under this supposition Conclusive-justification is true, but Inference-DPA is false.

²⁶ Although this passage implausibly says that *statements* constitute reasons, Pollock actually thinks reasons are facts or—in a variant way of talking he finds preferable—true beliefs (1974: 33).

‘[M]y reason for thinking he is ill is that he has a glazed look in his eye, but as I did not consciously note the latter, I did not have the belief that he has a glazed look in his eye’ (1974: 60). Nonetheless my belief that my dog is ill is justified, as it would have been had it been the result of inference from the evidence that my dog has a glazed look. That my dog has a glazed look is, in Pollock’s terminology, my ‘implicit reason’ for believing that my dog is ill.

Why is the causal connection in (2) qualified by ‘suitable’? Without the qualification, there will be counterexamples of the general sort familiar from the literature on reliabilism.²⁷ Pollock alludes briefly to this sort of difficulty: he attempts to finesse it by ‘restricting the [causal] connections allowed to those ‘ordinary psychological causes’ that are normally involved in what philosophers have frequently called “unconscious reasoning”’ (1974: 63).

The efficacy of this restriction is debatable, but the main problem lies elsewhere. Pollock has given no reason why the ‘ordinary psychological causes’ at work in the example of the dog do *not* include the belief (or knowledge) that the dog has a glazed look in his eye. All he says is that ‘on a conscious level I was previously unaware of the glazed look’, which would seem to make room for the idea that he *was* aware of the glazed look (that is, did notice that the dog had a glazed look in his eye), albeit not ‘on a conscious level.’ Pollock seems to be relying on an overly restricted conception of belief: if ‘I cannot even articulate the implicit reason’ (1974: 64) for believing such-and-such, or if the ‘implicit reason’ was not ‘on a conscious level’, then I did not believe the implicit reason.

Further, none of Pollock’s examples is of any help in showing how small children or animals who lack beliefs about experiences might nonetheless come to know about their environment.²⁸ As Pollock himself notes, one element that is common to his examples is that ‘the circumstances . . . were such that I *could* have justifiably believed [E]’ (1974: 61). Since recognizing that a dog has a glazed look might well not be beyond the capacity of children (or dogs, come to that), consider another of Pollock’s examples. ‘I may believe that A dislikes B. I may be . . . quite right, and yet be unable to cite any particular reason for believing it’ (1974: 60). Suppose my reason consists in certain ‘behavioral cues’ (1974: 61) which specifically concern *linguistic* behaviour—subtle verbal put-downs, and so forth. No one would expect a pre-linguistic child to be able to know that A dislikes B on this basis.

At least going by Pollock’s discussion, (2) is remarkably ill-motivated. Since P1’ rests on (2), that premise is also unsupported. What’s more, it faces a serious objection.

²⁷ For instance: my dog has virus V, which causes both illness and tail-wagging. Case 1: I believe (and in fact know) he is ill by inference from the evidence (E) that he has virus V. Case 2: my dog’s wagging tail hypnotizes me, one effect of which is that I become delusional and believe my dog is ill. Since E causes tail-wagging, E causes my unjustified belief.

²⁸ This is perhaps no great surprise, given that accommodating the perceptual knowledge of animals and children is not Pollock’s motivation—see n. 22.

Remember that the sensible sceptic concedes that in the good case one is able to refer demonstratively to objects like hands, and to think singular thoughts about them ('That hand is large', and the like). If perception allows one to know that *there are* hands, it allows one to know that here is *this* hand. Indeed, it is natural to think that the singular case is primary: at least typically, one knows that there are hands because this is a trivial consequence of something else one knows, namely that here is *this* hand. According to P1', my belief that here is *this* hand is justified to the extent it would be if I had inferred it from evidence about my experiences, for instance that 'my experience is in all respects as of a hand held up in front of my face'. The sceptic assumes that such evidence, including any supplementary premises that I might appeal to (for instance about the reliability of sense perception), is entirely general, at least with respect to material objects like hands. That is, if *h* is my left hand, my evidence does not entail the existence of *h*. But it is quite unclear how entirely *h*-free evidence—moreover, evidence that does not entail the existence of *any* particular material object—could nonetheless be *evidence for* a proposition concerning *h*, this very hand. (This objection, of course, applies equally well to P1.)²⁹

