INTERPRETING MODERN EPISTEMOLOGY WITH MCDOWELL: REMARKS ON CONTEXTUALISM AND PERCEPTIVE EXPERIENCE

Interpretando a Epistemologia Moderna com McDowell: Observações sobre Contextualismo e Experiência Perspectiva

Erick Lima[1]

Vitória (ES), vol. 4, n.1
Janeiro/Junho 2015

SOFIA
Versão eletrônica

[1] Doutor pela Unicamp e Professor Adjunto no Departamento de Filosofia da Universidade de Brasília. Professor do Programa de Pós-graduação em Filosofia da Universidade de Brasília (PPGFIL-UnB).

Resumo: O presente artigo procura refletir sobre alguns importantes temas na epistemologia moderna a partir das propostas feitas por John McDowell. Primeiramente, procuro discutir em linhas gerais a interpretação que McDowell propõe de Kant e Hegel. O objetivo consiste em perceber como McDowell adota um panorama kantiano para a formulação de sua percepção do debate contemporâneo, propondo uma alternativa hegeliana (1). Em seguida, retomando discussões tanto na filosofia clássica alemã como na filosofia da linguagem, sustento que McDowell defende uma explicação contextualista da experiência perceptiva (2).

Palavras-chave: Kant – Hegel – McDowell – Percepção – Experiência – Contextualismo

Abstract: This paper analyzes some important issues in modern epistemology in light of McDowell's proposals. Firstly, I consider the main directions of McDowell's interpretation of the Kant-Hegel debate, in order to comprehend McDowell's adoption of a Kantian framework to delineate the epistemological contemporary discussion, as well as his indication of a Hegelian alternative (2). Then, based on some issues in the classical german philosophy and in analytical tradition, I argue that McDowell defends a contextualist explication of perceptive experience.

Key-words: Kant – Hegel – McDowell – Perception – Experience – Contextualism

It is noteworthy that, almost every time Hegel criticizes Kant, it is related to his critique of empiricism, particularly of Hume. Hegel's strategic attitude is motivated by his general perception of both, because both philosophical programs, considered symptomatically in the "*zweite Stellung*" of the Encyclopedia, present the same insufficiency: they are tied to an abstract differentiation between form and content, or as Hegel says, to the *Unterschied der Elemente*[2].

The main difference between Kant's and Hume's proposals exists only in the fact that, while Kant takes this separation as his conscious starting point, Hume's empiricism is unconscious of it, creating its fundamental delusion (*Grundtäuschung*). According to Hegel, this empiricism then seeks its "consistent consummation" as the epistemological comprehension of modern natural science, that is, as "*wissenschaftlicher Empirismus*"[3]. On the one hand, empiricism "denies the supersensible in general, or at least any knowledge of it which would define its nature; it leaves thought no powers except abstraction and formal universality and identity." On the other hand, when it aims to justify the claims of modern science to objective validity, "It employs the metaphysical categories of matter, force, those of one, many, generality, infinity, etc.; following the clue given by these categories it proceeds to draw conclusions (*fortschließt*), and in so doing presupposes and applies the syllogistic form (*Formen des Schließens*). And all the while it is unaware that it contains

[2] HEGEL, *Werke in 20 Bände*, 8, p. 110.
[3] Id., 8, p. 107.

metaphysics in wielding which, it makes use of those categories and their combinations in a style utterly thoughtless and uncritical"[4].

The conclusion of Hegel's critique of empiricism is particularly interesting in terms of its formulation of an epistemological position based on dialectical insight into the dissolved separation of form and content. "So long then as this sensible sphere is and continues to be for Empiricism a mere datum (*ein Gegebenes*), we have a doctrine of bondage (*Unfreiheit*): for we become free, when we are confronted by no absolutely alien world, but depend upon a fact which we ourselves are"[5]. This contains an obvious reference to an epistemological radicalization of Rousseau's and Kant's comprehension of freedom as self-determination, which McDowell evokes many times as our "intellectual freedom." It is also possible to perceive two things here. First, we can see Hegel's Kantian inheritance in his criticism of Hume's position for confusing justification with exculpation. Second, we can see Hegel's conception of the infinity of thinking, which goes far beyond Kant's transcendental idealism, with the most radicalized modern conception of freedom, demanding that the extra-conceptual datum be abolished. This aims to explain, beyond the limits of empiricism, the specific mode of cognitive justification to which the modern nomological natural sciences appeal, a discussion that could lead us to the Phenomenology's arguments about forces and laws.

