

On the Very Idea of Empirical Content

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The notion of *empirical content* plays a crucial role in John McDowell's theory of the relation between mind and world. He considers the question of how empirical content is possible to express a fundamental epistemological anxiety, which is even more basic and more radical than the skeptical problem of how we are entitled to have the beliefs we have. The anxiety involves questions such as how we come to have empirical beliefs at all, how we can have thoughts about facts outside our thinking or how it is possible that we are in touch with the world. McDowell tries to provide an answer in his *Mind and World* (1994)¹, where he proposes an intermediate position between Davidsonian coherentism and empiricist foundationalism. To defend this middle course as the only one to go, he reintroduces Kant's idea of experience as co-operation between ›receptivity‹ and ›spontaneity‹ – between sense perception and rational understanding. In a Kantian vein, McDowell argues that we cannot make sense of contentful thought without an input by the senses, but that in turn sense impressions already must be conceptual if they are to be accessible to rational thinking (taking seriously Kant's idea that ›thoughts without content are empty‹ whereas ›intuitions without concepts are blind‹). So what endows experience with empirical content is an elementary interplay of sense perception and conceptual activity that provides a fundamentally *rational* basis for thinking.

McDowell's main idea is compelling in its simplicity and because of its unifying intent. However, it is difficult to understand exactly how McDowell's solution is supposed to work, especially as he often freely disposes of Kantian terminology and metaphorical talk. I want to examine McDowell's theory of empirical content and present several problems arising from such a view. To simplify the discussion, I will pay attention to three questions, all related to the notion of empirical content:

- (i) What is the relation between sensibility and understanding in experience?
- (ii) How can we ›take in‹ the world in experience?
- (iii) What can count as a justification for empirical beliefs?

I will argue that McDowell fails to give a convincing answer to each of these three questions and therefore does not achieve to present a solution to the question of empirical content. I will further try to show that one of the positions McDowell rejects, coherentism, can be re-established by making it clear that any hope for a fundamentally rational basis of experiential intake rests on false assumptions and

¹ All page references in the text are to the second edition of this book: John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge Mass., London 1996.

finally proves insubstantial. What I will not explicitly discuss here is the problem of non-conceptual content, and I will only casually touch on the issue of conceptual relativism.

In a first part, I want to give a brief outline of the two positions McDowell rejects, by presenting their supposed answers to the three questions, and confront them with McDowell's intermediary proposal.

I. *Foundationalist empiricism*

McDowell sees empiricism of the foundationalist type as an enticing, although mistaken attempt to ease the anxiety of how empirical content is possible (6). The empiricist construes the relation between the senses and rational thinking as based on a division of labour: whereas our senses passively receive causal, unstructured inputs from the world, understanding gives these inputs a conceptual structure and integrates them into rational thinking. Empirical content is provided for by the sense data alone. By virtue of their givenness, sense impressions constitute a tribunal entirely independent of understanding. We can resort to an unstructured, pure and rationally uninfluenced sensory input, which assures that we are answerable to how things are in the world. Our empirical beliefs, our world view, can therefore be justified by recurring to the given elements in sensibility. Underlying such a view is a dualism of something given and a conceptual scheme that shapes the data.

McDowell rejects any foundationalist attempts to explain empirical content and our grasp of the world, for he is convinced that they wrongly rest on something given independently of conceptual activity. In the line of Sellars and Davidson, he rejects the ›Myth of the Given‹ or the ›dualism of scheme and content‹. Although McDowell perfectly agrees that sensory experience has to yield the empirical input of our thoughts (›thoughts without content are empty‹), he denies that anything given could possibly serve as a tribunal. A merely non-conceptual input would constitute a ›brute impact‹ or even an ›alien force‹ from outside, undermining our free judgment and the possibility of justification. A justification in that sense would be no more than an ›exculpation‹ (8). Only empirical input that is already experienced with a conceptual structure can become the content of our thinking and justify our beliefs (›intuitions without concepts are blind‹). According to McDowell, we have to give up the thought that sensibility makes a separate contribution to or is working independently from conceptual thinking (41).²

² It is important to see that the conception of content found in the ›dualism of scheme and content‹ does not fulfil the criterion of *empirical content* in McDowell's sense, since in his opinion content is always something conceptual. To forego misunderstandings, McDowell

II. Davidsonian coherentism

One way of evading the Myth of the Given is coherentism as proposed by Donald Davidson, who explicitly rejects the dualism of scheme and content. But can coherentism account for empirical content? The relation between sensibility and understanding in a coherentist framework is a very simple one: our senses receive causal input from the world, which directly causes beliefs in understanding. Contrary to the foundationalist view, there is no telling apart of unstructured content and a structuring conceptual device by which our understanding organises the input. What a perceiving subject is confronted with are perceptual beliefs, i. e. conceptual mental states that are caused by experience.³ The causal relation also explains how we can be in touch with the world: things or events in the world immediately cause beliefs in us through sensibility, so that direct access of our rational thinking to reality is secured. However, a merely causal connection cannot provide a justification for the resulting perceptual belief. What can justify a perceptual belief must itself be conceptual and integrated in rational thinking. This means that only other beliefs can justify a perceptual belief.⁴ Nevertheless, as Davidson claims, our beliefs must be mostly true, as we can only make sense of beliefs as veridical, at least in general. Our knowledge of the world is based in experience, but as this dependence is merely causal, an experience itself cannot be a *reason* for believing something.⁵

prefers to call it the ›dualism of scheme and the Given‹. Keeping the difference in mind, I will nevertheless use the more familiar term in what follows.

3 Donald Davidson, »On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme«, in: Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford, New York 1984 (1974), 183–198. Davidson's argument leading to the rejection of scheme-content dualism runs as follows: There is no way of making sense of the idea of a conceptual scheme at all, because there is no meaningful way of talking of *different* conceptual schemes. Assuming conceptual schemes to be something like languages (if anything at all), Davidson argues that what would mark out different conceptual schemes is that they are not intertranslatable. However, since we cannot make sense of a conceptual scheme confronting reality save in terms of its being true, and since we cannot understand the notion of truth other than in terms of translation, the idea of a conceptual scheme that is completely untranslatable is incoherent. Partial untranslatability is ruled out by the principle of charity, a precondition of all interpretation, according to which interpreters cannot do else but assume the same logic in other speakers. Instead of assuming a conceptual difference in the speaker, we can always just as well interpret the speaker as using the language differently (cf. also Peter M. S. Hacker, »On Davidson's Idea of a Conceptual Scheme«, *Philosophical Quarterly* 46 (1996), 289–307).

