

## Experience and Rational External Constraint

Caleb Liang

National Chung-Cheng University

### Abstract

In “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” Donald Davidson proposes a coherence picture of knowledge in which he makes the famous claim that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief.” In *Mind and World*, John McDowell criticizes Davidson’s theory for failing to make room for the connection between our worldviews and reality and leaving the notion of content unintelligible. In this paper I try to clarify their disagreement regarding perceptual experience and empirical content. I suggest that their dispute lies in the following two issues: whether the rational and external constraints on empirical thought can be treated separately, and whether an account of empirical content is theoretically prior to radical interpretation. Then I explore some possibilities by which their debate may be advanced. I make two moves on behalf of McDowell to show how Davidson’s reply to his

criticism may be found unsatisfactory. First, from a McDowellian point of view, it is not clear how Davidson's nonconceptual notion of experience might provide reason for revising beliefs. Second, Davidson's triangulation account of content presupposes the notion of content already.

**Key Words: Experience, Content, Coherentism, Davidson**

In “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” (hereafter *CTTK*) Donald Davidson proposes a coherence picture of knowledge in which he makes the famous claim that “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief (Davidson, 2001:141).” In *Mind and World* (hereafter *M&W*), John McDowell criticizes Davidson’s theory for failing to make room for the connection between our worldviews and reality and leaving the notion of content unintelligible (McDowell, 1994, Lecture 1). Davidson, in contrast, believes that McDowell’s criticisms are based on misunderstanding of his views. The disagreement between these two philosophers is profound; I don’t pretend to be able to solve it. In this paper I only try to clarify their disagreement regarding perceptual experience and empirical content. Then I explore some possibilities by which their debate may be advanced.<sup>1</sup>

## I.

According to McDowell, an account of empirical thought is unacceptable if it fails to make room for two commonsensical claims: first, our empirical thoughts and judgments have genuine content. Empirical judgments purport to tell us something about the world; if they fail to connect with the world, they don’t have genuine content. Second, experience provides justification for our empirical judgments. McDowell sees this

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the Conference on Donald Davidson’s Philosophy, September 2002, at National Tsing Hua University. Section 1 and 2 draw on chapter 4 of my Ph.D. dissertation, *Toward an Understanding of Objectivity: A Study of the Realism/Antirealism Debate and the Nature of Empirical Content*, Indiana University, 2001.

merely as a way to register the ordinary view that a natural way to justify an empirical claim like “A rabbit is jumping on the grass” is to appeal to perceptual experience, e.g., I see that a rabbit is jumping on the grass. McDowell thinks that there are important lessons embedded in these two commonsensical claims.

To think or to make a judgment about the world is to exercise conceptual capacities in a certain way. The first lesson, according to McDowell, is that the exercising of our conceptual capacities must be constrained *externally*; that is, there has to be constraint from outside our thinking activities. The second lesson is related to the nature of justification, which McDowell accepts as an essentially rational relation. He draws on Sellars’s “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (hereafter *EPM*):

[I]n characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says. (Sellars, 1997, §36)

McDowell accepts Sellars’ view that justification is fundamentally different from causal interactions between physical states of affairs precisely in that justification is a rational relation but causality is not. The second lesson according to McDowell is that since experience provides justification, the relation between experience and empirical thought must be *rational*.

Putting these two lessons together, McDowell claims that there must be a *rational external constraint* on empirical thought. He thinks this is the role of experience. Our empirical thinking must be rationally and externally answerable to the

world through experience.<sup>2</sup> McDowell contends that the only way to accommodate this idea is to consider experience as within what Sellars calls “the space of reasons” or what Davidson calls “the domain of rational interrelatedness.”<sup>3</sup> The outcome is the view that the content of experience is conceptual (McDowell, 1994, Lecture 1).

