

Disjunctivism  
&  
The Possibility of Perceptual Knowledge

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I, Joe Cunningham, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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## *Abstract*

This thesis is about one of John McDowell's epistemic arguments for perceptual disjunctivism. According to the argument in question we can know things on the basis of perception only if perceptions provide us with different epistemic reasons than phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations and this is possible only if perceptions have mind-independent states of the world as constituents and are hence a different kind of experiential state from hallucinations, as the perceptual disjunctivist suggests. I argue against some detractors that there is an argument with this structure to be found in McDowell's writings. I then argue that McDowell's own version of the argument fails because it relies on commitments to certain theses which generate problems for the argument. I then describe an alternative version of the argument. The alternative version of the argument relies on a distinctive theory of what it is for perceptions to provide their subjects with epistemic reasons. According to this theory, perceptions are not themselves reasons to believe things about the world but enable us to possess reasons which are then thought of as the states of the world they relate us to: perceptions are not reasons but are ways of possessing reasons. I attempt to develop this theory, defend it against some objections, and I argue that if it is correct then the epistemic argument can be got to work without any commitment to the problematic theses McDowell's version of the argument commits itself to.

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## *Introduction*

Perceptual experiences of the world put us in a position to know things about the world. According to one influential epistemological tradition ways of knowing things about the world like perception put us in a position to know things about the world because they provide us with good reasons to believe things about the world. According to this tradition then, perceptions provide us with good reasons to make judgements about the world and this is what enables those judgements to constitute articles of knowledge. This conception of the manner in which perceptual experiences puts us in a position to know things is of course highly controversial but I will not be questioning it in this thesis, instead I will work with the assumption that it is correct.

John McDowell works with the assumption that it is correct in his writings on knowledge in general and perceptual knowledge in particular<sup>1</sup>. Distinctively McDowell thinks that the claim that perceptual experience provides good reasons to make judgements about the world implies that experience must have a certain structure, a structure that the doctrine of disjunctivism about perception ascribes to it. It is with the claim that an inference can be made from the claim that perceptual experience provides us with good reason to believing things about the world to the claim that a disjunctive account of perception is true that is my concern in this essay.

I want to prove three things. The first is that there is an argument which moves from the claim that perceptual experiences provide one with good reasons to judge things about the world to be found in McDowell's writings. That there is an argument

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<sup>1</sup> McDowell (1982), (1986), (1994), (1995), (1996), (2002), (2008a), (2008b)

with such a structure to be found in McDowell's writings is a thesis which is questioned by commentators who doubt that he endorses disjunctivism at all<sup>2</sup>. The task of chapter one is to prove that there is an argument of that structure to be found in McDowell's writings. Chapter one will also provide an exposition of the disjunctive theory of experience.

The second thing I want to prove is that the version of the argument for perceptual disjunctivism that McDowell himself propounds is problematic. In chapter two I'll spend some time setting out his version of the argument and I will argue that although there is an objection that can be made to it which can be successfully rebutted by McDowell there are three other objections to it which it is at least not obvious that McDowell can mount a successful response to.

During my exposition of McDowell's version of the argument which purports to infer perceptual disjunctivism from the claim that perceptions provide us with good reasons to believe things about the world I will ascribe to him several theses about the nature of epistemic reasons in general and about perceptual reasons in particular. In chapter three I want to show that if those theses are rejected then a theory of perceptual reasons can be constructed which enables one to construct, in turn, a version of the argument for perceptual disjunctivism with the structure described which avoids the objections which beset McDowell's version of the argument. This is the third thing I want to prove. I will end chapter three with an attempt to defend the distinctive theory of perceptual reasons which is used to construct the second version of the argument for perceptual disjunctivism.

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<sup>2</sup> Byrne & Logue (2008), Haddock & Macpherson (2008), Snowdon (2004)

# I

## *Disjunctivism*

Genuine perceptions of mind-independent objects cannot be told apart from hallucinations of those very same objects solely by reflecting on what it is like for one to undergo them. Disjunctivists about perceptual experience deny that it follows from this that all's the same with one's experiential state whether one has a perception of an object or a hallucination of the same object. They deny this because they want to say that mind-independent objects and their properties are constituents of the experiential states that make up genuine perceptions whereas hallucinations have no such constituents and hence the two are fundamentally different kinds of experiential state. This essay is about the ramifications of this collection of claims for the theory of perceptual knowledge. In this first chapter I want to set out the disjunctive theory of perception more fully. I will then attempt to establish that McDowell endorses the view. Finally I'll set out in schematic form the epistemological argument in favour of it presented in his writings and to be discussed subsequent chapters.

### 1.

There are various ways of presenting the doctrine of disjunctivism about perception but following M.G.F. Martin I'll present it as a distinctive response to the argument from hallucination, an argument which attempts to establish a counter-intuitive result

concerning the nature of genuine perceptions of mind-independent objects<sup>3</sup>. In this section I'll present the argument from hallucination and in the following section I'll present disjunctivism as a response to it.

When we enjoy a veridical perception of a flickering candle there is some mental state that we in. This mental state is distinctively experiential, which is just to say that it has various features which distinguish it from other mental states like beliefs about the candle, or desires or emotions directed towards it, for example. Perhaps the most prominent feature of the perceptual state that distinguishes it from states of other kinds is its distinctive phenomenal character: what it feels like to enjoy a perception of a mind-independent object. What it feels like to enjoy a perception of a flickering candle is very different from what it feels like to believe that there is a flickering candle or to dislike the fact that there is a flickering candle.

Reflection on the distinctive sort of phenomenal character possessed by the experiential state constitutive of a perception of a flickering candle seems to reveal something about its intrinsic nature: a property it has which marks it out as the distinctive kind of experiential state it is. Reflection on what it is like to perceive a flickering candle reveals that the candle itself and the properties our experience presents it as having are constituents of the experiential state one is in when one perceives it and, more generally that experiential states which constitute instances of veridical perception have mind-independent objects and the properties our experience presents them as having as constituents<sup>4</sup>.

Part of what this means is that that we couldn't be in the kind of experiential state we are in when we perceive a mind-independent object were the object not to exist or were the object not to possess the properties our experience presents it as having: we couldn't be in the kind of experiential state we are in when we perceive the flickering candle if there were no flickering candle or were to fail to have a flickering flame, for example.

Another way of putting this point is by saying that the experiential state that we are in when we perceive the candle constitutes a relation between us and the candle itself as well as whatever properties the candle has that our experience of it presents us

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<sup>3</sup> Martin (2004); (2006)

<sup>4</sup> From now on the claim that the experience that constitutes a genuine perception of an object has the object itself as a constituent – a claim which I'm using to gloss naïve realism, here – should be taken as elliptical for the claim that the experience that constitutes a genuine perception of an object has the object itself *and the properties of it that are present to one by one's experience* as constituents.



with. Generalising this, the point is that experiential states which constitute instances of veridical perception relate us to mind-independent objects and their properties present in our environment<sup>5</sup>. Call this thesis about the nature of veridical perception *naïve realism* about veridical perception.

We have been considering the case of an individual who has a perception of a flickering candle. Now consider the following less common case:

*Experiment.* Daisy has volunteered to be the subject of an invasive scientific experiment. As part of the experiment Daisy will have the top part of her head numbed by local anaesthetic so that a surgeon can remove part of her skull to gain access to the part of her brain responsible for outputting visual experiences. The surgeon will stimulate that part of Daisy's brain and she is to describe to the surgeon what she seems to see. As part of the experiment the room in which Daisy is seated is darkened and a candle with a flickering flame is placed on a stool in front of her. The surgeon asks Daisy to stare at the candle throughout the experiment. At the beginning of the experiment the surgeon does not tamper with Daisy's brain and she has a genuine perception of the flickering candle. Throughout the remainder of the experiment the surgeon intermittently manipulates Daisy's visual centres in such a way that she undergoes hallucinations of a flickering candle on the stool in front of her which feel exactly the same to her as genuine perceptions of the real candle on the stool in front of her. At any given time during the experiment Daisy cannot tell solely on the basis of what it is like for her to undergo her visual experiences of a flickering candle whether she is undergoing a hallucination of the candle or perceiving the real thing. This is reflected in her descriptions of what she is experiencing: whenever the surgeon asks her what she is experiencing she responds by saying 'I'm seeing the flickering candle on the stool in front of me'.

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<sup>5</sup> Likewise from now on I will take the claim that experiences constitutive of genuine perceptions of an object constitute a relation between a subject and the object itself to be elliptical for the claim that experience constitutive of genuine perceptions of an object constitute a relation between a subject and the object itself *and the properties of the object that the experience presents it as having themselves*.

In *experiment* as far the phenomenology of each experiential state is concerned, Daisy cannot tell apart her hallucinatory experience and her genuine perception of a flickering candle. Call hallucinations like those which Daisy suffers *perfect hallucinations* because they perfectly match the phenomenology of the perceptions they replicate. The argument from hallucination says that it follows from the fact that the experiential state constitutive of a genuine perception of the flickering candle is phenomenologically indistinguishable from the experiential state constitutive of a mere perfect hallucination of a flickering candle that both experiential states have the exact same intrinsic nature: that the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions from corresponding perfect hallucinations entails that perceptions are the same kind of experiential state as hallucinations. Following Martin we can call the claim that hallucinatory states and perceptual states are the same sort of experiential state *the common kind assumption*<sup>6</sup>.

Care should be taken when attempting to understand what it is to say that hallucinatory states and genuine perceptual states are the same in kind. This is because there are ways of understanding what it is for two states to be different in kind on which the common kind assumption comes out as trivially false even though it is not<sup>7</sup>. It might be thought, for example, that if there is *any* property one state possesses but another state lacks then the two are different in kind. On this liberal way of understanding what it is for two states to be different in kind Daisy's perception of a flickering candle and hallucination of a flickering candle are different in kind because Daisy's perception occurs at 10.10am whereas her hallucination occurs at 10.15am: her perception is a 10.10am experience whereas her hallucination is a 10.15am experience so the two are different kinds of experiential state. The liberal way of individuating kinds of state implies that the common kind assumption is false, and obviously so.

But the common kind assumption is not obviously false. This means that there must be a less liberal way of individuating kinds of state and the common kind assumption must be read using this less liberal conception. On this less liberal way of individuating kinds of state there are properties that a state has that are more fundamental to it than other properties such as the particular time at which it occurred

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>7</sup> See *Ibid*, pp.360-361

or its particular causes. These more fundamental, basic, or intrinsic, properties delineate what we might think of as the essence of the state, if that word does not strike one as too spooky. This less liberal way of individuating kinds says that if two states are not identical with respect to the set of fundamental properties they have then they are different in kind. So mental states and physical states might be thought of as being different in kind because it is a fundamental feature of all and perhaps only mental states that there is something that it is like to undergo them whereas this is not a fundamental feature of physical states.

The common kind assumption should be read using this less liberal way of individuating kinds of state, and read this way it doesn't come out as a trivial falsehood. Read this way the common kind assumption says that perceptions and hallucinations have all of their most fundamental properties in common and differ with respect only to their non-fundamental properties, for example their causal origins, and the argument from hallucination attempts to deduce it from the claim that perceptions are phenomenally indistinguishable from perfect hallucinations.

Now, the experiential state one is in when one suffers a perfect hallucination of a flickering candle doesn't have the flickering candle itself as a constituent. That is because it is not a fundamental feature of hallucinatory states that they constitute relations to mind-independent objects: hallucinations don't have mind-independent objects as constituents. But it follows from the common kind assumption that the experiential state that constitutes one's perception of a flickering candle has the same basic nature as the experiential state constitutive of a perfect hallucination of a flickering candle. It follows in turn, then, that one's perception of a flickering candle does not have the candle as a constituent and that in general perceptual states don't have mind-independent objects as constituents. This straightforwardly implies that naïve realism is false and that is the argument from hallucination's counter-intuitive conclusion.

It is important to be clear about what exactly the argument concludes and what naïve realism says. The argument concludes that perceptions don't constitute relations between subjects and mind-independent objects, or, alternatively, that mind-independent objects don't partly constitute veridical experiences of them. This implies that when one enjoys a veridical perception the state one is in is exactly the same sort of thing as the state one would be in were one hallucinating: all is the same with one's experiential state whether one is perceiving or hallucinating.

This is not to make the absurd suggestion that perceptions and hallucinations are the same thing. It is just to say that in so far as they are different what makes them different is not a fundamental feature of the experiential states that constitute them but rather some non-fundamental feature of them, such as their causal origins: a perception is just an experience that's fundamentally the same in kind as a hallucination but which is caused in a certain way by the mind-independent object it is directed towards whereas a hallucination isn't, for example. A naïve realist about veridical perception, by contrast, wants to say that what makes perceptions different from hallucinations is that they differ with respect to their most fundamental features. This is the claim that the argument from hallucination purports to falsify.

So the argument from hallucination establishes that naïve realism is false. But the argument need not establish only this negative conclusion. The common kind assumption has it that perceptions are the same kind of experiential state as hallucinations. It follows from this that whatever theory one has of the fundamental nature of hallucinatory states is true of perceptual states as well. So if one endorses a sense-datum theory of hallucination which says that hallucinatory states have mind-independent objects as constituents the argument from hallucination establishes that a sense-datum theory of genuine perceptual experience is true as well. Or if one endorses an intentionalist theory of hallucination which says that hallucinatory states don't have constituents at all, or alternatively that they fail to constitute relations to any kind of object at all be it a sense-datum or an external object, but are instead propositional attitudes which present propositions about the objects they are directed towards to the subject who undergoes them, the argument from hallucination establishes that such a theory is true of genuine perception as well<sup>8</sup>. The argument establishes both that naïve realism is false and that whatever non-naïve realist theory of the fundamental nature of hallucinatory experience is correct is also correct of the fundamental nature of veridical experience<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> See Crane (2001) for a statement of the intentionalist analysis of hallucination and perceptual experience in general. See Crane (2008) for an analysis of perceptual experience which claims that it is (a) non-relational or fails to have constituents but (b) claims that experiential states are not propositional attitudes. In virtue of making claim (a) the view deserves to be labelled 'intentionalism'.

<sup>9</sup> Crane ((2001); (2005); (2006)) understands the argument from hallucination as purporting to establish the counter-intuitive conclusion that we do not perceive mind-independent objects 'directly' but only perceive them by being perceptually related to sense-datum which in some sense resemble mind-independent objects. In other words Crane presents the argument from hallucination as purporting to establish the truth of a sense-datum theory of perception. Indeed this is actually the orthodox way of presenting the argument (see, for example, Byrne & Logue (2008)). Following Martin I have presented

## 2.

Disjunctivists want to deny that hallucinations and perceptions are experiential states that have the same basic nature: they want to deny the common kind assumption. They want to do this moreover, because they endorse naïve realism about perception understood as the claim that mind-independent objects are constituents of the experiential state one enjoys during episodes of perception. So disjunctivism is the conjunction of naïve realism about veridical perception and the claim that veridical perceptual experiences are different sorts of state from hallucinatory experiences. This second claim, moreover, follows straightforwardly from naïve realism as it is understood here given that it is not part of the intrinsic nature of hallucinatory experiences that they have mind-independent objects as constituents.

So the disjunctivist will want to say that when Daisy perceives the flickering candle on the stool in front of her the candle is a constituent of the experiential state she is in whereas whenever she hallucinates a flickering candle on the stool as a result of the surgeon's manipulation of her visual centres she is undergoing a fundamentally different kind of experiential state. Daisy's perceptions and hallucinations don't just differ with respect to their causal origins – they don't differ only because her perception is caused in a certain way by the flickering candle itself whereas her hallucination isn't, for example – but differ with respect to their intrinsic nature: Daisy's perceptions are essentially experiences that have external objects as constituents whereas her hallucinations are essentially experiences which don't.