It would be a mistake to view this point as more grist for the sceptic's mill, providing a quicker route to scepticism by bypassing the rest of the argument. Any interesting sceptical argument proceeds by leading us gradually down the garden path by a series of apparently irresistible steps. P1', accordingly, should be a *plausible thesis about perceptual justification*, akin to the thesis that facts about the observed are our evidence for propositions about the unobserved in an argument for Humean scepticism about induction. At least on the face of it, P1' is not at all plausible.

We have considered two versions of Wright's sceptical argument, and found that McDowell denies the first premise of each. And arguments were given for thinking that McDowell is right: the first premise of each argument is false. However, the arguments are not McDowell's: the case against P1 and P1' did not appeal to DPA. Does this mean that McDowell is right for the wrong reasons? Is the song and dance about 'direct perceptual access' frictionless spinning in the void? As the next section argues, it isn't.

²⁹ Not surprisingly, there is a variety of escape-routes; the problem is finding some independent motivation for escaping. For instance, one might claim that my experiences do justify me in believing, say, that *h* has five fingers, but that this is not a strange asymmetry because it also justifies me in believing similar propositions about all objects distinct from *h*: *h'*, *h''*, ... Although I am justified *in* believing these propositions (I have 'propositional' justification for them), for numerous such objects *x* I will not even grasp the proposition that *x* has five fingers; the justification I have for believing *in* these propositions I cannot grasp is therefore idle. (For this suggestion applied to 'water' and other natural-kind terms, see Audi 2001; Smithies 2006: 27–8; for criticism of Audi, see Williamson 2007; for Audi's reply see Audi 2007.) The problem in the case of singular beliefs is even more acute than the natural kind case. According to the proposal, I have justification for the proposition that *h'''*, my left foot, with which I am well acquainted, has five fingers; clearly I have no such justification. Cf. Williamson 2007: 109–10.

Alternatively, one might deny that I am justified in believing the proposition that *h* has five fingers, trading it in for some surrogate that I am supposedly justified in believing, for instance the proposition that the object that is (actually) causing me to have an experience as of a five-fingered hand has five fingers (cf. Searle 1983: 47–8); among other problems, this suggestion apparently leaves animals and small children by the way-side, since they presumably do not entertain thoughts about the causation of experiences.

13.8. DPA Revisited

DPA, recall, is the conjunction of:

Inference-DPA: we are in a position to non-inferentially know external world propositions by perception.

And:

Conclusive-justification: Our justification for (some) external world beliefs is *conclusive*.

An argument for the first conjunct has in effect already been presented, in Section 13.5. If small children and other animals are in a position to have non-inferential perceptual knowledge, so are we. What about the second conjunct?

Consider a situation in which one sees a moving ball and thereby comes to know that *this ball* is moving; granted that knowledge entails justification, one is justified in believing that this ball is moving. For simplicity suppose one has never seen the ball before and has no prior beliefs about it. We may suppose that, according to Conclusive-justification, this good case is such that one is not justified in any corresponding bad case.

Consider, then, a corresponding bad case, in which the ball is not moving but just appears that way, exactly as it does in the good case. Is one justified in this bad case? To judge by the diverse answers to this question in the literature, the issue is not at all clear. Some of an internalist bent say that merely having the experience is sufficient for justification. Those with more externalist sympathies say that further conditions must obtain: that one's belief is the result of a reliable process, or something along related lines. And yet others agree with McDowell.

Of course there are (relatively) uncontroversial examples of justification without knowledge, like the unlucky detective mentioned back in Section 13.7. But once Inference-DPA is accepted, these examples cannot be appealed to by opponents of Conclusive-justification, because they all involve inference. If non-inferential perceptual beliefs can be justified without amounting to knowledge, that must stem from features unique to perception; isolating such features is evidently far from straightforward.

