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Non-Inferential Knowledge

Marie McGinn
University of East Anglia

The Chancellor's Hall
Senate House – University of London
Malet Street
London WC1E 7HU
United Kingdom

** NON-CITABLE DRAFT PAPER **

ABSTRACT

In investigating non-inferential knowledge, I'm concerned with statements which, in appropriate circumstances, for example, in response to some relevant enquiry, I am in a position to make 'straight off', 'immediately', not only in the sense that I do not have to engage in reasoning, but in the sense that there is no prior belief from which what I state could be presented as an inference. The kinds of things we can state in this way include observational judgements, perceptual statements, memory statements, statements about my current bodily posture, statements about my intentions for the future, and so on. All these kinds of statement are distinctive, not only because I am often in a position to make them straight off, or immediately, but also because, made in response to a relevant enquiry, the question, 'How do you know?', would not normally arise for them. Not only that, but the question, 'How do you know?', would, in normal circumstances, be odd, in the sense that it is very unclear what I should, or could, say in reply to it. The problem that my apparent capacity to state all these kinds of thing straight off, immediately, without any *prima facie* justification, poses is this: what is the nature of my entitlement to make them? How can a judgement that I make straight off be one to which I am entitled? The statements I'm concerned with are distinctive in not being grounded in other things which I judge to be the case, so how can they meet the requirement—which it seems they must meet in order to count as manifestations of knowledge, and thus in order for me to be entitled to make them—that they are ones for which I possess a *warrant*. In this paper, I focus on straight-off observational judgments and on two contrasting approaches to understanding the nature of my entitlement to make them. Both of the approaches are instances of what might be called a non-reductive form of naturalism and they both assume that it belongs to the nature of an entitlement to judge that the subject who judges is aware of his entitlement. However, while the first approach, which I argue against, sets out to provide an account of the nature of the warrant that I have for straight-off observational judgements, the second approach, which I defend, sets out to disconnect the source of my entitlement to make these judgements from the question of possession of a justification, or warrant, for making them. In a final brief section, I consider what light the kind of account of our entitlement to straight-off observational judgements which I develop sheds on the other kinds of judgement I am in a position to make straight off.

BIOGRAPHY

Marie McGinn is Professor Emerita in Philosophy at the University of York, and part-time Professor of Philosophy at the University of East Anglia. Her main areas of research are the philosophy of Wittgenstein, epistemology and the philosophy of mind. Her publications include *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*, (London: Routledge), 1997, of which a second edition is currently being prepared, and *Elucidating the Tractatus: Wittgenstein's Early Philosophy of Logic and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2007; she has also published articles on Wittgenstein, scepticism, naturalism, Merleau-Ponty and John McDowell; she is editor, with Oskari Kuusela, of *The Oxford Handbook to Wittgenstein*. Recent articles include: 'Wittgenstein and Naturalism', in *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. M.De Caro and D. McArthur, (New York: Columbia University Press), 2010; 'McDowell's Minimal Empiricism', *Philosophical Topics*, 2010; 'Wittgenstein and Williamson on Knowing and Believing', in *The Conception of Knowledge*, ed. Stefan Tolkdorf, (Berlin/New York: deGruyter), forthcoming 2011.

NON-INFERENTIAL KNOWLEDGE
MARIE MCGINN¹

1. In investigating non-inferential knowledge, I'm concerned with statements which, in appropriate circumstances, for example, in response to some relevant enquiry, I am in a position to make 'straight off', 'immediately', not only in the sense that I do not have to engage in reasoning, but in the sense that there is no prior belief from which what I state could be presented as an inference. In the current circumstances, such statements include:

- (i) This is a desk
- (ii) I am sitting down
- (iii) I am typing
- (iv) I had toast for breakfast
- (v) I see a desk
- (vi) I remember eating toast for breakfast
- (vii) I intend to eat out tonight
- (viii) I'm thinking about non-inferential knowledge
- (ix) I have a slight pain over my left eye
- (x) I am seeing a variety of colours

All these statements, as I currently make them, are distinctive, not only because I am in a position to make them straight off, or immediately, but also because, made in response to a relevant enquiry, the question, 'How do you know?', would not normally arise. Not only that, but the question, 'How do you know?', would, in normal circumstances, be odd, in the sense that it is very unclear what I should, or could, say in reply to it. It is, for example, very unclear what I might offer as evidence for the things I assert; that is at least part of what is meant by describing these statements as ones I'm in a position to make 'straight off'.

If we take the above statements as exemplars of the kinds of things we are generally in a position to say straight off, then the kinds of things we can state in this way include:

- (i) Observational judgements
- (ii) Statements about my current bodily posture
- (iii) Statements about my intentional actions
- (iv) Statements about my immediate past
- (v) Perceptual statements
- (vi) Memory statements
- (vii) Statements of my intentions for the future
- (viii) Statements of what I am thinking about
- (ix) Statements about what I am feeling
- (x) Statements about my visual impression

This gives some idea of the range of the things that I am in a position to say straight off, independently of any support from other things I believe which

¹ I am indebted to Stephen Everson, whose scepticism was a spur to many helpful discussions of the material presented in this paper.

might be given by way of justification. The range shows that what we state immediately, not on the basis of inference, is not restricted to descriptions of what seems to me to be the case, or of what I am trying to do, or of what I think I did, or of what I seem to remember, and so on. Many of the things I am in a position to say straight off—not only observational judgements—concern things that are objectively the case: the position of my limbs, what I am currently doing, what occurred in my recent past. Furthermore, the statements which I'm in a position to make straight off about my own mental states concern states such that being in them entails that something is objectively the case: that I'm seeing such and such, or that I remember so and so.

One feature that all the statements that I'm in a position to make straight off share is that the beliefs they express are reliable. Thus, where the statement is of a kind that is, in principle, confirmable by others ((i)-(vi)), it is generally the case that where others are in a position to confirm it, it is confirmed; statements of these kinds are such that, where others are in a position to confirm or disconfirm them, there is generally consensus as to their truth. Where the statements I make straight off are not confirmable by others ((vii)-(x)), it is generally the case that what I state fits in with other things I say and do, and that others take my sincere assertion as a criterion of the truth of what I assert. It is important to note that reliability, accord and trust generally characterize our ordinary practice in respect of those statements which I am in a position to make straight off or immediately, and for which the question, 'How do you know?', does not normally arise.

