World and Subject

With John McDowell

Conference on McDowell's Philosophy

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WORLD AND SUBJECT

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Themes from McDowell

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With My Parents

Their 23rd Wedding Anniversary

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献给我的父母，

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Analytical Contents

Episode N. The Many Faces of Human Subject

World

1.   I introduce the main theme of this essay, distinguishing my leading concern – human subject and its place in the world – from the one in philosophy of mind in the narrow sense, i.e. about the mind and its place in nature. The notion of 'nature' will be pivotal throughout the essay, so I intend to have a more careful treatment of it.

2.   I discuss why my title starts with 'world' rather than 'subject.' In doing this, the central thesis of the essay – the world and minded human subject are constitutively interdependent – is anticipated. A neutral attitude towards the notion of 'world' is recommended through considering the traditional way of conceiving the problem of perception: metaphysics first (realism or not), and then epistemology (directness or not). A. D. Smith, who exemplifies this way of thinking, assumes that we have the world at the beginning. I argue that the methodology behind this way of thinking is metaphysically biased. A similar failure, though with the opposite direction, is attributed to René Descartes, in particular his 'method of doubt.' In Descartes' case, the world is 'bracket' at the starting point.

Subject

1.   Here I mainly argue for two points. First, the problems about mentality and those about human subject should be tackled together, for to think otherwise is to separate 'mind' and 'self.' Second, to understand human subject is to understand various aspects of it, for a self is always a *functioning* self. I also distinguish 'subject' from 'self' in the course of discussion, arguing that only the former is broad enough for my purpose.

2.   John McDowell, my main figure, is introduced at this point. I note that his style of philosophizing creates difficulties for his commentators. In particular, we need to balance between the question-oriented and the figure-centered styles. I emphasis more on the latter because I hope to provide a more systematic investigation of McDowell's philosophy as an integrated whole and its place in the philosophical map.

3.   I identify two strands of my project. The first one is about the tension between the rational and the natural; the second one is about how the biological-rooted rational capacities enable us to be perceivers, knowers, thinkers, speakers, agents, persons, and (self-) conscious subjects. I emphasize the latter strand. And I summarize McDowell's engagements with other philosophers, including Aristotle, Robert Brandom, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Crispin Wright, Saul Kripke, Michael Dummett, Donald Davidson, Hubert Dreyfus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Derek Parfit, and Immanuel Kant, among others. I also say why I need an epilogue on self-determining subjectivity.

Episode Ⅰ. *Cogito* and *Homo sapiens*

Nature

1.   The tension between reason and nature (conceived with scientific terms) is characterized, and the fact that to have a satisfying self-image is to relieve this putative tension is noted.

2.   Wilfrid Sellars's remark is quoted here to pave the way for distinguishing 'the space of reasons' and 'the realm of law,' corresponding to Sellars's 'manifest image' and 'scientific image.' I introduce two ways of confronting this distinction – bald naturalism and rampant platonism – and discuss why McDowell thinks both of them are unsatisfying.

Nurture

1.   McDowell's alternative picture – a naturalism of second nature, or naturalized platonism – is described as a middle course between bald naturalism and rampant platonism. I then briefly discuss the notion of 'second nature' in Aristotle. The naturalistic credential of 'phronesis' is urged by relating it to the notion of *Bildung* in German philosophy. And then I discuss how McDowell invokes these resources to argue against a *factorizing* understanding of Aristotle's thought that humans are rational animals.

2.   Two lines of objection are described and answered. They concern the contrast between the space of reasons and the realm of law, and the differences between naturalized and rampant platonism. Two key points are argued; first, there are two

kinds of causality according to McDowell, and second, McDowell never attempts to knock rampant platonism down.

3.   McDowell's view on mere animals is illustrated by the distinction between world and environment from Hans-Georg Gadamer. The notion of 'world' is connected to 'language,' 'freedom,' and 'openness.' I explain how this distinction helps us avoid two strands in the Cartesian thinking, that mere animals are automata, and humans are immaterial souls.

4.   Brandom's accusation of residual individualism is partially answered by considering McDowell's criticism to Davidson's 'triangulation,' and a reservation of McDowell's presentation of Davidson – that is, triangulation is between 'self-standing subjects' – is made.

Episode Ⅱ. Perceiver and Knower

Primeness

1.   I invoke Timothy Williamson's two notions 'broadness' and 'primeness' to illustrate the differences between internalism and weak / strong externalism: internalism rejects both, weak externalism accepts broadness but rejects primeness, and strong externalism accepts both.