It is hardly satisfactory, then, merely to *assert* that Conclusive-justification is false: some argument must be given. Further, one needs to adjudicate between the internalist and externalist ways of denying it, likely getting embroiled in dubious reductive claims about justification along the way. If Conclusive-justification is true, these vexing burdens are lifted; in that respect, McDowell's view is certainly the simplest. Pending an argument against Conclusive-justification, it is arguably the default position.

Perhaps the clearest line of argument against Conclusive-justification is Pollock's argument for P_1' , discussed in Section 13.7. That argument was found wanting, as was P_1' itself, but since Pollock's view in one form or another enjoys considerable popularity, it is worth examining further.

Suppose, then, that one's non-inferential belief that this ball is moving is justified 'as if' it is the result of inference from non-entailing evidence about one's present experience, perhaps in conjunction with evidence about the reliability of one's perceptual systems, or facts about experiences one has had in the past. What experience? An experience as of *a* moving ball? Then (to repeat the objection at the end of Section 13.7) there would be no explanation of how one is justified in believing a singular proposition concerning this particular ball. Whatever experience does the explaining, it must be an 'object-dependent' experience, the having of which requires the existence of this particular ball, but does not require that this ball be moving. The obvious candidate is this: an experience as if *this ball* is moving, or, in more colloquial terms, this ball's *looking* (or *appearing*) to be moving to one. Generalized, the suggestion is:

P1''. Our external world beliefs are justified by having experiences that are sometimes *object-dependent*, for instance experiences as if *x* is so-and-so.

('Justified by having' should be interpreted as in P1'—see Section 13.6. P1'' should be read, like P1 and P1', as compatible with versions of dogmatism, apriorism, and explanationism.)

Although McDowell rejects P1'', in reaching it we have already moved some considerable distance towards his own position. According to the earlier two premises P1 and P1', the epistemically relevant kinds of experiences are those that do not entail the existence of particular objects. With the common assumption that a brain in a vat enjoys the full range of experiences of this general sort, these two premises imply that a brain in a vat is justified in believing that he has hands, like his unvattd counterpart. In holding Conclusive-justification, McDowell denies this conclusion, as does a proponent of P1'': brains in vats lack object-dependent experiences, hence are not justified in believing singular propositions.

Return to the example of the ball. One believes that this ball is moving as a causal upshot of how the ball looks, although this is not the result of an inference. According to P1'', one's belief is justified as if one had inferred it from the evidence that this ball looks or appears to be moving. But what is it for one to 'have evidence' that this ball appears to be moving? There is no accepted answer to that question. In order to give the defender of P1'' the maximum amount of rope, let us assume that to have E in one's body of evidence is to be in an exemplary epistemic position with respect to E, specifically to *know* E. (Thus for the sake of the argument we are temporarily assuming half of Williamson's 'E = K' thesis (2000: ch. 9): if E is part of one's evidence then one knows E.) One's belief that this ball is moving is then justified to the extent it would have been had one inferred it from the known premise that this ball looks (to one) to be moving.

Now consider a third-person version of the example of the ball. One learns (hence knows) that this ball looks to be moving to some animal. Suppose that one doesn't know *anything* about the veridicality of motion perception. Is the fact that the ball looks to be moving to some animal good evidence for the proposition that this ball *is* moving? Surely not. (Neither is it good evidence for the weaker proposition that *a* ball

is moving.) To believe that this ball is moving on such a slender basis would be to take a stab in the dark.

The situation would be somewhat improved if one knew a priori (perhaps on Davidsonian charity-based grounds) that ‘most perceptions are veridical’—but not improved enough. The extra knowledge might make it *likely* that the ball was moving, but it would be going beyond the evidence to flatly believe that it is.

