

Animality and Rationality
(On how John McDowell's Kantian view of moral experience
could accommodate research on emotion)

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Abstract

My main goal in this article is methodological: I want to spell out how a Kantian perspective could accommodate current empirical work on cognition, and in particular on emotion. Having chosen John McDowell as a guide, I try to characterize his view of moral experience and underline its Kantian traits (McDowell 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1998e, 1998f). I start by identifying the conception of freedom as exemplified in the rational wolf thought experiment in *Two Forms of Naturalism* as the main Kantian trait. I then go through the characterization of two other crucial aspects of our moral experience – (responsiveness to) reasons and value. I suggest that McDowell's approach to moral experience, although not itself strictly Kantian in all of its details, is an instance of a transformative view of rationality, as defended by Matthew Boyle (Boyle 2016) and that such transformative view is the key to accommodate empirical research on cognition within a Kantian perspective.

Key words

McDowell, Kantian perspective, emotion, rationality, transformative view

Among all the ideas of speculative reason freedom is also the only one the possibility of which we *know* a priori, though without having insight into it, because it is the condition of the moral law, which we do know.

(Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:4)

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The concept of freedom is the stumbling block for all *empiricists*.

(Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:8)^[1]_{SEP}

Does research on cognition, for example research on emotion done in the context of affective science, bear directly on a view of morality and moral questions? More often than not, especially outside philosophy, it is assumed without any further problem that there is a positive answer to this question. In this article I will raise some doubts regarding such answer. I will take John McDowell as my guide; I will characterize his view of moral experience, underlining its Kantian traits. McDowell is one influential voice in current moral philosophy and a Kantian in a specific sense which I will try to spell out here. I believe his view of moral experience helps us understand how a Kantian perspective could accommodate current research on cognition, exemplified by research on emotion as pursued in affective science, without assuming such research bears directly on a view of morality. Although my main point in what follows will be such methodological point, I also want to call attention to the Kantian mark in McDowell's work in moral philosophy, visible in the very formulation of questions regarding moral experience, which he sees as questions concerning relations between animality and rationality, the authority of reason and the nature of moral imperatives.

Although emotion is my example of research on cognition supposedly bearing directly on questions of morality, it needs to be said that McDowell does not write directly about the emotions. Yet he does write on a topic often close at hand in philosophical approaches to emotions and passions, the topic of virtue; that is what I will concentrate on. The focus of McDowell's moral philosophy is the exercise of moral capacities as part of the life of a rational animal. Virtue is at the centre of his story. Such focus on the exercise of capacities and virtue stands in contrast, from the start, with approaches to emotions more often found in contemporary affective science, where emotions are taken to be 'relatively short-lived and bounded episodes'¹, whether these are related to bodily sensations and conditions or to the appraisal and evaluation of events or objects in the agent's environment. McDowell's view of morality, like Kant's, is a view of practical reason, a complex view of what we, human animals and rational beings, want and strive for, deliberate on and decide for. As with Kant, there is one focal point bringing together the many strands of analysis: a view of reason as freedom and spontaneity. Perhaps McDowell would not go as far as Kant in saying that passions make men reason as if they were slaves.² Still, although the components of his view may be different from Kant's, he too believes that freedom lies where reason lies. This is what I ultimately intend to get at.

Emotion: a very brief mapping

¹ Colombetti 2014, p. 25.

² Sánchez Madrid 2013, p.121.

In order to be able to weigh the Kantian flavour of McDowell's view against the background of current approaches to the emotions we need a notion of the main stakes in ongoing discussions.³ The nature of emotion – the question whether emotions are feelings, evaluations or appraisals, or motivations – lies at the center of such discussions. There are two, as it were, extremes in the positions in the field: we may call them somatic theories and cognitivist theories. According to somatic theories emotions are fundamentally *feelings of the body*. Authors such as William James, Antonio Damasio or Jesse Prinz are on that side. What somatic theorists do, in more or less sophisticated ways, Descartes had already done this with his view of the passions of the soul: he thought that a passion was the consciousness of the activity of animal spirits in the body. The very influential idea that there are so-called 'basic emotions' (e.g. fear, anger, happiness, sadness, disgust,...) and that they are wired-in fits roughly within such view. On the other extreme there are the cognitivist theories. According to them, emotions are *judgements*, more specifically evaluative judgements. We may think here of philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum or Robert Solomon. The important thing is that qua judgements, or appraisals, emotions call our attention not to our own body but rather to that which is outside of us, outside our bodies – a world imbued with value – and they guide us therein. There are of course other theories, which we may see as hybrids of these two orientations- we may think of the work e.g. of Lisa Barrett or Lawrence Barsalou. Most importantly, they criticize one crucial idea of the somatic view, the idea of basic emotions.⁴