2.   How Cartesian 'method of doubt' results in the 'inner space model' is discussed. McDowell's objection to skepticism is distinguished from others' ones, for example Barry Stroud's objection to the KK principle. The case of perception is identified as a prominent example of the inner space model. I discuss the debate between the common kind theory and disjunctivism, and relate this to the traditional debate about the analysis of knowledge raised by Edmund Gettier. Later an objection from Simon Blackburn is discussed and answered.

3.   McDowell argues that the inner space model makes intentionality unavailable to us, because on that model we are never in touch with the world. Two motivations of the inner space model – from modern science and first-person authority – are damped: the former unjustly eliminates the space of reasons, and the latter renders our authority excessive. A stronger argument from the Fregean sense is answered by introducing the correct understanding of the notion of 'the cognitive realm.'

4.   I go back to the parallel story in epistemology. The relation between justification and epistemic luck is strengthened in McDowell's picture. And then I discuss how McDowell's argument against the 'interiorization of the space of reasons' works against the traditional hybrid view of knowledge. According to him, the traditional view cannot make sense of our critical reasons and epistemic lucks, and it is *ad hoc* as far as skepticism is concerned. Traditionalist' argument from BIV is also answered by

noting the distinction between justification and exculpation.

Openness

1.   Primeness naturally leads to openness. I discuss how McDowell combines Kant's discursivity thesis and Davidson's objection with the dualism of scheme and content. The dialectic between coherentism and the Myth of the Given is characterized, with McDowell's 'seesaw' metaphor: we need *external* as well as *rational* constraint, but the seesaw seems to show that we cannot have it both ways. Bald naturalism appears here as a possible way of dismounting the seesaw through repudiating the *sui generis* character of the space of reasons. And then I introduce McDowell's central claim in his Locke Lecture that experiences are passively conceptual all the way out.

2.   McDowell's central transcendental argument concerning how intentionality is possible is discussed. And his denial of 'the ontological gap' is explained. I then turn to the charge of idealism against the 'unboundedness of the conceptual' and how McDowell uses the act / content distinction to reply.

3.   Brandom argues against McDowell's emphasis on 'experience,' and thinks that the emphasis betrays a 'residual individualism.' I reply to this by clarifying the notion of 'experience' adopted by McDowell; the significance of this is reflected by the fact that the same misreading seems to occur in other philosophers' thoughts, notably Michael Ayers. This leads to the question about how McDowell conceives the social elements of intentionality.

Episode Ⅲ. Thinker and Speaker

Custom

1.   I investigate McDowell's conception of the social elements of intentionality by considering his criticisms to Kripke's Wittgensteinian skeptical paradox. Kripke's skeptical doubt from 'the infinite regress of interpretation' and his corresponding skeptical solution are characterized.

2.   Wittgenstein's remarks in *PI* §201 are referred to indicate a way to say no to the skeptic. I then explain why we should see Wittgenstein as distancing himself from reductionism about meaning. McDowell's various citations from Wittgenstein are interpreted, and Kripke's ways of pressing the skeptical challenge are discussed. In answering the challenge, I introduce Wittgenstein's notion of 'bedrock.'

3.   I contrast McDowell's way of understanding 'communal' practices with Kripke's and Wright's ones; the former respects Wittgenstein's notion of 'custom,' while the latter renders a group of people 'a wooden community.' It turns out that Brandom's picture has a similar problem. I connect the wooden picture to the inner space model

introduced before.

4.   Kripke's objections to McDowell's so-called 'primitivism' are discussed. I put the emphasis on objections raised by Martin Kusch. Kusch argues that dispositionalism does not rely on the infinite regress of interpretation, and McDowell's view is similar to dispositionalism. I dispute both of these. In addition, I rebut Kusch's insistence that Kripke's picture is essentially social. I also disagree with his way of connecting the indeterminacy of meaning to reductionism. Finally, I briefly argue that McDowell advocates a delicate version of realism about meaning.

5.   I trace the source of Kripke's and Wright's conviction in reductionism to the traditional dichotomy between the Cartesian and the Rylean, between psychologism and behaviorism. Quine is also responsible for this dichotomy. I discuss Dummett's effort to avoid the problem and McDowell's criticisms to it. Dummett distinguishes between 'full-blooded' and 'modest' theory of meaning, and thinks the latter unavoidably collapses into psychologism. I explain how McDowell invokes his conception of 'membership' to sustain the claim that in conversations we 'hear someone else's meaning in his words.' I then shift from McDowell's emphasis on custom and in turn on language to Davidson's claim that 'there is no such a thing as a language.'

