

THE INTIMATE HARMONY BETWEEN THE INTELLECT AND SENSIBILITY: McDOWELL AND PERCEPTUAL LEARNING

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Abstract. This paper argues for a shift in the debate surrounding McDowell’s conceptualism: from *contents* to *capacities*. This shift is important because the conceptual nature of a capacity is revealed in the way the capacity figures in the life of the animal, in particular in how the animal *acquires* and *sustains* the capacity. More specifically, I argue that a capacity is *conceptual* insofar as the subject can improve it by systematically exploiting interconnections among the features involved in its exercise. I first develop this notion through an analysis of skillful action, showing how a skilled agent perceives the interlocking demands of a situation and uses this perception to refine her performance. I then extend the model to perception itself, arguing that perceptual learning exhibits the same structure: theoretical knowledge can reshape perceptual organization, bringing it under conceptual control. This yields what I call a *systematically rational capacity*, which, I argue, comes in degrees and is not specific to humans. I next examine McDowell’s account of virtue, where practical wisdom is shown to consist in an *intimate harmony* between intellect and sensibility rather than a computation between independent components. I argue that this harmony, far from being restricted to the ethical domain, characterizes the relation between reason and sensibility in general: our intelligence just is the properly molded state of our perceptual capacities, reflectively adjusted. Finally, I turn to the role of language, which enables a degree of systematic integration unavailable to non-linguistic animals, and argue that language’s deepest contribution is not merely representational but *ethical*, and that here we can find what is special about us: language initiates us into a shared form of life in which we matter to one another and have a say in shaping what matters.

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1. Introduction

John McDowell can be justly described as a *rationalist*: every aspect of our lives can be brought within the reach of reason, since every aspect of our lives can be rationally shaped.¹ Indeed, the focal point of his work seems to be our *sensitivity to reasons*, a human capacity to perceive reasons as such. Notice the focus on the *perception of*



reasons: the main thesis of this paper is that, if we are able to *perceive reasons*, that is because our perception already involves an *intimate harmony* between intellect and sensibility. Notice also the focus on what we are *able* to do: it is a subsidiary point of this paper that the debate surrounding the conceptual nature of perception would be better conceived by focusing not on its *content* but on our perceptual *capacities*; discussion of content is downstream, so to speak, of discussion about capacities.²

This shift from talk of contents to talk of abilities or capacities is not idle. Traditional debates about the content of perception focus on its format, structure, and architecture.³ Such debates, while certainly interesting, are orthogonal to McDowell's concerns. As I read him, McDowell is not interested in how best to characterize the content of perception in computational terms. Rather, he is interested in better understanding how perceptual content figures in the lives of rational animals. I therefore emphasize the shift from content to capacity because, on the content framing, this type of question does not come into view, and may even be *obscured*. Talk of content is typically talk of an *exercise* of a capacity, so that, by focusing on content, we seem to be considering only a *snapshot* of the life of the animal, which can render out of focus its *history*. This is important because when we consider how the capacity figures in the life of the animal, we shift the focus to how it is *acquired and sustained*. Thus, as I will argue in this paper, for McDowell, perception displays the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility precisely because the way we acquire and sustain our perceptual capacities is open to *critical, intelligent improvement*—in a word, *systematic rational improvement*.⁴

The article is thus structured around this characterization. In Section 2, I consider McDowell's analysis of a paradigmatic case of systematic rational improvement, namely *skillful action*. This analysis reveals that what is crucial here is that the subject improves her capacities by considering the systematic interconnections among the features that characterize their exercise. Armed with this characterization, in Section 3 I show how to extend its application beyond skillful action to perception. The main problem with this extension is that the application of the notion of systematic rational improvement to skillful action depends on its nature as an action. Perception, however, is not an action. The aim of that section is, then, to show that perception is nevertheless structured in such a way that allows perceptual learning to display the central features of learning a skill. The next two sections are then dedicated to showing how the model thus uncovered displays the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility alluded to above. This is done in two steps. In Section 4, I analyze how McDowell himself provided an explicit model for this harmony with his account of *practical wisdom*, and, in Section 5, I propose a way to extend this model to intellect and sensibility more generally.

It should be clear from the description above that the notion of *systematic rational improvement* is crucial to the account developed here. The reader may thus

get the impression that this is all there is to say about rationality. I will argue in the conclusion, however, that this only characterizes a restricted aspect of it, what I call *systematic rationality*. Words such as “rational”, “intelligent”, and their cognates are not merely neutral descriptions of whatever it is that they apply to, but also a kind of honorific: they confer a special status to their subjects. This may partially account for why the charge of hyper-intellectualism against McDowell resonates so much: in saying that our perception is rational, McDowell seems to be emphasizing the *gulf* that separates us from other animals, as if we were somehow more special than they are.⁵ In the Conclusion, I propose, then, to analyze what could be meant by this special status and what it reveals about how we think about ourselves. As I will there argue, it is not by chance that the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility first appeared in McDowell’s ethical works. For it may very well be that its most important application is in highlighting how, in sharing a life, we end up not just *matter*ing to each other but also *rationally reflecting* about how we matter.

2. McDowell on practical rationality

The core of McDowell’s rationalism is a simple yet powerful idea: that our capacities are capable of *systematic rational improvement* as a result of our being sensitive to the interlocking features that make up our world. That is, we are able to notice the interlocking character of certain features and use this character to further improve our capacities. Since this rationalism is easier to understand in the domain of practical knowledge, it will be helpful to start with an account of skillful performance and then, in the next sections, move on to the more complicated domain of perception.

Consider a case of skillful performance, say, an expert playing chess. At a minimum, the expert player must know the success conditions of her performance. That is, her actions are controlled by her sense of what she is trying to do or achieve; in chess, this is normally to checkmate one’s opponent.⁶ This goal will determine a series of means to achieve it, say a number of tactics and strategies one may execute in a given position to beat one’s opponent; this series is not static, but is continuously changing during the course of play, adjusting for one’s opponent’s reactions. Not all such means will be equal, of course—some will be more effective than others at reaching one’s goal along certain dimensions (a faster or more elegant checkmate, for instance). Indeed, one can say that an action is executed more or less skillfully, among other things, as it displays greater or lesser sensitivity to this ranking of means. Now, different people will be able to recognize different such means. A novice may not be able to notice a quick strategy for forcing checkmate, which may be obvious to an expert. In other words, people will have different *sensitivities* to such means, and acuity in this sensitivity is precisely one of the hallmarks of the expert.⁷