The truth is every position above seems to have something going for it. Consciousness of the body does indeed seem to be involved in the emotions - if emotions were simply judgements how could we account for their phenomenology? And would they really motivate? Yet it is also clear that feelings of the body do not seem sufficient to orient and motivate agents in the world in specific ways – there should, as it were, be some conceptual content to emotion, as well as objects. If this is so, some 'constructivist' stance, 'injecting' articulated content in emotion, seems called for.

Involvement of emotions in motivation also naturally entangles emotions with complex issues in the philosophy of mind and action and in ethics, such as the issues of the nature of

³ My two main references for this overview were Scarantino and De Sousa (2018) and Deonna & Teroni. For the purposes of this mapping I will consider current philosophy of emotion as falling within affective science (2012). By affective science I mean the general field of study of affective phenomena, emotion included, which has at its center neuroscience and psychology but extends to other disciplines. The work of scientists such as e.g. Antonio Damasio or Jaak Panskepp belongs to affective science. Terminology may differ, but under the title of passions, affection, upheavals, appetites or (the more current) terms emotion and affect, the purpose is to give us an empirically-informed ways of thinking of anger, sadness, joy, love, envy, fear, pride, shame, disgust, anxiety, awe, boredom, panic, hostility, surprise, regret, *shadenfreude*, happiness, disgust, and others states and moods.

⁴ It should be stressed though, in spite of the fact that such criticism is important in the field, many current empirical studies simply take it that basic emotions exist, that they relate in a certain way to non-basic emotions, and that they are adaptations.

desire and value, and the metaphysical question of realism. Should emotions be understood in terms of desires or should they not? What is the relation of emotion to value? Are we necessarily led to subjectivism and antirealism in ethics if we bring emotion into an analysis of human motivation? Through this kind of questions philosophers (we may think of Martha Nussbaum, Jesse Prinz or Simon Blackburn) take on the task of trying to integrate a view of emotions into a view of the moral and rational life of humans. This is the arena in which McDowell's proposal, although not, as I said, a direct account of the emotions, appears as an alternative. Within moral philosophy McDowell's view may be classified as a fitting attitude theory of value.⁵ Fitting attitude theories of value propose to analyze value in terms of evaluative attitudes of agents which are endorsed as *fitting*—or, alternatively, as appropriate, correct, merited, proper, rational, or warranted. But here I am not as much interested in how McDowell's position could or should be classified within the map of alternatives in moral philosophy – although the fitting attitude characterization is illuminating - but rather in the Kantian spirit of his global approach to morality and in the way in which he depicts the relations between animality and rationality therein. It is such picture which would allow for the accomodation of empirical research on emotion within a view of morality.

Animality and rationality: the rational wolf thought experiment.

If we look at the texts, McDowell's moral philosophy often takes the form of a discussion of the classics, in particular of Aristotle, Hume and Kant. This gives rise to many exegetical discussions, but here I want to concentrate on just one thought experiment from a particular article, the article *Two Sorts of Naturalism*⁶. At the heart of the thought experiment lie the relations between rationality and animality in humans.

The thought experiment is about what being rational is for a natural being. Let us suppose that an animal other than a human becomes rational. In McDowell's terms, it becomes capable of giving expression to conceptual capacities and of asking for reasons of its own behavior. He would then ask himself: should I do as all wolves do? Should I hunt with the pack? Should I cooperate? Need I do it? Why should I do it? The point here is that being rational, once an animal such as the wolf becomes rational, is not conceiving one's own behaviour as just another phenomenon in the world, which the rational being then conceptualizes. Being rational involves being able to step rationally out of oneself and ask: why should I do as other wolves (or humans) do? It amounts then to, as McDowell puts it, letting (one's) mind roam over possibilities of behaviour *other than what comes naturally to wolves (or humans) and ask for reasons*. In other words, being rational, for a natural being such as an animal concerns agency and a particular position regarding one's agency, that of asking for reasons. In fact the topic of McDowell's thought experiment is that

⁵ See Jacobson 2011.

