

MCDOWELLIAN NEO-MOOREANISM

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ABSTRACT. It is claimed that McDowell's treatment of scepticism offers a potential way of resurrecting the much derided 'Moorean' response to scepticism in a fashion that avoids the problems facing classical internalist and externalist construals of neo-Mooreanism. I here evaluate the prospects for a McDowellian neo-Mooreanism and, in doing so, offer further support for the view.

1. MOOREANISM

Consider the following three-part response to the standard formulation of the radical sceptical problem, a response which mirrors in key respects the 'commonsense' proposal often ascribed to G. E. Moore, and which is regarded with almost wholesale derision.¹ The first part of the anti-sceptical response is to claim that one knows a paradigm 'everyday' proposition—i.e., a proposition that all of us would think we know, in those circumstances—such as, to use a famous example, that one has two hands. A claim of this sort is surely intuitive. The second part of the response is to note that since having two hands is inconsistent with the relevant sceptical hypothesis, such as the hypothesis that one is a (handless) brain-in-a-vat (BIV), it follows that if one knows that one has two hands then one also knows the denial of the relevant sceptical hypothesis, in this case that one is not a BIV. Again, this claim is also intuitive. Finally, the third part of the response is the extraction of the anti-sceptical conclusion that one knows the denial of the relevant sceptical hypothesis, in this case that one is not a BIV. Here, then, is a run-down of the argument, sticking to the BIV hypothesis throughout:

¹ For my own part I actually think there is a lot more (if you'll excuse the pun) going on in Moore's writings on scepticism than Mooreanism suggests, but I will not be getting into this exegetical issue since it is Mooreanism, rather than Moore's own nuanced anti-sceptical view, which is my focus here. For Moore's two key writings on scepticism, see Moore (1925; 1939). For an overview of some of the exegetical issues in this regard, see Baldwin (1993).

Mooreanism

- M1. I know that I have two hands.
 M2. If I know that I have two hands, then I know that I'm not a BIV.
 MC. I know that I'm not a BIV.

It is important to the Moorean view that there is nothing more to the stance than the presentation of an argument of this sort. The sceptic has called our knowledge into question, via the presentation of the sceptical hypothesis, and the Moorean, via his opposing argument, has rebutted the sceptic's claims. Thus, there is no case to answer, and hence nothing more that needs to be said. In this sense, then, the Moorean stance is a *pre-theoretical* proposal, in that it attempts to deal with the sceptical challenge in an entirely commonsense way which avoids the need for a theoretical response to the problem.

There are a number of problems with the Moorean strategy, but I will not be attempting to elucidate them all here.² Instead, I will just mention three key problems with the view.

Perhaps the most common complaint levelled at the Moorean argument is that there is something question-begging about responding to the sceptical problem in this way, in that it simply takes as an unquestioned premise in its argument the denial of the very claim that the sceptic will want to motivate as a conclusion of her argument. Call this the *dialectal impropriety* objection.³

We can get a grip on what the problem is here by considering the sceptical argument that the Moorean stance is supposed to be a response to. Keeping to the first-person, as Moore does, and sticking with the examples used above of having two hands and not being a BIV, we can formulate the opposing sceptical argument as follows:

Scepticism

- S1. I don't know that I'm not a BIV.
 S2. If I know that I have two hands, then I know that I'm not a BIV.
 SC. I don't know that I have two hands.

² See Pritchard (forthcominga) for a fairly comprehensive list.

³ See, for example, Wright (2002) for a complaint against Mooreanism of this sort.

Both of these premises are intuitive. The first is intuitive because it seems that whether or not we are BIVs is just something that we could never know because sceptical scenarios are defined such that there is nothing in our experiences that could offer us any definitive indication one way or another as to whether we are the victim of such a scenario. The second premise is exactly the same as the second premise in the Moorean argument, which we saw was intuitive above. This premise can be further motivated in terms of the closure principle:

Closure

For all S , φ , ψ , if S knows φ , and knows that φ entails ψ , then S also knows ψ .⁴

Closure certainly seems plausible, since it is hard to see how this principle could fail. How one could know one proposition, know that it entailed a second proposition, and yet fail to know the second proposition? Crucially, however, with closure in play—and given that one knows the relevant entailment, as presumably one does—it follows that if one knows that one has two hands then one also knows that one is not a BIV. We thus get the second premise, motivated in terms of the highly intuitive closure principle.

With these two premises in hand, however, the sceptical conclusion immediately follows. And since this argument can be repeated with any number of everyday propositions (one would just have to vary the sceptical hypothesis to suit), so the full intellectually devastating radical sceptical conclusion—that we are unable to know most of the empirical propositions which we typically think we know—is in the offing.

With the sceptical argument and the Moorean argument set side-by-side, one can see that the debate here encapsulates that old philosophical chestnut that one philosopher's *modus ponens* is another philosopher's *modus tollens*. Whereas the Moorean takes his everyday knowledge as secure and argues on this basis that he also has the required anti-sceptical knowledge, the sceptic begins by highlighting the implausibility of anti-sceptical knowledge and argues on this basis that we also lack everyday knowledge. With the debate so construed, however, one can see why the Moorean strategy can seem so dialectically inappropriate. The sceptic has given us an apparently compelling argument for thinking that

⁴ One might want to modify this principle in a number of ways in order to deal with potential counterexamples of a trivial sort (such as possible cases where the agent doesn't even believe the entailed proposition), but this unembellished version of closure should suffice for our purposes here.

we lack everyday knowledge. In response, the Moorean simply helps himself to the denial of the contested conclusion and reasons on this basis to the negation of the premise of the sceptical argument. Given that the Moorean argument begins and ends with this strategy, it is little wonder that few find it persuasive. At the very least, some sort of diagnostic story needs to be offered by the Moorean to explain away the intuitive appeal of scepticism, since without such a story we seem to be passing the problem by. Part of this diagnostic story will inevitably involve an epistemological theory to back up the view—a theory which explains, for example, why we can know the denials of sceptical hypotheses after all, contrary to our first intuitions on this score.

A second, and related, difficulty with the Moorean response is that it seems to offer us, at most, a *draw* with the sceptic, rather than a resolution of the sceptical problem. After all, given that the sceptical argument is just the *modus tollens* to Moore's *modus ponens*, and since both arguments have intuitive premises, it appears that the dialectical situation is that we are faced with two opposing arguments of equal force. If this is right, then even despite the Moorean argument we still have just as much reason to be sceptics as to be Mooreans. Put another way, it is still the case on the Moorean view that we have no good reason *not* to be sceptics. This is a kind of second-order scepticism which, while not obviously reducible to its first-order cousin (which would hold that we have reason to be sceptics), is still enough to make Moorean anti-scepticism not nearly as intellectually satisfying as it might at first appear. Call this the *impasse* objection.⁵

Finally, a third key problem with Mooreanism is that the Moorean argument seems to consist of a series of assertions which strike one as conversationally inappropriate, if not just plain absurd or contentless. As a number of commentators have noted—most trenchantly Wittgenstein (1969) in his final notebooks—the assertions in question in the Moorean argument seem to offend against our usual usage of the term 'know'. This phrase plays a very special role in our practices of knowledge self-ascription, but, crucially, not one that seems applicable to the kind of anti-sceptical assertions that the Moorean makes. We never normally say that we know the denials of sceptical hypotheses, and neither do we usually say that we know everyday propositions which are just plain obvious to everyone in that

⁵ Wright (1991) discusses this '*impasse*' objection to Mooreanism, and offers an argument which shows that the second-order scepticism which results collapses into first-order scepticism.

conversational context. Call this the *conversational impropriety* objection.

Although not at all an exhaustive list, these three objections do capture the heart of the difficulties facing Mooreanism, and thus highlight the work that a neo-Moorean view, one which can evade the problems facing Mooreanism, has to do.

2. CONTEMPORARY NEO-MOOREANISM

While no-one is persuaded by the Moorean anti-sceptical view, there are positions available in the literature which broadly mirror such a stance, what I have elsewhere termed “neo-Moorean” theories (Pritchard 2002b: §8; cf. Pritchard 2002c). The chief distinctive aspect of this sort of anti-sceptical theory is that it confronts the sceptical problem head-on by allowing that we can know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. Accordingly, the view avoids scepticism while retaining the closure principle by denying the first premise in the sceptic’s argument, (S1). Furthermore, neo-Mooreanism achieves this while avoiding, as much as possible, epistemological revisionism.⁶

One of the key issues facing neo-Mooreanism is how to explain how we can know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. The standard line in this regard usually adverts to some form of the safety principle for knowledge, as defended, for example, by Ernest Sosa (1999). This principle holds, roughly, that what is essential to knowledge is that one has a belief that could not have easily been false. The basic idea is that provided sceptical error-possibilities are indeed far-fetched, then it follows that one’s true belief that one is not a victim of such an error-possibility will be such that it couldn’t have easily been false, and so can count as knowledge.

