

Resisting the Disenchantment of Nature: McDowell and the Question of Animal Minds

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Carl B. Sachs
csachs@marymount.edu

Abstract: McDowell's contributions to epistemology and philosophy of mind turn centrally on his defense of the Aristotelian concept of a "rational animal." I argue here that clarification of how McDowell uses this concept can make more explicit his distance from Davidson regarding the nature of the minds of non-rational animals. Close examination of his responses to Davidson and to Dennett shows that McDowell is implicitly committed to avoiding the following 'false trichotomy': that animals are not bearers of semantic content at all, that they are bearers of content in the same sense that we are, and that they are bearer of "as if" content. To avoid the false trichotomy requires that we understand non-rational animals as having concepts but not as making judgments. Furthermore, we need to supplement McDowell's distinction between the logical spaces of reasons and of the realm of law with what Finkelstein calls 'the logical space of animate life'. Though McDowell has taken some recent steps to embrace a view like this, I urge a more demanding conception than what McDowell has thus far suggested. (177 words)

0. Introduction

In a cultural landscape dominated by scientific and technological manipulation of the natural world, the question of our similarities and differences between us and other animals has taken on increasingly more significant ethical and political dimensions. At the same time, the traditional conception of human uniqueness seems increasingly imperiled by every new discovery in paleontology, genetics, and cognitive ethology. In face of this trend, John McDowell has emerged as an eloquent voice in contemporary philosophy for his defense of the idea that normal mature human beings are “rational animals,” even going far as to insist on “the *traditional* separation of mature human beings, as rational animals, from the rest of the animal kingdom” (McDowell 2007a, 338; emphasis mine); the rest of the animal kingdom lacks our distinctive “responsiveness to reasons *as such*” (McDowell 2009a, 128; emphasis original).¹ At the same time, however, McDowell has addressed a theme of central importance to many cultural critics (and Continental philosophers): the critique of the “disenchantment of nature” (*M&W* 70-2).²

Due to his emphasis on the traditional separation, McDowell seems to be poised on the slippery slope towards the Cartesian view that animals lack mentality as such, despite his best efforts to forestall this interpretation. The present essay is intended as a sympathetic interpretation of McDowell’s views on the differences between sapient and

¹ For the emphasis on “responsiveness to reasons *as such*,” see McDowell (2009a, 128ff); see also McDowell’s response to Lovibond (Lindgaard 2009, 234-8).

² For further elaboration of this aspect of McDowell’s work, see Bernstein (2002), who brings McDowell into conversation with Adorno.

sentient animal life, to indicate those points where McDowell's view stands in need of clarification, and to situate this view in terms of what I will call "naturalized transcendental philosophy." We require a conception with correct emphases and nuances for reconciling our continuity with the other animals with the equally apparent discontinuity. This need can be met if skillful perceiving of and movement in an environment is a necessary condition for the possibility of having a world in view. Taking this view on board is necessary for a more adequate, though not perhaps complete, resistance to the disenchantment of nature, however much the resulting view differs from McDowell's.

I begin by considering how McDowell understands what it is to be a rational *animal*. Here I shall emphasize a subtle but important difference between Davidson and McDowell on the nature of animal life (1). I then turn to some of McDowell's views on animal life in order to show that McDowell is implicitly committed to avoiding a false trichotomy (2). Nothing short of making explicit a different kind of logical space, a 'logical space of sentient life' as such, will satisfy McDowell's implicit requirements, although McDowell himself has recently moved in this direction (3). I conclude by arguing that nothing short of fully embracing this conception will satisfy the demand that we resist the disenchantment of nature (4).

1. McDowell and Davidson on Animal Life

Beginning at least with *Mind and World* (1996), McDowell has argued that we need to avoid thinking of nature and reason so as to conclude that "an animal endowed with reason would be metaphysically split" (108). The alternative amounts, in a

“postlapsarian or knowing counterpart of Aristotle’s innocence” (109), to understanding how an animal could be endowed with reason. The “postlapsarian counterpart” is necessary because Aristotle is entirely innocent of the modern diremption between reason and nature. In contrast, McDowell embraces the signature thought of self-consciously modern philosophy; as he puts it, “the structure of the space of reasons is *sui generis*, in comparison with the organization of the realm of law” (108-9).

McDowell uses the Aristotelian idea that “normal mature human beings are rational animals” (108) in order to reconcile nature, now construed as including but also broader than the modern conception of nature that identifies nature with the realm of natural law, with a Kantian conception of reason as the standing obligation to reflect upon the relation between experience and world-view, and to act under the idea of freedom.

