

MCDOWELL'S MORAL REALISM AND THE SECONDARY QUALITY ANALOGY

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I. INTRODUCTION

Consider a difficulty common to various functional accounts of value concepts¹: the fact that evil objects, persons, and practices can all be described as functional from at least some practical perspectives. The good robber, the good instruments of torture, and the good bombing mission are familiar examples.

The solution is presumably familiar as well. What allows the possibility of calling someone a good robber is the possibility of looking at the qualities possessed by the robber from a practical perspective in which certain ends are valued, in this case, the end of successful thieving. From the standpoint of one interested in theft, or at least hypothetically contemplating it, what might appear otherwise to be a deficiency in an agent's function — she is deficient, say, with respect to the legal value of respect for the property rights of others — will appear to be a successfully achieved function — she is actually quite remarkable at cracking safes. This indicates that the practical standpoint is not rigidly fixed at some particular 'level' of evaluation.

How do we deal with examples such as the good robber? Presumably by evaluating the practical standpoint from which robbers may appear 'good' in light of some further practical standpoint within which the apparent actuality will appear deficient. While Smith may be a good thief, she is unlikely to appear to be a good citizen. Thus, if we view the virtues of citizenry as of superior importance to the virtues of safecracking, Smith's robberly virtues will be dimly evaluated.

But why view the virtues of citizenry as ultimate? Cannot they too be called into question? If so, we are faced with a further difficulty: that of specifying the nature of the *ultimately* judicative practical standpoint.

I believe that a similar difficulty arises in regards to recent attempts to treat value properties as analogous to secondary qualities. The problem is present, for example, in John McDowell's recognition of a disanalogy which

¹ E.g., that proposed by Peter Geach, "Good and Evil," *Analysis* 17 (1956), pp. 33-42.

exists between values and secondary qualities: value properties are not merely such as to *cause*, but rather such as to *merit* certain normative responses. How, then, can one attempt to assess the merit of a value judgement except in a way which parallels criticism of the good robber? Specifically, it would seem that some ascent to a more general framework of value, or a wider normative perspective, is required. This wider normative perspective would, in turn, seem the appropriate vantage point of a *moral* agent.

If so, the wider normative perspective would be a necessary part of any formulation of moral realism. Crispin Wright, in a recent work, has characterized realism, of any sort, as committed to two sorts of claims, one modest, the other self-assured.² The modest claim is a claim about objectivity: in the realm of the natural world, for example, that the facts are as they are in independence of all perceivers. The self-assured claim is that human perceivers can gain some form or other of access to those facts without terribly distorting them. So two forms of opposition to realism can be characterized by their denial of one or other of the two claims: skepticism rejects the self-assured claim; and anti-realism rejects the modest claim. The above claims about ascent to a general framework of value, by contrast with moral anti-realism and skepticism, have it that our normative commitments are not correct in virtue of being *ours* (modesty); and that the correct normative commitments are available through the ascent of reason (self-assuredness).

At the same time, such a formulation of moral realism would be threatening to that strand of moral theory which takes the analogy to secondary qualities as essential to a realist construal of moral properties. In particular, it threatens the analogy of values to secondary properties, by requiring a retreat to the general. For as we approach some form of ultimate value, which sets the limit on all other valuing, we seem to be approaching the conception of objective value as that which is of value, not from this or that particular perspective, nor only in this or that instantiation, but in itself, and hence generally. But it was this detached, non-particularistic, non-perceptual model that the secondary quality model was in part an attempt to avoid.