⁶ This aversion to revisionism is why standard contextualist anti-sceptical theories—as defended, for example, by DeRose (1995), Lewis (1996), and Cohen (e.g., 2000)—would not count as neo-Moorean proposals, even though they also allow that we can know the denials of sceptical hypotheses. This is because the contextualist achieves this by offering a complex and revisionistic philosophical theory about how our use of the term ‘knows’ is highly context-sensitive. For the neo-Moorean, however, such revisionism is unnecessary, and merely distracts one from offering the straightforward neo-Moorean response to the sceptic that is both required and available. For more on the relative merits of neo-Moorean and contextualist anti-sceptical theories, see Pritchard (2005a: part one; forthcominga).

The underlying motivation for safety comes from the intuition that what is essential to knowledge is that it is non-lucky true belief, where the safety principle captures the heart of this anti-luck intuition. Thus, the claim is that provided that one's environment is epistemically friendly, then one's anti-sceptical beliefs will not be lucky and hence can count as instances of knowledge.⁷

Clearly, however, the neo-Moorean cannot leave the story there, since we still need to be told how the neo-Moorean stance can avoid the problems which we saw afflicting Mooreanism. Moreover, we are also owed an explanation of the evidential basis of this anti-sceptical knowledge. In order to begin filling-in some of this detail it is essential that we first factor the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction into this discussion, since the nature of the further detail will dependent upon which side of this contrast one stands.

By epistemic internalism, I mean *access* internalism such that what makes an epistemic condition (i.e., a condition which, perhaps in conjunction with other epistemic conditions, can turn true belief into knowledge) an internal epistemic condition is that the agent concerned is able to know by reflection alone those facts which determine that this condition has been met. Meeting the justification condition, for example, at least as it is standardly conceived, involves the possession of grounds in support of the target belief, where these grounds—and the fact that they are supporting grounds—is reflectively accessible to the subject. Epistemic externalism denies this, and so holds that there are epistemic conditions which do not demand reflective access on the part of the subject of this sort. I will understand internalism about knowledge as being the view that meeting a substantive internal epistemic condition is *necessary* for knowledge possession, with externalism about knowledge as the denial of this thesis.⁸

⁷ For more on the issue of how to formulate safety, and its connections to anti-luck epistemology, see Pritchard (2005a, *passim*; 2005b; forthcomingb).

⁸ There are other ways of drawing the classical internalism/externalism distinction of course. One could put the point in terms of supervenience rather than access—see, for example, Conee & Feldman (2000)—or one might weaken the internalist requirement by saying that one only needs reflective access to the supporting grounds for one's belief and not also to the fact that they are supporting grounds, as Alston (1988) suggests (though note that he doesn't regard this view as an internalist thesis as such). The account of the distinction offered here is fairly standard, however, and, I believe, it also gets to the heart of what is at issue in the key debates between epistemic externalists and internalists. For more on the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction in general, see Kornblith (2001).

In order to see this distinction in action, consider how it applies to some of the core cases over which internalists and externalists diverge, such as the chicken sexer case. Here we have an agent who is exhibiting a highly reliable cognitive ability (to distinguish between the sexes of chicks), and yet who has false beliefs about how she is doing what she is doing (she thinks she is using her senses of sight and touch, when actually it is her sense of smell) and who typically lacks good grounds for thinking that she is reliable in this respect. Clearly such an agent does not meet a substantive internal epistemic condition as we have just defined that notion. Nevertheless, that, for the externalist at least, there is still an issue about whether or not the agent has knowledge indicates that what is in question here is the *necessity* to knowledge of meeting such an internal epistemic condition, which is just as it should be given how I have just characterised the externalism/internalism contrast.⁹

There is also a further assumption which is common to the externalism/internalism debate, albeit not one that (as we will see in a moment) is shared by everyone. This is that what an agent has reflective access to can never be such as to entail any specific empirical fact. One's reason for believing that there is a chair in front of one cannot be, for example, that one *sees that* there is a chair in front of one (which entails that there is a chair there), but only, say, that it *seems to one as if* there is a chair in front of one (or some other non-factive description of one's reason) which clearly doesn't entail any specific empirical fact. With this further claim in mind, we get what I will call the *classical* externalist/internalist thesis. We will return to consider this assumption in more detail below.¹⁰

It ought to be clear straight away that motivating a classical internalist version of neo-Mooreanism is not going to be at all easy. This is primarily because it is hard to see how we could account for our knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses on this view. Loosely speaking, I take it that the worry here is that since there is nothing in our present experiences that we can, as it were, introspectively 'point' to in order to indicate that we are not the

⁹ For further discussion of the chicken-sexer example, see Foley (1987: 168-9), Lewis (1996), Zagzebski (1996: §2.1 & §4.1), and Brandom (1998).

¹⁰ This assumption is closely related to the 'new evil genius' intuition that is often put forward in the epistemological literature. Very roughly, this is the claim that the reflective accessible grounds possessed by an agent and her envatted counterpart are identical (or, at least, that the reflectively accessible grounds possessed by the agent can be no better than that possessed by her envatted counterpart). For the classical discussion of this intuition, see Lehrer & Cohen (1983).

victim of a radical sceptical hypothesis, it follows that we are unable to have adequate reflectively accessible grounds to support our beliefs in this respect. Accordingly, on an internalist account, lack of knowledge of the denials of sceptical hypotheses seems to follow fairly quickly.

One can put this point into sharper relief by considering what the evidential basis of our putative anti-sceptical knowledge would be on the classical internalist view. Consider the following ‘underdetermination’ principle:

Underdetermination

For all S , φ , ψ , if S knows φ , and S knows that φ entails ψ , then S 's evidence for believing φ favours φ over $\neg\psi$.¹¹

In essence, this principle demands that one's knowledge be evidentially supported, where evidential support here means support which *favours* what is believed over known to be incompatible alternatives (i.e., which provides *more* support for what is believed than it does for the known to be incompatible alternatives). So construed, the principle seems entirely uncontentious, since it is hard to see how one's evidence could be genuinely supporting evidence if it did not perform this ‘favouring’ function.

The trouble is, however, that once one feeds sceptical hypotheses into this principle in the context of a classical internalist epistemology, then one immediately generates the sceptical problem. Think, for example, of your belief that you are not a BIV. Clearly, one knows that being a BIV is inconsistent with not being a BIV. With underdetermination in mind, then, it follows that knowing that one is not a BIV requires one possessing reflectively accessible evidence which favours your not being a BIV over being a BIV. But how could there be such evidence on the classical internalist account? After all, it seems that your experiences could be just the same regardless of which of these hypotheses were true. Thus, it follows that you cannot know that you are not a BIV.

By the same token, one cannot know that one has, say, two hands, either. As before, it seems that one's experiences could be just the same regardless of whether one is a BIV who merely seems to have hands or one is in normal circumstances, and so on the classical

¹¹ For a thorough discussion of the underdetermination principle, including some of the different ways in which it can be formulated, see Pritchard (2005c).

internalist picture it seems one cannot have any reflectively accessible grounds which would favour the hypothesis that one has hands over the alternative hypothesis that one is a BIV. Accordingly, given that one knows full well that having hands is inconsistent with being a BIV, it follows that one cannot know that one has two hands, and much else besides.¹²

It is unsurprising, then, that there are very few neo-Moorean stances in the literature that are conceived along classically internalist lines.¹³ Classical externalism, on the other hand, is clearly on stronger ground when it comes to motivating a neo-Moorean position. After all, that one lacks adequate reflectively accessible grounds by classical internalist lights for believing that one is not a BIV will not on this view decide the issue of whether or not one can have knowledge of this proposition, since other factors, such as the reliability of the process through which one formed one's belief, can also be relevant. Moreover, on this view one can regard one's evidence as consisting of a lot more than simply that which is reflectively accessible to one. Thus, the path is cleared to allowing one's anti-sceptical knowledge to be evidentially grounded and thus to blocking the underdetermination-based sceptical challenge.¹⁴

Taking the externalist route out of the sceptical problem is not without its own difficulties, however, since there clearly is a strong intuitive pull towards epistemic internalism.¹⁵ Accordingly, the worry one might have is that by opting for an externalist version of neo-Mooreanism one fails to stay true to the commonsense credentials of

¹² One might want to qualify the underdetermination principle in order to accommodate the intuition that not *every* belief needs to be evidentially grounded in order to be an instance of knowledge. Notice, though, that such an amendment to the principle wouldn't necessarily make any real difference to its ability to generate sceptical conclusions. After all, it is surely the case that when it comes to *most* of our beliefs in empirical propositions that they are only evidentially grounded to a degree that would support knowledge provided that such evidence is able to play this 'favouring' role. And since the sceptic only needs to call the epistemic status of most of our beliefs in empirical matters into question in order to motivate her sceptical doubt, this weaker construal of the underdetermination principle would, it seems, serve the sceptic's purposes equally well.