With a broader conception of nature than a system of laws, we can revive, within an explicitly modern conception both of nature and of reason, the Aristotelian conception of a rational animal. By doing so, “[w]e can conceive exercises of capacities that belong to spontaneity as elements in the course of a life. An experiencing and acting subject is a living thing, with active and passive bodily powers that are genuinely her own; she is herself embodied, substantially present in the world that she experiences and acts on” (111). In other words, the concept of a rational animal is that a mature, normal human being is a *part* of the world that also experiences the world *as a world*. In that way, McDowell contends, we can accept Kant’s insights into the importance of spontaneity in our self-understanding without any residua of the Cartesian ontological Real Distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*.

The importance of rational animality can also be brought more clearly into view through a comparison of McDowell and Davidson. Davidson has also contributed to showing how to reject the substantial conception of mindedness as *res cogitans*, of the methodological priority of the *cogito*, and to think of ourselves as “rational animals” (e.g. Davidson 2001a). Yet there is a subtle difference between McDowell and Davidson in their respective understandings of animal life. If, as has been argued, Davidson holds a fundamentally disenchanted conception of animal life, then McDowell’s attempt to resist the disenchantment of nature requires a serious divergence from Davidson, despite his profound debts to Davidson.³ If we aim at resisting the disenchantment of nature, as McDowell claims to do, then we must reject Davidson’s conception of animal life as a hold-over from the Real Distinction that frames the modern understanding of nature and reason.

On Davidson’s account, to say that something has beliefs and desires is to draw upon the vocabulary of intentional ascriptions. This vocabulary differs from the physico-chemical vocabulary by virtue of being governed by “the norm of rationality” (Davidson 1980; 2004). Consequently, Davidson argues that non-rational animals cannot be regarded as bearers of the sorts of intentional states expressed in propositional attitudes. Consider Davidson’s conception of non-rational animals in his “triangulation argument.” The triangulation argument (see e.g. Davidson (2001b)), holds that the attribution of propositional attitudes to a creature requires two individually necessary conditions of possibility. One is a continuous and coherent pattern of coordinated responses between two (or more) creatures and objects which both creatures find

³ See “Davidson in Context” (in McDowell 1996); see also “Scheme-Content and Empiricism” (reprinted as McDowell 2009b) and “The Constitutive Ideal of Rationality: Davidson and Sellars” (reprinted as McDowell 2009c).

motivationally salient. Without the triangulation between the creatures and their world, the concept of objectivity, and so of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, cannot even emerge. The other necessary condition is a public language. In the absence of triangulation and language, we would not even be able to determine what “the cause” is of an animal’s behavior – it could be the object, it could be the triggering of sensory receptors – or, for that matter, anything between the distal object and proximate receptors. But if the contents of propositional attitudes are determined by their causes, then in the absence of a reliable way of determining cause, then there is no way to individuate propositional attitudes, either. Accordingly, Davidson concludes that we must deny that non-linguistic animals have beliefs or desires *at all* (Davidson 2001a).

The contrast between Davidson and McDowell can be deepened by taking seriously an objection against Davidson raised Bridges (2006). Bridges argues that the very need for triangulation arises from worries about “the ambiguity of the concept of cause” (Davidson 2001b, 129) in our explanations of animal behavior. But these worries arise only because Davidson deprives himself of what Bridges calls “our ordinary conception of animal life” (Bridges 2006, 310). This conception draws upon our everyday lived encounters with animal others, as beings that have needs and interests whose relations with us and with each other can be valuable to them as well as to us. The ordinary conception of animal life, grounded in the form of life that we as animals share with the others, allows us to avoid having “to choose between Davidson’s bare vision of an animal driven to and fro by undifferentiated causal sequences passing through its body, and the sentimental pet owner’s view of an animal as a full-fledged thinker and agent who just happens to be unusually taciturn” (311). Without this “ordinary” conception,

Davidson deprives himself of distinction between seeing something *as* an animal and seeing something *as* a physico-chemical occupant of a region of space-time. As

Finkelstein (2007) puts the objection:

In order for Davidson's problem – we might call it the problem of “stimulus determination” – to get a grip on us, we have to view animals and human beings merely as potential *responders*, not as *hunters* or *chasers*. We mustn't help ourselves to the concept of hunting or chasing. And the point extends beyond *hunting* and *chasing* to, for example, such concepts as *fleeing*, *eating*, *mating*, *feeding*, *caring for*, and *playing*. ... one thing that must not be taken for granted if the problem of stimulus determination – the problem to which triangulation is meant as a solution – is to seem gripping in the first place: that people and animals have *lives*. ... whereas Davidson's triangulation theory *requires*, in effect, that we consider the behavior of animals and human beings as *lifeless*. (267; emphasis original).

