

**PERCEPTUAL PRESENTATION AND THE MYTH OF THE GIVEN**  
ALFONSO ANAYA

Pre-print. Published in *Synthese*. The final version can be found at:

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-021-03124-5>

ABSTRACT: This paper articulates and argues for the plausibility of the Presentation View of Perceptual Knowledge, an under-discussed epistemology of perception. On this view, a central epistemological role of perception is that of making subjects aware of their surroundings. By doing so, perception affords subjects with reasons for world-directed judgments. Moreover, the very perceived concrete entities *are identified* as those reasons. The former claim means that the position is a reasons-based epistemology; the latter means that it endorses a radically anti-psychologist conception of reasons. First, I articulate and motivate the Presentation View. Then, I defend the view from three incarnations of a major objection levelled within the ranks of reasons-based epistemologies: McDowell's version of the accusation that a view like this falls prey to the Myth of the Given. I argue that all three incarnations fail to show the Presentation View to be inadequate. The first version holds that a general characterization of the Myth clearly shows that it is an incoherent idea. The second version holds that endorsing the Myth makes it impossible to construe non- conceptual items as items that can stand in rational relations to judgements and beliefs. The third version holds that endorsing the Myth leads to a conception where perceptual experiences merely cause, but do not warrant, our perceptual beliefs and judgements. I explain in detail how the Presentation View has the elements to respond to each of these objections.

## Introduction

Although perceptual knowledge has interested philosophers since the beginning of philosophical thought (Austin 1962: 1, Plato 1973), the issue has recently received renewed attention in part due to the effervescence in the field of philosophy of perception. More specifically, the advent of disjunctivism has provided new impetus to otherwise neglected naïve realist approaches; simultaneously this has fostered the development of ever more sophisticated representationalist accounts of perception – many of them addressing arguments set forth by naïve realists.<sup>1</sup>

This fast-changing landscape in philosophical debates on perception has had an important impact in the *epistemology* of perception. Which has led, among other developments, to the revival and elaboration of different versions of epistemological disjunctivism (McDowell 1982, Pritchard 2012), agential accounts of perceptual knowledge (Miracchi 2017, Schellenberg 2019), and the exploration of the impact of attention and other cognitive processes in perceptual knowledge (Siegel 2017, Sillins & Siegel 2014). Among these positions, which have attracted considerable attention, we find an often sidelined and neglected epistemology of perception inspired by the development of ever-more sophisticated naïve realist accounts of perceptual experience (Martin 2002, Campbell 2002, Brewer 2007, Soteriou 2013). Following a central idea in Charles Travis' epistemology (2004, 2013), according to which a central epistemological role of perception is that of placing our surroundings in view, I label this position the “Presentation View of Perceptual Knowledge” (hereafter “PV”, for short). This paper aims to give the view some due attention and defend it as a plausible position which should be more carefully developed and examined. I do so by putting the view to a relatively old test – pitting it against the old and revered argument that accuses a view like this

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. Schellenberg's (2011) response to Travis (2004).

of falling prey to the Myth of the Given. I claim that new developments in the philosophy and epistemology of perception allow us to show that PV has a solid response to this challenge.

One central tenet of the Presentation View I shall defend here holds that part of the epistemological significance of perception consists in making perceivers aware of the concrete entities (*concreta*) that populate their environment.<sup>2</sup> Being in such a perceptual state affords subjects with warrant for world-directed judgements.<sup>3</sup> On this approach, perception is responsible for presenting the world to the perceiver; in Travis' words, perception's epistemological role is that of bringing our surroundings into view.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the label "Presentation View of Perceptual Knowledge".<sup>5</sup>

One distinctive trait of PV as I articulate it is a division of epistemological labour. On this view, perceptual knowledge enjoyed by rational adult humans is the result of the interplay of two separate contributions: first, successful perception provides perceivers with reasons for world-directed judgements; secondly, perceivers must put themselves in a position where they are entitled to exploit those reasons in a judgement or, in other words, to base their judgement on those reasons.<sup>6</sup> Seeing a goldfinch provides me with reasons for judging that there is a goldfinch before me; but that by itself would be insufficient for a corresponding judgement to

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<sup>2</sup> As we shall see below this wide category is meant to include entities that do not fall straightforwardly under the ordinary category of "objects", such as absences. See Austin (1962) for useful discussion on the "objects" of perception.

<sup>3</sup> §1 will offer a detailed explanation of how perception has this epistemological role.

<sup>4</sup> See Travis (2004, 2005, 2007, 2013) for a defence of the view that the chief epistemological role of perception is that of presenting the (perceivable) world to us. For a similar view see Kalderon (2011).

<sup>5</sup> The terminology used to describe the position is significant. I use the notion of "presentation" to suggest that a central epistemological role of perception is that of merely showing us what there is (for us) to perceive. On this view, it is an additional step that *we* make out what there is before us, by recognizing our surroundings as the things they are (see Austin 1946: 97). This stands in clear contrast to talk of "manifestation", prominently used by McDowell (1996), which suggests that perception delivers judgeable (or at least, thinkable (2006, 2008)) contents to perceivers.

<sup>6</sup> A terminological clarification is in order: the notion of "exploiting" one's warrant in a judgement should be read as a being equivalent with the notion of "basing" a judgement on one's warrant. The use of an expression or the other is merely a stylistic matter.

be knowledgeable. Additionally, I must be entitled to exploit those reasons in a judgement.<sup>7</sup> To gain that entitlement perceivers must recognize the goldfinch as the animal it is, they must *be prepared* to defend their judgement from potential counter-considerations, and finally they must be *capable of refraining* from endorsing the content provided by recognition in a judgement. In addition, sometimes (though not necessarily always) perceivers will have to actively attend to specific parts of the scene in order to yield successful recognition, or to adequately address specific counter-considerations.

This division of labour is one of the most distinctive aspects of the version of PV I articulate here. Both Travis (2007, 2013) and Kalderon (2011) have formulated versions of PV which explain in some detail how perception of concrete entities provide subjects with warrant for world-directed judgements (i.e. the first part in the division of labour). Nevertheless, they say little about the *active* contributions that I identify – contributions required to exploit these warrants in knowledgeable judgements. Although both claim that recognitional capacities are necessary for perceptual knowledge,<sup>8</sup> they do not characterize this contribution as an exercise of the perceiver’s agency. Moreover, they fail to emphasize the further agential contributions for perceptual knowledge that I identify (i.e., being prepared to defend judgements from counter-considerations, and being capable of refraining from judging). As a result, my version of PV, unlike Travis’ and Kalderon’s, puts special weight on the *epistemic agency* that perceivers must exercise in order to gain perceptual knowledge. As we shall see, this will allow us to provide a specially convincing response to McDowell’s third version of the charge that PV falls prey to the Myth of the Given.

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<sup>7</sup> Here, I use the notion of “being entitled” in its ordinary sense of having a right to (do) something. Not to be confused with any technical notion articulated recently by epistemologists – such as Burge (2005) or Wright (2004).

<sup>8</sup> This thought is specially salient in Kalderon (2011) and Travis (2007, 2013).