¹³ Though see Pryor (2000) and Wright (2004). I critically discuss these views at length elsewhere. See Pritchard (2005d; forthcominga).

¹⁴ Elsewhere I have developed a neo-Moorean response to scepticism that runs along classical externalist lines in this way. See, for example, Pritchard (2005a: part one; forthcominga). One could also regard Williamson's response to scepticism as falling under this general category. See especially, Williamson (2000).

¹⁵ It is a concern of this sort that lies behind 'metaepistemological' challenges to externalist anti-sceptical theories. See, for example, Fumerton (1990) and Stroud (1994).

Mooreanism. If such revisionism is unavoidable, then this price might be worth paying to get a way out of the sceptical predicament. My interest here, however, is in whether there is a version of neo-Mooreanism available which is true to our internalist intuitions but which avoids the problems facing classical internalist renderings of the neo-Moorean thesis.

3. McDOWELLIAN NEO-MOOREANISM

I think that we can find such a position in the work of John McDowell (e.g., 1982; 1995), who offers an anti-sceptical thesis which has all the main features of neo-Mooreanism but which does not fit into the classical externalism/internalism contrast and which, as a result, is often either simply misunderstood or just plainly ignored.¹⁶ What is distinctive about it (amongst other things) is that while it is a version of epistemic internalism, in that it demands of a knower that she be in a position to know by reflection alone what the reasons which support her knowledge are (this view would not count the chicken sexer as a knower, for example), it is not a classical form of internalism since it does not share the further assumption of classical internalism noted above. In particular, McDowell argues that one's reasons can be both empirical and factive—i.e., can be reasons for believing an empirical proposition *and* entail what it is that they are a reason for.

As we noted above, it is tacitly accepted throughout epistemology that what one has reflective access to cannot extend beyond the 'inner' to take in factive empirical reasons in this way. According to McDowell, however, this conventional wisdom is false and leads to a philosophical picture which invites the sceptical challenge. Moreover, the source of the problem with this conventional wisdom, according to McDowell, is the failure to endorse the kind of content externalism that he has in mind.

McDowell's view is best thought of as a form of disjunctivism which is directly cast along epistemic lines. Disjunctivists hold that, contrary to the prevailing consensus on this matter, a veridical perceptual experience and its counterpart phenomenologically indistinguishable non-veridical experience each have a different content. That is, that each

¹⁶ For some of the (relatively very few) recent discussions of McDowell's response to scepticism, see Brandom (1995), Macarthur (2003), Greco (2004), Wright (2004), and Comesăna (forthcoming). As we will see below, many of these commentators simply misunderstand what McDowell is trying to say.

experience in such a pairing does not have the same content, even though the two experiences are, *ex hypothesi*, indistinguishable as far as the agent is concerned. A pairing of cases that would be relevant for our purposes would be the ordinary (or ‘good’) case—e.g., where one is simply sitting at one’s desk and having the associated perceptual experiences—and the counterpart sceptical (or ‘bad’) case—such as in which one is a BIV being ‘fed’ one’s experiences as if one is sitting at one’s desk. On the standard picture, we should treat the experiences in the two cases as having the same content, and thus as being the same experience. The disjunctivist, however, disagrees.

One would naturally expect disjunctivism to have ramifications for one’s epistemology, since on most standard views of perceptual knowledge the nature of one’s perceptual experience forms part of one’s perceptual evidence, and thus if one’s experiences are different in the two cases just considered, then so too must be one’s evidence. Rather than consider the general issue of whether disjunctivism about perceptual experience has this consequence for perceptual evidence, I want to focus instead on the specific McDowellian version of disjunctivism which directly expresses the disjunctivist point in epistemic terms. McDowell’s claim is that the subject’s reasons are different in the two cases, even though the two cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable to the subject. I will refer to this formulation of the thesis as *epistemological disjunctivism* to highlight the fact that the view is explicitly and directly advanced as an epistemological thesis, rather than being a thesis primarily about perceptual experience from which epistemological conclusions of the sort that McDowell has in mind may or may not be drawn.

In order to see McDowell’s epistemological disjunctivism in action, consider the following case—my believing, on the basis of (what I take to be) my perceptual experience, that John is in my office. In the good case, in which I am not deceived and so form my belief that John is in my office on the basis of my seeing that this is the case, then for McDowell my reason for believing that John is in my office will ordinarily simply be that I see that this is the case, where *seeing that* is factive in that one can only see that something is the case if it really is the case. I may have other reasons in favour of my belief, of course, but the point is that this is the ‘master’ reason in this regard since as a factive reason it is able to suffice, in

conjunction with the relevant belief formed on this basis, for perceptual knowledge.¹⁷

In contrast, consider the bad case in which I have what I would take to be the same experiences as in the good case, but in which I am in fact a BIV. In this case the factive reason would clearly be unavailable to me since I cannot *see* that John is in my office if I am a BIV. Instead, the supporting reason would be of a different form, such as that it seems to me as if John is in my office. Thus, even though the two cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable, on this view the nature of the supporting reasons for my beliefs in the two cases are different. McDowell's radical thesis is that even despite this, it remains that one's reasons are reflectively accessible to one, such that in the good case one's reflectively accessible reason in favour of one's belief is the factive empirical reason that one sees that John is in one's office.¹⁸

¹⁷ Presumably, it is not guaranteed on the McDowellian picture that I possess knowledge in the good case, since while there is in fact no deception taking place in the good case, it may be that there are (misleading) defeaters present which I should take into account and which undermine the possibility of possessing knowledge (perhaps I have been falsely told, for example, that I have been drugged, and I have no reason to doubt this). The good cases that we will consider, however, will be those paradigm cases in which there are no defeaters present, and thus where the agent is guaranteed to have knowledge, at least provided she forms her belief in the target proposition on the basis of the relevant reason(s). What is important for the McDowellian position, I take it, is only that there is a wide class of good cases of this sort, not that *every* good case is of this sort.

¹⁸ I take it that it is essential to the McDowellian view that one lacks perceptual knowledge in the bad case, so described, even if, as it happens, the belief in question is true—perhaps one is a freshly envatted BIV *and* John is presently in one's office. If this is the right way to read McDowell (he isn't altogether clear on this score), then he has a straightforward response to perceptual Gettier-style cases. Consider, for example, Chisholm's (1977: 105) 'sheep' example in which an agent is, or so he thinks, looking at a sheep in the next field and on this basis forms the true belief that there is a sheep in the next field. Unbeknownst to him, however, the 'sheep' he is looking at is in fact a large furry dog that looks like a sheep, but this doesn't affect the truth of his belief since there is a sheep in the field which is hidden from view behind a hedge. The agent thus has a true belief which is supported by good reflectively accessible grounds but which, intuitively, is not knowledge. Such cases present the challenge of explaining why perceptual knowledge is lacking in these cases even though—again, intuitively—it would be regarded as present in counterpart cases, such as a case in which the agent in the example just described is actually looking at a sheep in the field.

