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McDowell and the Puzzle of Conceptual Form

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Abstract

In the course of a recent debate with Hubert Dreyfus, John McDowell emphasizes the notion of conceptual form or shape to explain how conceptual capacities are 'operative' in prereflective 'coping' activities. This paper considers how that notion is to be interpreted. Assuming conceptual form to be determinate is unnecessary to explain the universal applicability of concepts and conflicts with an argument McDowell uses against Evans. Attempting to avoid this conflict by leaving it indeterminate makes talk of conceptual form misleading, reducing it to an imprecise way of affirming our ability to apply concepts to subject-matter of any form whatever. As a consequence, Dreyfus's challenge to McDowell cannot be met by appealing to the notion of conceptual form or shape. I further argue that it remains a puzzle how McDowell's notion of conceptual form is to be understood, and that the difficulties with his response to Dreyfus point to an underlying tension between various claims McDowell makes about conceptual capacities.

Key Words: McDowell, conceptual form, conceptual content, nonconceptual content, Dreyfus

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Introduction

In the course of his debate with Hubert Dreyfus over whether or not prereflective 'coping' activities are conceptual in kind, John McDowell assigns an important role to the notion of conceptual form or shape.[1] Assuming a distinction between 'ground floor' abilities that do not involve the use of concepts and 'upper stories' of rational-discursive abilities that do, Dreyfus had challenged McDowell to specify the sense in which conceptual capacities are 'operative' in prereflective behaviours despite our being unaware of exercising them (Dreyfus 2007b: 372, 376). In response, while recognizing a difference between the actual and potential application of capacities of the kind that Dreyfus seems to be emphasizing, McDowell argues that conceptual capacities can be thought of as operative in prereflective experience provided both share a common form that ensures the availability of such experience to higher level rational abilities.[2] As he puts it, all experience – including prereflective experience of 'coping' – is conceptual in the sense of being 'conceptually shaped' or 'conceptual in form': 'What is important is this: if an experience is world-

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disclosing […], *all* its content is present in a *form* in which […] it is suitable to constitute contents of conceptual capacities'.[3]

Understanding this thought – that all experience is conceptual in shape or form – is clearly central to assessing McDowell's response to Dreyfus. This in turn requires an understanding of what conceptual form is taken to be. Accordingly, the main purpose of this paper is to consider how the notion of conceptual form that McDowell relies on is to be interpreted, in particular whether or not it is to be thought of as imposing a determinate constraint on the form of content (as use of the term intimates). The first two parts of the paper consider these two opposing basic interpretations in turn and argue that both are unsatisfactory in the context of McDowell's position. One consequence of this, I will claim, is that Dreyfus's challenge to McDowell cannot be met by appealing to the notion of conceptual form. A further consequence, highlighted in the final part of the paper, is that it remains a puzzle how the notion of conceptual form that McDowell invokes is to be interpreted. Finally, I go on to argue that this puzzle has a deeper dimension and that the difficulties with his response to Dreyfus point to an underlying tension between various claims McDowell makes about conceptual capacities.

1. Conceptual form as determinate

What does it mean to say that content is conceptual in 'form' or 'shape'? It might seem obvious that such locutions, if they are to have any point, are at the very least saying *something* about the form or shape of the contents referred to. Presumably such form should be attuned to the functional space (e.g. the 'space of reasons') in which concepts are assumed to operate, as assumptions about the representational function of concepts will be reflected in the kind of content they can bear or embody. But no matter what precisely it is taken to consist in, the notion of conceptual form should at least have some demarcational force, constitute some kind of constraint, such that whatever it applies to has a specific kind of form, the 'conceptual' one as opposed to some other(s). Thus it seems, as I shall put it here, that conceptual form or shape should be taken to be *determinate* in some way.

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Although McDowell says surprisingly little to elucidate the notion of conceptual form on which he relies, various passages suggest that he does think of it as such a determinate constraint on the form of content. For example, in *Mind and World* he had described the content of an experience as corresponding to a that-clause: '*That things are thus and so* is the content of the experience, and it can also be the content of a judgement […]. *That things are thus and so* is the conceptual content of an experience' (McDowell 1996: 26). In later work he explicitly rejects his previous assumption that conceptual content is propositional in kind, but continues to describe the ('intuitional') content of experience as being '*in a form* in which it is *already suitable* to be the content associated with a discursive capacity' (italics added; McDowell 2009: 264). Similarly, in his exchange with Dreyfus McDowell draws on the Kantian background of his position in suggesting that conceptual form entails 'categorial unity', i.e. a connection or relation to other possible contents of experience, and emphasizes that his 'claim is that when experience is world-disclosing, its content has a distinctive form'.[4]

