

BE(ING) HERE NOW
NOTES TOWARDS AN INDEXICALIST
EPISTEMOLOGY¹

Jon Cogburn

Blessed sister, holy mother, spirit of the fountain, spirit
of the garden,
Suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood.
Teach us to care and not to care.
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks,
– T.S. Eliot, *Ash Wednesday*.

ABSTRACT: I model the version of Wilfrid Sellars' Myth of the Given argument that John McDowell presents in *Mind and World* along the lines of one of Graham Priest's inclosure paradoxes, with McDowell's "spinning of the wheels" worry being a worry about denial of Transcendence and his "exculpation not justification" worry being a worry about denial of Closure. This exercise reveals much, importantly: (1) McDowell's conceptualism does not in fact, resolve the paradox, and (2) on the other hand, with insights from Graham Harman, Hilan Bensusan, and the Rinzai tradition of Zen Buddhism, a non-conceptualist, indexicalist, epistemology can.

KEYWORDS: Hilan Bensusan; Buddhism; Conceptualism; Epistemology; Indexicalism; Intuitionism; Graham Harman; John McDowell; Myth of the Given; Graham Priest; Zen Buddhism.

¹ I must thank Irfan Alam, John Anderson, Michael Ardoline, Jack Arnold, Kenji and Paula Arai, Hilan Bensusan, John Bova, Graham Bounds, Emily Beck Cogburn, Rendon Dupaquier, Ron Dupuis, Daniel Felty, James Edward Hackett, Chris Hamilton, Michael Harter, Parker Kelley, Ira Knox, Dax Markland, Damon McGregor, Gabriel Connor, Christopher and Abigail RayAlexander, N. Mark Rauls, Neil Tennant, Ian Van Cleaf, James Waldek, Niki Young, and Gwendolyn Zywicke.

1. No character in Buddhism is more redoubtable than the mountain, for centuries prior to Zen, the metaphorical, and often literal, ground of meditation.² And at least since Dogen's writings, the mountain has served as figure, not just as something we might contemplate on the mat or paint with negative space, but also as a character in the stories, aphorisms, and koans we associate most strongly with Zen. Consider:

1. Like Dogen himself, one must go to the mountain to attain realization, but one can go to the mountain here, in this valley, so long as one understands the moon's reflection inside a drop of water.
2. Before and after Zen, but not during, the mountain is a mountain.
3. The color of the mountain is the Buddha's body, and the mountain and river together actualize the ancient Buddhas.
4. The mountain, with its innumerable characteristics, and which within itself hides innumerable mountains, must not be viewed from the scale of human thought.

To get to know a Zen monk is to begin to suspect in one's bones that to understand any of these claims would be a wonderful thing, perhaps sufficient for moksha, enlightenment, or realization, whatever we want to call that desirable state to which contemplatives tend.

2. While, as far as I know, no major figure in the history of Western philosophy has *explicitly* denied that the color of the mountain is the Buddha's body, at least since Kant, we are all taught that the beginning of philosophical sophistication, and perhaps liberation as well, is the recognition that mountain *cannot but* be viewed from the scale of human thought.

3. The conquistadors came seeking Christians and gold. And even in those days (*plus ça change!*) this required thinking of mountains entirely in ways that Kantians assure us it is impermissible to think of ourselves, as a mere means, or in Heidegger's terminology (cf. "The Question Concerning Technology") as "standing reserve."

According to Heidegger, for the epistemological conquistador *all there is* to the

² The parts of the Buddhist tradition emphasized in this paper will be familiar to readers of Toshihiko Izutsu's classic *Toward a Philosophy of Zen Buddhism*.

mountain is that which makes possible its practical exploitation.³ And according to the Frankfurt School, it follows from this that, for the epistemological conquistador, *all there is* to the rational appraisal of our beliefs and desires concerning the mountain is appraisal of effectiveness of means as more or less efficacious for achieving ends which are, as with the kind of *ersatz* value produced by exchange, ultimately arbitrary.⁴

Heideggerians and students of the Frankfurt School cannot but see scientific naturalism as the conjunction of two myths:

- (1) the properties which allow us to predict how things will react when disturbed are *all there is*, and
- (2) putting everything else in the metaphysical wastebasket does not render the resulting conceptual scheme a reflection of our own controlling souls.

Pace the naturalist, to view the mountain as *nothing more than* a lump of matter to be manipulated at will just is to view from the scope of human thought, because it is to view it as nothing more than raw material for our own theoretical and practical projects.⁵

And this is precisely why the epistemic claim that the mountain can only be viewed from the scale of human thought cannot be separated from the Kantian political project of affirming the autonomy of human beings (at least those determined to be sufficiently able minded) at the expense of everyone and everything else's. The conquistadors come searching for Christians and gold. One cannot separate the tasks.