The McDowellian view, as I am here describing it, has an easy answer to this question, which is that, contrary to first appearances, the agent's perceptual reasons, and thus his reflectively accessible grounds, are different in the two cases, which is why the agent can have knowledge in the one case and not the other. In the good case the agent has perceptual knowledge because he is forming his true belief on the basis of a reflectively

This view clearly has fairly radical ramifications for the sceptical problem. On this picture, since, in the good case, it is possible to have perceptual knowledge on the basis of one's factive perceptual reasons, it follows that one's reasons in favour of one's target everyday perceptual belief can favour the proposition believed over sceptical alternatives. That is, one's reflectively accessible grounds in favour of one's everyday perceptual belief in the good case can be such that they *entail* that one is not in the sceptical scenario, and if this is right then they surely thereby *favour* one's belief in the everyday proposition over the sceptical alternative, thereby blocking one of the key moves in an underdetermination-based scepticism. Furthermore, in cases in which one has knowledge of the everyday perceptual proposition on this basis, and one knows that the proposition believed entails the falsity of a specific sceptical hypothesis, there ought to be no problem with also allowing that one has knowledge of the denial of this sceptical hypothesis, thereby enabling the McDowellian view to deal with the closure-based sceptical argument as well.

We saw above that there is, in principle at least, a classical epistemic externalist account of knowledge available which allows that the epistemic support one has for one's perceptual beliefs could favour the proposition believed over sceptical alternatives, thereby offering a response to both underdetermination and closure-based sceptical arguments. This was achieved, however, by allowing that such epistemic support was not fully reflectively available to the subject. In contrast, what is distinctive about the McDowellian stance is that the epistemic support in question—the agent's perception-based reasons—is of its nature reflectively accessible to the agent. Moreover, since McDowell allows that one's perception-based reflectively accessible reasons can be factive, he doesn't face the underdetermination problem we posed for classical internalist neo-Moorean stances above. Accordingly, if the position can be adequately motivated, then it offers a way of dealing with the sceptical

accessible factive empirical reason (in the example just described, this is his seeing that there is a sheep in the field). In contrast, in the corresponding Gettier-style case, the true belief is formed on the basis merely of it seeming to the agent as if there is a sheep in the field, and reasons of this sort do not by themselves suffice for perceptual knowledge. There is thus a straightforward explanation of why knowledge is lacking in perceptual Gettier-style cases, even though it is present in the non-Gettiered counterpart case. Moreover, note that the McDowellian account—in virtue of allowing factive perception-based reasons—offers this response to the perceptual Gettier problem without in the process eschewing the tripartite conception of perceptual knowledge as, essentially, justified true belief, even though Gettier-style cases are usually taken to show that such a view is unsustainable.

problem while staying broadly within the internalist epistemological model.

4. MOTIVATING McDOWELLIAN NEO-MOOREANISM

McDowell offers three main considerations in favour of his view. The first is that it enables us to deal with certain perennial epistemological problems, such as the problem of scepticism. We will consider this claim in more detail below.

The second is the contention that epistemological disjunctivism accords with a commonsense way of thinking, and talking, about perceptual reasons. That is, in response to a challenge to a claim to know I might well respond by citing a factive reason in defence of my claim, which suggests that we do, ordinarily at least, allow factive reasons to be our rational support for our knowledge.

For example, suppose I tell my boss over the phone that my colleague is in work today (thereby representing myself as knowing this to be the case), and she expresses scepticism about this (perhaps because she falsely believes that my colleague always skips work when she isn't there). In response I might naturally say that I know that she's in work today because I can *see that* she's in work—she's standing right in front of me.

The naturalness of this conversational exchange implies that it is McDowell who is working with the commonsense position, and his detractor who is offering the revisionistic view. Of course, this fact in itself may mean very little when set against the grander theoretical scheme, since sometimes our commonsense convictions are plainly wrong, and it is in any case notoriously hard to read our commonsense convictions off everyday language use in this way. Perhaps, for example, we only cite factive reasons in the way just described because we are implicitly bracketing the kind of error-possibilities which could count against the reason being factive. If that's right, then the citing of a factive reason has a kind of elliptical form—i.e., *given that certain shared presupposition of the conversational context hold*, then one's reason for believing *p* in these cases is that one sees that *p*. This description of events would, however, provide little support for McDowell's position.¹⁹

These complications aside, the importance of this appeal to commonsense lies, I take

¹⁹ I consider this possibility in detail in Pritchard (2003).

it, in the fact that if one is able to dress one's position up in the garments of commonsense, then this puts one's view into a default position relative to opposing views which revise our commonsense convictions. Such a default position is highly defeasible, of course, in large part because of the considerations just raised, but it is important to a thesis like McDowell's since on the face of it it is this view which represents the radical revisionary option in the light of the opposing prevailing conventional wisdom. If McDowell is right that we often speak in a way that would support his account, then this goes a long way towards levelling the dialectical playing field in this regard.

The third consideration McDowell offers in favour of his epistemological disjunctivism is a negative thesis to the effect that it is far from clear what prevents us from advancing a position of this sort. That is, proponents of the standard view about perception-based reasons seem to take it as given—and hence as not requiring further argument—that one's reasons must be the same in the good case and the counterpart sceptical case. The McDowellian claim, however, is that such a thesis is not obvious at all, and that once the argument is presented it is clear that it is problematic.

We can express the argument for the standard picture of perception-based reasons in terms of the following 'highest common factor' argument:

The Highest Common Factor Argument

- P1. In the 'bad' case, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs can only consist of the way the world appears to one. (Premise)
- P2. The 'good' and 'bad' cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable. (Premise)
- C1. So, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs in the 'good' case can be no better than in the 'bad' case. (From (P2))
- C2. So, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs can only consist of the way the world appears to one. (From (P1), (C1))

The idea behind the argument is that one's perceptual reasons are what is common to the two indistinguishable cases—i.e., the *highest common factor*. The first two premises are granted by McDowell, and it seems fairly clear that the ultimate conclusion, (C2), follows from the first premise and the penultimate conclusion, (C1). The joker in the pack is thus the move from the second premise to the penultimate conclusion.

Classical epistemic externalism certainly has grounds to resist a move of this sort, at

least where one's 'reasons' are understood broadly so that they do not presuppose an internalist construal—where they are simply understood as one's perceptual evidence, say. After all, there seems no obvious principled reason why an epistemic externalist should regard an agent's perceptual evidence as being limited in terms of what is phenomenologically distinguishable to the agent. The externalist could hold, for example, that the nature of one's perceptual evidence is in part determined by facts concerning the pedigree of the perceptual mechanism through which that evidence is gained—its reliability in the relevant environment, for example—facts which, on the classical externalist account, are not reflectively available to the subject. On a classical externalist picture of evidence of this sort, the nature of the perceptual evidence in each case would be different because of the different pedigree of the perceptual mechanisms concerned, even though the two cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable to the agent.

Indeed, a form of disjunctivism about perceptual epistemic support of the general type envisaged by McDowell is available to the classical epistemic externalist, since she could claim that whether that epistemic support is of a factive sort can be dependent upon further environmental facts obtaining which are not reflectively accessible to the subject. On this view, then, *either* one is in the good case and the epistemic support for one's perceptual belief is factive, *or* one is in the bad case and the epistemic support for one's perceptual belief is non-factive, merely phenomenal say (e.g., that one *seems* to see that such-and-such is the case). With such a disjunctivism in play, a way of blocking underdetermination-based scepticism becomes available, since one can claim that in the good case one has adequate evidential support for one's perceptual beliefs which, *qua* factive evidence, is able to favour the believed hypothesis over known to be incompatible sceptical alternative hypotheses, even though the two scenarios are phenomenologically indistinguishable.²⁰

McDowell's idea, however, is that one can help oneself to this sort of picture without thereby conceding that one's epistemic support, now construed again as one's reasons, needs

²⁰ Speaking loosely, one could describe Williamson's (2000) response to scepticism as being a classical externalist view of this sort. According to Williamson, one's evidence is identified with one's knowledge, and thus evidence is factive. Furthermore, Williamson also claims that the perceptual evidence one's experiences give rise to is not the same in the good and the bad cases. In the good case, one's experiences will give rise to factive perceptual evidence in favour of one's belief, even though the subjectively indistinguishable experiences in the bad case will not generate the same factive perceptual evidence.

to be understood such that it is reflectively unavailable to the subject. In effect, McDowell wants to claim that we can endorse *both* the (externalist) claim that one's perception-based reasons in the good case can be factive *and* the (internalist) claim that one's reasons must be reflectively accessible. McDowell thinks that even someone who endorses the thesis that one's reasons must be reflectively accessible can object to the move from (P2) to (C1). After all, on the picture of reflectively accessible reasons that he outlines, there *is* a difference in the agent's reasons in the two cases, but the agent's reasons are held to be no less reflectively accessible on account of this. The proponent of the highest common factor argument thus owes us an explanation of what is wrong with such a view before they can help themselves to the key move from (P2) to (C1).