On the Bridges-Finkelstein view, Davidson accepts an epistemological version of the Real Distinction: the modern bifurcation between the realm of physico-chemical laws and the space of beliefs and desires. The impact of objects on our sensory surfaces certainly *causes* beliefs and desires, but Davidson does not understand the relation between mind and world as anything other than a *merely* causal relation. Now, it is well-understood that the Real Distinction turns out, on Davidson's view, to be *only* epistemological – a distinction between types of explanation – and as such is intended to be ontologically innocuous.⁴ But even a de-ontologized, merely epistemological

⁴ See Rorty (1991) on why Davidsonian anomalous monism is ontologically innocuous.

version of the Real Distinction fails to acknowledge the force of our ordinary conception of animal life. I agree with Davidson and McDowell that we should not collapse one side of the epistemological Real Distinction into the other. (One way of putting my thought here is that we need *many more epistemological Real Distinctions* than the single bifurcation that we have inherited from the dawn of modern science.)

In contrast with Davidson, McDowell rightly holds that we cannot understand animals, let alone normal mature human beings, without the concept of *having a life*. Indeed, it is because we can understand the concept of having a life, in the case of non-rational animals, that we can understand ourselves as rational animals whose “lives are patterned in ways that are recognizable only in an inquiry framed within the space of reasons. ... we can see thinking and knowing as belonging to our mode of living ... [and as] part of our way of being animals” (McDowell 2004, 95). Only because animals have mental lives *at all*, in the sense that Davidson has little choice but to deny, can we see rational animals as having the *particular sort* of mental lives in which the exercise of rational capacities figures centrally, and which makes the mental life of rational animals qualitatively different from the mental life of non-rational animals. I shall pursue this line of thought in two directions: negatively, by showing that McDowell is committed to avoiding a false trichotomy with respect to animal minds, and positively, by showing what is needed in order to make a home for a correct view of animal minds.

2. Avoiding a False Trichotomy

In construing animal life, McDowell implicitly acknowledges the need to avoid the following false trichotomy:

- a) denying that sentient animals have any mental life whatsoever, i.e. non-rational animals cannot be construed as anything other than mere automata.
- b) ascribing full-blown judgments to animals, identical in content to our own – thus, when I see a door and a cat sees a door, the same content – *that this is a door* – must be ascribed to both of us;
- c) ascribing judgments to animals, but only in an “as if” or “analogical” fashion, so that the semantic content of animal life turns out to be something of a convenient fiction;

McDowell’s rejection of (b) so prominent that his rejection of (a) and of (c) is often glossed over. Yet the avoidance of all three prongs can be clearly and consistently located throughout his work. Consider, for example, his review of Davidson’s *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*:

I do not want to join those who think, against Davidson, that creatures without language have a subjective orientation towards objective reality, at any rate in the interesting sense that gives rise to the familiar problems of epistemology. In general I find Davidson’s human chauvinism on this question perfectly congenial. (McDowell 2009d, 153)

Whatever ought to be said about non-rational animals, it should seem uncontroversial that they cannot be regarded as having the capacity to distinguish between subjective perceptual intake and the objective world which confronts them – that is, we should reject (b). Following this point, however, McDowell continues:

(Though I wish he would say more about how we should talk about brutes, who are, as he concedes (pp. 101-2), much more like us than they are like guided missiles.

We need more than just the insistence, which I applaud, that our ways of understanding brutes differ crucially from our ways of understanding ourselves and one another. We need a positive line about our ways of understanding brutes, and it is not satisfying to suggest that crediting them with intelligent engagements with their environment is just a convenience, called for only by the fact that we lack detailed knowledge about their internal control machinery.) (ibid., 153-4)

McDowell acknowledges our need for a way to talk about the sort of intelligibility which we discover in animal life, an intelligibility which is irreducible to neuroscientific facts. In short, we need to find a way of rejecting (a) and (b) without, as Davidson seems to, opening the door to (c). It is the entire trichotomy which must be rejected.

Consider how McDowell acknowledges (but also, he would say, corrects) Dennett's use of the distinction between what we say about semantic content at the personal and sub-personal levels:

The fact that there is this perfectly intelligible interplay between what we decide we can correctly say, in content-involving terms, about frogs, on the one hand, and the detail of a content-involving (information-processing) account of the inner workings of the parts of frogs, is no reason to mix the two stories together. ...