4. However, very early on in the Kantian revolution, another stock figure arose, one almost automatically generated as a sad, or perhaps pseudo, dialectical opponent of the conquistador: the romantic. That is, if the conquistador forces

³ To be clear, as D. Parker Kelley has shown me by example and in conversation, Heidegger merely gives us critique of how the bad metaphysics of the scientific naturalists collapses all justification into an idealized model of scientific justification. It does not in any way track the context of actual scientific discovery, which involves hearing and working with the mountain. This is why so many good and great scientists are not scientific naturalists.

⁴ See especially Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

⁵ The idea that scientific naturalism is actually a bad faith form of anti-realism masquerading as realism is one of Graham Harman's most provocative claims, also one his opponents consistently miss. See the discussion of overmining and undermining that opens Harman's *The Quadruple Object*.

slaves to extract gold (coal, aluminum, chromium, copper. . .) from the mountain, the romantic either swoons before it, as in the poetry of Wordsworth, or stands athwart it as in the Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer*.

One might see these two forms of romanticism as at odds, with Wordsworth subservient to the mountain and Friedrich's climber conquering the mountain in an analogous manner to the CEO of the extraction company removing the mountain's top. But that is not fair.⁶ In part, Romantic poetry's obsession with the lofty state of the viewer renders it a horrible example of the Zen aphorism, which directs us to the mountain itself. And, contrariwise, the hiker in the Friedrich painting beholds an immense sea of fog, other peaks, taller mountains in the distance, and the cloudy sky above. To the extent that the painting does after all instantiate the aphorism, it is because the climber's position allows her to be even more sublimely overwhelmed.

When experiencing the sublime, we do find ourselves being overwhelmed, but not in the agonizing sense that leads Schopenhauer, in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, to describe noise as the supreme archenemy of all serious thinkers. To some extent, the pleasure of the sublime is a kind of negative theology starting with pleasure of our own finitude, our inability to fully make sense of what we are experiencing.⁷ And it is not unreasonable to view this as at least on the path to not viewing the mountain from the perspective of human thought.

However, Kant himself blocks this path in his canonical discussion of the sublime in *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant, when we are overwhelmed in a positive way, we don't really experience the ungraspable. According to the argument which Quentin Meillassoux in *After Finitude* associates with Fichte, but which Kant almost certainly got from George Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*, experiencing the ungraspable is supposed to be impossible, because in experiencing anything, we render it graspable. Our initial experience of the sublime is really then nothing more than the experience of our own limitations, which Kant weirdly takes to always be a source of pain.

Then, for Kant's account of the dynamical sublime, the pleasure is perversely

⁶ I need to especially thank Damon McGregor for much discussion which has allowed me a more nuanced view of the romantic.

⁷ Readers of Adrian Johnston's hilarious and incisive comments on negative theology in "Points of Forced Freedom: Eleven (More) Theses on Materialism" will easily be able to read this paper as a response.

just the pleasure of *not* being wholly undone by the experience. For Kant, the sublime is thus a kind of masturbatory sadomasochism of the inner autocrat, the autocrat's pain at the prospect of losing control of its own mental faculties and body serving to enhance the pleasure in the reassertion of control. We initially feel endangered by nature, but when we realize that we are not in fact in danger, *that very fact* brings us pleasure. Here we see how the pleasure of the Kantian romantic is in the end no different from that which motivates the conquistador.

5. From a romantic mindset, nothing is more risible than Wilhelm von Humboldt's reproaching a particular mountain for being too craggy. He would have done better to swoon, write bad poetry, or perhaps just adopt the right kind of serious expression. We think that in mocking Von Humboldt we are symbolically striking a blow against the conquistador, for how much distance is there between appraising the mountain for Christians and gold and appraising it with respect to how it would look on a hotel room wall, or in a selfie?

With respect to von Humboldt, Theodor Adorno is not unlike Ramones drummer Marky Ramone patiently explaining to Anthony Bourdain that the hipster censoriousness with respect to the music of Billy Joel is both unmerited and unserious:

. . .[Von Humboldt's] naivete, which does not delimit the use of human taste at the boundary of extrahuman nature, attests to a relation to nature that is incomparably deeper than admiration that is content with whatever it beholds.⁸

For Adorno, the romantic's commitment to treating every mountain as equally fabulous is fatuous precisely because it entails the conquistador's view that mountains cannot really be better or worse in themselves.

At best, the romantic can endorse something along the lines of what Kantians in fits of condescending magnanimity end up saying about non-human animals or the young, elderly, and disabled humans. If we view or treat the mountain with too much cruelty, it may be better or worse for *our* (that is, able minded, middle-aged humans') own well-being. It might degrade *our* environment. It might make *us* less sensitive souls and hence crueler to other able minded, middle-aged

⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 93

humans. It might deprive *us* of some of the Wordsworthian “whoosh” moments we might be lucky enough to recall on our death beds. Etc. Etc. Etc.

