In his recent collection of essays titled *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars (HWV)*, John McDowell draws on the work of Kant, Hegel, and Sellars in an attempt to clarify, *inter alia*, the cooperation between our abilities to make up our minds and to experience the sensible world of which we are a part. (Unless otherwise noted, all references here in are to *HWV*.)

As Kant, Hegel, and Sellars all recognize, clarifying the relationship between our mutually dependent capacities for rational judgment and for sensory intuition is integral to understanding not simply how our categorial thought is rationally constrained, but also how we think determinately at all (p. 37). Specifically, a satisfactory account of the relationship between our perceptual and judgmental capacities would enable us to make sense of intentionality for rational subjects, i.e., the way our empirical intuitions open us up to things we can think about. In this way intentionality explains thought’s answerability to the world; it is what enables thinking that aims at empirical judgment to be correct or incorrect. And unless such thinking can at some point be correct or incorrect, it is not thinking but meaningless babbling – or an ‘inner’ analogue thereof. So if we can make sense of intentionality, then we can lay skeptical worries to rest; we can see how ‘thought and the world must be understood together’ (p. 143). This in brief is McDowell’s semantical route to realism, or rather his route to ‘an idealism that does not diverge from common-sense realism’ (p. 143).

McDowell recognizes that it takes certain constraints – like the laws of logic and empirical facts – to be freed from the immeasurably greater constraint of mindlessness. For a detailed discussion of enabling constraints, see Essay 5. In Essay 9 McDowell makes this point with respect to objective ethical norms. McDowell thus opposes Pippin’s constructivist interpretation of Hegel, which ultimately struggles to make sense of changes in ethical beliefs as genuine improvements.

With respect to perceptual beliefs, experience must allow the world to stand in judgment over our attempts to make up our minds. Accordingly, McDowell agrees with Sellars that empirical descriptions of sensory consciousness fail to capture the normative role that sensory consciousness must play for empirical judgments to be thoughts at all (p. 5). When I
believe that there is a book in front of me because I see a book in front of me, this ‘because’ indicates a rational relation to what I should think rather than a causal relation to what I do think (p. 127, cf. *Mind and World*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 68). For experience to justify rather than merely cause belief, for it to function normatively like this, it must, on the one hand, be receptive so that it opens us up to the world; and it must, on the other hand, be categorically formed, i.e., formed in a manner that opens us as rational beings up to the world. The former dimension of experience relates to the ‘downward dependence’ of conceptual capacities on sensory intuitions, contra unconstrained coherentism. The latter dimension relates to the ‘upward dependence’ of sensory consciousness on conceptual capacities, contra traditional (naïve) empiricism.

Although *HWV* is a collection of essays that each can stand alone, McDowell’s affirmation of Kant’s insight into intentionality ties most of these essays together. While it is not Kant but Hegel whose outlook McDowell ultimately endorses, one of the keys to McDowell’s purportedly Hegelian view is nevertheless an adequate grasp of the co-extensiveness of the understanding and sensibility, especially the categorial form of intuitions.

McDowell maintains that if experiences reveal the way things are, then those experiences entitle us to beliefs about those things in an indefeasible, non-inferential way (p. 131). This contention is intuitively plausible. However, it is hardly uncontroversial given that veridical experiences can in principle be indistinguishable from non-veridical counterfeits like hallucinations. We cannot determine a priori which experiences are veridical. And dreaming, to take one example of a counterfeit, precludes the possibility of carrying out genuinely empirical procedures to determine whether one is dreaming. On McDowell’s line, nevertheless, the important question is how something like intuitions can figure into our thinking in a non-mysterious way. For the answer, McDowell follows Hegel and Sellars in picking up on the relationship Kant identifies between our sensory capacities and our judgmental capacities.

In a key passage from the so-called ‘metaphysical deduction’ in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 79/B 104) Kant propounds the idea that passively elicited sensory representations or intuitions of particular objects (for self-conscious beings such as ourselves) owe their unified form to our conceptual capacities, which derive from our ‘spontaneous’ capacities for reasoning. Intuitions differ from judgments, not so much
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in their logical structure, but in their passivity. As perceptual experiences are involuntary actualizations of conceptual capacities, McDowell agrees with Sellars that they should be modeled on linguistic performances in which claims are literally made. Hence Sellars’s contention that perceptual experiences ‘contain’ claims in a way. The content of sensory intuitions of particular objects may thus be expressed with singular demonstrative phrases like ‘that cube’. Against the Myth of the Given, McDowell additionally affirms Hegel’s and Sellars’s understanding of the holistic nature of conceptual capacities: we must have many concepts to have any. (Kant also confirms this fact but does not explore it to the extent that Hegel or Sellars does.) An intimately related point, which is crucial for McDowell’s project, is that conceptual capacities are essentially rational. As sensory intuitions have conceptual structure, we find the holism and the rationality of conceptual capacities in the mere intuition of a red round object – veridical or not. Such an experience requires being capable of exercising an active spontaneity of understanding by judging, e.g., that it is not green and that the lighting conditions are not unusual. Not just any parroting will due. This latter judgment about the lighting conditions rests in turn on a grasp of the distinction between ‘is’ and ‘looks’, which essentially involves a notion of ‘truth’. With respect to the former judgment, taking something to be ‘red’ implies taking it to be ‘colored’. And having a grip on ‘color’ requires having a grip on many different colors. On McDowell’s idealism, there is arguably no difference between the conceptual order and the real order here. They are two sides of ‘the one and the many’ coin. Disappointingly, however, McDowell fails (at least in this collection) to relate the holistic implications of his conceptualism to Kant’s case for the ‘objectively validity’ of reason’s ideal of systematicity.