Why is it so important for Hegel to contest subjective idealism and *a fortiori* the empiricist defense of the mythical given? My answer to this question is largely inspired by McDowell's efforts concerning Hegel's philosophy. I think that Hegel aims, above all, to comprehend specific human experience as a metabolism—an immanent interaction between mind and world. This kind of philosophical attitude can only be satisfying if there is no gulf, no absolute separation, between subject and object.

In the Phenomenology, after the dialectics of sensible certainty—and, as a matter of fact, as its most general result (for us)—Hegel attempts to interpret, in a practical sense, the meaning of the proved necessity of the conceptual mediation of the immediate, even in its most abstract linguistic structure[6]. According to Hegel, the role of human language is inherent even to animals, in a practical sense: relating things to the world without considering them to be endowed with absolute reality.

In the Philosophy of Right, in the context of Hegel's discussion of appropriation (*Besitzergreifung*) and elaboration (*Formierung*) (§§ 52–56), which is probably inherited

[4] HEGEL, *Werke in 20 Bände*, 8, p. 107/108
[5] Id., 8, p. 110
[6] Id., 3, p. 90

from Locke's discussion in the fifth chapter of the second Treatise, Hegel argues that human appropriation and transformation through labor could play the role of refuting of absolute realism, the general thesis that things exist absolutely outside human's cognitive and practical capacities, in and for themselves[7].

Following Kant's theory of experience, but not his transcendental idealism, Hegel aims to consider everything that belongs to the human world: everything that, immanently experienced, depends on the interaction between mind and world, in terms of the reciprocal mediation of subject and object. This is the most general task of his philosophy. Recognition, desire, knowledge, labor, language, action, and appropriation are only some of the many instances of an interaction between subject and object. This interaction can only be perceived if we have already criticized and dissolved the Myth of the Given, the idea of an objective realm that is completely beyond thinkable contents and, therefore, outside human practice or *Vermittlung überhaupt*[8].

I believe that McDowell makes the same point, although with an epistemological emphasis on our interaction with the world, when he argues that the Given should not be defended simply out of a "phobia of idealism," in order not to lose the independence of reality. "The constraint comes from outside thinking, but not outside what is thinkable. When we trace justifications back, the last thing we come to is still a thinkable content; not something ultimate than that, a bare pointing to a bit of given. But these final thinkable contents are put into place in operations of receptivity, and that means that when we appeal to them we register the required constraint on thinking from a reality external to it. The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experience, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility"[9]. In accordance with this, it comes as no surprise at all that Honneth had approximated, via McDowell, Hegel's criticism, in his theory of action, of the abstraction from the previous synthesis between normativity and shared practices in the persistent mentalism in Kant's epistemology[10]. "That is what makes it seem impossible to combine empiricism with the idea that the world's making an impression on a perceiving subject would have to be a natural happening. The mistake here is to forget that nature includes second nature. Human beings acquire a second nature in part by being initiated into

[7] HEGEL, *Werke in 20 Bände*, 7, p. 114–115
[8] Ibid.
[9] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 28
[10] HONNETH, *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*, p. 52 e p. 93

conceptual capacities, whose interrelations belong in the logical space of reasons"[11]. This appeal to the second nature as a proto-conceptual instance is what makes Hegel as a thinker focused on interaction, particularly the interchange between mind and world. As McDowell implicitly suggests, this also allows the possible compatibility of Hegel's idealism with a minimal empiricism and a fallibilist, open account of experience as an interaction and cooperation between spontaneity and receptivity.

I think that it is admirable that Hegel conceives both minimal forms of interaction with the world, the theoretical and practical, sense-certainty and desire, as still confused forms of bare mediation. This leads us directly to McDowell's idea of an engaged intellect and may help to clarify why McDowell's interpretation of Hegel in *Having the World in View* is radicalized in terms of an allegorical[12] account of the Lordship-Bondage that claims the inherent, first biological[13], relation between the empirical self and the apperceptive consciousness. In what follows, I am going to consider first McDowell's overall interpretation of Kant and Hegel, and then McDowell's discussions about perceptive experience.