## II.

In *CTTK*, Davidson conceives the notion of experience differently. As McDowell presents him, Davidson regards experience as outside the space of reasons. Experience for Davidson is nonconceptual; hence it has only causal impact on our belief system. Davidson agrees with McDowell that there is a sense in which justification is intrinsically different from causal relations. He explicitly asserts, “causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified (Davidson, 2001:143).” Davidson holds that experience only

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes McDowell speaks of experience as a rational external constraint; sometimes he says it is the world that plays this role. As I read him, he means both, and there is no tension in this way of talking. His thought is that both the world and experience are in the space of reasons. The world is the ultimate source of the rational external constraint. Experience can be said to play the same role because its content is conceptual, hence propositional, such that in experience we take in empirical fact, which is also propositional. In this sense McDowell speaks of experience as openness to reality, *through which* the world exerts a rational external constraint on our thought. This of course is highly controversial. But here I only try to lay out his view, not to defend it.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Sellars’s *EPM* §36, and Davidson’s reply to John McDowell’s “Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism” (hereafter *SCDE*).

causes us to have certain beliefs; it does not play any justificatory role.

Davidson's view is that, according to his principle of charity, in order to make an alien speaker's utterances intelligible, most of his beliefs must be interpreted as true. This allows us to have "a legitimate presumption" that, if the speaker's belief coheres with most of his other beliefs, it is true. Justification of beliefs comes from the fact that they are rationally supported by other beliefs, and that they enjoy the interpretive presumption in favor of their truth (Davidson, 2001:153).

McDowell's criticism is that although Davidson recognizes that justification is a rational relation, and that empirical thought needs external constraint, he treats these two matters *separately*.<sup>4</sup> Davidson proposes that the rational constraint, i.e., justification, comes from other beliefs, which are conceptual; the external constraint comes from experience, which is nonconceptual. McDowell rejects this view on the grounds that Davidson's notion of experience is nonconceptual and is not able to provide a rational and external constraint. It fails to meet the requirement that empirical thought has to be constrained by the world through experience *both* rationally and externally.

Davidson states that "What distinguishes a coherence theory is simply the claim that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief (Davidson, 2001:141)." In McDowell's interpretation, that means the only resources that can serve as justification are *within* the sphere of our conceptual exercises. McDowell thinks that this view suggests "images of confinement within the sphere of thinking, as opposed to being in touch with something outside it (McDowell, 1994:15)." That

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<sup>4</sup> I learned this way of putting the point from David Finkelstein.

is, there is no rational external constraint on the confined belief system. Such a view generates the worry that the belief system is only “frictionless spinning in a void”, i.e., losing its bearing on reality.

McDowell thinks that in defending coherentism Davidson underestimates the motivation that drives some philosophers into the so-called the Myth of the Given— the incoherent idea that nonconceptual sensory impressions can somehow provide justification for beliefs. Davidson’s diagnosis, as McDowell presents it, is that what entices people to resort to the idea of the Given is to answer the global skeptic who asks: “Why couldn’t all my beliefs hang together and yet be comprehensively false about the actual world (Davidson, 2001:140)?” Davidson thinks that appealing to the idea of the Given is hopeless and that the correct way is to apply the principle of charity, which requires most of the speaker’s beliefs be interpreted as true. This makes global skepticism impossible. McDowell says Davidson fails to see that

[T]he Myth of the Given has a deeper motivation, in the thought that if spontaneity is not subject to rational constraint from outside, as Davidson’s coherentist position insists that it is not, then we cannot make it intelligible to ourselves how exercises of spontaneity can represent the world at all. (McDowell, 1994:17)

According to McDowell, the principle of charity can be effective only after empirical content is in place. But without an external constraint that is also rational, our empirical beliefs do not really have content. Davidson’s coherentism fails to take that into account, leaving no room for the idea of empirical content.

### III.

Davidson argues that the above criticisms do not sustain, but merely reflect McDowell's misunderstanding of his views. As I see it, they disagree first on how to conceive the relation between experience and belief, and second, on how to explain empirical content. In this and the following section, I draw on Davidson's response to clarify their disagreement. Then I will conjecture some possible moves on McDowell's behalf in the hope of that their debate may continue.

In his reply to McDowell's "Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism", Davidson asserts that McDowell misunderstood his notion of causality. He says:

I have from almost my first published essay ("Actions, Reason and Causes") emphasized the essential and uneliminable way causality is built into mental concepts and explanations. Perception, memory, and intentional action are all cases where events described in mental terms and events described in physical terms interact, and any account of reasoning must depend on the fact that some beliefs cause others. (Davidson, 1999:106)

It is not difficult to see the basis of this complaint. In "Action, Reasons, and Causes" Davidson explicitly argues that the reasons that rationalize an action are also its cause (Davidson, 1980:3-19). In "Mental Events" he advocates anomalous monism, according to which mental events like judgments, beliefs, and perceptions causally interact with physical events (Davidson, 1980:208). Concerning the nature of beliefs, Davidson contends that a belief can cause, and be caused by, other beliefs, and that a belief must be understood holistically, i.e., in terms of its rational connections with other beliefs (cf. Davidson's *CTTK*). These points suggest that Davidson does not see cause and reason as mutually exclusive. Just because something is part of a causal relation it does not follow that the very same thing cannot be rationally connected with others. Rather, it is an important claim in Davidson's



philosophies of mind and of action that causality is in “the domain of rational interrelatedness (Davidson, 1999:106).”