In the remainder of this essay, I shall argue that the two models need not be necessarily exclusive. To argue this, it is necessary to show first that the problem which I have just raised really can be seen to exist in McDowell's moral philosophy, and second, that McDowell's recent work in epistemology gives some hope for a resolution of the tension between the secondary quality, and the generalist, models. In my view, the secondary quality model captures a recognizable *phenomenological* feature of the moral life: on occasion, the circumstances seem to demand that we do such and such, we seem to see that this must be done. Mother Theresa saw in the poor persons of dignity in need of aid; the honest fellow who sees a pedestrian drop her wallet simply sees an opportunity to be of help in returning the wallet. Phe-

² Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.) Ch. 1.

nomenologically, it seems inappropriate to describe such agents as inferring, from general principles, some particular conclusion, for their judgment seems predominantly shaped by the particular demands of the situation.

The secondary quality model alone, however, does not seem adequate either for an account of how one acquires, as a part of one's character, this perceptual ability, nor for an account of rational criticism of the deliverances of our moral sense in the face of conflict. Evil persons, lazy persons, and well-meaning but misguided persons see in the fallen wallet an easy buck, a troublesome difficulty to be avoided, and an opportunity to lecture a stranger about personal responsibility, respectively. What accounts for the difference in acquired perceptual ability, on the one hand, and the superiority of the honest agent's response on the other? Where the secondary quality goes wrong, in both respects, is in its alliance with moral particularism, e.g., that of Jonathan Dancy. There are, I will argue, resources in McDowell's work for rejecting the particularist turn.

II. MCDOWELL'S MORAL REALISM

McDowell's moral realism is set out in a number of well known articles, especially "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" (MRHI), "Values and Secondary Qualities," (VASQ) and "Virtue and Reason" (VR).³

In MRHI, McDowell argues against Phillipa Foot's claim that the requirements of morality exercise an influence on the will only if the agent has certain desires. McDowell's position is realist, cognitivist, and internalist.

His view is realist, for "the requirements of morality [are] imposed by the circumstances of action (MRHI p.14)." It is cognitivist, and internalist, because the virtuous person's way of *understanding* a situation is sufficient to motivate her. The difference between two agents, one of whom motivated, and the other of whom is not is not a difference of desire:

it is not that the two people share a certain neutral conception of the facts, but differ in that one, but not the other, has an independent desire as well, which combines with the neutral conception of the facts to cast a favorable light on his acting in a certain way... the admitted difference in respect of desire should [itself] be explicable, like the difference in respect of action, in terms of a more fundamental difference in respect of how they conceive the facts (MRHI p. 17).

³ John McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. 52 (1978), pp. 13-29; "Virtue and Reason," in Stanley G. Clarke and Evan Simpson, eds., *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), pp. 87-110; "Values and Secondary Qualities," in Ted Honderich, ed., *Morality and Objectivity* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 110-129. I do not treat them here in strict chronological order. All further references are marked in the text.

It is thus an intersection of the way the world *is*, with a type of character who is peculiarly able to conceive of the world in *that* way, which accounts for obligation, and the motivation to meet one's obligation.

In two later essays, McDowell follows up different strands of the argument. In VASQ, he defends the claim that it is the *world* which is itself 'value laden,' and in VR he defends the claim that it is in consequence of the virtuous agent's *conception* of that world, and not in consequence of some desire, that the virtuous agent is motivated to act as the world demands.

In VASQ, McDowell argues against J.L. Mackie's 'error theory' of morality. According to Mackie, the common sense conception of moral values is that they are genuine aspects of the world. In this respect, thinks Mackie, an account of the *meaning* of moral terms such as that proposed by Stevenson is incorrect: we do not *mean* by 'this is good,' 'I approve of this, do so as well.' But Mackie convicts moral language of a different problem, that of failure of reference. We may intend our language to be taken as referring to value aspects of the world, but there are, in fact, no such aspects.

McDowell argues that the error theory is based on a misconception about how we commonly understand value properties. For Mackie, common sense likens value properties to primary qualities — qualities which are objective by being "simply *there*, independently of human sensibility (VASQ, p. 167)." But to claim that what is objective in *this* sense is identical with what is objective in the sense of 'being veridical,' is erroneous:

Secondary qualities are qualities not conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states, and thus subjective themselves in a sense that that characterization defines. In the natural contrast, a primary quality would be objective in the sense that what it is for something to have it can be adequately understood otherwise than in terms of dispositions to give rise to subjective states. Now this contrast between objective and subjective is not a contrast between veridical and illusory experience (VASQ, p. 170).