General Remarks on McDowell's interpretation of Kant and Hegel

In this part of my attempt to contribute reflectively on the role played by Kant and Hegel in McDowell's philosophical project, I would like to explore a hypothesis. It seems that McDowell is inspired by a Hegelian interpretation of Kant's Idealism, while on the other hand elaborating a comprehension of Hegel's theoretical philosophy which is, in some decisive features, heterodox, at least when compared with other interpretations of Hegel, not only in the analytical tradition, but also in the so-called continental lines of thought. By this, I refer to the compatibility that McDowell sometimes alleges between Hegel's absolute idealism and the epistemological realism that is preserved in McDowell's program of a "minimal empiricism."

First, let me characterize McDowell's overall position in epistemology. As a strategy to make sense of some epistemological debates in modern philosophy, I intend to take seriously McDowell's idea of a "interminable oscillation" between the defense of the Myth of the Given, and the (often idealist and coherentialist) rejection of the mythical interpretation of the given, as a nonconceptual ultimate ground, a bare presence to which we could "point at"

[11] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. XX
[12] Id., *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, p. 163
[13] Id., p. 161

— maybe through, or better, by "acquaintance," as Russell would put it — in order to justify our claims of objective validity in empirical knowledge.

Now, I think that it is possible to locate Kant's and Hegel's epistemological efforts in the context created by McDowell's thesis of an oscillation. There is a significant motive in McDowell's tactic, for instance in Mind and World, of initially formulating his point of view in Kantian terms. Indeed, for McDowell, there is an instigating ambiguity in Kant's theory of knowledge, in terms of the nature of the given: this ambiguity must be taken as productive for the delineation of McDowell's position.

"It is central to Absolute Idealism to reject the idea that the conceptual realm has an outer boundary"[14]. In Having the World in View, McDowell developed an even more detailed account of the necessity of coming to grips with Hegel's way of thinking in epistemology. Based on Hegel's allegation that Kant adopts the so-called semantic thesis of idealism, McDowell argues that "Kant explains experience's possession of objective purport… in terms of the idea that intuitions are informed by the categories," "in terms of its exemplifying logical unities that are characteristic of judging"[15]. McDowell understands the reformulated deduction of categories, the so-called B version, as a Kantian reaction to an incipient and perhaps plausible critique of subjective idealism. "By invoking the unity of apperception we enable ourselves to make sense of the objective purport of intuitions and the objective purport of judgements together"[16]. However, despite this focus on the deduction of self-conscious intellectual activity—an insight that, according to McDowell, is radicalized by Hegel—Kant developed a differentiated set of conditions in the Transcendental Aesthetic, not related to the thinkability of objects, but their givenness. For McDowell, the "B" version of Kant's deduction is, as a way of speaking, reactive to the risk of subjectivism, because that is where Kant aims to deny that the Transcendental Aesthetic "offers an independent condition for objects to be given to our senses"[17]. According to McDowell, the decisive move in the "B" version of the deduction consists in the argument that "the unity constituted by conformity to the requirements of our sensibility, which is the unity of the pure formal intuitions of space and time, is not a separate unity, independent of the unity that consists in being informed by the categories"[18]. The fact that Kant's theory of sensibility falls short of the equilibrium and symmetry between subject and object, which Hegel presented as *echter Idealismus*,

[14] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 44
[15] Id., *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, p. 70
[16] Id., p. 71
[17] Ibid.
[18] Id., p. 74

transforms Kant's efforts into something near "subjectivistic psychologism"[19]. To McDowell, Kant's thesis of the ideality of space and time, in comparison with the engagement between spontaneity and receptivity, sounds constitutive of experience, as a "subjective imposition"[20]. The Transcendental Aesthetics, to which Kant appeals throughout the first Critique in order to domesticate the metaphysical use of categories, is the point where the Critique reinstates the Myth of Given. "Kant conceives that matter as having its own form, prior to the unity that informs the formal intuitions"[21].

McDowell states that "the insight that is fundamental to critical philosophy is that the conditions for the possibility of our knowing things are not derived from independent conditions on things in themselves … we need to bring the conditions entirely inside the sphere of free intellectual activity "[22], which for him means the same as that "we need that Hegelian conception if we are to preserve Kant's critical insight"[23]. According to McDowell, Kant's theory of experience creates some justificatory deficits. "To understand empirical content in general, we need to see it in its dynamic place in a self-critical activity"[24].