What is more, the involvement of content here, and only here, is literal; underneath the metaphor of the environment telling the frog things, we have the literal truth that the frog becomes informed of things. Whereas the content-

involving truth at the “sub-personal” level is irreducibly metaphorical. (McDowell 1998a, 349)

McDowell transforms Dennett’s distinction between “personal” and “sub-personal” content into a distinction between two senses of ‘content’: a literal sense and a metaphorical sense. When we talk about information-processing at computational-neurobiological level (“what the frog’s eye tells the frog’s brain”), we talk *metaphorically*: retinal cells do not literally talk to cells in the optic lobe, because cells are just not the sorts of things that can talk. We find convenient to speak in this way about neurophysiological events, in roughly the same way that evolutionary theorists find it convenient to talk about adaptive purposes, as convenient shorthand for claims that could in principle be replaced, without explanatory loss, by testable hypotheses about differential fecundity and/or mortality.

Yet McDowell argues that when we talk about what is going on at the “froggy” level, we speak *literally*, not metaphorically: “In short, in Dennett’s own memorable and exactly right phrase, the system is a syntactic engine, not a semantic engine. The same goes for its parts. Animals, by contrast, are semantic engines ... they become informed ... [t]he background against which this makes sense is their competent inhabiting of their environment” (ibid., 351). Whereas sub-personal content is merely “as if” content, personal content is *not* “as if” content. The frog’s brain is, like ours, a syntactic engine; the frog itself, like us, is a semantic engine. Though McDowell puts scare-quotes around “sub-personal”, he does so because “there are no persons around in contrast with whom we can mark the standard distinction” (ibid., 347). Sub-creaturely content is ‘as if’ content, but creaturely content is genuine content, however distinct from the content of

rational animals. In other words: if McDowell had spoken of *sub-creaturely* instead of *sub-personal* content, he would have had no need for scare-quotes at all.

Now, in characterizing animals as non-rational, McDowell means only that we “cannot construe them as continually reshaping a world-view in rational response to the deliverances of experience” and so they cannot be seen as “subjects who are in charge of their thinking, standing ready to reassess what is a reason for what, and to change their responsive propensities according” (McDowell 1996, 114). It follows that animals do not have “outer experience” *in the sense that we do*, which is to say, in the Kantian sense; conversely, animals thus construed cannot have “inner experience” in the Kantian sense, either. Neither subjectivity nor objectivity can come into view for them, at least not in the rich sense that matters for McDowell. But what exactly are we denying to animals once we allow for the common-sense insistence that animals “can be, in their ways, clever, resourceful, inquisitive, friendly, and so forth” (ibid., 182)? To describe animals in this way clearly invokes the vocabulary of mental life. We need to make philosophical room for our ordinary articulation of how to think of animals as having rich cognitive (and affective) lives without being obliged to consider them as subjects in the full-blooded sense.⁵

It is mere prejudice, inherited from the Real Distinction (whether ontological, as in Descartes, or epistemological, as in Davidson), which prevents us from regarding animals as semantic engines, bearers of content. The difficulty lies in articulating the difference between the kind of content we attribute to animals as perceivers of

⁵ McDowell’s understanding of this “full-blooded sense” would need to be explicated in terms of how he draws from many philosophers, but esp. Sellars and Gadamer. For the purposes of this paper, I must put in the background how Sellars and Gadamer shape McDowell’s conception of rationality and of personhood, though these philosophers are crucial for how I understand McDowell.

environments and the kind of content we attribute to ourselves as “having the world in view”. One approach is to say that whereas non-rational animals *perceive* and *act*, they do not *make perceptual judgments* or *perform actions*. The capacity to form perceptual judgments is just what happens when conceptual capacities, in the demanding sense that interests McDowell, are actualized in sensory consciousness. While resisting the disenchantment of nature requires rejecting the epistemological Real Distinction, we are not thereby committed to rejecting the distinction between the content of mere semantic engines and the content of rational semantic engines.

At this point it is helpful to clarify the McDowellian view in response to objections raised by Gaskin (2006). Gaskin objects that, while it is true that

[Animals and infants] do not themselves possess the conceptual capacities which are actualized in their sensory consciousness, but there is another route which they can exploit to achieving the needed actualization of conceptual capacities in their sensory consciousness. For infants and animals can benefit (transcendentally) from the fact that we mature human subjects possess the requisite conceptual capacities: *our* conceptual capacities are actualized in *their* sensory consciousness. ... from the fact that a subject’s mental state *constitutively involves* the actualization of conceptual capacities in that subject’s sensory consciousness, it does not follow that the subject in question must *itself have* those conceptual capacities. (138-9)