Notice that, although there is some degree of latitude here, it is clear that the effectiveness of the means is not something that is up to the agent to decide: once the goal is fixed, the *situation*, and not the whims of the agent, determines the effective means to achieve it. That is, given a goal, there will also be given a series of means that can be exploited to achieve it, and, moreover, such means will generally come with an implicit rank according to their effectiveness.⁸ Of course, it is not as if our goals came with tables of means that we can then look up in order to decide how to act. Rather, the various features of the situation will determine, given the goal, what the means are to achieve it. So, in the case of a checkmate, the various positions of the pieces and their possible moves determine the most effective way of achieving it; importantly, in such a case, the positions of the pieces and their possible moves are various features of the situation that *interact* in order to determine the means: it *would* be sensible to move the knight to that square *had not* the queen been targeting it, etc. We speak, then, of an agent being *sensitive* to the demands imposed by the situation if she can *perceive* how the varied features of the situation contribute to the effectiveness of the means of realizing her ends.⁹

Evidently, not *all* the features of the situation will be relevant for realizing a given goal. Given a certain position on the board, the possible movements of the leftmost pawn may not be as relevant as the possible movements of the bishop. Part of developing such a sensitivity, then, is to be better attuned to the *most relevant* features of the situation. A novice may spend a lot of time pondering the moves of the knight and the queen, when it is the movement of the rook that could be decisive in her position. Since this aspect of a person's sensitivity will be typically molded by her acquisition of knowledge in a given domain (e.g. chess strategies and positional play), we can say that part of its development is her cultivating an attunement to which pieces of knowledge may guide her behavior in better completing whatever she has set out to do.¹⁰

We can thus begin to articulate what is rational about the sensitivity in question. If by practical rationality we understand our capacity to determine the effective means for our ends,¹¹ then the notion of skillful action points in the direction we have been describing, namely that in accomplishing a certain task, a person can become aware of the interconnections between the features of the situation that constitute the task, and exploit them in order to become more skillful. But to be aware of such rational interconnections is just to *unify* the features as bearing on each other. We can precisely describe this *unity* as the unity of a *concept*, so that in better appreciating such interconnections, the agent comes to a better grasp of the *concept* of her action. In fact, that is precisely how McDowell defines the notion of an empirical concept in the following important quotation:

(...) I urged that we could not recognize capacities operative in experience

as conceptual at all were it not for the way they are integrated into a rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one's thinking to the deliverances of experience. That is what a repertoire of empirical concepts is. The integration serves to place even the most immediate judgments of experience as possible elements in a world-view. (McDowell 1996, p.29)

Going back to the case of a person developing a growing awareness of how given features of a situation contribute to the realization of her ends, the vocabulary of concepts allows us to re-describe this process as the person coming to a progressively better grasp of the concept of her task, or, as McDowell puts it in another context, as the person's "initiation into a conceptual space" (McDowell 1998, p.39), one that is organized by whatever practical concept is involved in the task at hand.¹² Indeed, McDowell is clear that the point of speaking about practical concepts is to make explicit that the person can rationally reflect on her actions: "The point of saying that the rational agent, unlike the dog, is realizing a concept in doing what she does is that her doing, under a specification that captures the content of the practical concept that she is realizing, comes within the scope of her practical rationality (...)." (McDowell 2007a, p.369). That is, the point of speaking about practical concepts, under the reading I'm recommending here, is that this allows us to emphasize that the person can exploit the interconnections among the features of a given situation to more efficiently promote her ends.¹³ Let us summarize these findings in a definition:

Systematic Rational Capacity: A capacity is *systematically rational* if the subject is able to improve the capacity by actively exploiting the interconnections among the features of the situation involved in exercises of the capacity. In those cases, we say that the capacity is controlled by a *concept*.

In order to get a better grip on this definition, it will be important to ward off a couple of misunderstandings of what is entailed, in McDowell's view, by this conceptual character of our capacities.¹⁴ First, as the focus on improvement should make clear, McDowell's position involves the subject critically assessing her performance in general, rather than consciously reflecting upon it with each exercise of the capacity. That is, the reflective distance needed for active improvement relates to how the capacity is *acquired and sustained*, not to how it is exercised.¹⁵ Second, and relatedly, the conceptual character of a given capacity does not mean that in exercising the capacity the subject is algorithmically applying a rule, or even that the person can codify into general propositions the way she exploits the features of a situation. Indeed, precisely not: that is why we describe it as a *sensitivity* to the demands of each particular situation, in a way that may *outstrip* any general rule.¹⁶

The important point, then, is that a capacity is *systematically rational* because one is sensitive to the interconnections among the features involved in the exercise of the

capacity. This sensitivity is rationally shaped, being the product of active improvement, though this does not mean that it will always be codifiable in explicit rules. This systematic integration of our capacities, in which we can exploit their interconnections to improve on any one of them, is the key, I claim, to McDowell's conception of reason. According to this conception, what marks a given capacity as conceptual or not is not any feature of the capacity taken in isolation, but rather the way it can be *systematically integrated with our other capacities*. That is, what is rational is not this or that isolated capacity, but rather the *degree of systematization among our capacities*. Of course, as should be clear, this means that this type of systematic integration can only give rise to a difference *in degree* among different species of animals: the more integrated the animal's capacities, the more rational it is. That is why I call it *systematic rational capacity*, and not rational capacity *sans phrase*. In order to obtain the latter, we must wait for the conclusion.

In any case, we saw how this systematic model of rationality could be used to analyze skillful action, by specifically exploiting its means-ends structure. The attentive reader will have already noticed, however, that at the core of this account is a *sensitivity*, a capacity to *perceive* the requirements of the situation. To substantiate this account, then, we must analyze the case of perception, and see how this seemingly passive capacity can nevertheless be integrated into what McDowell calls, as we have seen, our "rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one's thinking to the deliverances of experience". This will be the task of the next section.

3. Perception as a systematic rational capacity

At first, it seems that a simple application of the ideas from the previous section to our perceptual capacities yields the opposite conclusion from what we wanted. That is because our perceptual capacities seem to be exercised in only one way, namely to perceive things. This is bolstered by the fact that to perceive something is not an *action* at all: using Anscombe's (1963) well-known test, it is easily seen that there is no sense in asking *why* a person perceived something, certainly not in the sense of asking for a *reason* for the perception. Thus, perception does not seem to be tied up with our projects and goals, and hence it seems that there is no question of the most efficient *means* to perceive, and so no room for improvement, let alone rational improvement, of such capacities. Still, I believe such a conclusion can be resisted. Although it does not display a means-end structure, our perception is still *organized*, and this organization can be improved upon. This improvement is called *perceptual learning*, and McDowell's point, as applied to perception, will be precisely that such learning can be rationally shaped.¹⁷

In order to understand the possibility of perceptual learning, we should first bear

in mind that perception is not a simple registration of information from the senses, as if the senses provided us with a mere aggregate of colors, sounds, textures, tastes, or smells. Rather, we perceive a *unified scene*. McDowell emphasizes this by saying that we perceive unified wholes in which the elements must be *understood together*:

The presentations of visually sensible ways to be that are the elements of a visual intuition are not a mere multiplicity; in the intuition the ways to be are *understood together*—so in a unity for which the subject's understanding is responsible—as ways a single object is, and the object is thereby visually present to the subject. (McDowell 2018b, p.30, original emphasis)

This point is central to my argument in this section, so it merits some unpacking. To say that we perceive a scene is to say, first, that we perceive a situation as being populated by *objects*, cohesive, bounded, spatio-temporally continuous wholes.¹⁸ But this is to say, second, that in perception we do not see all such objects as an undifferentiated mess, so that perception is also a capacity to *discriminate*: when we perceive a feature, we are able to differentiate it from other features.¹⁹ And, third, when we differentiate the features from each other, they do not all strike us in the same way, so that we *single out* some of the features that compose a scene as the focus of our attention. We can encapsulate these three characteristics in the following definition:

Perceptual Capacity: Our perceptual capacities are sensory capacities to discriminate and single out features; that is, to differentiate features from the environment and to make some of them the object of our attention.²⁰

The importance of this organization of our impressions into a coherent scene can be illustrated by means of an example. Consider the cases of people wearing left-right-reversing goggles, as described by Hurley and Noë (2003, pp. 148-152). Despite receiving visual impressions from the environment and registering colors and shapes, these people are, in a very real sense, blind. According to Hurley and Noë, their problem is that, in such a situation, the usual linkage between their sensations and action is severed, so that they find themselves unable to connect changes in movement to changes in sensation. Hence, they cannot single out the *features relevant to action* as the focus of their attention and therefore cannot (visually) *perceive* the features in question. We thus see how a breakdown in organization leads to a breakdown in perception.

This example also helps to highlight an important feature of perception: it is intimately connected to action and to the realization of our goals. Indeed, it was this intimate connection that underwrote the argument from the last section. Recall that we saw there how the rational improvement of a skill depended, among other things, on the subject being able to better *perceive* the interlocking features relevant to the

accomplishment of a task. Obviously, this only works if we can perceptually discriminate features and focus on some of them—the relevant ones—to the detriment of others. Clearly, the goals of the agent in that situation determine *which* features are relevant. In other words, the perceptual organization of a scene is crucial for us to realize our actions, and so crucial for us to realize our goals. That is, while perception itself does not display a means-end structure, *it can nevertheless be a means to our goals*. This is what provides us with a solution to our initial puzzle: we can say that we *improve* our perceptual capacities insofar as we make them more efficient in their contribution to such goals.²¹

If, however, our goals can control the way we improve our perceptual capacities, then this means that we can train our capacities by actively exploiting the interconnections between features of a situation that realize the goal in question. That is, we can train our perceptual capacities by bringing them under the control of the *concept* of our goals. That is why McDowell insists that rationality *transforms* the character of perception. It transforms perception because now features perceived *are also data for our theoretical rationality*: “Affordances are no longer merely input to a human animal’s natural motivational tendencies; now they are data for her rationality, not only her practical rationality but her theoretical rationality as well” (McDowell 2007b, p. 344, original emphasis)²²

This is important because it means that our *theoretical knowledge* can guide how we improve our perceptual capacities. That is, our perceptual capacities are *systematically integrated* with our more theoretical knowledge, so that we can then actively exploit this knowledge to improve them. In other words, our perceptual capacities are *systematically rational* in the sense delineated in the last section: they can be acquired and sustained by critical reflection on our performance. Our perceptual capacities are *controlled by concepts*, so that we can say that they are *conceptual capacities*.

More concretely, consider the case of an expert radiologist.²³ An expert radiologist can make a correct diagnosis of the presence of lesions from an x-ray plate in less than 200ms, which is less than the time required for a voluntary eye movement.²⁴ The expert thus has a capacity to discriminate lesions from non-lesions that the layperson does not have, even though they may be looking at the same object, namely an x-ray plate. Since the object under observation is the same, the difference cannot be accounted for by a difference in what is presented to them. Rather, it is how the expert organizes the scene that is relevant. Both the layman and the expert look at the same thing, but while the layperson may see only a black-and-white shape that vaguely resembles a rib cage, the expert may in addition group a certain black-and-white region as the lungs and, furthermore, focus attention on the white traces in that region as signs of consolidation, itself a symptom of some kind of lung disease. We therefore see how a difference in the grouping of regions and the distribution of saliences can contribute to a different perceptual capacity for discrimination.²⁵

Notice that, in order for the region to become grouped as the lungs and for the white traces to become salient as signs of consolidation, the radiologist must have considerable knowledge of human anatomy and the effects of x-ray radiation on the human body, among other things. This is important because it shows that her perceptual capacity was acquired not merely by drilling on the difference between x-rays with lesions and x-rays with no lesions.²⁶ Rather, it was achieved by, first, *critically reflecting* on the fact that fluid-filled alveoli block x-rays differently from air-filled ones, that blocked x-rays do not hit the plate, and thus that the plate retains its white aspect in the blocked regions (this is where her theoretical knowledge of physics and anatomy comes in). Then, she must *actively* seek to re-organize the way she perceptually experiences an x-ray plate by training herself to single out a white distribution of dots in the lung region (which indicates consolidation) while not paying attention to other dots, which may merely indicate our normal bone structure (this is the part where the organization of her experience comes in). Notice that it is not merely the case that her *interpretation* of the experience changes, but, rather, that her *perception itself* changes, since the difference lies in which features are singled out in her perceptual experience. In this case, the concept of a pulmonary disease *controls* the acquisition and sustenance of the radiologist's perceptual capacity—the capacity to perceptually single out symptoms of a disease—by making her focus on its *known* symptoms and how they appear in an x-ray in order to quickly single out the relevant perceptual features for her diagnosis.

In other words, because our understanding of our goal places it against the background of a “rationally organized network of capacities”, we will be able to exploit the *interlocking character* of its features and other features relevant to its achievement so that our *perceptual organization of the scene* will better reflect what is relevant to this achievement. More briefly, we can say that the way we perceptually organize a scene can be related to our overall *conception* of objects and their features, so that we can exploit this conception in order to make our *perceptual grasp* of the scene better suited to our goals. Importantly, according to the view outlined here, what is relevant to the systematic rationality of a capacity is precisely that we are able to exploit its systematic interconnections with other capacities. It is crucial for such a picture, therefore, that our perceptual capacities are themselves systematically organized in such a way that we can rationally exploit them. Indeed, I hold that this systematic organization is the key to a proper view of McDowell's conception of the relation between the intellect and sensibility. McDowell himself provided us with a template to explore this issue in his discussion of *virtue*. It is to this topic that I will turn next.