Primarily, then, McDowell's contention is that the argument for the highest common factor account of perceptual reasons is underdeveloped, thus leaving open the possibility of an epistemological disjunctivism which he exploits. Still, I think many detractors of the McDowellian account are dissatisfied by a negative argument of this sort for the simple reason that they think there is a straightforward problem with epistemological disjunctivism, and thus that the highest common factor conception of perceptual reasons is the only game in town.

We can draw this problem out via the following putative *reductio* of the McDowellian view:

Putative Reductio of Epistemological Disjunctivism

- P1. In the 'bad' case, the supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs can only consist of the way the world appears to one. (Premise)
- P2. The 'good' and 'bad' cases are phenomenologically indistinguishable. (Premise)
- P3. One's reasons are reflectively available to one. (Premise)
- A1. The supporting reasons for one's perceptual beliefs in the good case can be factive. (Assumption for *reductio*)
- C1*. So, one is able to know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive perceptual reason in the good case. (From (P3), (A1))
- C2*. So, for all one can know by reflection alone, one could just as well be in the bad case than in the good case. (From (P2))
- C3*. So, one is unable to know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive perceptual reason in the good case. (From (C2*))

If this argument is allowed to stand then, since (C3*) contradicts (C1*), it will follow that the assumption, and with it epistemological disjunctivism, will have to be denied. We have already seen that the first two premises are accepted by McDowell, and he will also accept the third premise too. In addition, the move from (P3) and (A1) to (C1*) ought to be uncontroversial by McDowell's lights. The move to (C2*), however, is certainly problematic for a McDowellian. After all, according to McDowell, there *is* a difference between what is reflectively available to the agent in the bad case and what is reflectively available in the good case, since it is only in the good case that the agent has the relevant factive perception-based reason available to her. By McDowell's lights, therefore, the inference to (C2*) simply begs the question, meaning that (C2*) and, with it, (C3*), will not be allowed to stand.

This point highlights where the source of the opposition lies when it comes to epistemological disjunctivism and the highest common factor conception of perceptual experience. Proponents of the latter view claim that since there is no phenomenological difference between the good case and the bad case, so there can be nothing reflectively available to the subject that could indicate that she is in the good case. According to the epistemological disjunctivist, however, this is not so, since if one is in the good case then it is reflectively accessible to one that one is in possession of a factive perceptual reason, and one could only be in possession of such a reason provided that one is in the good case. Thus, there is something reflectively available to one that entails that one is in the good case even though there is no phenomenological difference between the good case and the bad case.

The proponent of the highest common factor conception of perceptual reasons will no doubt find this claim puzzling, and part of the reason for this puzzlement is, I think, that on the face of it this claim seems to entail that one can know, by reflection alone, that one is in the good case (and thus not in the bad case), and this does not seem at all plausible. I think we can show, however, that this is not a consequence of the view, and in so doing provide a crucial plank of support for McDowell's position.

5. McDOWELL'S 'MCKINSEY' PROBLEM

In order to do this, I first want to consider a second objection that one might level against

McDowell's view which, as we will see, is closely related. The objection that I have in mind is one that mirrors the famous 'McKinsey' puzzle that concerns the supposed compatibility of first-person authority and content externalism.²¹ For it seems that on the McDowellian view one can use one's reflective access to one's factive empirical reasons, along with one's reflective knowledge of the relevant entailment (i.e., from the factive empirical reason to the empirical fact), to acquire reflective, and thus non-empirical, knowledge of the empirical proposition which the reason is a reason for (e.g., that John is in one's office). We can express this argument roughly as follows:

McDowell's Putative 'McKinsey' Problem

- P1'. In the good case, one is able to know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive empirical reason. (Premise)
- P2'. One is able to know by reflection alone that if one is in possession of a factive empirical reason for believing the empirical proposition *p*, then *p*. (Premise)
- C1'. So, in the good case, one is able to know by reflection alone the empirical proposition *p*.
(From (P1'), (P2'))

Intuitively, this is just a *reductio* of the view, since one ought not to be able to come to know specific empirical truths by reflection alone.²² Indeed, this *reductio* in part explains, I think, why very few commentators have taken McDowell's position seriously and have stuck instead to the conventional wisdom on reflective access to reasons that is implicit in the

²¹ For more on this problem, see Nuccetelli (2003).

²² I say 'specific' empirical truths since it is not nearly so obvious that it would be counterintuitive to suppose that one could know *general* empirical truths by reflection alone. Indeed, given the historical popularity of transcendental arguments, it would be odd if it were counterintuitive to suppose that one could know general empirical truths by non-empirical means. To take a contemporary example, consider Davidson's (1986: 314) claim that "belief is in its nature veridical". If this is true *a priori*, and one can know non-empirically that one has beliefs, then it follows that one can know non-empirically that most of one's beliefs are true, a proposition which is clearly empirical. Although some may find such a conclusion objectionable, it would hardly stand by itself as a *reductio* of the view, and most who do object to this conclusion would surely grant that it is not obviously counterintuitive.

classical way of drawing the externalism/internalism contrast in epistemology.²³

It is not obvious, however, that McDowell's position is subject to a problem of this sort. The reason for this is that the difficulty only emerges if one *acquires* non-empirical knowledge by running through an inference of this type, and it is far from clear why, on the McDowellian view, this would be so. In particular, the McDowellian conception of perceptual knowledge in these cases is such that one could only be in a position to run through such an inference provided one already has the empirical knowledge in question, and thus the problem concerning the non-empirical acquisition of empirical knowledge does not arise.

In order to see this, one only needs to recall that for McDowell a factive reason for believing p , in conjunction with a belief that p which is based on that factive reason, will suffice for knowledge that p . Note, however, that reflective accessibility is itself factive, in that if one is in a position to reflectively access that one has a factive reason for believing p , then it must be the case that one has that factive reason for believing p . Furthermore, even though the possession of the factive reason is consistent with non-belief in the target proposition on the McDowellian view,²⁴ it is obviously not going to be possible for someone to run through the reasoning described above without in the process acquiring the reason-based belief in the target proposition, thereby meeting all the conditions required on this view for empirical knowledge in this case. Thus, given the further trivial claim that if one has empirical knowledge of p then one cannot also have reflective (i.e., non-empirical) knowledge of p , it follows that there is no prospect of acquiring non-empirical knowledge in this case, and thus McDowell's McKinsey-style difficulty disappears. That is, the two premises of the argument outlined above do not entail the conclusion, since in the circumstances envisaged by the premises one has empirical knowledge of the target proposition which undermines the possibility of acquiring the non-empirical knowledge at issue in the conclusion.²⁵

In effect, the proponent of the *reductio* has failed to notice that while knowledge is,

²³ For three recent commentators who have not taken McDowell's non-classical internalist view at face-value and have instead either read him as a classical externalist or classical internalist, see Brandom (1995); Wright (2002); and Greco (2004).

²⁴ See, for example, the exchange between Stroud (2002) and McDowell (2002b).

²⁵ For more on this point, see Neta & Pritchard (forthcoming).

plausibly, closed under known entailment, it does not follow that specifically *non-empirical* knowledge is closed under (non-empirically) known entailment, such that where one knows the antecedent proposition non-empirically one thereby knows the conclusion non-empirically. As we have just seen, there are counterexamples to this more demanding principle which concern cases in which the nature of the inference in question ensures that the agent's knowledge of the conclusion is empirical rather than non-empirical.²⁶

This point is important for the problem raised in the last section, since the worry expressed there was that if what one is able to know by reflection alone is different in the good case as opposed to the bad case—and one also knows (non-empirically) the import of these differences—then why doesn't it follow that one can know by reflection alone the empirical fact that one is in the good case, and thus the further empirical fact that one is not in the bad case? As in the 'McKinsey' argument just noted, one is, it seems, gaining non-empirical knowledge of a very specific empirical truth.