In establishing its negative and positive conclusions the argument from hallucination relies on the common kind assumption. It attempts to infer the common kind assumption from the true claim that it is not possible to tell that one is enjoying a veridical perception as opposed to a perfect hallucination by reflection solely on what it is like to be in either state. Because they deny the common kind assumption and

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it as purporting to establish that naïve realism is false and that either a sense-datum theory or an intentionalist theory of perception is true because I am using the argument solely as a means to present the disjunctive theory of perception and am therefore only interested in it in so far as it establishes that a certain component of that theory of perception – naïve realism – is false.

insist that perceptions and hallucinations are fundamentally two different kinds of experiential state disjunctivists deny that it follows from the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions and perfect hallucinations that the two experiential states are the same in kind. This is the disjunctivist's distinctive response to the argument from hallucination: the argument fails because it moves invalidly from the claim that perfect hallucinations cannot be told apart phenomenologically from corresponding veridical perceptions to the claim that hallucinations are the same kind of experiential state as perceptions. So even though Daisy cannot tell them apart based solely on what it is like to undergo either, her perceptions of the flickering candle and her hallucinations of the flickering candle are different sorts of state.

Because they deny the common kind assumption disjunctivists will not just have to deny the move from the phenomenal indistinguishability of perfect hallucinations and perceptions to the common kind assumption made by the argument from hallucination but also any other move from a true claim about the nature of experience to the common kind assumption. For example it could be argued that a given veridical perception and its perfect hallucination each have the same set of brain states as proximal causes and that it follows from this that they have the same intrinsic nature. The disjunctivist will have to find a way of blocking an inference like this if they are to give a full defence of their view of perception. The argument from hallucination is not the only argument which the disjunctivist must offer a response to.

To say that perceptions and hallucinations are different kinds of experiential state is not to say that there aren't descriptions of perceptions and hallucinations which are correct of both sorts of state. Both states can be correctly described, for example, as perceptual experiences: when one undergoes a perception of a flickering candle one can truthfully be said to be undergoing a perceptual experience just as when one undergoes a hallucination of a flickering candle one can also truthfully be said to be undergoing a perceptual experience. Similarly whenever a subject undergoes a perception or a hallucination of a flickering candle it will be true of them that they will be in the position to truthfully avow that they seem to see a flickering candle: that they seem to see a flickering candle is a correct description of their state of mind whether they undergo a perception or a perfect hallucination of a flickering candle.

All of this is consistent with the disjunctivist's denial of the common kind assumption. What's distinctive about disjunctivism is that it says that these descriptions of a subject – that they are undergoing a perceptual experience of a

flickering candle or that they seem to see a candle for example – can be made true by two different sorts of experiential state. Non-disjunctivist's will want to say, by contrast, that when it is true to say that a subject seems to see a flickering candle or that she enjoys an experience of one it is a single kind of experiential state that makes those descriptions of the subject true.

So for the disjunctivist when it is true to say that a subject seems to see a flickering candle that is because she is *either* enjoying a genuine perception of a flickering candle *or* she is suffering a perfect hallucination of a flickering candle where the sorts of state picked out by each disjunct in that disjunction are different in kind. This explains why the theory is called disjunctivism<sup>10</sup>. For the non-disjunctivist on the other hand what makes it true to say that a subject seems to see a flickering candle is that she is undergoing a kind of experiential state that is common to both perceptions and hallucinations.

### 3.

I have given offered a generic specification of disjunctivism as the conjunction of naïve realism and the denial of the common kind assumption. As well as Snowdon and Martin, McDowell seems to endorse disjunctivism in a number of writings and in this section and the next this is what I want to prove, as the claim has become controversial as of late. That he endorses the thesis can seem obvious. Here is what he says, for example, in *Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge* (1982):

In a deceptive [hallucinatory case] case, one's experiential intake must *ex hypothesi* fall short of the fact itself [the state of the world presented to the subject by her perceptual experience and knowable

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<sup>10</sup> One point worth noting is that the thesis at the heart of disjunctivism need not have the logical form of a disjunction. The thesis is that when one has a perceptual experience one either has a genuine perception, which is one kind of state, or a hallucination, which is another. That thesis could just as easily be expressed by a sentence which does not have the form of a disjunction, for example by the sentence 'when one undergoes a perceptual experience one could be enjoying a genuine perception, which is one kind of state, *but* one could be suffering a hallucination, which is another kind of state'. Rather misleadingly, disjunctivism does not, essentially, have anything to do with disjunctions (see Snowdon 2005, pp.137).

on the basis of it], in the sense of being consistent with there being no such fact. So that must be true, according to the argument, in the non-deceptive case too.<sup>11</sup>

Here McDowell gives a summary of the conclusion of the argument from hallucination<sup>12</sup>. Shortly after this McDowell suggests that we should avoid this conclusion by adopting disjunctivism. He says that instead of embracing the conclusion of the argument we can:

...say that an appearance that such-and-such is the case can be *either* a mere appearance *or* the fact that such-and-such is the case making itself perceptually manifest to someone. As before the object of experience in the deceptive case is a mere appearance. But we are not to accept that in the non-deceptive cases too the object of experience is a mere appearance, and hence something that falls short of the fact itself. On the contrary, the appearance that is presented to one in those cases is a matter of the fact itself being disclosed to the experiencer.<sup>13</sup>

Here it is easy to read McDowell as saying that in cases of veridical perception – ‘non-deceptive’ cases – one’s experience essentially relates one to a fact about the object presented to one and knowable on the basis of experience whereas in phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinatory cases – ‘deceptive’ cases – one’s experience instead relates one to a ‘mere appearance’. The disjunctivist says that experiential states constitutive of veridical perception are essentially relations between subjects and mind-independent objects as well as the properties of those objects presented to one in one’s experience of them and are therefore different in kind from hallucinatory experiences. In the above passage McDowell is suggesting that we should conceive of the experiential states constitutive of veridical perception as relations between subjects and *facts* about the objects presented to us by our

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<sup>11</sup> McDowell (1982), p.386

<sup>12</sup> McDowell actually refers to it as the argument from illusion (*ibid.*, p.380 and pp.385-386. See also his (1995) pp.396-398) but we can ignore that detail here.

<sup>13</sup> McDowell (1982), pp.386-387



perceptions that are knowable on the basis of the experience. Is this tantamount to an endorsement of disjunctivism?

I think that it is. In the above passage as well as in the remainder of his (1982) we can think of McDowell as suggesting that a genuine perception of an O which is F is fundamentally a relation between a subject and a true proposition – or a fact – about O and its Fness whereas a hallucinatory experience, although phenomenally indistinguishable, is not. But if perceptions have facts about their objects and properties of those objects as constituents then they must also constitute relations between their subjects and the objects and properties in question. If they didn't then they wouldn't be able to have true propositions about those objects and properties as constituents in the first place. We can think of McDowell as suggesting that mind-independent objects and the properties of them presented to one in experience are constituents of experience *in virtue of being* constituents of the facts about those objects that are themselves constituents of experience, even though this is not the case with hallucinatory experiences. Presented like that McDowell's views clearly seem tantamount to disjunctivism, conceived of as the conjunction of naïve realism and the denial of the common kind assumption<sup>14</sup>. I will be largely ignoring these details of McDowell's own particular version of disjunctivism in what follows and talk as if he endorses the simple generic version of the doctrine I presented in prior sections.

In *Singular Thought and the Extent of Inner Space* (1986) McDowell seems to express his commitment to disjunctivism again:

...of facts to the effect that things seem thus and so to one... some are cases of things being thus and so within the reach of one's subjective access to the external world [i.e. veridical perceptual experiences], whereas others are mere appearances.<sup>15</sup>

Short of the fully Cartesian picture, the infallibly knowable fact – its seeming to one that things are thus and so – can be taken

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<sup>14</sup> I have only given the briefest of sketches of McDowell's particular brand of disjunctivism here. The view is actually considerably more complicated. For example, McDowell wants to say that external objects and their properties get to be constituents of perceptual experiences in virtue of those experiences essentially having true *demonstrative* propositions as their content: objects are constituents of perceptions because perceptions are essentially factive propositional attitudes that pick out their referents using demonstrative expressions.

<sup>15</sup> McDowell (1986), p.241

disjunctively, as constituted either by the fact that things are manifestly thus and so [e.g. in cases in which one sees that p] or by the fact that that merely seems to be the case.<sup>16</sup>

In these passages McDowell can be read as suggesting that cases in which it is true that for all one's experience suggests it seems to one as if the world is a certain way divide into two disjoint cases. In cases of the first kind one undergoes an experience with a state of external reality itself as a constituent: the object and its properties one's experience relates one to are constituents of one's experience, perhaps by being constituents of a fact that is itself a constituent of one's experience. In cases of the second kind this is not the case. This is so even though cases of the second kind cannot be told apart phenomenologically from cases of the first: in both cases it is true that it seems to the subject that things are a certain way with the world. This seems quite clearly to be an endorsement of disjunctivism.

But commentators on McDowell's work such as Byrne and Logue (2008) and, more tentatively, Haddock and Macpherson (2008) and Snowdon (2005) want to deny that he endorses disjunctivism about perception. Instead they say that he endorses an epistemological thesis that is analogous to disjunctivism but which is neutral with respect to the truth of disjunctivism. Roughly, the thesis states that genuine perceptions and phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations differ with respect to their epistemic properties. The commentators who suggest that McDowell doesn't endorse disjunctivism want to say that his supposed avowals of disjunctivism such as those quoted above should actually be read as avowals of this epistemological thesis. Byrne and Logue even suggest that there is textual evidence which suggests that he thinks it's false<sup>17</sup>.

I think that they are correct to ascribe the epistemological thesis to him and that it is correct to say that the epistemological thesis doesn't obviously have anything to do with disjunctivism but that they are wrong to think that we should therefore read

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p.242

<sup>17</sup> See Byrne and Logue (2008), pp.65-68, Haddock and Macpherson (2008), pp.4-13, and Snowdon (2005), pp.139-140. As noted Byrne and Logue say that McDowell actually thinks that disjunctivism is false. Snowdon thinks that it is not obvious that he endorses disjunctivism because it is not obvious that it follows from epistemic disjunctivism, which is the thesis McDowell seems mostly concerned with. Haddock and Macpherson think that McDowell's views have undergone a development. They say that in his (1982) he doesn't endorse it; in his (1986) it is not clear whether he endorses it; but that in his (1992) he explicitly endorses it. Commentators who think that McDowell does endorse disjunctivism include Crane ((2005), §3.4) and Martin ((2006), pp.356-357 fn.7).

McDowell's supposed avowals of disjunctivism as avowals of this epistemological thesis. I'll deal with that suggestion in the proceeding section. For now I want to deal with Byrne and Logue's suggestion that there is textual evidence to suggest that McDowell actually thinks that disjunctivism is false.

In favour of their claim that McDowell thinks that disjunctivism is false they quote the following passage from his recent *The Disjunctive Conception of Experience as Material for a Transcendental Argument* (2008a) where McDowell discusses the nature of the disjunctivist's claim that when one has a perceptual experience as of a mind-independent object one either has a veridical experience of an object, which is one kind of state, or one has a non-veridical experience of an object, which is another kind of state:

The two sides of the disjunction differ in epistemic significance... This difference in epistemic significance is of course compatible with all sorts of commonalities between the disjuncts. For instance, on both sides of the disjunction it appears to one, say, that there is a red cube in front of one.<sup>18</sup>

Here, McDowell is expressing his commitment to the epistemological thesis analogous to disjunctivism mentioned above and to be discussed in sequel. In the passage he also suggests that the thesis is consistent with certain 'commonalities' between cases of veridical perception and non-veridical perception. Byrne and Logue take this commonality to be a shared fundamental experiential nature, and if that's what McDowell's suggesting in the above quotation then he is committing himself to the falsity of disjunctivism.

But McDowell is surely not endorsing the claim that perceptions and hallucinations are the same kind of experiential state in the above paragraph. He seems only to be pointing out that whether one genuinely perceives a red cube in front of one or one suffers an indistinguishable non-veridical experience as of a red cube in front of one it will be true to say of one that it appears to one that there is a red cube in front of one, and as we saw in section three this claim is perfectly consistent with disjunctivism's denial of the common kind assumption. So Byrne and Logue are incorrect to say that

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<sup>18</sup> McDowell (2008a), fn.15

what McDowell says in the above quote constitutes a commitment to the falsehood of disjunctivism.

If it's still in doubt whether McDowell endorses disjunctivism, consider the following highly revealing passage from *Putnam on Mind and Meaning* (1992):

Compare the psychological feature that is unsurprisingly shared between someone who sees that such-and-such is the case and someone to whom it merely looks as if such-and-such is the case... It is not compulsory to conceive seeing that such-and-such is the case as constituted by the common feature together with the favourable facts about embedding in the environment. We can understand things the other way round: the common feature – its being to all intents and purposes as if one sees that such-and-such is the case – intelligibly supervenes on each of the divergent “wide” states. And it is better to understand things this way round.<sup>19</sup>

Here McDowell is suggesting that we should not conceive of the state of seeing that some fact about the world is the case as an experiential state that is common between veridical and non-veridical visual perception, in conjunction with facts about the way such an experiential state is ‘embedded in the environment’. McDowell is denying, for instance, that we should identify what it is to see an O which is F as an experiential state which is common to a hallucination as of an O which is F but which is set apart from such a hallucinatory state by being caused by the O and its Fness.

Rather he is suggesting that we should conceive of the state of seeing an O which is F and the state of having a hallucination as of an O which is F as each constituted solely by different sorts of experiential states that are conceived of as ‘wide’ states: states which one can be in only if one’s environment is a certain way. McDowell is suggesting that we should identify seeing an O which is F solely with an experiential state that one can be in only if one’s environment is the way one’s experience presents it to be and that we should identify a hallucination as of an O which is F solely with an experiential state that one could be in even if one’s environment is not the way one’s experience presents it to be.

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<sup>19</sup> McDowell (1992), p.284

He then suggests that we should think of the ‘common element’ shared by perceptions and phenomenally indistinguishable non-veridical perceptual episodes – that it seems to one that the world is the way each kind of experience portrays it – as realised by or as supervening upon the different kinds of wide experiential states that constitute perceptions and hallucinations respectively. In virtue of claiming that the experiential states constitutive of perceptions and hallucinatory experiences are states that one can be in only if the world is a certain way it seems like McDowell is straightforwardly endorsing disjunctivism in the above passage.

#### 4.

We have seen that there is textual evidence which suggests that McDowell embraces disjunctivism and that Byrne and Logue’s claim to the contrary lacks justification, in so far as that justification was supposed to be provided by the piece of textual evidence they took to favour their claim that McDowell is no disjunctivist. I now turn to a different way of justifying the claim that McDowell doesn’t endorse disjunctivism provided by the commentators mentioned in the preceding section according to which McDowell’s supposed avowals of disjunctivism are actually avowals of an epistemological thesis analogous to disjunctivism.

The epistemological thesis in question can be presented as a response to an epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination. This version of the argument purports not to establish a counter-intuitive thesis about the nature of veridical perception but a counter-intuitive thesis about the epistemological features of veridical perception. I’ll present the argument then present the epistemological analogue of disjunctivism as a response to it, before getting to the suggestion that McDowell’s supposed avowals of disjunctivism should actually be read as avowals of this epistemic thesis.

Evie sees a burning weeping willow in front of her. Her visual experience is a case of sight, and as such it is a genuine perception: there really is a weeping willow on fire in front of her and she is having a visual experience of it. If Evie were to form a judgement with the content *there is a weeping willow on fire in front of me* she would

not only be making a true judgement but she would be making a judgement that her veridical visual experience of the burning weeping willow in front of her gives her good reason to make: her judgement would be made justified by her perceptual experience.

But let's imagine that Evie has a visual experience of a burning weeping willow in front of her that isn't a genuine perception of a burning weeping willow – isn't a case of her *seeing* a burning weeping willow – but is actually a visual hallucination of a burning weeping willow that Evie cannot tell apart from a genuine sighting of a burning weeping willow based solely on what it is like for her to suffer it. In this case if Evie were to form a judgement with the content *there is a weeping willow on fire in front of me* she not only would be making a false judgement – assuming that there is actually not a weeping willow on fire in front of her, of course – but she would also not be making a judgement that her visual experience of a burning weeping willow in front of her gives her good reason to make: her judgement would not be made justified by her perceptual experience.

