

McDowell's Debt to Kant and Hegel: The Question of the Rehabilitation of Objectivity

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Abstract

John McDowell is one of the emerging thinkers of great importance in contemporary philosophy. McDowell is particularly interested in the vexed problem of the relationship between thought and reality. In seeking to rehabilitate the ideal of objectivity in the face of Rorty's reduction of objectivity to solidarity, McDowell's inspiration derives from Kant and Hegel. Our aim is to explore McDowell's debt to Kant and Hegel and how this enables him to address the complex issue of the relation between mind and the world. Our contention is that McDowell's recourse to Hegel's correction of Kant enables McDowell to address the problem of relation between realism and idealism without endorsing Rorty's claim that pragmatism reconciles realism and idealism, so that McDowell distances himself from the problematic reduction of objectivity to solidarity, while maintaining that beyond Cartesianism epistemology retains some kind of role in addressing the problem of knowledge.

Keywords: Hegel, Kant, Knowledge, McDowell, Objectivity.

1. Preamble

John McDowell, a South African philosopher, is one of the emerging thinkers of great importance in contemporary philosophy. A University of Pittsburg Professor of philosophy, McDowell's contribution has been mainly in the area of metaphysics, epistemology, ancient philosophy, meta-ethics and philosophy of mind. McDowell is particularly interested in the

vexed problem of the relationship between thought and reality, which dominated modern philosophy and is the core focus of his *magnum opus*, *Mind and the World*. As commentators have noted, in seeking to rehabilitate the ideal of objectivity in the face of Rorty's reduction of objectivity to solidarity, McDowell's inspiration derives from Kant and Hegel.

Our aim in what follows is to explore McDowell's debt to Kant and Hegel and how this enables him to address the complex issue of the relation between the mind and the world. Our contention is that McDowell's recourse to Hegel's correction of Kant enables McDowell to address the problem of relation between realism and idealism without endorsing Rorty's claim that pragmatism reconciles realism and idealism, so that McDowell distances himself from the problematic reduction of objectivity to solidarity, while maintaining that beyond Cartesianism epistemology retains some kind of role in addressing the problem of knowledge.

For sake of convenient exposition, we develop our argument in terms of the following procedure. After a brief account of McDowell's reliance on Kant and Hegel, we examine how McDowell's recourse to Hegel enables him to avoid the reduction of objectivity to solidarity. The final moment of our reflection concludes with a statement on the contemporary relevance of McDowell. Let us begin immediately then by focusing on McDowell's reliance on Kant and Hegel in dealing with the issue of the relation between the mind and the world.

2. The Question of McDowell's Debt to Kant and Hegel

The aspect of Kant's philosophy that appeals to McDowell is what has come to be regarded as Kant's Copernican revolution in epistemology which addresses the question of the relationship between object and subject of knowledge in the

wake of Hume's reduction of modern philosophy to scepticism.¹

In developing his account of the relationship between object and subject in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is careful to insist that there is a fundamental co-operation between the concept and intuition, or rather, between the faculty of spontaneity and the faculty of receptivity such that the coming to be of the object of knowledge (objectivity) is always understood as a product of the co-operation between both faculties.² Kant famously expressed the upshot here by saying that "concepts are empty without intuitions and intuitions are blind without concepts."³ Kant's point, in other words, is that both concepts and intuitions mutually require each other in order to fulfill their epistemic promise as far as the determination of the object of knowledge is concerned; hence, the conclusion that the coming to be of objectivity is a product of the partnership between both faculties.