Several observations should be made about these passages. First, if it indeed is a determinate or 'distinctive' form, then to say that content has a conceptual form would be an informative claim, something like saying 'x is triangular in form', which rules out many particular shapes and tells us something specific about the shape of x (it has three corners). Further, it would in this case impose some constraint or exclusion, a filtering so to speak, such that anything that is not conceptual 'in form' would fail on principle to be captured by experience. In this respect the notion of conceptual form would be analogous to the constraints on representation that limit (while simultaneously defining) analogue or digital recording media, such as the spatial or colour-scale resolution of a digital image. It is also significant that McDowell often links conceptual form with the notions of predication and judgement. This might give the impression that his position is an intellectualist one – as Dreyfus (2005: 47, 61) at one time suggested – that applies terms designed for describing the semantic functions of highly rational discursive activities to all mental states, or that he is attributing a linguistic form to all experience and perhaps reality. My interest here, however, is not with such specific claims about *which* determinate constraints are assumed by McDowell to be linked with the

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conceptual form label. Rather, my concern is with the more general claim *that* conceptual form/shape is a determinate form of some kind or other, some form/shape that is the conceptual one, no matter what this is specifically assumed to be.

If McDowell's view is that conceptual form is determinate or distinctive in kind, as so far suggested, then one might expect him to argue that the contents of experience cannot take on a form that is 'nonconceptual' in the sense of violating the constraints (whatever these are taken to be) imposed by the notion of conceptual form. An argument serving this purpose is found in *Mind and World*, where McDowell opposes Gareth Evans's attribution of a basic epistemological role to 'informational states' that bear a kind of nonconceptual representational content. Evans's view is based on a distinction between conceptual content, linked with the role of states in predicative judgement (as with McDowell) and nonconceptual content ('information'), which is to be instantiated by the structure of perceptual states and due to causal interaction with the environment (cf. Evans 1982: 122-9). These two kinds of content are to be linked – as indeed with Dreyfus (2005: 59-61) – by the possibility of 'conceptualization' through which nonconceptual content is taken up into conceptual content, thus entering into conscious experience and becoming 'available to' judgement (Evans 1982: 227, 157 f.).

McDowell unsurprisingly opposes the postulation of such a conceptualization step, as it presupposes a level of experience that is not always already conceptual in the sense he requires. But what is being opposed? What is 'conceptualization'? Of particular relevance here is the question of whether or not conceptualization is a process that entails a change in form. Thus one possibility is that conceptualization is linked with the imposition or introduction of a specific mode of organization, amounting to a transformation of something not antecedently conceptual in form to something conceptual in form. In this case nonconceptual content would become conceptual content by undergoing a change in form. The alternative is that conceptualization is not taken to entail a change in form, such that whatever conceptual capacities are applied to will already have had the same form as the

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content that conceptual capacities operate with. In this case, conceptualization would be a process of merely picking out, or making explicit, features of content – rather than a transformation of the form of content.

In the present case matters are complicated somewhat because it is arguably not clear which of these two possible senses of conceptualization Evans intends. Thus, on the one hand, Evans thinks of information as being subject to constraints that enable it to be taken up in 'information based' thoughts that exploit agents' recognitional capacities.[5] This might be seen as an insistence that information have the right form to function as a component of thought. If it were accepted that such constraints do bear on the form of information states, rather than on their (subsequent) representation in 'active' thoughts, then it might be plausible to say that information already has conceptual form, and in this respect to deny any need for conceptualization. This line of thought may appear congenial to McDowell's aims. However, it will become clearer below that we have no reason to assume – and that in fact McDowell himself provides grounds to doubt – that the possibility of uptake into active thoughts imposes constraints on the form of whatever those thoughts refer to.