4 Donald Davidson, »A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge«, in: Ernest LePore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation. Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Oxford, New York 1986 (1983), 307–319, here: 319.

5 Davidson, »A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge« (fn. 4), 313 f.

According to McDowell, Davidson takes for granted that we are in touch with the world.⁶ Davidson does not seem to consider that before we can ask in what way our beliefs can be rationally supported, we have to show how our beliefs come to have empirical content. Now, as McDowell claims, empirical content is possible only if the impact from the world is *rational*. Davidson's causalist view allows for a rational constraint only from *within* thinking, whereas the impact from the outside is simply causal. If our beliefs are only rationally constrained from within, McDowell objects, our thinking cannot be more than a ›frictionless spinning in a void‹ (11). There must be a rational connection between sense perception and thinking, for a merely causal impact cannot deliver the right kind of content: ›Thoughts without intuitions are empty, and the point is not met by crediting intuitions with a causal impact on thoughts; we can have empirical content in our picture only if we can acknowledge that thoughts and intuitions are rationally connected‹ (17). Only a ›rational constraint‹ from the world allows for conceptual content, and only conceptual content is available to rational thinking. Therefore, a merely causal impact on our thinking, as proposed by coherentism, does not constitute the conceptual basis needed for empirical content in the favoured sense.

III. McDowell's middle course

What then is McDowell's own answer to the problems mentioned? His idea is to avoid the pitfalls of the positions just sketched by dissolving the opposition between sensibility and understanding. Echoing Kant, McDowell sees ›receptivity‹ and ›spontaneity‹ both involved in experience, the two faculties engaging in a fundamental interplay: ›The fact that thoughts are not empty, the fact that thoughts have representational content, emerges out of an interplay of concepts and intuitions‹ (4). In experience we receive sensory input from outside, but at the same time experience is an actualisation of *conceptual capacities*. It is important to see that these conceptual capacities belong to ›spontaneity‹, i. e. the active faculty of understanding.⁷ Experience is not the reception of brute data, nor a merely causal process, but an event already endowing the perceiving subject with *conceptual* content: ›In experience one finds oneself saddled with content. One's conceptual capacities have already been brought into play, in the content's being available to one, before one has any choice in the matter‹ (10). In giving due weight both to the dimension of the ›receptive‹ and the ›spontaneous‹ aspects of

6 John McDowell, ›Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism‹, in: Lewis E. Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, Chicago 1999, 87–104, here: 92.

7 John McDowell, ›Précis of *Mind and World*‹, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* LVIII (1998), 365–368, here: 367.

experience, McDowell on the one hand makes sure that thought is constrained from without through the passive faculty of sensibility, so that we are potentially ›answerable to the world‹. On the other hand, by involving conceptual capacities already in experience, McDowell allows for the fact that the constraint from outside is *rational*: »In experience one takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge« (9). The conceptual content of experience is rationally accessible, which accounts for the openness of thinking to the world as well as for the rational underpinning, the justification of our beliefs.⁸

Ensuring a ›rational constraint‹ from the outside world, via experience, on our thinking, McDowell means to outplay both foundationalism and coherentism: on the one hand, something merely given could at most constitute a brute impact, but not a tribunal for rational thinking, and on the other hand a merely causal input would neither constitute the appropriate content for our thinking nor a rational basis for our empirical beliefs.

IV. *Slippery slope: problems with McDowell's middle course*

I have presented three answers to three questions concerning the very idea of empirical content, one in the vein of foundationalist empiricism, the second assuming a coherentist framework and a third, intermediate solution as suggested by McDowell himself. In the following main section I will take a closer look at McDowell's solution, again in the light of the three problems related to empirical content. Is it an acceptable view and is it really better off than its competitors? I will try to unravel some hidden and questionable premises and finally compare it to coherentism, a view that to my eyes is rejected too rashly by McDowell.

(i) To the first question of how sensibility and understanding are related to each other, McDowell answers as follows. In the process of experience there is a fundamental co-operation going on between sensibility and understanding: experiences »inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity« (24). Only together can they yield empirical content. Now, what is difficult to understand is McDowell's idea that »even though experience is passive, it draws into operation capacities that genuinely belong to spontaneity« (13). As he characterises spontaneity as essentially free and under the subject's control, it becomes unclear how the conceptual capacities can be »passively drawn into operation in experience«

⁸ McDowell consequently distinguishes between beings who enjoy experience with empirical content, who are ›in possession of the world‹, and beings that do not strictly speaking enjoy experience and therefore are ›merely coping with an environment‹ (McDowell, »Précis of *Mind and World*« (fn. 7), 367 f.).

(33) and so be involved in the causal process of sensory intake. It certainly is desirable to reconcile rational free thinking with the causal process of sensory intake. McDowell wants to show that there is no real opposition between the two. He tries to dissolve the contrast between receptivity and spontaneity by introducing the notion of ›second nature‹ (cf. lecture 5): just because spontaneity is not integrated into the network of causal laws, that does not mean that spontaneity falls outside the bounds of nature. Nature embraces, besides law-like processes, phenomena of second nature, and the latter, such as our capacities of rational thinking, naturally evolve from the former when a human being is initiated into a cultural tradition and acquires a language. Phenomena of second nature can be seen as thoroughly natural, although not law-like. Natural occurrences can be understood by being subsumed under a law, but just as well by placing them in their rational interconnectedness.