The conclusion in respect of the symbiosis between spontaneity and receptivity in determining the object of knowledge is one of the most important insights that Kant establishes in the "Transcendental Aesthetics" and "Transcendental Logic" sections of his *magnum opus*. Indeed it is a core element of Kant's transcendental idealism which, is well known, represents Kant's response to the challenge posed by Hume's skepticism.⁴

A key move that Kant's transcendental idealism makes is to circumvent Cartesian dualism by installing a transcendental

¹ See Vasalis Politis, "Editor's Introduction," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, by Immanuel Kant, Revised and expanded translation based on Meiklejohn, edited by Vasilis Politis (London: J. M. Dent, Everyman, 1993), xxvii-lij; See also Gary Hatfield, "Editor's Introduction" in *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that present itself as a Science*, by Kant, with an introduction by Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), ix-xxxiv.

² Politis, "Editor's Introduction," xxvii-lij.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 74.

⁴ See Vasalis Politis, "Editor's Introduction," in *Critique of Pure Reason*, xxix-xxxiv; by Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics that present itself as a Science*, with an introduction by Gary Hatfield, 4:257-4:258).

framework such as to guarantee that object and subject of knowledge are transcendently related. The *proviso* is such that the transcendental communion between object and subject becomes the condition for the possibility of knowledge. This in turn allows Kant to maintain, in response to empiricism and rationalism relative to the question of source of true knowledge, that all our knowledge begins from experience, but they do not all arise from experience, given that the *apriori* forms of intuition that make knowledge possible are not derivable from experience, but are part and parcel of the transcendental machineries of the subject.⁵

The result then is that knowledge involves a process of determination in which the object of knowledge is constituted by the subject of knowledge; thanks to the partnership between the faculty of spontaneity and faculty of receptivity, so that, properly understood, the object conforms to the subject and not the subject conforming to the object.⁶ Of course, if the object of knowledge conforms to the subject and is constituted by the subject, it means object can be known only as determined by the subject. In other words, the object cannot be known as it is in-itself, but only as appearance. It means invariably that the categories are mere thought-determinations and not determination of *object qua object*. Indeed, Kant insists that if the limit of knowledge is transgressed by applying the category to things-in-themselves, it will lead to transcendental illusion.⁷

Kant's limitation of knowledge to appearance is the other side of his Copernican revolution and it is an aspect that has been much criticized. One of Kant's foremost critics is none other than Hegel. Basically Hegel maintains that Kant's limitation of knowledge to appearance is inconsistent with the central thrust of his Copernican revolution in respect to the

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B1-B6.

⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface to the Second edition, BXV.

⁷ See W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Twentieth Century to Wittgenstein and Sartre*, second edition revised (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970), xix-xxiv.

transcendental activity of the subject in constituting the object of knowledge.⁸ In limiting knowledge to appearance and maintaining that the thing-in-itself is inaccessible to cognition, Kant only replaces Cartesian substantive dualism with another form of dualism, namely, cognitive dualism.

In Hegel's view Kant's Copernican insight regarding the activity of the subject in epistemological process means that, properly understood, no opposition should subsist within consciousness. In other words, we cannot maintain any form of dualism ultimately between object and subject, whether substantive or cognitive dualism.⁹ In Hegel's view, therefore, it is not just that the object of knowledge conforms to the subject, but the subject in its constitution of the object also knows the object as it is in-itself. This is essentially the point that Hegel's dialectic develops and to this extent Hegel arguably corrects Kant's cognitive dualism and completes the critical philosophy in keeping with the groundbreaking insight of Kant's Copernican revolution.¹⁰

In addressing the issue of the relation of mind and world, or subject and object, in his own contemporary context, McDowell focuses on the development from Kant to Hegel as recounted above; for, he believes that in the exchange between Kant and Hegel, there are resources for rethinking the nature of the relationship between mind and world such as to escape from the purported reduction of objectivity to solidarity. Against this backdrop McDowell seeks to avoid two extreme positions in *Mind and World*. First is a "coherentism that threatens to

⁸ See Hegel's critique of Kant in the *Science of Logic*, translated by A. V. Miller with Foreword by Professor J. N. Findlay (New Jersey: Humanities Press International, inc.1996), 579-595.

⁹ See Robert Stern, *Kant and the Structure of Object* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 35-42.