In other words, Gaskin sees no reason why we cannot unproblematically ascribe to animals and infants the same content that we routinely ascribe to ourselves; when we say that an infant or dog is in pain, the content of its experience is what we would ascribe to

ourselves: that what it feels is a pain. As it stands, this view seems to misunderstand a crucial difference between rational and non-rational animals. If we dissolve the philosophical prejudices that stand in the way of seeing non-rational animals as perceivers in their environment, then there are things that show up to them as things perceived (as ‘perceiveds’). We, with the demanding sorts of conceptual capacities that distinguish sapience from sentience, can of course *judge* that the things which can appear to non-rational as perceiveds are *also* available for us as objects of our judgments. (It is, of course, *our* judgment that rational and non-rational animals are responding to “the same thing.”) But this does not require that we ascribe to the non-rational perceiver the *same* content contained in our judgments. When my cat nudges his empty food bowl, I understand that, at a rough level of approximation, he wants to be fed, but I do not understand the fine-grained content that I can grasp among my fellow speakers. Beyond a certain point – and surely that point depends on one’s experience, training, and sensitivity – the mental content of our fellow-creatures is closed off to us, even when we have not succumbed to some theory, whether Cartesian or Davidsonian, which leads us to doubt that it is there.

Still, a serious problem remains: McDowell has forcefully argued that there is no intelligible sense to be given to the thought that there is a non-conceptual element to sapient experience and that to think otherwise is to succumb to the Myth of the Given.⁶ It is often thought that if animals do not judge, then they lack concepts as such, and since McDowell denies non-conceptual content, he has sometimes been interpreted as

⁶ Thus for example, “receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation [between receptivity and spontaneity]” (McDowell 1996, 9). For if receptivity *were* separable, even notionally (or Notionally?), then the exercise of conceptual capacities, whether passive or active, would involve *taking* the deliverances of receptivity *as* guiding those capacities ‘from the outside’, as it were – which is to say, to take them not only as innocuously given, but as committing us to what McDowell takes to be the Myth of the Given.

having no way of understanding, or even acknowledging, animal mentality at all. Yet since McDowell regards sentient animals as genuine (and not merely ‘as if’) semantic engines, it does not seem plausible that we can construe them as entirely shorn of conceptual capacities, since it does not seem a hopeful line of thought to stipulate that there is semantic yet non-conceptual content. At the same time, the very idea of sapience, and the distinction between sapience and sentience, requires that the idea of judging play a central role in our account of sapience. Thus sentient animals are regarded as having concepts but not as judging. Is this coherent?

I suggest that it is coherent if one entertains the following line of thought. In the language that Frege taught us to speak, and which McDowell (along Sellars and Brandom) accepts, we distinguish between the *sense* and the *reference* of judgments. On the classical picture, sense and reference are distinguished in terms of whether truth-value is preserved under substitution of synonyms for synonyms in order to avoid ascribing contradictory beliefs to rational beings. If we regard sentients as using concepts but not forming judgments, then the sense/reference distinction does not apply to the semantic content we ascribe to them. The concepts of animals, at least certain kinds of animals (the so-called ‘higher animals’), have *neither senses nor referents*. Yet they count as genuine concepts because they allow for certain kinds of generalizations: an animal can respond similarly to different occasions of perceptual stimuli if it has a concept for classifying those stimuli as similar.

On this line of thought, we are spared from the following false trichotomy:

- a) ascribing full-blown judgments to animals, identical in content to our own – thus, when I see a door and a cat sees a door, the same content – *that this is a door* – must be ascribed to both of us;
- b) ascribing judgments to animals, but only in an “as if” or “analogical” fashion, so that the semantic content of animal life turns out to be something of a convenient fiction;
- c) denying that sentient animals have any mental life whatsoever, i.e. non-rational animals cannot be construed as anything other than mere automata.

If we regard sentient content as conceptual but non-judgmental, then we can say that the sense/reference distinction is *irrelevant* to understanding the semantic content of merely sentient animals, whereas it is *indispensable* to understanding the semantic contents of ourselves as rational animals. This should not seem too surprising, since the sense/reference distinction is required for understanding *linguistic* representations. For non-linguistic representations, it does not apply. For this reason we cannot avoid finding something inscrutable about the mental contents of non-rational animals.

But if that is right, then in what sense should we ascribe any conceptual content to animals that are only perceivers (and copers), and not judges? We should ascribe concepts to them insofar as they act on the basis of generalizations: they respond in similar ways to similar kinds of motivationally salient perceptions. The mental life of a sentient animal consists of continuously modulated responses to a variety of phenomena that are motivationally significant to the animal as a unified center of perceptual and motor activity. The unity of the animal is manifested in the totality of habits through which it responds to changes in motivationally salient aspects of the perceptual field.

They exhibit behaviors that are best explained in terms of their possessing generals, not merely particulars, brought out in terms of creature's habits; a creature's habits express the kinds of concepts that it employs in organizing its environment for itself. More precisely, its habits are the outward criteria of the concepts that we attribute to it. *That* they think is as certain as the uncertainty as to *what* they think.