Tristan Garcia takes Adorno’s defense of von Humboldt to be the key to understanding the normative significance of beauty:

[Adorno] cites Wilhelm von Humboldt, who reproached a landscape for not being beautiful enough because it lacked trees. While these words might seem ridiculous, since they reproach a landscape for being what it is, in Adorno’s ears they have a particularly interesting ring to them: aesthetic judgement appears to correspond precisely to the possibility of intuiting the difference beneath the natural mask of a thing’s identity and how ‘it could have been otherwise’, how it *ought* to be different from what it is. Every aesthetic judgment is based on the possibility of this implicit reproach, otherwise nothing can be beautiful. We must understand that it could have been different, that it could have been what it is differently, and that it is ugly if it is insufficiently what it is (Garcia, 337).

Viewing the mountain not from the scale of human thought requires being open to the idea that the mountain has its own ends, which it may or may not attain.

Of course, von Humboldt might have gotten these ends wrong, but for Adorno and Garcia, von Humboldt’s critic (*who is also Graham Harman’s critic*)⁹ is in fact the shallow one, since the critic poses as a lover of the mountain but denies the possibility of the mountain having ends. And if the mountain has no ends in itself, then we can’t help but to appraise it entirely in terms of our own. But then, as with the Wordsworthian, we do not love the mountain but in fact only ever love ourselves.

6. If von Humboldt went wrong, it was because of his lack of solicitude combined with the abundance of confidence with which he announced the

⁹ The clearest example of this is Alexander Galloway’s “The Poverty of Philosophy: Realism and Post-Fordism” which both manages to pull off the Trumpian trick of accusing your opponent of your own greatest weakness (see Tristan Garcia’s extended discussion in *Form and Object* about how the erasure of the mountain, correlationism, in the end reduces all value to exchange value) and is, I think, the only published instance in Western philosophy of someone actually sincerely committing the “but Hitler was a vegetarian” fallacy (here the fact that capitalists too talk of objects). Feh.

mountain's defects. Openness to the idea that the mountain has ends should not motivate arrogance about one's ability to discern those ends.

Epistemic humility is the realization that one might be mistaken about the degree of confidence one has that one's beliefs are true. Perhaps transforming the mountain through terrace farming is one way the mountain can attain its vocation. What about some cabins? I don't know 100%. Let's be very careful, and at the very least not terraform the mountain in a way that makes it vastly more susceptible to landslide.

Good enough so far. But the Fichtean worry broached above raises the spectre of *semantic humility*, which is far more difficult.¹⁰ The beliefs about which we can be more or less confident are expressed in language, the predicates of which express concepts. Of necessity, these are concepts that can be thought by humans and expressed in human language. And so when we try to articulate even what the mountain might be calling on us to do, we must express that call in our own language. When the mountain issues forth an Alphonso Lingis-style imperative to us, must it speak our language? If one couples epistemic humility with semantic pride, one could take this to be the case. But semantic pride here is yet another instance of viewing the mountain from the scale of human thought.

This, I would suggest, is the deepest point that one might view Von Humboldt's critics as making. There is always the possibility that when one hears the call of another, one is hearing the voices in one's own head. If one rejects semantic pride, which is the view that the entire cosmos speaks with your own language,¹¹ then one must consider the possibility that if a mountain could speak, we could not understand it. What strike us as imperatives are always to some extent voices in our own head. But then we seem to be back where we started, in our Kantian prisons, forced to view the mountain from the perspective of human thought.

7. Let me reiterate. If we understand the mountain, it is not because it speaks words. The voice is in this respect silent, neither the Schopenhaurian noise

¹⁰ This distinction is from Neil Tennant (p.c.) who characterizes Dummettian intuitionism as the combination of epistemic pride and semantic humility.

¹¹ Robert Brandom's doctrine of "reciprocal sense dependence" (cf. *Reason in Philosophy*) just is this view, as are all of the non-Lewisian theories of modality justly excoriated in John Divers' *Possible Worlds*.

preventing reason's use of concepts nor the monkey mind chattering of words that express those very concepts. The voice of the mountain lies outside of the conceptual.

Philosophers opposed to the conquistador thus have a clear task, conceptualizing the non-conceptual. But is that even possible? And where to begin?