¹⁰ See Sandra M. Dingli, *On Thinking and the World: John McDowell's Mind and World* (Ashgate, 2005), 27-55. See also Jason Bridges, "Review of Richard Gaskin, *Experience and the World's Own Language: A Critique of John McDowell's Empiricism*, Oxford University Press, 2006, 251pp, in Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews, 2007. 02:12.

disconnect thought from reality”; and secondly, an account of the given as “bare presences that are supposed to constitute the ultimate grounds of empirical judgments”¹¹

McDowell believes that both positions falsify the true nature of the relation between mind and the world. The former position is associated with certain constructivism that dominates modern thinking and relative to which object is seen as construct of the subject, while the second position is associated with what has come to be known as metaphysical realism, the view that the object can exist independent of subject without conceptual mediation.¹² As a counter-point to these positions, McDowell wants to develop an account of the relationship between the mind and the world in which certain interdependence subsists between the mind and the world; or between object and subject such that we cannot speak of object without conceptual mediation just as the object cannot be passed off as a construct of subjectivity.¹³

By maintaining that there is no object without conceptual mediation, McDowell distances himself from the celebrated Myth of the Given which Sellars classically criticized and by maintaining that object cannot be passed off as a construct of subject McDowell objects to the sort of coherentism that has come to be associated with Davidson. At the close of the first chapter of *Mind and World*, McDowell states explicitly the two extreme positions and a possible way out of them:

We are prone to fall into an intolerable oscillation: in one phase we are drawn to a coherentism that cannot make sense of the bearing of thought on objective reality and in the other phase we recoil into an appeal to the Given which turns out to be useless. I have urged that in order to escape the oscillation we need a concept of experiences as states or occurrences that are passive but reflect conceptual

¹¹ John McDowell, *Mind and the World*, with a new Introduction (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), 24.

¹² McDowell, *Mind and the World*, 14-24.

¹³ McDowell, *Mind and the World*, 14-24.

capacities, capacities that belong to spontaneity in operation.¹⁴

In the succeeding page of *Mind and the World*, McDowell states the solution to the dilemma of the two unsatisfying positions thus:

We need to recognize that experiences themselves are states or occurrences that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity. We must not suppose that spontaneity first figures only in judgment in which we put a construction on experiences with experiences conceived as deliverances of receptivity to whose constitution spontaneity makes no contribution. Experiences are indeed receptivity in operation; so they can satisfy the need for an external control on our freedom in empirical thinking. But the conceptual capacities, capacities that belong to spontaneity, are already at work in experiences themselves, not just in judgments based on them; so experiences can intelligibly stand in rational relations to our exercises of the freedom that is implicit in the idea of spontaneity.¹⁵

3. McDowell, *Mind and the World*: Beyond Coherentism and the Myth of the Given

From what McDowell says in this passage we begin to see why commentators affiliate McDowell with Kant and Hegel.¹⁶ Indeed, as our account of the development from Kant to Hegel above indicates, it is evident that Kant anticipated the issue of the relation between spontaneity and receptivity in addressing the challenge of Cartesian dualism and the complication it occasions for our understanding of the relationship between object and subject of knowledge. Indeed, it is the upshot of Kant's account of the co-operation between spontaneity and

¹⁴ McDowell, *Mind and the World*, 23.

¹⁵ McDowell, *Mind and the World*, 24.