I do not think the notion of second nature is of much help here. It might be an interesting idea that the contrast is not between freedom and (all of) nature, but between freedom and conformity to law. Nevertheless the question remains how we can conceive of nature as having room for both spontaneity and natural law.⁹ In McDowell's account of experience something crucial is missing, namely an explanation of the interplay between receptivity as determined by law-like processes, and spontaneity as characterised by free activity. The supposed answer is in fact only a shifting of the problem to another domain: from the tension between reason and nature to the tension between second nature and first, law-like nature. The interaction of sense perception and thinking as described by McDowell also raises doubts about the status of the conceptual capacities that are ›activated‹ in sensory intake. Such a view makes room for sensory intake being structured or organised by conceptual capacities; they might even be seen to constitute a conceptual scheme in a Davidsonian sense, a scheme organising the unstructured content yielded by the senses. Of course McDowell would dissent. It is part of his program to evade scheme-content dualism and the Myth of the Given. But simply to presuppose that the interaction between sensibility and understanding is not of the sort that leads to a division of unstructured intake and conceptual organisation is to beg the question. As long as McDowell is not more precise about the interaction between sensibility and receptivity (e. g. that sensibility *causes* beliefs in understanding, or the like) he does not preclude scheme-content dualism.¹⁰

9 Sean Greenberg, Marcus Willaschek, »Is McDowell confronted with an Antinomy of Freedom and Nature?«, in: Marcus Willaschek, *John McDowell: Reason and Nature. Lecture and Colloquium in Münster 1999*, Münster 2000, 51–54, here: 54. Page numbers referring to the web resource <<http://web.uni-frankfurt.de/fb08/PHIL/willaschek/mcdowellkolloq.pdf>>.

10 I guess that the whole problem of interaction between sensibility and understanding in experience could be dissolved by a slight change in describing experience. We could use a

(ii) The second, more important problem is how experience of the world is possible at all. How can we ›take in‹ the world in experience; how can our thinking be in touch with reality? As sketched above, McDowell holds that experience can be said to ›take in‹ the world only if it is constrained from outside and if this constraint is rational. The first condition, external influence, or, as McDowell calls it, *friction* (11/39), is satisfied by the passivity of sense perception, by receptivity. Perceiving subjects cannot control how things are represented to them, since the world has an immediate causal impact on them. The second, *rational* constraint condition is met by the fact that conceptual capacities, belonging to active thinking, are ›drawn into operation‹ already in the very act of experience. Experience of the world, and with it empirical content, is made possible by this interplay. The problem of how an interaction between fundamentally different faculties is supposed to work has already been discussed. But the difficulties of McDowell's position go deeper. The idea of a rational constraint is not just understood in a trivial sense that experiential content becomes rationally accessible because concepts are applied already in experience.¹¹ Rather McDowell wants *the world itself* to exert rational, as opposed to merely causal, influence.

To allow for this possibility, McDowell postulates the ›unboundedness of the conceptual‹, according to which there is no border between the world and our thinking (lecture 2). This means that there is no distinction between the conceptual content of experience and – at least when the subject is not misled – the facts in the world corresponding to that experience. A fact in the world is *identical* with the content of a thought about this fact:

In a particular experience in which one is not misled, what one takes in is *that things are thus and so*. *That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement: it becomes the content of a judgement if the subject decides to take the

notion of conceptual content that is close to McDowell's but avoids the mentioned pitfalls. Instead of assuming two distinct faculties – which leads to obscure talk of conceptual capacities being drawn passively into operation in sensibility – we could give a very simple account of experience: in experiencing the world, concepts *are applied* – *tout court* (cf. Marcus Willaschek, *Der mentale Zugang zur Welt. Realismus, Skeptizismus, Intentionalität*, Frankfurt a. M. 2003, ch. 57). The perceptual appliance of concepts explains why experience is not under the subject's rational control, but is nevertheless conceptual. If e. g. someone is in possession of the concept *bent*, she will invariably perceive a stick held into water as bent, although she might perfectly know that the stick is not in fact bent. I am not sure exactly how the appliance of concepts should be explained in detail, but the advantage of such a characterisation is that it does not seem to invoke – as McDowell's account does with its confrontation of two fundamentally different faculties – a dualism. The only thing one would need to claim is that normal adult people, in contrast to small children or animals, are in possession of concepts, and their sensory apparatus is constituted in a way that these concepts are inextricably applied in experience.

¹¹ In the sense suggested in fn. 10.

experience at face value. So it is conceptual content. But *that things are thus and so* is also, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are. (26).

Such a view not only invites idealism, as McDowell himself is aware of, but also, as I will try to show here, rests on dubious metaphysical assumptions. McDowell's theory depends on a conception of *facts* as both worldly states and thinkable content. But it is contentious whether the world consists of *facts*. Not many philosophers would accept such a Tractarian conception of the world as consisting of facts, rather than of things or events.¹² Especially when it comes to the impact of the world on our senses, it seems implausible to credit *facts* with the required causal force. Let me explain why such a view is problematic. The use of the notion 'fact' in everyday speech is ambiguous between meaning something like a natural state of the world, going on entirely independent of being minded, and something propositional, the occurrence of which is only possible in the context of conceptual activity. Being aware of the ambiguity, we cannot just understand facts as both worldly states and thought content. We should decide on one of the characterisations. But then, if we decide to consider facts as natural, non-propositional occurrences in the world, how could they at the same time constitute the content of our thinking? It seems strange that objects or events *themselves* should become the contents of our thinking, e. g. that what we have in mind should be the *real* shining sun, instead of a representation of the sun, or the like. With his view of an unbounded conceptual sphere however, McDowell prevents any interpretation in that direction. Facts are not supposed to be literally *entering* our mind nor to become something internal in experience. »On my conception, to enjoy an experience in which all goes well is simply to have a fact available to one, so that it can be normatively behind a judgement one might make.«¹³ So there is just *one* thing – rather than two entities, one outside, the other inside – that can both be a state of the world and the content of experience. »When one thinks truly, what one thinks *is* what is the case« (27). We simply get hold of facts by thinking *them*.

Facts then are, in McDowell's eyes, clearly something conceptual and propositional. However, having decided on the propositional side in the mentioned ambiguity of our talking of facts, we can hardly think of facts as by themselves exerting causal influence. It is not sufficient that facts account for what McDowell calls a *normative*, rational relation between mind and world, since the only way of making sense of such a relation is that there must be a *semantic* correspondence between the description of a state in the world (e. g. the fact *that it is*

12 E. g. Hilary Putnam's criticism in his »McDowell's mind and McDowell's world«, in: Nicholas H. Smith (ed.), *Reading McDowell. On Mind and World*, London, New York 2002, 174–190, here: 179 f.