The Presentation View has received little attention in current epistemological debates.<sup>9</sup> It is not uncommon to find brief articulations of this view (which means that the conceptual space it occupies is acknowledged by some philosophers) only to be swiftly dismissed as an implausible, untenable or unviable position (Echeverri 2013). My main aim here is to provide new arguments for the viability of the view as a serious contender in the current epistemological arena. Others have already begun rehabilitating the Presentation View in current epistemological debates (e.g. Kalderon 2011, Travis 2004, 2007, 2013, and French 2020). Here I seek to contribute to this rehabilitation. The strategy is twofold. First, I articulate the view in detail and systematically. I do not develop here an exhaustive and direct defence of my position, for that would be the topic of a couple of papers in themselves. Instead, I defend its plausibility within current debates following the indirect route of putting it to a difficult test. More specifically, I respond to a particularly acute obstacle that stems from John McDowell's competing epistemology of perception – namely, the accusation that PV falls prey to the Myth of the Given. I argue that PV has the resources to respond to this challenge. Attentive readers might think that there is nothing new in this strategy, since Kalderon (2011) himself mounts an argument against the Myth and in favour of (his version of) PV. But there are important differences between our strategies. Kalderon follows an indirect route aimed at questioning the legitimacy of the Myth itself, whereas I assume that the Myth has a legitimate bite that defenders of PV should address. As a result, I develop direct responses to three different versions of the charge found in McDowell's work. I take it that defending PV in this manner is dialectically important. For my approach provides some reasons in favour of PV to

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<sup>9</sup> Although it has experienced a revival in recent years. See Kalderon (2011), Travis (2004, 2005, 2013), French (2016, 2020), and as a target of criticism in McDowell (2018) and Cunningham (2018).

those philosophers who remain unmoved by Kalderon's case and think that there is some legitimacy in the charge of falling prey to the Myth.<sup>10</sup>

In §1, I articulate PV in some detail and systematically. In §2, the bulk of the paper, I argue for the plausibility of PV, following the indirect route that I just mentioned.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the standing of PV is favoured. Given that it can respond effectively to McDowell's acute charges we have reason to engage with the view seriously.

## 1. The Presentation View of Perception

The Presentation View is first and foremost motivated by reflection on ordinary cases where rational adult humans come to know things about their surroundings through perception. This led J.L. Austin to identify two separate contributions in perceptual knowledge acquisition.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, a perceptual encounter with  $x$  provides subjects with warrant for world-directed judgements about  $x$ . On the other, subjects ought to do certain things to be able to exploit that warrant in a knowledgeable judgment. Let me explore these contributions in turn. The aim of this section is to articulate the view systematically. The result is not a thorough

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<sup>10</sup> For more detail about how my strategy differs from Kalderon's see pp. 17-8 below. I thank two anonymous reviewers for pushing me to be more explicit about this.

<sup>11</sup> I focus my efforts in responding to formulations of this attack by McDowell (1996, 2008) for two reasons: first, McDowell's is one of the most influential characterizations of the Myth as it arises specifically for perceptual knowledge; and, second, in recent work (2008) he has tried to fill an important gap in this literature by developing explicitly a *general* formulation of the Myth (I discuss this formulation in detail in §2.1) – something which is conspicuously missing from Sellars' (1963) original introduction of the notion. For other prominent formulations of the Myth see Davidson (1986), Williams (1977), and Bonjour (1985). Although I focus on versions of the challenge that can be found in McDowell (1996, 2008), it is worth mentioning that I also take into consideration further clarifications he makes in his more recent (2018). But being a defensive paper against criticisms by Travis (2013), I do not find a version of the Myth that differs from those articulated elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> See Austin (1962), p. 114.

defence of the view,<sup>13</sup> although I do advance some considerations (and motivations) in favour of its central tenets. Instead, we get a systematic and well-motivated articulation of PV.

### *1.1 Perception and conclusive warrant*

When things go right, as we suppose they do in most cases, successful perception seems to put perceivers in a distinctively good position to gain knowledge about their surroundings. For Austin, a perceptual encounter with some aspect of the environment, by virtue of providing us with awareness of that aspect, opens up the *possibility* for subjects to gain knowledge about *that* aspect. This is so because perception affords subjects with a distinctively good type of epistemic warrant; a type of warrant characterized by Austin as *better* than mere evidence. This idea is central in a widely known passage:

The situation in which I would properly be said to have *evidence* for the statement that some animal is a pig is that, for example, in which the beast itself is not actually on view, but I can see plenty of pig-like marks on the ground outside its retreat. If I find a few buckets of pig-food, that's a bit more evidence and the noises and the smell may provide better evidence still. But if the animal then emerges and stands there plainly in view, there is no longer any question of collecting evidence; its coming into view doesn't provide me with more *evidence* that it's a pig, I can now just *see* that it is, the question is settled. (Austin, 1962: 115)

One suggestion by Austin is that the type of warrant enjoyed by someone who sees the pig is *better* (epistemologically) than the warrant she would enjoy if she merely saw evidence of porcine presence. Moreover, the former type of warrant suffices to *settle* the issue of whether

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<sup>13</sup> That will be the target of §2.

a pig is there. “Austin’s Insight” is my label for the contention that perception provides subjects with a distinctively good kind of epistemic warrant, different from evidence.<sup>14</sup> Of course this is not to deny that perception can also provide subjects with evidence – e.g., when I see hoofmarks that indicate porcine presence.

The Presentation View I defend endorses Austin’s Insight and develops it by fleshing it out more precisely. Thus, I need to explain why seeing the pig puts the subject in such a good position to know that the pig is before her. The goodness of her epistemic position amounts to thereby being afforded with a kind of warrant that can *settle* the issue in question. But why is it that seeing the pig can help us settle whether a pig is there, whereas merely seeing its traces often falls short of settling it? One natural response is that it is *impossible* for a subject to see the pig *and* the proposition that there is a pig before her be false.<sup>15</sup> Contrast this with a subject who merely has perceptual *evidence*: seeing hoofmarks on the ground is consistent with the falsity of the same proposition, for they could be marks made by a jokester with a pig’s severed feet.

This observation merely records that perceptual states are *factive*: being in those states imply the truth of certain propositions.<sup>16</sup> But we also need an account of the *nature* of the warrant afforded by this factive state. The observation about factivity provides a lead. Why is it that seeing a pig implies that a pig is before one? Clearly, because the pig’s existence (upon which the relevant experience depends) is *incompatible* with the falsity of the relevant proposition. In general terms, there is an *alethic necessitation* relation between some objects of

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<sup>14</sup> My use of “evidence” follows Austin’s (1962, 1946, 1950, 1979b). It is characterized as a consideration that “speaks” in favour of the truth of a statement by “indicating” its truth, where the relation of indication is consistent with the falsity of the supported statement.

<sup>15</sup> This conception of perception, and its associated is consistent with McDowell’s (1982, 2010, 2011, 2013) account of conclusive perceptual warrant.

<sup>16</sup> See Williamson (2000) for a defence of seeing as a factive state.

experience and the truth of certain (non-necessary) propositions:<sup>17</sup> e.g. the pig's existence necessitates the truth of certain (non-necessary) propositions.<sup>18</sup> PV brings these observations together in the claim that perception provides us with conclusive warrant by making us aware of concrete entities in our environment. The suggestion is that, given their alethic necessitation relation to propositions, the concrete entities we perceive *are* reasons for certain world-directed judgements.