¹⁶ Paul Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12-23.

receptivity that McDowell draws from in addressing the challenges posed by the two extreme positions of coherentism and the myth of the Given.¹⁷

Obviously the service that Kant renders in this context is the resource his account provides for overcoming dualism. For, on Kant's account of the relation between spontaneity and reciprocity it is superfluous to maintain the myth of the Given, since it is evident, on Kant's account, that the object is always in need of mediation by concepts in order to become an object for the subject.¹⁸ I think this is largely why Kant maintains in opposition to Cartesianism that the subject is not passive in the epistemological process, but active.¹⁹

Yet so far as there is a residue of dualism in Kant's critical philosophy, as we have seen, the gain secured by Kant's account of the symbiotic relation between spontaneity and receptivity is undermined, so that we are faced with the possibility that the object could be a mere construct of the subject. It is in this respect that the appeal to Hegel's correction of Kant becomes pertinent and pivotal in helping McDowell to address the challenges posed by the two extreme positions of the myth of the Given and Coherentism.²⁰

Indeed, given the unity that binds the two extreme positions as far as the demands of a proper account of the nature of the relationship between object and subject is concerned, it is Hegel that proves most important for McDowell in the end; for without the contribution of Hegel in reconnecting thought to object the oscillation between the two extremes cannot be arrested.²¹ So, as it were, in his own context Hegel has already dealt with the dilemma which contemporary philosophers grapple with in respect of the relation between thought and reality.

¹⁷ See Dingli, *On Thinking and the World*, 27-55.

¹⁸ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 39-40.

¹⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, BXV.

²⁰ See Dingli, *On Thinking and the World*, 29-45.

²¹ Dingli, *On Thinking and the World*, 25-45.

It is not surprising therefore that McDowell relies on Hegel in addressing the matter. Indeed, McDowell is heavily indebted to Hegel in dealing with the fundamental issue that the critical philosophy of Kant generates in respect to the relationship between the mind and the world. Although Kant had noted the need for co-operation between sensibility and understanding, stressing that intuition without concept is blind just as concept without intuition is empty, Kant's transcendental idealism is vitiated by the dualistic framework in which it is articulated.²²

The effect of the dualism is especially evident in Kant's distinction between *phenomenon* and *noumena* and the claim that the *noumena* lies beyond the domain of conceptual, while our knowledge is limited to appearance. This distinction means that it will always be difficult to account for the reality of the external world, given that, on Kant's scheme, only a relational sort of objectivity is possible, so that we cannot really claim to have knowledge of the world beyond the determination of our cognitive faculty.

McDowell thinks Kant's claim is problematic, albeit, he wants to preserve the emphasis on the co-operation between sensibility and understanding. In redressing the Kantian mistake, McDowell's strategy is to dissolve Kant's dualism and extend the bound of the conceptual, such that the conceptual becomes boundless. To accomplish this, while dismantling Kant's residual dualism, he maintains that perceptual experience is already conceptual by its very nature, so that the problem of accounting for the relation between object and subject does not arise, given that they exhibit the same ontological type.²³

In making this argument McDowell relies heavily on Hegel, who he thinks gives us a more adequate account of the relationship between object and subject, given that he is not held hostage by Kant's dualism. Indeed, in this fundamental sense McDowell believes that Hegel provides us with a

²² Dingli, *On Thinking and the World*, 25-45.

²³ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 24-45; 82-83.

fundamental completion of Kant's critical philosophy.²⁴ The thorny issue will always be to account for the unity between experience and subjectivity. McDowell thinks that Hegel does the job better than Kant and it is in this respect that he relies on Hegel in rethinking the matter of the relation between mind and the world to use his own categories. Indeed, as Sandra Dingli correctly notes,

McDowell's interpretation of Hegel's completion of Kant forms the basis of his ideas in *Mind and World*. His major claim in this regard is that 'the way to correct what is unsatisfactory in Kant's thinking about the supersensible is rather to embrace the Hegelian image in which the conceptual is unbounded on the outside' (MW 83). Such a picture eliminates the necessity of the Kantian 'thing-in-itself' and leads McDowell to a resolution of the seemingly irresolvable dualism of reason and nature as it incorporates both the realm of law and the space of reasons into the conceptual sphere.²⁵

Given our account of how McDowell recourse to Hegel's correction of Kant in settling the problem of the oscillation between the two extreme positions of the myth of the Given and Coherentism, we can appreciate why a core dimension of McDowell's project of rehabilitation of objectivity in the wake of Rorty's reduction of objectivity to solidarity is the negation of Rorty's thesis. That pragmatism reconciles realism and idealism by dissolving the classical problem of the relation between subject and object in a pragmatic synthesis that sees knowledge re-conceptualized as a social phenomenon rather than epistemic phenomenon. Understandably, Rorty's claim is predicated on his hermeneutics of Western philosophy, which takes the alleged collapse of traditional epistemology, on account of its dualistic assumption, as a license to transit to epistemological behaviourism and the so called post-epistemological culture in

²⁴ See Dingli, *On Thinking and the World*, 37-38.