13 John McDowell, »Experiencing the World«, in: Willaschek, *John McDowell: Reason and Nature* (fn. 9), 3–18, here: 16.

raining) and the description of a true belief or a veridical experience about this state (the belief or experience *that it is raining*). But even if we regarded facts as *truth-makers* of beliefs, a fact could not justify the corresponding belief, nor could it in any sense be responsible for the belief. Of course it is possible to say that a belief, e. g. that it is raining, is true if and only if it is raining, and even that the fact that it is raining *determines* whether the belief is true or not. But this connection between mind and world is of a semantic kind and does not tell us anything about how the belief has been *induced* in the believer's mind. The ›normative‹ connection McDowell mentions is settled by our use of language, i. e. semantically, and does not reveal anything about how the world affects our senses and our thinking. What can make for friction is causality, not semantic correspondence, what affects us are objects and events, not facts. Accounting for the very idea of empirical content is as much establishing a *causal* relation as a normative connection (we will see below what is required for a *justification* of empirical belief). Once McDowell has introduced the ›unboundedness of the conceptual‹, construing the whole world as consisting of facts, i. e. propositional, conceptualised entities, he seems to forget about friction. With such a view, the questions of why there should be a causal impact that coincides with the normative constraint, and how this coincidence is to be explained, remain unanswered – and with it the question of how empirical content is possible.¹⁴

It even looks as though McDowell's propagating the ›unboundedness of the conceptual‹ is putting the cart before the horse: must *the world* be conceptual (even in the sense of conceptualisable or ›thinkable‹, in McDowell's terms (28)), to allow for the possibility of conceptual content? Or is it not rather *us* – the perceiving subjects – who must have the ability to experience the world in terms of concepts? Instead of holding that the world itself is essentially conceptual or conceptualisable, it would seem more reasonable to focus on the perceivers who are confronted with a yet unconceptualised world but who are able to experience and grasp it by means of concepts. Just because the world can (at least to some extent) be conceptually captured, it does not thereby need to be characterised as conceptual *itself* (as e. g. there is no need to credit any object of medium weight and adequate stability as essentially portable). To a similar criticism¹⁵ McDowell answers that »[...] we have no way of grasping the very idea of a fact except as the idea of something that could be truly thought to be the case. [...] the very idea of the world and the very idea of being minded in a certain way are inter-

14 My point is not that McDowell does not *want* to have a causal interaction between mind and world – he clearly strives at such a connection (e. g. McDowell's reply to Hilary Putnam, »Responses«, in: Nicolas H. Smith, *Reading McDowell* (fn. 12), 269–305, here: 293) – but that with his conception he is not in a position to account for it.

15 by Marcus Willaschek, »On ›The Unboundedness of the Conceptual‹«, in: Willaschek, *John McDowell: Reason and Nature* (fn. 9), 35–40.

dependent [...].¹⁶ But here again, McDowell's argument rests on the assumption that the world consists of facts. I perfectly agree that a fact, considered as something conceptual and propositional, *is* dependent on being minded. But if facts are taken to be natural occurrences in the world, the idea of a fact does not in any way depend on the idea of being able to ›be truly thought to be the case‹. McDowell does not, and probably does not want to, dissolve the ambiguity involved in the notion of a fact. But as I argued above, to reduce the world to facts means losing the causal connection between mind and world, so what is at stake is the very idea of empirical content.

Another problem with McDowell's conception of facts as simultaneously constituting the world and our contents of experience concerns the difference between veridical experience and hallucination.¹⁷ To be in a position to draw the distinction, McDowell must hold that only in veridical experience we experience *that things are such and so* – e. g. that a particular stick is bent – whereas in non-veridical experience we do not. But then, one might ask, what is the content of the non-veridical experience supposed to be? If in such cases I do not see *that the stick is bent*, what else may be the content of my experience? McDowell would surely not hold that experience is always veridical nor that in non-veridical experience we do not have anything like empirical content. But in his picture I see no way to describe *non-veridical* propositional contents. The problem arises because McDowell attaches the identity of facts in the world and in (veridical) content to the *form* we give it in description, namely *that p*. This implies that a thought that *p* always corresponds to a fact that *p* in the world. But to be sure, propositional content does not always correspond to the world. This point might look trivial, since it focuses on the way we *talk* about facts and not on the facts themselves, but I do not see how McDowell would answer to it.¹⁸

Connected to this difficulty, there is another strange-looking implication of McDowell's view of ›taking in facts‹ in experience: a veridical and a non-veridical experience that *appear* to be the same cannot really *be* the same – not even before the experiencing subject judges their correctness. If I see a straight stick held into water, and I see it bent, I cannot, following McDowell, have the experience *that the stick is bent* – since the stick is not in fact bent. Only if there is a real bent stick can I have the experience that the stick is bent. This runs counter to our intuitions. We would normally think of both cases as experiences of a bent stick

¹⁶ Response to Marcus Willaschek, »Responses«, in: Willaschek, *John McDowell: Reason and Nature* (fn. 9), 95–97, here: 96.

¹⁷ A criticism also made by Robert Brandom, »Non-inferential knowledge, perceptual experience, and secondary qualities: placing McDowell's empiricism«, in: Nicolas H. Smith, *Reading McDowell* (fn. 12), 92–105, here: 94.

¹⁸ The paradox that we can think what is not the case is actually considered by McDowell – as going back to Wittgenstein, *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, § 95 –, but he does not tell us how such cases fit in his picture (27).

and the experiences as being the same. The difference arises only later, when we either judge that the stick is not in fact bent (although we *experienced* it to be so), or accept that we have just seen a bent stick. Why should we consider already the experiences as distinct and not just our final judgement, based on other perceptual beliefs and knowledge?