This means that PV is committed to a “Radical Anti-psychologistic” conception of reasons. It is anti-psychologistic because it holds that non-psychological entities are reasons for belief and action.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it is “radical” because it holds that concrete entities (or *concreta*), not only facts, are reasons for belief and judgement.<sup>20</sup> Here, the notion of a “concrete entity” is understood as encompassing spatiotemporally located entities,<sup>21</sup> and thus selects a class of entities which is not ontologically homogeneous. The class includes material objects (e.g. a blueberry), property instances (e.g. the blueberry's purpleness), processes (e.g. the blueberry's rolling down a table), and events (the blueberry's falling to the floor);<sup>22</sup> but it also

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<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that my appeal to an alethic necessitation connection intends to avoid unnecessary commitments to the existence of truthmaking entities, a controversial aspect in Kalderon's (2011: 226) version of PV.

<sup>18</sup> I exclude necessary propositions from the class of propositions that can stand in this kind of alethic necessitation relation with *concreta*. It is true that necessary truths (e.g.  $2+2=4$ ) are true no matter what perceived objects there are. But the kind of alethic necessitation relation I am concerned with here is one where the relevant proposition is true *by virtue* of the existence of the concrete object perceived.

<sup>19</sup> See Dancy (2000) for anti-psychologism about reasons. For discussion, see Roessler (2014), Wallace (2006), Hornsby (2008), and Peters (2019).

<sup>20</sup> For this version of radical anti-psychologism see Kalderon (2011), who in turn finds a version of the view from Johnston (2006). For discussion see French (2016).

<sup>21</sup> For a formulation and discussion of this definition of *concreta* see Hale (1987) and Rosen (2014). See Hale (1988) and MacBride (1998) for further discussion about the concrete/abstract distinction.

<sup>22</sup> For those who believe in tropes, these can be included in the list. On the one hand, some construe tropes as concrete entities (Giberman 2014), and thus would fall under the class of *concreta*. On the other, those who construe tropes or “moments” (Mulligan *et al* 1984) as particularized properties (Kriegel 2005) or as abstract particulars (Lowe 2008) often concede that tropes exist at a particular place at a given time (unlike universals). On this conception, tropes are *abstract* because several tropes can exist in the same place at the same time (Kriegel 2005) – e.g., the coffee's bitterness and the coffee's coldness can coexist. On this conception, tropes can be included in our list because they are spatiotemporally located entities that can be objects of perception.

includes entities which do not fit straightforwardly in these categories, such as shadows, rainbows, reflections, and others.<sup>23</sup>

Radical Anti-psychologism is one of the most controversial aspects of PV, and here I lack the space to defend it exhaustively.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, a few things can be said in its favour. It can be argued that concreta have ‘normative force’ and play a motivational role in rational subjects’ cognitive and practical lives. These are two distinctive features of reasons, according to philosophical discussions on the topic.<sup>25</sup> In the context of belief and judgement,  $x$  has normative force when its obtaining makes a given belief or judgement that  $p$  appropriate, by virtue of favouring its truth.<sup>26</sup> We can argue that concreta’s normative force is underpinned by their standing in alethic necessitation relations to propositions. For the obtaining of this relation ensures that the existence of concreta *does* favour the truth of those very propositions.

Second, the defender of PV can also straightforwardly account for the motivational role of concreta. The mere existence of reasons is insufficient for them to be relevant for our reasons-based attitudes. For instance, the empty coffee can is a reason to buy more coffee – but unless I am appropriately aware of it, that reason cannot make a difference in my cognitive and practical life. Additionally, those reasons should be, somehow, accessible to subjects in ways that they are available for their judgements or actions. This is the “motivational role” of reasons.<sup>27</sup> PV has a ready explanation for the motivational role of concreta. Uncontroversially,

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In fact, trope’s perceivability is often cited as a reason for their existence (Lowe 2008). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for calling my attention to this issue.

<sup>23</sup> On the variety of perceivable “objects” see Austin (1962), Kalderon (2011), and Soteriou (2018).

<sup>24</sup> Kalderon (2011) articulates quite clearly a version of radical anti-psychologism that is very similar to the one I endorse here. Nevertheless, radical anti-psychologism is part of his “dogmatic” (in his own words (2011: 227)) exposition of PV. As a result, he does not provide arguments in its favour. Here I aim to fill this gap by providing the beginning of an argument for it.

<sup>25</sup> See Dancy (2000), Alvarez (2014) and Roessler (2014).

<sup>26</sup> I use the notion of “favouring the truth of  $p$ ” as an umbrella term including cases where  $x$  merely indicates (but does not guarantee) the truth of  $p$ , and cases where  $x$  guarantees (and not merely indicates) the truth of  $p$ .

<sup>27</sup> See Alvarez (2014).

many concreta are objects of perceptual awareness. Additionally, successful recognition allows perceivers to form judgements in response to perceived concreta.<sup>28</sup> PV can explain concreta's motivational role as follows: subjects become aware of concreta through perception, and recognition allows them to exploit concreta as reasons in beliefs and judgements.

To sum up, the case in favour of Radical Anti-psychologism goes as follows. Concreta stand in alethic necessitation relations to propositions, which grounds their normative force as reasons. Perception and recognition allow subjects (who aim to form a true worldview) to exploit the obtaining of that relation in judgement formation, which explains how concreta play a motivational role in the subject's cognitive life.

PV endorses this conception of reasons and suggests that perception can be regarded as a source of reasons for world-directed judgements. Perception puts the subject in a *distinctively* good epistemic position, for the reasons afforded to her by perception are *conclusive*. The alethic necessitation relation ensures that the existence of a given concretum is incompatible with the falsity of certain propositions. In this way PV accommodates Austin's insight that perceptual warrant can help us *settle* issues: it can help us settle them insofar as it provides us with conclusive reasons.<sup>29</sup>

### *1.2 Being in a position to exploit warrant*

I have explored only one part of PV's account of perceptual knowledge – how perception affords perceivers with warrant. Additionally, on this view, it is up to perceivers to ensure that they can exploit that warrant in knowledgeable judgements. For even if perception puts

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<sup>28</sup> In §1.2 I say more about recognitional capacities and their importance in perceptual knowledge acquisition.

<sup>29</sup> See McDowell (2011, 2013) for a defence of conclusive perceptual warrant from recent attacks by Burge (2011). See also Kalderon (2011).

subjects in a position to acquire knowledge, warrant possession by itself does not guarantee that a corresponding judgement would be knowledgeable. Being in a position to know is not the same as actually knowing. Possessing warrant is consistent with the subject not exploiting (or not being entitled to exploit) that warrant in a judgement: even if I face the one true barn in Barn Façade County (Goldman 1976), thereby possessing warrant to think that there is a barn before me, I might not be entitled to exploit that warrant in a corresponding judgement. Among other things, before being so entitled, I should discard the (very relevant) possibility that it is a barn façade.

Nevertheless, determining with much specificity what subjects should do to be entitled to exploit their perceptual warrant is not straightforward. In fact, this might be impossible to determine in abstraction from the operative circumstances. Suppose I can clearly see an American goldfinch on a tree. Suppose further that other similar looking birds abound in the area, such as the female scarlet tanager. It seems obvious that, in this situation, I should discard the possibility that it is a female scarlet tanager if I am to warrantedly judge that it is an American goldfinch. But in different circumstances I would not have to do this: consider a similar case with no similar-looking birds around. Differences in perceivers' acuity might also play a role. Consider a case in which an expert ornithologist and I spot a goldfinch on a tree. A cursory glance might suffice for the ornithologist to tell it is a goldfinch, whereas I might need to take some time, get closer to it, or consciously recall a diagram of a goldfinch inspected earlier. The point is that *how much* subjects should do to be entitled to exploit their perceptual warrant depends, greatly, on the particular circumstances they find themselves in.