Bildung

1.   I introduce Davidson's target – the conventional view of communication – and his putative counterexamples from malapropism. Although McDowell agrees on this, he nevertheless dissent to Davidson's 'leap,' that a public language plays no role in the constitution of subjectivity. This reflects their different conceptions of 'language games.'

2.   I argue that McDowell sides with Davidson that we should not participate the rule-following discussions generated by Kripke's celebrated work on Wittgenstein. This involves giving up the conviction that communication is constituted by shared rules or conventions. The relevance of *Bildung* is also indicated.

Episode Ⅳ. Agent and Person

Embodiment

1.   I start the argumentation by deepen my characterization of conceptualism, which has been introduced in the context of 'openness.' I emphasize McDowell's distinction between 'responsiveness to reasons' and 'responsiveness to reasons *as such*.' This concerns the relation he draws between conceptuality and rationality. Another crucial distinction about the way conceptual capacities enters the picture – between 'exercise'

and 'operative' – is also explained. I then consider Ayers's objection that the picture recommended by McDowell makes our experiences 'quasi-linguistic.' This is a misunderstanding based on the dualism of the sensory and the intellectual. I then show that McDowell has a parallel story for 'action,' indicating that the locus of the disagreement between him and Dreyfus is the very idea of 'passivity' in perceptions and actions.

2.   I note that Dreyfus launches his objections by contrasting McDowell with Samuel Todes's *Body and World*. Dreyfus first introduces his general framework between 'detached rule-following' and 'situation-specific way of coping.' I argue that actually McDowell regards conceptual capacities as situation-specific, and we can see this in his objections to Kripke's 'infinite regress of interpretation.'

3.   Dreyfus improves his framework by replacing the original distinction with the one between 'subjectivity' and 'absorption.' However, I argue that his example from the baseball player Chuck Knoblauch betrays his confusion of 'conceptual mindedness' and 'attention.' I then argue that McDowell never regards attention as central in his picture. And I explain why Dreyfus's conception of self-awareness is problematic and how McDowell argues that Dreyfus and sometimes Maurice Merleau-Ponty lapse into 'the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect.'

4.   I argue that Dreyfus conflates the Myth of the Given and foundationalism, and thereby unwittingly falls into the former: his notion of 'solicitation' belongs to the realm of law, but it is used by him to do the 'base-providing' work. I then note that Dreyfus is ambivalent about the status of human body: sometimes it is distinctively human-like, but sometimes it is like an automaton.

5.   I remind my readers that the Myth of the Disembodied Intellect is in effect a version of the inner space model. And I connect McDowell's talks about 'I' to his conception of 'personhood.'

Embedment

1.   Derek Parfit's reductive approach to develop John Locke's general picture about self-consciousness is introduced. Against this, McDowell elaborates Gareth Evans's argument based on 'identification-freedom.' Parfit's thinking is faulty because in responding to the identification-freedom in the first person case, he implicitly holds the so-called 'narrow assumption.'

2.   Since the trouble is due to the narrow assumption, McDowell's argument against it is from the notion of 'broadness'; in this context, this amounts to the emphasis on the third-person perspective. McDowell's diagnosis of Parfit is that the latter, as well as many others, mistakenly thought the root of the Cartesian is immaterialism. I then explain how McDowell reconciles Locke's insight with 'animalism.' Later I discuss

McDowell's argument that any account based on the notion of 'quasi-memory' – first introduced by Sydney Shoemaker and endorsed by Parfit – nevertheless commits the factorizing way of conceiving memory.

3.   In talking about personhood, McDowell seems to oblige himself to take a stance towards the mind-body problem. I envisage what McDowell would say by discussing his criticisms against Davidson's anomalous monism. Two motivations – the unity of science and avoidance of Cartesian dualism – are dislodged. I explain why McDowell thinks that the premise to be renounced is 'the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality.' Furthermore, McDowell argues that Davidson's position leads to epiphenomenalism. Finally, McDowell's own position 'event dualism' is sketched but without elaborations.

Episode Ⅴ. *Apperceiver* and *Homo sentiens*

Objectivity

1.   The Evans-Strawson argument based on 'identification-freedom' is applied to Kant's thinking about 'apperception.' McDowell argues that the interdependence of self-consciousness and consciousness of the world argued by Kant in Transcendental Deduction would be more satisfying if it can accommodate the fact that humans are 'bodily presences in the world.' Unlike Parfit, Kant is not attracted by reductionism; instead he argues that the 'I think' must be a merely formal condition. Nevertheless, McDowell's argument against Parfit works in Kant's case as well.