Now, the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination asks us to infer from the phenomenal indistinguishability of Evie's sight of a burning weeping willow in front of her and her hallucinatory visual experience of a burning weeping willow in front of her that both experiential states provide her with the exact same set of reasons to make judgements about objects they present to her and that *a fortiori* they provide her with the exact same reasons to make a judgement with the content *there is a weeping willow on fire in front of me*. In other words the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination says that it follows from the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions and perfect hallucinations that both are the same with regards to what reasons they give the subject to make judgements about objects they present to her. This is the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination's equivalent of the common kind assumption made by the argument from hallucination proper I discussed earlier. Both arguments attempt to deduce their respective common kind theses from the claim that perceptions and hallucinations are phenomenally indistinguishable.

Why exactly one might think that it follows from the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions and hallucinations that they provide the same reasons for judgements about the objects they present is something I'll address in the next chapter. For now we can note that it follows from the claim that perceptions

provide the same reasons for judgements as hallucinations that a perception of an O which is F does not provide a good reason to judge that there is an O which is F, given that hallucinations of an O which is F fails to provide a good reason to make a judgement with that content. This is the counter-intuitive epistemological claim that constitutes the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination's conclusion. Evie's genuine perception of a burning weeping willow in front of her doesn't give her a good reason to judge that there is a burning weeping willow in front of her after all because her visual experience is phenomenally indistinguishable from a hallucinatory experience which does not provide good reason to make that judgement.

There is an important corollary of the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination that I should note before offering a sketch of the response to the argument that constitutes the epistemological thesis analogous to disjunctivism that the commentators mentioned correctly ascribe to McDowell. The corollary is that if we assume that if genuine perceptions of an O which is F provide reasons for taking it to be true that there is an O which is F that are only as good as those which hallucinatory experiences of an O which is F provide to make the same judgements, as the argument establishes, they do not put us in a position to *know* that there is an O which is F then the argument establishes that even in cases of genuine perception we are not in a position to know propositions such as that just described on the basis of them. In other words if we assume that it is condition of having perceptual knowledge that p that perceptual experience must provide us with good reason to judge that p and if we assume that hallucinations provide us with no such good reason then the argument establishes a scepticism about perceptual knowledge.

The epistemological thesis analogous to disjunctivism about perception which commentators correctly ascribe to McDowell consists in the claim that necessarily, veridical perceptions do provide better reasons to make judgements about the objects they present their subjects with than hallucinations and the claim, which follows, that genuine perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to what reasons they give their subjects for making judgements about the objects they present: perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to their epistemic properties. This is so, moreover, even though perceptions and hallucinations are phenomenally indistinguishable. Since this epistemological thesis shares a structure with disjunctivism about perception I

will label it *epistemic disjunctivism* and I will refer to the thesis about perception discussed in previous sections of this chapter as *perceptual disjunctivism*<sup>20</sup>.

Assuming that if perceptions don't provide us with good reasons to judge that p on the basis of them, as the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination purports to establish, then they don't provide us with knowledge that p either, I noted that a corollary of the argument I've been discussing is a scepticism about perceptual knowledge. In so far as epistemic disjunctivism enables us to reject the argument in question it also gives us a way to reject the scepticism about perceptual knowledge the argument generates, albeit in conjunction with a certain thesis about the relation between knowledge and perceptual reasons. Genuine perceptions can provide us with knowledge about the world because unlike phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations they give us good reasons to make the very same judgements about the world that constitute our knowledge of it, or so says the epistemic disjunctivist.

It seems correct to claim that McDowell endorses this thesis. The most explicit confirmation of this is provided in his (2008a). We have already come across a passage from that paper in which McDowell expresses his commitment to epistemic disjunctivism, but here is another:

Experiences of the first kind [genuine perceptions] have an epistemic significance that experiences of the second kind [phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations] do not have. They afford opportunities for knowledge of objective states of affairs. According to the highest common factor conception [the claim that both kinds of experience have the same epistemic properties] appearances never yield more, in the way of warrant for belief, than do those appearances in which it merely seems that one, say, sees that things are thus and so.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> As Snowdon points out ((2008), p.35) the term 'disjunctivism' is now used as a label for views in such disparate areas of philosophy as the philosophy of perception (as we have seen), epistemology (as we have also seen), the philosophy of action, and the theory of reasons. For the most part I will be focusing on disjunctivism about perception although as will become apparent later disjunctivism about perception shares a common structure with views of the same name in the philosophy of action, epistemology, and theory of reasons. Indeed it is in virtue of this that those views share a name with the distinctive doctrine about the nature of perceptual experience that is my focus.

<sup>21</sup> McDowell (2008a), p.381



Here, McDowell can easily be read as saying that genuine perceptions provide one with different reasons – ‘warrant’ – for beliefs about the world than do hallucinations and that therefore they put one in a position to know things about the world, unlike hallucinations. McDowell is committing himself to epistemic disjunctivism in the above passage as well as the thesis that if genuine perception is to put us in a position to know anything about external reality then it must provide us with different reasons or warrant than phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinatory experiences.

What has epistemic disjunctivism got to do with perceptual disjunctivism? The former thesis says that perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to what reasons they provide for their subjects with whilst the latter says that perceptions have states of the world as constituents and are therefore different in kind from hallucinations. There is no *obvious* relation between them. It seems possible to hold perceptual disjunctivism without holding epistemic disjunctivism. This is because it seems possible to reject the idea that the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions and hallucinations entails that they are the same in kind whilst accepting the idea that it entails that they provide the subject with the same reasons. Likewise it seems that one can be an epistemic disjunctivist whilst remaining neutral on the truth of perceptual disjunctivism. This is because it seems possible to explain why perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to their epistemic properties by pointing out that they differ with respect to some non-fundamental property – their causal properties, say – and this is consistent with the claim that the perceptual disjunctivist essentially wants to deny: that they are the same basic kind of state.

Commentators who wish to deny that McDowell endorses disjunctivism seize on the fact that epistemic disjunctivism doesn’t obviously entail disjunctivism. Their reasoning seems to be as follows. McDowell obviously wants to endorse epistemic disjunctivism. But there is no clear separation between epistemic disjunctivism and perceptual disjunctivism in his presentation of either view. He often says things which look like avowals of perceptual disjunctivism but then talks as if what he has really avowed is epistemic disjunctivism and vice-versa. Given that his main concern is with epistemic disjunctivism this must mean that whenever he seems to endorse perceptual disjunctivism he actually means to endorse epistemic disjunctivism. But since that thesis seems consistent with the falsehood of perceptual disjunctivism McDowell doesn’t actually endorse the latter.

I think that this line of reasoning can be questioned. It is true that McDowell wants to endorse epistemic disjunctivism, as we have seen. It is also true that there is no clear separation between epistemic disjunctivism and perceptual disjunctivism in McDowell's works: he does indeed say things which look like avowals of perceptual disjunctivism – for example the passages quoted at the beginning of section three – but which he talks about as if they are avowals of epistemic disjunctivism and vice-versa<sup>22</sup>. It doesn't follow from the fact that McDowell equivocates between perceptual and epistemic disjunctivism and that he is really interested in arguing for the latter that his supposed avowals of perceptual disjunctivism should actually be understood as avowals of epistemic disjunctivism, however. This is because the best way to explain the equivocation between the two theses in McDowell's work is that he sees them as intimately related and perhaps even equivalent. In other words I am suggesting that what explains why McDowell avows perceptual disjunctivism but then talks as if he has avowed epistemic disjunctivism and vice-versa is that he thinks that if one wants to endorse epistemic disjunctivism then the only way one will be in a position to do that is to endorse perceptual disjunctivism as well.

If that's what explains why McDowell equivocates between the two theses then there is no reason not to take McDowell's avowals of perceptual disjunctivism at face value: McDowell is interested, first and foremost, in establishing epistemic disjunctivism but he thinks that to do so he has to endorse perceptual disjunctivism as well and this is why he expresses his commitment to perceptual disjunctivism and then talks as if he has thereby committed himself to epistemic disjunctivism. The commentators mentioned, then, are wrong to think that an equivocation in McDowell's language should lead us to think that he doesn't really endorse perceptual disjunctivism.

Of course the reading of McDowell that I have just offered requires that we ascribe to him the thesis that there is an intimate connection between epistemic disjunctivism and perceptual disjunctivism: it requires us to say that McDowell thinks that the only way to get epistemic disjunctivism to work is if one also adopts perceptual disjunctivism. But I noted above that there is no *obvious* connection between the two kinds of disjunctivism: it seems possible to be a perceptual disjunctivist without being

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<sup>22</sup> For example in his (1982), pp.385-387 he presents what looks like perceptual disjunctivism as a response to what looks like the argument from hallucination but then throughout the rest of the paper talks as if he has thereby established epistemic disjunctivism.

an epistemic disjunctivist and vice-versa. Whilst it is not obvious that there is a connection between these views I think that McDowell thinks that there is, as I have made clear. A consequence of this is that it enables us to extract an epistemological argument for disjunctivism from McDowell's work, an argument which purports to infer perceptual disjunctivism from epistemic disjunctivism. I want to say more about the structure of that argument in the next section. In the following chapters I will try to defend and develop it.

## 5.

My defence of the claim that McDowell endorses perceptual disjunctivism resulted in the ascription of an epistemological argument for perceptual disjunctivism to him and it is this argument that is the subject matter of the rest of this essay. In this final section I want to clarify the argument's structure.

Epistemic disjunctivism says that perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to what reasons they provide their subjects with to make judgements about the states of the world they present to those subjects. Perceptions provide their subjects with better reasons to make judgements about the world than do hallucinations and this explains why they put their subjects in a position to know things about the world even though hallucinations don't, assuming that there is such a link between perceptual knowledge and perceptual reasons. Perceptual disjunctivism says that perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to their fundamental nature: perceptions have mind-independent states of the world as constituents whereas hallucinations don't. What is the structure of the argument that moves from the former thesis to the latter that McDowell puts forward?

I think the argument goes like this. McDowell's argument starts from the claim that perceptions of a burning weeping willow put us in a position to know that there is a burning weeping willow even though hallucinatory experiences as of a burning weeping willow fail to put us in a position to know that there is a burning weeping willow. Let's call this the *anti-sceptical claim* since it involves the anti-sceptical thesis that perceptions put us in a position to know things.

What explains why the anti-sceptical claim is true? One thing that seems like it could explain why the anti-sceptical claim is true is that whenever one has a hallucination of a burning weeping willow it is false that there is a burning weeping willow whereas whenever one genuinely perceives a burning weeping willow it is true that there is a burning weeping willow. If this were true then it would explain why hallucinations don't put us in a position to know things even though perceptions do, because to be in a position to know that there is a burning weeping willow it has to be true that there is a burning weeping willow. Unfortunately it is not possible to explain the truth of the anti-sceptical claim in this way because it is simply not true that whenever one has a hallucinatory experience as of a burning weeping willow it is false that there is a burning weeping willow: one can have an hallucinatory experience of an object even if that object actually exists.

What else could explain why the anti-sceptical claim is true? Another way of explaining its truth could be provided by a certain way of conceiving of *how* perceptual experience puts us in a position to know things. According to the way in question a perception puts us in a position to know that p – where 'p' is some relevant piece of information about the mind-independent object that we perceive – by providing us with *good reasons* to judge that p. Another way of presenting this conception of how perception enables us to know things is as the view that perception doesn't count as a way of knowing that p just because it is capable of explaining why one knows that p, but because the explanation it makes available of why one knows that p involves considerations which function as one's reason to believe that p and so is a kind of rational explanation: that S perceives that p enables S to know that p because the claim 'because S perceives that p' could be given as way of explaining *in a satisfactory way from the standpoint of rationality* why S knows that p<sup>23</sup>.

How does this reasons-based conception of perceptual knowledge lead us to an explanation of the truth of the anti-sceptical claim? The anti-sceptical claim says that perceptions put us in a position to know things about the world even though phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations don't. The reasons-based approach to perceptual knowledge just described says that perceptions put us in a position to know things because they provide us with good reasons to make the very judgements that constitute the knowledge they enable us to possess. It seems clear that this last claim

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<sup>23</sup> See Cassam (2007) for a discussion of what it is for  $\Phi$ ing that p to count as a way of knowing that p. Cassam doesn't consider the reasons-based account of ways of knowing that I've just sketched.

is only capable of explaining the first if it is also the case that perfect hallucinations don't provide us with good reasons to make the judgements which would constitute knowledge were we to make them on the basis of genuine perceptions. So the reasons-based conception of perceptual knowledge constitutes an explanation of the anti-sceptical claim when we marry it to the claim that from 'S perceives that p' we can infer 'S has good reason to believe that p' even though we cannot infer it from 'S suffers a hallucination as of p' and this is so even though perceptions of p are phenomenally indistinguishable from hallucinations as of p. It should be clear by now that what is being suggested here is that given the correctness of the reasons-based approach to perceptual knowledge what explains why the anti-sceptical claim is true is that epistemic disjunctivism is true.

This is exactly how the inference from the anti-sceptical claim to epistemic disjunctivism is structured. The *first part* of McDowell's epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism says, then, that what explains why perceptions enable us to know that p even though phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations don't is that necessarily, perceptions provide us with different reasons to believe that p than hallucinations. The first part of McDowell's epistemic argument constitutes a transition from the anti-sceptical claim to epistemic disjunctivism and it represents the truth of the latter both as a *necessary condition* of the truth of the former, as well as providing an *explanation* of the truth of the former.

But now we might ask what explains why perceptions provide us with better reasons than phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations? The *second part* of McDowell's epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism says that what explains why a perception of an O which is F provides one with a better reason to judge that there is an O which is F than a mere perfect hallucination as of an O which is F is that necessarily, one's perception has the O and its Fness themselves as constituents and is hence a different kind of experiential state than one's perfect hallucination as of an O which is F, which doesn't have the O and its Fness themselves as constituents. The second part of McDowell's epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism consists in a transition from the truth of epistemic disjunctivism to the truth of perceptual disjunctivism and it represents perceptual disjunctivism both as a *necessary condition*

of the truth of epistemic disjunctivism, as well as providing an *explanation* of its truth<sup>24</sup>.

That's the schematic version of McDowell's epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism. It is an argument which starts with the claim that perceptions and hallucinations put one in differing positions to know things, and then infers from this that they differ with respect to what reasons they provide us with, and finally draws from this the conclusion that they constitute fundamentally different kinds of experience because perceptions of the states of the world they provide us with reasons to believe things about have those states of the world as constituents whereas hallucinations don't. I've outlined the structure of the argument but it is not obvious how it could be got to work: how should we understand the claim that perceptions provide us with better reasons than hallucinations? And is it really the case that perceptual disjunctivism needs to be endorsed in order for epistemic disjunctivism to be viable? In the next chapter I will outline McDowell's own version of the epistemic argument which will provide an answer to these questions.

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<sup>24</sup> Note that to say that p provides an explanation of q is not to say that p is *sufficient* for the truth of q. 'That the rock was thrown at it' provides an explanation of why the window is broken but it is not sufficient for the truth of that claim, for example. I want to point this out because I want to make it clear that the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism says that epistemic disjunctivism is a necessary condition of the truth of the anti-sceptical claim and explains why it is true but does *not* say that epistemic disjunctivism is sufficient for the truth of the anti-sceptical claim: it leaves it open that even though perceptions provide one with better reasons than hallucinations that doesn't *guarantee* that perceptions put us in a position to know things about the world whereas hallucinations don't, even though it might explain that fact. Likewise for what the epistemic argument says about the relation between epistemic disjunctivism and perceptual disjunctivism: it does not say that perceptual disjunctivism is sufficient for the truth of epistemic disjunctivism, even though it is necessary for it's truth and also explains why it's true, if it is.

## II

### *A Version of the Epistemic Argument for Perceptual Disjunctivism*

We saw in the last chapter that an epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism can be extracted from McDowell's writings on the matter. The first part of the epistemic argument says that what explains why our perceptions put us in a position to know things about the objects they present us with even though indistinguishable hallucinations don't is that they give us better reasons to make judgements about those objects than hallucinations. The second part of the argument says that what explains this, in turn, is that perceptions have the very states of the world they provide us with reasons to make judgments about as constituents whereas phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations don't. In this chapter I want to present McDowell's version of this argument. I'll argue that there are a number of objections which can be made against this version of the argument, some of which seem fatal.