⁶ McDowell 1998.

which in the philosophical traditions is often called freedom⁷. It is freedom in the sense that mattered to Kant in the following passage of *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*:

For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required but *freedom*, and indeed the least harmful of anything that could even be called freedom: namely, freedom to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters. But I hear from all sides the cry: *Do not argue!* The officer says: Do not argue but drill! The tax official: Do not argue but pay! The clergyman: Do not argue but believe! (Kant 1996, 8:37, p. 18)

Freedom in the sense that matters here is asking for reasons for one's actions. This is done by beings who are 'capable of giving expression to conceptual capacities and of asking for reasons of [their] own behavior'. This is one sense of freedom which many current naturalists, either in philosophy or the cognitive sciences, often forget, or are blind to. Not McDowell: he thinks that paying attention to the concept of nature at use in one's investigations of mind and morals is crucial for avoiding blindness to such sense of freedom. By not paying too much attention to the concept of nature at use one risks appealing, in a less than reflective way, to (supposedly) natural facts as underlying what humans do, how they act, what it is for a human to be human. Reductionist and scientific naturalists are, according to him, prone to fall into such trap. McDowell's own focus on rationality as *second nature*⁸ to our *animal nature* is his particular way of avoiding such trap.

One different way to put the same point is to say that McDowell uses the thought experiment of the rational wolf to clarify the shape that naturalism should take. McDowell's naturalism is very distant from more mainstream naturalism in current philosophy of mind. In mainstream philosophy of mind the main questions usually concern the reduction of mental states to physical states. Yet the focus of McDowell's naturalism is on *reason*, or *rationality*, in its relation to nature. For him, being a naturalist does not lead to a project of reduction, rather it takes the shape of clarifying how our rationality fits within our animality, how the authority of reasons stands in relation to our animality. The task is not figuring out how particular mental states and physical states relate but rather how reason (i.e rationality) and nature relate. So McDowell's naturalism, often called second nature naturalism, involves the rejection of what Macarthur and De Caro call the ontological and methodological doctrines of scientific (reductionist) naturalism.⁹ Such rejection opens the way to what we may see as his pursuit of philosophical anthropology, or at least a beginning thereof. One main task of philosophical anthropology is to conceive

⁷ McDowell is often keen on using the Kantian term 'spontaneity'. Considering this would lead us into a different kind of discussions.

⁸ The term is inspired in Aristotle and his approach to virtue; for Aristotle a man's character becomes second nature.

⁹ According to the Ontological Doctrine of Scientific Naturalism, the world consists of nothing but the entities to which successful scientific explanations commit us to. According to the Methodological Doctrine of Scientific Naturalism, scientific inquiry is in principle the only genuine source of knowledge or understanding (see De Caro and Macarthur 2004 and 2010).

of the authority of reason in the face of the *authority of our first nature* ('first nature' is McDowell's term for the picture of humans provided by natural science).

Some critics of McDowell in the philosophy of mind and moral philosophy (not the reductionist naturalists I just mentioned, but yet another kind of critics) consider this focus on reason and nature abstract. It is abstract in that it is not an 'embodied' approach, and thus not centered on our bodily nature as individuals. It centers rather on the nature of our rational capacities. It is our rationality, our conceptual capacities, and not our individual body that matters for McDowell when weighing the relations of reason to nature. The capacities of the agent which are his reference are, of course, seen as belonging to an animal, a physical being, a living being in the world. One might even say that even if his approach to our rationality is not embodied it is – to use currently fashionable terms in the mind sciences – embedded, extended and enactive. But the focus is on the capacities, not the body.

Anyway at the center of McDowell's multistranded view of moral experience and of the capacities involved therein, of which I will say more in what follows, lies freedom, as captured in the thought experiment of the rational wolf. I will now analyse other aspects of our moral experience according to McDowell. Although these will appear under the guise of historical exegesis their point is not merely historical; what is being analysed is ultimately how, in ourselves, here and now, animality and rationality relate, as we exercise such moral capacities.