Nevertheless, despite contextual differences, I suggest that there are at least three different agential capacities which are necessary for perceptual knowledge: 1) the capacity to recognize perceived things as the things they are, 2) the capacity to address potential counter-

considerations against the perceptual judgements the subject makes, and 3) the capacity to refrain from endorsing the content provided by perceptual recognition in a judgement.<sup>30</sup> The explicit incorporation of this form of epistemic agency sets my articulation of PV apart from other prominent versions.<sup>31</sup> As we shall see (§2.3), this aspect of PV will allow us to articulate a cogent response to one version of McDowell's charge that PV falls prey to the Myth of the Given.

Here, I lack the space to make a strong case for the necessity of (1-3) for perceptual knowledge. But that is not my aim here. I am merely explaining systematically the components of PV in order to show in the coming section that it has the resources to address McDowell's Myth of the Given objection. Having this in mind, let me say something brief to explain why my version of PV takes these activities to play a necessary role in perceptual knowledge acquisition.

Let us begin with recognitional capacities. Consider a case in which you see something entirely new, not similar to anything seen before. Imagine, for instance, that you encounter a boni giant sengi – a rare African mammal – for the first time. Despite seeing it, and therefore having warrant for judging that a boni giant sengi is before you, you would arguably be unable to use your warrant in a judgement unless you recognize the animal as a boni giant sengi. Acquiring that recognitional capacity and exercising it successfully in the relevant occasion would allow you to exploit that warrant.

Let us turn to consider how sensitivity to counter-considerations might help the subject exploit perceptual warrant. Consider a case where you clearly see a goldfinch, which leads you

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<sup>30</sup> By no means exercise of these capacities exhaust what subjects might need to do to exploit perceptual warrant.

<sup>31</sup> Particularly, Kalderon's (2011) and Travis' (2004, 2013). Importantly, I take it that the explicit incorporation of an agential component is not obviously incompatible with their versions of PV. In my opinion, incorporating these components would strengthen their views.

to think that there is a goldfinch before you. This seems to be a case where you successfully exploit your warrant in a knowledgeable judgement. But we can introduce a further complication to the scenario, which raises doubts as to whether the judgement would be knowledgeable. Suppose you recognize goldfinches by their red heads. If you are informed that other red-headed birds abound in this part of the country (e.g. woodpeckers), then suddenly there is a real possibility that the bird was not a goldfinch after all. Under these circumstances, it would be natural to suggest that it is unclear whether you are in a position to exploit your perceptual warrant in a knowledgeable judgement.<sup>32</sup> But why would you not know? After all, you did see a goldfinch and recognized it as such. One natural suggestion appeals to deontological considerations. It could be argued that a knowledgeable judgement has to be formed, and sustained, in an epistemologically responsible manner. To ignore a valid consideration which raises the possibility that you are mistaken would be irresponsible. A judgement cannot be knowledgeable if it is irresponsibly formed or sustained. If this line of thought provides a satisfactory explanation of the relevant intuition, it also provides a suggestion of what is missing in the example to achieve knowledge. The perceiver should be, at the very least, sensitive to potential counter-considerations. And when a valid counter-consideration arises, she must be able to neutralize it; alternatively, if she is unable to neutralize it, she should suspend judgement on the matter.<sup>33</sup> Thus, if there is something additional about the situation which allows you to determine that the bird before you *is not* a woodpecker, then you might regain entitlement to exploit your warrant. For instance, you could point out that the red patch in its head has a shape not exhibited by woodpeckers.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A suggestion along these lines can be found in Austin (1946).

<sup>33</sup> I explore this issue in detail in my (manuscript)

<sup>34</sup> This is consistent with the claim that independent information, from a source different to perception, might allow subjects to neutralize counter-considerations.

This last observation leads to the final agential contribution in PV. If the perceiver lacks resources to neutralize a counter consideration for her judgement, she must at least be able to suspend judgement on the matter, if she is to remain a responsible believer. This means that, to guarantee epistemic responsibility, epistemic agents must be able to retract or refrain from endorsing a given content in a judgement. Sometimes, in order to save one's integrity as cognizers, we are required to retract our judgements.<sup>35</sup> This means that perceptual knowers must have at least this minimal kind of agential control over the judgements they make – notice that this is far from endorsing any strong version of doxastic voluntarism.

In summary, the Presentation View holds that in making us aware of concreta, perception makes us aware of reasons for world-directed judgements. It endorses a Radical Anti-psychologistic account of reasons on which concreta are reasons for belief and judgement. Even though successful perception provides perceivers with warrant (i.e. reasons) for world-directed judgements, this does not entail that subjects have the corresponding perceptual knowledge. For possession of warrant is compatible with not exploiting, or being unable to exploit, that warrant in a judgement. According to PV, depending on the circumstances, there is a set of capacities perceivers should exercise if they are to exploit their warrant in a knowledgeable judgement. I have explored a paradigmatic set of capacities perceivers need to exercise: recognition, sensitivity to counter considerations, and the capacity to refrain from judging.

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<sup>35</sup> This idea can be found in Descartes (1996: 43), as he repeatedly points out in the *Meditations* that even if we are unable to attain knowledge of many of the issues that are cast into doubt by critical reflection, we can always retort to suspension of judgement in order to save our cognitive integrity and avoid falsity.

So far, I have merely outlined the main commitments of PV. In the remainder of this paper, I contrast PV with a prominent alternative epistemology of perception with the aim of showing that PV is a serious contender in current discussions on perceptual knowledge.

## **2. The Presentation View and the Myth of the Given**

The Presentation View I advocate here is a kind of reasons-based epistemology of perception. Thus, serious challenges to PV can be mounted from the perspective of foes of reasons-based accounts; and these need to be addressed in an exhaustive defence of PV. This task will be left for another occasion. For my plate will be full with responding to, perhaps, the most forceful objection against PV from *within* the ranks of reasons-based epistemology. This objection has been prominently articulated by John McDowell, who would regard my attempt to vindicate the Presentation View as a dead-end – and would do so for principled reasons. He would argue that the view falls prey to the “Myth of the Given”, and any view which endorses the Myth is bound to fail in making perceptual knowledge intelligible. Allow me to elaborate.

In a nutshell, falling prey to the Myth consists in endorsing the view that the conceptual capacities necessary for adult human’s knowledge “are operative only in *responses* to experiences, not in experiences themselves” (McDowell, 2008: 258, emphasis added). McDowell’s alternative view is that empirical judgements are “rationally intelligible” in the light of experience because conceptual capacities are “operative *in experience itself*, not just in judgements in which we respond to experience” (ibid., emphasis added). For him, perception provides reasons for subjects only because their conceptual capacities are (passively) actualized in experience. But for PV some perceived concreta can be reasons for judging, and *not by virtue* of any conceptual capacities being actualized in perception. Thus, for PV, *contra* McDowell,

experience can play an epistemologically significant role without conceptual capacities being actualized in it.

I take it that this characterisation captures the main point of disagreement between McDowell's own view and PV *qua* position that endorses the Myth.<sup>36</sup> Here, I shall look closely into some of McDowell's arguments for rejecting views that endorse the Myth. I argue that his attacks leave my version of PV untouched. For McDowell's reasons against endorsement of the Myth do not straightforwardly apply to it. I argue that some interpretations of the Myth of the Given are not genuinely mythological. Others are, but PV is not committed to them.