Thus we must distinguish between

first, the possible veridicality of experience [which is one type of objectivity]... in respect of which primary and secondary qualities are on all fours; and second, the not essentially phenomenal character of some properties that experience represents objects as having [a second type of objectivity]... which marks off the primary perceptible qualities from the secondary ones (VASQ, p. 172).

McDowell's complaint against Mackie is that it is a mistake to saddle the realist with a conception of value as that which is valuable from no perspective at all. Values are values for creatures with our particular sensibility. But it is not true that brute human sensibility *will* be attuned to the values in the world: it is the virtuous character who is able to conceive the world in a way that makes sense of value being motivationally efficacious.

In VR, McDowell defends this point: to be virtuous just is to have the sensitivity to the particular situation which is necessary for acting in accordance with the requirements generated by the situation. His position is again internalist, for the virtuous person's conception of the situation completely explains why she acted as she did — the conception is sufficient to show the favorable light in which the agent viewed the action.

The problem of the good robber lurks in the background of these essays, however. How is it that we can gain assurance that what the virtuous agent perceives as the requirements of the situation, or as the value manifested in the situation, is a superior perception to that of the vicious, who perceives quite the opposite? In VASQ, this problem is brought out by way of a disanalogy between values and secondary qualities:

... a virtue (say) is conceived to be not merely such as to elicit the appropriate 'attitude' (as a color is merely such as to cause the appropriate experiences), but rather such as to *merit* it (VASQ, p. 175).

Thus, our explanations of why we responded in the way we did to a certain situation will require, not that we show how we were causally affected, by why the situation deserved our response — and this must necessarily be attended by a critical outlook on what one takes to require such and such a response, and a willingness to change one's responses as necessary.

This critical evaluative and justificative activity will not, as it were, be external to moral practice. Rather, the materials available for use in criticism and justification of moral assessments must themselves be the materials generated from within our own "broadly evaluative point of view (VASQ, p. 177)."

But what is this broadly evaluative point of view from within which we can criticize our perceptual-evaluative responses to the world? For it is just such a broadly evaluative point of view that I earlier in this essay claimed was necessary to make intelligible one's particular responses, and which, I suggested, might require a retreat to the general. Does McDowell himself urge a retreat to the general?

As I understand him, although he urges a retreat to the *conceptual*, he does not urge a retreat to the *general*. But his opposition to generality takes more than one form. In VR, for example, McDowell manifests a Wittgensteinian hostility to any view of the evaluative process which would reduce it to a mechanical application of universal rules to the particular. There is a general background to the sensitivity to the particular, namely, an overall sense of how one should live one's life. But this conception is not itself codifiable: McDowell does not wish the general background necessary for a sensitivity to the particular to be, specifically, a *theory*, with universal principles, or rules.

This argument, inasmuch as it focuses on moral principles and rules of a familiar sort, does not seem entirely convincing. Consider G.E.M. Anscombe's characterization of the just agent. Once she knows an act under the

description “judicially punishing a man for what he is clearly understood not to have done” then she knows that that this is a paradigm case of injustice. And, not having a “corrupt mind,” she simply does not consider such an act.⁴ It is not obvious that such an agent is engaged in the mechanical application of a rule. It does seem likely, however, that this straightforward ruling of the just agent depends upon something like a background conception of how to live, and the values in play in that conception, e.g., fairness, and respect for the dignity of persons. This brings us back to McDowell’s picture of the virtuous agent’s evaluative background, the conception of how she is to live her life. For one might see the nature of this evaluative background as itself hostile to generalism at the level of rules.