Suppose McDowell accepts all these points of Davidson’s. Will their debate on experience thereby cease? I think not. Although Davidson sees experience as the cause of beliefs and there are areas where causality can be conceived as a kind of rational relation, he refuses to give a justificatory role to experience. In order to remove epistemic intermediaries so as to undermine skepticism, he explicitly claims that experience has nothing to do with the justification of beliefs. Hence, with regard to the relation between experience and beliefs, Davidson posits that cause and reason are separate, in other words, the external and rational constraints on beliefs are separate.

The separation of the external and rational constraints is the point on which McDowell disagrees with Davidson. Both agree that empirical thoughts require a rational and an external constraint in order to obtain justification and content. Their disagreement lies in whether these two sorts of constraints have to come from the same source. I will focus on justification in this section and address the issue of content in the next.

McDowell sees the nature of justification as both rational and conceptual. As I read him, he holds a strong view that rationality and conceptuality essentially link together. For things to be rationally connected to others, they themselves must be conceptually articulable such that they possess conceptual, hence propositional, content. Only something with conceptual content can give reason to another conceptual content. McDowell also thinks for something to be properly considered as conceptual, there is a transcendental requirement as reflected in Kant’s remark that “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A51/B75).” McDowell holds the Kantian view that empirical thought is the result of the cooperation between spontaneity and

receptivity. He reads Kant's remark as implying that "receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation (McDowell, 1994:9)." My interpretation of McDowell's view is that concepts and intuitions are mutually constitutive; both cannot be what they are without the contribution from each other. The rational and the external constraints needed for empirical thought are then taken to be, at least partly, constitutive of each other. A proper notion of rational constraint is one in which the notion of external constraint is already built in, and vice versa. It is this line of thought, I think, that motivates McDowell to maintain that the external and rational constraints on beliefs cannot be separate, and that we need to conceive experience as already equipped with conceptual content in order to provide the rational external constraint.

Davidson states that McDowell is wrong in thinking that he does not "give the deliverances of the senses an ultimate evidential role (Davidson, 1999:106)." What McDowell means by "the deliverances of the senses" is the content of experience, which is both propositional and conceptual. This is not how Davidson uses the term. He says, "What the senses "deliver" (i.e., cause) in perception is perceptual beliefs, and these do have an ultimate evidential role (Davidson, 1999:106)." In this instance, it looks as if the two philosophers talk past each other. But this is not the case. Both Davidson and McDowell agree that only states with propositional content can play the evidential role, i.e., provide justification, for other propositional contents. Their disagreement is reflected in McDowell's belief that experience is a state of this kind, while Davidson sees experience as neither propositional nor conceptual; his assertion is that only beliefs have these qualities.

In response to McDowell's *SCDE* Davidson says, "the beliefs that are delivered by the senses are always open to revision, in the light of further perceptual experience, in the

light of what we remember, in the light of our general knowledge of how the world works (Davidson, 1999:106).” Based on the above Kantian thought, I conjecture a McDowellian might cast doubt on Davidson’s view as follows: If experience is neither propositional nor conceptual, how are we to make sense of the idea that empirical beliefs are open to revision *in the light of* further perceptual experience? For experience to play this role i.e., give us reason to change our beliefs, it must *mean* something *to us* and exert normative force on our conceptual capacities. The content of experience must be in the conceptual, hence, propositional, shape. Only then are we entitled to say that experience can rationally revise our beliefs. For McDowell, as I read him, this is the only way that the phrase “in the light of further perceptual experience” can be made intelligible. Since Davidson’s notion of experience specifically blocks this view, there is a call for his response.