Would it help to multiply the evidence concerning how things appear to a particular animal? Suppose one additionally learns that before this ball looked to be moving, a cube looked to be stationary, and then looked to be hit by another ball, and so forth. *Perhaps* one could know the general shape of the animal’s environment—that it contains moving bodies, and the like—by an inference to the best explanation of this evidence. *Perhaps* the hypothesis that this ball is moving is even a plausible hypothesis, but the possibility that the animal’s perceptual system was malfunctioning on this occasion can hardly be ruled out. (Note that in order for this third-person example to be a good parallel for the perceptual case, background evidence should be kept to a minimum. One does not have evidence that directly concerns the workings of the animal, nor for that matter does one know anything science might deliver about the nature of its environment.)

What if the two previous strategies—apriorism and explanationism—were combined? Arguably that still doesn’t secure knowledge that this ball is moving. An analogy: one knows that an ancient text is a largely accurate report of a riot in a marketplace in Samarra. No matter how coherent the text, one’s evidence does not allow one to know specific details, for instance that a basket of dates was overturned, or that Hasan’s eggs were stolen.

This complaint against the combined strategy is not decisive, at least not without a more lengthy discussion. But apriorism and explanationism face more serious difficulties. Recall the objection to P1 in Section 13.5, that it did not make room for the perceptual knowledge of languageless animals and small children. On the dogmatist view, the solution to this problem is to switch to a non-inferential transition between the experience and the corresponding belief. This can seem harmless, because it is not obviously objectionable to suppose that a non-inferential transition between an experience as if p and the belief that p takes place in animals and children. But on apriorism and explanationism, there are further inferences to be dispensed with—either from non-sensory evidence or from other sensory evidence concerning one’s past experiences. It is not credible to suppose that the necessary non-inferential transitions take place in animals and children. Hence once the inferential picture has been dispatched, apriorism and explanationism have too.

So far, we have been considering a third-person variant of the example of the ball: one knows that this ball looks to be moving to some animal. The first-person case is of course the one that is of primary interest. But what difference does it make if the animal in question is known to be oneself? None: egocentrism is no more plausible in epistemology than elsewhere.

The upshot is this. P_1'' makes partial scepticism hard to resist: we may know something about the external world, but many particular facts—that this ball is moving, say—are beyond our ken. A fortiori, P_1 or P_1' also leads to partial scepticism. (This insight may be credited to McDowell. As he says, commenting specifically on the dogmatism of Pryor 2000, ‘it is hard to see how dogmatism genuinely contrasts with giving in to scepticism’ (2011: 54).)

If an account of justification leads to partial scepticism, it should be rejected—especially if there are alternatives that do not have this consequence. The influential approach to perceptual justification originating in Pollock is therefore no serious alternative to Conclusive-justification. There may be other reasons for rejecting Conclusive-justification, but they hardly leap out of the literature. Conclusive-justification is at least a good working hypothesis.

That completes the prima facie case for DPA.³⁰ Although the arguments against P_1 and P_1' did not employ it, they might as well have. Uncovering the principal defects in sceptical arguments is also to make it plausible that we enjoy ‘direct perceptual access’ to facts about our environment.³¹

A final note. As may be apparent from earlier quotations, McDowell’s official picture of perception goes much further than DPA. He in effect adopts a revision of P_1'' , on which our justification consists in (in his preferred terminology) ‘seeing that p ’. This is compatible with Conclusive-justification because, as McDowell emphasizes, what constitutes our justification is *factive*: if one sees that p then p . Whether these additions to DPA are correct cannot be examined here.³² But for the purposes of bucking a strong trend in contemporary epistemology, DPA will do.

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³⁰ Now DPA is fully in view it should be clear that Williamson 2000 also accepts it.

³¹ So McDowell would deny that in Wright’s barn example (see Section 13.2 above) Wright has direct perceptual access to the fact that there is a barn up the road, assuming that Wright is not in a position to know this. See McDowell 2011: 45–6.

³² For helpful discussion see Pritchard 2008. One immediate problem is understanding what McDowell means by ‘ S sees that p ’. An attractive view is that it entails ‘ S knows that p ’ (Warnock 1954; Williamson 2000: ch. 1) but McDowell denies this. He also denies that it entails ‘ S believes that p ’ (McDowell 2007: 277–8).

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