#### 1.

I'll begin with what McDowell's version of the epistemic argument says about the first part of the argument: the transition from the anti-sceptical claim to epistemic disjunctivism. This part of the argument says that what explains why perception puts

us in a position to know that p even though a phenomenally indistinguishable hallucination doesn't is that it is a condition of perception putting us in a position to know that p that it provides us with different or better reasons to judge that p than a phenomenally indistinguishable hallucination. So even though I can't tell apart my perception of a lemon tree in front of me from a perfect hallucination as of a lemon tree in front of me necessarily, my perception provides me with better reason to judge that there is a lemon tree in front of me than my hallucination and this is why my perception affords me an opportunity for knowledge that there's a lemon tree in front of me even though my hallucination doesn't. How does this inference work according to McDowell's version of the argument?

McDowell accepts the idea that in order for perception of a lemon tree in front of one to put one in a position to know that there is a lemon tree in front of one it must be the case that one's perception provides one with good evidence or a good reason to judge that there is a lemon tree in front of one: McDowell endorses the reasons-based account of perceptual knowledge I sketched at the end of the previous chapter<sup>25</sup>. But he also thinks that for one's perception of a lemon tree in front of one is to put one in a position to know that there is a lemon tree in front of one it must provide one not just with any kind of good evidence in favour of that judgement, but with *indefeasible* evidence for that judgement. This, I take it, is how McDowell understands the notion of good perceptual evidence for a proposition describing the external objects and properties a given perception presents one with: indefeasible evidence that one's perceptual experience of those objects and properties enables one to possess.

For McDowell an article of evidence, E, counts as an indefeasible reason to judge that p just in case the possession of E is inconsistent with the falsehood of p<sup>26</sup>. For example the fact that there are five apples in the fridge provides me with indefeasible evidence for the judgement that there are fewer than six apples in the fridge, and the fact that Evie is standing in front of me provides me with indefeasible evidence for the judgement that there is someone standing in front of me. Whenever I refer to an article of evidence or a reason as 'indefeasible' I'll be using the word in this sense. E counts as *defeasible* evidence to believe that p for McDowell, by contrast, if the possession of it is consistent with the falsehood of p. For example the fact that two individuals share a similar set of genes provides me with defeasible evidence to

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<sup>25</sup> See, for example, McDowell (1995), p.395

<sup>26</sup> McDowell (1982), 370-371.



believe that they are related, and the fact that the branches of the tree outside are shaking provides me with defeasible evidence to judge that it is windy. Whenever I refer to an article of evidence 'defeasible' I'll be using the word in this sense.

So McDowell thinks that what explains why my perception of a lemon tree in front of me enables me to know that there is a lemon tree in front of me is that it provides me with reason in favour of the judgement that there is a lemon tree in front of me that's inconsistent with the falsehood of that judgement: my perceptions provide me with indefeasible evidence. But why does McDowell think that perceptions of an O which is F have to provide one with indefeasible as opposed to defeasible reasons for believing that there is an O which is F if they are to put their subjects in a position to know that there is an O which is F?

I think that this is because he thinks that if perceptions were to provide one with defeasible reasons for believing that p – where 'p' is a proposition describes the external objects and properties one's perception presents one with – then perceptual experience would not be able to afford us opportunities for knowledge that p without the aid of background knowledge which linked one's perception or perhaps the content thereof to the truth of 'p' – knowledge, for example, that the existence of our perceptual experiences indicate that 'p' is true – and this is not, intuitively, the correct picture of how perceptual knowledge works<sup>27</sup>.

When I perceive a lemon tree in front of me I can know that there is a lemon tree in front of me without having to know that if I have an experience of a lemon tree in front of me then it is probable that there is a lemon tree in front of me, for example. When I perceive a lemon tree in front of me I am simply in a position to know that there is a lemon tree in front of me without the aid of any background knowledge concerning the relation between my experiences of a lemon tree and the fact that there is a lemon tree in front of me. McDowell thinks that this implies that my perception of a lemon tree needs to provide me with indefeasible reasons to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of me: if a knowledge source provides one with only defeasible evidence for the belief that p then it must rely on the subject's background knowledge if it to provide one with evidence in favour of p for the subject and since perception is a knowledge source that doesn't rely on the subject's background knowledge in order

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.373

to function as evidence for the belief that p it must provide the subject with an indefeasible reason to believe that p.

So McDowell wants to say that perceptions provide their subjects with indefeasible reasons to believe that p and that this is what explains why they put us in a position to know that p. But what exactly is the indefeasible reason in favour of believing that there is a lemon tree in front of one that one's sighting of a lemon tree provides one with? Consider what McDowell says in the following passage:

Seeing, or perhaps having seen, that things are thus and so would be an epistemically satisfactory standing in the space of reasons.<sup>28</sup>

So sticking with the visual case McDowell wants to say that one's indefeasible reason for believing that p that one's perceptual experience provides one with is *that one sees that p*, and that one sees that p genuinely counts as an *indefeasible* reason to believe that p because from 'S sees that p' we can validly infer 'p': seeing that p is a *factive* state, a state which one can be in only if 'p' is true.

In claiming that one's sighting of a lemon tree in front of one provides one with the indefeasible reason *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one McDowell is making a significant assumption about the nature of perceptual reasons. The assumption is that perceptions provide their subjects with reasons to believe that p partly by constituting a fact – that one sees that p, say – that can in turn constitute the sole premise of a valid deductive inference which has 'p' as its conclusion. Perceptions provide their subjects with reasons, then, in the same way that rainfall provides one with a reason to believe that it is raining: rainfall provides one with reason to believe that it is raining because it constitutes the fact that it is raining and this can, trivially, constitute the sole premise in a deductive inference to the claim that it is raining. Similarly, one's sighting of a lemon tree in front of one provides one with a reason to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one because it constitutes the fact that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one and this can in turn constitute the sole premise in a valid deductive inference to the conclusion that there is a lemon tree in front of one.

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<sup>28</sup> McDowell (1995), pp.396

That this *premise-constituting* conception of perceptual reasons is correct is an assumption of some significance and I'll be coming back to it later<sup>29</sup>. It seems to me to be the product of two ideas. The first idea is the *inferentialist* conception of reason-hood which says roughly that something can be a reason for believing that *p* if and only if one can infer *p* from it: only if it can constitute the premise in an argument for *p*<sup>30</sup>. The second idea is that the correct way to understand how perceptions provide their subjects with reasons to believe that *p* is by constituting the reason itself: perceptual experiences themselves just *are* the reasons they provide their subjects with to believe that *p*. If we combine these two ideas we get the premise constituting conception of perceptual reasons that McDowell commits himself to when he says that in cases of visual perception *that one sees that p* constitutes one's reason to believe that *p*.

I do not want to dwell on the premise-constituting conception of perceptual reasons at the moment. It will come up again in chapter three. In the remainder of this section I want to describe how McDowell uses the claim that perceptions provide their subjects with indefeasible reasons to believe that *p* of the form *that one perceives that p* in the first part of his version of the epistemic argument.

McDowell wants to say that what explains why perception puts me in a position to know that *p* is that it is a necessary condition of my perceptions putting me in a position to know that *p* that they provide me with the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p* to believe that *p*. But if this is the correct picture of the way perceptual knowledge works then, McDowell wants to say, what explains why I can't know that *p* on the basis of a given hallucinatory experience is that my hallucinatory experience fails to constitute an indefeasible reason of this form to believe that *p*. This is because *that one perceives that p* is trivially not a condition that obtains when one suffers a visual hallucinatory experience phenomenally indistinguishable from the visual perceptual experience one enjoys when one's experience gives one the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p*. Indeed it is difficult to see how hallucinatory experiences could provide one with indefeasible reasons to believe that

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<sup>29</sup> The Premise constituting conception of perceptual reasons seems to me to be tacitly assumed by many philosophers of perception working within the internalist tradition. The most prominent is BonJour (1985; 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Pryor (2005) calls this claim the 'premise principle', rejects it and thus the premise constituting conception of perceptual reasons along with it.

p in any sense given that one could undergo such a hallucinatory experience even if p were false.

But if what explains why perceptions put me in a position to know that p is that they provide me with indefeasible evidence *that one perceives that p* and what explains why hallucinations don't put me in a position to know that p is that they fail to provide me with such indefeasible evidence then what explains why perceptions and hallucinations put me in differing positions to know things about the world is that perceptions and hallucinations provide me with different reasons to believe things about the world even though they might well be phenomenally indistinguishable: what explains why the anti-sceptical claim is true is that epistemic disjunctivism is true. This is how the first part of McDowell's version of the epistemic argument runs.

## 2.

I have presented the first part of McDowell's version of the epistemic argument. In this section I want to present the second part of McDowell's version of the argument.

We have seen that so far McDowell wants to say that perceptions and hallucinations provide us with different reasons to believe that p because visual perceptions, for example, provide us with the indefeasible reason *that one sees that p* to believe that p whereas hallucinations don't. We have also seen that McDowell wants to say that sightings provide us with such reasons partly by constituting them: my sighting of a lemon tree constitutes the fact that I see that there is a lemon tree in front of me, and this is part of what explains how my sighting can provide me with such reasons.

But just because one's visual experience constitutes the fact that one sees that p it doesn't follow that that fact can function as a reason for one: it doesn't follow that one counts as possessing that reasons. It might seem plausible to think that one must have *reflective* knowledge that one sees that p in order for seeing to function as one's reason for believing that p: one must be capable of knowing by reflection on one's current state that one sees that p if the claim that one sees that p is to function as a

reason to believe that p<sup>31</sup>. This claim seems plausible in the light of the plausibility of the more general claim that one needs to have reflective knowledge of the considerations that constitute one's reasons to believe that p if they are to constitute one's reasons for belief at all<sup>32</sup>. If we assume that one must have reflective knowledge of the claims that constitute one's reason for believing that p then we get the result that in order for one's visual experience to put one in possession of the indefeasible reason it constitutes, from 'S is having a visual perception of a lemon tree in front of her', for example, we must be able to validly infer 'S is capable of knowing by reflection that she sees that there is a lemon tree in front of her'.

In order for one's visual experience of a lemon tree in front of one to provide one with the indefeasible reason *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* it not only must constitute that fact but it also must put one in a position to know it by reflection. But how can it be the case that one's visual perception of a lemon tree is sufficient for the reflective knowability of the claim that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one?

I think that McDowell explains how this can be so by making a significant assumption about the epistemological status of our experiential states. The assumption is that for any perception of a mind-independent object if one enjoys such a perceptual state, one is capable of knowing by reflection that one is enjoying that perceptual state. This assumption could be justified by the claim that for any psychological or mental state if one is in that state then one is in a position to know by reflection that one is in that state in conjunction with the claim that perceptual states are psychological states<sup>33</sup>. Since the subject's visual perception of a lemon tree constitutes the fact that she sees that there is a lemon tree in front of her it follows from the assumption about the epistemological status of our perceptual states that one's visual

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<sup>31</sup> Or at least have a justified belief that one sees that p. To keep things simple I'll stick solely with the claim that one needs to know that one sees that p in order for the claim that one sees that p to function as a reason to believe that p. This shouldn't lead one to think that I think that the claim couldn't function as one's reason to believe that p when one has a mere justified belief in it however.

<sup>32</sup> Again, many epistemologists working within the internalist tradition support this claim. BonJour (1985; 2002) provides the paradigm case of a philosopher who endorses this claim. McDowell seems to endorse it. See his (1982), pp.390-391; (1994), p.418; (1995), pp.403; and (2002), pp.100-101. Neta & Pritchard (2007) as well as Pritchard (2008) ascribe the thesis to him as well.

<sup>33</sup> This is a version of a thesis which Williamson (2000), ch.4 labels the 'luminosity' thesis and is a very familiar thesis about the epistemology of the mental. When the luminosity thesis is conjoined with the thesis that for any mental state, if one is not in that state then one is in a position to know by reflection that one is not in that state we get a version of what Williamson calls the 'transparency' thesis which says that for any mental state one is able to tell by reflection whether one is in that state or whether one is not in that state. The transparency thesis expresses the thought that we are infallible about the goings on in our own minds.

perception of a lemon tree in front of one is sufficient for the knowability by reflection of the fact that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one. This is how McDowell shows that one's visual perception of a lemon tree in front of one provides one with the reason *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one: it does so because it constitutes that fact and because it is it is knowable by reflection.

Now, in explaining how one's visual perception of a lemon tree in front of one is sufficient for one to possess the reason *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* McDowell has drawn on two claims. The first is that one's visual perception of a lemon tree constitutes the fact that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one. The second is that for any perceptual state directed towards a mind-independent object if one enjoys such a perceptual state, one is capable of knowing by reflection that one is enjoying that perceptual state. According to the second part of McDowell's version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism it follows from these assumptions that perceptual disjunctivism is true.

The second assumption effectively states that we can have reflective knowledge of the perceptual states that we are in. Now as we have seen, if our perceptions are the same kind of experiential state as hallucinations then they are different from hallucinations only because they require the existence of their mind-independent objects and have some extrinsic property which relates them to such objects such that they can count as perceptions of those objects, such as the property of being caused by those objects. But it is not clear that we can know by reflection that we are in states of this kind: surely we cannot know by reflection, for example, that the experiential state we are in when we undergo a perception is caused by its object. It follows, then, that if our perceptual states are the same kind of experiential state as hallucinations then we can't know that we are in them by reflection. Hence, if the second assumption McDowell makes to explain how it is that one can know that one perceives that *p* holds, perceptions and hallucinations must be of different experiential kinds: they must differ with respect to some of their intrinsic properties and not just their non-intrinsic properties.

The first assumption that McDowell makes says that our perceptual states constitute the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p* to believe that *p* that they provide us with. Now, it cannot be the case that one perceives that *p* unless it is also the case that *p*, as we have seen. This implies that the perceptual state which constitutes the fact

that one perceives that *p* cannot be a state that we can be in unless *p* is true. But we have seen that it seems to follow from the second assumption that our perceptual states must be constituted by experiential states that are different in kind from hallucinatory states and cannot be constituted by states that are the same in kind experientially as hallucinatory states but which are distinguished from them by their non-intrinsic properties, like for example their causal origins. So it follows from both assumptions together that the perceptual state that constitutes the fact that one perceives that *p* must be identical to an experiential state different in kind from a hallucinatory state and which can be enjoyed only if *p* is true.

But it seems that the only way to accommodate this consequence of the two assumptions is to say that the state of the world which constitutes *p* is a constituent of the experiential state different in kind from a hallucinatory state which makes up the perceptual state that constitutes the fact that one perceives that *p*. In other words, the only way to accommodate the consequence of the two assumptions just described is to say that the perceptual state that provides one with the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p* by constituting that fact must be different in kind experientially from a hallucinatory experience because it has the state of the world which constitutes the fact that *p* as a constituent, and this is just what the perceptual disjunctivism suggests.

This is McDowell's way of getting the inference from epistemic disjunctivism to perceptual disjunctivism to work. One's visual perception of a lemon tree provides one with the indefeasible reason *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one whereas a visual hallucination as of a lemon tree in front of one doesn't. Our visual perception enables us to possess this reason because it constitutes the fact that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one and our perceptions enable us to know this indefeasible reason by reflection, as must be the case if we are to count as possessing it. One's visual state enables one to know by reflection that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one because it is itself knowable by reflection and it constitutes the fact that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one. Because it constitutes the fact that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one and this fact cannot obtain unless there is a lemon tree in front of one, one's visual state must be a state one can be in only if there really is a lemon tree in front of one. But if one's visual perception of a lemon tree in front of one is to be knowable to one by reflection then it cannot be an experiential state the same in kind as hallucination but which differs from hallucination with respect to

some of its extrinsic properties, such as its causal properties. It follows that one's visual perception of a lemon tree in front of one must be an experiential state different in kind from a hallucination as of a lemon tree in front of one that one can be in only if there really is a lemon tree in front of one. But the only way this can be the case is if one's visual perception of a lemon tree in front of one is an experiential state that has the lemon tree in front of one itself as a constituent and this is why it is different in kind from a hallucinatory state as of a lemon tree in front of one, as the perceptual disjunctivist suggests. This is McDowell's version of the second part of the epistemic arguments.

### 3.

In the first section I presented McDowell's version of the first part of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism. In the second section I presented McDowell's version of the second part of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism. Putting McDowell's version of each part of the argument together we get an argument that works overall as follows.