Concerning Kant's efforts in justifying the objective validity of judgements of experience, we could say with McDowell that "a Kantian conception of empirical intuitions almost succeeds in showing how the very idea of objective purport can be understood in terms of free intellectual activity"[25]. If we deepen some of the interpretative strategies that McDowell develops concerning Kant's justification of the objective validity of empirical knowledge, is it possible to perceive Kant as adopting the immanent perspective of his theory of experience that McDowell points out in his approach to the "B" version of the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories, for example in the attempt at a "complete solution of Hume's problem"[26], refuting Hume's denial of the emphatically objective validity of empirical judgments. If the notion of experience appeals to the synthetic unity of universal consciousness, of a shared intentionality, Kant's criticism of Hume offers the possibility of perceiving its conceptual, communicable, intersubjective, and linguistic structure in a way that is immanent to the experience. "Experience consists in the synthetic connection of appearances (perceptions) in a consciousness, insofar as this connection is necessary"[27]. Here,

[19] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 76
[20] Id., p. 77
[21] Id., *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, p. 79
[22] Id., p. 80
[23] Id., p. 81
[24] Id., p. 34
[25] Id., p. 81
[26] KANT, *Kants Werke – Akademie Textausgabe*, AA, IV, p. 313
[27] Id., AA, IV, p. 305

Kant surprisingly follows a suggestion from Hume that the "principles of the association of perceptions" could be visualized in natural language[28]. Kant argues that the categories "serve as it were only to spell out appearances, so that they can be read as experience"[29]. He goes even further: "to pick out from ordinary cognition the concepts that are not based on any particular experience and yet are present in all cognition from experience (for which they constitute as it were the mere form of connection) required no greater reflection or more insight than to cull from a language rules for the actual use of words in general, and so to compile the elements for a grammar (and in fact both investigations are very closely related to one another)"[30].

By arguing that the immediate knowledge of objects is impossible[31], and that the objective validity of experience depends on its conceptual structure (the structure of the perception through the synthetic unity of the apperception), Kant's solution to Hume's problem anticipates Hegel, Wittgenstein, and McDowell. This is true above all in the idea that internal or external experiences are conditioned and structured conceptually. Therefore, a comprehension of experience that attributes it with a radically intuitive, private, and non-conceptual nature poses justificatory difficulties.

At the end of the second lecture on Mind and World, McDowell explains in more detail how his efforts relate to Kant's theory of knowledge. These considerations are also important in clarifying what McDowell understands to be the vulnerability of Kant's proposal, as well as the benefits that can be gained by a Hegelian reorientation in epistemology. For McDowell, to answer the question about insufficiencies in Kant's efforts is to understand whether Kant credits receptivity with a separable contribution in its connection with spontaneity. The ambiguity of this answer is central to McDowell's interpretation of Kant. "For Kant, experience does not take in ultimate grounds that we could appeal to by pointing outside the sphere of thinkable content"[32]. That is why McDowell thinks that, from the standpoint of experience, Kant's thought relates to our cognitive interaction with the world, and the primacy of cooperation between spontaneity and receptivity, concept and intuition. "What we find in Kant is precisely the picture I have been recommending: a picture in which reality is not located outside a boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere"[33]. However, according to McDowell, this potentially liberating thesis of the "unboundedness of

[28] HUME, *Hume: An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: And Other Writings*, p. 19
[29] KANT, *Kants Werke – Akademie Textausgabe*, AA, IV, p. 312
[30] Id., AA, IV, p. 322/323
[31] Id., AA, IV, 299
[32] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 41
[33] Ibid.

the conceptual" is embedded in the transcendental perspective. "Once the supersensible is in the picture, its radical independence of our thinking trends to present itself as no more than the independence any genuine reality must have"[34]. Therefore, just as the transcendental perspective threatens Kant's theory with the Myth of the Given, reducing drastically our responsible freedom in empirical thinking, this standpoint of the philosophical investigation of differentiated sensible and conceptual conditions of experience also transforms Kant's account of empirical knowledge into an idealistic proposal, subject to risking its coherence. "I think it has to be admitted that the effect of the transcendental framework is to make Kant's philosophy idealistic in the sense I have been considering"[35].