8. In the existing philosophical literature, there are many ways to delimit the conceptual from the non-conceptual, and relative to each one, many debates about which side of the divide things lie on. For example, it is experiences which are so delimited, we can debate whether there are any non-conceptual experiences.¹² If the delimitation concerns creatures, we can debate the extent to which non-human animals possess concepts.¹³ These are important conversations, and I hope that what we discover here will have non-trivial consequences for them. In this section, however, by "the conceptual" we shall mean something both limited and idealized, the set of true sentences. "The conceptual" in this sense then might be seen as being coterminous with the best linguistically mediated picture of the way the world is. Let us call the set of sentences in question V.

In what follows we will assume that V is consistent and that part of how consistency is maintained is via the kind of ersatz indexicality one gets in formal logic, where temporal and modal conditions of utterance for indexical sentences such as "I am here now" or "I might do that" are given explicitly. In order to get this kind of ersatz indexicality, in all likelihood this would render the sentences of V akin to the sentences spoken by Montague grammarians while doing model theory, giving truth conditions relative to moments, places, and worlds defined.

¹² There are! See the essays in York Gunther's edited anthology, *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*. This debate divides between (a) discussions of Raffman qualia, which concerns the way our ability to make phenomenal distinctions so vastly outstrips our non-indexical vocabulary and ability to reidentify entities as instances of the same concept, and (b) discussions of normativity in the phenomena itself. Unfortunately, these two distinct issues get mashed together in the literature. The essays in Gunther's anthology, including his own, make great progress on the issue of Raffman qualia but none on the issue of indexical normativity, which is ours as well as McDowell's (and, as I will suggest, Kant's and Heidegger's to boot) original problem. For more on this, see footnote 19 below.

¹³ They do! See Mark Okrent's *Rational Animals: The Teleological Roots of Intentionality*.

Or perhaps, in the manner of Quine, this could be done at the level of the object language through novel translations. It doesn't matter. What is important here is the basic idea of a consistent set of true sentences that jointly describe all of the world's facts.

Perhaps Quine's nicest metaphor from his and J.S. Ullian's eponymously titled essay is that sets of true sentences such as V can be thought of as "webs of belief," with the strings in question marking out inferential relations. Some of the things one believes are *reasons for* some of the other things that one believes. Since negation is in the language, some of the things one believes are also *reasons against* some of the other things one believes. These inferential roles hold even when, as with V , the set is too big for any one person to believe.

In referring to reasons, we will use the terminology " $r(x)$ " which we will call x 's reason set. In set theory this is:

$$r(x) = \{y \mid y \text{ is a reason for some } z \text{ in } x\}$$

Here, " $r(x)$ " just is the set of beliefs that function as reasons for the members of x . With even more set theoretic notation this is:

$$r(x) = \{y \mid \exists z (z \in x \wedge y \text{ is a reason for } z)\}$$

To be clear, the members of $r(x)$ are not reasons for everything in x being everything in x . It's rather that the reasons for each member of x are gathered together in $r(x)$.

Now let us consider three plausible, and important, principles, which can be shown to be mutually inconsistent. Here is the first:

Existence: V exists

This just says that the conceptual, as we have delimited it here, exists.

Our next two principles concern the r function. The first is a prohibition on circular reasoning. This should be commonsensical. If someone asks you why water is wet, if you reply that it's because water is wet, you are not answering the question. Following the terminology of Graham Priest's treatment of Russell's paradox in *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, we can see this prohibition as an instance of Transcendence, and can formulate it thus:

Transcendence: $\forall x \neg(r(x) \subseteq x)$ ¹⁴

This says that for any set of sentences x , the set of reasons for those sentences will not be a subset of x . This means that at least one reason in $r(x)$ will not be in x .

Our second principle stipulates that since reasons are beliefs, the set of reasons for a set of beliefs will itself be a subset of V . Again, borrowing terminology from Priest, we have:

Closure: $\forall x (r(x) \subseteq V)$

Donald Davidson states this bluntly, “nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief” (Davidson 1986, 310). As with Transcendence, this is likely to appear as commonsensical, at least when V contains all of the true beliefs. Then, since we give reasons in language, isn’t it the case that reasons are linguistic entities? But then, since $r(x)$ is the set of reasons for the sentences in x , $r(x)$ is a set of true sentences, and hence a subset of V .