This line of thought can be brought to bear on McDowell's pointed disagreement with Nagel as to whether we can or cannot know "what it is like to be a bat". As Nagel famously puts it:

we may ascribe general *types* of experience on the basis of the animal's structure and behavior. Thus we describe bat sonar as a form of three-dimensional forward perception; we believe that bats feel some versions of pain, fear, hunger, and lust, and that they have other, more familiar types of perception besides sonar. But we believe that these experiences also have in case a specific subjective character, which is beyond our ability to conceive. ... The fact that we cannot expect to ever accommodate in our language a detailed description of Martian or bat phenomenology should not lead us to dismiss as meaningless the claim that bats and Martians have experiences fully comparable in richness of detail to our own.

(Nagel 1979, 170)

Nagel contends that there are phenomenological facts – facts about kinds of subjectivities – which are in principle inaccessible to us, given our distinct kind of subjectivity. In response, McDowell suggests that this is way of putting the point involves a confusion of attributions of full-fledged subjectivity and 'proto-subjectivity' (1996, 121-123). But how then to understand his talk of 'proto-subjectivity'?

We should accept that while there *is* something it is like to be a bat, this must be understood only in terms of understanding bats as perceptually aware of their environments as populated by bearers of bat-significance. It should not be taken to mean that ordinary, non-rational bats are *pour soi*. We can make sense of ‘proto-subjectivity’ by seeing non-rational animals (including ordinary bats) as having concepts (hence the ‘subjectivity’) but not the sort of concepts to which the sense/reference distinction applies (hence the ‘proto’). We are justified in talking of concepts in order to register our ordinary conception of animal life as a life of habits which in turn are best explained in terms of classifying motivationally salient perceptions as similar and different from one another. The fundamental problem with Nagel’s argument is his reliance on the Sartrean distinction between the *pour soi* and *en soi* (1979, 169), which eclipses the very conceptual space necessary to bring into view the lives of animals as such. Hence, whereas Nagel reinforces the Real Distinction, McDowell shows us the beginning of a way out of it.

Though we certainly do make judgments about animal content, there is a distinction worth making between the phenomenology of genuine intersubjectivity – the experienced relations between full-blown subjects, or persons – and the phenomenology of the experienced relations by us sapient animals of the *differences* between us and the mere sentient. Though we do experience and judge them to have genuine (and not merely metaphorical or analogical) semantic contents, we do not experience them as having the *same kind* of semantic content that we enjoy. When I see that one of my cats is nudging the empty food bowl, I do not see him as endorsing the proposition *that I am hungry*, but I do see him as intending to show me that he is hungry. Although the

content that I attribute to him would be paraphrased as something like “food!” – or, more precisely, as “_____!” – it is nevertheless of the utmost importance that this is *not* something that we attribute to thermostats or guided missiles. What I wish to do now is bring more clearly into view our need for this distinction, and the role that this distinction plays in our lives as the sort of beings that we are.

3. The Logical Space of Animal Life

The notion I wish to invoke here is that of a *logical space of animate life*, as first developed by Finkelstein (2007, see esp. pp. 126-7; 142-8). In characterizing logical spaces, McDowell writes, “I think the best way to understand this contrast of logical spaces is in terms of a distinction between two ways of finding things intelligible: on the one hand, placing things in a context of rational considerations for and against them ... and, on the other hand, finding things intelligible in the ways the natural sciences do, for instance by subsuming them under law-like generalizations” (McDowell 2009e, 246-7). Finkelstein broadens this conception of a logical space when he suggests that “[w]e might speak here of a distinctive logical space in which we locate mental items and their expressions along with the circumstances against whose background they have the significances they have” (Finkelstein 2003, 126). Thus, I understand a logical space as a framework or context which makes possible the intelligibility of the items placed in it; different logical spaces constitute the *a priori* conditions of possibility of different kinds of intelligibility. (In these terms, the epistemological Real Distinction is best understood in terms of a distinction between logical spaces.)

The logical space of reasons brings into view inferential relations (formal and material) that constrain rational thought. The logical space of the realm of law brings into view the physico-chemical regularities governed by laws (or by law-like generalizations). Now, the behavior of living things, and in particular animals, is not describable in terms of the space of reasons. But it should be clear by now that animal life is not describable in terms of the realm of law; if they were, then we would either not see a distinction at all between animals and guided missiles, or see such a distinction as a convenient fiction – hence creaturely mental content would be, at best, “as if” content. To avoid the false trichotomy, we need at least one more kind of logical space, what Finkelstein calls “the logical space of animate life,” which governs a priori the application of concepts we need to form judgments about their mental content: concepts such as “*hunting and chasing ... fleeing, eating, mating, feeding, caring for, and playing*” (Finkelstein 2007) and more generally, “perceiver”, “behavior,” “habit,” and “environment”.