On the other hand, Evans also appears to think that nonconceptual content is distinguished from conceptual content by differing in its form or structure. He illustrates this thought by suggesting that we are able to see and discriminate – i.e. experience – many more shades of colour than we have concepts to represent such discriminations (Evans 1982: 229). Here the suggestion is that nonconceptual content differs from conceptual content in being more fine-grained. Conceptualization would in this respect entail a change in form, one required to map a continuous (or at least finely graduated) colour manifold onto a finite and discrete range of (linguistic) terms. This line of thought presents a challenge to McDowell's position, and in response he offers an argument intended to show that such fineness of grain fails to establish that content is not conceptual. Thus in the case of colour sensitivity McDowell argues that, if one genuinely has the ability to recognize a certain colour over an extended period, 'the conceptual content of such a recognitional capacity can be made explicit with the help of a sample' and referred to by 'a phrase like "that shade", in which the demonstrative exploits the

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presence of the sample' (McDowell 1996: 57; cf. also 2009: 263). In more general terms, the argument is that the use of determinable and demonstrative concepts in combination with recognitional capacities suffices to ensure that fineness of grain does not succeed in distinguishing something as nonconceptual. Rather, according to McDowell, by such means any discernible differences (in a finely grained manifold) are conceptual in the sense he requires of being available for use in rational discourse.[6]

One relatively minor problem with McDowell's argument is that it is difficult to see anything that Evans need disagree with, and hence how it counts against the latter's claims. Evans could no doubt agree with McDowell that any feature of nonconceptual content can be 'exploited in active judgements'. The difference between their positions turns on what it is to be available for such exploitation: for Evans this requires a 'conceptualization' of intrinsically nonconceptual content, the imposition of a specific form of organization (defined by the space of concepts actually possessed), whereas for McDowell content intrinsically has conceptual form. Yet the scenario McDowell describes can equally well be seen as both fully compatible with Evans's point about fineness of grain and as a way of explicating the process of conceptualization – as a process in which the use of indexicals and determinable concepts yields ad hoc conceptual abilities.

A second problem with McDowell's argument — one more important for the purposes of this paper — is that it does not establish that no change in the form of content takes place, and so does not succeed in showing that Evans's information manifold was already conceptual in form. One reason for this is that the argument does nothing to allay the impression given by Evans's example that there is such a change. In that example, nonconceptual content is articulated in a rich variable space of continuously variable factors that define spatially distributed colour patterns (e.g. location, hue, tone, brightness). By contrast, McDowell's argument relies on representation via the finite and discretely articulated system of a language – as it presumably must in order to preserve an intrinsic connection with reasons and rationality. In this sense it seems still to involve a shift from one variable and functional space to another, and hence from one form of representation, and content, to another.

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It might be responded to this that McDowell does not need to show there is no change at all in the form of the content, as long as any changes that do occur are partial and those factors that constitute conceptual content are preserved. That is, it might be thought that the conceptual form is preserved despite the loss of other formal features – as though a filter were being applied that allows only the conceptually shaped features to be captured. However, this will not help with the present (second) problem for the further reason that McDowell's argument does not allow even the more modest conclusion that specific formal features – e.g. the 'conceptual' ones – are preserved. For as long as it is assumed that the notion of conceptual form imposes a determinate or distinctive constraint on the *form* of content, the procedure he describes fails to establish that whatever our conceptual capacities (e.g. demonstrative terms) are directed at (e.g. subpersonal information-bearing states) is *antecedently* conceptual in form. It fails to do this because it cannot be inferred from the mere possibility of applying a certain mode of representation that the 'distinctive' form of whatever is represented is being captured. To infer this would involve an illicit projection of the kind Wittgenstein mocks in §104 of the *Philosophical Investigations* as 'predicating of the thing what lies in the mode of representation'. In other words, it would be simply fallacious: the possibility of applying concepts to any given fine-grained manifold no more implies that this is antecedently conceptual than the existence of digital watches or black and white photographs entails that time lacks continuity or that the world lacks colour.[7]

Despite these problems, it seems to me that McDowell's argument does succeed in establishing a powerful and highly general result. For what the procedure he describes shows is that the use of relatively coarse, context-dependent expressions suffices to introduce any differences discernible in a fine-grained manifold into language-games that involve the giving and taking of reasons. This kind of procedure could clearly be extended to other cases in which some kind of content or subject matter is thought to resist the application of concepts in virtue of its form. As a result, whether or not one thinks to talk of 'conceptualization' is appropriate, McDowell plausibly succeeds in showing that any distinguishable feature of a differentially structured manifold can be exploited in conceptually articulated rational discourse. In other words, he succeeds in showing that

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concepts are universally applicable in the sense that they can be applied to identifiable features of any shape or form.[8]