4. McDowell on virtue and reason

The usual, dualistic picture of our practical reason is that it consists primarily of two components: a motivational component, consisting of desire and other pro-attitudes, and a cognitive component, consisting of our beliefs and the capacity to draw inferences about what to do on the basis of the interaction between our desires and our beliefs. According to this model, the independence of the two components relative to each other means that, in deciding whether to act, we must *weigh* the considerations brought forward by our motivational component and by our cognitive component, and then act on whatever consideration outweighs the other. It is almost as if, in coming to a decision, we must always perform a kind of computation: we have a situation specified by the cognitive component, we have what we desire specified by the motivational component, and then we compute, given the situation, the best course of action that satisfies our desires, or, if we accept that reason may impose its own independent demands, the best course of action given our desires and reason's demands.

McDowell, however, believes that this picture is deeply flawed, insofar as it does not explain the psychological organization of the virtuous person. In particular, it does not explain Aristotle's distinction between the continent and the temperate person, that is, between someone who acts correctly *in spite of* his inclinations (the continent person) and someone who acts correctly because *his inclinations are aligned with his acts* (the temperate person). The problem is that the dualistic picture posits that the two types of people, the continent and the temperate, have the same intellectual grasp of the demands of the situation, differing merely in their *desires*. As McDowell (1998 [1978], p.91) explains, this assumption results in a completely unrealistic picture of the temperate person.

To see this, note that, on the traditional, dualistic picture, since a decision is always made by a kind of weighing of the contributions of the various factors that seem relevant for action, it seems that the only way a temperate person can fail to have the relevant inclination is if either the person's desiderative component is impoverished, so that she will not have desires that in certain situations would generate vicious actions, or else she is beholden to an almost magical power of using her intellect to *outweigh* such desires by sheer force of will. Either way, the result is that a temperate person does not appear *human*, because her relation to her desires is not human. Rather than finding fault with Aristotle's distinction, however, McDowell proposes that we jettison the moral psychology that underlies this impasse. Interestingly, in order to give the correct moral psychological account of the situation, McDowell appeals to a *perceptual* model of moral cognition.

The perceptual model gives us a more psychologically plausible account of the situation because, according to such a model, a situation does not merely present itself

neutrally to a person. Rather, as we have seen in the last section, the person's perceptual capacities *organize the scene* by singling out its features, in particular the features relevant for achieving her various goals. In the case of action, we may say that the relevant features are so many *opportunities for action*, each such feature functioning as a type of "affordance" for a given course of action. As in the perceptual model considered in the previous section, these opportunities for action are also *organized under a concept* (namely, the concept of the course of action itself), so that given features are grouped together or perhaps rendered more salient. The difference, then, between the continent and the temperate person is that the latter *grasps the situation differently*, and this is because the situation does not present itself "neutrally" to each of them, but, rather, the presentation itself already involves an evaluation of the merits of the opportunities for action.

To illustrate, let us consider McDowell's own example of a person who is presented with an opportunity to be unfaithful to his partner. The continent person sees this as an *opportunity to satisfy his desire*, but, perhaps by weighing the potential risks or whatever other process, he decides against acting on it. The case for the temperate person is entirely different. Although *in the abstract* she may have the same libido as the continent person, and would perhaps enjoy the opportunity, her *perception* of the situation is different, so that the opportunity itself is not *salient* to her. That is, because her perception of situations is controlled by the concept of the noble, the courses of action that are salient are precisely the courses of action that instantiate the concept of acting nobly, which, by hypothesis, do not include the unfaithful course. So, where the continent person sees an opportunity to satisfy his desire, the temperate person sees something else entirely, perhaps not even an opportunity for action at all. It is almost as if the continent person is beholden to the dualistic picture sketched above, and must perform a computation in order to decide how to act. Because he is performing the computation, the attractions of acting unfaithfully appear as relevant to him, and even when he manages to overcome them, he nonetheless feels as if something was lost. For the temperate person, however, because she directly sees what is relevant to act nobly, the attractions of acting unfaithfully do not even register, and so she can wholly identify with her course of action. McDowell puts this thought in the following way:

On the view I am describing, by contrast, the motivating potential of the competing attractions has not exerted any influence in forming the judgement that the person should have acted on—so that, as above, it might be expected to have used itself up there, and it is mysterious how it can still have energy to inject after it has been outweighed. The virtuous view of what should be done does not so much as take those attractions into account. So we can think of them as a potential source of motivating energy, not used up in the formation of the judgement. There can be a risk that the potential

will be actualized, if the attractions are not insulated, by the clear perception of a silencing requirement, from engaging the inclinations. (McDowell 1998 [1978], p.93)

This new account of the situation is more psychologically realistic because it opens up the space for us to *learn* how to be virtuous. According to the dualistic picture, because their intellectual grasp was taken to be the same, there seemed to be no path from the continent to the temperate person, unless the path included some kind of stoic training regimen to either deflate our appetites or inflate our will. On McDowell's perceptual model of virtue, we are directly confronted with courses of action, so that, in molding our motivational propensities, what we are doing is *learning to see the relevant courses of action in a given situation*. And learning to see the relevant courses of action is just one more instance of *perceptual learning*, the same perceptual learning we discussed in the last section. We then have a more natural path to virtue, one that makes use of *our theoretical knowledge* (in this case, of what is noble) to shape our perception of the situations we find ourselves in, in such a way that the noble actions are singled out and the disgraceful disappear from view. In other words, as our actions are themselves integrated by *concepts of what to do*, we can use our knowledge of the various features that compose such actions to organize them according to their correlations with noble and disgraceful actions. That is why McDowell (1998, p.39) speaks here of an *initiation into a conceptual space*, one that is organized by the concepts of the noble and the disgraceful.