McDowell’s picture of this evaluative conception is of a piece with the recent anti-utilitarian claim that the values in play in a flourishing life are plural and incommensurable⁵ — McDowell calls such values ‘concerns.’ This plurality and incommensurability, however, can seem to call into question the possibility of any general ethical claims.

It is a familiar claim that the direction of fit of practical principles, conceptions and so on is world to mind. In theoretical reason, by contrast, the fit is mind to world. Now theoretical conceptions may require a plurality of principles (e.g., explanatory principles), but what determines these principles is already set: the world. Thus, to some extent, we can hope for a system of theoretical principles that is not only coherent, but is complete as well.

On the other hand, a practical conception, which contains a multiplicity of ‘concerns,’ which are not ‘weighable’ with respect to one another (VR, p. 103), is not guided by some single unitary reality which determines it in all possible respects. Rather, a practical conception of how to live that contains various concerns neither reducible to, nor commensurable with, one another, can determine no one set unitary course of action over all possibilities. One might conclude, then, that whatever the shape of these concerns, no general ethical principles would be possible. But this does not follow. Despite the impossibility of generating a *complete* practical system, if the concerns that underlie the conception of how to live are general, then practical reason can shape our lives in broad ways. An agent may be guided by negative principles, which indicate ways in which the overall conception will be frustrated (by inevitably frustrating some of the agent’s concerns) and by positive principles which require a general coherence to the way one pursues one’s concerns. To use a familiar Rawlsian notion, one might be required to form a rational plan of life. But the requirement of general coherence may well be compatible

⁴ The example is from G.E.M. Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 33, 124 (1958). Reprinted in Steven Cahn and Joram Haber, eds., *20th Century Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1995), pp. 351-364, quotation p. 362.

⁵ On plurality and incommensurability, see Charles Taylor, “The Diversity of Goods,” in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 129-144.

with a number of different, and mutually exclusive, ways in which those concerns may be pursued. Hence completeness is still not an option.

We are led, in this way, back to the question of principles and rules. The above picture of practical reason as guided by basic concerns, and then as guiding their structured pursuit seems capable of generating general moral *principles*, although I have certainly not demonstrated that this is the case. However, if Anscombe's claims about just men and the judicial punishment of the innocent are compatible with denial of the mechanical application model, the possibility of general principles will be unproblematic. And note that the picture works only by abandoning the claim, characteristic of consequentialism, that the practical work of reason must result in a complete system. So McDowell's worries on this front may be allayed. But the picture also *requires* generality at the level of the concerns. If the concerns cannot be articulated as general values, and turn out to be no more than transparent for sensitivity to the particular situation, then practical reason will be able to gain no purchase in its structuring role.

What emerges as the most significant question about generalism, then, prior to questions about general rules, has to do with the nature of the 'concerns' which form, I take it, the ground of the conception of the good life. On McDowell's view, and a generalist view, these concerns will provide the overall normative-conceptual framework within which an agent will be enabled to exercise a sensitivity to the demands of the particular, to recognize situational requirements, and to apprehend value in the world. How are to we characterize these concerns? For so far forth we could perhaps say that McDowell wishes these concerns to be in the realm of the conceptual without being general, whereas I have done no more than sketch a possible picture of a non-problematic relationship between general concerns and principles. Is there a stronger positive case to be made for generalism at the level of concerns?

III. THE SPACE OF REASONS

There is a general similarity in structure between McDowell's views on the ontology and epistemology of value, and his recent work in *Mind and World*. There, McDowell is not primarily concerned with the practical domain. Rather, he wishes to dissolve a problem which has plagued contemporary epistemology, a tension between conceptual scheme, and the Given.