It is noteworthy that, in *Having the World in View*, McDowell recasts his defense of Hegel from the accusation that he comprehends objectivity as a projection of the mind, resulting from unconstrained conceptual movements. Once more, this accusation appeals to the Myth of Given in order to ensure common-sense realism about objective validity. However, according to Hegel and McDowell, when we assume that there is a reality outside the boundaries of the conceptual sphere, we lose also the genuine realm of experience, comprehended here as the interaction between concept and intuition: the dimension of our immanent conceptual engagement with the world. McDowell conception of experience, inspired by Kant and radicalized by Hegel, claims to be a genuine guide of empirical inquiry, considering, in the light of the unboundedness of the conceptual, "the world we experience as the medium within which the freedom of apperceptive spontaneity is exercised"[36]. He refutes the accusation of extreme idealism with the idea that our sensibility is reconceived as a '"moment' in the free self-determination of reason."[37] "The standpoint of Absolute Knowledge is a standpoint at which we understand that the pursuit of objectivity is the free unfolding of the Notion. It is not the standpoint at which we have somehow removed ourselves from the empirical world. If the case of the pursuit of objectivity that we are considering is empirical inquiry, we are already engaged with the empirical world in enjoying Absolute Knowledge"[38]. Therefore, according to McDowell, the risk of coherentialism threatens not Hegel's efforts, but Kant's idealism. With the theory of space and time as providing the conditions of objects, transcendental idealism suffers from "unassimilated

[34] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 42
[35] Id., p. 44
[36] Id., *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, p. 86
[37] Id., p. 87
[38] Id., p. 88

subjectivity"[39], something like a psychological theory of human sensibility, to which "unassimilated objectivity"[40] corresponds: this is a world completely outside our conceptual operations. However, despite this oscillation, in the case of Kant's epistemology, McDowell seems to claim that the adoption of the Myth of Given can also have the consequence of spinning in a void, and the imposition of "subjective" projections. "Hegelian whole-heartedness brings everything within the scope of free subjective activity. If one takes such a description out of context, it can seem that the move abandons the realism of common sense – that it obliterates anything genuinely recognizable as objective reality, in favour of projections from unconstrained movements of the mind. But the context gives the lie to this. Expanding the scope of intellectual freedom does not tip the scale to the side of the subjective, as if the objective (so-called, we would have to say) can only be a projection of subjective activity, taken to be independently intelligible… Because there is an unassimilated subjectivity at the base of Kant's construction, it amounts to no more than subjective idealism"[41].

McDowell concludes his interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy by stating that, although Kant presents some important insights in his theory of experience, which could put an end to the oscillation by healing the need for constraint from outside, he also contributes to the perpetuation of the Myth of Given. Curiously, McDowell seems to believe that, besides Kant's overall tendencies to conceive external constraint as conceptual, Kant's subjective idealism feeds the risk of conceptual projection and, therefore, as I understand his interpretation, of coherentialism. Ironically, what for Kant establishes the compatibility between transcendental idealism and empirical realism—the alleged ideality of space and time as pure forms of sensible intuition—is what McDowell sees as tying Kant's idealism to subjectivism.

The most differentiated appreciation of McDowell's provocative interpretation of Hegel can be seen in certain developments in *Having the World in View*. In comparison with Kant's idealism, Hegel's philosophy does not fall short of the semantic thesis of idealism—the idea that the self and the concepts are isomorphic—but presents the structure of what Kant himself called the original unity of the transcendental apperception, which also constitutes the starting point of Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories. McDowell's argument comprehends absolute idealism as a symmetrical philosophical thesis, corresponding to the equipoise and compatible with epistemological realism. This is indeed a surprising

[39] Id., p. 151
[40] McDOWELL, *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*, p. 151
[41] Id., p. 152

interpretation, if we consider it in the light of other analytical or continental interpretations of Hegel.

Contextualism and perceptive Knowledge

As I see McDowell's development, he belongs to a trend of thought in which it has become strategic to explore contextualism, another discernable component in some of Hegel's discussions. Still, before the analytical tradition assumed atomistic and constructivist positions, with Russell's idea of knowledge by acquaintance as the base of the analytical criticism of descriptions, Frege's functionalist logic had proposed a relation between concept and argument that opposed the relation, suggested by Aristotle, between individual substance and its accidents. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein illustrates this conception of a more inherent relation using his peculiar definition of the object's independence (*Selbständigkeit*) to linguistic meaning, which is perhaps the most important idea of the ontology he that develops in correspondence to his pictorial theory of the proposition. "Things are independent (*selbständig*) in so far as they can occur in all possible situations, but this form of independence is a form of connection with states of affairs, a form of dependence (*Unselbständigkeit*)"[42]. According to this kind of paradoxical conception of independence, we must consider all the states of affairs, in which an object may play the role of both concept and argument, as constitutive of the essence of the objects. "Objects contain the possibility of all situations"[43]. "The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object"[44]. This view is the basis for a contextualist comprehension of the proposition: the idea that the meaning of something is determined only in the context of a proposition. "Only propositions have sense (*Sinn*); only in the nexus of a proposition does a name have meaning (*Bedeutung*)"[45]. Nevertheless, considering the fact that propositional contextualism is sometimes attributed to Kant's theory of judging, it will be no surprise that Hegel discussed it too.