## IV.

McDowell claims that in dealing with global skepticism Davidson’s coherence theory illegitimately takes the content of belief for granted. Davidson says this is another misunderstanding of his view, for he does have an account of content that is based on his theory of interpretation and a picture of triangulation involving communication and a shared world.

According to Davidson, belief and meaning are interdependent. The task of the interpreter is to understand what the speaker thinks and says at the same time without knowing either beforehand. The interpreter starts out by determining the causes of the speaker’s assent to basic sentences. Then the principle of charity directs the interpreter to preserve the truth of the speaker’s sentences and beliefs as far as possible. For this to

work, the interpreter has no choice but to take the content of the speaker's belief to be partly determined by the cause of that belief (cf. Davidson, 2001:151). It is based on the requirement of successful interpretation that Davidson says that the content of the speaker's thoughts and sayings are partly determined by the history of causal interactions with the environment (cf. Davidson, 2001:200). One might say that, in so far as the interpreter does not assume belief and meaning beforehand, there is a sense in which the methodology of radical interpretation does not take the content of the speaker's beliefs and sentences for granted. If the attempt of preserving truth is constantly frustrated, the speaker's rationality will be in doubt, or in other words, it is questionable whether the speaker should be considered as a possessor of content.

In his reply to *SCDE*, Davidson expresses his view that the cause of a belief *constitutes* its content. He says:

Central to my account of empirical content is the process of triangulation, which narrows down the relevant distal causes of perceptual beliefs, and makes possible grasp of the concept of objectivity. The type of cause repeatedly singled out as the cause of assent to a given perceptual sentence then constitutes the content of that sentence and of the belief that sentence can be used to express. (Davidson, 1999:107)

He depicts a theoretical triangle to explain empirical content. The three apexes of the triangle consist of two agents and an environment they share. The lines that form the triangle stand for three causal relations: the first agent responds to particular objects or events in the environment, the second agent responds to the same thing, and the two agents communicate with each other. In describing an example where a child learns how to speak simple words like "table," Davidson says:

The learner is subsequently caused to make similar sounds

by situations the learner instinctively classes together. Corrections are possible, of course. Success at the first level is achieved to the extent that the learner responds with sounds the teacher finds similar to situations the teacher finds similar. The teacher is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the learner. The learner is responding to two things: the external situation and the responses of the teacher. All these relations are causal. Thus the essential triangle is formed which makes communication about shared objects and events possible. But it is also this triangle that determines the content of the learner's words and thoughts when these become complex enough to deserve the term. (Davidson, 2001:203)

Davidson emphasizes three important features of this triangulation. First, the relations between the two agents and their interactions with the environment are all causal. Second, it is necessary that both agents are responding to the same objects or events, in other words, that their reactions and beliefs have the same causes. He says: "Without this sharing of reactions to common stimuli, thought and speech would have no particular content—that is, no content at all (Davidson, 2001:212)." Third, it is equally crucial that there is communication between the two agents, for having a belief requires appreciating the contrast between what is *believed* to be the case and what *is* the case, and only communication can generate such appreciation. He says, "Until a base line has been established by communication with someone else, there is no point in saying one's own thoughts or words have a propositional content (Davidson, 2001:213)." The contents of the speaker's beliefs and sentences are determined by communicating about shared objects or events. In Davidson's theory, since this is what it takes for there to be content, the elements of the triangle—two agents, the shared cause of their reactions, and communication—thereby give a constitutive account of content.



Does Davidson's account of content meet the requirement of providing a rational external constraint for content? Robert Brandom in his comment on McDowell claims that Davidson's theory of interpretation offers a satisfactory explanation of content. He thinks there is more than one way to explain the rational external constraint for content. Davidson provides one such account that is as good as McDowell's. He says:

The interpreter is responsible for characterizing the perceptible environing facts to which the one interpreted is taken to be responding, and is charged with attributing propositional contents to the sentential responses that make the one interpreted largely correct in her noninferential reports. (Brandom, 1996:252)

Brandom endorses the third person point of view that the task of attributing propositional content to sentences and beliefs does not have to be achieved personally by the speaker. It can be carried out by the interpreter. It is perfectly fine that experience bears only causal but not rational relations with the speaker's beliefs and utterances because the rational external constraint does not have to enter into the speaker's point of view—it can come from the interpreter's standpoint. The interpreter assesses the speaker's empirical report by comparing it with the fact that causes it. From the interpreter's point of view, the speaker's empirical thoughts and reports are rationally and externally constrained by the world (Brandom, 1996:252).