²⁵ McDowell, *Mind and World*, 37-38.

which objectivity is reduced to solidarity.²⁶

Nonetheless, one singular result McDowell achieves via his recourse to Hegel in addressing the problem of the oscillation between the two extreme positions of the myth of the Given and Coherentism is the retrieval of the debate between realism and idealism; for, if, in fact, we cannot speak of object without conceptual mediation just as we cannot pass of the object as a construct of subjectivity, it means that McDowell can be united with Rorty in rejecting dualism, but insist that the dissolution of Cartesian dualism does not legitimize epistemological behaviourism.²⁷

Apparently the service Hegel renders here allows McDowell to negotiate this complex turn. In re-reading the history of the problem of objectivity in the light of Hegel's contributions, McDowell apparently blocks Rorty's path towards the installation of pragmatism as the paradigm of philosophy, culture and politics, while agreeing with him on the need to transcend Cartesian dualism.²⁸ Yet because of the resources that Hegel offers on the matter, McDowell is able to see, as Rorty is unable to see, that the dissolution of Cartesian dualism only restates the problematic of the subject-object relation, given that inevitably, as Hegel allows us to understand, the relation between object and subject cannot be undone as far as the issue of the nature of knowledge is concerned.²⁹

In view of this consideration, it is not surprising that McDowell insists that pragmatism is not the true reconciliation of realism and idealism, given that beyond the pragmatic synthesis we are still faced with the question of how the subject

²⁶ See Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. By John Rajchman and Cornel West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 3-19.

²⁷ See Richard J. Bernstein, "McDowell's Domesticated Hegelianism" in *Reading McDowell on Mind and World* edited by Nicholas H. Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 9-24.

²⁸ McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity" in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. by Robert B. Brandom (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 2002), 109-128.

²⁹ McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," 109-128.

relates to the object. Interestingly, it is on account of this consideration that McDowell insists on the answerability of our concepts to something other than concepts, meaning effectively that the correlation of concept and reality cannot be undone, but is a *sine qua non* for a proper account of the nature of knowledge.³⁰ Thus the idea that we are answerable not only to our peers and society, but to something beyond our peers and society—in other words, to reality, as McDowell says—is a vital moment in McDowell’s rehabilitation of objectivity, following its reduction to solidarity.³¹

4. Realism-Idealism Debate: The Claims of Reformed Epistemology

What emerges therefore from the standpoint of McDowell is that Rorty’s hermeneutics of Western philosophy is one-sided, so that the critique of epistemology it supports is faulty as well. Rorty creates the impression that the emergence of epistemological behaviourism and the new culture it inaugurates seals the death of epistemology. However, McDowell thinks otherwise. From McDowell’s standpoint, the retrieval of the debate between idealism and realism means that far from being dead epistemology is still alive.³² Not only does the retrieval indicate that pragmatism is not a true reconciliation of idealism and realism, but it also shows that Rorty’s deconstruction of epistemology is suspect.³³

Consequently, beyond the dissolution of Cartesian dualism, the question of the nature of subject-object relation and how to account for it remains a substantive philosophical challenge. Interestingly, this challenge defines the province of traditional epistemology. Indeed, all through its history epistemology has

³⁰ McDowell, “Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity,” 109-128.

³¹ McDowell, “Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity,” 109-128.

