

《國立政治大學哲學學報》 第十二期 (July 2004) 頁 27-70

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A Neo-Pragmatist Approach to the Theory of Knowledge

“The questions which philosophy fails to answer, are answered by seeing that they should not be so posed in the first place.”

G. W. F. Hegel (*Aphorisms*, 2)

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Abstract

For many, analytic philosophy is taking a new turn in the past fifty years or so. Donald Davidson considers himself participating a philosophical revolution against what he calls “subjectivism”; Richard Rorty points out that analytic philosophy has shifted from its “Humean stage” to its “Kantian stage” and finally to its “Hegelian stage.” This so-called revolution has been more or less acknowledged nowadays; however, its main ideas as a whole have never been portrayed or agreed upon. For one thing, the proponents have different views concerning the *target* of the revolution. Sellars takes “the myth of the Given” as his greatest foe, Davidson owes it to “the myth of subjective,” Rorty renounces “the Mirror of Nature,” and McDowell takes issues with “the side-ways-on picture.” In this paper, I will try to put this philosophical movement in focus by spelling out its major

contentions and implications in a *pragmatist* framework, and to explain that the main target of this philosophical trend is the philosophical tradition that has its roots in modern epistemology.

**Keywords: pragmatism, epistemology, internalism,
externalism**

Introduction

For many, analytic philosophy is taking a new turn in the past fifty years or so. Donald Davidson, for one, considers himself participating a philosophical revolution against what he calls “subjectivism,” the position that holds subjective ideas as media of thought. Richard Rorty, for another, identifies Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Quine as pioneers of a philosophical movement that attempts to usher analytic philosophy from its “Humean stage” to its “Kantian stage” and finally to its “Hegelian stage.” This so-called revolution has been more or less acknowledged nowadays; however, its main ideas as a whole have never been portrayed or agreed upon. For one thing, the proponents have different views concerning the *target* of the revolution. Sellars takes “the myth of the Given” as his greatest foe, Davidson owes it to “the myth of subjective,” Rorty renounces “the Mirror of Nature,” and McDowell takes issues with “the side-ways-on picture.”¹ In this paper, I will try to put this philosophical movement in focus by spelling out its major contentions and implications in a *pragmatist* framework. The best way to carry out this project, in my view, is to limit our attention to the theory of knowledge, in particular, the internalism/externalism debate in modern epistemology. For this debate brings the new epistemological conception in sharp contrast with the traditional one, and thus reveals the true essence of the revolution.

The internalism and externalism debate in modern epistemology centers on the confrontation between

¹ Sellars, 1997; Davidson, 1988; Rorty, 1979 & 1997; McDowell, 1996.

foundationalism and coherentism, on the one hand, and reliabilism, on the other. The internalist positions seem to be faced with insurmountable difficulties (foundationalism with the myth of the Given and coherentism with the problem of isolation), which eventually point out to some externalist restoration; and reliabilism rises to the occasion. However, reliabilism soon wears out its welcome, for its naturalistic bent comes with no epistemic flavor; many have thus regarded externalism as an untenable option in epistemology. The aim of this paper is to question the line of thought underlying this internalism/externalism debate. In my view, the impasse between internalism and externalism, which has become a symptom of modern epistemology, is created by a false war between *subjectivism* and *naturalism*. In order to break off this impasse, we may consider a refreshing approach in epistemology, initiated most notably by Sellars and Davidson in the mid-twentieth century.

Sellars's pragmatic theory of knowledge condemns both naturalism and subjectivism. For him, to know something is to take a *normative stance* to how things are, or, in his famous remark, knowledge is a "standing in the space of reasons." Davidson advocates non-naturalistic externalism, as he distances his epistemology *externalized* from Quine's epistemology *naturalized*; his "triangulation" account of the ground of intentionality and meaning provides a forceful objection to subjectivism. Both Sellars' pragmatism and Davidson's externalism look upon *linguistic practices* as the source or criteria of justification- and knowledge-attribution; for this reason, their approaches may be called *the pragmatic* or *pragmatist turn*, or so I shall argue.

Two most prominent developments of this pragmatist approach in present time are due to John McDowell and Robert

Brandom. Both of them take Sellars's space of reasons as the starting point, but they work out drastically different accounts of knowledge. Their differences can be characterized, most remarkably, by their clash with the traditional account of knowledge as *true justified belief*. McDowell highlights the primeness of knowledge against the tripartite conception of the traditional account; Brandom recasts the definition of knowledge in terms of his social-pragmatic notions. In other words, whereas McDowell offers a *therapeutic deconstruction* to the mainstream epistemology, Brandom gives it a *pragmatic reconstruction*. I will argue, in this paper, that after their achievements, the epistemic concepts such as reason, justification, inference, and reliability all have completely different looks. After the pragmatic turn, the distinction between internalism and externalism seems to lose its significance — at least its traditional significance.

1. The internalism/externalism debate in modern epistemology

One of the hotly discussed issues in epistemology in the modern time is the debate between internalism and externalism. The basic idea of epistemological internalism is that when one has a justified belief, one must know (in some sense) one's reason for the belief, and can cite the reason to support one's belief; externalism denies this sort of cognitive access. More precisely, let us consider the following definitions (Bernecker and Dretske, 2000: 65).

—Internalism about justification: “all of the factors required for a belief to be justified must be cognitively accessible to the subject and thus internal to her mind.”

—Externalism about justification: “some of the justifying factors may be external to the subject’s cognitive perspective.”

—Internalism about knowledge: “For a justified true belief to be knowledge the subject must know or at least justifiably believe that her belief is justified.”

—Externalism about knowledge: A subject “can know without having any reason to think she knows.”

In modern history, the internalism/externalism debate has been represented by the conflict between foundationalism and coherentism, on the one hand, and reliabilism, on the other. In order to fully grasp the historical backgrounds, I will begin with three defining features of modern epistemology: *inferential justification*, *the regress problem*, and *knowledge as justified true belief*. In my view, all major epistemological doctrines (foundationalism, coherentism, and reliabilism) aim to provide responses and reflections to these three features.

Inferential justification — a standard view about justification — is the idea that a belief and its justifier are inferentially related. As Bonjour puts it, (1978: 96)

The most natural way to justify a belief is by producing a justificatory argument: belief A is justified by citing some other (perhaps conjunctive) belief, from which A is *inferable* in some acceptable way and which is thus offered as a reason for accepting A.