9. Here is an interesting fact. Our two principles concern all sets of sentences. One of them also uses the name for the set of all true sentences. From this you get a kind of self-reference. Here, Closure ($\forall x (r(x) \subseteq V)$) is a sentence about V which can then be applied to V itself just by instantiating the universal quantifier with V . That is, if every set of sentences is such that its reason set is a subset of V , then the reason set for V is a subset of V . This is self-reference on the cheap as it were, since the usual apparatus of Gödel numbering, fixed points, diagonalization, etc. is nowhere needed in our argument. But then consider:

Claim: Existence, Closure, and Transcendence are jointly contradictory

Proof:

1. V exists Existence

¹⁴ In *Garcian Meditations* I call such paradoxes “quasi-Priestian” because in Priest’s inclosure paradoxes the various versions of Transcendence and Closure all involve membership, not subset-hood. In “Meillassoux’s Dilemma” Joshua Heller and I demonstrate that Kaplan’s Paradox has the form of a quasi-Priestian inclosure paradox. One should in principle be able to transform a quasi-Priestian argument into a Priestian one, as x is a subset of y when x is an element of the powerset of y . But then the argument would concern the powerset of the initial existing totality, not that totality. Even if something like that did work as a general strategy, I think that it (in this context) would wrongly suggest that the powerset axiom is a possible source of the contradiction in question.

2. $\forall x (r(x) \subseteq V)$	Closure
3. $r(V) \subseteq V$	2, \forall elimination
4. $\forall x \neg(r(x) \subseteq x)$	Transcendence
5. $\neg(r(V) \subseteq V)$	4, \forall elimination
6. \perp	3,5 \neg elimination

In natural language, assume that V , the set of all true sentences, exists. Then by Closure we know that the reason set for V is a subset of V . But by Transcendence, it follows that the reason set for V is not a subset of V . Contradiction!

10. In *Beyond the Limits of Thought*, Priest demonstrated both that Russell's paradox concerning the set of all sets involves versions of Existence, Closure, and Transcendence and that most if not all existing paradoxes in the history of logic can be fruitfully considered versions of Russell's paradox. Since, in most cases, the arguments for Closure and Transcendence only involve mathematics and logic, one typically has a choice of, with Priest, viewing paradoxes of totality as true contradictions, or as Patrick Grim does with respect to an overlapping but distinct set of targets in *The Incomplete Universe*, denying that paradox generating totalities such as the set of true beliefs exist. One typically instances Grim's option either by denying Existence or by characterizing the totality as an ersatz one so that Closure is false.

John Bova and Paul Livingston's explorations into diagonalization, Gödel's incompleteness proofs, and self-reference in continental philosophy have allowed us to combine and extend Priest's and Grim's results, yielding the (terminology mine):

Bova/Livingston Hypothesis: All absolutes generate a tension between consistent plurality and inconsistent totality.¹⁵

To be clear, the thesis itself does not tell us what to do with the tension. One could view it as a choice between the path of Grim or the path of Priest. One could respond to the tension more dialectically, an eternal seesaw with neither Priest

¹⁵ See Livingston's *The Politics of Logic: Badiou, Wittgenstein, and the Consequences of Formalism* for, among other things, a remarkably lucid, deep, and plausible interpretation of the French post-structuralists in terms of the hypothesis.

nor Grim ever winning. One could view it as something more akin to what philosophers of quantum physics call entanglement, with the underlying metaphysical fact of the matter being the tradeoff itself.¹⁶

11. Even Graham Priest would agree that adopting the path of inconsistent totality is akin to how Winston Churchill saw the United States as always doing the right thing after all the alternatives are exhausted. So let us consider the other three options.

If one is already moved by Grim's book, then one might just say that he gives us independent reasons for taking the set of true sentences to not exist. However, this is a little bit like the student convinced of global skepticism trying to use that to undermine a discussion of David Lewis's model of causation. Yes, if global skepticism is true, we won't know what causality is like, but that wasn't the point. So I propose for now at least that we bracket *both* agreement with Priest that all three of the premises are true and agreement with Grim that Existence is false.¹⁷

Transcendence. While our example of the person offering "because water is wet" as a reason for water's wetness shows that Transcendence is commonsensical, that does not mean it is trivial. Indeed, John McDowell's "frictionless spinning in a void" metaphor's use as a criticism of coherence theories of knowledge should be understood as a defense of Transcendence in exactly this context. In fact, though neither of them uses this terminology, McDowell explicitly criticizes Davidson's own denial of Transcendence:

Davidson is clear that if we conceive experience in terms of impacts on sensibility that occur outside the space of concepts, we must not think we can appeal to experience to justify judgements or beliefs (McDowell 1996, 14).

And McDowell agrees with this, if by "experience" one means mere causal impingements of the world upon us. However:

¹⁶ See the discussion of entanglement in Aaronson's *Quantum Computing Since Democritus*. In a sequel, I will explore the view that the metaphysical facts are those of entanglement, and the analogue to measurement is the consistent plurality moment in the working out of dialectical to and fro. I *think* that this both follows from what I say here and that it is consistent with what I meant by "paradoxico-metaphysics" in *Garcian Meditations*.

¹⁷ In conversation John Bova has suggested to me that in such arguments denial of existence of some totality might actually only ever really denying either Transcendence and Closure with respect to a function defined over that (supposed) totality. In part because of the bracketing above, I won't pursue this here, though reading Grim closely with Bova's thought in mind would ramify out into our present concerns.