What this issue shows is that the notions of experience and empirical content must not be bound too tightly to the notions of fact or truth. The experiencing subject does not distinguish between veridical and non-veridical content already in experience. We can say that someone experiences that some stick is bent, irrespective of whether the stick is *in fact* bent. Only when it comes to assessing the single experience, to evaluating it in the light of former experience and present beliefs, do we apply criteria such as: is it *really the case* that the stick is bent? Is the stick bent *as a matter of fact*? Is it *true* that the stick is bent? Was my experience of the bent stick *reliable*, or did it only *appear* to me that the stick was bent? All this is not a matter of experience, but of rational thinking. Now, does this mean that experience does not comprise any assurance of being veridical or at least an endorsement of the associated proposition? Doesn't our notion of experience literally purport to make truth available to us? The answer is yes and no. On the one hand, to be sure, the senses are our door to the world, that is to truth. In some way the very idea of experience must include the notion of truth, if we want to credit perceiving subjects with direct access to the world, but on the other hand it would be meaningless to speak of truth if our senses were not sometimes unreliable: the notion of truth depends upon the difference between veridical and non-veridical experience. It looks as if possible falsity both is a necessary condition for truth and puts truth into question. The paradox can be mitigated by being aware that talking of truth *presupposes* a possibility of error, but at the same time *constrains* the extent of possible falsity: we can err, but it is impossible that our error is global. The notion of truth implies no more and no less than *partial* fallibility, so that *overall* correctness is preserved. While every single experience might be non-veridical, most of them must make us believe true things. The senses are our source of perceptual beliefs, and if they were not in general reliable, we could not be speaking of beliefs or of truth at all.¹⁹

So what is required is a notion of experience that allows for single errors, but still precludes global error, that is a total detachment from the world. McDowell's conception of experience is that of a passive, though already conceptual reception of a sense impression that *invites* the experiencing subject to adopt a corresponding perceptual belief.²⁰ It is all up to the subject whether she adopts such a belief or not (11). McDowell draws a distinction between experience and

19 This somewhat echoes Davidson's coherentist view in »A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge« (fn. 4).

20 McDowell's reply to Barry Stroud, »Responses« (fn. 14), 279.

the acceptance of the experienced content in order to provide for a ›receptive‹ side that makes for our grasp of the world and a ›spontaneous‹ side that ensures the freedom of understanding. He clearly distances himself from the coherentist view, for which experience *directly* invokes a perceptual belief without any possible intervention by the perceiving subject. Now, is it just a verbal difference whether we see experience as an impression that *invites* us to adopt such an attitude or if we see experience as immediately *causing* perceptual beliefs? To me, the distinction seems rather crucial. If what we experience only constitutes an ›invitation‹ to adopt a certain perceptual belief, it remains obscure what could serve as criteria to accept or reject the suggested belief. We cannot allow for the possibility of comparing an experience to the world itself or to anything like brute data without falling back to the Myth of the Given. There seems to be no other way of deciding whether to accept such an invitation than by comparing the output of experience to other beliefs we already hold. This means that the mental entities yielded by experience must be of a kind that enables them to be scrutinised in the light of other beliefs. But what kind of mental states fit this condition better than perceptual *beliefs*? To explain how the immediate output of experience can be accessible to rational thinking we must credit it with a clear endorsement, which means *identifying* it with a perceptual belief.

What is more, allowing for just an invitation makes room for some intermediary entity or process, interposed between experience and perceptual belief. But in granting any sort of intervention of an intermediary instance we run the risk of losing our grip on the world and of encouraging some version of conceptual relativism. Our freedom with regard to the empirical content of experience must be zero. We can only be confronted with reality if we are faced in experience with accomplished facts, i. e. perceptual *beliefs*.²¹ If we take perceptual beliefs to be the immediate result of every clear enough experience, we have an explanation of how experience can give us an impression of how things are; at the same time we can understand how error is possible: while we might sometimes be caused to believe something wrong, single wrong beliefs can be corrected by recourse to other beliefs.

(iii) Discussing the way experience provides us with content about objective reality, we have already touched on the last issue under consideration here: the question of what can count as a *justification* for perceptual beliefs. I want to address the problem of justification separately, as it will again reveal important facets in the discussion of empirical content and bring out further problems in McDowell's account. McDowell thinks that experience itself is endowed with justificatory force. Since it is already conceptual, embedded in the network of spontaneity, experience can count as a reason for belief. Experiences indeed *are*

²¹ For this point cf. also Barry Stroud, ›Sense-experience and the grounding of thought‹, in: Nicholas H. Smith, *Reading McDowell* (fn. 12), 79–91, here: 86 f.

the reasons for our judgments about objective reality (62). McDowell thus takes the contents of experience to be »ultimate in the order of justification«,²² without thereby committing himself to the Myth of the Given. Experiences are not like brute data, but conceptual through and through. He is aware that nothing non-conceptual could possibly serve to justify perceptual judgments.

However, I am not sure if McDowell's notion of experience is qualified to account for justification. Let's have a closer look at what is required for a belief to be justified. What McDowell's picture very well illustrates is that *perceptual* belief enjoys a somewhat special status when it comes to justification. Whereas the justification of non-empirical beliefs takes place *within* the belief system, empirical belief has to be constrained from two sides: additional to the inner-rational constraint there must be a constraint coming from the empirical world. This means that a perceptual belief can be justified only if it is based on sense perception (if *perceptual* content can be assigned) *and* if this perceptual content can be integrated into rationality (if it is accessible to the subject as *conceptual* content). By virtue of being receptive, it is supposed to be the experience of a mind-independent world. By virtue of being conceptual, it is held to be embedded in reason and therefore can count as a reason to justify beliefs. Only if both criteria are fulfilled is experience endowed with empirical content in the truest sense of the word and so can be used to justify belief.

Against this background, it might look as though it is sufficient to *experience that p* (i. e. to have a perceptual, at the same time conceptual impression), in order that my belief that p is justified. But does my seeing that the stick is bent fully justify my belief that I have just seen a bent stick? To be sure, there is no more required to *applying* a certain concept beyond the fact that the perceiver *sees* that it applies to the perceived object. But since my seeing that p can sometimes be a mere illusion, there must be more to justification than just having an empirical and propositional content available.²³ To count as justified, a belief must get *additional* rational support from other beliefs available in the belief system, beliefs that are independent and therefore incorruptible by the experience in question, but still rationally connected to it. However, justification can never be an absolute warrant of truth. We have seen that the experience that p does not necessarily mirror a fact and might be false. Experience can be no »warranting item« for knowledge in the strict sense, as McDowell seems to suggest.²⁴ But

22 McDowell, »Experiencing the World« (fn. 13), 13.

23 On the one hand, although I agree with Barry Stroud, who counts someone's »seeing that p« as a *ground* for his thinking that p (»Sense-experience and the grounding of thought« (fn. 21), 90 f.), something more is needed to account for *justification*. On the other hand, as I have already argued, McDowell's »taking in that p« is too strong as it implies truth: the possibility of (single) error must lie within the scope of experience and empirical content.