³² See Matthais Steup, “Epistemology in the Twentieth Century” in *Routledge Companion to Twentieth Century Philosophy*, edited by Dermot Moran (London: Routledge, 2008), 469ff.

³³ Steup, “Epistemology in the Twentieth Century,” 469ff.

been preoccupied with the task of justification of the subject-object relation, all in a view to containing the challenge of skepticism.³⁴ Pragmatism's claim to overcome realism and idealism, and thus render the need for epistemology superfluous, is predicated on the dismissal of the problem of subject-object relation as a pseudo-problem.

Because McDowell does not see the problem of subject-object relation as a pseudo-problem, albeit, he shares in pragmatism's antipathy towards Cartesian dualism, McDowell believes there is still work for epistemology beyond the dissolution of Cartesian dualism.³⁵ The claims of reformed epistemology as advocated by McDowell have to be seen against the backdrop of the challenge arising from the dissolution of Cartesian dualism. Reformed epistemology not only plays the role of securing the philosophical space for the question of the nature of object-subject relation to be raised afresh, following the dissolution of Cartesian dualism, but it also sees itself as a significant philosophical stakeholder in determining how the matter is to be decided and what the decision ought to be. This invariably is what McDowell suggests in the following passage from "Towards Rehabilitation of Objectivity" to the effect that,

Rorty is notorious among philosophers for his campaign against epistemology practiced in the manner of the Cartesian and British empiricist tradition. But putting it like that underplays how drastic Rorty's thinking about epistemology is. For Rorty an activity in that view is simply what the label epistemology means. He has no time for a different, perhaps a useful kind of reflection that might still deserve to count as epistemological. My aim in this paper is to argue that what I take to be Rorty's basic conviction with which I sympathize do not require so completely a dismissive stance towards the very idea of epistemology. Indeed, I want to urge that Rorty's basic project positively requires a more hospitable attitude to something that may

³⁴ Steup, "Epistemology in the Twentieth Century," 469ff.

³⁵ McDowell, "Towards the Rehabilitation of Objectivity," 109-112.

as well be counted as epistemological reflection.³⁶

What McDowell refers to in the above passage as Rorty's basic conviction he endorses, is their shared antipathy towards Cartesian dualism. But McDowell is also clear that this antipathy does not need to preclude the possibility of epistemology. Reformed epistemology assumes the burden of determining the credentials of what should count as epistemological, following the retrieval of the problem of object-subject relation. In the broad context of the resurgence of the question of the nature of subject-object relation and how to account for it, reformed epistemology performs the excellent service of precluding any dualistic formulation of the matter.³⁷

Invariably this is the core lesson McDowell recollects from Hegel's correction of Kant to the effect that object and subject are correlates in which the subject is about the object, so that it makes no sense dualistically separating the object from the subject, or treating the object as mere construct of the subject.³⁸ Nonetheless, beyond the dualistic separation of object and subject and recognition of their togetherness, the question of the nature of the inter-play that subsists between them in their togetherness remains germane.

Armed with this basic assumption, reformed epistemology undertakes to address afresh the matter of the debate between idealism and realism by reviewing the history of the controversy. The first result is the dismissal of pragmatism as a viable contender in negotiating our understanding of the nature of the subject-relation. The point is that pragmatism is plagued by the same dualistic assumption that legislate its claim, so that, in truth, pragmatism turns out to be its own worst enemy. This result is not surprising at all; for, if pragmatism thrives on the

³⁶ McDowell, *Mind and World*, ix-x.

³⁷ Cf. Michael Friedman, "Exorcising the Philosophical Tradition," in *Reading McDowell and Mind and World* ed. by Nicholas H. Smith, (London: Routledge, 2002), 25-57.

³⁸ See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 83; see also Dingli, *On Thinking and the World*, Chapter 2 and Bernstein, "McDowell's Domesticated Hegelianism," 9-24.

dissolution of the problem of subject-object relation, it means pragmatism cannot offer us any real help in understanding the inter-play that subsists between them.