This initiation into a conceptual space has an important consequence that strikes at the heart of the dualism sketched out above. Because the initiation into a conceptual space organized by the noble and the disgraceful involves acquiring a perceptual capacity to single out courses of action as being closer to one of these poles than to the other, to classify a course of action under one concept rather than another *already* is an exercise of an intellectual and a desiderative capacity, since the concept of the noble exerts a normative pull on the person. That is because the concept of the noble is, at least partially, the concept of an action that is part of a social practice that counts such an action as being important, as overshadowing other courses of action. So, to classify a course of action under the concept of the noble is already to classify it as being something one cares about. Hence McDowell's insistence that the state of a virtuous person cannot be cleanly separated into component parts, as the dualistic picture would have it:

On this reading, it is not that practical wisdom issues orders, whose content it determines by its own independent operations, to motivational propensities that have been separately moulded to obedience. A virtue of character, strictly so called, involves a harmony of intellect and motivation that is more intimate than that. Practical wisdom is the properly moulded state of the motivational propensities, in a reflectively adjusted form; the sense in which

it is a state of the intellect does not interfere with its also being a state of the desiderative element. (McDowell 1998, p.40, original emphasis)

This is the crucial insight. If, as is typical, we associate a person's desires with her *sensibility*, it means that, in characterizing virtue, we cannot cleanly separate reason from sensibility. Moreover, according to the argument developed so far, the dualism fails in the moral case because it already fails in the perceptual case. The critical step is the application of the perceptual model to virtue, so that we can say that the reason why we cannot cleanly separate reason from sensibility in characterizing virtue is because we cannot cleanly separate reason from sensibility *in perception*—we perceive a course of action under the concept of the noble, which means *at the same time* perceiving it as something we care about and intellectually classifying it. But if to be made aware of something is already the exercise of an intellectual capacity, then the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility cannot apply only to the practical case. It must apply across the board. The goal of the next section, then, is to show how, paraphrasing McDowell, our general intelligence is the properly molded state of our perceptual capacities, in a reflectively adjusted form.

5. The intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility

In the last section, we saw how McDowell's analysis of virtuous action, by concluding that "practical wisdom is the properly molded state of the motivational propensities, in a reflectively adjusted form", dismantled the dualism underwriting the traditional picture of the mind. We now wish to see if the resulting picture can characterize the relation between reason and sensibility *in general*. McDowell himself suggests this development, from virtue to reason in general, in *Mind and World*:²⁷

Moulding ethical character, which includes imposing a specific shape on the practical intellect, is a particular case of a general phenomenon: initiation into conceptual capacities, which include responsiveness to other rational demands besides those of ethics. (McDowell 1996, p.84)

Now, the very features we exploited in characterizing perceptual learning will be useful in characterizing the "more intimate harmony" between perceptual capacities and intelligence that we are after. We saw that the perceptual salience of certain features can itself be the result of intelligent training, in such a way that this salience is controlled by a concept. What this means is that the interlocking features that we are able to discern thanks to the conceptual capacity control the way we perceptually organize the scene before us. Indeed, the argument from that section can even be taken to mean that in reflective perceptual learning, we are being *initiated into a conceptual capacity*: we are learning to better appreciate the interconnections among

the various features that we are able to discern thanks to the conceptual capacity in question. But, conversely, if we take an initiation into a conceptual capacity to be the better grasp of the interlocking character of a range of features, then this can also be taken to mean that such an initiation can take the form of perceptual learning, of being sensitive to this interlocking character in perception.

To illustrate this point, consider the case of bees. Bees exhibit a remarkable flexibility in their use of mental maps, exploiting subtle solar and gravitational cues to navigate outside the hive, for instance by flying directly to the hive after being released at a random external point. They can also exploit olfactory cues to navigate the intricate interior of the hive, displaying remarkable navigational skills on the inside. They thus possess *some* degree of systematic rationality. Indeed, as Carruthers (2009) makes clear, the very fact that they are able to make use of mental maps is already indicative of some degree of systematization, something akin to what Hurley (2003) calls *islands of rationality*, namely flexibility within contexts but not across contexts.²⁸ Following Carruthers, then, we can say that the flexible behavior displayed by bees in exploiting the systematic interconnections between solar and gravitational cues shows that they possess a kind of concept—a solar-and-gravitational space concept, perhaps. Similarly, their use of olfactory cues shows that they possess a kind of concept—perhaps olfactory space—that allows them to solve complex navigational tasks inside the hive. To have a concept, then, is just to have a grasp of the interlocking character of a range of features, a grasp that allows one to solve complex tasks by exploiting this integration.

This focus on the relevant *capacity* of the subject allows us, then, to see the same process—perceptual learning—as both a better grasp of a concept and a better organization of a scene. One improves one’s conceptual capacities insofar as one is able to better exploit the interlocking character of the range of features under the concept. Just as in the virtue case, what mattered was that the subject had in mind the relevant courses of action, here also what matters is that the subject has the relevant capacity to home in on and discriminate certain features. Thus, just as in the virtue case, we can indifferently describe the state of the subject as being either intellectual or desiderative, so too can we indifferently describe the state of the subject as being either conceptual or perceptual. That is why, as intimated in the last section, we can say that our general intelligence is the properly molded state of our perceptual capacities, reflectively adjusted. It is the properly molded state of our perceptual capacities, because such a state *is* the conceptual capacity to home in on the relevant features and exploit their interconnections, and this state is “reflectively adjusted” because it is the result of intelligent training. *This* is the more intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility.

This intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility also explains why McDowell insists that reason is not a mere *additional* capacity that we have on top of our

sensibility, but, rather, something that *transforms* it into the specific kind of sensibility it is.²⁹ It is not something additional because the ability to systematically correlate our perceptual capacities in order to better appreciate the interlocking features of the world is part and parcel of a sensibility, as we saw in Section 2. On the other hand, it also transforms it, because the ability to appreciate this systematic correlation—an ability that can properly be called possession of a *concept*—can impact the flexibility of the animal's response to the world, including, as we have seen, its perceptual response. It is unsurprising, then, that even bees can exhibit this intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility, for their sensibility is also transformed by their own form of conceptual capacities.

Nevertheless, there is a significant difference in degree between bees and humans. Bees are incapable of constructing a better navigation route that passes through the hive in the direction of a point outside it, largely because they are unable to combine their different navigation abilities into a *single* ability to navigate across space. That is, they are unable to *grasp the interconnected character of their abilities* to improve their navigational performance, which is just to say that they are unable to bring those abilities under a single *concept*. In other words, they lack a single concept of *space*. It is as if they inhabited two different spaces, a solar-gravitational space and an olfactory one, so that their world is ultimately fragmented. This fragmentation points to a genuine lack, since it fails to meet a concrete navigational need of the bee, and so constitutes an actual defect in rationality. This answers the demand of Carruthers (2009) to point to a substantive problem with lack of integration: since they cannot fully exploit the interconnections among their capacities to address challenges that they confront in their own environment, they cannot efficiently solve complex navigational problems involving the inside and the outside of the hive at the same time. Moreover, who knows what needs may arise in the course of a creature's career? The more we integrate our capacities, then, the more we are able to flexibly respond to a world, turning it into *our* world. Ideally, we could bring every feature to bear on our capacity to exploit every other feature; but, of course, like the bees, we also fall short of this, so that *full* systematic rationality remains only an ideal.³⁰

This amounts to a mere difference in degree between us and bees: we are further along the scale of systematic integration than they are. This should not be underestimated, as it means the world is open to us in a way that it isn't to them. What explains this difference? Do we just possess a better memory? McDowell himself believes that the explanation is found in our possession of language:

So if occupying the space of reasons in the primary sense is being able to respond to reasons appreciated as such, then only language users can occupy the space of reasons in the primary sense. But this is without prejudice to the legitimacy of finding a kinship between the sort of explanatory nexus

in which we place intentional action undertaken for reasons and the sort of explanatory nexus in which we place purposive behaviour undertaken by animals that cannot have the sort of distanced attitude to their predicaments that language makes possible. (McDowell 2018a, p.11)

How does language bring about this transformation, however? I contend that the answer to this question can be gleaned from the following quotation by McDowell:

The feature of language that really matters is rather this: that a natural language, the sort of language into which human beings are first initiated, serves as a repository of tradition, a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what. The tradition is subject to reflective modification by each generation that inherits it. Indeed, a standing obligation to engage in critical reflection is itself part of the inheritance. (...) But if an individual human being is to realize her potential of taking her place in that succession, which is the same thing as acquiring a mind, the capacity to think and act intentionally, at all, the first thing that needs to happen is for her to be initiated into a tradition as it stands. (McDowell 1996, p.126)

There are two aspects to McDowell's answer here that I would like to emphasize. The first is that, as language users, we are better able to encode the patterns we detect and, moreover, can pass on such patterns. McDowell finds here an unlikely ally in Andy Clark, for whom language is precisely a more powerful tool for systematization.³¹ According to Clark (2000), this more powerful tool changes the character of our systematic capacities for two reasons. First, by providing stable labels for the patterns discovered by our perceptual capacities, language allows us to *de-contextualize* the patterns and detect patterns *among the labels themselves*, that is, higher-order patterns.³² This means that, insofar as language is a medium that enables us to bring a given conceptual capacity to bear on *any* context, it also allows us to operate in a *single* conceptual space. Potentially, *any* feature of the world can bear on any other, and language allows us to exploit this potential to the maximum. That is why our world is truly a *world* and not just an archipelago of islands of rationality in Hurley's sense.

But second, the fact that we now possess stable labels for our patterns means that we can also *transmit* our knowledge of these patterns to others, who can then go on to find their own interconnections among the patterns they inherit. According to this picture, then, the fact that language de-contextualizes our perceptual patterns means that it also provides us with a way to *store* the patterns thus discovered in a manner that allows them to be the object of *joint attention*. That is, we can share them with other people, thus offering opportunities for further refinements, which can then be passed on to still others, in a continuous practice. This last point already indicates that to pass on such patterns is not just a passive exercise, however. It is the *initiation*

of a conversation, of a way to mobilize reasons for why my refinement is supposedly better than yours, why we should accede to the traditional labels, and so on.

That is why, in the above passage, McDowell does not talk merely about passing on our knowledge. He also talks about language being a repository of a *tradition*, of *accumulated wisdom*, and how part of this tradition and wisdom is a *standing obligation to engage in critical reflection* on our inheritance. The important point is that by critically engaging with our tradition, we are being initiated into a practice of refining it *by conversing with each other*. The importance of language, then, is not just that it is a store of patterns—though it certainly is that. More pointedly, language allows us to *converse* with each other, thereby introducing a normative dimension into our practice. We are like non-linguistic animals in that we have the capacity to perceive scenes in a unitary way and uncover hidden regularities in such scenes. Unlike non-linguistic animals, however, we also take each other as *agents* whose lives have not merely an impact on each other, but also, and more importantly, *significance* for one another, in the sense that we hold each other accountable. As I will argue in the conclusion, this is the source of the felt distance that separates us from them: the distance between fully fledged agents, who can bear responsibility for their lives, and those who are not such agents, and are thus, in a way, exempt from such responsibility.

6. Conclusion: on what matters

I started this paper by claiming that John McDowell is a kind of rationalist, according to whom every aspect of our lives can be brought within the reach of reason. We can now see that the notion of reason that McDowell appeals to is nothing like the generic, detached model often attributed to him.³³ It is a model which places *perception* at the center of the account, in such a way that we can directly *perceive* reasons for action. As we have seen, conversely, this same feature of McDowell's account of perception can be put another way: to have a reason can be a case of *perceiving* something, as when we directly perceive a course of action as salient, or a given configuration as indicating a disease. That is why the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility is already in place even among non-linguistic animals. They navigate their environments intelligently, and do so because they can also systematically exploit their perceptual capacities to solve complex problems and satisfy needs. This last point left us with a puzzle, however: how, then, to account for the perceived difference between linguistic and non-linguistic animals? If rationality is merely a matter of systematic integration, why does it sound like an honorific?

We saw in Section 4 how one aspect of the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility in us humans is our *ethical* perception, a perception of courses of action organized by the concept of the noble. We can then begin to understand the

difference between humans and other animals if we understand that our conceptual sensibility is not merely directed to the solving of biological needs, but is also directed to the ethical significance of our actions. This means that when we perceive a reason for action, we are also perceiving how it embeds in a complex ethical space, in which our actions acquire not only *impact*, but also *significance* to ourselves and to others. It is not by chance that, in his early ethical papers, McDowell insists on the importance of our trying to make a person *see* a situation in a new light, as being itself a way of reasoning with her, as *appealing to reason* (McDowell 1998 [1979], p.65)—such is the intimate harmony between intellect and sensibility in *our* case.

This casts new light on—makes us perceive anew—Wilfrid Sellars's (1956/1991, p.169) famous simile of the *space of reasons*. Sellars characterized our knowledge attributions as being attributions of inhabiting the same *space of reasons*, that is, the space of *justifying and being able to justify what one says*. This may seem to restrict the import of the simile to the merely epistemological dimension. If we gloss the space of reasons as the space of *giving and asking for reasons*, its broader import becomes apparent: according to what we have just seen, appeals to reason can also take the form of injunctions to perceive the situation in a different way. As we saw previously, perception is a matter of organizing the scene before us, the organization in question reflecting our goals and, thus, our interests, our sensibility, our own point of view. When asking someone to perceive a situation in a different way, we are then asking her to take all these factors into account, to imagine herself in *someone's* position, to understand the situation from *this person's* point of view—typically, but not exclusively, our own. That is why we can say that, when giving and asking for reasons, we are not merely seeking justification, but also understanding. It is important not only to understand why this is *a* reason for something, but also why it is *someone's* reason, why such considerations move her, why she perceives the world the way she does.³⁴ The space of reasons, then, is not an abstract space where propositions stand in relations of justification to each other. It is the actual practice of *trying to understand one another*, which includes, as a special case, trying to understand the other person's justification.