24 McDowell, »Experiencing the World« (fn. 13), 10.

even the well-established beliefs that are used in the justification of a perceptual belief might – from time to time – be wrong. Therefore, in a single case of experience, we can never have absolute certainty about the truth of its propositional content, but still, for the above mentioned conceptual correlation of experience and belief with truth, justification comes very close to warranting knowledge. From all this we can infer what is needed for justification: a particular perceptual belief that *p* is justified if it is based on the experience that *p* and if it is accessible to *and* supported by other well-established beliefs in the belief system.²⁵

Now, does McDowell's position correspond with justification so understood? Surprisingly enough, a serious problem for McDowell arises from the special status he himself imposes on perceptual belief. Perceptual beliefs cannot be justified completely *within* thinking, since they already have to come stuffed with empirical input from the world – they must have empirical content. Expanding the sphere of the conceptual by equating the world with facts enables McDowell to explain how empirical content could become rationally accessible. But, as we have seen, McDowell's own account overestimates the conceptual aspect of facts and thus loses our grip on the empirical world. Experiences à la McDowell cannot constitute cases of *experience that p* in the relevant sense. They are disconnected from the world, which undermines from the start the possibility of justifying perceptual beliefs.

But even if McDowell were in a position to credit experience with empirical content, experience as he characterises it could not constitute rational support for belief. We have seen that McDowell deprives experience of an immediate commitment for belief. But this as well robs experience of any justifying force. It is fine to hold that the experience that *p* plays a role in the justification of the belief that *p*, as we recognise a normative, semantic relation between the two. But what sense do we make of cases where I see e. g. a bent stick, but nevertheless form the belief that the stick just seen is straight (i. e. non-bent)? When confronted with a stick held into water it is of course reasonable for the subject to finally form the belief that the stick is straight, despite her seeing it bent. But it

²⁵ There is a social dimension to justification that is not explicitly considered here: in some sense, what justifies our judgments about the world is not to be found solely in the subject's own private experiences, but rather in the fact that someone, possibly someone else, can understand a constraint as justifying the application of the concept (this idea is brought forward by Robert Brandom, who accuses John McDowell of individualism: »Perception and Rational Constraint«, *Philosophy and the Phenomenological Research*, LVIII (1998), 369–374). I will not go into the matter here, but it seems plausible to me that a subject must be in a position to make a justification comprehensible to other rational beings in order to count as having a truly rational justification – which is a claim compatible with the view I am advocating here.

would be arbitrary, if not contradictory, to claim that the experience that *p* constitutes a rational basis for the belief that non *p*. Now, McDowell would certainly not argue that some experience that *p* justifies a belief that non *p*. But he already is in trouble if he allows that *sometimes* an experience that *p* does not lead to a belief that *p*. If we are free to decide which belief we are willing to accept when we have a certain experience, so that we sometimes form beliefs that are *different* from the propositional content of the experience, how can it *in the preferred cases* stand in a justifying relation to the belief? What we need is an unmediated connection from experience to belief that cannot be interfered by the perceiving subject. If the subject in the end does not always stick to a belief resulting from experience, it is because in the run of the justification process, the perceptual belief might be rejected by other, better established beliefs, such as the belief that refraction only makes things *look* bent. But after all, we only have a true basis for justification if the experience that *p* is essentially connected to the belief that *p*.

V. Back to coherentism

The discussion of three questions concerning the idea of empirical content has made it clear that the problems raised by McDowell are not satisfactorily solved by his own theory. Firstly, he fails to make intelligible the interaction of ›receptivity‹ and ›spontaneity‹ lying at the heart of his position. Secondly, McDowell's extension of the ›conceptual realm‹, which involves taking facts to be both mental contents and natural occurrences, means to lose our grip on the world. Thirdly, the alleged freedom of perceiving subjects to accept or reject experienced contents deprives experience of the required justificatory force. I conclude from this that McDowell himself has not succeeded in accounting for the idea of empirical content. His attempt to follow a middle course between foundationalist empiricism and coherentism has met serious obstacles. It might be conceded that there is in the end no such happy medium. But must this worry us? I agree that scheme-content dualism is unmasked as a myth, but could we not perhaps simply resort to coherentism? In this section I want to argue that coherentism is not as bad off as McDowell accuses it of being. Smoothing out some misunderstandings will even show that a coherentist picture counters most of the unsolved problems posed by McDowell.

Let us recapitulate the accusation McDowell brings forward against coherentism: it is the fact that coherentism settles for a merely causal connection between world and mind that is the thorn in McDowell's side. He is convinced that only a rational constraint from outside allows for empirical content. »McDowell points out that if our beliefs lack rational connections to experiences – if experiences are *only* causes of those beliefs, and not also *justifiers* – then it is impossible to see how our beliefs have *empirical content* at all; we lose our grip on how we

are believers at all.«²⁶ Before trying to tackle McDowell's challenge of rational constraint, I first want to show that coherentism performs better in several points where McDowell fails to convince.

(i) What is the relation between sensibility and understanding in experience? The difficulties in McDowell's account set in with the assumption of two distinct faculties, a merely passive, receptive faculty and a free, spontaneous one. In such a picture, the causality of sense experience tends to threaten the freedom of thinking, such as our freedom to accept or reject a belief ›invited‹ by experience. In contrast to such a conception, the coherentist account does not presume a duality of sensibility and understanding and therefore is not confronted with a conflict between causality and free thinking – as it is put by Davidson: ›Thinking, perceiving, remembering, and voluntary action characterize certain physical objects, and (in my view) causality does not ›constrain‹ these activities, but enables them.«²⁷

(ii) Regarding the question of how we can be in touch with the world, the coherentist maintains a clearly causalist view. Whereas McDowell, with his claim that the world consists of facts – i. e. entirely conceptual entities – inadvertently prevents the world from exerting causal influence on our senses, the coherentist sticks to common sense: what is accessible to observation are objects and events, not facts, sentences or true propositions.²⁸ Sense experience is seen as a purely causal process. So, while McDowell thinks that experience is just ›inviting‹ the subject to form a belief according to the experiential content, for the coherentist experience invariably leads to such a belief. A perceptual belief is the inevitable result of an uninterrupted causal chain. With such a causalist account, the coherentist avoids what McDowell invokes, namely postulating an intermediary step intruding the connection between world and mind. Coherentism preserves a direct access to the world in experience. Moreover, coherentism can easily explain what poses a problem to McDowell, namely how it is possible that experience sometimes leads to the forming of wrong beliefs while it cannot be possible that we are always fooled by the senses. I can sometimes be caused to believe something wrong, e. g. come to think what I have just seen is a bent stick. But since I can evaluate my perceptual beliefs in the light of other beliefs, e. g. that things held into water only appear bent because of refraction, I will reject this belief in a moment. The causal impact leaves no freedom to the perceiver, as the perceptual beliefs are directly induced in us. This makes our grip on the world as

²⁶ This accurate recapitulation of McDowell's basic idea is by Hilary Putnam, ›McDowell's mind and McDowell's world‹ (fn. 12), 175.