What about idealism? If pragmatism is not a viable contender in the issue of how to account for the object-subject relation, does idealism fare better? From the standpoint of reformed epistemology, idealism is also problematic. In recognizing the subject-object relation as germane for the problem of knowledge, idealism fares better than pragmatism. But then idealism misunderstands the nature of the relation so far as it privileges the polarity of the subject over the polarity of the object.

Of course, McDowell recognizes that there are different species of idealism in the history of philosophy. But, the truth is that, in the end, they all suffer from the same malaise of reducing the object to the subject. This is true of Berkeley's idealism as it is true of Kantian idealism. Same could also be said of Fichtean idealism and Schellingian idealism, or, again, Hegel's speculative idealism. Without prejudice to the differences between them, they all take subjectivity as the absolute principle in terms of which the subject-object relation is reconciled, whether it is the empirical subject or the transcendental subject, or again the dialectical subject.³⁹

So far as subjectivity is taken as the absolute principle in terms of which object is accounted for, it is difficult to do justice to the object in its objectivity. This is the Achilles heel of all idealistic systems except in cases where the principle of subjectivity is moderated. But then in the event of moderation, it is doubtful whether what we are left with, in the end, could be said to be idealism without qualification.⁴⁰

³⁹ See Damian Ilodigwe, *Bradley and the Problematic Status of Metaphysics* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006), 30-46.

⁴⁰ I think this will be true Bradley's version of idealism as should be evident from his account of dilemma of the relation of thought and reality in *Appearance and Reality*, second edition with an appendix. Ninth Impression (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), Chapter 1. See Ilodigwe, *Bradley and the Problematic Status of*

In addressing the issue of the relation of the mind and the world, McDowell is certainly aware of the pitfall of idealism. This is largely why he is critical of coherentism, for he understands that in privileging subjectivity over objectivity in whatever form, we run the risk of undoing the correlation between thought and reality unless we insist that both are mutually dependent. The weakness of idealism is that it affirms the dependence of reality on thought but often fails to affirm the dependence of thought on reality.⁴¹

As we have seen, it is the desire to firmly anchor the mind and its activity in the world of the object that inspires McDowell's interest in Hegel's correction of Kant. Yet it is arguable that upon anchoring thought in reality by making the Kantian thing-itself the object of cognition, Hegel undermines the otherness of the object, in the end, so far as he maintains that there can be no final opposition within consciousness, so that the difference between object and subject is reconciled at the altar of dialectical subjectivity.⁴²

McDowell seem aware of this; for, in drawing from Hegel in order to escape from the so called oscillation between the myth of the Given and coherentism, he is at pains to distance himself from idealism nonetheless, so that it is clear that he does not take idealism as offering us a satisfactory solution in respect of the question of the nature of the subject object relation. Idealism is right to stress the dependence of the object on the subject, but unless the dependence of the subject on the object

Metaphysics, pp. 245-260; see also his "Bradley's Account of Truth: Between Epistemology and Metaphysics" *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Volume 19, No 2, 2013: 219-250.

⁴¹ Arguably this is the point of Schelling's critique of Hegelian Idealism—a criticism which can also be found in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche and has been appropriated by contemporary representatives of the existentialist movement such as Sartre and Ponty in various ways.

⁴² See Redding, *Analytic Philosophy and the Return of Hegelian Thought*, 1-20.

is stressed in the same vein, the truth in idealism turns into error.⁴³

Indeed, this has always been the point of the criticism of idealism from the stand-point of realism. Whereas, realism stresses the dependence of the subject on the object as a counter-point to the excesses of idealism, realism often tends to ignore the fact that the object is also dependent on the subject. Thus, in asserting the independence of the object without equally acknowledging its dependence on the subject, realism goes to the opposite extreme. It is not surprising therefore that a ding-dong affair seemingly persists between idealism and realism in the history of philosophy.⁴⁴