Perceptions put us in a position to know that  $p$  – where 'p' is some relevant proposition about the objects and properties of those objects presented to us by our perceptions – whereas hallucinations don't. What explains why perceptions put us in a position to know that  $p$  whereas hallucinations don't is that perceptions provide us with the indefeasible reason to believe that  $p$  *that one perceives that p* whereas hallucinations don't. Perceptions and hallucinations, even though they can be phenomenally indistinguishable from one another provide us with different reasons to believe things about the world. Since that fact has to be reflectively accessible to one if it is to function as one's reason the perception that one has which constitutes it must be itself knowable by reflection. But one's perception can be knowable by reflection only if they are constituted by experiential states different in kind from those which we suffer when we undergo hallucinations. But since one's perceptions constitute the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p* to believe that  $p$  and the existence of that reason entails that  $p$  is true perceptions must be constituted by experiential states that



one can enjoy only if *p* is true. This implies that the experiential states that constitutes the perception which one has which in turn constitutes the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p* must have the states of the world that constitute *p* as constituents and hence are for that reason different kinds of experiential states from hallucinations, as the perceptual disjunctivist suggests.

I'll call this McDowellian version of epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism the *reflective knowledge* argument. In the remainder of this chapter I want to argue that it doesn't work.

#### 4.

In this section I want to consider an objection to the second part of McDowell's reflective knowledge argument that I think McDowell can meet. The objection is that the reflective knowledge argument, with its insistence on the claim that one can know by reflection that one is in the experiential state constitutive of perception in conjunction with its insistence on the idea that one can only be in such a state if some proposition about the world *p* knowable on the basis of that experience is true, runs into a version of the well-known problem Michael McKinsey (1991; 2007) presented for externalist theories of mental content<sup>34</sup>. I'll call the objection the *McKinsey objection*.

The problem, McKinsey thinks, is that externalist theories of mental content which say that one is in a position to know by reflection that one is enjoying a mental state that has a content which is supervenient on the state of one's environment have to say that one is able to have knowledge by reflection of the facts about the world on which the content of the mental state in question supervenes. This is supposed to be a problem because intuitively it is simply not the case that we can come to know facts about the world by reflection. According to the second objection to McDowell's reflective knowledge argument McDowell's commitment to the claim that we can know by reflection the indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p* runs him into the very same problem that McKinsey thinks the content externalist runs into.

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<sup>34</sup> Neta & Pritchard (2007), pp.389-390 point out that McDowell runs into a version of this problem.

The problem for McDowell can be presented as follows. McDowell says that if S is in the experiential state that constitutes her perception that p then S is in a position to know by reflection that she perceives that p. But perceiving that p is a factive state: if S perceives that p then p is true. So let's assume that S undergoes a visual perception of a lemon tree in front of her which constitutes the fact that she sees that there is a lemon tree in front of her. By McDowell's reckoning we can infer that S is in a position to know by reflection that she sees that there is a lemon tree in front of her. But assuming that S is reasonably intellectually sophisticated she will be capable of knowing by reflection that if she sees that there is a lemon tree in front of her then there is a lemon tree in front of her. If we assume that knowledge is closed under known entailment however then it follows immediately that S can know by reflection that there is a lemon tree in front of her: she can know a fact about the world by reflection. But as McKinsey protests it is surely false that one can know by reflection that a certain proposition about the world is true.

So it seems that the reflective knowledge argument if sound has the consequence that we can know by reflection that certain facts about the world obtain and this is counter-intuitive. As Pritchard and Neta (2007) point out however there is a way for McDowell to respond to the McKinsey objection and thus defend his argument<sup>35</sup>.

They start by noting the following. To know that p by reflection for McDowell is to have a belief that p that's based on one's reflectively known indefeasible perceptual reason to believe that p. One's reflectively known indefeasible perceptual reason to believe that p is *that one perceives that p*. To base one's belief that p on this indefeasible reason is just to infer p from it. So as long as one infers p from the reflectively known proposition *that one perceives that p* one counts as having perceptual knowledge for McDowell. But in the supposedly problematic cases in which one comes to know that p by reflection by inferring it from the claim that one perceives that p, also known by reflection, this is precisely what occurs: one infers p from one's reflectively known indefeasible reason *that one perceives that p*. Hence in cases in which one comes to know that p by reflection by inferring it from one's reflective knowledge that one perceives that p one also comes to know that p *by perception* as well for McDowell.

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, pp.391-394

How does this help with the problem we're now considering? The problem is that it is a consequence of McDowell's reflective access argument that one can know facts about the world by reflection. Pritchard and Neta's claim is basically that it is a consequence of McDowell's reflective access argument that one can know that *p* by reflection but only when one also knows that *p* by perception: it is a consequence of McDowell's reflective access argument that being in a position to know that *p* by perception comes along with being in a position to know it by reflection. But this claim surely doesn't help with the problem because it says that it really does follow from McDowell's reflective access argument that one can know things about the world by reflection; why does it help with the problem to say that it follows from McDowell's argument that one can know things about the world by reflection only when one also knows them by perception?

The answer is that it doesn't seem anywhere near as problematic to say that facts about the world are knowable by reflection only when they are also knowable by perception than it does to say that facts about the world are knowable by reflection *alone*. If it were a consequence of McDowell's account that we can know things about the world by reflection alone then that would be a problem for McDowell because it is surely counter-intuitive to say that we can come to know things about the world simply by sitting down and reflecting. But if it is a consequence of McDowell's account that we can know things about the world by reflection only when we also know those things by perception that doesn't seem so counter-intuitive because in far as his account has the consequence just described he doesn't have to countenance the possibility of an agent coming to know things about the world just by sitting down and reflecting. So McDowell can respond to the objection that his reflective access argument leads him to be committed to the claim that one can know things about the world by reflection as follows: the claim that one can know things about the world by reflection is only implausible if it is read as the claim that one can know things about the world by reflection *alone*, but my account doesn't have that consequence, instead it has the consequence that one can know things about the world by reflection only when one also knows them by perception, so my account fails to have any problematic claim as a consequence.

So the McKinsey objection to McDowell's reflective access argument is not effective. In the following sections I turn to an objection put forward by Wright (2002; 2008) which is fatal to McDowell's argument, or so I will try to show.

## 5.

In the previous section I showed, following Pritchard and Neta, how McDowell can meet the McKinsey objection. In this section I want to point out that McDowell's reflective knowledge argument carries with it commitments which lead McDowell to be committed to a distinctive conception of what it is to know that one is undergoing an experiential state by reflection. This conception will need to be articulated more fully and defended by McDowell if his reflective knowledge argument is to be acceptable. I'll call this issue with McDowell's argument the *phenomenal indistinguishability issue*.

The claim that's key to McDowell's derivation of perceptual disjunctivism from his version of epistemic disjunctivism is that if one has a perception of a mind-independent object then one is in a position to know by reflection that one has a perception of a mind-independent object. There is an obvious problem with this claim however: given the phenomenal indistinguishability of the experiential state that constitutes one's perception of an O which is F and the experiential state one is in when one suffers a hallucination as of an O which is F doesn't it straightforwardly follow that one cannot know by reflection that one is in former sort of experiential state when one is, even if they are different in kind?

The claim that the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptual states and hallucinatory states implies that one cannot know by reflection that one is in either is one way of motivating the key premise of the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination that I discussed in the previous chapter. According to the premise in question the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptual and hallucinatory experiential states implies that they must provide the subjects with the same reasons to believe things about the world. If the phenomenal indistinguishability of the two states implies that one is not in a position to know by reflection that one is in the experiential state constitutive of perception when one is and if it is assumed that one must be able to know that one is in such an experiential state by reflection in order for perception to provide one with different reasons to believe things about the world than

hallucination as McDowell suggests, then the key premise of the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination follows.

If McDowell is to meet the objection to the reflective knowledge argument just sketched then he will have to find some way of showing that one can know by reflection that one is in the experiential state he thinks constitutes perception of a mind-independent object when one is even though that state is phenomenally indistinguishable from a hallucination as of the same object. That is, if McDowell is to defend his argument he will have to find some way of saying that even though perceptions and hallucinations are phenomenally indistinguishable it doesn't follow that one cannot know by reflection that one perceives when one does: reflective knowledge of one's own perceptual states is not knowledge based on the phenomenology of those states<sup>36</sup>. If McDowell's perceptual knowledge argument is to be acceptable he needs to develop and defend this account. This is the phenomenal indistinguishability issue.

## 6.

So far we have seen that McDowell can defend himself against the McKinsey objection and that his argument isn't acceptable until he's addressed the phenomenal indistinguishability issue. In this I want to present another objection with the reflective knowledge argument. I'll call this objection *the knowledge of perception objection*.

We have seen that according to the reflective knowledge argument it is one's reflective knowledge of one's own experiential state – reflective knowledge that one perceives that p – which constitutes one's possession of a perceptual reason to believe that p. The reflective knowledge argument has it, in other words, that perceptual knowledge is mediated by knowledge of one's own experiential states: it is mediated by one's reflective knowledge that one perceives that p.

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<sup>36</sup> See Martin (2006), part II for a discussion of how a disjunctivist might say that one is in a position to know that one is in a given perceptual state even though that state is phenomenally indistinguishable from a hallucinatory state.

I think that there is a sense in which the idea that perceptual knowledge is cognitively mediated in such a way over-intellectualises perceptual knowledge. Surely there are cases in which a subject experiences an O which is F and then is in a position to know that there is an O which is F without having to be in a position to know that she perceives that there is an O which is F? It seems that there are even cases in which subjects seem to be able to possess perceptual reasons and hence perceptual knowledge even when they are not capable of forming any beliefs about their own perceptual experiences at all. Consider the following case:

*Planet of the Blind.* Grace lives on a planet inhabited solely by people who have been blind since birth. There is no one on Grace's planet who has a sense of sight. Consequently no one on Grace's planet possesses the concept *vision*, *sight*, *seeing*, or any other concept of visual perception. One day Grace undergoes surgery on her the area of her brain response for visual perception. She awakes from her anaesthetic and, as a side effect of the surgery, has been cured of her blindness: she now has visual perceptions of mind-independent objects as rich and as our own. Because Grace does not possess any concepts of visual perception she has no conception of what is happening to her. Consequentially she is unable to form any judgements which employ any such concepts. She looks out the window and sees a lemon tree outside. She possesses the concept of a lemon tree and is able to recognise it using her new powers of vision. Her visual experience of a lemon tree outside provides her with a good reason to judge that there is a lemon tree outside and thereby puts her in a position to know that there is a lemon tree outside.

If a case like that of Grace's is possible then one's perceptual experience can provide one with good reason to believe that p and hence can put one in a position to know that p without one having to possess any article of knowledge about one's perceptual states, including one reflective knowledge that one perceives that p. This is because the case of Grace in *Planet of the Blind*, if possible, and if cases of the same structure can be constructed for other modes of perception, shows that an individual

can have perceptual reasons and perceptual knowledge even though they are not in a position to have any knowledge concerning their own perceptual states and hence are not capable of having reflective knowledge that they perceives that p.

I don't want to argue for the claim that cases like *Planet of the Blind* are possible, even though it seems to me that they are. I simply want to note that in order for the claim at the heart of the reflective knowledge argument that perceptions provide their subjects with indefeasible reasons of the form *that one perceives that p* to be acceptable it will have to be shown that they are not. This is the knowledge of perception objection.

## 7.

So far I have presented McDowell's version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism – the reflective knowledge argument – and have attempted to show that McDowell can respond to the McKinsey problem, that he must deal with the phenomenal indistinguishability issue if his argument is to be acceptable, and that McDowell's argument runs into the knowledge of perception objection. In this section I want to present an objection to the reflective knowledge argument originally propounded by Wright (2002; 2008).

Wright's objection can be presented as follows. For a consideration, R, to constitute a reason, defeasible or indefeasible, to believe that p it must be possible to validly infer p from R. This is the inferentialist conception of reason-hood that I briefly mentioned earlier and which I claimed McDowell commits himself to when he says that perception provide their subjects with reasons to believe that p by constituting indefeasible reasons of the form *that one perceives that p*. But this is not all it takes for R to constitute a reason to believe that p, according to Wright. In addition for R to constitute a reason for one to believe that p one must be able to have reason to endorse the claim which constitutes R independently of one having reason to believe that p itself. In other words Wright thinks that one has to rationally avow the claim which constitutes R without already being able to rationally avow p if R is to constitute a reason for one to believe that p. If one can have justification for R without

having prior justification for p then Wright says R can *transmit* its justification to p, and only then can it be a reason to believe that p:

...a proper proof should be cogent – should be compelling. A cogent argument is one whereby someone could be moved to rational conviction of – or the rational overcoming of doubt about – the truth of its conclusion. So a chain of valid inferences cannot be cogent if only someone who already took themselves to be rationally persuaded of the conclusion could rationally receive whatever grounds purportedly warranted its premises as doing just that... to acquire a warrant for the premisses of a valid argument and to recognise its validity is *thereby* to acquire – perhaps for the first time – a warrant to accept the conclusion.<sup>37</sup>

So Wright thinks that for R to be a reason for p one must be able to validly infer p from R and R must be capable of ‘transmitting’ the justification one has for it to p, where R can transmit its justification to p only if one can be moved to rational conviction of R even though one is not already rationally convinced of the truth of p. If, for example, p itself were part of the justification one has for R then R could not be a reason for p, according to Wright because if it were then in order for one to possess justification for R one would already have to possess justification for p, which according to Wright’s conception of reason-hood is impossible.

So Wright is saying for example that if the claim that there is rain water on Tom’s jacket is to be a reason to believe that it is raining then it must be possible to infer that it is raining from the claim that there is rain water on Tom’s jacket *and* it must be possible to justify the belief that there is rain water on Tom’s jacket without already having to possess reason to believe that it is raining in order for it to function as a reason to believe that it is raining. Since one cannot have justification for the claim that there is rainwater on Tom’s jacket without already having justification for the claim that Tom is wearing a jacket the former cannot constitute a reason for the latter according to Wright. Since one can have justification for the claim that there is rainwater on Tom’s jacket without already having justification for the claim that it is

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<sup>37</sup> Wright (2002), p.333



raining, however, it is possible, by Wright's lights, that the former could be a reason for the latter, though a defeasible one.

Now, McDowell says that one's reason to believe that  $p$  that one's perceptual experience provides one with is the reflectively knowable fact *that one perceives that  $p$*  – reflectively knowable, it will be recalled, because it is constituted by one's reflectively knowable experience that has the state of the world which constitutes  $p$  as a constituent. If Wright is correct then it must be possible to infer ' $p$ ' from that proposition if it is to be a reason. Clearly it is possible to infer ' $p$ ' from the claim that one perceives that  $p$ , so McDowell's perceptual reasons fulfil one of Wright's criteria for reason-hood – indeed, this is exactly what we'd expect given that McDowell himself agrees with this criteria. In addition, however, if Wright is correct then in order for the claim that one perceives that  $p$  to count as a reason to believe that  $p$  it must be possible to justify the claim that one perceives that  $p$  independently of the claim that  $p$ : if *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* is to count as a reason to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one for example, it must be possible to avow with rational propriety the claim that one perceives that there is a lemon tree in front of one without having any prior justification to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one.

But it seems that one cannot have justification to believe that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one without already having justification to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one. This is because seeing that there is a lemon tree in front of one is phenomenally indistinguishable from a hallucination as of a lemon tree in front of one. Given this it seems that the only way one could rationally avow that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one is if one already has justification to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one, that way one could have reason to believe that the perceptual state one is in is a sighting of a lemon tree and not a mere perfect hallucination of one.

Now, if this is correct then according to Wright *that one perceives that  $p$*  cannot be a reason to believe that  $p$  afterall: since one can only rationally avow the former if one is already in a position to rationally avow the latter, for the reason that perceptions are phenomenally indistinguishable from hallucinations as of the same objects, it follows from Wright's conception of reason-hood that *that one perceives that  $p$*  is not a reason

to believe that p. This is so, moreover, whether or not a disjunctive conception of perceptual experience is true, as Wright points out<sup>38</sup>.