Moral experience (I): Responsiveness to reasons

If, then, there is to be a supreme practical principle and, with respect to the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one such that, from the representation of what is necessarily an end for everyone because it is ^[SEP]an *end in itself*, it constitutes an *objective* principle of the will and thus can serve as a universal practical law.' The ground of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself*.

(Kant *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* 4: 429)

For McDowell one central component of our moral capacities is responsiveness to reasons. He wants to understand what the authority of reason amounts to, in rational animals such as ourselves. That is what he is doing in his article "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?".¹⁰ At the background of what McDowell says lies Philippa Foot's critique of Kant. In face of Kant's views on the inescapable character of moral reasons, Foot asks: What does it mean to say that we ought to do x? (e.g. what does it mean to say that I ought to pay my 100.000 euro debt to my friend Susana?) We inherited from Kant, and very often accept, the idea that there is a distance between hypothetical and categorical imperatives: moral imperatives are categorical. That *I ought to pay my debt to Susana* is categorical. But what is really at stake when we say that moral imperatives are categorical, or that we have moral reasons to do X?

¹⁰ McDowell 1998d.

According to the ‘orthodoxy’, hypothetical imperatives are conditional in that they state that I should do X if I want Y. In contrast, categorical imperatives are unconditional in the sense that the recommended action imposes itself as an end in itself. This is precisely what Foot rejects: if that were the only difference then we should take social rules (e.g. rules of etiquette) to be categorical. After all their use is also clearly non-hypothetical - it is not dependent on any further ends. (Think of “One ought to eat with knife and fork”; this is not dependent on any further ends).

If we are not willing to think of moral imperatives as etiquette imperatives, then we should think of another way of supporting the idea that moral imperatives are categorical. One such way is to claim that what Kant means is that in acting morally we do as reason dictates. But this is precisely what Foot thinks is ungrounded. She thinks it is perfectly rational that someone asks him or herself *Why should I be moral? Why be moral?* The immoral – he or she who sees no reason to obey moral precepts – cannot be accused of being irrational. Many things may be said about a person not willing to do x, when one thinks he, or she, ought to do it. We may say that she is cruel, selfish, rash or imprudent. Yet someone who thinks that moral imperatives are categorical would have to claim that *she is irrational*. But that we cannot do. Moral requirements do not *per se* give us reasons for acting. Moral reasons are available only for she who cares about moral good, Foot claims. It is in this sense that she claims that moral imperatives are conditional, or hypothetical.

McDowell does not agree: for him, as for Kant, moral imperatives are indeed categorical. Yet he does grant Foot that *there is no irrationality in not conforming to them*. His strategy for spelling this out is to focus on the virtuous person. He is never fully explicit about what a virtuous person is (nor need he be, he thinks). In McDowell’s eyes, that there are virtuous persons is simply the starting point for understanding morality as an exercise of reason. For the virtuous person the thing to do in a particular situation is objective, it is simply there to be seen. This is so because the virtuous person is distinguished by the way she reads (conceives of) events: the way she perceives things to be gives her the reasons to do x. In other words, the virtuous person recognizes requirements in situations: no further desires need to be added to that.

It is easy to see that in the arena of moral philosophy it matters to put things in such terms against the Humean. This is because the Humean sees reason (i.e. the representing of circumstances) as motivationally inert – it is my having a brute desire for E which constitutes my having a reason to pursue E. For the Humean there is thus a gap between representing things as thus and so – which does not move one to act – and being moved to act; such gap can only be filled by a desire.

Naturally, a whole view of perception goes with McDowell's criticism of the Humean belief-desire model¹¹. Yet the main point for my purposes here is that McDowell thinks that there is no such thing, for human agents such as ourselves, as a neutral perception of facts which is shared by every perceiver, to which a motivational layer is then added. He also thinks that beliefs are themselves motivating. And then if in a given situation someone does not see X as the thing to do (e.g. I do not see that I ought to my debt to Susana) this happens not because she lacks the desire a virtuous person has but because she does not see reality the same way a virtuous person does.

So Foot thinks that moral imperatives are hypothetical and thus Kant was wrong whereas McDowell thinks moral imperatives are categorical and Kant was right. They do give us the thing to do unconditionally in that there is no supplementary desire needed for being motivated to do the thing to do. It is here that Hume was wrong. Yet the fact that one does not see certain traits of moral reality is no sign of irrationality. For McDowell moral requirements are categorical *not because they are recognizable by every rational being* but because once they are recognized they necessarily motivate those who see them. In McDowell's expression *moral reasons silence every other reason present*.