The point of McDowell's appeal to the notion of conceptual form or shape in his debate with Dreyfus was to explain how conceptual capacities might be thought of as 'operative' in content or experience in which they do not appear to be exercised. This was to be achieved by supposing that the relevant content or experience was already of the right form – i.e. conceptual form – for concepts to be applied to them. This section has considered McDowell's argument against Evans's claim that some representational content is nonconceptual in its form. While I have allowed that this argument shows concepts can be applied to any identifiable features, it does not suffice to attribute a determinate (conceptual) form to whatever those concepts are applied to. In fact, to the contrary, McDowell's argument provides reason to think that the applicability of concepts does not impose any constraints on the form of the subject matter to which they are applied. Accordingly, the notion of conceptual form, insofar as this is assumed to be determinate, seems neither necessary nor (therefore) able to do the work McDowell assigns to it.

2. Conceptual form as indeterminate

It might so far seem odd to suggest, as I have been doing, that to see the notion of conceptual form as saying something determinate about the form or shape of the contents is an *interpretation*. After all, one might wonder, how else could it possibly be 'interpreted'? To see why an alternative appears necessary, it will help to draw out further the implications of McDowell's argument against Evans. It was just suggested that this argument shows concepts can be applied to referents or content of any form or shape whatsoever. However, this means that, while plausibly recognizing the extreme versatility of our conceptual and rational capacities, McDowell's argument against Evans simultaneously undermines the idea that these capacities can be thought of as attributing a determinate 'conceptual' form or structure to their referents.

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This brings out a difficulty with assuming that conceptual form is determinate in the context of McDowell's position. For the point of this assumption is to suggest that conceptual form is in some way specific, and that this specificity serves as a constraint or a filter on the form of contents that can be represented by conceptual capacities. However, we have just seen that McDowell's argument against Evans runs counter to both these suggestions. Hence the assumption that conceptual form is determinate conflicts with the implication of his argument against Evans, leading to a tension in McDowell's overall position.[9]

Perhaps then, as odd as it may initially appear, McDowell's talk of 'conceptual in form' might instead be interpreted such that it is indeterminate, i.e. does not say anything determinate about the form or shape of whatever is referred to. This would provide an explanation for McDowell's saying little to elucidate what conceptual form or shape is supposed to be. For it would then seem right to leave this open, so that those comments he does make ought to be seen as offering a few, nonexclusive examples of the diverse forms conceptual capacities might take. Interpreted in this way, McDowell's pervasive conceptualism would not be attributing a determinate form or functional organization to all of experience or reality, but merely asserting that whatever determinate form the latter have, concepts, as employed in discursive practices, will in principle be able to track it. Rather than imposing any exclusion or constraints on experience, this would simply affirm that conceptual capacities can adapt themselves to any feature presented in our sensory experience. This would clearly be a less informative claim than that suggested by the first interpretation of 'conceptual form', comparable now to saying 'x has a spatial form', i.e. roughly it has a shape of some kind (occupies space in some way) rather than a specific shape (e.g. triangle).[10] However, it is important to note that this claim, odd though it may initially appear, might still suffice for McDowell's overarching aim of securing the justificatory role of experience in knowledge claims.[11] For it leaves intact the thought that nothing lies beyond conceptual determination as a matter of principle, and in this sense avoids postulating a mythical Given.

This second interpretation is unsatisfactory, nevertheless, because it makes the 'conceptual in

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form' label misleading in several ways. First of all, because this label surely appears to signal that a determinate form is being attributed to contents of experience, which is the opposite of what the second interpretation states. Second, it would no longer make any sense to talk of 'conceptual' form or shape, because on this interpretation there is no form or shape that is specifically 'conceptual' and no contrast to 'nonconceptual' form. Finally, it is also misleading because having a form that is 'conceptual' is not what matters, since – as McDowell's argument against Evans establishes – there is no form or shape of content that could not in principle be exploited in discourse or rational activity. Rather, on this second interpretation, to say that experience or features of the world are conceptual 'in form' reduces to a claim about the applicability of concepts, a reassurance that whatever form the world takes on in our experience, we will be able to capture this with concepts and exploit it in rational discourse.

We might be moved to consider this second interpretation of 'concept form', I suggested above, by the difficulties generated by the first interpretation. However, while not obviously inconsistent with McDowell's overarching project, this second interpretation leaves the notion of conceptual form empty and, as reinterpreted, standing for a claim not properly made in terms of a form that is supposed to characterize concepts.