²⁷ Donald Davidson, ›Comments on Karlovy Vary Papers‹, in: Petr Kotatko et al. (eds.), *Interpreting Davidson*, Stanford 2001, 285–307, here: 289.

²⁸ Donald Davidson, ›Empirical Content‹, in: Ernest LePore, *Truth and Interpretation* (fn. 4), (1982), 320–332, here: 323.

tight as possible. Once we have assured general openness to reality, we can be sure that our beliefs are mostly true. That beliefs are true in general (but not always) is a conceptual necessity, i. e. beliefs must be seen as mostly true if we want to make sense of the concept of belief at all.²⁹ The fact that we are caused to believe what we believe explains why we could not simply come to have completely different belief systems – a possibility McDowell could not convincingly rule out.³⁰ Since our world view is not something we make up, but is largely induced in us via sense experience, we perforce come to have an overall picture rather similar to other beings endowed with a similar sensory apparatus.³¹ It therefore seems that friction, the most important requirement for empirical content, is to be found in the external causes of our perceptual beliefs.³²

(iii) Let us finally turn to the third and last issue concerning empirical content, the justification of empirical beliefs. The problem is tightly connected to the main criticism McDowell brings forward against coherentism, namely the requirement of a rational constraint by the world on experience and thinking. I therefore hope to tackle also the question whether, or in what sense, a rational constraint is needed to account for empirical content. McDowell and Davidson both think that a justification, in the sense of sufficient rational support or evidence, can only be provided by something fully conceptualised and propositional. They also agree that the results of sense experience actually bear justificatory force. However, we must be aware that they differ in what exactly the justifying item is, as well as in what precisely it is evidence for. Davidson considers the justifying item yielded in experience to be a full-blown belief, whereas in McDowell's account it is just a mental state ›inviting‹ such a belief. We have just seen that a mere invitation to believe allows for the possibility that we form beliefs *different* from what we have experienced – which loosens any alleged connection between experience and belief. If it is possible to derive from the experience that p a belief other than p, the former cannot constitute a justification for the latter. Experience thus cannot play the justificatory role McDowell attaches to it. While McDowell unsuccessfully tries to attach justificatory force to experience itself, i. e. to a conceptualised mental state that invites, but is not identical with a belief, Davidson does not look for rational support from experience: experience is simply a causal process leading to perceptual beliefs. The reason

29 It is one of Davidson's main points that it is in the nature of belief that beliefs are mostly true (e. g. in »A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge« (fn. 4), 319).

30 For this point also see Michael Friedman, »Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition. Comments on John McDowell's *Mind and World*«, *Philosophical Review* 105 (1996), 427–467, here: 465 f.

31 Davidson, »Empirical Content« (fn. 28), 331.

32 Donald Davidson, »Reply to John McDowell«, in: Lewis E. Hahn, *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (fn. 6), 105–107, here: 106; or Davidson, »Comments on Karlovy Vary Papers« (fn. 27), 289.

why he does not accept experience itself to bear justificatory force is that we are not able to draw back on our impressions: »there is no clear meaning to the idea of comparing our beliefs with reality or confronting our hypotheses with observations.«³³ Coherentism so evades falling back into the Myth of the Given, which McDowell is vulnerable to by interposing a mysterious mental state between sensory input and perceptual belief. According to coherentism, what can serve as a justification for a particular perceptual belief are other, well-established beliefs held by the perceiving subject. The perceptual belief in turn, if sufficiently supported, can be used to justify other, forthcoming beliefs. But only *within* rational thinking is it possible to give and receive rational justificatory support. The relation between a particular experience and the resulting belief in contrast is not rational in any sense, but purely causal.

Exactly at this point, when everything seems to be perfectly solved, McDowell is back on the scene with his main criticism: can a perceptual belief, produced in a purely causal way, really be contentful? Would not beliefs, under such conditions, be disconnected from reality? If rational support can only be given from within thinking, how can a coherentist position account for »friction«, how can it be that we »take in« the world in experience? McDowell claims that we must find a *rational* constraint from outside thinking, so that experience itself gives our beliefs justificatory support. I think we are now in a position to definitively knock down McDowellian doubts by way of clarifying how exactly the rational constraint requirement is to be understood. In what sense must a rational constraint be secured, and is justification essentially a rational relation? In the definition of justification given above, it becomes clear that the role of justification consists as much in securing a rational ground for belief as in establishing direct access to the world and thereby ensuring, if things go well, the truth of the justified belief: a particular perceptual belief that *p* is justified if it is based on the experience that *p* and if it is accessible to and supported by other well-established beliefs in the belief system. Justification in the normal run makes sure that a subject only believes that *p* if *p* really is the case.

Now, whereas McDowell clearly focuses on the first aspect of justification, the way a perceptual belief is based on experience, the coherentist position stresses the second aspect, the rational support of empirical beliefs within the belief system. The second, inner-rational aspect of justification is not at issue here. McDowell and Davidson would agree that this is a rational relation and that it plays an important role in consolidating our world view. The disagreement concerns the interpretation of the first condition. While it is McDowell's main project to show that empirical beliefs are rationally constrained by experience, Davidson simply accepts the trivial fact of causal influence and is not further interested in