This is a problem for McDowell's reflective knowledge argument for perceptual disjunctivism because the claim that the reason that one's perceptual experiences provide one with to believe that p is *that one perceives that p* is central to McDowell's derivation of perceptual disjunctivism from epistemic disjunctivism. That part of the argument says that since *that one perceives that p* is one's perceptual reason to believe that p and since one's perceptions must provide one with reflective knowledge of it if it is to be one's reason, the perceptual state which constitutes the fact that one perceives that p must be reflectively knowable to one, and this can be the case only if it is an experiential state which has the state of the world which constitutes p as a constituent, as the disjunctivist suggests. The effect of Wright's criticism is that McDowell cannot rely on the claim that one's perceptual reason to believe that p is the fact that one perceives that p to derive perceptual disjunctivism from epistemic disjunctivism.

So because seeing a lemon tree in front of one is phenomenally indistinguishable from a visual hallucination as of a lemon tree in front of one, one cannot have justification to make the former claim without already having justification to make the claim that there is a lemon tree in front of one, and this implies that *that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one* cannot be a reason to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one. This causes problems for McDowell reflective knowledge argument for perceptual disjunctivism as we've seen. Before moving onto to look at replies to Wright's objection in the next section however I want to finish this one by noting that the rationale Wright has for claiming that *that one perceives that p* cannot be a reason for one to believe that p can be understood to be another motivation for the key premise in the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination. This premise says that because perceptions and hallucinations are phenomenally indistinguishable they each provide us with the same reasons to believe that p. According to Wright the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions and hallucinations precludes the rational avowal of the claim that one perceives that p prior to the rational avowal of the claim that p and this precludes in turn the former functioning as a reason for the latter. If it is assumed that perceptions are supposed to

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, pp.39-40; (2008), pp.396-400

provide their subjects with different reasons to believe that *p* to hallucinations only because they enable their subjects to have reflective access to the claim *that one perceives that p* then if it's true, as Wright thinks, that phenomenal indistinguishability precludes the claim that one perceives that *p* constituting a reason to believe that *p*, then the key premise of the epistemic analogue of the argument from hallucination follows.

## 8.

We saw in the last section that McDowell's reflective knowledge argument is vulnerable to an objection from Wright. According to this objection since *that one perceives that p* cannot be rationally avowed independently of the rational avowal of the claim that *p* itself *that one perceives that p* cannot constitute a reason to believe that *p* after all. Hence, McDowell can't rely on the claim that it is a reason in his reflective knowledge argument for perceptual disjunctivism as he does. In this section I want to examine a response to it. I will argue that it fails and hence that unless a better response is forthcoming Wright's objection seems fatal to the reflective knowledge argument.

According to the first response to Wright it is correct to say that if *R* is to constitute a reason to believe that *p* then not only must one be able to infer *p* from *R* but one must be able to rationally avow *R* without first having to rationally avow *p*, as Wright says. It follows that one must be able to rationally avow the claim that one perceives that *p* before one rationally avows the claim that *p* if the former is to constitute a reason for belief in the latter. Wright is wrong however to suggest that one cannot offer a rational avowal of the claim that one perceives that *p* independently of one's rational avowal of the claim that *p* itself: one *can*, according to the response to Wright's objection we're now considering, rationally avow the claim that one sees that there is a lemon tree in front of one before one is in a position to avow that there is a lemon tree in front of one.

How is this possible? According to the response we're now considering McDowell claims that *that one perceives that p* is knowable by reflection. But if this claim is

right then doesn't it follow that one can rationally avow that one perceives that p without having to rationally avow first that p? That is, if it is true that one can know that one perceives that p by reflection then that proposition can be rationally believed even though one doesn't already rationally believe that p and therefore can function as a reason to believe that p after all, so Wright's objection fails.

But why should we accept that if it is knowable by reflection that one perceives that p then one can rationally avow that one perceives that p without already having to rationally avow that p? One reason to accept it, so this response to Wright's problem might say, is that if a claim is knowable by reflection then this implies that what justifies one's belief that one perceives that p is one's process of reflection itself, and one can undergo this process of reflection without having to be in a position to rationally avow the claim that p. Hence because one can know that one perceives that p by reflection one can have justification for that claim prior to any justification one has for the claim that p and Wright's objection fails.

One thing that should be noted about this response to Wright's objection first off is that it presupposes that it is possible for one to know that one perceives that p by reflection even though perceiving that p is phenomenally indistinguishable from a hallucination as of p and as we saw it is a substantial question whether that is the case. The current response to Wright's objection has to have an answer to the phenomenal indistinguishability issue if it is to be acceptable.

A second worry with this response to Wright is that it simply does not seem plausible to suggest that even if one can know that one perceives that p by reflection it follows that one can rationally avow that one perceives that p prior to possessing any justification for the claim that p itself. The defence of this claim offered by the respondent to Wright says that one's process of reflection justifies one's claim that one perceives that p without one having to have any prior justification for the claim that p itself. But is it really a correct picture of how reflective knowledge works to say that one's process of reflection rationally justifies the claims that it puts one in a position to know? What exactly is it about the process of reflection which is supposed to justify the claim that one perceives that p? If this idea is not made more intelligible then it is not clear how the present response to Wright can substantiate its claim that one's capacity to know that one perceives that p by reflection can put one in a position to rationally avow that one perceives that p without having to possess any justification to believe that p itself in the first place.

Due to Wright's objection and the other objections presented in this chapter which it is not obvious how McDowell might respond to I conclude that we should reject the reflective knowledge argument. All is not lost for the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism however as there is another more successful version of the argument available, or so I will argue in the next chapter.

### III

## *Perceptual Reasons*

In the previous chapter I outlined McDowell's version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism: the reflective knowledge argument. I outlined several problems for this argument: the McKinsey objection, the phenomenal indistinguishability issue, the knowledge of perception objection, and Wright's objection. I argued that McDowell can meet the McKinsey objection but that it is not clear how he can meet any of the other objections. In this chapter I want to develop an alternative version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism which is distinct from the reflective knowledge argument and which avoids the problems for it just mentioned. The version of the argument I want to develop doesn't rely on the claim that one's perceptual reason to believe that *p* is *that one perceives that p* but instead relies on a distinctive theory of what it is for perceptions to provide reasons for the beliefs about the world they support. I'll develop this distinctive conception of perceptual reasons first, then I'll show how it can be used to develop a version of the epistemic argument that is distinct from McDowell's and which avoids the problem for it mentioned, then I'll defend the emergent version of the epistemic argument from a group of fresh objections.

#### 1.

The claim at the heart of McDowell's reflective knowledge argument is the claim that *that one perceives that p* is the indefeasible reason one's perceptual experiences

provide one with to believe that p. This is a reason to believe that p because 'p' can be validly inferred from it. Our perceptions enable one to possess this reason because to possess a reason is to have reflective knowledge of it and because experiences are knowable by reflection whilst also constituting the fact that one perceives that p this ensures that having a perceptual experience is sufficient to have reflective knowledge of an so to possess the indefeasible reason to believe that p: *that one perceives that p*.

Embedded in this last paragraph are a number of claims about reasons, perceptual reasons, reasons possession, and what it is for perceptions to provide one with reasons that McDowell drew on in his reflective knowledge argument. The claims about the nature of reasons are:

(A) Something can constitute a reason to believe that p only if 'p' can be inferred from it

And, the claim which follows from (A):

(B) Reasons to believe that p must be the sorts of things from which 'p' can be inferred.

(A) and (B) essentially state what I called earlier the *inferentialist* conception of reason-hood which McDowell and, seemingly, Wright as well as Brewer (1999), Bonjour (1982; 2002), and Steup (2001) amongst many others work with.

The claim about perceptual reasons in particular contained in the above summary of the position articulated by the reflective knowledge argument is:

(C) Perceptual reasons in favour of p are indefeasible: they cannot be possessed by the subject if it is false that p.

Claim (C) is motivated by the idea that all defeasible reasons – reasons the possession of which is consistent with the falsehood of p, for example the premises in an inductive argument for p – can only bequeath the subject knowledge with the aid of further background knowledge had by the subject which relates such evidence to the truth of p itself, in conjunction with the further idea that perceptual reasons can

bequeath subjects knowledge without relying on any such background knowledge possessed by the subject.

The claim about reasons possession embedded in the paragraph summarising the position expressed by the reflective knowledge argument is:

(D) To possess a reason is to have reflective knowledge of it: if R is to constitute a reason to believe that p then one must be capable of knowing R by reflection.

Claim (D) can be motivated by the thought that if reasons are knowable by reflection then they can be rationally avowable independently of the claims they are supposed to support. If this idea is correct, moreover, then (D) has the consequence that all reasons are reasons in Wright's sense: they are claims which are rationally avowable prior to the claims that they are supposed to support.

Finally, the claims about what it is for perceptions to provide one with reasons to believe that p contained in the summarising paragraph are:

(E) Perceptual experiences provide their subjects with indefeasible reasons in part by constituting the facts from which p can be deduced which are themselves identical to reasons

(F) Perceptions provide their subjects with indefeasible reasons also by enabling those facts to be reflectively knowable by the subject precisely because the subject's experiences themselves are reflectively knowable and those experiences constitute the subject's indefeasible reasons, as (E) suggests.

Claims (E) and (F) together essentially state what I earlier called the premise-constituting conception of perceptual reasons which says that provide one with reasons by constituting premises perceptions – reflectively knowable ones – from which 'p' can be deduced.

Claims (A)-(F) are related to each other in a number of ways, some of which I have already made explicit. As I have said claim (A) entails claim (B). Since (B) is effectively equivalent to the claim that reasons are propositions (D) entails (B) given



that it is using the word 'knowledge' to mean 'propositional knowledge'. (D) also implies that only true propositions can be reasons, since knowledge is factive. Both claims (E) and (F) presuppose that perceptual reasons are indefeasible as (C) suggests. Claim (E) presupposes claim (A) and with it claim (B). Claim (F) presupposes claim (D). Claims (E) and (F) express a conception of the manner in which perceptions provide their subjects with reasons that gain their motivation from claims (A)-(D) such that if any of those claims were to be rejected then so too could either or both of claims (E) and (F).

I want to reject claim (A): I don't think that a reason in favour of believing that p need be something from which 'p' can be inferred. With my rejection of (A) comes a rejection of (B): I want to deny that reasons to believe that p need be the sorts of things from which 'p' can be inferred. In other words I want to deny that all reasons need be propositions and *a fortiori* true propositions, as (D) entails. I want to accept (C): I want to say that perceptual reasons are indefeasible in the sense that the possession of them is inconsistent with the falsehood of the claims they support. But I want to reject (D): one doesn't need to know R by reflection in order to count as possessing it. I want to reject (D) because I don't think that one needs to have *knowledge* of one's reasons to believe that p in order to possess reasons at all. All of this puts me in a position to reject (E) and (F): perceptions don't provide us with reasons by constituting true propositions from which 'p' can be deduced and which we can know by reflection precisely because they are constituted by our reflectively knowable experiences.

## 2.

I want to begin to develop the account of perceptual reason which can, I will argue, be used to deliver a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism that is more satisfactory than McDowell's and which incorporates a rejection of every claim mentioned in the previous section except claim (C), the claim that perceptual experiences provides one with indefeasible reason. The account I want to develop is structurally analogous to the account of ways of knowing developed by Williamson

(2000)<sup>39</sup>. I'll present that account in this section and in the next I'll present the account of perceptual reasons I want to defend.

When one knows that  $p$  one does not know it *simpliciter*, there is always some determinate way in which one knows it. Examples of ways of knowing are memory, introspection, mathematical intuition, the testimony of others, and of course perception. Williamson develops a novel account of what it is for something to count as a way of knowing: of what it is for perceiving, introspecting, remembering, and in general  $\Phi$ ing to count as a way of knowing that  $p$ <sup>40</sup>.

The account relies on Williamson's claim that knowing is a discrete kind of mental state<sup>41</sup>. Traditionally, many epistemologists have conceived of the state of knowing that  $p$  as a state composed of three discrete and more basic elements. The first element which the tradition claims forms a part of the state of knowing that  $p$  is the psychological state of believing that  $p$ : a subject cannot know that  $p$  without believing that  $p$ , hence the belief that  $p$  is a component of the state that constitutes knowing, according to the tradition. The second element which the tradition claims forms a part of the state of knowing that  $p$  is the truth of  $p$  or, alternatively, the fact that  $p$ : a subject cannot know that  $p$  without it being true that, hence the truth of  $p$  is a component of the state that constitutes knowing, according to the tradition. The third and final element which the tradition claims forms a part of the state of knowing that  $p$  is whatever component which needs to be added to the belief that  $p$  and the truth of  $p$  to make up the state of knowing, and following Alvin Plantinga we can call this component of knowledge, traditionally conceived, 'warrant'<sup>42</sup>. We can think of warrant as a property that one's belief that  $p$  has which relates one's belief to the fact that  $p$  in such a way that one's belief that  $p$  together with the truth of  $p$  can constitute knowledge that  $p$ . So according to the traditional view to know that  $p$  is to be in a complex state that constituted by a belief that  $p$ , the truth of  $p$ , and warrant to believe that  $p$ , whatever that is.

A consequence of the traditional view is that there is no kind of state of mind that the subject can be in which is necessary and sufficient for knowing that  $p$ . This is a consequence of the traditional view because it says that the only psychological state

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<sup>39</sup> Williamson (2000), pp.33-41

<sup>40</sup> See Cassam (2007) for a discussion of ways of what it is for  $\Phi$ ing to count as a way of knowing that  $p$ .

<sup>41</sup> Williamson (2000) defends this claim in chs. 2, 3, and 4. See Fricker (2009) for a critique of the claim that knowing is a state of mind.

<sup>42</sup> Plantinga (1993)

that the subject is in when she knows that p is her belief that p, the other components of the state of knowing are not states of mind, hence the traditional view has the consequence that there is no kind of mental state that is equivalent to knowing that p.

Williamson rejects this consequence of the traditional picture of knowing that p and with it the traditional picture itself. That is, Williamson wants to say that there is a distinctive kind of mental state being in which is necessary and sufficient for knowing that p: just like believing or experiencing, knowing is a kind of psychological state. Since knowing is factive moreover – one cannot know that p unless p is true – it follows that on Williamson's view there is some mental state that one can have to only true propositions. This constitutes a rejection of the traditional picture because if knowledge is a distinctive kind of psychological state then it cannot be composed of a belief that p, the truth of p, and a warrant to believe that p, as we have seen. Indeed, if we assume that the only way in which it could be composed of a set of discrete and more basic elements is if it were composed of the three elements just mentioned then it follows from Williamson's account that the state of knowing that p is itself metaphysically basic and is not composed of discrete and more basic elements at all<sup>43</sup>.

Williamson's distinctive account of knowledge dovetails with his distinctive accounts of what it is for something to be a way of knowing that p. According to Williamson ways of knowing that p are factive propositional attitudes – attitudes like seeing that p and remembering that p – which constitute states of knowing in the same way that particular colours constitute the state of being coloured. The state of being coloured is constituted by discrete colour properties like redness and greenness because the state of being coloured is a *determinable* state of which individual colour properties are *determinates*: being coloured is a state which can be instantiated by an object only if there is some determinate way of being coloured which constitutes that state. Similarly, Williamson wants to say, the state of knowing that p is constituted by propositional attitudes like seeing that p and remembering that p because the state of knowing that p is a determinable state of which those propositional attitudes are determinates: knowing that p is a mental state of a subject that can be instantiated by a subject only if there is some determinate way of knowing that p which constitutes that

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<sup>43</sup> If it is assumed further that the *concept* of knowledge is structurally isomorphic to the *state* of knowing then it follows from this in turn that the concept of knowledge is primitive and is not analysable into more basic concepts. This is indeed a claim that Williamson makes (2000, ch.1).

state. Factive propositional attitudes like seeing that p and remembering that p just are these ways of knowing that function as determinable for the state of knowing that p.

### 3.

I've just sketched Williamson's account of knowledge and ways of knowing. I do not want to say whether I think either account is correct. I sketch them only because the account of perceptual reasons I want to develop has significant parallels with Williamson's accounts of knowledge and ways of knowing. The account of perceptual reasons I want to develop is generated by the application of an account of what it is to possess a reason to believe that p in general to the case of the reasons that perceptual experience provides one with to believe that p in particular. I'll sketch the general account and then apply it to the case of perceptual reasons in particular in the next section. A distinctive account of perceptual reasons will emerge.