Before we can follow Hegel's discussion about this point, it should be noted that, along the course of his intellectual trajectory, Wittgenstein seems to have radicalized propositional contextualism in a pragmatic direction, for example in the Blue Book. "The sign (the sentence) gets its significance from the system of signs, from the language to which it

[42] WITTGENSTEIN, *Werkausgabe in 8 Bänden*, 1, p. 12; 2.0122
[43] Id., 1, p. 12; 2.014
[44] Id., 1, p. 12; 2.0141
[45] Id., 1, p. 20; 3.3

belongs. Roughly: understanding a sentence means understanding a language. As a part of the system of language, one may say, the sentence has life"[46]. This tendency, which, if anything, becomes even more manifest in the *Philosophical Investigations*, opposes the earlier orientation of the analytical tradition, which often conceived the conceptual structure of experience from the representionalist perspective of formal semantics. In their work, McDowell and Brandom claim that something like this move in analytical tradition is anticipated by Hegel's way of considering the problem of experience. While, on the one hand, McDowell has a more predominantly contextualist orientation, Brandom would rather consider Hegel's contextualism in the light of his idea of an intersubjective conceptual structure of human experience. That is why Brandom considers Hegel as also anticipating an inferentialist approach to propositional content, adding another dimension to Hegel's semantic holism.

McDowell's thesis regarding the unboundedness of the conceptual does sound very Hegelian. I think that its peculiar richness is due to the way that McDowell integrates other discussions in contemporary philosophy into this view; for example, he appeals to Wittgenstein's private language argument as an attempt to neutralize atomist and empiricist conceptions of the internal and external experience of secondary qualities, in particular the experience of colors. According to McDowell, Wittgenstein's private language argument aims to affirm that "a bare presence cannot supply a justificatory input into a conceptual repertoire from outside it, the sort of thing the connection between concepts and spontaneity made us hanker for"[47]. Wittgenstein's argument is part of a wider strategy to reverse logical atomism, which is defended by Russell and slightly compatibilized by the Tractatus, with Frege's propositional contextualism. This strategy amounts to a refusal of nominalism and referentialism and to the proposal of a semantic holist attitude to propositional content, which is Wittgenstein considers, for example, in his discussion of the public character of rule-following activity and the irrevocable reciprocal reference of rules.

Wittgenstein's argument does not affirm the irrelevance or inexistence of immediate events, but rather their inherent relation with concepts, plural. The most important consequence of this move, in relation to an atomist comprehension of the experience of secondary qualities and the perception of colors, consists in the idea that the components of perceptive experience are grammatically organized. Wittgenstein notes this in the paragraphs of *Philosophical Investigations* that refer to Plato's Theaetetus. These paragraphs support the

[46] Id., 5, p. 21
[47] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 20

thesis of "the complex of primary elements which become descriptive language by being compounded together" (§§ 46–63). This presents a more intimate relation between objects and empirical concepts than that affirmed by Russell, in a way that prevents them from possibly being perceived immediately as sense-data, by acquaintance, as the verification basis for propositional or descriptive knowledge. Wittgenstein's private language argument (§§ 242–315) confirms his notion, present in the "grammar of colors," that there is a radical mediation of experienced events (even mental) through empirical concepts, constructed on the normative structure of language. "So the Private Language Argument just is the rejection of the Given, in so far as it bears on the possibilities for language; it is not an application of a general rejection of the Given to a particular area. What is an application of the general point is the rejection of bare presences as what sensations and so forth are"[48].