The problem that my apparent capacity to state all these kinds of thing straight off, immediately, without any prima facie justification, poses is this: what is the nature of my entitlement to make them? How can a judgement that I make straight off be one to which I am entitled? Insofar as the problem of entitlement concerns something which we characterize as non-inferential knowledge, there is a tendency to understand the question as asking what my justification or warrant is for the straight off statements I make. If these statements are to count as knowledge claims which I am entitled to make, then, the sense is, they must not merely be true, but I must be justified in making them. Yet the statements I've listed are distinctive in not being grounded in other things which I judge to be the case, so how can my statements meet the requirement—which it seems they must meet in order to count as manifestations of knowledge, and thus in order for me to be entitled to make them—that they are ones for which I possess a warrant.

In this paper, I will begin by focusing on straight-off observational judgments and on two contrasting approaches to understanding the nature of my entitlement to make them. Although the two approaches are contrasting, they share a number of commitments. First of all, they are both instances of what might be called a non-reductive form of naturalism, in which normative practices, such as judging, calculating, inferring, and so on, are seen as part of human natural history, and the actions of individuals who are participants in those practices are held to exhibit a kind of intelligibility which can be captured only by means of descriptions which employ normative notions. Secondly, they both assume that it belongs to the nature of an entitlement to judge that the subject who judges is aware of his entitlement. However, while the first approach sets out to provide an account of the nature of the warrant that I have for straight-off observational judgements, the second approach, which I shall

defend, sets out to disconnect the source of my entitlement to make these judgements from the question of possession of a justification, or warrant, for making them. Before I look at these two approaches, I want to make a final comment about reliability.

As I've just noted, the reliability of the beliefs expressed by the kinds of statements I'm in a position to make straight off is one feature that is shared by all the kinds of statements I listed earlier. This is clearly not a contingent feature of them. The idea that the beliefs thereby expressed by statements of these kinds might be generally unreliable amounts to the idea that no rational pattern could be discerned in the utterances a speaker makes, that is, no coherent connection could be seen between the sounds uttered and either the way the world is, or the other things the speaker does, or the other sounds he makes. However, this would clearly put in question whether the speaker's utterances amount to statements, rather than to mere vocalisations. In respect of statements that we make straight off, a high degree of reliability is a condition on the sounds a speaker utters having the status of statements at all. No doubt the reliability of the beliefs expressed by means of these kinds of statement depends, at least in part, upon the reliable operation of systems of sub-personal processing of which the subject is completely unaware. In assuming that it belongs to the nature of entitlement to judge that a subject who judges is aware of his entitlement, I have excluded purely reliabilist accounts of the nature a speaker's warrant for these kinds of judgement. However, that does not mean that a speaker's capacity to make these judgements does not depend essentially on his systems of sub-personal processing being in good working order; there are clearly conditions which underpin the reliability of a speaker's straight-off judgements which are beyond his ken. It does not follow, of course, that the kind of straight-off assertions we are concerned with are, even implicitly, assertions that these conditions are met.

2. The first approach I want to look at sets out to show that the observational judgements I am in a position to make straight off have the status of knowledgeable judgements for which I possess an indefeasible warrant. It is also accepted, however, that these judgements do not depend on any other belief, but have the status of non-inferential knowledge. The warrant for a judgement which is known non-inferentially, according to this first approach, is not another belief, but rather an experiential state. This is a view that has been developed in great detail by John McDowell. He claims that straight-off observational judgements can be seen as rational responses to perceptual states which provide them with an indefeasible warrant, and which a subject enjoys independently of, or prior to, the observational judgements he makes. One of the main aims of McDowell's account of non-inferential knowledge is to develop a conception of perceptual experience on which the idea of a rational relation between experience and the judgements which are based on it is intelligible.

McDowell accepts Sellars's view that relations of warrant can hold only between conceptually structured items. However, he argues that if we accept the Kantian insight that, in the case of subjects with the relevant conceptual capacities, the content of experience is conceptually structured, then we are in a position to see observational judgements concerning matters of fact as both warranted and non-inferential: they are warranted by, though not inferred from, the experience to which, given its conceptual content, they can be seen as

a rational response. Thus, when things go well, and I am perceiving the desk before me, the warrant for the judgement, 'This is a desk', is provided by the fact that there is a desk before me making itself visually manifest in experience. McDowell writes:

[E]xperience at its best makes aspects of objective reality present to us.... To have an experience describable in those terms is to have an indefeasible warrant for believing that things are as the experience is revealing them to be. (McDowell, 2010:245)

[I]n a non-defective exercise of a [perceptual] capacity its possessor is self-consciously equipped with an indefeasible warrant for belief about the environment. (McDowell, 2010:247)

If it is the case that the fact that there is a desk before me is making itself manifest in experience, then the warrant that this experiential state provides for the judgement, 'This is a desk', is one which is incompatible with that judgement's being false. On McDowell's account, the circumstance of a fact's making itself manifest to a subject in experience provides the subject both with a reason to judge that the fact obtains and a guarantee that the judgement is true, so that what is judged amounts to a rationally grounded judgement which is non-inferentially known to be the case: 'experiences can be such as to exclude any possibility that things are not as they are experienced to be' (McDowell, 2006:135).