McDowell contends that the strategy of adopting the interpreter's standpoint only pushes the problem one step back. He thinks Davidson's account contains an unexplained assumption that the interpreter's interpretation has content already. If a rational external constraint is needed for content, this requirement applies not only to the speaker but also to the

interpreter. McDowell thinks neither Davidson nor Brandom meets this requirement. He says:

The difficulty arises again about how Brandom can be entitled to the idea that an interpreter (or, better, the persona he wants to be entitled to see as that of an interpreter) is in touch with the relevant aspects of reality... Brandom's picture leaves the fact itself, as the external rational constraint that it is on the activity of deciding what to believe, out of her view qua responder. That means that the supposed interpreter's observational hold on reality is in turn made unintelligible by the picture's externalism. (McDowell, 1996:295)

McDowell insists that in order for a third person to interpret the speaker's reports to make the speaker as rational as possible, the interpretation must have content first. Without content there is no interpretation. This requires that the interpreter's conceptual capacities rationally connect with the external world. McDowell thinks Brandom and Davidson illegitimately take this connection for granted. Before the interpreter can compare the speaker's reports with the relevant aspects or facts of reality, the interpreter must ascertain those facts first, and he must take in those facts as a rational external constraint on his thought. That is, the rational external constraint must be in view of the interpreter as he contacts the world through experience. It requires that for the interpreter experience serve as the rational external constraint. This is just what Davidson and Brandom oppose but actually what they need.

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The exchange between Brandom and McDowell does not bring up Davidson's triangulation. I would like to develop McDowell's criticism to take that into account. In "The

Emergence of Thought”, Davidson says:

The triangular relationship between agents and environment to which they mutually react is, I have argued, necessary to thought. It is not sufficient, as is shown by the fact that it can exist in animals we do not credit with judgment. (Davidson, 2001:130)

Davidson thinks that the triangulation is only a necessary condition for the content of thought because the process of triangulation also takes place in the behavior of prelinguistic animals. Here are his examples:

One sees this in its simplest form in a school of fish, where each fish reacts almost instantaneously to the motions of the others. This is apparently a reaction that is wired in. A learned reaction can be observed in certain monkeys which make three distinguishable sounds depending on whether they see a snake, an eagle, or a lion approaching; the other monkeys, perhaps without seeing the threat themselves, react to the warning sounds in ways appropriate to the different dangers, by climbing trees, running, or hiding. (Davidson, 2001:128)

Davidson immediately comments that no matter how complex and purposeful these animal behaviors are, they “cannot be regarded as due to propositional beliefs, desires, or intentions, nor does their mode of communication constitute a language (Davidson, 2001:128).”

Davidson’s point is to emphasize that without the triangulation the content of thought would be impossible. What concerns us here is his view about what more is needed for content. His answer is language. As he explains:

The reason, stated briefly, is that unless the base line of the triangle, the line between the two agents, is strengthened to the point where it can implement the communication of



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propositional contents, there is no way the agents can make use of the triangular situation to form judgments about the world. Only when language is in place can creatures appreciate the concept of objective truth. (Davidson, 2001:130)

We have seen that according to Davidson, communication is essential to the triangulation. In this situation, his view is that without language there can be no communication of propositional contents that enables the speaker to learn the contrast that is necessary for contentful beliefs, or, put another way, the contrast between what is believed to be the case and what is the case.

At this point, a McDowellian might worry that after all Davidson's account does presuppose that content is already in place. This is because, as Davidson's holism suggests, acquiring a language and having propositional thought are always interconnected. According to Davidson, communication involves radical interpretation. Linguistic communication is two agents speaking to and interpreting each other. He says:

The only way of knowing that the second apex of the triangle—the second creature or person—is reacting to the same object as oneself is to know that the other person has the same object in mind. But then the second person must also know that the first person constitutes an apex of the same triangle another apex of which the second person occupies. For two people to know of each other that they are so related, that their thoughts are so related, requires that they be in communication. Each of them must speak to the other and be understood by the other. They don't, as I said, have to mean the same thing by the same words, but they must each be an interpreter of the other. (Davidson, 2001:121)

Communication is a kind of interaction whereby the participants are both speakers and interpreters of each other,

thinking and talking about the world they share. One can say that for Davidson communication is mutual interpretation. Therefore it seems to me that McDowell's criticism of Brandom is applicable here. McDowell insists that one cannot take the content of the participants' interpretation for granted; there must be a rational external constraint on the participants not only when they speak but also when they interpret. It is on this point that McDowell thinks Davidson's account fails.