It is important to notice that McDowell does not share Kant's rationality-based universalism. This is partly because the question for him, when it comes to understanding our moral experience and responsiveness to reasons, is seeing (i.e. conceiving things a certain way), and not (immediately) reasoning. This means that no rational argument can bring an agent to see a situation a certain way. In order to see things as being a certain way one has to be the right sort of person, a virtuous person, and that involves *Bildung* i.e. education and custom, and thus second nature. McDowell's account of responsiveness to moral reasons is definitely not a view of Platonic reasons: it involves the circumstances the agent is in and the agent's capacities to see moral saliences. The virtuous person has an understanding of the situation which involves not only having the belief that there is something to do but also being motivated to do it. She sees the thing to do; for her the thing to do is objective. Even if there is no external standpoint to recognize them truth and objectivity are present in moral perceptions and situations.

The most important point about rationality here, anyway, is that being virtuous is not something which separates rational from irrational people. It is rather a matter of *Bildung*, of training of the practical intellect so that certain reasons to act become visible for an agent. In other words, the exercise of our moral capacities is dependent on the tuning and

¹¹ The classic formulation of McDowell's position on perception can be found in *Mind and World* (1994). According to McDowell, although a perceiver's sub-personal cognitive states cannot be thought of as representations proper, perceptual experiences themselves represent things as being a certain way. A perceiving is a taking-to-be, which then is (or not) endorsed by judgement. In more recent formulations (namely in his 2009 article *Avoiding the Myth of the Given*), McDowell speaks of perceivings as *seemings* and thus claim-like. 'Claim' is a term of Wilfrid Sellars, a term which McDowell thinks is 'wrong in the letter but right in spirit'. For McDowell's conceptualist view of perception and what it stands opposed to in current philosophy of perception see Miguens 2019.

sharpening of (moral) perception by education. It is always in particular circumstances that virtue becomes an habit, and thus ‘second nature’ to a particular human.

Notice that if things are so with our moral capacities, then not only ethics cannot be formalized into a set rules to be applied in similar cases (knowing the thing to do in each case cannot be deduced from general principles, since it requires judgement in context) but also matters ethical in general will turn out to be quite different in nature from what one might have expected. They will turn out on matters of perceiving things in certain ways and in that sense close to perceptual judgements. Imagine that I am watching a woman being stoned to death for adultery and I see it as unimaginably cruel – and still the person next to me sees it as rightful. There will never be anything like a rational proof of a judgement such as ‘To stone an adulterous woman to death is cruel and unrightful’. But McDowell’s point is that this does not *per se* mean that reason is not involved in the agent’s thinking in any particular circumstances what the thing to do (or not to do) is.

Is this not clear relativism? It is certainly a picture in which recognizing the objectivity of moral reasons is dependent on capacities which are admittedly parochial. The problem is, how do we know that it is our eyes that are opened to the *right reasons* and not somebody else’s eyes? McDowell is aiming for a very difficult balance: since for him there is no such thing as universality of rationality, he cannot defend that moral reasons are universal. He is not a strict Kantian here. Moral reasons are objective only in that they necessarily appeal to rational beings for whom virtue has become second nature. Notice though, and that is what interests me most here, that according to McDowell not only no appeal is possible to the universality of rationality as foundation for morality but also there is also nothing like a *natural foundation for morality*. No appeal to our first nature, our animality, will ever open the doors of moral experience: only reason does. This second point is thus clearly Kantian: morality simply cannot be read off our animality, our first nature. Morality is a matter of reason. This is so in the sense that moral capacities are rational capacities, they are conceptual, and contextually tuned; they are not a rechanneling of natural impulses. Being rational for a natural creature is being able to step behind natural impulses and ask for reasons and according to McDowell there is no fixed way of doing that. That is the point of the thought experiment of the rational wolf – this is why the thought experiment is about freedom. It is being rational that brings freedom to a (human) animal.

Moral experience (II): the place of value in the natural world.