It is important that in holding that experience provides reasons for judging, McDowell is claiming that the reason for which I judge that this is a desk makes essential reference to the fact that I am seeing it. Thus, the reason for which I make the judgement that this is a desk is that I see that it is, so that, from my perspective, the belief is a response to an experiential state which I am currently enjoying, and in which the fact that this is a desk is making itself visually manifest. Thus, McDowell explicitly rejects the idea that it is the fact that this is a desk that is my reason for judging that it is, for that would mean that in articulating my reason for judging, I would merely restate what I believe, and this could not be regarded as providing a warrant for it. In order to provide a warrant, the reason must show how my belief about how things are is a rational response to the fact that this is a desk, and thus is something which can amount to knowledge of it. Facts, McDowell argues, exert a rational influence on belief only by being experienced, and thus if the belief that there is a desk is to amount to knowledge that there is, then it must be that my reason for holding it essentially alludes to the circumstance that I am seeing it:

When I believe, on the basis of my visual experience, that there is a hummingbird at the feeder, my reason for believing that is precisely that

I see it to be so—that I experience, visually, its being so—or at least seem to. If I am asked to give my reason for believing that there is a hummingbird at the feeder, it would be absurd to respond by simply restating what I believe, and the absurdity is not lessened if in doing so I would be stating a fact. If my experience is a case of seeing how things are, the fact itself exerts a rational influence on me, but only by being experienced, and a sheer statement of the fact makes no sense as a specification of my reason for my belief. (McDowell, 2006:134)

[W]hen one specifies the reason for which someone holds a perceptual belief, one cannot, in my view, omit the person's experience and go straight to the fact experienced. (McDowell, 2006:135)

On this account, although the judgement that this is a desk is one that I make immediately and without reflection, I do have a warrant for the judgement, and it is one which appeals to the fact that I am currently experiencing the fact that this is a desk.

3. There have been a number of objections to McDowell's account. One important line of criticism has been that the idea that the perceptual experience of creatures with conceptual capacities amounts to openness to facts does not by itself explain how such experiences can transmit a positive epistemic status to beliefs that are based on them.² Thus, it is argued that in order to make an experience in which a fact makes itself manifest the basis of a well-founded observational judgement, there would have to be a criterion by which a subject could distinguish experiences in which a fact makes itself manifest from an experience in which this merely seems to the subject to be the case. It is only if a subject is in a position to distinguish genuine seemings from mere seemings to see—and is thus in a position to know that he is directly aware of a fact—that the notion of experience as openness to facts could explain how the positive epistemic status of the experience could transmit to the belief that is based on it. Given the possibility of deceptive cases, it is argued, a subject is never in a position to take advantage of the warrant that an experience in which a fact is making itself manifest allegedly provides. Given that deceptive cases are possible, a subject lacks the capacity to distinguish cases in which experience provides him with a warrant from those in which it does not, and whatever positive epistemic status his experiential state possesses in the former cases, if it cannot be recognized, it cannot be a source of the entitlement by means of which it passes its epistemic status on to something else.

It seems to me that this objection misses the externalist element in McDowell's account. McDowell is very clear that his attempt to make sense of the idea that perceptual experience provides indefeasible warrants for observational judgements is not intended to show that we are ever in a position to provide a justification for these judgements which would satisfy the sceptic.³ His account is intended merely to serve as a picture by means of which we can, in a positions of reflection, reassure ourselves that, when things go well, we are in a possession of an indefeasible warrant, provided by the fact that a fact is making itself manifest in experience, and are thus in a position to make knowledgeable judgements about, or form beliefs which amount to knowledge of, the objects and events occurring in our surroundings.⁴ The account was never supposed to put a knowing subject in a position to guarantee his knowledge claims, but only to show how, even though he cannot prove he knows to a sceptic, someone who judges that *p* for the reason that the fact that

² See, for example, Crispin Wright (2002, 2008)

³ Thus, McDowell acknowledges that '[i]t is true that we could not establish that we are open to facts in any given case; at any rate not to the satisfaction of a determined sceptic, who can always insist on exploiting fallibility to give bite to the question how we know the present case is one of the non-misleading ones.' (McDowell, 1994:113)

⁴ McDowell describes his philosophical aim as follows: 'The aim here is not to answer sceptical questions, but to begin to see how it might be intellectually respectable to ignore them, to treat them as unreal, in the way common sense has always wanted to do.' (McDowell, 1994:113)

p is making itself manifest in experience, can be in possession of an experiential warrant, or justification, for his belief which guarantees what he claims to know, guarantees it as a fact. According to McDowell, 'the sheer intelligibility of [this] idea is enough' (McDowell, 1994:113), and this does not require that the subject have an infallible way of telling that he is enjoying such an experiential state. The fact that a subject may, on some occasions, take a case of a mere seeming to see that something is thus and so as a case of seeing it is thus and so, does not alter the fact that, when he sees things are thus and so, the seeing provides him with an indefeasible warrant for a judgement about how things are.

4. The externalist element in McDowell's account means that all that he is claiming is that, if and when we are in a situation of perceiving our environment, then facts about our experience provides us with reasons to judge which constitute indefeasible warrants for the judgements we make about how things are in our environment. It is this claim that I now want to look at more closely. On McDowell's account, it is the state of seeing that this is a desk which provides me with a warrant for judging that this is a desk. Insofar as facts about experience are my warrant for the judgement that this is a desk, I can articulate my warrant for the latter judgement in the statement 'I see that this is a desk'. It seems natural to object at this point that this articulation of my warrant for the judgement that this is a desk, 'I see that this is a desk', incorporates a description of what I see, and thus presupposes that I have already settled what is there to be seen. If I'm in a position to state 'I am seeing a desk', then that means I have already made the judgement, 'This is a desk', and so it is hard to see how this could count as providing a warrant for the judgement.

It is central to McDowell's account of my warrant for observational judgements, which on his account cases of genuine seeings provide, that 'I see that *p*' is a canonical way to specify my reason for judging that *p*: '[t]he canonical justification for a perceptual claim is that one perceives that things are as it claims they are' (McDowell, 2008:385) There is no thought that 'It appears to me to be the case that *p*' is the only way to specify my reason, for if it were, then reasons would stop with how things appear; they would never get as far as anything factive and would therefore fall short of providing an indefeasible warrant for the judgement that *p*. Thus, he argues that 'It appears to me that *p*', although true, is not 'the whole truth about the relevant inner state of affairs' (McDowell, 2010:244), and thus not the whole truth about my reason to judge. For while 'I see that *p*' entails 'It appears to me to be the case that *p*', 'It appears to me to be the case that *p*' does not entail 'I see that *p*'. In order to specify my reason for the judgement that *p* in a way that succeeds in showing that the judgement is warranted, that is to say, knowledgeable, the specification must make it clear that 'the state is the appearance it is only because it is a state of having something perceptually present to one' (McDowell, 2010:251), that is, it must take the form 'I see that *p*'.