Before moving on, I would like to emphasize how my defence of PV against the charge of falling prey to the Myth differs from Kalderon's (2011) own defence. Kalderon opts for an "indirect" strategy, which avoids responding directly to any specific version of the charge. For he is less concerned with any specific version of the charge (as I am with McDowell's), and more concerned with questioning the legitimacy of the charge itself (Kalderon 2011: 220-1, 240-1). Thus, Kalderon examines epistemologies of perception tailor-made to avoid the Myth (in particular Sellars' and McDowell's) only to show that those very views can themselves be charged with falling prey to the Myth: "If criticism of conceptions designed specifically to avoid the Myth naturally motivates a conception that is known, or reasonably judged, to be a form of the Myth this is some reason, at least, to think that the Myth of the Given is no myth" (Kalderon 2011: 221). In contrast, I employ a *direct* strategy. I do defend my version of PV from three specific versions of the charge. There are at least two reasons for following this route. First, a strictly dialectical reason is that my strategy has something to offer to those who remain unconvinced by Kalderon and think that the charge of falling prey to the Myth *does*

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<sup>36</sup> See Kalderon (2011: 220, 241) for the case that PV is a form of the Myth.

have some bite to it and that defenders of PV ought to address the charge directly. To them, I offer a direct response to (some versions) of the charge. In this sense, my strategy can be thought of as complementary to Kalderon's (bearing in mind the small differences between our versions of PV): he offers reasons to think there is nothing problematic with the Myth and therefore that defenders of PV should be unapologetic of their endorsement of it; for the unconvinced I offer reasons to think that PV has the resources to respond to three prominent versions of the charge directly. Second, since my strategy centres on providing cogent responses to specific construals of the Myth, I choose to focus on McDowell's construals for the importance they have in current epistemology of perception.<sup>37</sup> If I can show that PV, as I conceive it, can address (some of) McDowell's charges, then this is at least a reason to see PV as a live option in the current philosophical landscape. Of course, this is not to say that PV therefore is able to respond to *all* other versions of the charge. That would have to be judged by close inspection of each version of the charge. My only point here is that looking closely at prominent charges found in McDowell's work, PV has an adequate response to those charges. Given their importance in the field, this amounts to a good reason to think of PV as a serious contender in the epistemology of perception.

Now let me say something brief about McDowell's general epistemological project to place his arguments against the Given in context. McDowell aims to make space for a view in which perceptual experience can ground perceptual knowledge. To achieve this, he aims to strike a balance between two accounts of perception's epistemological import that he finds unacceptable: on the one hand, a coherentism or a pernicious form of idealism (exemplified by Davidson's coherence theory) where perceptual experience cannot play a justificatory

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<sup>37</sup> See footnote 11 for further explanation of my choice of target.

role;<sup>38</sup> and, on the other hand, a simple empiricism where experiential inputs are not conceptually structured. He thinks that much of the modern epistemological tradition has been swinging from one unacceptable view on the matter to another, where the swing has been marked by an exaggerated reaction to the perceived failures of the opposite position. He recommends breaking free from this dialectical swing by rejecting some of the assumptions which shape the discussion.

On his diagnosis, each position is motivated both by a correct and valuable insight and by an overreaction to the perceived shortcomings of the opposite view. Thus, the empiricist position is motivated by the correct idea that for empirical thought (and knowledge) to be objective at all (i.e. about the mind-independent world) perceptual experience must stand in justificatory relations to thought. Its mistake, according to McDowell, lies in construing perceptual experiences as actualizations of sensibility with no involvement of conceptual capacities. Coherentism provides a diagnosis of what is wrong with the empiricist position: perceptions as conceived by the empiricist cannot stand in justificatory relations to thought. For them, only conceptually structured states (such as beliefs) can provide the subject with reasons for belief and judgement. For McDowell, this is a correct insight by the coherentist. But coherentism comes with its own set of problems. Particularly, that it renounces the empiricist's insight which helps ground empirical thought in mind-independent reality. How can we make sense of our beliefs being about objective reality if our alleged avenue of contact with the empirical world (i.e. perception) cannot provide us with justifications for our judgements and beliefs about said world?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Davidson (1986, 1973). McDowell's own view has been characterized as a form of idealism. He responds that the kind of idealism he espouses is not a pernicious one (2011).

<sup>39</sup> See McDowell (1996), especially the Introduction and Ch. 1.

For McDowell, this is how the empiricism-coherentism tension plays out. For him, the only way out of this pernicious seesaw consists in rejecting some of the terms which shape the dialectic. This can be achieved, he thinks, while retaining each view's insights: on the one hand, that perception stands in justificatory relations with beliefs and judgements; on the other, that only elements in the "space of reasons", i.e. elements with conceptual content, can stand in justificatory relations to beliefs and judgements. McDowell argues that it seems that we can only choose *one* of these insights because there is a background deep-seated construal of perception on which conceptual capacities are not involved at all. Rejecting this construal allows for the adoption of a view which, allegedly, has the advantages of coherentism and empiricism with none of their problems. Thus, McDowell advances a conception of perception inspired in Kant's work, according to which conceptual capacities are (passively) actualized in experience. On this view, perceptions belong to the "space of reasons" and thus are able to ground empirical thought in objective reality.

McDowell's case depends on his rejection of the traditional alternatives within the dialectic. In the remainder of this paper, I focus on, and challenge, his rejection of the empiricist side of the dialectic. I scrutinize McDowell's stated reasons for rejecting views that maintain *both* that perception can justify our empirical judgements, *and* that it does not involve the actualization of the perceiver's conceptual capacities – that is, views which endorse the Myth. PV would be classified by him as falling within this class, for it holds that we can account for the epistemological significance of perception without endorsing the claim that conceptual capacities are actualized in it (e.g. Kalderon, 2011: 220). I shall look closely at three arguments advanced by McDowell against endorsement of the Myth. The first of them rests on a general characterisation of the Myth – which supposedly shows that endorsement of the Myth is itself incoherent. The other two arguments attempt to find specific shortcomings that views

endorsing the Myth will necessarily exhibit. I argue that all three arguments fail as attacks to my Presentation View.

### *2.1 McDowell's General Characterisation of the Myth*

What does it mean to say that a theory endorses the Myth of the Given? And why is endorsement of the Myth a reason to reject an epistemological account of perception? These are not easy questions. The very notion of the Myth of the Given has its origin in Wilfrid Sellars' work.<sup>40</sup> Interpreters have noted that a major problem with the notion of Givenness is that Sellars himself did not advance a positive general characterisation of it.<sup>41</sup> McDowell addresses this problem by offering a general characterization of his own and claims that close inspection reveals the Myth to be "incoherent" (2008: 256). It is unclear, however, that the several references to the Myth (in its general form) in that essay pick out one and the same characterization. This inconsistency, I argue, provides an opening to challenge McDowell's claim that the Myth is incoherent.

After pointing out that Sellars does not offer a general characterisation of Givenness, he offers the following suggestion:

Givenness in the sense of the Myth would be an availability for cognition to subjects whose getting what is supposedly Given to them does not draw on capacities required for the sort of cognition in question (McDowell, 2008: 256).

On this formulation, the Myth holds that i) we have a capacity  $c_1$  which makes some sort knowledge  $k_1$  available to us, where ii) having knowledge of sort  $k_1$  requires the actualization

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<sup>40</sup> Especially his "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1956).