From either of two positions regarding scheme and given, we seem driven to the other. McDowell characterizes the space of our conceptual scheme as the space of reasons, and hence as the space of, in Kant's term, 'spontaneity' — the realm of reasons is the realm of freedom. But if our conceptual space is a space of freedom, then it can seem as if we risk 'frictionless spinning in the void,' if our conceptual space cannot be yoked to the deliverances of the world, and thus constrained by how things really are. So we resort to the notion of the Given, what is brutally given to us by the world apart from our

conceptual scheme, the unconceptualized deliverances of sensibility. In this way the space of reasons becomes wider than the space of concepts.

This recourse to the Given raises problems. We sought the Given for justification, but, in extending the given beyond our conceptual space, and hence beyond the realm of freedom, we place the given outside the scope of *rational* consideration, eliminating any rational relation between the given and our conceptual space. We sought justifications, but we get only exculpations. Thus some, like Davidson, urge a retreat to the conceptual, with a purely coherentist view of justification.⁶

McDowell dissolves the dichotomy by arguing against the view that the space of reasons outstrips that of concepts, but likewise against the view that we are therefore thrown into our own frictionless conceptual space with no recourse to the world. Rather, our conceptual capacities are passively drawn upon in the deliverances of sensibility. This captures the essential insight of Kant's claim that "Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."

McDowell's view is summarized as follows:

In 'outer experience,' a subject is passively saddled with conceptual contents, drawing into operation capacities seamlessly integrated into a conceptual repertoire that she employs in the continuing activity of adjusting her world-view, so as to enable it to pass a scrutiny of its rational credentials. It is this integration that makes it possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, or at least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience.⁷

There are parallels here with McDowell's moral philosophy. It does not make sense to think that the deliverances of our 'moral' sensibility are brutally given, and hence beyond our freedom; nor would we wish a frictionless moral spinning in the void, i.e., by making our moral conceptualizing free from all ties with the world. In the recognition of the requirements, or the value-ladenness, of a situation, our conceptual capacities, and in particular, our conception of the good life, are passively drawn upon — thus it is quite natural for the virtuous person, but only the virtuous person, to *see*⁸ that a situation demands something, and as well to be able to *judge* that it is really so, and reflect upon and criticize the deliverances of her own moral sensibility.

⁶ Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in Ernest Lepore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 307-19.

⁷ John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 31. Further references are in the text as MW.

⁸ It is important, I think, to maintain the perceptual verb, and emphasize that in certain moral experiences, the virtuous agent really is confronted, as it were, by the world's moral fabric.

There are also similarities between, on the one hand, the need for a continual readjustment of our world view, right down to the (admittedly unlikely) prospect of reshaping and readjusting those concepts which lie at the outermost boundary of our conceptual system, secondary quality concepts, and on the other hand, the need to be critical of our evaluative stances.

Nevertheless, we here again come across the disanalogy mentioned before, that which centers around the *merit* of our taking something to be thus and so evaluatively. For the notion of merit requires that value experience be integrated further into the systematic web of the conceptual than the experience of a secondary quality. In what follows, I argue that this deeper integration into the conceptual requires a deeper reliance on the general.

The notion of merit should draw us further into the conceptual than should an experience of a secondary quality precisely because of the variance of perceptual-evaluative response to the particular from agent to agent. This variance should naturally shift our practical focus to those concerns which provide the framework for our evaluative responses to the world. We must thus draw more deeply on the conceptual — certainly more deeply than in our experience of secondary qualities, which does not admit of such varied, framework-dependent, responses.