Closer inspection of the position reveals that this problem doesn't arise, however, and the forgoing remarks on McDowell's apparent 'McKinsey' problem indicate why. I take it that the argument that is implicit here proceeds in three stages as follows. First, one is able to know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive empirical reason for believing *p*. Second, given that one also knows non-empirically that one could only have the factive empirical reason for belief in *p* if one is in the good case, then one can conclude, on entirely non-empirical grounds, that one is in the good case. Finally, given that one knows non-empirically that the good case is inconsistent with the bad case, one can also conclude, again on entirely non-empirical grounds, that one is not in the bad case. Thus, even though there is, *ex hypothesi*, no phenomenological difference between the good case and the bad case, it

²⁶ I discuss the differences between these two principles in more length in Pritchard (2002a). I think this stronger closure principle is implausible whatever one's wider epistemological stance, but it is worth noting that from a McDowellian point of view it is particularly contentious because of the way in which it in effect insulates non-empirical knowledge from empirical knowledge, when a key part of the McDowellian programme—see especially McDowell (1986)—is to undermine the sort of (Cartesian) picture that (McDowell thinks) leads to such an insulation. So while I've tried to put my argument in such a form that it does not already presuppose commitment to the general McDowellian picture, were one to set it within that frame then one could read it as highlighting an important *consequence* of a certain theme that runs through McDowell's thought. I am grateful to Adrian Haddock for pressing me on this issue.

seems nonetheless possible on the McDowellian view that one can know by reflection alone that one is in the good case as opposed to the bad case.

We can express this argument as follows:

McDowell's Other Putative 'McKinsey' Problem

- P1'. In the good case, one is able to know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive empirical reason. (Premise)
- P2''. One is able to know by reflection alone that if one is in possession of a factive empirical reason for believing the empirical proposition p , then one is in the good case. (Premise)
- P3''. One is able to know by reflection alone that if one is in the good case, then one is not in the bad case. (Premise)
- C1''. So, in the good case, one is able to know by reflection alone that one is in the good case. (From (P1'), (P2''))
- C2''. So, in the good case, one is able to know by reflection alone that one is not in the bad case. (From (C1''), (P3''))

Given our earlier remarks on McDowell's apparent 'McKinsey' problem, however, the mistake in this reasoning should be obvious. In drawing the penultimate conclusion, (C1''), it is essential that one has the required belief that one is in the good case (if one did not already have it), formed on the basis of the rational support one possesses in favour of this claim. Furthermore, the recognition that one's factive empirical reason for believing the target proposition entails that one is in the good case—(P2'')—highlights that one is in possession of a factive empirical reason for believing that one is in the good case. Accordingly, it follows that one can no more come to know non-empirically via this chain of reasoning that one is in the good case than one can come to know the target proposition non-empirically via the parallel McKinsey-style reasoning, since in running through the reasoning one thereby acquires (if one did not already possess it) empirical knowledge that one is in the good case, thereby excluding the possibility of one possessing non-empirical knowledge for this claim.

That is, the first two premises do not entail (C1'') since the circumstances described in these premises ensure that the agent has empirical knowledge of the fact that she is in the good case, thereby excluding the possibility of non-empirical knowledge at issue in (C1''). Moreover, as before, the error here is to confuse the plausible principle that knowledge is

closed under knowledge entailment with the much more demanding—and, as we have seen, *false*—principle that non-empirical knowledge is closed under (non-empirically) known entailment, a principle which fails in these cases. Given that the penultimate conclusion does not follow, however, then neither does the ultimate one, (C2''). One cannot, on the McDowellian picture, acquire non-empirical knowledge that one is in the good case as opposed to the bad case, and so the worry stated earlier does not emerge. This claim, however, is consistent with the McDowellian thesis that what is reflectively available to one in the good case is not the same as what is reflectively available to one in the bad case. One of the key supposed problems for epistemological disjunctivism—and thus one of the core motivations for the highest common factor theory—is thus shown to be illusory.

I think this result should not surprise us, since on the McDowellian view gaining reflective knowledge of one's factive empirical reasons is not a purely introspective affair, in contrast to the classical internalist view. Instead, recognising that one is in possession of a factive empirical reason, such as that one sees that such-and-such is the case, is itself a partly world-directed activity since these are, as it were, *world-involving* states as opposed to being the kind of purely mental states envisaged by the classical internalist. It is little wonder then that there are limits to the kind of non-empirical knowledge that one can gain by reflecting on one's factive empirical reasons, since it is inevitable that the drawing of some consequences from one's reflective knowledge in this regard will result (if it is not possessed already) in empirical knowledge of the target proposition being possessed.

As we will see, this general point about the scope of one's non-empirical knowledge by McDowellian internalist lights is important to understanding how McDowell might respond to a certain sort of problem that could be raised for his neo-Moorean response to scepticism. Before we can get into that issue, however, we need to look a little closer at what the McDowellian response to scepticism is.

6. McDOWELL ON SCEPTICISM

I mentioned above that one of the considerations that McDowell offers in favour of his epistemological disjunctivism is that it enables us to resolve certain perennial epistemological problems, such as the problem of scepticism. Interestingly, though, McDowell himself does

not seem to be at all inclined to advance his anti-scepticism in a *direct* way at all. That is, he does not conceive of the position as issuing in an anti-sceptical argument, such as a neo-Moorean argument, which opposes, and thereby neutralises, a specific sceptical argument, such as the argument we outlined in §1. Indeed, he is uncomfortable with the very idea of calling his treatment of scepticism an “answer” to the problem at all, remarking, for example, that his view is “not well cast as an *answer* to skeptical challenges; it is more like a justification of a refusal to bother with them.” (McDowell 1995: 888) This coyness is odd, since if McDowell’s view is correct, then one *can* directly answer the sceptical challenge, and it is puzzling why McDowell doesn’t recognise this.

Part of the reason why McDowell expresses his anti-scepticism in this cautious fashion is, I think, because he regards such caution as being mandated by his avowedly “diagnostic” treatment of the sceptical problem, where the diagnosis is that scepticism of the sort that he is interested in “expresses an inability to make sense of the idea of direct perceptual access to objective facts about the environment.” (McDowell 200X: 5) Indeed, he makes this contrast between answering the sceptical problem and merely diagnosing it explicit in the following passage: “the thing to do is not to answer the skeptic’s challenges, but to diagnose their seeming urgency as deriving from a misguided interiorization of reason.” (McDowell 1995: 890) Still, it is far from obvious why a diagnosis of scepticism could not also be (and ought to be) an answer to the sceptical problem.

In order to get a better grip on why McDowell makes this distinction, I think it is important to recall that part of the motivation that he offers for his view is that his disjunctive account of perceptual reasons is the commonsense conception of reasons that we have been blinded to by epistemological theory. The importance of this is that with the debate so construed he can claim that the sceptical problem is the *result* of abstract philosophising, rather than the natural intuitive puzzle that it appears to be. Since the visceral pull of scepticism lies in its apparent appeal only to intuition, this exposure of the sceptic as, in effect, a covert philosopher ensures that we can ignore the puzzle with impunity. Indeed, this would be a very Moorean claim to make. If intuition, properly understood, licenses anti-scepticism over scepticism, then there is no need to engage with the sceptical problem further

once one has highlighted this fact.²⁷

This, in any case, may well be the official story as to why McDowell's expresses his anti-scepticism so cautiously. I want to suggest, however, that this official story disguises a tacit motivation that McDowell has for putting his view forward in this way. This is that I think McDowell conceives of an answer to the sceptic as consisting of a series of Moorean-style assertions, and he recognises—as we did above in §1—that such assertions are clearly problematic. That is, an answer to the sceptic will, it seems, consist in claiming, for example, that one knows the denials of sceptical hypotheses, and one knows them *because* one knows everyday propositions and the relevant entailment. With the awkwardness of such assertions in mind, it is little wonder that McDowell prefers to simply remove the urgency from sceptical arguments and then refuse to engage with them thereafter, since it avoids the need to make Moorean assertions of this sort.

In order to see this point in more detail, it is worthwhile considering how classical externalist and internalist neo-Moorean views would go about accounting for the impropriety of Moorean assertions. To begin with, note that, ordinarily at least, one needs good reflectively accessible grounds to back up an assertion if one is to properly make that assertion, especially if the assertion involves a claim to know. This means that the conditions under which it is appropriate to claim knowledge and the conditions under which knowledge is possessed will be closely connected on the classical internalist account, but not so closely connected on the externalist account. This is another reason why classical internalists will have great difficulty motivating a form of neo-Mooreanism, since they will find it hard to explain why the Moorean assertions are inappropriate if they are true since, if they are true, they will also be assertions which are appropriately supported by adequate reflectively accessible grounds and so, presumably, ordinarily properly assertible.