Davidson recoils from the Myth of the Given all the way to denying experience any justificatory role, and the coherentist upshot is a version of the conception of spontaneity as frictionless. . . Davidson's picture depicts our empirical thinking as engaged in with no rational constraint, but only causal influenced, from outside. This just raises a worry as to whether the picture can accommodate the sort of bearing on reality that empirical content amounts to. . . (McDowell 1996, 14)

To deny Transcendence in this context is to endorse coherentism about justification which, as McDowell urges, undermines the idea that our conceptual schemes have any bearing on reality.

Closure. The danger here is more subtle and at the heart of what is, or at least should be, at issue when philosophers worry about the Myth of the Given.¹⁸ For McDowell (and, again, he doesn't use this term), denying Closure risks confusing exculpation and justification. In the context of affirming Existence and Transcendence, denying Closure means claiming that something besides beliefs can operate as reasons, playing a justificatory role with respect to those beliefs. However, if our view of the world is the kind of naturalism gestured at above, this will leave us badly confused. Remember that for the naturalist, *all there is* are objects and the kinds of properties that allow objects to be manipulated. This is a purely causal realm.

With the word "exculpation," McDowell is signaling the manner in which the relevance of the causal to the justificatory is entirely in terms of the contrapositive of the Kantian dictum that ought implies can. If causal constraints prohibit you from doing something, then you do not have an obligation to do that thing. But this does not in any manner tell you what you *are* obligated to do, or to refrain from doing when not constrained either way. Again, though he doesn't put it this way, McDowell's view that the denial of Closure risks confusing justification and exculpation is simply the application of Kant's moral insight to epistemology. Purely causal constraints might limit what we in fact believe, but they cannot tell us what we ought to believe.

¹⁸ Some of the discussion that follows arose from discussions with Christopher Ray Alexander about the philosophy of Raimon Panikkar, whose ecumenical work and philosophy can be read as thematizing a denial of Closure with respect to the above argument. See especially Panikkar's Gifford lectures, *The Rhythm of Being*. Understanding this text requires remembering both his life in a small room on the Varanasi Shaivite temple grounds and as a consistent discussion partner over the last two decades of Martin Heidegger's life.

12. If I am correct that McDowell's the myth of the given problematic has the form of an inclosure paradox, then one can only see McDowell's solution to the problem as an attempt to violate Closure in a way that does not end up confusing justification and exculpation. McDowell in effect holds that particular experiences are outside of V because they are not sentences, but can still operate as reasons because they are always already conceptually articulable in sentences.

McDowell, following the German Idealists, correctly understood that one must category jam the Kantian categories of concept (which for Kant are multiply instanced, applied actively by a human understanding that can normatively appraise logical relations between them) and intuition (which were unique particulars passively taken up in experience).¹⁹ For McDowell, if the intuitions were always already conceptualizable, then perhaps particular entities outside of V can nonetheless play a justificatory role with respect to V via the logical inferences of the sentences always already available to describe those experiences.

McDowell's splitting the difference provoked an enormous literature and several substantive revisions by McDowell himself with respect to how he wants to formulate the insight. But let us just note two things from our perspective. First, when one formulates the myth of the given problematic as an inclosure paradox, it is not clear if conceptualism is actually a solution. If the McDowellian is claiming that all individual experiences are taken up as registering true sentences, then given that V is defined above as the set of true sentences (and not the set of true sentences taken up at a given time), Closure is not denied after all and there is still a paradox! Second, McDowell's conceptualism can be read as doubling down on the claim that the mountain must be seen from the perspective of human thought. That his thought is so much more expansive than that of the bald naturalist is surely an improvement on what actual conquistadors would do with the mountain, but one might argue that it falls after all into the trap Kant laid for the romantic.

¹⁹ See Graham Bounds and my "Identitätsphilosophie and the Sensibility that Understands" for an interpretation of Schelling's account of intellectual intuition along these lines. In another sequel to this paper, I argue that this was the original issue Kant broaches in the schematism section of the first critique, one he there failed to solve via changing the subject, a failure which necessitates the *Critique of Judgment*. Just as this paper can be read as a riposte to Johnson's critique of negative theology, it can also be read as a radicalization of Kant's theory of beauty.

13. Hilan Bensusan shows how it can be fruitful to contrast conceptualist and indexicalist epistemology via what each might say about Leibniz's Law, which entails that two objects are distinct if and only if one possesses a property the other lacks. As an epistemic thesis, Leibniz's Law is the claim that we differentiate objects in terms of those properties that are epistemically accessible and ready for uptake into language. This is the conceptualist's epistemology.