<sup>41</sup> This idea can be found in McDowell (2008: 256), Alston (2002), and Kalderon (2011: 219-21).

of capacity  $c_2$ , and iii) that successful exercises of  $c_1$  – i.e. exercises which do make knowledge of sort  $k_1$  available to us – do not involve actualizations of  $c_2$ . The Presentation View endorses this form of the Myth. For PV maintains that perceptual experience ( $c_1$ ) makes propositional knowledge about the mind-independent world ( $k_1$ ) available to subjects, while it also holds that knowledge of that sort does require the actualization of conceptual capacities ( $c_2$ ). But it denies that perceptual experiences themselves involve the actualization of conceptual capacities. In other words, for the defender of PV, having perceptual knowledge requires the actualization of our conceptual capacities in judgement, but denies that these are actualized in perceptual experience too.

However, it is not so clear that endorsing this version of the Myth would render an epistemology of perception incoherent. For there is nothing intrinsically incoherent with the idea that conceptual capacities, which have to be actualized in propositional knowledge, need not be actualized in perceptual experience. On this general characterization of the Myth – let me call it the “weak characterization” – there is no obvious reason to think that endorsing the Myth would be a fundamental flaw for an epistemological theory.

But McDowell insists that a conspicuous *general* characterization shows the Myth to be an incoherent idea. In the following passage (which follows immediately the one previously quoted) McDowell argues for this point:

If that is what Givenness would be, it is straightforward that it must be mythical. Having something Given to one would be being given something for knowledge without needing to have capacities that would be necessary for one to be able to know it. And that is incoherent (McDowell, *ibid*).

Here, McDowell takes himself to be merely elaborating on the weak characterization discussed before (this explains the opening line: “if that is what Givenness would be...”). But this

characterization of the Myth is not identical, nor is it equivalent, to the “weak characterisation” advanced before. I call it the “strong characterisation” of the Myth. Crucially, I argue that PV would not endorse the Myth thus characterised. This would be an important result, for the alleged incoherence identified by McDowell could not be extended to PV. Let me elaborate.

On this strong characterization, the Myth indeed shows itself to be mythical. On it, the Myth consists in thinking that i\*) we possess a capacity  $c_1$  which makes some sort of knowledge  $k_1$  available to us, where ii\*) having knowledge of the sort  $k_1$  requires the actualization of capacity  $c_2$ , *but* where iii\*) the subject lacks the capacity  $c_2$  altogether. And this is a straightforwardly incoherent idea. On this conception, a given capacity *makes available* knowledge of one kind, while at the same time the subject lacks a necessary capacity for having that kind of knowledge. How, then, could this capacity make the relevant knowledge *available* to the subject, if the subject *cannot* have it? In the perceptual case, the strong characterisation produces the following picture: perception ( $c_1$ ) makes perceptual knowledge ( $k_1$ ) available to perceivers, where having that type of knowledge requires possession of conceptual capacities ( $c_2$ ). Yet perception makes this type of knowledge available even if subjects lacked conceptual capacities altogether – i.e. capacities required to have that very knowledge which is supposedly made available.

Arguably, the strong and weak characterisations of the Myth are not equivalent, nor is the strong characterisation entailed by the weak one. On the strong one, subjects might lack altogether the capacity  $c_2$  required for having the relevant type of knowledge made available by  $c_1$ . On this conception, perception might make propositional knowledge available for subjects even if they lacked conceptual capacities. But the weak characterisation does not have this implication by itself. For the weak characterisation only requires that capacity  $c_2$  not be *actualized* in exercises of capacity  $c_1$ . This is consistent with the claim that  $c_1$  would be

epistemologically significant only for subjects with capacity  $c_2$ , *contra* the strong characterisation. Accordingly, PV maintains that perception makes propositional knowledge available for subjects with appropriate conceptual (and recognitional) capacities.

Importantly, no obvious incoherence arises for the weak characterisation, as it does for the strong one. For on the weak characterisation, the subject may possess the capacities ( $c_2$ ) required for having the relevant knowledge. The incoherence identified by McDowell arises only when perception is construed as making knowledge available for subjects who lack conceptual capacities altogether. But the weak characterisation of the Myth does not have this consequence. Moreover, the Presentation View rejects the strong characterisation, but accepts the weak one. On it, perception makes knowledge available only for subjects who possess conceptual capacities. Thus PV avoids endorsing the problematic strong characterisation of the Myth. As a result, the position defended here is impervious to this criticism by McDowell, for the charge of incoherence would only apply if the view endorsed the strong characterisation of the Myth.

## *2.2 Specific Problems with Endorsement of the Myth*

But this is not McDowell's only reason against endorsement of the Myth. Further arguments claim that accepting the Myth gives rise to major problems for the resulting theories. On this understanding of the charge, even if the general notion of the Myth is not incoherent, endorsing the Myth gives rise to insurmountable theoretical problems. Let us look closely at a couple of such arguments. The first one rests on a conception of reasons which is directly at odds with PV:

The idea of the Given is the idea that the space of reasons, the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere. The extra extent of the space of reasons is supposed to allow it to incorporate non-conceptual impacts from outside the realm of thought. But we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities. The attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do (McDowell, 1996: 7).

Here, McDowell appeals to a particular way of understanding the “space of reasons” in order to exclude experiences as conceived by a “Given theorist” as belonging to said space. For McDowell, only elements in the “space of reasons” can stand in *justificatory relations* with judgements or beliefs. While a defender of PV could concede this conception of justificatory relations, she could nevertheless maintain that elements without conceptual content *also belong* to the space of reasons. Thus, she claims that concreta stand in justificatory relations with judgements or beliefs. For PV, “the space of justifications or warrants, extends more widely than the conceptual sphere” (McDowell, *ibid*). McDowell argument is that such an extension is theoretically untenable.

But why should the “space of reasons” be circumscribed to the conceptual sphere? Why reject that concreta truly belong to the space of reasons? A claim implicit in the passage above, but made explicit elsewhere, might provide the beginning of an answer: “[e]mpirical justifications depend on rational relations, relations within the space of reasons” (McDowell, 1996: 6). That is, the claim is that (a) in order for an item to stand in a *justificatory relation* to judgements, this element has to stand in a *rational relation* to judgements. McDowell illustrates this relation by appeal to some paradigmatic examples: *implication* and *probabilification*. He then

seems to make the further claim that (b) an element can stand in rational relations to judgements only if it stands to them in relations *similar enough* to those of implication and probabilification. The final step is the claim that (c) given that elements not belonging to the conceptual sphere (e.g., concreta) do not stand in relations of implication or probabilification (nor in relations similar enough to those) to judgements, then these elements cannot stand in rational relations to judgements.

Given my commitment to a reasons-based epistemology I will not challenge claim (a) in McDowell's argument. Perhaps it is possible to mount a challenge to (c), but I will not pursue this strategy in detail here. It could be argued, contra (c), that elements outside the conceptual sphere stand in relations similar enough to those of implication or probabilification. We could appeal to ordinary talk, for it seems that sometimes we appeal to concreta to indicate that something is likely to occur: "I think the match will be postponed, just look at the rain!" But I shall not pursue this strategy here. Instead I challenge claim (b) in McDowell's argument. That is, the claim that only elements that stand in relations similar to those of implication or probabilification stand in rational relations to judgements.