On the classical externalist account which allows that knowledge might be possessed even in the absence of good reflectively accessible grounds, in contrast, there will be a class of cases in which agents have knowledge but cannot properly claim that knowledge because they lack adequate reflectively accessible supporting grounds for their claim. Think, for example, of the chicken sexer case described above. Here we have an agent who has

²⁷ This way of reading McDowell makes his strategy for dealing with the sceptical problem similar in key respects to that proposed by Williams (1991).

knowledge by classical externalist lights, but who is clearly not in a position to properly assert what she knows—much less assert that she knows it—since she lacks any good reflectively accessible grounds to back-up that assertion. If the classical externalist is right in thinking that we can know the denials of sceptical hypotheses, even though we lack good reflectively accessible grounds in support of our beliefs in this regard, then one's anti-sceptical knowledge will be akin to the brute knowledge possessed by chicken sexers. It is little wonder, then, that Moore cannot properly make the assertions he does, even when what he asserts is true.

The problem facing McDowell is akin to that facing the classical internalist, in that one would naturally think that if one really does possess the knowledge in question, and one can moreover offer *conclusive* reflectively accessible grounds in favour of that knowledge, then there ought not to be any bar to claiming that one has that knowledge. On the face of it, then, there ought to be nothing at all amiss about Moore's assertions by McDowellian lights, even though they clearly are problematic. It is thus not surprising that McDowell wishes to distance his anti-scepticism from views which try to answer the sceptical challenge, and which thereby find themselves making Moorean assertions.

Still, I think that McDowell can be bolder in his treatment of scepticism, since, as we will see, there is an intermediate form of anti-scepticism available here, one which answers the sceptical argument but which does not do so by making Moorean assertions. What McDowell's view requires, I suggest, is an account of why such Moorean assertions are inappropriate even though true, an account which is in the spirit of McDowell's general epistemological disjunctivism. In the next section I aim to offer just such a thesis.

7. KNOWING AND SAYING THAT ONE KNOWS

To begin with, it is important to note that we rarely convey our knowledge by making assertions which are prefixed with the phrase, 'I know'. Instead, one typically conveys one's knowledge of a proposition simply by asserting the proposition in question. Adding the further 'I know' phrase is rare, and standardly reflects not just emphasis but also an ability to resolve a particular challenge that has been raised.

For example, one might initially convey one's knowledge of what the time is by

simply asserting, say, ‘It’s 10.22am’, but then be prompted into the further explicit claim to know this proposition by a challenge to one’s original assertion. The usual way to challenge such an assertion is to raise an error-possibility which is held to be salient, such as when someone doubtful that this is the time points out that one’s watch looks very old and so could well be unreliable. In responding to a challenge of this sort with an explicit knowledge claim one is representing oneself as being in possession of stronger reflectively accessible grounds in support of one’s assertion than would be implied simply by making the assertion itself.

Notice, however, that one is also usually representing oneself as being in possession of reflectively grounds which speak specifically to the error-possibilities raised. In particular—and this is a point which, I think, has often been overlooked in this regard, despite its epistemic importance—the grounds one needs available to one in making a claim to know in response to this sort of challenge must be such as to *discriminate* between what is asserted and the relevant error-possibility. This claim is important because, intuitively, the kind of evidential support one needs in order to have knowledge is weaker than this. All that is required here is the sort of ‘favouring’ evidence that we saw above in our discussion of the underdetermination principle (which is still a strong requirement on knowledge, as we also saw).²⁸

In order to make this point clear, consider the famous ‘zebra’ case offered by Fred Dretske (1970). Here we are asked to imagine someone who is at the zoo in normal circumstances and sees what looks like a zebra in the zebra enclosure. On this basis, she forms the belief that there is a zebra before her. Clearly, such an agent would normally be attributed knowledge in this case, and we would be perfectly happy with any assertion she might make to the effect that there is a zebra before her—which would represent her as having knowledge of this proposition—since she has adequate reflectively accessible grounds to back-up that assertion, such as that she sees that there is a zebra before her.

Similarly, an explicit claim to know that she sees a zebra would also be deemed appropriate in this context, if the circumstances were right. For example, if the original claim that the creature before her is a zebra is challenged in some mundane fashion—perhaps by someone short-sighted who wonders out loud why, since she was expecting to be near the gorilla enclosure, there should be zebras here—then it would be unproblematic for our agent

²⁸ For more on the relationship between knowledge and discrimination, see Pritchard (2006).

to respond to this challenge by saying that she knows that this creature is a zebra.

It is important to recognise why such an explicit claim to know would be entirely appropriate, given how we have described the situation. The reason for this is not just that the agent is in a position to offer very good (indeed, conclusive) reflectively accessible grounds in favour of the proposition known. Nor is it that he has good reflectively accessible grounds in favour of the proposition known which prefer this proposition over the target error-possibility (that it is a gorilla rather than a zebra), which is what her conclusive factive empirical reason secures. This is because the mere fact that one's reflectively accessible supporting reason is that one sees that there is a zebra before one does not speak specifically to the issue of discrimination in the light of the target error-possibility.

It is possible for example, though unlikely in this case, that our agent has the factive empirical reason in question but lacks further good reflectively accessible grounds which would enable her to discriminate between the target proposition and the target error-possibility—i.e., between creatures that are zebras and (non-zebra) creatures that are gorillas. Such grounds might be, for example, that zebras and gorillas have very different shapes and gaits. If the agent lacked discriminating grounds of this sort, then the assertion would be deemed inappropriate even though the agent has the supporting factive empirical reason. This is because explicitly claiming knowledge in the light of this challenge will normally generate the conversational implicature that one is able to offer grounds in support of the proposition claimed as known which would suffice to distinguish the scenario described by this proposition from the specified error-possibility. If grounds of this very specific sort are lacking, however, then this conversational implicature is false and the assertion is thereby inappropriate, even though true, and even though it is supported by conclusive and thereby favouring grounds. In this case, however, the agent does have the required grounds.

Here, then, is the crux of the matter: whereas reflectively accessible factive reasons in support of one's belief suffices for knowledge possession, such reasons are not sufficient by themselves to ensure that a corresponding explicit claim to know is appropriate. Recognising this fact is essential, I claim, to understanding how the McDowellian can both regard perceptual knowledge in certain cases as conclusively supported by reflectively accessible grounds on the one hand, and yet not properly assertible on the other.

As I noted a moment ago, it would be very odd in the case just described to suppose that the agent concerned has the factive supporting reason without in addition possessing the

required discriminating reasons. Given the straightforward nature of the discrimination in question, most people in the circumstances described would possess the required discriminating reasons. Nevertheless, there are cases where one is in possession of the factive supporting reason but where one lacks the relevant discriminative grounds, and some of these cases concern scenarios in which one is considering sceptical hypotheses. Accordingly, if one fails to pay due attention to this point then one will be led into denying knowledge to the agent even though on the McDowellian neo-Moorean view it is possessed.

Imagine, for example, that the error-possibility that the zebra may in fact be a cleverly disguised mule is raised and taken seriously in that conversational context. Since the original assertion that the creature is a zebra has been challenged, it would ordinarily be appropriate for the agent, if she knows this proposition, to explicitly say so, just as she did in the case just described where the objector wonders why she isn't presently looking at a gorilla. If the agent now claims to know that there is a zebra before her in the light of this error-possibility being raised, however, then this will generate the implicature that the agent has reflectively accessible grounds which could serve to discriminate between the proposition claimed as known and the target error possibility. That is, the agent is representing herself as having grounds which would suffice to enable her to tell the difference between these two creatures (i.e., a zebra and a cleverly disguised mule). Such grounds might be, for example, that she has examined the creature at close range and been able to determine that it is not painted. Typically, of course, the agent will not have grounds of this sort available to her, and so her claim to know will be inappropriate because it generates a false conversational implicature.

Notice, however, that this fact alone does not suffice to indicate that the agent lacks knowledge of the target proposition. After all, in the standard case at least, the agent will have grounds which favour the hypothesis that the animal before her is a zebra over the alternative hypothesis that it is a cleverly disguised mule. After all, part of the agent's grounds on the McDowellian view will consist in her seeing that there is a zebra before her, and this ground excludes the possibility that there is a cleverly disguised mule on the scene instead. Moreover, the agent also has further relevant reflectively accessible grounds that she can offer, such as the grounds she has regarding the implausibility of a zookeeper going to such lengths to deceive patrons, and the penalties that would be imposed were such a deception to come to light, as presumably it would eventually. There is no reason to deny knowledge here, nor even to deny that such knowledge is appropriately supported by

reflectively accessible grounds. Nevertheless, unless the agent concerned has made special checks or has special discriminative abilities, then to explicitly claim to know such a proposition in this context would be inappropriate.