A view of value is a further element of McDowell’s account of our moral capacities. How are we to understand our capacity to see value? *Can it fit the viewpoint of natural science upon nature?* This is the question famously posed by J.L.Mackie’s, whose error-theory answers it negatively. Spelling out what is wrong with such answer, and what underlies it, is crucial for McDowell.

The error-theorist grants that our evaluative discourse has cognitive content. We see actions as cruel or generous, as just and unjust. It does seem to us that there is value in the

world. Yet there is not. It is a massive error, an illusion: values are not part of the fabric of the world, Mackie claims.

In “Values and Secondary Qualities”¹² McDowell takes the steps he believes are needed to counter this sort of approach: basically he proceeds to bring apart the conception of nature and value it is built upon. Ultimately he proposes that in order to be moral realists we do not have to think of moral properties as primary properties, or assume that the world as it is in itself can only be described in terms of primary properties. In fact, it is this idea of the world as it is in itself that is a fantasy. An analogy with colour does work here. Colours are not less real because they are to be understood in terms of the object’s disposition to present a certain kind of perceptive appearance and thus in terms of how they appear to a subject. The property of an object ‘being red’ is to be understood as ‘being in certain way such that under certain circumstances it appears red’ to a mind. Moral properties, like colour properties, depend on being perceived by subjects with the appropriate sensibility in certain circumstances. There is no such thing as ‘being red’ which is not appearing red to some mind. Yet this does not *per se* mean that such qualities are not there to be perceived independent of that particular appearing to a particular mind. Such properties are not subjective in the sense of being illusory. They are not illusory –in fact they are there to be experienced (by many minds).

McDowell’s main point here is that a conception of the world should include room for experience of the world and for what there is from the viewpoint of such experience – and this is not the case with Mackie’s conception. His conception of the world, or nature, is, in McDowell’s term, simply too thin; it identifies nature with the content of a view from nowhere, where there are only primary properties. Such view of nature should, according to McDowell, be rejected.

Of course, there is another alternative here. We might regard value not as illusion but simply as spreading (ourselves) unto the world. This is what Hume did, and this is the point in contemporary moral philosophy of e.g. Simon Blackburn’s projectivist quasi-realism, a Humean, i.e. a non-cognitivist, view of our moral capacities¹³.

The neo-Humean sees our moral judgements not as descriptions of reality but as expressions of our attitudes before it. According to Humean projectivism, properties that seem to genuinely belong to objects are just a projection or reflex of our subjective responses to a world which in fact does not contain such properties. Blackburn’s account of this situation, i.e. his quasi-realism, is McDowell’s target in “Projection and Truth in Ethics” and “Non-cognitivism and Rule-Following”.

According to McDowell the projectivist makes one all important mistake: she explains genuine traits of reality as reflexes of our subjective responses. According to the

¹² McDowell 1998a.

¹³ Blackburn 1984.

projectivist, there is priority and explanatory independence of our subjective responses in relation to the aspects to be explained. McDowell's claim is that there is no such priority: our feelings and traits of reality are paired as siblings, not as parents and children. Neither are moral properties prior and independent to our subjective responses as the realist would have it, nor are our subjective responses prior to moral qualities as the projectivist thinks¹⁴.

The opponent can obviously point out that McDowell's no-priority view is circular, and needs to appeal to something like the default human sensibility; the opponent naturally doubts that there could be such thing. The view is also obviously conservative: Blackburn accuses McDowell of merely citing or postulating the ethical verdicts of our own concepts and practices. These are the accusations McDowell is defending himself from in "Non-cognitivism and Rule-Following". His claim is that when we say that acting virtuously is what the virtuous person does that is simply the end of the line. We cannot go any further; there is no way out of this circle. The situation simply reflects the fact that we cannot think of value from without our evaluative experience. But that does not mean that there is no value or that value is merely a reflex of our responses. Only if we believe that it is possible to step back from our ongoing practices to ground them, will we believe that a realism dependent on human sensibility is not sufficient. But for McDowell there is no sideways-on view available here; we cannot transcend our practices nor our parochial viewpoint towards a supposed 'reality such as it is in itself'. When it comes to accounting for our moral capacities there is nothing to look for beyond that which we have learned when we were introduced into a practice. There is nothing to keep us on the rails, in McDowell's celebrated simile¹⁵, except for the shared practices themselves. Practices are all we have, even to account for the *rightness* of practices.