This capacity to understand one another is not mechanical, as if, in order to understand each other, we must have a clear picture of the rails on which each of us travels. As McDowell (1998 [1979], p.61) insists, there are no such rails, so that we must instead appeal to what, following Cavell (1962/2002), McDowell calls the *whirl of organism*, that is, our natural reactions, sensibility, attitudes, our natural interests and feelings, in short, our shared *form of life*. But sharing a life with others is not merely having a “congruence of subjectivities”, to use McDowell's (McDowell 1998 [1979], p.61) apt phrase. It is also to be caught in a web of interpersonal relations and reactions, and to have our actions, our attitudes, and our characters *reverberate* throughout this web, leaving a kind of *footprint*.³⁵ To *share a life*, therefore, is to *mat-*

ter to other people and to have other people *matter* to us, to leave a footprint in their lives just as they leave a footprint in ours. Because what other people do is generally a reflection of who they are and what they care about, their *reasons* matter to us, insofar as such reasons are a source of our understanding of the other person.³⁶

To understand a person involves not only inference, but also perception. And if perception reflects a person's point of view, then the point of view from which we perceive the other is one of sharing a life, of being caught in the same web of interpersonal relationships. As a consequence, the understanding we are trying to achieve by inquiring after a person's reasons is not the understanding of a detached observer. It is instead the understanding of those who have been *affected* by the other and so are trying to gauge their own *reactions* to this effect. Such reactions—resentment, joy, gratitude, among others—will be calibrated precisely depending on the *character of the person and of the person's will*, so it is not surprising that we take an interest in them; indeed, one could say without exaggeration that it is only *natural*—a part of our life—to take such an interest.³⁷

Of course, our understanding of someone is not achieved in isolation. It is often a result of *conversation*, since, even when all facts are clear, it may not be clear what the appropriate reaction to them is, how we should feel about them. After all, we do not merely react to *deeds*, we react to *persons*, and conversation may be required for us to come to grips with what we ourselves feel about the situation. This is not only because in conversation we learn more about each other and, what comes to the same thing, our respective reasons, but also because in conversation it may become clear to us how to calibrate our own reactions to whatever happened by *articulating* those reactions and reflecting on them.³⁸ This may explain why, then, non-linguistic animals are not perceived by us as fully fledged agents. Because they are non-linguistic, their ability to converse with us is severely limited. This means that they cannot direct our attention and negotiate how they are perceived by us, limiting their ability to share with us a *joint* construal of their interpersonal footprint. Since they cannot share in this joint construal, it is unsurprising that we also attribute to them a lesser agency, as they are incapable of sharing in the shaping of their own footprint; indeed, they literally have no say in the matter of what they are responsible for. This points to a deeper divide between us and them, in that we do not *share a life*. That is not to say, of course, that they cannot *take part* in our lives, even in the sense of leaving a footprint; we obviously care a great deal about non-linguistic animals. But they are unable to *share in the activity of shaping this form of life* by making themselves understood, by actively correcting and inviting us to new ways of understanding.

To be caught in this continual reshaping of our interpersonal footprint, in this continuing conversation, transforms the character of our conceptual abilities, of our systematic integration of our capacities. This systematic integration of our capacities is no longer just a clever way to navigate through our world. For now this navigation

also impacts others, so that our ability to thus navigate can be the object of *responsibility*. To take responsibility for our capacity to navigate through this shared life is to *identify ourselves* with this impact, to *endorse* its footprint and to call it our own. Part, then, of what it means to systematically integrate our capacities is to claim more and more parts of this life as our own, to assume responsibility for them. That is why Richard Moran can say that “in the activity of ‘identification’ someone determines what shall be part of him as a *person*” (Moran 2017 [2002], p.156).³⁹

We have here, then, a distinct linguistic contribution supporting the transformation of ourselves into agents, into people with significance for others and for themselves. We saw at the end of the last section how language provides us with stable labels for certain perceptible patterns, and thus allows us, first, to de-contextualize them and, second, to pass them on to others. But we also saw there how language is an initiation into a *tradition*, into a *shared form of life*. Consider again the case of the “noble”, introduced in Section 4. To understand how to use the label “noble” is precisely to understand how certain courses of action leave a certain footprint, how one’s action affects others and oneself, and, more importantly, how to *care* about this effect. This is not something that can be achieved passively, but must involve an *active exploitation of the systematic interconnections among the features* that define courses of action. Hence, when embedded into this interpersonal context, language allows us to give names to the features that contribute to our footprint, so that we may *negotiate with others* their significance in a continuing conversation. In other words, language allows us to say what matters and to *have a say* in what matters.

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Notes

¹McDowell himself claims the mantle of “rationalist”. Cf. McDowell (2017) for his defense of the position against Haugeland’s attack.

²Interestingly, Susan Hurley (2003, p.232) also defended such a shift in her own work in animal cognition. Incidentally, in proposing this shift, I’m not claiming that perception has no content, but only emphasizing that a focus on capacities can better bring McDowell’s position into view. Thanks to the second anonymous referee for asking me to clarify this.

³For representative disputes, cf. Haugeland (1998 [1981], 1998 [1991]), Shea (2014), Burge (2018), Lande (2021).

⁴One theme that I regret lacking the space to develop is the Rylean ancestry of such rationalism, especially the idea of rational improvement. Consider, for instance, Ryle’s account of self-improvement in *The Concept of Mind* and also in his later essays, in particular, “Thinking and Self-Teaching” (Ryle 1971). Cf. Jackson (2020) and Elzinga (2018, 2023) for accounts of Ryle that give central place to this idea.

⁵As is well-known, both Burge (2003, 2011) and Dreyfus (2005, 2007a) charge McDowell with hyper-intellectualizing our mental lives, and, at least in the case of Burge, it is clear that he disagrees with McDowell on the nature of the separation between us and other animals.

⁶Of course, that is not the only goal one may be engaged in when playing chess. One may be trying to teach chess to another person, or to impress one’s audience with a beautiful play, or even to pretend that one does not know chess, perhaps to humor someone.

⁷Not the *only* mark, evidently; others may include openness to experimentation, resilience in the face of obstacles, etc.

⁸Cf. Douskos (2019) for an illuminating discussion of these aspects of skillful action, which he calls their *variability* in the ways of executing them and the *value-ranking* along a given evaluative dimension.

⁹That is not to deny that, in complicated cases, the agent will need to *reason her way* to the conclusion of what the most efficient means are. Even in such cases, however, this reasoning will be grounded in her perception of which particular features of the situation are relevant for completing the task at hand.

¹⁰This is one way in which knowledge guides one’s action. Cf. Hyman (1999, 2015) for more on this topic. For what it’s worth, this does not imply that such facts are discursively articulated by the person. She only needs to be *sensitive* to the facts in question. Still, since in many cases the person will be conscious of them, it does imply that knowledge of propositions is often, perhaps *always*, involved in the exercises of the relevant abilities. Cf. Kremer (2017) for a particularly insightful account of the interdependence between knowledge how and knowledge that.