Notwithstanding the large extent that Hegel, Sellars, and McDowell embrace Kant’s account of intentionality, they all reject it as ultimately subjectivist. But they do so not because concepts are imposed on the contents of our impressions, for there are no raw impressions of things without categorial unity; impressions are themselves passively elicited actualizations of conceptual capacities. By McDowell’s lights, in the B Deduction Kant successfully addresses an objection that the pure concepts of the understanding are so imposed on intuitions (Essay 4). Rather, Hegel, Sellars, and McDowell reject Kant’s account because our concepts apply only to spatial and/or temporal objects. This would be fine except Kant claims that spatio-temporality characterizes not things themselves but only our forms of representation. In other words, the genuine objectivity of our empirical judgments is restricted in Kant’s account by the ideality of space
and time.

From here though, McDowell follows Hegel in a way that seems to distance him (McDowell) from Sellars. Whereas Hegel, according to McDowell, reconceived the receptivity of sensibility as ‘a “moment” in the free self-determination of reason’ (p. 87), Sellars holds that the assimilation of sensations to thoughts – i.e., the failure to preserve a sense in which receptivity is ‘sheer receptivity’ (non-conceptual) – has either unconstrained idealism (in the pejorative sense of the term) or reductive empiricist phenomenalsim as its consequence. Accordingly, Sellars thinks Kant should have understood sensory intuitions in two strictly distinct ways: as non-conceptual representations and conceptual representations of the same physical object. For those who are wary of idealism, a label that Hegel himself only uses infrequently to characterize his view, McDowell may seem to put undue emphasis on the upward dependence of intuitions on conceptual capacities. While McDowell tempers his conceptualism in the final essay, ‘Avoiding the Myth of the Given’, he continues to disagree with Sellars that sensory intuitions should be understood as both conceptual and non-conceptual. Sellars has various reasons for maintaining his double-aspected view of sensory intuitions – such as, (1) experience is richer than our conceptual repertoire can be and (2) the groundlessness of a non-veridical, hallucinatory episode (it’s disconnectedness from reality) is not an instance of misunderstanding or misconception. However, McDowell has persuasive conceptualist responses or at least supplies the resources for such responses. On (1) for example, insofar as we can discursively isolate contents of experience, those contents must already be presented with a discoverable identity. This implies that they must be presented in a unified, categorial form, a form that mere sensation cannot provide independently of conceptual capacities on which the productive imagination draws (p. 264, cf. Mind and World, p. 57).

With respect to McDowell’s divergence from Kant in favor of Hegel, I have some critical notes. McDowell must inevitably neglect important issues, for only so much can be said in a single volume, let alone in self-standing essays that have been collected for a volume. But I believe there are some crucial issues that McDowell should not have passed over without comment.

One such issue is Kant’s conceptions of space and time. Kant’s view may be counterintuitive; it may contravene ‘common sense realism’. But since McDowell fails to explain why we should believe that space and time are not merely our forms of representation, McDowell has done nothing more than merely assert that Kant’s project ultimately fails. Besides, Kant
thought his view accommodates what we might now call ‘common sense realism’. Take this statement by McDowell, for example: ‘Kant’s Deduction would have worked if Kant had not attributed brute-fact externality to the spatial and temporal form of our sensibility’ (p. 85). It would have worked to do what? Confirm the view we’ve assumed to be true? We can criticize Kant for false advertising, as he takes himself to have averted the threat of subjective idealism. We can criticize Kant for a careless use of terms like ‘objective’ when he discusses the ‘objective validity’ of the categories only within the context of our forms of intuition. But this will give us no reason to believe that the conditions of the possibility of knowledge of things tell us about the conditions of the possibility of things themselves.

McDowell may be correct that ‘in [Kant’s] picture it remains a sort of brute fact about us . . . that the pure intuitions that reflect the forms of our sensibility are intuitions of space and time’ (p. 76). From this McDowell may be correct to conclude that ‘[t]ranscendental idealism, which is just this insistence that the apparent spatiality and temporality of our world derive from the way our sensibility is formed, stands revealed as subjective idealism’ (ibid.). But this merely describes Kant’s critical philosophy negatively. No rejection of Kant’s transcendental idealism should neglect to mention, as McDowell does, that Kant has a thesis that effectively presents us with a false dilemma: ‘we can know a priori of things [e.g., that they are spatial and/or temporal] only what we ourselves have put into them’ (Critique of Pure Reason, B xxii note).

Something else goes missing in McDowell’s treatment of Kant. Whereas Kant addresses the question of ‘whether’ we know, McDowell finds this unnecessary because this question is supposedly motivated by non-compulsory skeptical worries. Instead, McDowell seems to hold that skeptical worries will prove unwarranted once we get clear about ‘how’ we know. But if non-veridical experiences share with veridical experiences the quality of being categorically formed – i.e., the quality that purportedly explains ‘how’ – then answering ‘how’ cannot suffice for much against skepticism if McDowell wants to maintain that non-inferential perceptual beliefs can have an indefeasible base.

One of McDowell’s few shortcomings is his tendency to paint the philosophical picture in broad brush strokes. In addition to his cursory criticism of Kant’s idealism, his endorsement of Hegel’s understanding of the relationship between thought and being is vague. For instance, McDowell does not misrepresent Hegel’s view when he says that Hegel sees the receptivity of sensibility as ‘a “moment” in the free self-determination of reason’. But without more precision readers are unlikely

Notwithstanding the aforementioned shortcomings, McDowell’s *HWV* is richly insightful into how we can be realists on various fronts. Although I would not recommend this book to students coming to Kant, Hegel, or Sellars for the first time, the fresh and incisive interpretations McDowell offers in this collection will undoubtedly prove helpful and challenging to scholars interested in any of these philosophers or in the problems on which McDowell brings these seminal figures into dialogue.

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