The general account of reasons possession I want to develop can be presented as follows. A reason to believe that p is any state of the world which is either a truth-condition of p, if it is an indefeasible reason, or which renders the truth of p probable, if it is a defeasible reason. In other words any state of the world which is connected to the truth of p in either of these ways is a reason to believe that p. If it is connected to the truth of p by being a truth-condition of p then it is an indefeasible reason to believe that p. If it is connected to the truth of p by rendering p likely to be true then it is a defeasible reason to believe that p.

By a 'state of the world' I don't just mean facts about the world or, what I am taking to be the same thing, true propositions about the world. States of the world which have different metaphysical profiles can count as reasons too, on the view to be developed here. For example, the beers in the fridge can be a reason to believe that there are beers in the fridge just as much as the fact that there are beers in the fridge can. This is the *first* claim that forms a part of the general theory of reasons I want to present.

For a subject to be in possession of a reason, R, to believe that p, where, as the first claim states R is to be conceived of as a state of the world related to the truth of p in

either of the ways described – whether a fact about the world or a state of the world with a different metaphysical profile – according to the account I want to develop, is for two conditions to obtain. The first condition (i) is that the subject must be in some *psychological state* that is directed towards R and has R itself as a constituent where this psychological state constitutes her possession of R: the first condition that the current account claims to be necessary for the possession of a reason to believe that p is that one must be in some psychological state that constitutes a relation between the subject and the state of the world which constitutes R, and this psychological state constitutes her possession of R. Where R is a fact this state will be a factive propositional attitude such as knowing that p, if Williamson is right to claim that knowing is a factive propositional attitude that is. If however R is not a fact but a state of the world which is related to the truth of p in either of the ways mentioned which is of a different metaphysical category then the psychological state in question need not be a propositional attitude but some other kind of state that can have states of the world as constituents.

That's the first condition that the current account claims is necessary for reasons possession. The analysis it expresses of the state of possessing a reason to believe that p is structurally analogous to the account Williamson gives of what it is to know that p. Condition (i) says that there is some psychological state that constitutes being in possession of a reason to believe that p where this reason is conceived of as a state of the world. Similarly Williamson says that there is some psychological state – a propositional attitude to be exact – that is identical to knowing that p and this psychological state is factive and therefore has the fact that p itself as a constituent. The account of reasons possession just sketched says that whenever one possesses a reason R, there is some psychological state that one is in which has the state of the world which constitutes R as a constituent and which constitutes one's possession of a reason: a description of the agent's psychological states should reveal whether she possesses a reason to believe that p, conceived of as a state of the world which is related to the truth of p in either of the ways described.

Williamson's account constitutes a rejection of any account of knowing that p which says that knowing that p is composed of the psychological state of believing that p in conjunction with the truth of p and warrant for p. Similarly Condition (i) of the account of reasons possession constitutes a rejection of any account of what it is for a subject to possess a reason R to believe that p which says that one can possess a

reason to believe that  $p$ ,  $R$ , even if  $R$  is not a constituent of any psychological state that one is in. The account constitutes a rejection, for example, of any account of reasons possession which says that to possess a reason,  $R$ , to believe that  $p$  is to be in a psychological state that represents  $R$  as confirming the truth of  $p$  but which is merely caused by  $R$ , say, and doesn't have  $R$  as a constituent. In virtue of insisting that condition (i) is a necessary condition of subject possessing a reason to believe that  $p$ , the account of reasons possession we are now considering says that it is purely a psychological of the agent that constitutes her possession of a reason to believe that  $p$ .

So the first condition of a subject possessing a reason  $R$  to believe that  $p$  is that  $R$  must be a constituent of some psychological state that the subject is in where this psychological state constitutes one's possession of the reason  $R$ . The second condition which is a necessary condition of a subject possessing a reason  $R$  to believe that  $p$ , where  $R$  is some state of the world which is a truth condition of  $p$  or makes  $p$  likely to be true, and which is together with (i) is sufficient for a subject to possess the reason  $R$  can be presented as follows.

For a subject to possess a reason  $R$  to believe that  $p$  it is not enough that  $R$  is a constituent of the subject's psychological state that constitutes her possession of  $R$ . That there is rainwater on Tom's coat constitutes a defeasible reason for me to believe that it is raining because it makes it likely to be true that it is raining outside. Assuming that knowledge is a psychological state and that I know that there is rainwater on Tom's coat I am in some psychological state with that fact, which constitutes a reason to believe that it is raining outside, as a constituent. Still, I don't possess any reason to believe that it is raining outside unless in some manner I conceive of the fact that there is rainwater on Tom's coat to be indicative of the truth of the claim that it is raining outside. Similarly a lemon tree in front of me might be a constituent of my visual experience, my visual experience might well count as a psychological state, the lemon tree in front of me might be an indefeasible reason to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of me because it makes that claim true, and I might therefore have a state of the world which constitutes a reason to believe that there's a lemon tree in front of me as a constituent of a psychological state that I'm in, but that psychological state can't constitute a possession of a reason unless I also

conceive in some way of the lemon tree in front of me as something which makes it true that there's a lemon tree in front of me<sup>44</sup>.

So if a psychological state which has R as a constituent is to constitute my possession of the reason R in favour of the belief that p then I must conceive of R as either a truth-maker of p, if R is an indefeasible reason to believe that p, or as confirming the truth of p, if R is a defeasible reason to believe that p. This rather inchoately specified thought is the second necessary condition of a subject possessing the reason R to believe that p which together with condition (i) is sufficient for a subject to possess the reason R. That is, the second necessary condition for a subject possessing the reason R to believe that p is (ii) a subject must conceive of R as either a truth maker of P if R is an indefeasible reason to believe that p or as making p likely to be true if R is a defeasible reason to believe that p if she is to possess it as a reason to believe that p.

Presupposing the truth of the claim that reasons are states of the world that stand in the relations to the truth of p described and putting both condition (i) and condition (ii) together we get the following theory of what it is for a subject to possess a reason, which I will call the *psychological theory of reasons possession*:

(PTRP): S possesses a reason R to believe that p iff either S is in some psychological state with R as a constituent and conceives of R as a truth maker of p, if R is an indefeasible reason to believe that p or S is in some psychological state with R as a constituent and conceives of R as making p likely to be true, if R is a defeasible reason to believe that p.

(PTRP) is distinctive because it insists that one can possess a reason only if the state of the world which constitutes that reason is a constituent of a psychological state one is in. It implies that claims (A) and (B) are false because it presupposes that reasons to believe that p need not be the sorts of things from which 'p' can be inferred: they need not be propositions, although a true proposition about the world can constitute a reason according to (PTRP). It also implies that claim (D) is false: one need not have reflective knowledge of a certain proposition that constitutes a

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Brewer (1999), ch.3 and BonJour (2002), pp.9-10

reason to believe that p if one is to possess a reason to believe that p. (PTRP) says that if knowledge is a psychological state then if a proposition that is a reason to believe that p is reflectively known then one is in a position to possess a reason to believe that p, but (PTRP) leaves it open that one can be in a position to possess a reason to believe that p if the state of the world which constitutes that reason is a constituent of some psychological state not identical to knowledge, assuming, again, that knowledge is a psychological state.

This is the general account of reasons possession that I'll be working with in this chapter. In the following two sections I want to apply it to the case of perceptual reasons in particular and then use the emergent theory of perceptual reasons to construct a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism which avoids the objections to the reflective knowledge argument I discussed in the previous chapter. After that I will offer a defence of (PTRP) and the account of perceptual reasons which emerges from it.

#### 4.

(PTRP) is the general theory of reasons possession that I want to suggest, when applied to the case of perceptual reasons in particular, generates a theory of perceptual reasons which if assumed correct gives us a way of constructing a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism which is more successful than the reflective knowledge argument in so far as it avoids the objections to that argument outlined in the previous chapter. In this section I want to apply (PTRP) to the case of perceptual reasons and clarify the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges. I will also distinguish it from theories of perceptual reasons found in Steup (2001) and that utilised by the reflective knowledge argument.

(PTRP) says that to possess a reason to believe that p, where reasons are conceived of as states of the world which are connected to the truth of p either by being a truth-maker for p if the state of the world constitutes an indefeasible reason to believe that p or by rendering p likely to be true if the state of the world constitutes a defeasible reason to believe that p, is to have one such state of the world as a constituent of some



psychological state one is in and to and to conceive of it either as a truth-maker for p if it is an indefeasible reason or as making p likely to be true if it is a defeasible reason.

Perceptions of an O which is F provide one with good reason to believe that there is an O which is F. When we have a reason to believe such a proposition provided to us by perception we have perceptual reasons. How are we to understand how a perception of an O which is F is to provide us with a reason to judge that there is an O which is F in the context of (PTRP)? That is, how should we conceive of perceptual reasons assuming that (PTRP) is true?

(PTRP) states that psychological states which have states of the world which constitute reasons constitute possession of those reasons, given that one conceives of these states of the world as connected to the truth of the propositions they constitute reasons to believe. Perception of an O which is F provides one with reasons to believe that there is an O which is F. It seems that the correct way to combine these theses is to say that a perception of an O which is F just is a psychological state which has O and its Fness as constituents, where the O and its Fness constitute an indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F, given that the presence of an O which is F is a truth-maker of the proposition that there is an O which is F. Perceptions of a state of the world provide one with reasons to believe in propositions that describe the existence of those states of the world because those states of the world are indefeasible reasons to believing in propositions that record their existence, and perceptions of them are psychological states that have them as constituents and which constitute one's possession of them as reasons, assuming that the subject conceives of those states of the world as truth-makers of the judgements they constitute reasons for.

On this account of perceptual reasons which falls out of (PTRP) perceptual experiences are *ways of possessing reasons*, where reasons are then conceived of as states of the world, and are not to be thought of as reasons themselves. They are ways of possessing reasons because to possess a reason is partly to be in some psychological state that has the state of the world that constitutes one's reason as a constituent and perceptions are psychological states which have states of the world which constitute indefeasible reasons as constituents.

On the account of perceptual reasons being developed here the relationship the possession of reasons and perceptual experience is structurally analogous to the account of the relationship between knowing and ways of knowing according to

Williamson. Williamson says that ways of knowing are to knowing as the state of being red is to the state of being coloured: ways of knowing are determinable of the psychological state of knowledge. Similarly on the account of perceptual reasons that falls out of (PTRP) that we are now considering perceptions are to the state of possessing reasons to believe that *p* as the state of being red is to the state of being coloured: having a perception of an *O* which is *F* is determinate of the determinable state of possessing a reason to believe that there is an *O* which is *F*. This is because, to repeat, perceptions are psychological states which relate one to states of the world which are thought of as reasons, and being in such a psychological state is constitutive of what it is to possess a reason according to (PTRP), as long as one conceives of those states of the world as standing in certain relations to the truth of the propositions they are reasons for.

It should be clear how the current account of perceptual reasons differs from the account which the reflective knowledge argument is married to, an account which is made up of the conjunction of claim (E) with claim (F). On that account indefeasible perceptual reasons are facts of the form *that one perceives that p* constituted by our perceptual experiences. Such facts count as indefeasible reasons for the belief that *p* because ‘*p*’ can be validly deduced from them. We count as possessing those reasons because we are capable of knowing those facts by perception. On the account of perceptual reasons that falls out of (PTRP) indefeasible perceptual reasons to believe that *p* are the states of the world that constitute *p* that are the constituents of our perceptions of such states of the world. Such states of the world count as indefeasible reasons because to believe that *p* because they make ‘*p*’ true. We count as possessing those reasons because the states of the world that make them up are constituents of our perceptions and perceptions are psychological states and we conceive of them as truth-makers for *p*.

The account of perceptual reasons that falls out of (PTRP) is also distinct from an account of perceptual reasons offered by Steup (2001). Steup thinks that an inferentialist conception of reason-hood is true: he thinks that something can be a reason to believe that *p* only if one can infer it from *p*, and he thinks that it follows from this that all reasons are propositions. That is, Steup is committed to claims (A) and (B)<sup>45</sup>. To that extent he is in agreement with the conception of reasons that the

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<sup>45</sup> Steup (2001), p.1

reflective knowledge argument employs. He does not, however, think that one's perceptual experiences provide their subjects with reasons to believe that *p* by constituting facts of the form *that one perceives that p* from which 'p' can be inferred. Instead he thinks that perceptual experiences provide their subjects with reasons to believe that *p* because they have true *propositional contents* from which 'p' can be inferred. On Setup's picture perceptual experiences provide their subjects with reasons to believe that *p* because they enable true propositions from which 'p' can be inferred to function as premises in an inference to *p*<sup>46</sup>.

So for example Steup says that one's perception of a lemon tree in front of one is constituted by a perception with the true propositional content *that there is a lemon tree in front of one* and one's experience provides one with this claim as a reason to believe that there is a lemon tree in front of one by enabling it to function as a premise in an inference to the claim that there is a lemon tree in front of one. This view differs from the view of perceptual reasons which the reflective knowledge argument utilises because although it is committed to the claim that perceptual reasons are the sorts of things from which 'p' can be inferred, it carries with it no commitment to the claim that perceptual reasons are identical to facts which record the existence of one's perceptual experiences of the form *that one perceives that p* and it carries with it no commitment to the view that one needs to have reflective knowledge of the claims which constitute one's reasons in order for one to count as possessing those reasons. Instead, on Steup's view one's perceptual experiences provide one with reasons by having them as propositional content.

I want make clear how Steup's view and the view of perceptual reasons which emerges from an application of (PTRP) are similar and how they are different. On Steup's view perceptual experience provide one with reasons to believe that *p* by enabling propositions to function as premises in an inference from which 'p' can be inferred, and it is the propositional contents of perceptual experience which function as reasons, not perceptual experiences themselves. Perceptions give one access to reasons instead of constituting them.

On the view of perceptual reasons which emerges from the application of (PTRP) perceptual experiences perceptual reasons are identified with the states of the world which one's perceptions present one with and are not identical to perceptual

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<sup>46</sup> This view is similar to that propounded by Brewer (1999) and possibly Crane (2001).

experiences themselves. Perceptions give one access to reasons instead of constituting them. This is what the view which emerges from the application of (PTRP) has in common with Steup's view. Unlike Steup's view however, the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from the application of (PTRP) doesn't carry with it any commitment to the idea that reasons to believe that  $p$  are true propositions or the sorts of things from which ' $p$ ' can be inferred and so doesn't carry with it any commitment to the claim that perceptions have true propositional contents. The view which emerges from the application of (PTRP) can also be used as a basis to construct a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism, unlike Steup's view. In the next section I turn to this argument.

## 5.

In the previous section I applied (PTRP) to the case of perceptual reasons. The emerging theory of perceptual reasons says that perceptual experiences are ways of possessing reasons, specifically they are ways of possessing indefeasible reasons to believe propositions which record the existence of the mind-independent states of affairs that form the constituents of the psychological state constitutive of perception. In this section I want to show how this theory of perceptual reasons can be used to construct a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism.

I will start with what the first part of the new version of the epistemic argument: the transition from the anti-sceptical claim the epistemic disjunctivism. The new version of the epistemic argument that I want to develop here affects the inference from the anti-sceptical claim to epistemic disjunctivism in a similar way to the manner in which the reflective knowledge argument affected the inference, but without any reliance on the claim that *that one perceives that  $p$*  is one's perceptual reason to believe that  $p$ .

The first part of the new version of the epistemic argument can be presented as follows. A perception of an  $O$  which is  $F$  puts its subject in a position to know that there is an  $O$  which is  $F$  whereas a hallucination as of an  $O$  which is  $F$ , even though it is phenomenally indistinguishable from the perception, does not. This is the anti-

sceptical claim. What explains why such perceptions put us in a position to know things whereas phenomenally indistinguishable hallucinations don't is that they provide us with indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F whereas a hallucination doesn't. The indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F of which perceptual experience constitutes our possession is the O and its Fness – a state of the world which is a constituent of the perceptual experience. Since one could have a hallucination as of an O which is F even though there is no O which is F one does not possess such an indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F when one has a hallucination as of an O which is F and this is what explains why hallucinations as of an O which is F don't put us in a position to know that there is an O which is F. Hence what explains why perceptions and hallucinations differ with respect to whether they put us in a position to know that there is an O which is F is that they provide us with different reasons even though they are phenomenally indistinguishable as the epistemic disjunctivist suggests.