The logical space of reasons is a *logical* space, which means that it is constituted by concepts *in the demanding sense*. It is *we* who place merely sentient animals in the logical space of animate life; they do not place themselves there. But when we place them so, we succeed in acknowledging the fact that conceptual capacities, in the non-demanding sense (not employed in the making of judgments), are necessary for the possibility of the kind of mental life that they enjoy – not, to be sure, as *judgers* and *agents* as we inhabitants of the space of reasons are, but as *perceivers* and *responders*.

If the logical space of reasons governs a priori how we must understand responsiveness to reasons as such, then the logical space of animate life governs a priori

how we must understand responsiveness to motivationally salient perceptual and motor cues in its surrounding environment. Finkelstein's critique of Davidson can thus be re-framed: the problem with Davidson is that animals, as inhabitants of a logical space distinct from the logical space of nature as the realm of law, do not come into view *as such*. McDowell, on the other hand, must have animals considered as such to come into view if his own account of rational animality is to succeed.

It is worth taking some time to see how adequately McDowell's current views accommodate the thoughts urged here. Hence I shall turn to his responses to recent criticisms advanced by Macdonald (2006), Bernstein (2002), and Lovibond (2006).

MacDonald (2006) argues that functional explanations provide a successful model for non-rational cognition; to this end he recommends a version of teleosemantics. In response McDowell (2006) agrees that while there is an important distinction between nomological and functional explanations, that does not detract from the *sui generis* character of rational explanations per se: "the division I chiefly care about it between space-of-reasons intelligibility and *any* intelligibility which is not of that kind" (McDowell 2006, 235; emphasis added). This division is by no means imperiled through a more fine-grained description of the kinds of intelligibility other than the discursive intelligibility through which a world comes into view for a community of subjects. We should both to affirm the discontinuity between sapient animals and merely sentient ones and to affirm, or at least acknowledge, the continuities between us and the other animals.

This insistence is emphasized by Bernstein (2002): "McDowell's model ... needs to be made radically plural: gorillas live out their experience of pain differently than cats,

and cats differently than mice, and mice differently than spiders. The sameness and differences are analogical but objective all the way down” (243). While Bernstein’s egalitarianism should certainly be applauded, one might worry whether “analogical but objective” is the best way of putting the point. Rather, we should say that it is a fact about gorillas, cats, mice, and (perhaps) spiders that they live out their feeling of pain – that in talking of a mouse in pain, we are registering a fact about murine sentience – but that the judgment is not grounded in an argument from analogy. Rather, we see that the mouse is in pain – a pain that is quite different from the pain of a sapient animal, but pain nevertheless. For the real inconsistency would be to deny that our ascriptions of mental content to other sapients is grounded in an argument from analogy, but to affirm or even intimate that our ascriptions of mental content of the merely sentient is grounded in an argument from analogy. It is to McDowell’s credit that he sees the need to avoid this inconsistency, at least in its more invidious versions.

One way in which McDowell avoids this inconsistency is by speaking of the “proto-subjectivity” of animals. In a careful assessment of MacIntyre’s (2001) critique of McDowell, Lovibond (2006) draws from MacIntyre an important lesson:

that when we contrast animal ‘proto-subjectivity’ with (full) human subjectivity, we should take care not to let our appreciation of the discontinuity here suppress the awareness of the continuity implicit in our ‘proto-.’ We should be willing to recognize members of certain other species ... in general as located (in common with *all* animal species) on a ‘scale of spectrum’ rather than on the far side of a ‘single line of division between ‘them’ and us’. (267; emphasis original)

Lovibond emphasizes ‘all’ in order to indicate the need for a highly differentiated conception of “animals.” If we are not to follow Descartes or Davidson in simply *mystifying* sentient cognition, then we need to be careful as to how we describe animal life:

The particular kind of imaginative failure that tends to conceal this fact from philosophers is entrenched by the habit of contrasting our own species, as I have been doing so, with an undifferentiated category of ‘other’ animals, instead of paying attention to the massive differences that exist, in respect of purposive behavior, between earthworms or crabs on the one hand and creatures such as dogs, gorillas, chimpanzees, and bottle-nose dolphins on the other. (266)

Yet, it is equally important not to make too much of the distinction between earthworms or crabs and dogs, gorillas, chimps, and dolphins. There is no point of re-drawing the line between “us” and “the brutes” and re-drawing it elsewhere on the field. That would simply resurrect the phantasy of a “transcendence of biology” (McDowell 1996, 115) by moving the line of scrimmage. We must insist not only on continuity as well as on discontinuity, but also, and even more importantly, that *both* continuity *and* discontinuity go all the way down.