Conclusion: McDowell, Kant and Boyle's transformative view of rationality

Even if I have been looking for convergences between Kant and McDowell in their views of practical reason, McDowell's naturalism and his focus on virtue should *prima facie* preclude any deep affinity with Kant. That is not the case though: such deep affinity exists, at least in McDowell's eyes. I have been suggesting that one place to look for the affinity are the relations between our animality and our rationality: these are at the heart of McDowell's philosophical anthropology. The most general question of McDowell's view of practical reason is the relation between animality and rationality in our own being. This is why globally considered McDowell's naturalism, in moral philosophy and elsewhere, takes the shape of a fight, the fight against the ungrounded attraction of what he sees as bad metaphysics¹⁶. By this he means empiricism, what he calls bald scientific empiricism.

¹⁴ Here McDowell is obviously not a Kantian in a strict sense: Kant's view of value is ultimately that the only unconditionally good thing is a good will.

¹⁵ McDowell 1998g, p. 91.

¹⁶ Naturally McDowell's Wittgensteinian conception of philosophy informs the whole approach. See Miguens 2019.

Here too we might see an affinity with Kant.

Kant said in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that «The concept of freedom is the stumbling block for all *empiricists*.» (Kant, 5:8);^[17] McDowell would agree. In fact McDowell believes there is a spell, which he thinks should be broken, hanging over the discussions of the nature of reasons and value above, and many other discussion in philosophy (e.g. on meaning). The spell is, according to him, the picture of shallow empiricist naturalism which has us accept that what science aims to discover is nature of reality in so far as it can be characterized in absolute terms, as a view from nowhere. This is what leads to forms of naturalism based on a concept of nature according to which meaning and value are, in McDowell's expression, 'injected from the outside'. In contrast, as we saw in the cases of reasons for acting and of value, a naturalist such as McDowell has come to accept that he is dealing with the interior of nature. He sees moral values as attuned to particular sensibilities and moral properties as anthropocentric but real. He sees responsiveness to reasons as not attached to anything like universal rationality yet still objective. He believes that we examine our moral practices from within, and that in doing that there is no possibility of dissociating descriptive from normative elements. He thinks that there is no such thing as evaluatively neutral reality onto which moral judgement projects, or injects, our values. Such picture is of course not in itself thoroughly Kantian; the affinity with Kant lies in the move of countering the naturalist-empiricist picture¹⁷. But the affinities do not stop there.

I now want to introduce my final suggestion and give a name to what I believe a Kantian orientation consists in, methodologically speaking. McDowell's approach to our moral experience is an instance of a *transformative view* of rationality, as defended by Matthew Boyle (Boyle 2016). McDowell's philosophy in general and his moral philosophy in particular is a view of rationality, a view of our conceptual capacities. It is a framework in which to think of ourselves as a rational beings and position us in the world (actually, he is happy to call the world 'nature', and this is not indifferent – someone like, e.g. Heidegger, would never do it). What such framework does is to depict our rationality as second nature to our first nature – to our animality. It is also a view of rationality according to which there is no stepping outside *our own* rationality and this is the gist of what Matt Boyle calls a transformative view of rationality¹⁸. A transformative view of rationality contrasts with the 'additive views of rationality' which are taken for granted by the naturalist-empiricist-reductionist approaches which are dominating in large swaths of philosophy and cognitive science, including, naturally, much research on emotion. This is how Boyle sees the contrast:

Additive theories of rationality, as I use the term, are theories that hold that an account of our

¹⁷ Also by Wittgenstein, of course.

¹⁸ Boyle 2016.

capacity to reflect on perceptually-given reasons for belief and desire-based reasons for action can begin with an account of what it is to perceive and desire, in terms that do not presuppose any connection to the capacity to reflect on reasons, and then can add an account of the capacity for rational reflection, conceived as an independent capacity to ‘monitor’ and ‘regulate’ our believing-on-the-basis-of-perception and our acting-on-the-basis-of-desire (Boyle 2016, p. 527).