It is noteworthy that the compatibility that McDowell perceives between Hegel and Wittgenstein on the unboundedness of the conceptual has contributed to the recovery of one of the most interesting epistemological debates in modern philosophy—the argument between Hume and Kant concerning the secondary qualities. In the second chapter of the *Inquiry*, Hume mentions the example of the shade of blue as "one contradictory phenomenon, which may prove, that it is not absolutely impossible for ideas to arise, independent of their correspondent impressions"[49]. Kant, on the other hand, considered the implications of the problem of secondary qualities in the chapter named "Anticipations of Perception," in the *First Critique*, where he argues that "in all appearances, the real, which is an object of the sensation, has intensive magnitude, i.e., a degree"[50]. We could interpret this conclusion as a proto-contextualist argument, for Kant seems to be arguing that perceptive knowledge, or even sensation, is only possible when it is structured by the categories of quality, which impose the continuity of sensory matter and, correspondingly, the possible, or alternatively only illustrate the "spectrum ." "All reality in perception has a degree, between which and negation there is an infinite gradation of ever lesser degrees"[51]. Perhaps we could say, with Wittgenstein, that "a speck in the visual field, though it need not be red, must have some colour: it is, so to speak, surrounded by colour-space"[52]. McDowell tends to radicalize this line of thought by arguing that "we have to understand any particular secondary-quality

[48] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 20
[49] HUME, *Hume: An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: And Other Writings*, p. 14
[50] KANT, *Kants Werke – Akademie Textausgabe,* III, p. 153
[51] Id., III, p. 153
[52] WITTGENSTEIN, *Werkausgabe in 8 Bänden*, 1, p. 12; 2.01.31

experience against a background of other secondary-quality experience, possible or actual"[53]. This solution anticipates Hegel's and McDowell's treatments of secondary qualities. "No one could count as making even a directly observational judgement of colour except against a background sufficient to ensure that she understands colour as potential properties of things"[54]. McDowell aims not only to neutralize the thesis of secondary qualities having a non-conceptual character, eliminating the atomist expectation for an immediate and indubitable directed access, but also to delineate a contextualist position, based on an access that is mediated by a system of empirical concepts. According to McDowell, even in the perception of colors, "where the linkages into the whole system are minimal, the relevant conceptual capacities are integrated into spontaneity at large, in a way that enables the subject to understand experiences in which those capacities are drawn into operation as glimpses"[55].

In the Phenomenology, according to Hegel, the "dialectics of sense-certainty"[56] is a privileged development for comprehending the engagement between conscious experience and language. In its most radicalized form, sense-certainty claims to be "pure intuition"[57]. The development of sense-certainty is the "history of its experience"[58]. That is to say, those who defend any self-sufficient form of immediate knowledge, about "the existence of external objects, which can be more precisely defined as actual, absolutely singular, wholly personal, individual things, each of them absolutely unlike anything else… what they mean is not what they say… those who started to describe it would not be able to complete the description, but would be compelled to leave it to others, who would themselves finally have to admit to speaking about something which is not"[59]. Of course, in the itinerary of the shapes of consciousness, the immediate result of this experience consists in the perception of the thing being mediated by the property (*Eigenschaft*)[60]. However, as the "experience of sense-certainty"[61] suggests, from the point of view of the "phenomenological we," "language… has the divine nature of directly reversing the meaning of what is said, of making it into something else, and thus not letting what is meant get into words at all"[62]. The experience of the intention of being pure intuition collapses in the necessity of linguistic or conceptual

[53] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 32
[54] Id., p. 13
[55] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 31–32
[56] HEGEL, *Werke in 20 Bände*, 3, p. 87
[57] Ibid.
[58] Id., 3, p. 89
[59] Id., 3, p. 90/91
[60] Id., 3, p. 89
[61] Id., 3, p. 87
[62] Id., 3, p. 91

mediation in general. "We simply suppose they come only as elements in a bundle of concepts that must be acquired together"[63], as McDowell says.