Inferential justification immediately brings in the problem of *infinite regress*. Inferential justification implies that knowledge consists in inferential chain; however, this chain cannot extend infinitely. There are two sensible possibilities: we admit either that there are non-inferential justification or that

inferential chain can be circular, and these two options have been developed into the two most popular internalist positions, namely foundationalism and coherentism.

Foundationalism: If knowledge is ever possible, inferential justification must come to an end. It must terminate in beliefs whose justification does not depend on others. These are the so-called *foundational beliefs*. They are non-inferentially justified, and they serve as foundation of all other beliefs. Empirical knowledge thus has a two-tier structure.

Coherentism: The regress of justification “circles back upon itself, thus forming a closed system” (Bonjure, 1976: 118), and it is the internal coherence of the belief system that is subject to epistemic evaluation. There is no non-inferential justification of beliefs; there is no foundational belief.

Foundationalism and coherentism, however, are subject to some major problems, which pave the road to *externalism* (or reliabilism, in particular).

(a) Foundationalism: It seems that even foundational beliefs need some kind of vindication (e.g., that foundational beliefs are truth-conducting), and the vindication is revealed only if some further beliefs are involved. This is Sellars’s “epistemic ascent argument” against foundationalism, recapitulated by Bonjour (1978, 102) as follows.

- (1) My foundational belief that *p* has feature *F*.
- (2) Beliefs having feature *F* are likely to be true.
- (3) Hence, my foundational belief that *p* is likely to be true.

If so, the justification of foundational beliefs depends on further beliefs; and thus these foundational beliefs are not foundational after all! An intuitive way out is to resort to *externalism*: in case of foundational beliefs, one may have no

cognitive awareness of their justifying conditions. These beliefs are justified because they are acquired in a certain way; for example, my foundational belief of seeing a red object is justified because I am appeared thusly.

(b) Coherentism: According to coherentism, the justification of a belief is determined by its coherent relations with other beliefs, and thus the internal coherence of a belief system is what matters in epistemic appraisal. However, a *coherent* system is not guaranteed to be a *true* system. The isolation problem arises because even the most coherent system of belief can, at least in principle, be *isolated* from how things are in the world. Coherentism needs an explanation of “how relations among beliefs can provide a high probability of truth, or a reliable indication of how things are in the empirical world” (Moser, 1986: 9). Again, externalism is summoned.

Central to the traditional epistemology is the analysis of knowledge as *true justified belief*. While internalism concentrates on the justification-condition, externalism pays great attention to the connection between the truth- and the belief-conditions. The idea underlying externalism is that there is a *causal* connection between the two conditions. To say that a person S knows that P is to say that S’s believing that P is caused in an appropriate way by the fact that P. Contrary to coherentism, externalism stresses that what yields knowledge is causal history of a belief, not its coherent relation with other beliefs. Contrary to foundationalism, externalism holds that our causal relationship to the external world “converts” true belief into knowledge; it does not matter whether we have any idea about the relationship or not. Reliabilism, in brief, is the idea that a belief yields knowledge not because its relation to other beliefs, but mainly because it results from some reliable processes, that is, processes that connects beliefs with truth.

Externalism stresses on the natural history of beliefs — how they arise and change, instead of their justification conditions. Externalism thus understood involves *naturalism*, the attempt to reconstruct or reduce the conception of knowledge in naturalistic vocabulary. David Armstrong's favorite example is that a thermometer can yield knowledge when its states are reliable indicator of the temperature. Many scholars argue against this naturalistic bent of reliabilism; for them, a reliable thermometer may convey information but does not express knowledge. Lehrer, for example, argues that receiving information is not sufficient for knowledge; there is a further condition: "one must have some way of knowing that the information is correct." He elaborates, "If a person does not know that the information, that p, which she receives is correct information, then she does not know that p. All forms of externalism fail to deal with this problem adequately."² It is widely accepted nowadays that reliabilist externalism, indeed, explains *away* the normative element that is essential for knowledge.

² Lehrer gives an example of a thermometer and claims that none of the reliabilists (Armstrong, Dretske, and Nozick) can make it a case that the thermometer *knows* the temperature of the oil. "Suppose that the thermometer is an accurate one and that it records a temperature of 104 degrees for some oil it is used to measure. We can say, with Armstrong, that there is a nomological connection between the temperature and the thermometer reading, with Dretske that the thermometer receives the information, with Nozick that the thermometer would not record a temperature of 104 if it were not true that the oil was at 104 degrees, and with Goldman that the reading is the outcome of a reliable temperature-recording process. The problem with the analogy is that the thermometer is obviously ignorant of the temperature it records. The question is—why?" (Lehrer, 1990: 163)

2. Naturalism, Subjectivism, and Pragmatism

It seems therefore that both internalism and externalism are inadequate accounts of knowledge. In this paper, I want to examine the line of thought underlying this internalism/externalism debate. The real issue behind this debate, in my view, is a competition between two predominant traditions in the modern history of philosophy: naturalism and subjectivism.

(a) Naturalism promises to explain or reconstruct non-natural properties (in this case, epistemological or doxastic properties) in terms of natural properties — properties that are vindicated by natural science. With the rise of modern science, naturalism has become, arguably, the most attractive approach in philosophy.

(b) Subjectivism, according to Davidson, postulates “private subjective objects of the mind” that play epistemological role in our cognition (1988: 46). This approach is initiated by Descartes’ division between mind and matter and culminates in Locke’s treatment of the faculty of understanding. According to Locke, “The Mind knows not Things immediately, but only by the intervention of the Ideas it has of them” (Locke, 1975: 563). Human knowledge is possible because, Locke argues, we have the faculty of the Understanding which sorts out the ideas and determines their meaningful relations: “agreement” (with things) and “connection” (with other ideas). As Locke puts it, “Knowledge then seems to me to be nothing but the perceptions of the *connexion* and *agreement*, or *disagreement* and *repugnancy* of any of our Ideas” (1975: 525).