Consider the following peculiarity of values as secondary qualities, i.e., of those aspects of value-ladenness that the world presents to us. Often, the values that concern us in a situation are not met *directly* in the world. Rather, we experience the world evaluatively as promising certain values, if we do such and such, and as promising to frustrate certain values if we do something else. We respond, for example, to signs that a friendship might, in some particular case, be *possible*; we read a book because we believe that we *will* enjoy it; or we tell the truth in an awkward situation in order *to bring about*, or perhaps restore, a just order in our dealings with others. Friendship, aesthetic enjoyment, and justice only exist potentially in these cases, however. But these forms of potentiality in the world make it possible for the world to call forth action on our part.⁹

But then whence comes the directedness by which a world-aspect's potentiality is seen as directing the agent towards some further actualization of value? In an example of McDowell's, a social situation can direct a virtuous agent towards the display of kindness; yet again, this kindness does not

⁹ Williams, in discussing McDowell's position, suggests that there is most convergence on 'how things are' in the ethical case, where 'thick' concepts are concerned, and cites "*coward, lie, brutality, gratitude*, and so forth. They are characteristically related to reasons for action." Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 140. But it seems to me that the following are more appropriately related to reasons for action: that x *would be* cowardly, that y *would be* lying, that z *would be* an act of brutality, and so on. 'That it would be such' is, I think, something that the virtuous agent can see straight off, and it is this fact, that it would be such, that makes the action guidingness of the recognition possible. After it already is an act of brutality, it is too late.

actually exist in the situation. How is it that we are directed by, or in light of, what we do not find in the world? It would seem that it is precisely in consequence of the concerns which root our conception of the good life that the facts of the world are viewed as directive — and it is precisely a lack of or deficiency in these concerns which will warp the agent's perceptual response to the situation, if, for example, the agent is insufficiently concerned with respect for the feelings of others.

This puts the virtuous agent's perceptual response much more deeply within the conceptual than does the sighted person's viewing of the color red, for much more depends, in the latter case, on what the world presents us with, whereas in the former case, much more depends upon how we would have the world be.¹⁰

That we should draw more heavily on the conceptual here might not itself lead to the conclusion that we are also ascending in respect of generality: the moral particularism of Jonathan Dancy, for instance, advocates "holism in the theory of reasons," i.e., global assessment of considerations for action, without conceding that there are any considerations which function *generally*. Thus,

our account of the person on whom we can rely to make sound moral judgments is not very long. Such a person is someone who gets it right case by case. To be successful, we need a broad range of sensitivities, so that no relevant feature escapes us, and we do not mistake its relevance either. But that is all there is to say on the matter.¹¹

This seems too thin an account. On Dancy's view, the concerns and sensitivities have become entirely transparent for the demands of the situation. They seem, thus, incapable of articulation, and to play no intelligible role in a picture of moral development.

In explaining the possibility of someone who 'gets it right,' both Dancy and McDowell point to the importance of education into a moral tradition:

The ethical is a domain of rational requirements, which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them. We are alerted to these demands by acquiring appropriate conceptual capacities. When a decent upbringing initiates us into the relevant way of thinking, our eyes are opened to the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons. Thereafter, our appreciation of its detailed layout is

¹⁰ Thus, when McDowell suggests that the way to make evident the virtuous agent's perception of the situation is to say things like 'See it like that,' or 'But don't you see,' (as at "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" 21), it will be necessary also to give attention to the general concerns which the non-seeing agent might have, in virtue of which it might *make sense* to see it 'like that.'

¹¹ Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 64. Further references are in the text as MR.

indefinitely subject to refinement, in reflective scrutiny of our ethical thinking. We can so much as understand, let alone seek to justify, the thought that reason makes these demands on us only at a standpoint within a system of concepts and conceptions that enables us to think about such demands, that is, only at a standpoint from which demands of this kind seem to be in view (MW, p. 82).

There is nothing in this passage that I would dispute; but everything turns on the interpretation of the 'system of concepts and conceptions that enables us to think of such demands.' For if McDowell views this system as of a piece with Dancy's 'holism of reasons,' then the notion of education into a moral tradition becomes unworkable.

In the absence of generalized and universalized concepts and conceptions, it is difficult to understand just what the nature of a formative education will be. One would think that a good moral education would be entirely general with respect to certain values at least — life, knowledge, art, friendship — even while acknowledging the need for non-rule guided discernment in many particular cases in which such values were to be fostered. But not all cases: here we see the importance of the relationship between general values and negative principles. Learning how to be a friend means learning never to betray one's friend. And this requires that friendship emerge as an entirely general value in one's conception of how to live.