If, as McDowell appears to accept, my articulation of what he claims is my warrant for the judgement that *p* presupposes that I have already made the judgement that *p*, it is difficult to see how it succeeds in providing the latter with an independent warrant. It is, of course, the case that perception is a way of coming to know about the world insofar as it provides opportunities for observational judgements. Giving 'I see that *p*' in response to the question,

‘How do you know that p ?’, is generally a way of indicating how I am in a position to affirm that p . However, this falls short of McDowell’s claim that the judgement that p is a response to an experiential state with the same propositional content, which constitutes an indefeasible warrant for it. If I give ‘I see that p ’ as my reason for judging that p , then it seems that all I am doing is repeating the judgement and at the same time indicating that it is a judgement made on the basis of observation, that is to say, that it is an immediate response to the visible world, and is not arrived at on the basis of inference or testimony.

Insofar as an observational judgement is an immediate response to the visible world, then it follows that there is an appearance that is the basis of my judging that p ; my judgement is a response to what appears, in the sense of what is visible. If my judgement that this is a desk is an immediate response to what is visible before me, then it is an observational judgement: a case of observing that something is so. Although this says something important about the status of my judgement, it is not yet to provide it with an independent justification. It doesn’t provide an independent warrant for the judgement that this is a desk, insofar as that judgement is already presupposed in any description I give of what appears that doesn’t fall short of the observed fact, including the statement that I see that p .⁵ It is true that whenever I make a true observational judgement such as, ‘This is a desk’, in response to the visible world, a statement of the form, ‘I see that this is a desk’ will be true. But if we ask what my reason is for the response to the visible world that is expressed in the observational judgement itself, then it seems to me that the only reason which properly captures my reason for making it, it is precisely that it is a desk, that is, that this is a correct description of what is there to be seen. This is not, of course, to provide a warrant for the judgement, for it simply repeats it. However, it can be said to count as giving the reason, rather than the mere cause, of my judgement insofar my response is clearly not a mere reflex, such as blinking in response to a bright light, but one in which I bring my acquired mastery of the relevant observational concepts to bear on the objects and events by which I am confronted. However, my reason for the judgement cannot, without the obvious circularity of p because (it is correct to judge that) p , be regarded as my warrant for the judgement; repeating a judgement is not a way of justifying it.

The claim is that McDowell’s suggestion that my warrant for the observational judgement is that I see that it is a desk really does no better, in providing a justification for my judgement that this is a desk, than the outright repetition of the judgement does. For, the claim is, it is on the grounds of my making the observational judgement that this is a desk that I am in a position to state that that is what I see, and so the latter cannot be an articulation of my warrant for the former, although it may be an indication to someone else of why I am in a position to affirm it, that is, of the fact that the judgement is an observational one. One might put this by saying that, if and when we are in a

⁵ I am not the first to raise this objection to McDowell’s account of non-inferential knowledge. For example, Barry Stroud writes in criticism of McDowell: ‘Someone who is asked why she believes that a certain object in her view is square might...give the unsurprising reply “Because I see that it is square”...It involves judging or asserting that the object is square. That judgement is part of the experience of seeing that the object is square.’ (Stroud, 2002:87). Charles Travis writes: ‘Where I see the pig to be before me, my mind is made up. Nothing remains (on that score) for me to take at face value or not. The world has already drawn credence from me. To see that such-and-such is so is to take it to be so.’ (Travis, 2004:79)

situation of perceiving our environment, then our straight-off judgements about what is there to be seen provides us with reasons to judge what we see. The straight-off observational judgements have logical priority in the sense that it is by making them that what is there to be seen can become a reason for action, or for making further judgements, for example, judgements about what I see. This priority goes against McDowell's attempt to 'to put experiences in the epistemological position in which Sellars puts reports of observation' (McDowell, 2009: 254). It suggests that if we want to understand the nature of our entitlement to the observational judgements that ground perceptual statements of the form, 'I see that p ', and bring what is there to be seen within our ken, then we should not look to facts about experience which constitute warrants for those judgements, but to the capacities which put us in a position, when we are perceiving the world, to respond with a description of what is there to be seen, and thus to judge what it is that we see. That is to say, our entitlement to straight-off observational judgements should not be understood on the model of being in possession of a justification which guarantees the judgement. This is the second approach to the problem of entitlement, one which disconnects the nature of my entitlement to judge that this is a desk from the idea that I possess an independent warrant for it.

5. The logical priority of the observational judgement over judgements of the form, 'I see that p ', manifests itself in an asymmetry between reasons for action and reasons for straight-off observational judgements. Suppose I give the fact that p , a state of affairs I am not currently observing, as my reason for ϕ 'ing. It is not enough that I take it to be true that p and it is true, in order for my ϕ 'ing to be a rational response to the fact that p . It is only if I know that p that my ϕ 'ing constitutes a rational response to the fact that p ; the fact that p exerts a rational influence on my action, is my reason for acting, only insofar as it is something that I know to be the case. McDowell argues that something analogous is true in the case of observational judgements and that this shows why it is absurd to suggest that a mere repetition of the judgement could give my reason for judging (See McDowell, 2006, §5). Thus, if I give that this is a desk as my reason for judging that it is a desk, it is not enough that I take it to be a desk and it is a fact that it is a desk, in order for my judging to be a rational response to the fact that it is a desk. It is, McDowell argues, only if I am experiencing the fact that it is a desk that my judging it is a desk constitutes a rational response to the fact that it is; the fact exerts a rational influence over my judgement only insofar as it is something experienced. It for this reason that in giving my reason for judging that this is a desk I must allude to the circumstance of a fact's making itself manifest to me, that is, to my seeing that it is a desk.

However, there is an important asymmetry between the two cases. In the case of an action performed in response to the fact that p , a state of affairs I am not currently observing, my truly judging that p is clearly not enough for the judgement to count as a case of knowledge. If the judgement is true but is made on grounds that do not qualify it as knowledge, then an action performed for the reason that p is clearly not a response to the fact that p , which remains beyond my ken. At best we can say that I act as I do in virtue of my true belief that p ; I cannot be motivated to act by a fact that has not come within my ken, and mere true belief is not sufficient for that. In the case of an observational judgement, things are otherwise. For in a perceptual situation, if I judge that

this is a desk and it is one, then that is sufficient to establish that I see that it is a desk: the truth of the observational judgement is, in these circumstances, a criterion of my seeing that it is a desk. The requirement that I am experiencing the fact that it is a desk adds nothing to what is already established, in these circumstances, by the truth of the observational judgement that I make. If, in a perceptual situation, I say that this is a desk, and it is, it follows that I am seeing that it is; there is no distinction in this case which parallels the distinction between mere true belief and knowledge in the case of reasons for action.