We may now see that the debate between internalism and externalism signals the influence of the two philosophical

traditions. (i) The internalists (foundationalists or coherentists) are subjectivists in the sense that they inherit Descartes' and Locke's tradition, according to which the mind consists of *ideas* that are mostly generated by encounter with external objects, and when our understanding is in good order (i.e., when *ideas* are clear and distinct or are in coherent relation), we obtain knowledge of the external world (*ideas* accurately represent the world). (ii) The externalists are clearly naturalists for their tendencies to reduce or vindicate non-natural properties (such as "justification") in terms of natural properties.

In order to break off from the impasse between subjectivism and naturalism, I suggest we consider a new movement in epistemology, a pragmatist approach initiated most notably by Sellars and Davidson in mid-twentieth century, and its full development was due to McDowell and Brandom at the end of the century. It is, indeed, difficult to identify the common features of the so-called *neo-pragmatism*. It is my hope that we will have a clearer and richer characterization of the theory at the end of the paper, when relevant issues and arguments are presented. But, in order for us to begin with some understanding of this pragmatist approach, I would like put forward two general ideas.

(a) Naturalism and subjectivism have dominated philosophy for more than three or four centuries, and finally there emerged a movement, originated around the 1950's, to *opt out* of the struggle between the two prevailing approaches. From the proponents' perspective, naturalism explains *away* some elements that play important role in our everyday life, whereas subjectivism involves troublesome presumptions such as mind/matter dualism and indirect knowledge about external world. This new movement may be called "commonsense philosophy," as it assumes the priority of everyday life practices (common sense) over philosophical doctrines (such as subjectivism and naturalism). Some scholars, furthermore,

propose “therapeutic philosophy,” according to which philosophy aims to provide cure for the diseases created by *bad* philosophy, and even “quietism,” the view that philosophy should construct no theory. I would regard these proponents as neo-pragmatists or their close allies.

(b) Those who I classify as neo-pragmatists, as I shall explain, give a theoretically central place to *social, linguistic practices* in their account of knowledge and justification. For example, Sellars’ explanation of the “space of reasons,” Davidson’s triangulation account, Rorty’s practice of justification, McDowell’s notion of “Bildung”, and Brandom’s elaboration of “the space of giving and asking for reasons” hinge on the idea of linguistic practices.

3. Sellars: the space of reasons

Sellars takes the myth of the Given as his greatest foe. This myth combines both naturalism and subjectivism because, according to it, what we directly perceive is not objects in the world but some subjective ideas (and thus subjectivism); these ideas are given to the mind independently of concepts but can serve as the foundation of our knowledge about the world (and thus naturalism).

(A) Non-Naturalism

Against naturalism, Sellars argues that knowledge is a kind of standing in the space of reasons. As he writes (1997: 76),

The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the

logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.

Sellars explicitly distinguishes “the logical space of reasons” from “the logical space of nature.” To place a thing in the logical space of reasons is to consider it under normative categories such as reason, meaning, and intentionality, whereas to place a thing in the logical space of nature is to give it a naturalistic description conferred by physical sciences. Sellars’ main idea against naturalism is that giving and asking for reasons for one’s claims and actions are significant aspects of our life, and their significance is *lost* if placed in the space of nature.

(B) Non-Subjectivism

Sellars’s argument against subjectivism is ingenious and interesting (1997: 32-46). He considers two forms of statements.

(P) X is green.

(Q) X looks green.

According to subjectivism, what we directly perceive is not objects in the world but subjective ideas. That is to say, subjective ideas, not things in the world, are the direct object of our knowledge. Thus, on subjectivism, appearance is epistemologically prior to reality. In other words, (Q) is prior to (P).

According to Sellars’s pragmatism, when someone makes an assertion, she utters a sentence and, more important, has an attitude of “endorsing” it. It follows that in making the first claim, one states that X is red (namely (P)) and “endorses” it. In making the second claim, one *again* states (P) but “withdraws” the endorsement. Hence, Sellars argues, (P) is prior to (Q) in the sense that (Q) *presupposes* (P). Thus, appearance is not

epistemologically prior to reality. Therefore, subjectivism is false.

4. Davidson: From “Epistemology Naturalized” to “Epistemology Externalized”

In his “Epistemology externalized,” Davidson spells out his non-naturalistic externalism in order to dismiss the myth of the subjective.³ Davidson’s main target is subjectivism, according to which sensory ideas or sense data are “epistemic intermediaries between our minds and the rest of the world”; for Davidson, such ideas do exist but are not “epistemically basic” (Davidson, 1990: 194). In “Externalisms” (2001b), he further discusses different forms of externalism provided by himself, Kripke, and Burge. Davidson compares the merits and defects of different forms of externalism, and presents his “triangulation” account that he thinks can fill in the gaps between those externalisms.

Davidson’s externalism blends two important insights of Kripke’s and Burge’s versions of externalism.

(i) According to Davidson, the insight of Kripke’s “social pragmatism” is that “contents of our thought depends... on interaction with other thinkers” (2001b: 3). Kripke’s concept of rule-following requires social interaction. Davidson elaborates

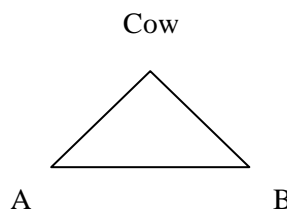
³ Davidson states that the main difference between his philosophy from Quine’s is that “I do not accept Quine’s account of the nature of knowledge, which is essentially first person and Cartesian. But I do find congenial Quine’s resolutely third person approach to epistemology” (Davidson, 1999:194).

that only when there are two creatures, there is the possibility of *divergence* in behavior, which makes room for *error*, and he insists that the concept of error is a *condition* of objectivity of thought. As Davidson states, “Only social interaction brings with it the space in which the concepts of error, and so of meaning and thought, can be given application” (2001b: 4). However, adding other speakers is not enough for intentionality. Davidson raises the “sunflowers example” to show that “Simple adding further creatures with identical dispositions cannot turn dispositions into rule-following.” Moreover, the concept of *content* — a central idea in the discussion of externalism — is entirely missing in Kripke’s account, since his examples are mostly about mathematics.

(ii) Burge’s perceptual externalism emphasizes the “necessary connection” between the contents of thoughts and the relevant features of the world. From his viewpoint, the content of thought is determined by “the history of causal interactions with the environment” (Burge, 1988: 200). This theory, according to Davidson, shows “how particular contents can be assigned to our perceptual beliefs, and so explains in part how thought and language are anchored to the world” (Davidson, 2001b: 2). Perceptual externalism, too, has defects. First, it lacks the social factor in Kripke’s account, and thus makes no room for error. Second, Davidson finds the concept of “common cause” essential in the condition of thought, while Burge’s notion of “normal cause,” as we shall see, cannot fill the same role.