In the quoted passage, unfortunately, we do not get a detailed argument for (b). All McDowell has to say is that "we cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgement is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts" (McDowell, *ibid*), and he moves on to mention implication and probabilification. We can acknowledge that these are indeed paradigmatic instances of rational relations. But this should not be confused with the further claim that any other rational relation needs to be, therefore, similar to these paradigms. We need a further reason to think that only elements which stand in relations similar to the paradigms, can stand in rational relations.

There is a gap between “rational relation” and “conceptual relation” in McDowell’s reasoning. One way of trying to get more from McDowell would be to inquire why the relations of implication and probabilification are rational relations in the first place. Why does the fact that a conceptual item stands in an implying or a probabilifying relation with  $p$  provide subjects with warrant for judging that  $p$ ? It would be natural to respond by drawing attention to the way in which the obtaining of these relations could be exploited by a subject who aims to attain knowledge of the world. Indeed, items standing in implication and probabilification relations to specific propositions favour the *truth* of those very propositions, and consequently they favour the formation of corresponding judgements and beliefs. Someone who seeks to attain knowledge could exploit the obtaining of these relations to form warranted judgements. For instance, if the claim that it will rain tomorrow *implies* that the tennis match will be cancelled, I could exploit that implication (provided it rains, and I am apprised of that fact) to make the warranted judgement that the match will be cancelled.

But if this feature, i.e., “favouring the *truth* of a proposition”, underpins a relation as a *rational relation*, then there is no good reason to exclude from this class the alethic necessitation relation that obtains between concreta and propositions. This alethic relation is that of necessitation of the truth of a proposition  $p$  if a concretum  $c$  exists or obtains – for instance, the existence of the goldfinch necessitates the truth that there is a goldfinch. When a concretum stands in such an alethic necessitation relation with a proposition  $p$ , that is an excellent way of favouring the truth of  $p$ . E.g., the existence of the goldfinch is inconsistent with the falsity of the proposition that there is a goldfinch. The obtaining of this relation could be exploited by someone who aims to attain knowledge of the world. This line of reasoning presents us, then, with an alternative to McDowell’s narrow understanding of rational relation. Once we establish that rational relations are such in virtue of exhibiting a connection to truth

– a connection which can be exploited by rational beings – we are left with no reason to exclude concreta’s alethic necessitation relation to propositions from the class of rational relations. And, thus, we are left with no reason to exclude concreta from the space of reasons, for they too seem to be able to stand in rational relations to judgements and beliefs.

### *2.3 Limited agency*

Possibly, the passage above is not meant to be a stand-alone argument against the Myth. The final phrase of that passage – “the attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do” – might be read as a clause to be expanded in the paragraph that follows. There, McDowell takes a different tack and argues that endorsing the Myth leads to a conception where subjects have no room to respond to reasons in the manner they see fit. This leads to a view where our perceptual judgements and beliefs are out of our agential control. In turn this is supposed to lead to a position where perceptions cannot provide justifications for our empirical judgements – for all they can do is give us exculpations for them. McDowell points out (correctly in my opinion) that we seek an account where our perceptual judgements are justified, not one which merely provides excuses for our flawed perceptual judgements. This is the last argument that I shall examine here. But first I should say a few words about McDowell’s thoughts about the legitimacy of the use of empirical concepts in an empiricist framework.

Following Kant, McDowell conceives the faculty of understanding as fundamentally spontaneous or active, whereas sensibility is understood as fundamentally receptive or passive (Kant, 1998; McDowell, 2006:127-8). On this view, perception is passive because in experience we receive something which is there to be experienced independently of our experience of it. I remarked before that McDowell endorses the empiricist claim that experiential inputs are

necessary if empirical thought is to be objective at all. For him, thought's interaction with experience is necessary to legitimize our use of empirical concepts as something other than "moves in a self-contained game" (McDowell, 1996: 5) – or, in Kantian jargon, as empty thoughts. Perception provides the constraint which is meant to keep our free understanding within bounds. To provide this constraint, experience must be able to stand in rational relations to thought, which amounts to experience standing in conceptual relations to thought. This leads McDowell's to a conception where experience involves the (passive) actualization of conceptual capacities. His insistence that conceptual capacities are *passively* actualized in experience derives from his commitment to the idea that sensitivity is fundamentally a passive faculty. It is crucial for him that conceptual capacities are passively actualized in experience, for otherwise perception could not provide an adequate constraint on the active exercise of conceptual capacities exhibited in thought: "In fact it is precisely because experience is passive, a case of receptivity in operation, that the conception of experience I am recommending can satisfy the craving for a limit to the freedom that underlies the Myth of the Given" (McDowell, 1996: 10).

Now we are better positioned to understand McDowell's third argument against the Myth. For him, there is something fundamentally wrong in the way Given theorists implement the idea that experience constrains the otherwise free exercise of understanding:

What we wanted was a reassurance that when we use our concepts in judgement, our freedom—our spontaneity in the exercise of our understanding—is constrained from outside thought, and constrained in a way that we can appeal to in displaying the judgements as justified. But when we make out that the space of reasons is more extensive than the conceptual sphere, so that it can incorporate extra-conceptual impingements from the world, the result is a picture in which

constraint from outside is exerted at the outer boundary of the expanded space of reasons, in what we are committed to depicting as a brute impact from the exterior [...] What happens there is the result of an alien force, the causal impact of the world, operating outside the control of our spontaneity. But it is one thing to be exempt from blame, on the ground that the position we find ourselves in can be traced ultimately to brute force; it is quite another thing to have a justification. In effect, the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications (McDowell, 1996: 8).

This passage is difficult and rich. Perhaps the fundamental claim can be summarized as follows: from the perspective of the Myth, perception cannot provide us with the right kind of constraint on empirical thought, for the sort of relation instantiated between perception and thought (as supposedly conceived from that perspective) falls short of providing justifications for judgements. Let us unpack this claim further. McDowell claims that extending the space of reasons beyond the conceptual sphere (a move which is tantamount to endorsing the Myth) commits us to the view that the relation between perception and thought is a merely causal one. The suggestion is that perceptions can, at most, bring about world-directed judgements; a process over which we seemingly have no control. On this position, McDowell suggests, there is no space for subjects to react appropriately to reasons, for their perceptual beliefs and judgements are nothing but a deterministic response to the “brute impacts from the exterior”. Accordingly, we cannot be blamed for having the world-directed judgements we end up having, for their formation is beyond our control. Nevertheless, not being liable for our empirical judgements is not the same as being justified in holding them. Let us now assess this argument’s effectivity against PV.

An Implicit claim in McDowell’s reasoning is that judgements are justified only if subjects are somehow responsible for their formation. More specifically, on the reasons-based

epistemology endorsed here, the claim is that judgements are warranted when their formation is a response to reasons as such, attributable to the subject. Additionally, there is the claim that being blameless for a judgement's formation is *insufficient* for that judgement to be justified. Let us grant these plausible assumptions. Even so, it is not obvious why endorsing the Myth, as PV does, would imply a commitment to the claim that perceptual judgements are merely caused by perception, and that this process is beyond our control. There is not much of an argument from McDowell in favour of this claim. Nevertheless, at least two arguments based on this passage can be articulated on McDowell's behalf. Both depend on the assumption that views which endorse the Myth construe the relation between experience and judgements as a merely causal relation.