McDowell motivates the claim that there is symmetry between the action case and the judgement case by appeal to the example of a *trompe l'oeil* pictures (McDowell, 2006:136). Suppose I am looking at a *trompe l'oeil* picture of a violin on a wall which is in front of exactly such a violin, and make the observational judgement 'There is a violin before me'. As McDowell observes, this judgement is true, but is not a response to the fact there is a violin before me, since I do not see the violin, but only a *trompe l'oeil* painting of one. It now looks as if we need to add the requirement that I am seeing the violin for my judgement to be a rational response to the fact that there is a violin, and thus to qualify as a warranted, knowledgeable judgement. However, the example clearly depends upon our taking as an exemplar of an observational judgement a general judgement of the form, 'There is a violin before me'. If we take a paradigmatic observational judgement of the form, 'That is a violin', which is clearly the ground of my believing that there is a violin before me, then said in response to the *trompe l'oeil* painting, that observational judgement is not true, that is, this is not a case of observing that that is a violin; this in itself establishes that I am not seeing that it is a violin, and therefore that I am not seeing that there is a violin before me.

If we recognize the logical priority of the demonstrative observational judgement, then its falsity in the case of the *trompe l'oeil* picture already establishes that this is not a case of observing that something is so, and thus that the general belief which is based on the observational judgement is not a response to a fact. Adding that the true general belief must be a response to seeing that there is a violin before me, in order to be a rational response to the fact that there is, adds nothing, for what it requires is already covered by the requirement that the demonstrative observational judgement on which the general belief is based be true. Again, this shows that 'I see that this is a desk' is not a way of articulating an independent warrant for the observational judgement that this is a desk, or of showing, what truth of the judgement alone is taken not to show, that the judgement is a rational response to the fact that it is a desk; the truth of the straight-off observational judgement that this is a desk already establishes that this is case of observing that this is a desk, that is, that it is a correct description of what is there to be seen, and thus a case of seeing that this is a desk; it adds nothing in respect of showing that the judgement is a response to the fact that this is a desk to say that it is a case of seeing that it is, for that is something which is already established by the truth of the observational judgement itself. Thus, it seems that it really is the case that the reason which properly captures my reason for judging that this is a desk is precisely that it is a desk, that is, that this is a correct description of what is there to be seen, although repeating the judgement is clearly not a way of providing the original judgement with a warrant; there is nothing more

fundamental in the order of justification than our straight-off observational judgements.⁶

It might be objected here that it is possible to provide an example in which the judgement that p has a demonstrative content and is true, but in which I do not see that p . Imagine, for example, that I am confronted by a red square which, unknown to me, is illuminated by a red light. In this case, my observational judgement, 'That is red', is true, but it is not true that I see that the square is red, for if I were confronted with a white square in the same circumstances, I would still judge, 'That is red'. On McDowell's account, the fact that I am not seeing that the square is red means that my original, true judgement is not a response to the fact that the square is red, and is thus not a warranted or knowledgeable judgement. It is only if the fact that it is a red square is making itself visually manifest in experience that my judgement is a response to the fact that it is red, and that is why 'I see that it is red', when I am seeing it, is an articulation of both my reason and my warrant for the judgement.

What I want to say about this case is analogous to what McDowell himself might say about the judgement, 'This is a barn', made while standing in front of the only real barn in barn-façade country. McDowell might argue that this is a case in which there are circumstances obtaining such that, if I knew them, I would recognize that I am not in a position to judge (in respect of barns) that things are as they appear, so that even when their appearing the way they do is a matter of the fact that there is a barn making itself manifest in experience, I am not, given the circumstances, in a position to take advantage of the warrant that experience provides, and thus not in a position knowledgeably to judge, 'That is a barn'. Similarly, the above example describes a case in which there are circumstances obtaining (the light is non-standard) such that, if I knew them, I would recognize that I am not in a position to make observational judgements about the colour of objects. I'm not in a position to make, which is to say I'm not entitled to make, the true judgement, 'That is red', because the circumstances are such that I am not in a position to make, or am not entitled to make, any judgements about what colour an object is; it is a condition of my being in a position to make judgements about the colour of things that the lighting conditions in which I view them are normal. When lighting conditions are normal, the truth of my judgements of colour is enough on its own to establish that I am making an observation about an object's colour, and thus that I see that the object has that colour, and there is no need to add that I must see that it is so coloured in order for my judgement to be a response to the fact it is.

In general, our mastery of observational concepts include a grasp of the conditions in which we are entitled to make straight-off judgements involving them; when I'm aware that viewing conditions are in some way odd, or if I have only a brief glimpse, or a partial view, then I am also aware that what, in other circumstances, might be a straight-off observational judgement involves an element of inference, and that, strictly, the straight-off judgements I am in a position to make are restricted to how something looks, or to a vaguer or less

⁶ This view seems to fit well with Charles Travis's view of perception, which he expresses as endorsement of an idea of Austin's: 'Austin's idea is that...our senses merely bring our surroundings into view; afford us some sort of awareness of them. It is then for us to make of what is in our view what we can, or do.' (Travis, 2004:64)

specific description of what is there to be seen (for example, ‘There is a dark elongated shape over there’ rather than ‘This is a desk’). Which circumstances count as standard for a given observational concept is something that is settled by the nature of the concept, and not by reference to the nature of the subject’s experiential state. When viewing circumstances are standard, the true, straight-off observational judgements I make settle which true perceptual statements of the form, ‘I see...’, I’m in a position to make; in circumstances which count as normal for the relevant concepts, the truth of an observational judgement is enough on its own to establish that that is what was seen; true judgements which, in the circumstances I am entitled to make, establish the description under which what is there to be seen is seen.