Compare the triangulation of prelinguistic animals and that of rational agents. As Davidson explains, they are similar in that the relations that connect the three apexes of the triangle, the interactions between the two creatures and their interactions with the shared environment, are all causal. The difference between human and animal interactions is that human interactions involve interpretation. It is through interpretation that the common cause of the agents' reactions is determined. It can be said that mere causal relations do not provide content; rather, the interpretation of the cause performs this function.

Furthermore, McDowell holds that there is an issue of how the content of the interpreter's thought is possible. For McDowell, interpretation is an exercise of conceptual capacities. When the interpreter applies the principle of charity to the speaker's utterance to maximize truth, he is making moves in the space of reasons. To attribute content, the interpreter's exercise of conceptual capacities cannot be understood as merely causal reactions, and it has to be conceived as rationally and externally constrained by the world through experience. What qualifies certain creatures as interpreters is that they are capable of receiving empirical facts as rationally and externally constraining their thinking and speaking. McDowell contends that this requires we understand experience as being conceptual so as to provide the rational external constraint. By seeing experience as nonconceptual, Davidson's theory leaves no room for this idea, thus causing concern about how to distinguish

between the interactions that the rational agents participate in to form the triangle and the interactions of prelinguistic animals. If the notion of human experience is not taken to be able to provide the rational and external constraint, in McDowell's thinking, all we have explained is exculpations of utterances, not content.<sup>5</sup>

## V.

I have suggested in section 3 that the separation of external and rational constraints is a useful way to characterize the debate between Davidson and McDowell. At this point, I would like to suggest a second way to specify their disagreement. McDowell, influenced by Kant, insists that there must be a satisfactory account of content first for Davidson's theory of interpretation to gain its foothold. He thinks his Kantian account of content is theoretically prior to and must be assumed by radical interpretation. Davidson thinks things should be the other way around. The triangulation that involves linguistic communication gives a constitutive explanation of what it is to have content. Radical interpretation is theoretically prior to the notion of content. I have raised two questions on McDowell's behalf that might deserve Davidson's responses: First, if experience is nonconceptual and hence plays only a causal role, how are we to make sense of the idea that our beliefs can be rationally revised *in light of* experience? Second, if Davidson's triangulation involves interpretation that already presupposes content, what is the justification for this presupposition? The

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<sup>5</sup> cf. McDowell, *M&W*, p. 8. There he talks about justification, but I think a similar remark can be made with regard to content.

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disagreement between Davidson and McDowell is by no means shallow. It will be of great philosophical interest to see this debate continues. I hope these two questions have made a step toward engendering further discussion.<sup>6</sup>

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## 經驗以及理性並外在的限制

梁益堉

### 摘要

在〈一個真理與知識的融貫理論〉(“A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”)這篇文章中，戴維森提出一個關於知識的融貫理論。其中，他宣稱了一個著名的命題：「除了其他信念之外，沒有任何事物能做為持有一信念的理由。」在《心靈與世界》(*Mind and World*)一書裡，邁道爾(J. McDowell)批評說，戴維森的理論並未合理說明我們的信念與世界之間的關聯，也使得**內容**這個概念變得不可理解。本文試圖釐清這兩位哲學家關於感官經驗和經驗內容的爭議。我將指出，他們的爭執是在以下兩個論題上：第一，關於經驗思想所需的**理性限制**和**外在限制**是否可以分開處理？第二，關於**經驗內容**的說明是否在理論上優先於戴維森的**基進詮釋**理論？接著我將嘗試使他們的爭議有所進展。我將考量戴維森對邁道爾的反駁，然後從邁道爾的立場來對戴維森的意見提出兩點質疑：首先，從邁道爾的角度，戴維森所謂的經驗是**非概念性的**。這樣的經驗能否提供用以修正信念的理由，是令人存疑的。其次，戴維森用來說明**內容**的**三角測量**理論其實已經預設了**內容**這個概念。

**關鍵詞：**經驗，內容，融貫論，戴維森