

*Perception and Concepts: The Argument of The Fineness of Grain*

McDowell (1994) claims that perceptual experiences have a conceptual content and gives epistemological reasons for this claim. Basically, he points out that perception is a source of knowledge, and since perception can be a source of knowledge only as long as it has a conceptual content, he concludes that perception is conceptual. One remarkable feature of this argument is that it does not rely on some specific analysis of phenomenology of perception, but it rather concerns the intrinsic nature of perception. This approach, I claim, becomes problematic when McDowell specifies the conditions that a subject must meet in order to be credited with a (demonstrative) concepts.

*Evans' argument*

Evans (1982) famously made the case for nonconceptual content by means of an example involving colour vision. He asks: do we have as many colour concepts as there are shades of colour that we can sensibly discriminate? Apparently not, we don't have so many concepts (and linguistic terms) for colours; therefore he concludes that colour perception involves nonconceptual contents.

*McDowell's reply*

McDowell replies to Evans by appealing to demonstrative concepts (like *that red, that shape...*). The idea is that an apparatus constituted of a demonstrative concept and a capacity of recognition (you've got to be able to consistently reapply the concept) is sufficient to have conceptual contents which are as fine grained as the experience.

*A Problem for McDowell*

I think there's a tension in McDowell's position: on the one hand he claims that it is part of the epistemological nature of perception that it has a conceptual content (we might say: it's a priori that perception is conceptual). On the other hand he's forced to specify an empirical, psychological condition for the possession of demonstrative concepts: the subject must display recognitional capacities, he must be able to re-identify the properties which fall under the given concept. In other words, McDowell is forced to link the "conceptuality" of perceptual content to memory and recognition, which are empirical matters that can obviously vary from person to person (I could have a degree of, say, visual memory, and you can have another degree). This tension, I think, makes McDowell's cause lost: it will be sufficient to find a subject who cannot display the required recognitional capacity in a given circumstance, and nonetheless can perceive, and Conceptualism will be refuted. Imagining cases like this is easy enough, as is also shown by Kelly (2001).

-Evans, G. (1982) *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

-Kelly, S. (2001) 'Demonstrative Concepts and Experience', *Philosophical Review*, 110, pp. 397-420.

-McDowell, J. (1994) *Mind and World*. London: Harvard University Press.