A truly indexicalist epistemology, on the other hand, would admit of at least the possibility of two entities which are identical from the point of our conceptual repertoire and are such that we can nonetheless recognize them to be normatively distinct.²⁰ Bensusan considers this in its full generality, as a metaphysical thesis:

Interiorities are therefore intimately marked by the exterior but form units that can be referred to through demonstratives. . . . The interiorities thus delimited can also be compared with substrata, something that can make two indiscernibles – two subjects of the same predication – not identical. If two particular entities have different substrata, they can have the same qualities and relations but still be different. (Bensusan 2018, 160)

The epistemic point might then be seen as an instance of the metaphysical thesis, say when the two indiscernible objects in question are intentional (in Graham Harman's terminology, sensual) objects for the knower.

Violations of Leibniz's Law can of course be achieved trivially, by over-narrowly delimiting what counts as "conceptual," for example not allowing spatiotemporal locations or deictics such as "this is darker than that" which pick out recognizable phenomenal differences (Raffman qualia) that are too fine grained to have their own words or to be recognized as such. The manner in which ersatz indexicals are allowed into V above, via Quinean translation or Montagovian indexing, shows this to be a non-sequitur though.²¹

²⁰ What follows, follows from Hilan Bensusan's remarks, in *Indexicalism*, on Saul Kripke's critique of the description theory of meaning. For what it's worth, I think it is also what is going on in at least the first half of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Dialectic in at least the first half of that book is nothing other than conceptual schemes evolving precisely because they lack the resources to make differentiations that spirit nonetheless recognizes. In Hegel and in life, dialectic is just concepts catching up to (and often necessarily changing in the process) what is indexically available. This being said, we should remind ourselves that dialectics isn't everything in philosophy or life.

²¹ Footnote 12 above already suggests that Raffman qualia is a non-sequitur with respect to the myth of the given debate, properly understood. McDowellians correctly note that Raffman qualia and the ability to pick them out deictically does not take one out of the realm of the conceptual. Unfortunately though, since

For a non-trivial example of the failure of Leibniz's Law, I turn to a pregnant and astonishing suggestion made in *Guerilla Metaphysics* by Graham Harman about the relation between comedy and tragedy. I think that what Harman writes here is true, but all I ask here is that the reader find it not wholly implausible:

We have seen that for Bergson, comedy is intimately wrapped up with character, with the way in which the free resilience of life is haunted by some pre-given load of physical or moral destiny. But oddly enough, this is exactly what we say about tragedy as well, which speaks as clearly as comedy does of flaws and the punishment of hubris. We ourselves are wrapped up in our private destinies, trapped in our habits and mannerisms and fates, although normally we are deadened to this fact by our catching sight of a constant freedom within. The interesting thing is that both comic and tragic characters are united in seeming *less* free than we are, although the former are objects of ridicule and the later earn our admiration as well as our pity (Harman 2005, 135).

The possibility that jumps off the page is that it might simply not be possible at the conceptual level to articulate what differentiates comedy from tragedy. As Harman demonstrates in his longer discussion, both tend to involve the Bergsonian intrusion of the mechanical on the non-mechanical. Somehow though, in the presence of tragedy, we know to react with solicitude and in comedy with derision.

One might react to this with some version of the Twainian lines that comedy is tragedy plus time, or (more to the point) comedy is when you break your leg and tragedy is when I sprain my ankle. Perhaps Leibniz's Law is not really compromised here because there is no fact of the matter about whether we should respond derisively or solicitously. So at best there is a comedy/tragedy concept and our pretense that one should behave differently is without reason.

Or perhaps, as Jonathan Dancy suggests with respect to moral vocabulary in *Ethics Without Principles* and Kant with respect to beauty in *Critique of Judgment*, our correct normative assessment, in the case of comedy and tragedy whether to respond with derision or solicitude, is non-conceptual yet not anti-realist or relativist. The particular occasion is itself a reason, calling us without words to solicitude or derision, justifying in part applications of concepts, yet not itself

the issue concerns normativity, successfully assimilating Raffman qualia to the conceptual does nothing to obviate the worries that conceptualism itself fails to undermine Closure and thereby either solve the paradox or get us out of the Kantian prison.

within the conceptual. Perhaps this just is the silent call of the mountain.

14. In “On Layer Cakes: Heidegger’s Normative Pragmatism Revisited” Mark Okrent interprets Division One of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* as an attempt to derive conceptual content from the kind of normatively guided behavior in-principle available to non-linguistic animals. For Heidegger, properly understood, my grasp of the concept CIGARETTE lies in part in knowing the proper ways to light one and that, all else being equal, they are not to be put in my ears. Heidegger’s story, as articulated by Okrent, is quite a bit more complicated than this, but it essentially involves bootstrapping off of normatively guided (and guidable) behavior.