33 Davidson, »Empirical Content« (fn. 28), 324.

this point. Since any particular experience might be non-veridical and so fail to make us believe the truth, rational support cannot, according to Davidson, come from experience itself, but is provided by other settled beliefs.³⁴ However, it has become clear that we cannot *at all* want justification to be an absolute warrant of truth. Even if a belief is supported by the most settled beliefs, any single justification could be fallible – just as any single experience can. Consequently, the support we get from within rationality is qualitatively no better than the support we get from experience itself – we can only make evidence quantitatively better by evaluating a particular belief in the light of other beliefs. Thus what is needed in the justification of a perceptual belief is not only rational support from within thinking, but just as much, and first of all, what we could call the ›intake‹ support coming from the experience itself. The first part of the definition must not be underestimated, since it is what ensures the connection to the world and what accounts for empirical content. Although the coherentist principally wants to restrict justification to the sphere of rational thinking, he certainly demands a link between what we perceive and what we come to believe: the cause of my perceptual belief that *p* must be *my seeing that p*. There seems to be nothing better to fit the first condition, that my belief that *p* is *based* in the experience that *p*, than if it is *caused* by such an experience.³⁵

However, I think coherentism is right in claiming that we must give up the idea that the support we get from experiencing the world is or could in any sense be rational. We have nothing available in experience that could *rationaly* account for the corresponding perceptual belief. Let me illustrate this point: if someone were asking »How do you know John is at the party?«, my answer could simply be that *I have seen him* (or heard his voice etc.). But this is certainly not giving a reason in a strictly rational sense, but a report of my experience, with the implication that it was sight that *caused* my belief.³⁶ Besides such a report I could of course underpin my perceptual belief with other beliefs I hold, e. g. that John is a friend of the host, that he was invited to the party etc. But giving the cause of a perceptual belief is needed to explain *how I came to have* this belief and no

34 Davidson, »A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge« (fn. 4), 310.

35 Cf. Richard Rorty's conclusion, in favour of coherentism, that causal interaction is »as intimate as connection with [...] [the] world [...] can get.« (»Response to John McDowell«, in: Robert B. Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and his critics*, Malden, Oxford 2000, 123–128, here: 127).

36 Cf. Davidson's answer to the discussion of *chicken-sexing*: »The chicken-sexer (we are told) cannot give a reason why he believes a chicken is male or female; he looks and feels, and believes. This seems to me just the way perception works. Of course we can often justify a judgment by saying, ›It looks and feels that way‹, but this either adds nothing more than the information that it was sight and feel that prompted the belief, or it expresses the belief that it looks and feels the way a female chicken looks and feels, which is another belief, and one that can be a reason to believe the chicken is of one sex rather than the other.« (»Comments on Karlovy Vary Papers« (fn. 27), 290).

other, it is what links my belief to the world. Davidson is very well aware of the ›ultimate evidential role‹ of sense experience.³⁷ What he does not accept is any (strictly speaking) *rational* support coming from experience. Justification thus proves to be a rational relation only insofar the support given *within* thinking is concerned, but fully rests on causality when it comes to the support given by experiential intake. The coherentist's picture is qualified to give an account of both how perceptual beliefs are linked to the world and so filled with empirical content and how they are rationally supported – namely within rational thinking. McDowell's fundamental worry about a rational constraint *by the world* seems to confuse the issue and ultimately turns out to be insubstantial.

Let me add a last note on why I think McDowell's anxiety about a rational connection with the world is tempting but fundamentally misguided. In asking for answers we sometimes reach a point where we cannot reasonably ask any further. Such a final point is reached when it comes to asking for conceptual correlations.³⁸ A conceptual correlation is something we can *uncover*, or we can give examples to *illustrate* it – but we are not in a position to ultimately justify it. Asking for a justification of conceptual correlations just does not seem to make sense. Now, McDowell's fundamental question of *how empirical content is possible* rests on the possibility that we are *not* in touch with the world, that we can make sense of a notion of *world view* disconnected from the world.³⁹ But we cannot give meaning to a world entirely absconded from us. Neither can we think of beliefs that are completely devoid of empirical content. Beliefs are essentially connected with what we call the world or truth. We could not understand what a belief is,

37 Davidson, »Reply to John McDowell« (fn. 32), 106.

38 Referring to Wittgenstein, Jonathan Lear indicates a similar final point called ›empirical exhaustion‹: »Philosophy takes up where empirical explanations peter out. Explanations must come to an end somewhere; and it is the job of philosophy to help us comprehend that which has no explanation and which, therefore, cannot be justified.« (»Leaving the World alone«, *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), 382–403, here: 387).

39 That is exactly the mistake McDowell commits according to Rorty: »We shall fear that the world is on the verge of absconding as long as we think that causal connection with the world is not a tight enough way of bonding with it. [...] I think of McDowell as, contrary to his own best intentions, keeping alive the pathos of possible distance from the world.« (»Response to John McDowell« (fn. 35), 124). It might be conceded that in his post-*Mind and World* writings McDowell is perfectly aware of these conceptual, or what he prefers to call it, ›transcendental‹ connections. There, he makes explicit that the question of how empirical content is possible is not answerable in *empirical* ways, but that it is a transcendental question concerning *the very idea* of empirical content, i. e. the *conditions of possible experience* of the world (e. g. John McDowell »Having the World in View. Sellars, Kant, and Intentionality« (The Woodbridge Lectures, 1997), *Journal of Philosophy* 95 (1998), 431–491). It was Sami Pihlström who pointed out to me to take into consideration this ›transcendental turn‹ in McDowell's philosophy (for an argument cf. Sami Pihlström, *Naturalizing the Transcendental: A Pragmatic View*, Amherst (NY) 2003, ch. 4).

if all beliefs were disconnected from the world or could be false. It seems that the concepts of world, truth and belief are conceptually correlated – the one does not make sense without the other.⁴⁰ One possible reason why we cannot hope to step outside the fundamental conceptual framework we have is given by Davidson: namely, that the causal relations between the world and our beliefs at the same time supply the *interpretation* of our language and our beliefs.⁴¹ We can therefore simply *state* these correlations, but cannot give any further explanation of *why they hold*. Therefore, someone who asks for a rational foundation of the very idea of empirical content simply wants too much. He asks the wrong question. It is a conceptual necessity that we are endowed with empirical content in experience, that we get hold of the *world* in the truest sense of the word.⁴²

40 As Rorty puts it: »Truth« in the sense of ›truth taken apart from any theory‹ and ›world‹ taken as ›what determines such truth‹ are notions that were [...] made for each other. Neither can survive apart from the other« (»The World Well Lost«, *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972), 649–665, here: 663).

41 Davidson, »Empirical Content« (fn. 28), 332.

42 I would like to thank Andreas Graeser, David Lüthi, Jonas Pfister and Sami Pihlström for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.