3. The puzzle of conceptual form

I have so far considered two basic alternatives for interpreting the notion of conceptual form that McDowell's emphasizes in his debate with Dreyfus. On the first interpretation, the 'conceptual form' label refers to a determinate form or shape – the conceptual one as opposed to others. This interpretation not only exposes McDowell to the charge of illicitly projecting the form of representations onto their referents, but also conflicts with the argument he offers against Evans's postulation of nonconceptual contents, which implies that the application of conceptual capacities imposes no structural or formal constraints on whatever these are applied to. On the second interpretation, the label does not identify a determinate 'conceptual' form or shape. While this interpretation is consistent with McDowell's argument

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against Evans and avoids any risk of illicit projection, it amounts to merely an imprecise way of reassuring ourselves of the soundness of our epistemic abilities rather than a genuine claim about conceptual form.

The preceding considerations have consequences of several different kinds. First of all, they suggest that appealing to the notion of conceptual form or shape does not help McDowell in the way he appears to suppose in his debate with Dreyfus. With regard to the first interpretation, the assumption that prereflective coping activities involve experience which has a determinate conceptual form is not necessary to explain their possible exploitation by higher level rational abilities. Further, the second interpretation fails to identify a specific role for conceptual form/shape, since *ex hypothesi* no determinate form is identified that could play any such role. Hence, no matter how this notion is interpreted, whether as a determinate form or otherwise, it cannot be relied on to establish that conceptual capacities are 'operative' in prereflective engaged activities of the kind that interest Dreyfus.

The above considerations also, second, highlight a puzzle affecting McDowell's own position in that it remains unclear how the notion of conceptual form is to be understood. Part of the difficulty here is perhaps that it is not particularly clear which specific constraints McDowell thinks define conceptual form. However, the first section of this paper bracketed that concern and argued at a more general level that any determinate form which is identified as conceptual form will remain problematic, so that the notion of conceptual form cannot do the work McDowell assumes it to do. As an alternative, the second section of the paper considered interpreting the notion of conceptual form somewhat counterintuitively as indeterminate. Yet this renders unclear why it should be appealed to at all and gives the impression that it serves only as a misleading way of asserting the universal applicability of concepts. Moreover, it should be noted that any notion of form must be one or the other, either determinate or indeterminate. Taken together the two preceding sections therefore suggest that – independently of any potential gaps in McDowell's account – it is not clear how an appeal to the notion of conceptual form or shape, no matter how interpreted, could possibly make a positive contribution to his position.

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I now want to suggest, however, that this puzzle runs somewhat deeper and that, rather than being an isolated loose end, the difficulties apparent in interpreting the notion of conceptual form point the way to an underlying problem with McDowell's position. Indeed, we might expect this to be the case, as McDowell's use of the notion of conceptual form is presumably intended to capture an important aspect of the way he conceives of conceptual capacities. Accordingly, difficulties manifested via the notion of conceptual form should be expected to correspond to a deeper tension.

To allow the underlying problem to be seen, I want to highlight three thoughts that have featured in the preceding discussion. The first is that McDowell appears to believe that conceptual capacities are linked with some kind of formal constraint(s), or, to put it in the terms I have been using here, that conceptual form is determinate. This is already suggested by the fact that he talks of conceptual 'form' or 'shape' at all, and is clearly attested by some of the passages cited in the first section of this paper. The second thought is that concepts can be applied to subject matter of any shape or form. This is not simply, as it might appear, a restatement of the basic commitment of McDowell's conceptualism. Rather, it expresses the result of his argument against Evans, which shows that no form of manifold eludes in principle the application of concepts. It may look as though these first two thoughts are straightforwardly in conflict. For the first appears to suggest that conceptual capacities impose formal constraints on whatever they are applied to – that the latter must already be in the right (conceptual) form to be exploited by those capacities – while the second suggests that there are no such constraints. However, a conflict between these two thoughts is not necessary and can be avoided, provided it is allowed that the application of concepts involves the *imposition* or introduction of a specific form through a conceptualization step. This is where the third thought comes in. For we have also seen above, in his critique of Evans, that McDowell rejects the idea of such conceptualization. Indeed, it seems that he is required to do this in order to avoid postulating something 'Given' that initially stands outside the domain of the conceptual and requires a transformation into conceptual form.

Thus it seems that there is an underlying tension in McDowell's position which can be

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summed up in terms of his commitment to an inconsistent triad of claims. For he appears to be simultaneously affirming (a) that conceptual capacities have a determinate form, (b) that they place no determinate constraints on the form of their subject-matter, and (c) that the application of concepts does not involve any transformation of subject-matter into a determinate (conceptual) form.