2.   Here I consider Maximilian De Gaynesford's objections that McDowell's Kant is not Kant. His reconstruction of McDowell's argument, however, is problematic at many points. For example, he thinks that McDowell's argument relies crucially on the notion of 'reference,' and that McDowell mistakenly attributes the anti-immaterialism premise and the narrow assumption to Kant, and so on. I dispute all of these.

3.   I argue that McDowell's argument against Kant's formal 'I think' is an example of his general denial of 'scheme-content dualism.' Davidson's initial introduction to this dualism is discussed. I concentrate on McDowell's construal of it, discussing several applications of his criticisms, including anti-interiorization of the space of reasons, the conceptuality of experience, a novel reading of the private language argument, and his repudiation of 'Nomological Character of Causality,' the fourth dogma of empiricism. McDowell's thought is that we can retain real objectivity only if we firmly reject forms of scheme-content dualism.

Subjectivity

1.   The narrow sense of 'subjectivity' – the 'what it is like' respect – is the main

theme here. I start with Ned Block's claim that the great chasm in philosophy of mind is between the qualia theory and representationalism. The essential features of 'qualia' are identified as 'non-cognitive' and 'intrinsic.' I argue that McDowell case against them can be found in his holism of the mental and his objections to scheme-content dualism. As a result, McDowell is a representationalist in philosophy of mind.

2.   'Representationalism' and 'intentionalism' are often interchangeable terms, so I need to address Tim Crane's claim that intentionalism and disjunctivism are incompatible. In order to engage with this point, I investigate versions of McDowell's disjunctivism. According to my interpretation, McDowell commits state, reason, content, and (weak) phenomenal disjunctivism (the 'state' and 'reason' ones are my own terminology). I take issue with Alex Byrne and Heather Logue concerning McDowell's commitment to metaphysical (in my term, 'state') disjunctivism.

3.   Since the issues between disjunctivism and intentionalism originally arise from the argument from illusion / hallucination, I introduce a version of the argument and identify two crucial features of it, arguing that we can anchor the debate with either of them, but Crane's framework corresponds to neither. I prefer one of the framework since it reflects nowadays' heated debate between disjunctivism and the 'common kind theory.' This framework helps us to see the essential claim of intentionalism. And I further relate the present discussion to the internalism / externalism debate. I thereby argue that the 'disjunctive versus factorizing framework' proposed by Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne is not fine-grained enough.

4.   I suggest that we should not use 'representationalism' and 'intentionalism' interchangeably. The former is a theory in philosophy of mind in general, claiming that 'all' mental facts are representational facts; the latter is a theory in philosophy of perception in particular, claiming that 'intentional object' is a better explanation than sense-datum. I also find fault in Crane's assimilation of the adverbial theory and the qualia theory. The failure to distinguish representationalism from intentionalism is due to a misunderstanding of the transparency (if any) of experience and a misreading of the main aim of the argument from illusion, I submit. I tentatively conclude that in philosophy of mind McDowell is an inter-model weak representationalist, and in philosophy of perception he is a disjunctive intentionalist.

Epilogue. Self-Determining Subjectivity

Freedom

1.   McDowell identifies 'the space of reasons' with 'the realm of freedom,' which is closely related to our 'self-determining subjectivity.' To understand this, we need to have an intelligible notion of 'the space of reasons causation.' I agree with Richard

Gaskin that McDowell has not provided a fully satisfying conception of it. However. I think McDowell's transcendental argument for the existence of that kind of causality is convincing. Besides, I suggest that though providing a satisfying explanation of this kind of causality does not lie in the heart of McDowell's philosophical outlook, still it would be better if we have a deeper understanding of it.

2.   I note the fact that McDowell says a lot about self-determining subjectivity in the context of German Idealism, but those efforts do not directly improve the situation. My own suggestion is that self-determining subjectivity is socially real, but the details of this sketchy picture have not been wrought out.

Wisdom

1.   I remind that the same considerations about self-determining subjectivity apply to McDowell's thinking about practical wisdom. I suggest that philosophers of science should leave open the possibility of the naturalism of second nature, so that they can help us to understand more about causality in the space of reasons, if any.

2.   I close the essay by relating McDowell's emphasis on wisdom to the familiar hierarchy of understanding from data, information, knowledge, to wisdom. McDowell provides a fruitful way for us to reconsider the importance of wisdom. I then rehearse my main theme that practical wisdom initiates us into the space of reasons, and this second nature endows each of us a *cogito*, which can be a perceiver, knower, thinker, speaker, agent, person, and (self-) conscious being in the world.

World and Subject

THE EPISODES