The first argument interprets this passage as a continuation of the previous one.<sup>42</sup> The previous paragraph claims that perceptions can stand in rational relations to judgements only if they stand in relations similar to those of probabilification or implication. But causal relations are not similar to these. One salient difference, for present purposes, is that the obtaining of a causal relation, by itself, "says" nothing about the truth of the judgements caused by perceptions. For instance, seeing the Müller-Lyer illusion might cause a mistaken judgement about the relative lengths of the seen lines. That my seeing caused that judgement would be a weak reason for its truth. Thus, the obtaining of that relation could not be exploited by a subject who wishes to attain knowledge of her environment.

PV's response to this line of reasoning should be obvious. For the Presentation View, perceived concreta warrant world-directed judgement not in virtue of the causal relation that obtains between concreta and judgements; instead, concreta provide this warrant by virtue of

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<sup>42</sup> See p. 25 above.

the aforementioned alethic necessitation relation. Unlike causality, the alethic necessitation relation does favour the truth of certain propositions. I explained in the previous section why this relation should be regarded as a rational relation, despite one of its relata lying outside McDowell's construal of the "conceptual sphere".

The second argument emphasizes the alleged absence of agency in the formation of perceptual judgements. For McDowell, endorsing the Myth leads to a conception where perception merely causes perceptual judgements, a process which *is not* a response to reasons as such from the thinker. On this view, judgements cannot be evaluated in an epistemic dimension. For these judgements to be evaluable as justified or unjustified, the subject must have some degree of control over them – and she must form the judgements on the basis of an assessment of her reasons for them. Endorsement of the Myth, McDowell argues, leads to a view in which perceptions determine by themselves which judgements and beliefs we have, and there is nothing we can do about it.

In response PV must reject McDowell's interpretation of what follows from endorsing the Myth. Particularly, we must reject the claim that subjects lack control over their perceptual judgements. Crucially, in the specific version of PV defended here, the formation of perceptual judgements is a process which is *not* beyond our control. Experience makes certain aspects of the environment present to us, and it is true that we have little control over this process. Although we control whether we open our eyes, or keep looking at an aspect of perceived environment, it is not up to us what is out there for us to see.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless this does not imply that the judgements we make in response to experience are entirely beyond our control. On PV, the formation of perceptual judgements is not a brute effect of perception – rather it

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<sup>43</sup> See Kalderon (2017) for a discussion of the extent to which perception is also an active occurrence.

is the result of exercising our conceptual and recognitional capacities, and of actively endorsing the propositions judged. Let me elaborate.

Firstly, on PV, subjects can decide whether to endorse the deliverances of their conceptual and recognitional capacities in a judgement. For instance, if a subject possesses the recognitional and conceptual capacities to tell that a bird she sees is a goldfinch (and she exercises them successfully on this occasion), she will be in a position where she *can decide* to accept or reject the proposition that a goldfinch is before her, by *making* the judgement or *refraining* from making it.<sup>44</sup> Some examples illustrate vividly that such a possibility is often open: if I am warned that I am about to enter an area where goldfinch ringers abound I might refrain from endorsing the judgement that there is a goldfinch before, despite seeing it clearly and successfully recognizing it as such. This suggests that successful perception and recognition do not necessarily lead to endorsing the relevant judgement. On the Presentation View, perceivers *do* retain some control over their perceptual judgements. Subjects retain, at least, the capacity to endorse or reject the propositions “put forward” by recognition. Thus, under PV perceptual judgements are not brute effects of perception; they are attitudes responsive to reasons that are under our control. It is not true, then, that endorsement of the Myth leads necessarily to adopting a view where subjects are saddled with perceptual judgements.

This response should suffice to placate McDowell’s worries. For his own view addresses the worry of deterministically caused perceptual judgements by appealing to the aforementioned idea that perceivers retain the capacity to refrain from endorsing the judgement delivered by perceptual experience (for, on his view, experience provides conceptually structure or judgeable contents to perceivers). For him, on an adequate construal

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<sup>44</sup> See Steward (2012) for the development of a minimal conception of control, according to which we exercise control over a process or event  $x$  when we are able to block its occurrence.

of experience “minimally, it must be possible to decide whether or not to judge that things are as one’s experience presents them to be. How one’s experience represent things to be is not under one’s control, but it is up to one whether one accepts the appearance or rejects it (McDowell, 1996: 11). As I have argued, PV has the means to secure, at the very least, this role for the agent in the formation of perceptual judgements. So, in this third version of McDowell’s charge, the accusation that PV endorses the Myth of the Given has no force against the Presentation View.

This much suffices to show McDowell’s third version of the charge of falling prey to the Myth to be unfounded. Recall, nevertheless, that the capacity to withhold judgement is only one of several agential capacities that are required for perceptual knowledge acquisition, according to my version of PV. Thus, the Presentation View accords agents a larger role than the minimal role identified by McDowell. Up to this point I have advanced a *defensive* strategy in favour of PV. A potential way of developing a positive case in favour of the Presentation View could exploit potential explanatory advantages of the robust role accorded to the agent in perceptual knowledge acquisition. For instance, in contrast to McDowell, PV holds that exercises of recognition are, in some sense, the result of the perceiver’s agency (granted, this is a substantial claim in need of extensive detailed defence). But this difference could be exploited in an argument to the effect that PV provides a good explanation of the fact that we ordinarily praise (or reprimand) people for their success (or failure) to recognize things. Think, for example of a case where we reprimand someone for using parsley in a recipe that calls for coriander. Unfortunately, this argumentative line must be left for another occasion – I merely highlight it as a potential avenue for future research in the development of PV. After all, as I have argued, the fact that PV has solid responses against different versions of the charge of

falling prey to Myth of the Given gives us some reason in favour of the view's plausibility and the need to pay closer attention to it.

### **3. Conclusions**

Let us take stock. I have articulated in a systematic fashion the central tenets of (my version of) the Presentation View of perception. I detailed how the view differs from one prominent alternative account within the ranks of reasons-based epistemologies of perception (i.e. McDowell's view), and defended it from potential attacks stemming from it. I tackled three different versions of the argument which appeals to the Myth of the given, articulated by McDowell. I showed that all three versions fail to show that there is anything fundamentally misguided in the Presentation View of perception.

The value of this contribution lies in articulating systematically a position in the epistemology of perception, a position that is often unfairly sidelined. Perhaps one reason why the position has not been more widely discussed is that it has been assumed that the position is in principle untenable. And sometimes this assumption might be based on an implicit appeal to the idea that no tenable epistemology of perception can endorse the Myth of the Given. Others have argued that the Myth is not mythical after all and that defenders of PV should be unapologetic about endorsing it. But even if they are right, this might be unconvincing to some. The unconvinced might reasonably think that there is legitimacy in the charge of falling prey to the Myth and worry about the tenability of PV. The arguments I developed here should be useful to begin placating those worries. My detailed articulation of PV and my defence from specific versions of the charge by McDowell cast serious doubts on the threat that the Myth represents for PV. This should speak in favour of establishing PV as a serious contender in

the arena of epistemology of perception and should open the path to further development of the view, explaining how it could deal with other issues in the vicinity of perceptual knowledge. Only in this way we could provide a cogent and comprehensive case in favour of PV.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Martín Abreu Zavaleta, Santiago Echeverri, Guy Longworth, Francisco Martínez, Diego Rodríguez, Johannes Roessler, Simon Wimmer, and two anonymous referees of this journal for very helpful discussions and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. Thanks also to Ángeles Eraña for her supervision during my postdoctoral stay. This work was made possible thanks to the financial support of the postdoctoral program of the National Autonomous University of Mexico at the Institute for Philosophical Research.

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