(iii) Davidson’s triangulation combines both forms of externalism. He claims that we need two creatures and their awareness of each other’s reaction to some common cause, and these three elements form a “triangulation.” The concept of *common cause* demands that the two creatures involve some sort of “association”: “Each creature associates the other creature’s responses with stimuli from the share world” (2001a: 6). Here is

the idea. Consider an example in which two creatures, A and B, see a cow.



Davidson maintains that the basic triangle is *complete* when (i) there are causal connections between A and the cow, and B and the cow, respectively, (ii) there are causal connections between A and B (“also by way of perception”), and (iii) these two connections are correlated, for “each creature *associates* [the cow] with the cow-reactions of the other creature.”⁴ When the association is done, we may say that A’s and B’s cow-reactions are sharing a *common cause*. Davidson concludes, “An interconnected triangle such as this constitutes a necessary condition for the existence of conceptualization, thought, and language.”

(A) Non-subjectivism

Davidson’s view of triangulation is in clear opposition to the subjectivist *dogma* that “the ultimate evidence for beliefs about the external world is something non-conceptual that is directly given in experience.” His externalism against

⁴ Davidson, 2001:6. Davidson raises a colorful (dynamic) example of two lions and a gazelle to illustrate shared causes: “Each watches the other while both watch the gazelle, noting the other’s reaction to the change of direction” (2001:7).

subjectivism is particularly vivid in his contrast between “proximal and distal stimuli” (2001b, 8):

It is the cause common to both creatures, the cause that prompts their distinctive responses. Both creatures observe a cow. They do not share the neural turbulence that stirs in their brains, nor their retinal stimulations. They do not share photons streaming in, but the cow is mutually sighted and perhaps otherwise sensed.

In other words, the demand of common cause depletes the role subjective ideas play in the theory of knowledge.

(B) Non-naturalism

Davidson argues that his theory of triangulation is not a reductive account of intentionality in general (which includes both language and thought), since the baseline of the triangulation (that is, the line between the two creatures) requires communication and language. Moreover, Davidson contrasts the mental with the physical in a way similar to Sellars’s division of logical spaces. On Davidson’s theory, the physical is the realm guided by the physical laws, whereas the mental is the sphere where “the principle of rationality” rules. Davidson associates this distinction with his “anomalous monism,” according to which, an episode (say, of making a claim) can be described as a physical state and thus be viewed in terms of physical regularities or laws; yet, the very same episode can also be placed in a network of rational relations: it constitutes a reason for, or receives rational support from, other episodes. In other words, an event can have both mental and physical descriptions, and is thus governed by different “constitutive principles” and reveals different intelligibility or significance. In this light, there is no reductive relation between the mental and physical principles that modern naturalism aims to explore.

Is Davidson a pragmatist? He tends to say no. Rorty (1989) provides a detailed argument to explain why Davidson is a pragmatist. Their exchanges continue in these years, and the key to their disagreement is the concept of truth. In this paper, I would consider Davidson a neo-pragmatist for the following reasons. (i) His externalism goes against both naturalism and subjectivism; that is, in our terminology, his philosophy *opts out* of the tug of war between the two dominant traditions. (ii) His triangulation account is an account of linguistic practices in the minimal sense: it requires both social interaction and linguistic communication as “conditions” of thought. (iii) Whether *content-externalism* entails *justification-externalism* is one most hotly debated issue nowadays.⁵ Davidson apparently regards his content-externalism as having bearings on epistemological issues. He views his externalism as a form of “anti-subjectivism” which purports to show that “epistemology... has no basic need for purely private, subjective ‘objects of the mind’” (Davidson, 1988: 46). “The myth of the subjective” ascribes both casual and epistemological dimensions to subjective ideas (such as “sense data, impressions, ideas, raw feels, or propositions”); Davidson argues to the effect that subjective ideas constitute no “epistemological intermediaries between our minds and the rest of the world” (Davidson, 2001b: 2). He even concludes his externalism with a suggestion to give up *empiricism*, which, in his view, implies that “the subjective (‘experience’) is the foundation of objective empirical knowledge” (1988: 46).

⁵ See Boghossian (1989), Chase (2001), and Vahid (2003). Here is a reply to a comment raised by an anonymous referee of this journal, according to which Davidson proposes content-externalism that may have no bearings upon theory of justification or epistemology.

5. McDowell: the unboundedness of the conceptual

(A) Non-naturalism

McDowell elaborates further on Sellars's distinction between reason and nature and Davidson's distinction between the mental and the physical. In his view, Sellars's notion of "the logical space of nature" seems to involve a form of scientism, for it identifies *nature* as the subject matter of natural sciences, and Davidson's concept of the mental is not broad enough to cover the full range of our rational activities. Thus, on the one hand, he uses Sellars's notion of "the logical space of reasons" to replace Davidson's characterization of the mental, and, on the other hand, he borrows Davidson's construal of the physical to reconstruct Sellars's logical space of nature. In the end, McDowell proposes a contrast between "the space of reasons" and "the realm of laws," and treats them as "two kinds of intelligibility" to grasp nature. In his view, the space of reasons is the "space for the categories whereby we express our spontaneity — categories of meaning, intentionality and normality," and the realm of law is "the realm of what is intelligible in terms of the kind of laws which natural science aims to discover."⁶

McDowell explains that the Enlightenment favors a "disenchanted" conceptions of nature. In his view, Hume maintains a radically disenchanted notion of nature, according to which "nature had to be denied not only the intelligibility of meaning, but also the intelligibility of law." Kant has a *milder* notion of disenchanted nature in that nature embraces the

⁶ See Ho, 2002: 145-150, where Sellars', Davidson's, and McDowell's views pertinent to the characterizations of the space of reasons are discussed and compared.

intelligibility of law but not that of meaning (1996: 97). With the rise of modern science, there seems to be two ways of viewing nature: the mediaeval enchanted view of nature and the modern scientific disenchanted view of nature. It is a choice, as it were, between *superstition* and *civilization*. McDowell advocates the third rail, “partially re-enchanted nature,” a conception supported by his distinction of two kinds of intelligibility.