¹¹As Vogler (2002) reminds us, Anscombe (1963) puts practical rationality in this sense at the core of her account of intentional action. Of course, one need not agree with Vogler that this implies a certain primacy of this type of reasoning over other manifestations of practical rationality, in particular over what she calls “befitting-style reasons”. See Brewer (2009) for a more nuanced picture of this latter type of reasoning.

¹²In this quotation, McDowell is specifically discussing an initiation into an *ethical* conceptual space, one “organized by the concepts of the noble and the disgraceful” (McDowell 1998, p. 39). It is clear, however, that the point generalizes.

¹³This focus on the dynamic process of improvement in characterizing rational action is reminiscent of Ryle, who remarked that “We build habits by drill, but we build up intelligent capacities by training” (Ryle 1949/2009, p.30). I unfortunately lack the space to develop the parallel here, but the interested reader should consult Ryle’s distinction between *drilling* and *training*, e.g., in *The Concept of Mind* (Ryle 1949/2009, p.30-31). Cf. also the references mentioned in endnote 3.

¹⁴These misunderstandings are at work in Dreyfus’s well-known critique of McDowell (Dreyfus 2005, 2007a,b,c, 2013).

¹⁵McDowell speaks here of a “cultivated rationality” (McDowell 2013, p.47). Here again we have a clear parallel to Ryle’s distinction between habits and intelligent capacities.

¹⁶That such a capacity is not capable of codification does not mean that there is no room for rules or principles in accounting for it. I mention this because there is a persistent tendency to classify McDowell as a “particularist”, in line with Dancy (2004), who dispenses with such principles altogether. For examples of this misreading, cf., among many others, Lotfi (2009), Sharp (2016), and Nielsen (2015, p.43). For a correct view of what McDowell’s “particularism” (if we are still to use such a label) entails, cf. Bakhurst (2013).

¹⁷There is now a growing literature on perceptual learning, and I think there is considerable empirical evidence that it does take place. Cf., for instance, Connolly (2019), Stokes (2021a,b), Chudnoff (2021), and Burge (2022, chap. 18), though there is considerable disagreement about its extent—compare, e.g., Connolly (2019) and O’Callaghan (2022). For a nice overview of the literature, both psychological and philosophical, cf. Jenkin (2023).

¹⁸This last point has been forcefully argued by Spelke and her collaborators since the late 1980s by the use of a series of well-known experiments; for her most recent treatment, cf. Spelke (2022). For a nice textbook treatment, cf. Bermúdez (2020, pp.285ff). For more on object cognition in general, especially from a developmental perspective, cf. Santos and Hood (2009).

¹⁹Following O’Callaghan (2022, p.566n3), who is himself “following psychologists”, I use the term “feature” to include objects, attributes (including relations), and parts. Schellenberg uses the term “particular” to cover all these items, but I think the term “feature” is more widespread, and has the added advantage of not conflicting with the well-known usage of “particular” by, say, Strawson (1959).

²⁰This is a typical definition. Cf. Matthen (2005) and Schellenberg (2018) for support.

²¹The forms that this learning can take are not particularly important here, though it may be worth noting that the literature generally distinguishes four such forms: *differentiation*, *unitization*, *stimulus imprinting*, and *attentional weighting*. See Jenkin (2023) for discussion and references.

²²McDowell is there discussing affordances, that is, the perception of opportunities for

action. But it is clear that the point generalizes.

²³Cf. Jenkin (2023, p.10n1) for references about the perceptual learning of radiologists.

²⁴Cf. Stokes (2021a, p.252) and the references there cited.

²⁵Connolly (2014) also emphasizes how perception of high-level properties, such as *being a wren* or, in this case, *being a sign of an inflammation*, can arise through different grouping and different attributions of attentional weights to low-level properties, such as color or shape. As will become clear in the next note, though, I disagree with the mechanism he there posits for perceptual learning.

²⁶Which is why x-ray technologists do not achieve a similar level of expertise. Cf. Stokes (2021a, p.255) and the references there for details. Incidentally, this also shows that Connolly's (2014) posited mechanism of "blind flailing" cannot account for this type of expertise, which requires intelligent guidance and not just random variation of attentional patterns. Again, Ryle's distinction between drilling and training is relevant here.

²⁷Incidentally, Ryle once described his own project in these terms: "I was fairly clear that what was wanted was ... a Nichomacheanized *De Anima* that was also syntactically circumspect" (Ryle 1993, p.107)—this remarkable quotation was brought to my attention by Sprague (1999, p.89). This is a fairly apt description of my reading of McDowell in this section.

²⁸See also Chittka (2022) for some remarkable claims on bee intelligence.

²⁹This thought is particularly clear in *Mind and World* (McDowell 1996, p.64 and also Lecture VI). See also Boyle (2012, 2016) for this idea.

³⁰Camp (2009) also proposes full systematic integration as an ideal.

³¹Anne Reboul (2017) also emphasizes this aspect of language.

³²Cf. also Camp (2009) for the importance of de-contextualized abilities.

³³Most famously, by Dreyfus (2005, 2007a).

³⁴Richard Moran has put this point well: "And conversely, another person's request for reasons in such a case need not be seen as a demand to produce sufficient justification for one's caring, on pain of being rationally required to abandon it, but rather an invitation to articulate and make (more) intelligible the nature and form of one's caring." (Moran 2017 [2007], p.162).

³⁵This image of a web of interpersonal relationships and of a normative footprint as the person's impact on this web is taken from Sliwa (2024, p.136), though I'm taking the notion in a much broader sense than that intended by Sliwa. I was here particularly influenced by Hieronymi's (2024) insightful commentary, as will become clear. See also Hieronymi (2019, 2022) for the notion of *responsibility-as-mattering*, which is the obvious inspiration for the broader sense of footprint I'm working with.

³⁶As Frankfurt (1998 [1982], p.84) puts it: "If we consider that a person's will is that by which he moves himself, then what he cares about is far more germane to the character of his will than the decisions or choices he makes. The latter may pertain to what he *intends* to be his will, but not necessarily to what his will truly is."

³⁷This is exactly Strawson's (2008 [1962], pp.9ff) famous contrast between the observant and the participant attitudes.

³⁸I thus concur with Hieronymi (2024, p.157) that not all attempts at conversation are attempts at evading responsibility, and that, on the contrary, conversation may be necessary for there to be a footprint to begin with.

³⁹These are natural themes also from Harry Frankfurt's work. See especially the essay "Identification and wholeheartedness" (Frankfurt 1998 [1987]). As should be clear, I have also been greatly influenced by Moran's (2017 [2002]) discussion of Frankfurt's work, in particular the theme of responsibility that he finds there.

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