So the first part of the new version of the epistemic argument says that what explains why perceptions put us in a position to know things whereas hallucinations don't is that they provide us with indefeasible reasons whereas hallucinations don't, just as the reflective knowledge argument says. Where the new version of the epistemic argument differs from the reflective knowledge argument is in its suggestion that the indefeasible reason which one's perception provides one with is identical to the state of the world that is the truth maker of the proposition that it enables one to know, and which is a constituent of one's perception. The reflective knowledge argument identifies perceptual reasons with facts about one's perceptual states of the form *that one perceives that p* whereas the new version of the epistemic argument identifies them with states of the world that constitute truth-makers of the propositions one's perceptions enable one to know and which one has access to via perception.

That's the first part of the new version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism. I now move onto the second part: the transition from epistemic disjunctivism to perceptual disjunctivism. The new version of the argument affects the inference from epistemic disjunctivism to perceptual disjunctivism in a different way to the way in which the reflective access argument attempts to affect the inference. In particular it does not rely on the claim that one needs to have reflective knowledge of

whatever it is that constitutes one's reasons to believe that p in order to count as possessing those reasons.

The new version of the epistemic argument says that perceptual experiences provide one with indefeasible reasons to believe that there is an O which is F that are identical to the states of the world that are constituents of one's perceptual experiences. Since hallucinations don't provide one with such reasons, perceptions and hallucinations provide one with different reasons even though they are phenomenally indistinguishable. This is what epistemic disjunctivism amounts to according to the new version of the epistemic argument. The new version of the epistemic argument assumes the correctness of (PTRP) and consequently it assumes that in order for perceptions to provide their subjects with indefeasible reasons it must be the case that perceptions are psychological states of the subject which have the states of the world which are identical to those indefeasible reasons as constituents. Perceptions of an O which is F provide their subjects with an indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F which is identical to the O and its Fness, and that state of the world is itself a truth-maker of the proposition that there is an O which is F. But by (PTRP) a perception of an O which is F can only provide one with such a reason if it is constituted by a psychological state – a state of the subject's mind – which has the O and its Fness as constituents.

Now, it can be the case that a perception of an O which is F can have O and its Fness as constituents and be a psychological state of the subject only if perceptual disjunctivism is true. To see why, if assume that perceptual disjunctivism is false then perceptions of mind-independent objections are states that are composed of three elements: experiential states that are of the same kind as the experiential states one suffers when one undergoes a hallucination as of an O which is F, the state of the world made up of the O and its Fness, and some extrinsic property of the experiential states which relates it to the O and its Fness such that one counts as perceiving the O and its Fness such as a suitable causal relation between the experiential state and the O and its Fness. But on such a picture a perception of an O which is F is not itself a psychological state because the only psychological state one is in when one perceives if such a picture of perception is correct is the experiential state that is the same in kind as that which one undergoes when one suffers a hallucination, the other components of the state of perception are not themselves psychological states, so if a

non-disjunctivist picture of perceptual experience is correct then perceptions aren't psychological states.

It follows that if perception is to be a psychological state that has  $O$  and its  $F$ ness as constituents as it must be if it is to provide one with indefeasible perceptual reasons given the truth of (PTPR) then perceptual disjunctivism is true: perceptions provide one with indefeasible reasons but, according to the argument we are now considering, this can be the case only if they are psychological states which have states of the worlds as constituents and are hence a different sort of experiential state from that which constitutes hallucination, as the perceptual disjunctivist suggests.

This is the second part of the new version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism. It relies on the claim that if perceptions are to enable us to possess reasons then they must be identical to psychological states which constitute our possession of those reasons. It then infers from this that this can be the case only if perceptual disjunctivism is true because if perceptual disjunctivism were false then perceptions would not be psychological states at all. This brings out a parallel between what the perceptual disjunctivist says about perception and what Williamson says about knowledge. Williamson's account of knowing that  $p$  is inconsistent with the idea that knowing is identical to a state composed of a belief, the truth of the belief, and warrant. The new version of the epistemic argument relies on the claim that likewise, the perceptual disjunctivist's account of perception is inconsistent with the idea that perceiving is identical to a state composed of an experience the same in kind as hallucination, the object and properties perceived, and some extrinsic property of the experience that relates it to the object and properties perceived, for example as an effect to cause. I'll call the new version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism which relies on (PTRP) and the theory of perceptual reasons which falls out of it the *psychological access argument*.

## 6.

The psychological access argument is objectionable because it relies heavily on the theory of perceptual reasons which falls out of (PTRP), and (PTRP) is itself objectionable. In the following section I'll attempt to respond to a couple of

objections to (PTRP) and this will constitute a defence of the psychological access argument. In this section I want to point out that the argument avoids the problems which beset the reflective knowledge argument and is to that extent to be the preferred version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism.

The first objection that was presented against the reflective knowledge argument was the McKinsey objection. According to that objection the reflective knowledge argument is unacceptable because it carries with it a commitment to the idea that one can know that one perceives that *p* by reflection, and this implies that subjects who are at least moderately cognitively sophisticated can know that *p* by reflection. But it is counter-intuitive to say that one can know fact about the world by perception. I argued that there is a response which McDowell can give to this objection. Be that as it may it is certainly not the case that the psychological access argument runs into the objection because it doesn't commit itself to the claim that one can know by reflection that one perceives that *p* when one does. It commits itself to the claim, rather, that perceptions provide one with reasons because they are psychological states which constitute one's possession of reasons conceived of as the states of the world which are constituents of those perceptions.

The second objection that was presented against the reflective knowledge argument was the phenomenal indistinguishability issue. According to this objection the reflective knowledge argument relies on the claim that we can have reflective knowledge of our perceptual states and this claim cannot be accepted until it has been shown that the phenomenal indistinguishability of perceptions and hallucinations that are as of the same object doesn't preclude knowledge of one's perceptions by reflection. This objection cannot be made against the psychological access argument because that argument, again, doesn't make the assumption that one can know by reflection that one perceives that *p*.

The third objection that was presented against the reflective knowledge argument was the knowledge of perception objection. This objection states that it's counter-intuitive to suggest that perceptual knowledge and even the possession of perceptual reasons is mediated by knowledge of one's perceptual states as the reflective knowledge argument assumes because of the possibility of cases which constitute counter-examples to that claim such as *Planet of the Blind*, a case in which a subject is capable of possessing visual-perceptual reasons and hence visual-perceptual knowledge even though she possesses no concept of visual and so is unable to form



any judgements about what visual states she is in. The psychological access argument doesn't claim that perceptual knowledge and the possession of perceptual reasons is mediated by knowledge of one's perceptual states. It says instead that perceptual experience provide one with reasons because they are psychological states which have reasons conceived of as states of the world as constituents. This is all it takes to possess perceptual reasons according to the psychological access argument. As such the psychological access argument is perfectly consistent with cases like *Planet of the Blind*.

The final objection that was presented against the reflective knowledge argument was Wright's objection. According to this objection one cannot rationally avow the claim one perceives that p unless one already has justification for the claim that p itself and this precludes the claim that one perceives that p functioning as one's indefeasible reason to believe that p because it a condition of a claim being a reason to believe that p that one can infer p from it and that one can rationally avow it without having prior justification for p itself. The psychological access argument avoids this objection because doesn't claim that *that one perceives that p* is one's perceptual reason to believe that p in the first place and so one does not need to be able to rationally avow this proposition prior to possessing any justification for the claim that p in order to possess a reason to believe that p. Instead the psychological access argument rejects the inferentialist picture of reason-hood that Wright assumes is correct when he says that in order for a claim to constitute a reason to believe that p it must be rationally avowable prior to one possessing justification for the claim that p itself.

I conclude, then that the psychological access argument avoids all the objections that I presented against the reflective knowledge argument. To that extent, then, the former is to be preferred as a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism to the latter.

The version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism just propounded attempts to use the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from the application of (PTRP) to infer the truth of perceptual disjunctivism. But the theory of perceptual experiences which emerges from the application of (PTRP) is objectionable. In this concluding section I'll attempt to address two problems with the view.

The first problem can be presented as follows. According to the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from the application of (PTRP) a perception of an O which is F enables one to count as possessing the indefeasible reason constituted by the O and its Fness to believe that there is an O which is F because a perception is a psychological state of the subject with the O and its Fness as constituents and such a psychological state constitutes what it is for a subject to possess a reason, assuming that the subject conceives of the O and its Fness as a truth-maker of the claim that there is an O which is F, as (PTRP) states.

We saw that according to the psychological access argument it follows from the claim that perceptions are psychological states with states of the world as constituents that perceptual disjunctivism is true. This is because if perceptual disjunctivism is false then perceptual states are not *psychological* states with states of the world as constituents at all. It might well be conceded that only if perceptual disjunctivism is true can perceptions be psychological states with states of the world as constituents.

According to the first objection I want to consider however a subject need not be in a *psychological* state which has the O and its Fness as constituents in order for her to count as possessing the indefeasible reason that that state of the world constitutes to believe that there is an O which is F, as (PTRP) suggests. Instead a subject can be in a state which is merely composed of certain psychological and non-psychological elements that has the O and its Fness as constituents in order to count as possessing a reason constituted by that state of the world to believe that there is an O which is F. The upshot of this is that even if perceptual disjunctivism is false and perceptual experiences of an O which is F are not psychological states with the O and its Fness as constituents a subject can still count as possessing that indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F, so the psychological access argument does not work.

According to the objection we are now considering, then, a perceptual experience of an O which is F composed of an experience as of an O which is F the same in kind as a hallucinatory experience, the O and its Fness themselves, plus some extrinsic

property of the experience as of an O which is F which relates it to the O and its Fness in such a way that the experience can count as a perception of an O which is F such as a causal link between the experience and O, is sufficient for one to possess the indefeasible reason to believe that p constituted by the O and its Fness themselves to believe that there is an O which is F. It is not necessary that one's perception constitutes a psychological state with the O and its Fness as constituents if it is to constitute the state of possessing an indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F, according to this objection.

In response to this suggestion I want to protest that it looks as if one doesn't count as possessing the indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F constituted by the state of the world made up of the O and its Fness if the perceptual state that is supposed to constitute one's possession of such a reason is a non-psychological state composed of psychological and non-psychological components.

To see why consider the case of Steve and Sam. Let's assume that Steve has a 'perception' of a lemon tree in front of him which is composed of the psychological and non-psychological components listed above. Let's assume that Sam has a perception of a lemon tree in front of him which is a purely psychological state which has the lemon tree as a constituent. Let's also assume that both Steve and Sam conceive of the lemon tree they experience as a truth-maker for the judgement *there is a lemon tree*. Let's also assume that neither Steve nor Sam have any knowledge about their perceptual experiences. In particular, Steve doesn't know whether his experience is related in any way to the lemon tree itself. It seems that Sam counts as possessing an indefeasible reason to believe that there is a lemon tree but does Steve?

I think the answer is 'no'. After all Steve doesn't have any knowledge of whether there is a relation between the experience he's having and the lemon tree itself. Should we not conclude, then, that there is no suitable sense in which Steve can be counted as having access to a reason to believe that there is a lemon tree anymore than he would have if he were to have a true belief that there is a lemon tree in front of him which is caused in some suitable way by the lemon tree itself? Why should the latter sort of state fail to constitute the possession of a reason even though, according to the account of perceptual reasons possession utilised by the current objection, an experience which has the experience which has the exact same structure can? If a theory of perceptual reasons possession which falls out of an application of (PTRP) is

not assumed then it just looks mysterious why reliably formed true beliefs can't give one reasons but perceptions, which have the exact same structure as such belief, can.

I've sketched a response to the first objection to the psychological access argument. I now want to move onto the second, which can be presented as follows. The psychological access argument identifies perceptual reasons with states of the world. It says that the proper way to understand how perception provides one with indefeasible reasons is to take it that perceptions give us access to those states of the world by being constituted by psychological states that have those states of the world as constituents. Perception provides us with reasons when we have such access and we conceive of the states of the world in question as truth-makers of the judgements they constitute indefeasible reasons for. But it is hardly intelligible that a subject in such cases counts as possessing a *reason* to believe that there is an O which is F. After all if anyone asked her what her reason was to believe that there is an O which is F she may well not be in a position to provide them with anything from which p could be inferred, or which could make p rationally compelling, so in what sense does she count as possessing a reason at all?

In responding to this objection I want to point out that there is a perfectly intelligible sense in which the subject counts as possessing a reason to believe that there is an O which is F when she has a perception of an O which is F that is constituted by a psychological state that has that state of the world as a constituent and she conceives of that state of the world as a truth-maker for the judgement that there is an O which is F. Because the subject who enjoys such a perception of an O which is F *conceives of* the states of the world made up of the O and its Fness as a truth-maker for the judgement that there is an O which is F there is a state of affairs which is part of her *conscious perspective on the world* in virtue of being a constituent of the psychological state constitutive of perception – the state of the world made up of the O and its Fness – which she conceives of as a confirming the truth of her judgement that there is an O which is F. Because it is a requirement of the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from the application of (PTRP) that the subject conceives of the state of the world that constitutes the indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F that her psychological perceptual state has a constituent as a truth-maker of that judgement if that psychological state is to constitute her possession of reasons to believe that there is an O which is F the account has the consequence that whenever perception constitutes her possession of a reason there

will be something within her first-person perspective which she conceives of as confirming the truth of the claim that there is an O which is F.

But if this is a consequence of the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from the application of (PTRP) then there is surely a perfectly intelligible sense in which the subject genuinely counts as possessing *reasons* to believe that there is an O which is F when she is in a psychological perceptual state that has the O and its Fness as constituents and she conceives of the O and its Fness as a truth-maker of the judgement that there is an O which is F. I conclude, then, that the second objection, like the first, fails to do damage to the psychological access argument.

## *Conclusion*

I have attempted to show that there is an epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism to be found in McDowell's writings on the matter. I distinguished two versions of the argument: the reflective knowledge argument, which I attributed to McDowell, and the psychological access argument, which was constructed using the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from an application of (PTRP). I attempted to show that the psychological access argument is superior to the reflective knowledge argument to the extent that it avoids the problems which I argued beset the latter. The take home message of this essay is that if it is assumed that experiences give us access to reasons conceived of as states of the world by being constituted by psychological states which have those states of the world as constituents then it is possible to construct a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism which looks like it stands a better chance of working than the reflective knowledge argument.

At the end of the previous chapter I attempted to respond to two criticisms of the psychological access argument. I do not pretend that there are not additional criticisms of that argument that one might make. For example it might be objected that according to the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from (PTRP) a perception of an O which is F provides its subject with an indefeasible reason to believe that there is an O which is F by being constituted by a psychological state which has the state of the world made up of O and its Fness as constituents, *and the subject conceives of that state of the world as a truth-maker for the claim that there is*

*an O which is F*. But surely the subject counts as conceiving of the O and its Fness as a truth-maker for the claim that there is an O which is F only if she believes that the O and its Fness make it true that there is an O which is F. This implies that it is a consequence of the current theory of perceptual reasons that a subject must possess a certain kind of belief about the content of his perception if his perception is to enable him to possess a reason to believe that there is an O which is F. But this surely contradicts the claim made by the theory of perceptual reasons we are now considering that is perceptions themselves which constitute what it is for their subjects to count as possessing reasons to believe that there is an O which is F, not perceptions of an O which is F plus some further belief which says that the O and its Fness are truth-makers of the judgement *there is an O which is F*.

I think that in order to respond to an objection like this those wishing to defend the theory of perceptual reasons which emerges from an application of (PTRP) need to find a way of showing that our conceiving of the O and its Fness as a truth-maker for the claim that there is an O which is F is *built into* our perception of an O which is F itself and is not constituted by a belief that we might have in addition to that perception. I do not want to pursue this line of thought here. It will be enough for my purposes if I have managed to show that there is a version of the epistemic argument for perceptual disjunctivism which can be constructed using the theory perceptual reasons which emerges from an application of (PTRP) and which avoids the objections that beset McDowell's version of the argument.

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