There is no such thing for McDowell, as there is not for Boyle. We cannot begin with such an account because we are simply not in the position for that¹⁹. I suggest that this be seen as a Kantian point updated. We cannot have an account of what it is to perceive or desire, or, to take my example of an empirical field of research, we cannot have an account of emotion, in terms that do not presuppose any connection to the capacity to reflect on reasons and then add to it an account of the capacity for rational reflection. This is a crucial point when we thinking of the appeal to first nature facts (e.g. neuroscience or affective science research on emotion) about ourselves and amounts to a critical stance on many current naturalisms. McDowell is right that most current naturalists do not pay sufficient attention to the concept of nature²⁰. And I believe he is right that this is partly explained by the fact that more often than not they are under the spell of a picture, the picture of shallow empiricist naturalism. What McDowell does then is to offer an alternative to such picture, one which starts from the idea that we cannot step outside our rational capacities to characterize our own first nature. Our rational capacities do neither involve a flight into a space outside nature (as Platonistic universalist views of rationality and reasons would see them doing) nor are they merely a rechannelling of natural impulses. In fact, and that is why focusing on the moral shape of our rational capacities is illuminating, there is no natural foundation for morality. For a natural creature being rational is being able to step behind natural impulses and ask for reasons. There is no fixed way of doing that. That is the point of freedom in the thought experiment of the rational wolf.

If a view of conceptual capacities is the core of any account of human moral sensibility and human emotional life, as McDowell thinks should be the case, then any view of emotions as ‘atomized’ states and conditions, will turn out to be at least insufficient, or in need of supplementation, by a broader picture, a philosophical anthropology. It is such project of a philosophical anthropology that McDowell is engaged in, as Kant was. McDowell’s philosophical anthropology takes the shape of an account of the relation between our animality and rationality, an account whose pinnacle is freedom.

Until now I have been keeping my eyes on parallels between Kant and McDowell. Still, it

¹⁹ In his article Boyle identifies two particular difficulties for the additive approach, each one in fact analogous to a classic problem for Cartesian dualism. The interaction problem concerns how capacities conceived as intrinsically independent of the power of reason can interact with this power in what is intuitively the right way. The unity problem concerns how an additive theorist can explain a rational subject’s entitlement to conceive of the animal whose perceptual and desiderative life he or she oversees as ‘I’ rather than ‘it’. He argues that such difficulties motivate a general skepticism about the additive approach to rationality.

²⁰ Appealing to first nature facts, as many contemporary naturalists do, is a move that comes too close to a single view of what natural is for a rational animal. McDowell thinks such is undue.

should by now be clear that McDowell's approach to moral experience also takes some inspiration from Aristotle and could in fact as such (independently) be seen as a suggestion for those who study cognition²¹. What is most specifically Kantian in McDowell's view is certainly not the emphasis on context and second nature – that comes from Aristotle – but rather the emphasis on freedom and on the connection of freedom with 'human nature', i.e. on what it is for humans to be human. The questions concerning the authority of reason, categorical imperatives, the viewpoint of reason, all lead to the question of freedom.

Again, what should we think of emotion in this picture? Of course emotions do matter, and they seem to bring in a conception of ourselves as bodies much more than as reason. Our minds as individually embodied are intrinsically affective. Emotions do mark a continuity of life and mind. Yet freedom is in fact a break in what can otherwise be seen as such continuity of life and mind. This is what we may take Kant to have thought and McDowell thinks too. What McDowell does then is to give us a picture of what freedom consists in for a rational animal, in a world – our world. He is proposing that freedom lies where reason lies – this is a conceptual matter for a thinker who is an agent, not so much a matter of our embodied individuality. So no matter what the outcome of the current empirical research on emotions might be – whether somatic theories, cognitivist theories, or hybrid theories win the game – the philosophical question at the center of philosophical anthropology, the question of freedom, persists, and will not be decided empirically. Empirical research leaves out freedom as it matters to Kant and McDowell – as often has been the case throughout the history of the empiricist tradition in philosophy.

It is in such context that McDowell, the naturalist, says about Kant, the anti-naturalist, that:

It takes reflection on Kant, of all people, to show us the way to an acceptable picture of the relation of reason to nature. (McDowell 1998f, p. 197)

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²¹ This would go along the following lines. Moral sensibility is a perceptual capacity. Perception of saliences resist decomposition into pure awareness together with appetitive states. Knowledge constituted by reliable sensibility is a necessary condition for the possession of a virtue. Virtue is an ability to recognize requirements that a given situation imposes on one's behaviour.

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