Of these three claims the first appears to be the most dispensable. For giving up (b) would directly undermine McDowell's conceptualism by implying that concepts cannot be applied to all subject-matter. Giving up (c) would have the same consequence by allowing that there are features of the world and/or experience that are not conceptual in form without conceptualization. The remaining option is then to give up (a), corresponding to the second interpretation of conceptual form (as indeterminate) discussed above. Although somewhat counterintuitive, I have suggested this might allow many of McDowell's central claims to be preserved, in particular the universal applicability of concepts that his argument against Evans plausibly establishes, and might suffice for his overarching epistemological project. Yet if this is how McDowell thinks of conceptual capacities – as not having a determinate form – then it is difficult to see why he appeals to the notion of conceptual form or shape in explicating and defending his position.

The difficulties apparent in interpreting the notion of conceptual form thus reflect an underlying problem with the way conceptual capacities are to be understood on McDowell's position. While assuming those capacities to be linked with a determinate form leads to the risk of inconsistency, leaving the notion of form linked with them indeterminate makes it difficult to see what the point of emphasizing conceptual capacities might be. The overall implication of the preceding deliberations is that McDowell's appeal to the notion of conceptual form or shape is problematic not only in the context of his debate with Dreyfus but also more generally. The problem with that appeal is not simply that it is not particularly clear how McDowell conceives such form (though this may be true), nor even that it is difficult to see what it contributes to his position (as consideration of his response to Dreyfus illustrates), but that it suggests he is committed to a set of claims about conceptual capacities

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which would render his overall position inconsistent.[12]

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[1] See Dreyfus 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2013 and McDowell 2007a, 2007b, 2013. This paper draws out some implications of an attempt to situate my own view of language in relation to both Dreyfus and McDowell in chapter 9 of *Disclosing the World* (Inkpin 2016: 271-286). I am grateful to MIT Press for allowing me to reproduce material from that discussion in sections 1 and 2 of the present paper.

[2] McDowell 2007a: 348. On the former recognition see, for example, McDowell's comment that his concern is with content that is 'present in the content of a word-disclosing experience in a form in which it already either *actually is*, or has the *potential to be* simply appropriated as, the content of a conceptual capacity' (my italics; McDowell 2007a: 348).

[3] McDowell 2007b: 366; 2007a: 348, 347 f. – See also: 'what it means for capacities to be conceptual in the relevant sense' is that 'they are capacities whose content is of a form that fits it to figure in discursive activity' (McDowell 2013: 42).

[4] McDowell 2007a: 346, 348. – McDowell sometimes appears to suggest that conceptual form is in play because new experiences always take up their place against the holistic background of a 'rationally organized network of capacities' (McDowell 1996: 29, cf. 32). Note, however, that what is at issue between a Heideggerian approach, such as Dreyfus's, and McDowell's – as McDowell (2007a: 344) recognizes – is not whether there is some kind of holistic background playing a place-fixing role, but whether that background can be described as pervasively rational (as opposed to purposive and practical) in its constitution.

[5] In particular Evans (1982: 89-105) talks of 'Russell's Principle' and the 'Generality Constraint', which require information to serve as the basis for both discriminating abilities and the individuation of recombinable elements of thought.

[6] Cf. McDowell 1996: 47, 58, which parallel the above definitions of conceptual form/shape.

[7] The temptation is presumably to think of a shared conceptual form as a 'condition of possibility' for the application of concepts. But this is fallacious, as the above examples show. (Consider also representation on a weather map of air pressure or rainfall levels using different colours, or the audible binary form in which smoke detectors respond to the continuously variable concentration of smoke particles, etc.) – It would be more plausible to suggest that for a representation to be informative it is necessary that whatever it refers to be at least as rich in differential structure as the representational means deployed.

[8] This is why, as noted above, the possibility of uptake into active thoughts does not impose constraints on the form of Evans's information states.

[9] At least as long as the possibility of reconciling these two commitments via a conceptualization step is excluded, as with McDowell. See Section 3 below.

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[10] Keep in mind that 'spatial form' is indeterminate: it does not specify, for example, the number of dimensions or the geometry (e.g. Euclidean) defining the space referred to.

[11] For statements of this aim see, for example, McDowell 1996: 67; 2013: 41 f.

[12] I would like to thank Tristram Oliver-Skuse and Marilyn Stendera for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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