(B) Non-subjectivism⁷

McDowell embraces Sellars’s idea that knowledge as standing in the space of reasons, and warns us against “an interiorization” of the space of reasons, a distortion resulting from the infamous “argument from illusion” (or “the highest common factor thesis”). This argument begins with a seemingly intuitive view: Things can look thus and so to me when they are thus and so, *and* when they aren’t. “Appearances do not give me the resources to ensure that I take things to be thus and so on the basis of appearance only when things are thus and so” (McDowell, 2002: 878). This view yields an “inward retreat” (interiorization) of the space of reasons: A satisfactory standing in the space of reasons can be achieved all by myself — by the way things look to me and by my best effort to base my belief on it — “without the world doing me any favors.”

⁷ McDowell’s main idea is “the unboundedness of the conceptual,” which includes two themes. First, the space of reasons is the space of *concepts*. “The space of reasons is the space within which thought moves, and its topography is that of the rational interconnections between conceptual contents; we might equally speak of the space of concepts” (McDowell, 2002: 887). Second, the space of concepts is unbounded. McDowell’s argument against internalization (as we will discuss below) is a justification of the second theme.

According to the Argument from Illusion, we can achieve flawless standing in the space of reasons, and the standing is *favorable* when the world is kind, and *misleading* when not. (McDowell, 2002:879; emphasis added)

The true starting-point in the space of reasons must be something *common* to the favorable and the potentially misleading cases (like having it look to one as if things are thus and so).

The thing in common is “appearance.” The approach in question suggests an epistemological structure that begins with *appearance states*, and consequently treats *factive states* (such as “know,” “see,” and “remember”) as “derivative,” in need of further condition extra to the space of reasons.⁸ We may call this approach *the appearance approach*, and it should not be difficult to see that this approach is kin to *subjectivism*.

There are two ways to materialize the appearance approach: derivation and composition. McDowell briefly refutes the first theory and spends much effort in arguing against the second theory, for he thinks the latter constitutes a common mistake of modern epistemology. Let us start with the derivation theory. How can we derive factive states from appearance states, for instance, deriving *seeing* from *looking*? This derivation, in McDowell’s perspective, takes in (2002: 880):

First, the fact that it looks to a subject as if things are thus and so; second, whatever further circumstances are relevant (this depend on the third element); third, the fact that the

⁸ This contention seems to be at odds with our common understanding of knowledge as a *factive* state. Seeing, remembering and knowing are so-called “factive states,” states that implies the obtaining of relevant facts. These factive states are, according to Sellars, proper or prime (not derivative or composite) standings in the space of reasons. See Section 8 for detailed discussion.

policy or habit of accepting appearances in such circumstances is endorsed by reason, in its critical function, as reliable.

For McDowell, this sort of reconstruction is hopeless. We can never derive factive states from appearance states, no matter how we specify our circumstances and reliability. In McDowell's words, there are no "utterly risk-free policies and habits of forming belief" on the basis of perception.

The composition theory — what McDowell terms "the hybrid view" — is the contention that blameless moves are not factive, so knowledge is not merely a standing in the space of reasons, and thus the condition of *truth* is added as the external component of knowledge. As McDowell puts it, "Even including the best that can be had in the way of reliability, [reason alone] cannot duplicate the factiveness of epistemologically satisfactory positions; so it is precisely the truth requirement [is needed]" (2002: 883).

So, on the hybrid view, knowledge includes *the internal condition of reliability* and *the external condition of truth*. How are these two conditions related? According to McDowell, the relation is "a matter of luck."⁹ For it seems we have to do our best effort in reasoning, and then we need the world's favor, in order to obtain knowledge.

McDowell points out the many defects of the hybrid view. First, given that truth is divorced from reliability, "how can

⁹ On the hybrid view, knowledge is "partly a matter of luck in the relevant sense, something outside the control of reason; the hope is that this admission of luck is tolerable, because it comes only after we have credited reason with full control over whether one's standings in the space of reasons are satisfactory" (McDowell, 2002:883).

reason have the resources it would need in order to evaluate the reliability of belief forming policies of habits?”

Second, there is the accident problem. According to the hybrid theory, two subjects S1 and S2 can share the same standing in the space of reasons (in this theory, they share the same appearance state), whereas S1 is a knower and S2 isn't. In this case, the epistemically significance of the standing is unclear, and as a result the status of knowing seems accidental.

Third, there is the “too late” objection. “The hybrid view’s concession to luck... comes too late” (2002: 886). The function of reason, in particular, its evaluation of reliability, must already involve the world. The world does not come in *after* reason has done its job. “The connivance of the world,” in McDowell words, constitutes the perceptual entitlements. In this light, the world’s favor is “*not extra* to the person’s satisfactory standing in the space of reasons. Once she has achieved such a standing, she needs no extra help from the world to count as knowing.” There is no interface between how things are and the space of reasons: how things are “shapes the space of reasons as we find it.”

Finally, the hybrid view involves scheme-content dualism. McDowell traces the hybrid view to its origin in the interiorization of the space of reasons. The latter, McDowell states, is “the tendency to picture the objective world as set over against a ‘conceptual scheme’ that has withdrawn into a kind of self-sufficiency.” This is a *dualism* between matter (the Given) and form (thought), that is, the scheme-content dualism. Once the dualism is introduced, the concept of *content* becomes a myth. “When we set [the space of reasons] off so radically from the objective world, we lose our right to think of moves within the space we are picturing as content-involving” (2002: 889).

In conclusion, McDowell urges that we give up the appearance approach, which is based on the argument from

illusion. He opts for a factive approach, according to which appearance states presuppose factive states. “If we refuse to make sense of the idea of direct openness to the manifest world, we undermine the idea of being in the space of reasons at all, and hence the idea of being in a position to have things appear to one a certain way.”

6. Brandom: normative pragmatics and inferential semantics

Brandom combines Sellars’ pragmatism and Davidson’s externalism in his account of truth, reason, and knowledge. Brandom, a self-claimed pragmatist, makes explicit what it takes to be a pragmatist, but, as a so-called neo-pragmatist, he also separates himself from the traditional American pragmatists in some critical issues. To see this, let us examine his pragmatist theory of truth. Brandom first refutes what he calls “stereotypical pragmatism,” the pragmatic theory of truth that “the truth is what works.” There is distance between truth and what works. For example, even if we all believe that Einstein’s theory *works* — as many later experiments verify its predictions, but we still do not know whether it is *true*. Brandom suggests that pragmatism should be concerned with the linguistic use of a concept, or to be more specific, the role the concept plays — what work is done by the concept — in a linguistic practice. His theory addresses to “the question of what expressive and explanatory work is and ought to be done by the truth concept” in terms of five theses of pragmatism (1994: 286).