A parallel point applies in the case in which I wrongly believe that circumstances are such that I am not in a position to make observational judgements about colour, say, because I wrongly believe that the light is not standard. In these circumstances I refrain from making a judgement of colour which I may later realise I was in fact in a position to make. McDowell sees examples of this kind as forcing us to accept that there is a notion of seeing which does not involve endorsement of any observational judgement, and as bringing to light the sense of visual experience in which visual experience can provide independent reasons to judge. Thus, we see that ‘[a]n impression is something like an invitation...to accept a proposition about the objective world’ (McDowell, 2002:278).⁷ This, according to McDowell, is an invitation I may accept or reject, and if I reject it, I may realise later that it was not merely a matter of something’s looking to have a certain colour, say, green, ‘but that I was seeing it to be green’ (McDowell, 2002:277).

Again, the reference to seeing goes against the logical priority that I have argued the observational judgement has over a perceptual statement. If we accept that logical priority, then what I realise, in the above case, is that I was in a position to make observational judgements about colour and can therefore state that the object I saw not merely looked green but was green. It is on that basis that I am now in a position to say that I saw that I was seeing it to be green. Of course, it is true that prior to my being in a position to make this judgement, I was seeing a green object, and not merely an object that looked green. However, this is merely to specify what might be called the material object of my seeing. The intentional object is given by the description under which I saw this green object, which was, before the realisation that viewing conditions were normal, ‘an object that looks green’.⁸ It is this description which provides me both with reasons for action and for a judgement about what it is that I see, for it is the only fact that has so far come within my ken. It is only when I realise that I’m in a position to make the outright observational judgement, ‘That object is green’, that the fact that it is green comes within my ken and becomes a potentially rational influence on my actions and further judgements, including the judgement that I was seeing it to be green.

⁷ This idea clearly contrasts with the idea that perception affords us an awareness of our surroundings and that it is ‘for us to make of what is in our view what we can’ (Travis, 2004:64). It is the idea that something is ‘put forward’ in experience prior to the subject’s taking what is there to be seen in any particular way, either in an outright observational judgement of the form, ‘This is an X’, or in a less committal judgement of the form ‘This appears/looks to be an X’.

⁸ In describing matters this way, I am relying on G.E.M. Anscombe’s account of verbs of sense-perception in ‘The Intentionality of Sensation’ (Anscombe, 1981).

6. I want to turn now to the second approach to the problem of my entitlement to straight-off observational judgements; the one I want to defend. The first approach claims that my experiential state both provides me with a reason to judge and constitutes an indefeasible warrant for my judgement. The approach I want to recommend abandons the idea that experiential episodes are what lend our observational judgements whatever authority they possess, and aims to detach the question of our entitlement to these judgements from the issue of possession of a justification which guarantees them as correct. The idea is that we need to make clear the connection between a subject's ability to make straight-off observational judgements, confidently and without guidance, and the acquisition of the capacity to judge. If the capacity to judge is constituted, in part at least, by the ability to make observational judgements groundlessly, without guidance, straight off, without hesitation or doubt, then, the claim is, we should look for the source of the subject's entitlement to these judgements, not in something which grounds or justifies them, but in the authority which arises from his mastery of the concepts employed. This is to see the source of the entitlement to straight-off observational judgements in something quite distinct from that which entitles someone to an ordinary claim to know something, namely, that he possesses proper grounds for asserting what he thereby claims to be the case. In the case of straight-off observational judgements, the entitlement lies in capacities of the judge which form the background to his judging, and which give his observational judgements an authority which derives, not from his having a justification for what he asserts, but from his status as a master of the relevant concepts.

As McDowell observes, the capacity to judge is something that human beings acquire through the sort of education which is typical for them. In its earliest stages, this involves a child's learning, first, to manipulate objects, and then, to employ them in the performance of tasks which are not fully instinctive, but which it naturally identifies with and takes on as its own. A child's acquisition of language, and hence of the capacity to judge, is made in the context of its acquisition of the ability to take part in characteristic forms of human behaviour: eating, dressing, washing, playing, and so on. It is essential to this entire process of education that the child begins by trusting the adult. In the context of the process of initiation into these characteristic forms of human activity, the adult begins to teach the child judgements: 'This is your hand', 'This is a spoon', 'This is a ball', 'This is red', and so on. The child gradually learns to respond to objects unhesitatingly, not only by using them appropriately in the performance of tasks, but with the appropriate name or description. The acquisition of language, and hence the ability to judge, is based, in the first instance, on objects and properties being recognized and given their appropriate names over and over again. The child, quite naturally, trusts the teacher and follows his lead.

The test of the child's having mastered the concepts that the adult teaches him is his ability to go on and use the relevant expressions in ways that accord with those of his teacher, independently, without guidance, and without any hesitation or doubt. Coming to trust his own ability to judge, without guidance from his teacher, is essential to the child's acquisition of the capacity to judge. When the child develops the ability to react to the objects and events by which he is confronted with the correct name or description, as judged by his teachers, there is no question of his grounds for what he asserts; the truth of

his judgements is a criterion of his having learned to judge. No question of how the child knows what he judges arise, the child's growing entitlement to make the true, straight-off judgements he does resides entirely in the authority deriving from his increasing mastery of the relevant concepts.

In this way, the human capacity to judge does not have its roots in anything that might be called justifying judgements; in its primitive stages, the development of the capacity to judge does not involve questions of grounds for judgement. Rather learning to judge is, in the first instance, developing an unhesitating ability to say correctly what something is. We don't miss the absence of warrants or justifications for judgements in the early stages of our development of the capacity to judge. The idea is that this should help us to acknowledge the logical priority of straight-off observational judgements and to accept their status as confident and unhesitating responses to the objects and events occurring in our environment. When our response is the manifestation of the acquired mastery of the relevant observational concepts, and our judgements are true, then this brings the objects and events occurring in our environment within our ken in a way that allows us to treat them as reasons for action. Non-conceptual creatures respond to the significance of the objects and events occurring in their environment, and in that sense can be said to take what they see, for example, to be prey, an enemy, a potential mate, and so on. Only creatures with the ability to respond to the significance of objects and events occurring in their environment by describing what they see are in a position to consider what is seen as a reason for action. The suggestion is, what makes the immediate response of someone with conceptual capacities an exercise of rationality is not that he is in possession of an independent experiential warrant to which the judgement is a rational response, but that the capacities which are exercised in responding to the objects and events in his environment with appropriate descriptions are ones which ground his ability to constitute anything as a reason for action, or as a reason for making further judgements. It is the essential connection between the development of the capacity for straight-off observational judgements and becoming a theoretical or practical reasoner that qualifies the former as an aspect of reason.