Redding has recently shown how McDowell interprets the passage between "sense-certainty" and "perception" in a way that recovers his long-term collaboration with Gareth Evans, in the critical consideration of the epistemic status of indexical terms, as claimed by Russell's logical atomism. According to Russell, indexical and demonstrative terms denote elements of the reality that we access immediately, even to the extent of constructing ostensive definitions. With the help of Evans, McDowell intends to show that Hegel's concept of the perceived object contains a strong criticism of Russell's view, as it abandons all pretensions of the self-sufficiency and independence of immediate singularity, and sustains the conceptual mediation of a notion of empirical intuition, such as Kant's. According to McDowell, Hegel is collaborating with a concept-mediated notion of empirical deliverances, with the notion of a demonstrative in which the thing actualizes its general properties. As Redding has shown, this represents a double move in the direction of Aristotle: first, a particular thing, which had its singularity conceptually mediated, seems to be close to Aristotle's conception of the *Tode ti* or *synolon*, with unity of matter and form. Second, according to Redding, understanding Hegel in an Aristotelian way furnishes a richer image of what McDowell aims at with his thesis: in perceptive experience, the receptivity to empirical deliverances means the actualization of cognitive and conceptual capacities. In particular, in the case of the developments proposed by Hegel, the classificatory resources of particular objects would be immanent to the context constituted by these entities, which are not immediately singular[64]. "That passive operation of conceptual capacities in sensibility is not intelligible independently of their active exercise in judgement, and in thinking that issues in judgement"[65].

In the Philosophical Investigations, Wittgenstein summarized up the semantic component of the pragmatic theory of perceiving by claiming that description had primacy over naming (§49). On the other hand, Redding argues that McDowell's Aristotelism prevents him from capturing the Hegel's point in its full significance. "McDowell follows Hegel's criticism of sense-certainty in affirming the conceptual nature of perceptual experience, but he ignores the differences in the ways in which cognitive content can be conceptual that Hegel signals in the difference between perception and the understanding. For McDowell (but not

[63] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 31
[64] REDDING, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, p. 20–55
[65] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 13

Hegel) perceptual content is not only conceptual but also propositional"[66]. I think that what McDowell says about the conceptual and propositional character of perceptive content is not the whole story that could be told about Hegel's developments in the Phenomenology. However, if one sees Hegel's assertion that the oscillation of "perceptive understanding" (*wahrnehmender Verstand*) as due to the "logics of perception" (*Logik des Wahrnehmens*)[67], one could argue that perceptive content has a proto-propositional structure, and that it fails to capture the inferential relations between propositions because of its term-logic orientation. I think that this idea is compatible with McDowell's contextualism, which argues that perceptive experience is mediated through an integrated system of empirical concepts.

McDowell's contextualism affirms that "by virtue of the way in which the conceptual capacities that are draw into operation in an experience are rationally linked into the whole network… reality is all embraceable in thought but not all available to this experience. The object of experience is understood as integrated into a wider reality, in a way that mirrors how the relevant concepts are integrated into the repertoire of spontaneity at large"[68]. The picture of "understanding's equipment" is "a picture of a system of concepts and conceptions with substantial empirical content," part of "the medium within which one engages in active thought that is rationally responsive to the deliverances of experience"[69].

References

BRANDOM, R. *Making It Explicit*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

BRANDOM, R. *Tales of the Mighty Dead: Historical Essays in the Metaphysics of Intentionality*, 2002.

HABERMAS, J. *Verdade e Justificação: ensaios filosóficos*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2004.

HEGEL, G.W.F. *Werke in 20 Bände*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp, 1970.

_____. *Jenaer Systementwürfe I*. Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1986.

HONNETH, A. *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit*. Berlin: Reclam, 2001.

HUME, D. *Hume: An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: And Other Writings* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

KANT, I. *Kants Werke – Akademie Textausgabe*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968.

[66] REDDING, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, p. 580
[67] HEGEL, *Werke in 20 Bände.* 3, p. 104
[68] McDOWELL, *Mind and World*, p. 32
[69] Id., p. 33–34

LAFONT, C. *The Linguistic Turn in Hermeneutic Philosophy*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, 1999.

McDOWELL, J. *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel and Sellars*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

McDOWELL, J. *Mind and World*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

NUZZO, A. *Hegel and the Analytic Tradition*. Continuum: New York, 2010.

OLIVEIRA, M. A. *A reviravolta lingüístico-pragmática na filosofia contemporânea*. São Paulo: Vozes, 2001.

PINKARD, T. *Hegel´s Phenomenology. The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

PIPPIN, R. *Hegel´s Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

RAJCHMAN, J. *Post-Analytic Philosophy*. Columbia University Press: New York, 1985.

REDDING, P. *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*. Cambridge University Press: New York, 2007.

ROCKMORE, T. *Hegel, Idealism, and Analytic Philosophy*. Yale University Press: New York, 2005.

SELLARS, W. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

VERNON, J. *Hegel´s Philosophy of Language*. Continuum: New York, 2007.

WITTGENSTEIN, L. *Werkausgabe in 8 Bänden*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984.