- (1) Taking-true: Pragmatism advocates a *performative* analysis of truth in terms of “the act of calling something

true” rather than the *descriptive* analysis of truth as a property.

(2) Endorsing: The act of taking-true is to take up a normative stance: endorsing.

(3) Adopting: Endorsing a claim means “adopting it as a guide to action.”

(4) Aiming: Success of action is an essential criterion of appropriateness.

(5) Phenomenology of Truth: “once he has understood acts of taking-true according to this four part model, one has understood all there is to understand about truth.”

In sum, Brandom adopts a *performative* analysis of truth against the traditional *descriptive* analysis of truth, stressing on taking-true attitude, commitment to action, and phenomenon of truth *in place of* description of truth as a property in a purely cognitive manner. This pragmatist theory of truth sheds light on his accounts of space of reasons and knowledge.

(A) Non-naturalism

Like his predecessors, Brandom’s non-naturalism concentrates on the concept of the space of reasons. Given his pragmatist approach, Brandom offers an account of knowledge as a standing in the space of reasons (1995: 92-92):

(a) The space of reasons is the abstraction from “the concrete practice of giving and asking for reasons,” which is (more or less) our linguistic social practices.

(b) Standings in the space of reasons are understood as “commitments” and “entitlement” practically acknowledged by practitioners.

(c) Attributing standings in the space of reasons includes applying factive notions (“know”) and warrant notions (“reliable”).

(d) The concepts of truth and justification play different yet related roles in attribution of knowledge (see section 6).

Brandom explicates the space of reasons in terms of attribution and undertaking of commitment and entitlement, and the involved notions are normative ones, so he claims that his approach is “normativity all the way down.”¹⁰

(B) Non-subjectivism

Against subjectivism, Brandom provides a social perspective theory of knowledge.

A attributes knowledge P to B

≡ (i) A attributes a commitment (belief) P to B,

(ii) A attributes an entitlement (justification) to B, and

(iii) A herself undertakes the commitment (truth).

In this theory, it is the normative relation between different social perspectives, not the subjective ideas, that play the essential role. To buttress this claim, let us consider Brandom’s intriguing view on externalism.

¹⁰ Brandom argues that norms cannot be explained naturalistically by regularity. See his “gerrymandering” objection to regularism (Brandom, 1994: 28-29).

7. The social articulation of the space of reasons: Brandom on externalism

Brandom considers three varieties of externalism and identifies one of them as consistent with his theory of space of reasons.

(a) Extreme externalism: According to some radical version of externalism, knowledge is nothing but true beliefs generated from “reliable belief-forming mechanism.” In this sense, “knowledge can be diagnosed quite apart from any consideration of the space of reasons” (Brandom, 1995: 896).

(b) Moderate externalism: This is what McDowell calls the hybrid view, and we have seen this approach is seething with problems.

(c) Local externalism: “one can be justified without being able to justify.”

Brandom agrees with McDowell in dismissing the first two forms of externalism, but, contrary to McDowell, he argues for the third form. Brandom offers his social pragmatism to explain the failure of extreme and moderate externalism, and set the stage for the local externalism. In his theory, belief — as a condition of knowledge — involves the condition of *understanding*, that is, the capacity to grasp and apply relevant concepts. For Brandom, a speaker, unlike parrots and thermometers, understands her own claim only when she is able to grasp and apply the concept involved in the claim, and this ability depends on some practical know-how in the game of

giving and asking for reasons.¹¹ Given this theory, extreme externalism has the problem not with “its construal of the *justification* condition on knowledge but with its construal of the *belief* condition of knowledge.”

In order to refute moderate externalism, Brandom resorts to his social theory of knowledge. Brandom holds that knowledge is a *social status*, “because it incorporates and depends on the social difference of perspective between attributing a commitment (to another) and undertaking a commitment (oneself)” (1995: 904). This account highlights the *connection* between truth- and justification-conditions, since they involve the same proposition and pro-attitudes only under different perspectives. In this light, the hybrid view is misleading in treating justification and truth as independent conditions of knowledge.

Moreover, Brandom warns us against another theory that loses sight of the *distinction* between truth-and justification-conditions. This is the “aggregate theory,” the view that belief sufficiently *justified* is *true*. Brandom denounces this kind of falsehood-excluding justification for it would yield either skepticism or dogmatism. In sum, Brandom admonishes us not to set the distinction between justification and truth too *far apart* (as does the hybrid view) or too *close* (as does the aggregate theory). Only his own theory successfully connects truth, belief, and justification conditions in an appropriate way by manipulating the same proposition and attitude under

¹¹ To adopt a standing in the space of reasons, a speaker has to “master the inferential articulation of such potential positions, status, or standings that makes up the space of reasons—the things that can stand in relation *is a reason for* to each other” (Brandom, 1995: 898).

different perspectives. Thus, Brandom labels his approach a “new hybrid view” based on the distinction between *attributed* and *attributing* perspectives within the space of reasons.

The new hybrid view can shed light on local externalism that “one can be justified without being able to justify.” It is possible, Brandom argues, that a reliable non-inferential reporter has a knowledge claim but is unable to cite her reliability as a reason for her report. (i) Brandom’s first requirement is that the agent “can find [her] way around the space of reasons.” She has, as Brandom puts it, “at least a rough practical mastery of the inferential role [of her claim], the know-how to discriminate some things that follow from it from others that don’t, and some things that would be evidence for it from others that would not” (1995: 905). (ii) Brandom’s second requirement is that *others* regard the person’s claim as reliable and use it as a premise in their own inference. Reliability is thus a “socially articulated inference.”

Reliability inference

S believes that there is a candle (attributing a commitment).

∴ There is a candle (undertaking the commitment).

Brandom *mixes* internalism and externalism as follows: On the condition that both parties are internal to the space of reasons, the distinction between the internal and the external can be presented by the distinction between “attributing” and “attributed.”