There is clearly a difference between the judgements of a mature human being and the reactions of a child who is learning to judge. A mature human being has mastered a conceptual repertoire that goes way beyond observational concepts, and into which the latter are woven by an intricate network of conceptual connections. A mature human being is also a self-conscious judger, who not only understands what he does as the expression of a judgement, but also grasps that the exercise of his capacity for making observational judgements depends upon certain conditions being met. If he has reasons to believe that these conditions are not met, then he knows that he must refrain from making straight-off observational judgements which, in normal conditions, he understands himself to be entitled to make authoritatively, in virtue of his mastery of the relevant concepts. Thus, the claim is that there is an alternative to holding that our straight off judgements must either be judgements for which we must possess a justification or they are brute responses which are caused to occur in us, or which we find ourselves making, and which cannot be considered an exercise of rationality. Our judgement is an immediate response, and is therefore not grounded in anything that provides a warrant for it, but as an exercise of our self-conscious ability to describe the objects and events occurring in our environment, it is essentially the

performance of a rational being, who understands his entitlement to observational judgements as residing in the authority, which his acquired mastery of relevant observational concepts gives him, to describe what is there to be seen.

Consider again the straight-off observation judgement, which I am now in a position to make, 'This is a desk'. On the current approach, the correctness of my judgement itself constitutes a prima facie indication that I am entitled to make it, not in the sense that I have proper grounds for it, but in the sense that I am in a position authoritatively to make it. Clearly, correctness does not by itself entail entitlement in the latter sense, but all that is required to transform my prima facie entitlement into actual entitlement is that I have acquired mastery of the concepts involved. Given that my judgement is correct, and given that I speak English, no further question of my warrant for judging as I do arises. The judgement is groundless, but it is not arbitrary or irrational or a mere blurting out of sounds in response to a stimulus. Its rational status derives, on the one hand, from its being a conceptual response—the expression of a self-conscious intention to describe what is there to be seen—and on the other, from the connection between my capacity to respond in this way and my status as a theoretical or practical reasoner. The judgements are not made for any other reason than that they are correct, so that the reason for the judgement can only repeat it, but my ability to make these judgements in the way I do, immediately and without doubt, is essentially a rational capacity insofar as it is a manifestation of my acquired ability to make observational judgements, and thereby have reasons both for believing further things, and for performing actions.

The straight-off observational judgements that any particular subject is in a position warrantably, in the sense of authoritatively, to make will clearly vary with the background abilities that he brings to the context of judgement. Most human beings are able to use the names of a large number of people, places, buildings, monuments, and other objects, in describing what is there to be seen. There is also a large set of concepts—those which describe the perceptible properties of objects, such as their colour, shape, texture, degree of hardness, and so on; those which describe the familiar artefacts employed in normal human life, such as table, chair, book, and so on; those which describe the familiar natural objects that normal human life brings us into contact with, such as tree, grass, dog, cat, and so on; and many others—which most human beings are master of and able to employ in immediate descriptions of what is there to be seen. What other conceptual abilities a subject is able to bring to bear in describing what is there to be seen will depend upon the degree to which they have mastered concepts associated with particular areas of expertise, for example, those which put the subject in a position warrantably to observe 'That's a sycamore', 'That's a lime', 'That's a beech', and so on. The latter individual is in a position to be more specific about what is there to be seen, and thus about what he sees, than someone who has only a more basic conceptual repertoire. He may also be in a position to explain, to someone who does not know, what it is that distinguishes a lime from a sycamore, but that does not mean that his description, 'That's a lime', is inferred from descriptions of these distinguishing features. For someone with the relevant expertise, 'That's a lime' may be a non-inferential judgement which he makes immediately

and with appropriate authority, the question of how he knows, or of his justification for describing the world in the way he does, does not arise.

Our ability to describe what is there to be seen is, of course, fallible. The world contains fakes and simulacra—soap shaped to look like lemons, chunks of wood shaped and painted to look like apples, people who feign pain, resins made to look like bronze—by which I am liable to be taken in. In these cases, where there is an intention to simulate, it seems right to say that the way the object appears has a ‘face value’ and that, by taking its appearance at face value, I am led to make a false judgement. In this case, someone sets out to exploit my mastery of the criteria for describing something as a lemon, or someone as being in pain, to bring it about that these concepts are aptly employed in a description of what confronts me. In some cases, a closer look or further tests may reveal that the case is one of false appearance, but even then the concept of a lemon, or the concept of pain, does not become irrelevant. Rather, it becomes part of a more complex description which includes one of a class of qualifiers that denote some form of simulation: ‘fake’, ‘counterfeit’, ‘feigned’, ‘imitation’, ‘pretend’, ‘artificial’, ‘bogus’, ‘sham’, ‘hoax’, and so on. In other cases, the deception may be undetectable. In some cases, my being taken in may indicate irresponsibility and lack of entitlement to judge; in other cases, the deception may be such that I am blameless. However, it seems clear that all this shows is that I can be fooled by simulations and this has no tendency to threaten the authoritative status of correct judgements made in normal contexts.