Heidegger’s view is not standard behaviorism for two reasons. First, in the manner of analytic functionalists, he articulates the behavior as a holistic system. I light the cigarette in order to be able to draw the smoke into my lungs. I draw the smoke into my lungs in order to alleviate anxiety and (unsuccessfully) look cool. I alleviate anxiety in order to. . . Etc. Etc. Etc. Concepts such as CIGARETTE only get their representational and linguistically inferential role in virtue of my perfection of an arsenal of behavior involving cigarettes. Second, the behavior relevant to concept possession is normative in the sense that it involves particular goals as well as enforcement of the propriety of those goals and how to achieve them. That is, distinctions between getting it right and wrong, getting it better or worse, doing it weirdly in a way that may be an improvement or perhaps just evocative of style, etc., etc. are always in play. And all of these to some extent refer to a performance of life as one of the ways one thinks it ought to be performed. This performance is our reaction to the cosmos. And there is nothing distinctively human here. Non-humans remonstrate and praise one another’s behavior along these same axes. Non-human animals too take in the cosmos and develop their vocations, their various styles, in response as well.

Just looking at a mountain does not magically give you the concept MOUNTAIN. But just as people can be better or worse smokers based on their non-linguistic interactions with the cigarette, people can learn, manifest, and teach, through language and without language, better or worse ways of interacting with the mountain. Heidegger realized that much of this normative behavior is upstream of language and in fact foundational with respect to it.

Most importantly, with respect to our task, is the realization that Heidegger's series of normative "in order to" relations do *not*, as it does in his early and middle period, terminate in a "for the sake of which" relation which names a total wheel-spinning human contexture that itself is an arbitrary place in the history of being.²² The mountain itself calls us to silence, to solicitude, and to many things at variance with the normal human contexture, things such as sitting on a mat, things such as moving aside the chrysanthemum bouquet and filleting a large koi without ever touching it.

15. Readers of books by Hubert Dreyfus such as *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action* are likely to misunderstand it when Buddhists equate enlightenment itself with skillful coping.²³ For the Dreyfusarian, skillful coping is the kind of flexible adaptive richness human and other animals exhibit paradigmatically when something obtrudes on the current way they are pursuing their goals. Someone accidentally trips into your path, and you dance out of their way. Both of you smile. The bathroom doorknob comes apart and you use a butter knife to un wedge the bolt. Decades ago in *What Computers Still Can't Do*, Dreyfus correctly predicted that computers would not be very good at this kind of thing.

And practitioners of Zen are better at this kind of thing, both with respect to dancing out of the way while smiling and the inventive use of human language. But the skillful coping of Zen is not constrained by a naturalistic metaphysics which consigns all reason to that of how to efficiently attend preselected ends. To the extent that enlightenment just is skillful coping, it is primarily the ability to

²² The view I am rejecting is the one Lee Braver attributes to Heidegger in *Groundless Grounds*, which I think does capture Heidegger's middle period. In terms of our argument, Braver's Heidegger certainly rejects Transcendence, and probably Existence as well, though possibly for unrelated reasons. Unlike Braver, as noted above, I find the position to be unsatisfactory because it instantiates the frictionless spinning of wheels McDowell critiques, which non-incidentally I do not think can be separated from Heidegger's politics of his middle period. By way of contrast, in *Heidegger's Pragmatism* Mark Okrent's presentation of later Heidegger's quest for "non-metaphysical knowledge" can actually be read as moving, via a similar inclosure argument, towards what I am suggesting here, a denial of Closure, albeit expressed by Heidegger in a more negative theological vein. Christopher Ray Alexander and I would also argue that Heidegger's decades long dialogue with Panikkar assumes its proper importance in this reading.

²³ I thank John Anderson for stressing this understanding of enlightenment in the Buddhist tradition as well as how it contrasts with the discussions of the homophonous phrase in contemporary phenomenology.

always keep in view the mountain not from the scale of human thought, and to react accordingly. Skillful coping in Zen is at once surprising, novel, indeed sometimes shocking, yet surprisingly appropriate for all that.

16. The shinshoku, wearing lacquered hat and antique samurai coat, sits for an indeterminate amount of time in front of the cutting board, staring silently at the mountain, finding the silence until that which lies behind the silence is found, until that which lies behind the silence resounds.

When the time is right, the priest first moves the chrysanthemum bouquet to the side, then delicately grasps the large steel manabashi chopsticks in one hand and kitchen knife in the other. In the ensuing dance, human hands will not once touch the koi, which also dances in the air. At the dance's end, the fish lay in thirty-six predetermined pieces in thirty-six predetermined places on the board.

We will know and be known by the mountain.

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