What must be kept in mind if one is to talk (a variant of) the traditional language of justification as internal entitling and reliability as external entitling is that what they are internal or external is not the practice of giving and asking

for reasons, and so not the space of reasons, but rather the individual whose standings in that space are being assessed.¹²

Internal entitlement is self-undertaking, and external entitlement is attributed (and often in a manner of reliability inference).

8. The world's connivance *in* the space of reasons: McDowell on internalism

Brandom warns us against the aggregate theory, the view that belief sufficiently *justified* is *true*, since this kind of falsehood-excluding justification heads to either skepticism or dogmatism. Contrary to Brandom's warning, McDowell argues that there can be "justification for a belief sufficient to exclude the possibility that the belief is false" (2002: 97).

¹² McDowell, 2002: 905. A potential problem with Brandom's social pragmatism is the concept of objectivity. It seems that this theory cannot go beyond *perspectival objectivity*. Brandom is well aware of this issue, for he spends great efforts to explore or revise the concept of objectivity—he even comes up with "objectivity proofs." Nevertheless, his accounts of objectivity remain the main target of critics. In some sense, he seems to rely on our ordinary uses of factive vocabulary to explain how to advance from "taking-true" to "being-true." "Factives, . . . warrantives, . . . and cognitives . . . testify at once to the way in which *objective facts* (concerning how things really are, not just how they are taken to be) are incorporated in the *space of reasons*, and equally how the social articulation of that space makes such incorporation so much as intelligible" (2002: 908).

(1) Sufficient justification

Statements of the form “I see that...” in McDowell’s eyes, are “proper moves in the game of giving reason... Someone who can truly make a claim of that form has an entitlement, incompatible with any possibility of falsehood, to a claim whose content is given by the embedded proposition.” Seeing, like remembering and knowing, are so-called *factive states*, states that imply the obtaining of relevant facts. For example, that Jean remembers that it was raining implies that it was raining. As McDowell puts it, “Seeing that things are thus and so is a position that one cannot be in if things are not thus and so. Given that one is in that position, it follows that things are thus and so” (1995: 880). In this sense, “justification adequate to reveal a state as one of knowing must be incompatible with falsehood and can be had” (2002: 98).

(2) Insufficient justification

To deny sufficient justification is to endorse that “justification must fall short of guaranteeing truth” (2002: 99). Brandom’s *candle room example* clearly implies that “the entitlement one can credit to someone who seems to see a candle in front of her, is always *indifferent* to whether or not there is a candle in front of her.” McDowell comments on the example, “The entitlement in both [favorable and misleading] cases is the highest common factor of the two. Even in the best case, the subject’s entitlement does not go beyond the fact that she *seems* to see a candle ten feet in front of her, which of course does not guarantee that there is a candle there” (2002: 99).

This does not seem right because in normal cases, “the appearance that there is a candle in front of her is the presence of the candle making itself apparent to her. This is not a mere seeming.” Indeed, insisting on indifferent justification as the only kind of justification relevant to knowledge presupposes the

argument from illusion, as it recommends taking appearance as the starting point. McDowell has already shown us the untenability of such an approach.

The argument from illusion is particularly gripping mainly because there are two kinds of entitlement:

- a. Rational entitlement (e.g., when a belief is doxastically blameless, warrantive, or epistemically responsible)
- b. Factive entitlement (e.g., when a belief is fact-grounding)

The highest common factor view rests on the former as the only form of entitlement. In honoring Sellars's idea that "entitlement and truth do not come apart," McDowell argues that we have both entitlements. In effect, they would even assert that although the two kinds of entitlements have their distinctive functions, factive entitlement is prior to rational entitlement in the sense that without the former the latter is unintelligible.

McDowell reexamines the debate between Sellars and Brandom on externalism. Sellars seems to argue that a non-inferential reporter is able to cite her own reliability as a reason, from which the correctness of the report can be inferred. Consider the inference:

"I see that there is a candle in front of me."

"I am a reliable reporter."

∴ "There is a candle in front of me."

Brandom thinks this requirement too restrictive. His idea of reliability as social inference allows one to be justified without being able to justify, when *others* are entitled to make

the relevant “reliability inference.” McDowell is opposed to this approach. Imagine the following conversation.

A: “There is a candle in front of me.”

B: “How do you know?”

A: “I see that there is a candle in front of me.”

In this case, if A’s statement is true, A has vindicated his entitlement, and there is no need for external attribution of reliability, no need for social inference of reliability. The statement *I see that P*, for McDowell, is “a proper move in the game of giving reasons, a move that, if one can make it truly, *vindicates* one’s entitlement to a claim with the content of the embedded proposition.”

The difference between inferring and vindicating indicates that justification is not necessarily inferential. More important, it reveals the underlying structure of McDowell’s *minimal empiricism*. His metaphysics of knowing includes the world, stances, and culture (“*Bildung*”). In his view, to have a belief is to adopt a normative stance. A belief about how things are is “a posture or stance that is correctly or incorrectly adopted according to whether or not things are thus and so” (McDowell, 1996: xii). Taking a correct stance to how things are *connects* (or mediates) two elements.

(i) The presence of things makes themselves apparent to us;

(ii) *Bildung* opens our eyes to the facts.

McDowell’s notion of the *direct openness* of the world is thus the idea that facts are open to us who are cultivated to adopt correct posture to them; or, alternatively, if our cognitive posture is correctly executed, we will have “facts in view.” For McDowell, this is commonsense, and “only questionable philosophy can put it at risk.”

In order to illustrate the idea of openness, McDowell has a very interesting analysis of statements of the form “I see that P.”

9. Minimal empiricism: the analysis of “I see that P”

According to McDowell’s minimal empiricism, “experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are” (1996: xii). Statement of the form “I see that P,” in my view, represents a *tribunal* in the following two senses.

(1) There is no inferential relation between the entitlement of “I see that P” and the entitlement of “P” (even if “I see that P,” as a factive state, implies “P”). McDowell emphasizes the difference between vindicating entitlement and inheriting entitlement. Even if “I see that P” vindicates “P,” one’s entitlement to P is not *inherited* from an entitlement to “I see that P.” For if I wonder about whether P, I am not entitled to “I see that P.” In McDowell’s words, “One could not be entitled to “I see that there is a candle in front of me” while it was still in suspense whether one was entitled to “there is a candle in front of me” (2002: 100). So far as perceptual entitlement is concerned, there is no *inference* but *vindication*. “I see that there is a candle” is not a further (more basic) claim for the claim “There is a candle.” They enjoy the same entitlement. The additional contribution of “I see that P” over “P” is merely the indication of the idea of openness, for it amounts to saying “My cognitive posture is correctly executed, so I have the fact in view.”