In response to Lovibond, McDowell accepts much of what she says, but also qualifies it: “There is no conflict between insisting, for one purpose, on a continuity between rational animals and others, and acknowledging, for another purpose, a discontinuity that extends across that boundary” (Lindgaard 2008, 234) and that insisting on continuity in one sense is consistent with his emphasis on “the demanding interpretation of what it is to have a concept that belongs with the idea of animals that

are distinctive in being rational” (ibid., 237). On the interpretation pursued here, concepts in the non-demanding sense are at home in the logical space of animate life, whereas concepts in the demanding sense are only at home in the logical space of reasons.⁷

It must be emphasized that the proposal is to invoke a third logical space *within* the natural world. The logical space of animate life is as consistent with naturalism, taken in the broad sense, as is the logical space of reasons. So we need more than just “two sorts of naturalism” (McDowell 1998b): a bald naturalism that only countenances the nature qua subsumption of phenomena under law-like generalizations and a naturalism of ‘second nature’ which opens our eyes, via the right sort of *Bildung*, to normative facts. But I take this to be consistent with McDowell’s thought that a world is what comes into view when the perceptual-motor habits are permeated by those sorts of conceptual capacities acquired through initiation into a linguistic tradition. Thus experience, in the demanding McDowellian sense, is not animal perception with discursivity somehow added onto it; rather, discursivity transforms perception into experience (and so transforms an environment into a world-in-view). This is what McDowell intends, or should intend, when he says that “An intellectualistic conception of the human intellect regards it as something distinct from our animal nature. The best antidote is to see capacities of reason as operative even in our unreflective perceptual awareness” (2009d, 271). I cannot see how this picture of cognitive experience of rational and non-rational animals threatens to commit us any residua of Cartesianism;

⁷ My use of the difference between concepts in a demanding and non-demanding sense is inspired not only by McDowell but also by Glock (2000). But whereas Glock draws a distinction between simple thoughts and complex thoughts in his critique of the “third-person” attitude towards animals undertaken by Davidson, I use this distinction to articulate a suppressed assumption of McDowell’s, whose attitude towards thought-ascription is markedly different from Davidson in being undertaken from the first-person and second-person perspectives.

on the contrary, it specifies what it is for something to be a rational animal as distinct from a mere animal:

rational capacities, and hence availability to apperception, permeate our experience itself, including the experiences we act on unreflectively in our ordinary coping with our surroundings. Such is the form that animal engagement with the perceptive environment takes in the case of rational animals. (ibid., 272)

That is: *in the case of rational animals*, engagement with the perceptible environment takes on a different *form* than it does in the case of non-rational animals; our rational capacities thoroughly permeate, and so transform, perception of an environment into experience of a world, and transforming *mere* perceiving into perceptual *judging*. Only with the appearance of the capacities for judgment – including, paradigmatically, empirical judgments wrung from us by the permeation of sensory consciousness by those capacities – does it make sense to even distinguish between sense and reference, and so to ascribe the sorts of propositional attitudes that we do in making sense of our lives in common as necessarily involving responsiveness to reasons as such.

4. Conclusion

The task undertaken here has been to show that those sympathetic to a broadly McDowellian account of rational animality should accept the idea of a logical space that would be occupied by a detailed account of what it is to be a minded animal.⁸

McDowell invokes a partial re-enchantment of nature by seeing our conceptual

⁸ The logical space itself should be distinguished from detailed theories which give that space determinate content. For a good candidate theory of what it is to be a minded animal, see Hanna and Maiese (2009).

capacities as “second nature”. This requires seeing that we are rational animals, and as such, markedly distinct from all other animals insofar as the animality we share with the others is transformed by the rationality that distinguishes us from the others. This in turn requires a conception of animal life as the sort of thing that can be transformed by the acquisition of conceptual capacities, of a certain sort, through *Bildung*. But without putting in place the logical space of animate life, we have no positive story to tell in place of the false trichotomy that McDowell rightly avoids, and likewise no way of indicating the place occupied by the ordinary conception of animal life within a description of our form of life *qua* that of rational animals. Any theory, philosophical or scientific, of mindedness that does not take into account the distinctiveness of this logical space will remain beholden to the epistemological Real Distinction and to the disenchantment of nature that it makes possible.

I suggest, therefore, that we will need at least a third kind of logical space – if not, indeed, more than that! -- in order to embrace a naturalism that is not held captive by the disenchantment of nature that accompanied the rise of modern natural science, however respectful we may wish to be of its methods and accomplishments. Nothing less, and certainly much more, is required by the critique of the disenchantment of nature as an integral part of our resistance to what techno-scientific rationalization, as it has taken shape in the service of industrial and post-industrial capitalism, has done and is doing to human capacities in particular and vital potentialities in general.⁹

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