One might at first blush be puzzled by the contrast that is being drawn here. If one can indeed know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive empirical ground—such as, in this case, that there is a zebra before one—then how could it be that one is unable to discriminate the zebra case from the target non-zebra case, such as the situation in which one is faced with a cleverly disguised mule? After all, this factive empirical reason *entails* that one is not faced with a cleverly disguised mule, and one can know that this entailment holds non-empirically. Isn't one then in a position to know, by reflection alone, that one is now looking at a zebra rather than a cleverly disguised mule? And if one can do that, then what more could be required of an agent when it comes to possessing the relevant discriminatory ability?

Indeed, the sort of reflectively accessible grounds required in order to enable one to discriminate between the two scenarios are typically logically weaker than factive empirical grounds. That one has made a special check that the creature before one is a zebra rather than a cleverly disguised mule—one has examined the creature for signs of paint, for example—does not *entail* that the creature in question is a zebra. Accordingly, one would expect the relative logical strength of the factive empirical reason to be more likely to suffice for the possession of the relevant discriminatory ability rather than the discriminatory reasons actually demanded (I claim) in such cases.

It is at this juncture that the point we made earlier on becomes important. Recall that we noted that McDowell can consistently hold that one can possess reflectively accessible factive empirical grounds which entail that one is in the good case, and know by reflection alone that this entailment holds, and yet fail to know by reflection alone that one is in the good case (and, thereby, that one is in the good case as opposed to the bad case). The reason why this is so is that the principle being appealed to here—that non-empirical knowledge is closed under (non-empirically) known entailments—is false, and fails in these cases. As we saw above, in making an inference of this sort one inevitably ends up acquiring empirical knowledge of the fact that one is in the good case, thereby excluding the possibility that one acquires non-empirical knowledge of this proposition via this inference. Accordingly, it does

not follow from the fact that one can know by reflection alone that one is in possession of a factive empirical reason which entails that one is in the good case that one can know by reflection alone that one is in the good case (or, similarly, the one is in the good case as opposed to the bad case).

The same applies in the situation we have just considered. Suppose one comes to know by reflection alone that one's reason for believing that there is a zebra before one is that one sees that there is a zebra before one, and one also recognises that this entails that one is not looking at a cleverly disguised mule. Does it follow that one has non-empirical knowledge of the fact that one is not looking at a cleverly disguised mule, thereby indicating that one has reflectively accessible grounds which suffice to discriminate between the zebra hypothesis and the alternative cleverly disguised mule hypothesis? No. One no more has non-empirical knowledge of this proposition in this case than one has non-empirical knowledge that one sees that there is a zebra before one. The supporting reason in question is, remember, an empirical reason, and that supporting reason in conjunction with the relevant belief formed on that basis—a belief required for the inference to go through—will entail that one has empirical knowledge of the fact that one is not looking at a cleverly disguised mule, thereby excluding the possibility of acquiring non-empirical knowledge of this proposition. On the McDowellian account, then, there is the logical space to distinguish between reflectively accessible factive empirical grounds on the one hand, and reflectively accessible discriminating grounds on the other.

This distinction is absolutely vital when it comes to the sceptical case. What is different about the sceptical case is that while there clearly are agents who could properly make the relevant assertions in zebra-style cases because they have the special grounds required (such as a zoologist, for example), there are no such agents in the sceptical case. No one has adequate reflectively accessible grounds—by *everyone's* lights (including McDowell's)—which would enable them to discriminate between, say, seeing a zebra and being a BIV on a zebra-less planet who merely seems to see a zebra. There are, for example, no special checks that one can make which would be relevant in this regard.

This is why claiming to know the denials of sceptical hypotheses is conversationally inappropriate, since it generates the conversational implicature that one is in possession of reflectively accessible discriminating grounds which are in principle unavailable. Moreover, it is also explains why claiming to know even mundane everyday propositions in sceptical

contexts would be inappropriate, such as that one has two hands. After all, in such contexts the target error-possibilities at issue will be sceptical hypotheses, and thus in making this assertion one is falsely representing oneself as possessing adequately reflectively accessible grounds which would suffice to enable one to discriminate between having two hands and being a BIV who merely seemed to have hands.

8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

McDowell is thus able to account for the impropriety of Moorean assertions by appealing to independently motivated claims which are in the spirit of his epistemology. With this in mind, it is open to him to argue that, in the good case at least, what Moore says is entirely true while at the same time conceding that what Moore says cannot be properly said in this way. Moreover, he can do this while retaining a key internalist intuition about the importance of reflectively accessible grounds to knowledge possession. McDowell's quietism in the face of scepticism is thus optional, which means that we have available to us a fully-fledged form of McDowellian neo-Mooreanism.

Moreover, note that McDowell's view is also immune to the two other problems facing Mooreanism that we noted above. Since McDowell has diagnosed the appeal of scepticism as ultimately arising out of a theoretical, rather than a commonsense, claim about reasons, the view does not leave us with merely an *impasse* with the sceptic, since the default position of commonsense is with the anti-sceptical thesis rather than its sceptical counterpart. Relatedly, with the putative intuitive support for the opposing sceptical argument undermined, there is also nothing question-begging about the McDowellian neo-Moorean response to that sceptical argument either.

As we have seen, the apparent problems that face McDowell's non-classical internalism are illusory, and thus the choice between an unsatisfactory classical internalist neo-Mooreanism and a revisionary classical externalist neo-Mooreanism is not forced upon us. Furthermore, we have also seen that provided the view is accompanied by a complementary thesis regarding the conditions under which one can properly claim knowledge, then neither is one committed, in signing-up to a McDowellian neo-Mooreanism, to also subscribing to McDowell's famous brand of quietism. The path is thus cleared for a

robust form of internalist neo-Mooreanism cast along McDowellian lines.^{29,30}

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²⁹ This paper to a certain degree signals a departure from the view I defended in Pritchard (2003; cf. Pritchard 2005a: §9.2). The apostasy is not complete, however, since I still stand by many of the main charges against McDowell that I levelled in that paper, and this point deserves comment. In particular, I still think that McDowell's quietism in the face of the sceptical challenge is problematic, and also that even by his own lights the issue of epistemic luck that he raises in the context of the sceptical problem is a red herring. Furthermore, I still believe that one can find in Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* an important challenge to McDowell's conception of factive reasons which he never fully engages with himself. That said, I do now hold, as this paper indicates, that there is a plausible anti-sceptical position about knowledge that can be extracted from McDowell's writings on this topic. The key point is that it needs to be shown that McDowell's position does not generate the counterintuitive consequences that it initially seems to, and that it is not essentially wedded to a form of philosophical quietism. This is what I believe I have shown here, and which has prompted the change of heart. (Though note that saying that McDowell is in a position to adequately respond to scepticism about *knowledge* is not thereby to say that he is able to respond to the sceptical problem more generally. I now think that the key sceptical problem is not directed at knowledge possession at all, but rather at a certain kind of cognitive responsibility. For more on this point, see Pritchard (2005a: chapter 9; 2005b)).

³⁰ Earlier versions of the material that make-up this article have been presented at the following conferences: *Contextualism*, Bled, Slovenia (June, 2004); *Contextualism*, Amsterdam Free University (October, 2004); *Externalism and Internalism in Semantics and Epistemology*, University of Kentucky (April, 2005); and *Disjunctivism*, University of Glasgow (June, 2005). Earlier versions of this material have also been presented at Faculties of Philosophy at the Universities of York, Birmingham, Copenhagen, Aarhus (Denmark), Rijeka (Croatia), Hull, and Nottingham between 2004 and 2006. I am grateful to the audiences on all these occasions. Special thanks go to Jessica Brown, Tony Brueckner, Earl Conee, Gary Ebbs, Sandy Goldberg, Marie McGinn, Alan Millar, Ram Neta, Jim Pryor, Finn Spicer, two anonymous referees from Oxford University Press, and, especially, Adrian Haddock (it is hard to imagine a more conscientious editor).

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