(2) “I see that P” admits no further vindication. There is no regress of justification. If “I see that there is a candle” is true,

then there is *no* further vindication. This is so, not because it is a basic belief, but statement “I see that P” displays the robust link between the world and me. To see this, let us consider McDowell notion of reliability as authority. McDowell and Brandom have different interpretation of Sellars’s concept of reliability. “Sellars claims that the authority of an observation report ‘must *in some sense* be recognized by the person whose report it is.’” As we have seen in the previous section, Brandom argues against this internalism in favor of his reliability inference. For McDowell (2002: 101),

My reliability about [observation] has for me, rather, a sort of status that Wittgenstein considers in *On Certainty*. It is held firm for me by my whole conception of the world with myself in touch with it, and not as conclusion of an inference from some of that conception.

Reliability as authority seems to indicate a kind of self-trust about the relation between the world and me: A competent agent has the confidence that facts are open to her because she knows how to see them. In this sense, McDowell claims that Sellars’ view is right in that “observational authority must be self-consciously possessed.”

Thus, statement of the form “I see that P” plays the role of a tribunal in McDowell’s metaphysics of knowing, where he successfully discards the traditional notions of inferential justification and the regress of justification.

Finally, McDowell maintains that Brandom’s new hybrid view, like the old hybrid view, is subject to the interiorization of space of reasons. For, on this new view, undertaking a commitment is something “over and above” attributing an entitlement to the commitment (truth-condition over and above justification-condition). It follows that “there can be no entitlement such that to attribute it is already implicitly to undertake the commitment to which one is saying someone is

entitled.” In this sense, Brandom’s social-perspectival conception of knowledge requires “extra conditions over and above the standing in the space of reasons”.¹³

10. After the Pragmatic Turn

Let us take stock by examining the major traditional epistemic concepts after the pragmatic turn. I have argued that there are three main features of the modern epistemology, namely inferential justification, regress chain, and knowledge as justified true belief.

Inferential justification: According to McDowell’s “minimal empiricism,” a statement that P is vindicated by a statement about experience such as “I see that P,” but, as we have discussed in Section 9, there is no inferential relation between these two types of judgment. For Brandom, the traditional inferential justification is too restrictive. His “broad inferentialism” takes in the pragmatist notions of commitments and entitlements, which range over not only beliefs (theoretical commitments) but also actions (practical commitments).

¹³ McDowell, 2002: 102. Brandom’s blindspot, according to McDowell, is “to exploit the image of the space of reasons, cashed out in his social-perspectival terms, so as to secure the very idea of being on to things” (2002: 104). For McDowell, the idea of *being onto things* is never in danger and “Brandom’s idiosyncratic way of invoking the social . . . is epistemically unhelpful.” (a) In McDowell’s view, a rational animal acquires conceptual capacities “by being initiated into a social practice.” “The capacities transform their possessor into an individual who can achieve standings in the space of entitlements by her own effort.” (b) Brandom’s theory allows for subjects “individually incapable of achieving standings in the space of reasons” while able to “keep one another under surveillance.”

(1) Regress chain: McDowell contends that an experience revealed in a statement such as “I see that P” constitutes a “tribunal” because *vindicating entitlement* is prior to *inheriting entitlement* — vindication admits of no regress. In Brandom’s view, the regress argument is just one horn of the dilemma suggested by Wittgenstein’s famous puzzle about rule-following, to which Brandom provides his “normative pragmatism” (the concept of “norm implicit in practices,” in particular) as a solution.

(2) Analysis of knowledge: McDowell holds that the traditional tripartite analysis presumes a notion of justification *apart from truth* and is therefore subject to skepticism. Brandom recasts entirely the traditional definition of knowledge in terms of attributing and undertaking of commitments and entitlements.

After the pragmatic turn, all central epistemological notions such as justification and reliability have changed their meanings.

We have seen that the traditional debate between internalism and externalism is rendered unfruitful, as it is embedded in the struggle between naturalism and subjectivism. Again, after the pragmatic turn, we have acquired a new distinction between internalism and externalism, which is unbound as well as productive.

(a) Externalism:

Both McDowell and Brandom, as we have seen, are anti-naturalist, but they are externalists nevertheless. McDowell’s direct realism (openness of the world) and Brandom’s “Davidsonian semantic externalism” are in clear opposition to subjectivism. Their externalist accounts of the space of reasons involve notions of history, culture, and linguistic practices.

(b) Internalism:

Both McDowell and Brandom, as we have seen, are anti-subjectivist, but they are internalists nevertheless. McDowell's idea of unboundedness of the conceptual reveals that even the world is internal to the space of reasons: there is nothing external to the conceptual. His peculiar idea of *having facts in view* is almost as internalist as subjectivism. Brandom's argument for local externalism shows that external attribution of entitlement can apply only to those who are *internal* to the space of reason — "Something that can find its way around the space of reasons can count as having knowledge in particular cases in which it has a true belief that it is not in position to give reasons for" (1995: 905).

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知識論之實用主義轉向

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摘要

英美分析哲學在過去半個世紀經歷一大變革。戴維森自認參與了一場「反主體論」之哲學革命；羅遜亦稱分析哲學正逐漸由「休姆時期」走向「康德時期」再走向「黑格爾時期」。這個哲學運動目前已廣為知曉並接受，然而它的主要輪廓卻隱而不顯且爭議連連，革命者們迄今對於革命的對象尚未取得共識：賽勒思將「賦與之迷思」視為主要反對對象；戴維森則歸之於「主體之迷思」；羅遜攻擊「自然之鏡」；麥克道歐反對「外緣影響圖像」。本文將試著闡述此哲學運動之核心思想，主要人物及理論影響，並將其融入一實用主義架構之下，並指出新實用主義的主旨是反對笛卡爾以降以知識論為基調的現代哲學之傳統。

關鍵字：實用主義、知識論、內在論、外在論