Cases of simulation are, I want to argue, quite different from cases in which I am misled by appearances into misidentifying, or misdescribing, what is there to be seen. In the latter cases, I take something, the water running down the window, say, to be rain when it is water from the garden sprinkler. In this case, the idea of taking something ‘at face value’ does not apply, since there is no intention to create an appearance of rain. It is rather that I see something, water running down the window, which is, in many circumstances, a criterion of rain. However, in the current circumstances it is not a criterion of rain: the concept of rain is irrelevant to a description of what appears, that is, of what is visibly before me. Of course, it is true to say that the water running down the window ‘looks like rain’, but then it looks like other things too: water from a hanging basket, water from dripping trees, water from the windows being cleaned above, and so on. These similarities may make it understandable how I came to make a particular misidentification, but insofar as it is a misidentification it is a defective operation of my conceptual capacities. And this is shown by the fact that discovery of the error leads, not to an amendment of the original description, but a complete withdrawal of it: ‘I thought that was rain’, ‘I took that (wrongly) for rain’, and so on. However, the fact that I am not an infallible identifier of what it is that I confront does not imply that when I do, on the basis of a clear view in standard viewing conditions, identify correctly what is there to be seen, my identifications are not the authoritative exercise of my fallible conceptual abilities.⁹

⁹ What I say here about the fallibility of our conceptual capacity to identify what is there to be seen exactly mirrors what McDowell says about the fallibility of our perceptual capacity: ‘It is wrong to think it follows that even when one is not fooled in an exercise of [one’s perceptual] capacity, one’s position must fall short of having the greenness of something visibly present to one, and thereby having an indefeasible warrant for believing the thing to be green.’ (McDowell, 2010:245) I want to argue, in agreement with Travis, that when perception is

7. I want to end by returning briefly to the range of examples of non-inferential knowledge I listed at the beginning and consider what light, if any, is shed on them by the kind of account of our entitlement to straight-off observational judgements which I have just developed.¹⁰ As I noted at the start, all the examples of things I am in a position to say straight off are instances of statements that are in good standing without the support of other beliefs and they are all kinds of statement which are characterised, on the one hand, by their reliability, and on the other, by the trust with which they are received by others. The example I have focused on is the only one in which the knowledge expressed in the statement is made on the basis of observation, that is, as a response to the visible world that I confront in perception; all the other examples are first-person present indicative statements which, although they may presuppose my having made observational judgements, are not themselves made on the basis of observation or in response to an appearance. However, all the examples are distinctive insofar as my ability to say these kinds of thing straight off is connected with my possession of capacities that are essential to my status as a theoretical and practical reasoner: the self-conscious capacity to perceive and to remember, and the capacity for self-awareness both in respect of my bodily posture and movement, and in respect of what I am doing, thinking, intending, and so on.

At least some of the capacities that are manifest in our ability to say these kinds of things straight off have their primitive analogues in creatures that lack conceptual abilities. The higher mammals have the capacity to perceive and remember; the capacity for bodily awareness, for voluntary movement, and for intelligent, goal directed actions, in which any particular segment of behaviour can only be understood in relation to a whole series of voluntary movements which are directed towards a specific end. Animals manifest these capacities in meaningful, complex, voluntary behaviour that is responsive to the significance of the objects and events occurring in their environment. In the case of animals, there is clearly no question of epistemic justification; their voluntary, goal directed behaviour is a complex, spontaneous response which reveals both their goals and the significance that their perceived environment has for them. One of the central ideas of the account of observational judgements that I have developed is that we should see our ability to describe what we see as having its roots in our natural propensity for spontaneous, meaningful engagement with the objects and events occurring in our environment. When we learn to say what something is, or to describe what is there to be seen, justification and doubt are not in the picture. What is essential, at the point where we acquire the abilities that are essential to our becoming theoretical and practical reasoners, is that we learn to speak for ourselves, spontaneously and without guidance from others. Doubt comes in later, when our conceptual capacities become more refined and we learn that the proper exercise of our capacities for observational judgement requires that certain conditions are met, and that there are possibilities for fakery and pretence which require the employment of our observational concepts in the description of false appearances. However, the claim is, this does not affect our fundamental ability authoritatively to describe

misleading, it is our conceptual abilities, that is to say, our judgement, which is at fault, and not our perceptual faculties (Travis, 204:64ff).

¹⁰ The remarks in this final section are indebted to many discussions over a number of years with Rachael Wiseman, whose PhD thesis (Wiseman, 2010) develops in detail the kind of understanding of the nature of self-consciousness which I here merely gesture at.

the world we confront in observational judgements that we make, immediately, without the question of how we know, or the question of our justification for, what we state arising.

If we take this account of straight-off observational judgements as our model, then it suggests that we should not look to ground the non-observational, first-person statements, which are expressive of self-consciousness, in something which justifies them. Our first-person present tense indicative descriptions of our bodily posture, of our bodily movements, of our intentions for the future, of what we are thinking, of what we remember, and so on, are also things we learn to say straight off, spontaneously, without any question of justification or how we know arising. In the case of self-conscious bodily awareness, our development of these abilities has its roots in more primitive forms of self-awareness, and capacities for motor control and voluntary behaviour, which predate our development of conceptual abilities. Acquiring the relevant conceptual capacities means learning to say, spontaneously, not on the basis of observation, and without guidance from others, what my bodily posture is, how I am moving my limbs, what I am doing, and so on. Instead of looking for a special way in which a subject is 'given' to himself, or for a distinctive experience of intentional action 'from the inside', which grounds or justifies these first-person utterances, we should recognise that our capacity to state these things straight off is the form that bodily self-awareness and the capacity for goal directed action takes in creatures who have acquired conceptual capacities. The intentional actions of practical reasoners are responses to reasons in a sense in which the voluntary behaviour of higher mammals is not, but the ability to say, straight off, what we are doing and why is just the way our self-consciousness manifests itself, and we should not attempt to ground it in anything more fundamental.

Similarly, we might look at our ability to give expression to what we think or intend, or to what we feel, as a matter of our acquiring techniques for the spontaneous expression of thoughts and feelings, in which we simply speak for ourselves. We acquire the ability to make statements of these kinds in the course of developing certain characteristic human capacities, in which our going on to say what we think or feel or intend, independently and confidently, without guidance, in ways that accord with other things we say and do, is essential. Our entitlement to say these things does not, on this approach, derive from an experience which is the ground of our making them, but from the authority which derives from our mastery of the relevant concepts. Rather than trying to construct accounts which show that we have a warrant for the relevant first-person utterances, we should look at the primitive roots of the capacities we develop and the context in which we acquire them. The idea is that this will show that questions of justification and grounding have no application; as in the case of observational judgements, we need to be able to see why the straight-off nature of the statements does not mean that they are brute vocalisations which cannot be considered an exercise of rationality. Our first-person utterances are not grounded in anything, but as the exercise of our self-conscious ability to say what we think or intend, or what we feel, they are essentially the performances of a rational being who understands his entitlement to say these things as residing in the authority that he possesses in speaking for himself on such matters; the question of how he knows does not arise.

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