Consider the following argument of Dancy's in support of particularism, in which he argues against the "common view that pain is intrinsically bad:" "My daughter trod on a sea-urchin on holiday a few years ago, and we caused her considerable pain (not entirely with her consent) in extracting spines from her heel. Was the pain caused her something which made our actions worse than they would otherwise have been (MR, p. 65)?" It would certainly take a great insensitivity to the facts of the moral life to suggest that pain always made an action worse. But what of the claim that one should look out, in an especially attentive way, for one's children's welfare? Although there are no doubt cases in which one must do something which, perhaps indirectly, negatively affects one's children's welfare, to suggest that that welfare is a good, or a reason, only in some cases, but not in others, rather than its being a general consideration, seems false, and incompatible with moral education into parenthood.

So as far as the question of moral development goes, there seems some need for generality. We need to return, however, to the earlier question concerning rational criticism of the deliverances of one's developed moral sense. The requirement of generality can be approached here as well, this time through consideration of the notion of freedom: precisely because the conceptual is the realm of freedom, the ascent to the conceptual in the process of moral criticism is also an ascent to the general. The claim that a situation *merits* a particular evaluative response must call forth in an especial way a justification which respects the terms of our rational freedom, and, I

would argue, the form this respect must take is friendly to generalism of reasons.

McDowell's internalism is an attempt to respect this freedom at one level: it is our conception of the facts of the particular situation, rather than an independently intelligible desire, that gives us a motivating reason for action. An independent desire would, I suppose, function something like the Given, allowing us exculpations, but not justifications. But if the deliverances of our moral sensitivity are not insulated from our spontaneity, then judgment and criticism of those deliverances must be carried out in the conceptual realm in such a way as also to manifest a concern with reasons. But what does it mean to be sensitive to reasons, and hence free, at this conceptual level?

It seems plausible to suggest that the activity of criticism of one's reasons — concerns — at the conceptual level requires a certain degree of abstraction, with respect to those concerns, away from the way in which those concerns are peculiarly rooted in the particular fabric of one's own life, and towards a degree of generality which allows those concerns to be in some measure shared among agents. The freedom associated with the space of reasons is the freedom of not being bound, in taking something as evidence that such and such is the case, by what is unique to one's own access to the situation.¹² This is a Kantian point, even if the final position, with its emphasis on 'concerns,' is not one that Kant could ultimately accept.¹³ It is, then, the integration of these general concerns with the perceptual-evaluative particular which makes it "possible for us to conceive experience as awareness, or at

¹² Bernard Williams discusses just such a claim: rational freedom "is manifested, according to Kant, not only in decisions to act, but also in theoretical deliberation... I can stand back from my thoughts and experiences, and what otherwise would merely have been a cause becomes a *consideration for me*. In the case of arriving by reflection at a belief, the sort of item that will be transmuted in this way will be a piece of evidence... it might be for instance a perception. In the case of practical deliberation, the item is likely to be a desire, a desire which I take into consideration in deciding what to do." Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 66. Williams' objection that this way of conceiving the exercise of practical freedom, on the model of theoretical freedom, fails to respect the importance of the first-personal 'I' in practical thought is important; I think that my emphasis on rational criticism of practical 'concerns' can alleviate the problem, however — we are seeking a description of concerns which, while not motivated exclusively by facts about myself, will nonetheless appeal to me, even as they ought rationally to appeal to others.

¹³ That is, he could not accept that the *result* of free and rational criticism would itself be characterized as a 'concern,' for a concern would operate as an *object* of the will, and the transcendental framework requires Kant to hold that all objects are conditioned by the laws of causality.

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least seeming awareness, of a reality independent of experience," i.e., in the moral case, that this really is what ought to be done.

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