McDowell is conscious of this disjunction and is keen to step out of it, by affirming the mutual dependence between object and subject. It means in effect that McDowell is not at home with the sort of metaphysical realism that asserts the absolute independence of the object relative to the subject, nor is he at home with the sort of representative realism that is attributed to Locke, or again the internal realism of Hilary Putnam.⁴⁵ The point is that any form of realism that dualistically opposes the object to the subject is not acceptable, nor is it acceptable to make the subject to be exclusively dependent on the object. Again this explains why McDowell will not subscribe to the myth of the Given. Thus, while McDowell is keen to maintain a sense of the Given he will not commit to a sense of the Given that is withdrawn from the subject.⁴⁶

⁴³ See Ilodigwe, "Bradley's Account of the Self as Appearance: Between Kant's Transcendental Idealism and Hegel's Speculative Idealism," *Tattva Journal of Philosophy* 10, no 1, (2018), 1-18.

⁴⁴ We can hardly understand contemporary philosophy and its foundation without reference to this *ding-dong affair* between realism and idealism on the topic of the relation between object and subject, for virtually every current of thought in contemporary philosophy is at pain to find a way of rethinking the question of the realism between object and subject such as to avoid the extremes of idealism which recuperating a sense of realism.

⁴⁵ See Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?", 3-19.

⁴⁶ McDowell, "Towards the Rehabilitation of Objectivity," 110-112.

So it emerges that relative to the problem of how to account for the nature of the subject-object relation, McDowell is not satisfied with pragmatism nor is he satisfied with idealism or realism. Pragmatism is not the reconciliation of realism and idealism. Similarly, the subject-object relation cannot be satisfactorily resolved in terms of idealism nor can it be resolved in terms of realism. It means in effect that from McDowell's standpoint idealism and realism are not exclusive positions, but positions that mutually penetrate into each other so that one cannot be reduced to the other. The mistake of pragmatism is to treat them as dualistic opposites and then dismiss both of them out of court on account of its antipathy to dualism. But recognizing that both are not dualistic opposites, McDowell will not follow the path of pragmatism nor will he reduce one to the other. Yet, if he will not reduce object to subject or subject to object but affirm the unity between them, the question is: what is the ground of the unity of object and subject?

McDowell clearly does not subscribe to the idealist resolution of the matter. His position is closer to realism than idealism as should be evident from his idea that we are answerable to reality.⁴⁷ Yet, it will be a mistake to identify his position with classical realism as should also be evident from his criticism of the myth of the Given. He is neither on the side of idealism or realism. Nonetheless his answer is that the unity of object and subject is given and the given-ness is prior to any relational attempt to articulate the nature of the connectivity between object and subject.⁴⁸

The point is that right from the start, even before our effort to understand how object and subject are related, object and subject are naturally related, so that the matter of their relation or connectivity is something to be discovered, in the end, and not a matter for immediate conceptual articulation. One may object to this argument and counter-argue: why do make

⁴⁷ McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," 109-126.

⁴⁸ See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 47-65.

research if we already know and that is all? While Husserl's invocation of intentionality and his theory of inter-subjectivity is a response to this seeming impasse, Husserl's panacea is nonetheless problematic, as we are still left with the question of how to ground the unity of inter-subjectivity. Indeed, if the connectivity is given and is something to be discovered, the discovery presupposes that the connectivity is inherent and is not imposed from outside. It also presupposes that in its givenness, the object is naturally open to the subject, so that the natural communion that binds object and subject is the ground of all our activities as agents.⁴⁹

5. Conclusion

From our account of McDowell's rehabilitation of objectivity, it is evident that the grounds that McDowell covers are highly ramified. This means that a balanced assessment of his contribution is a demanding task that will require that we keep in view the various ramifications of his effort and how they hold together and relate with each other in their particularities. McDowell's task is rendered complex by the very fact that the issue he grapples with cuts across the entire spectrum of the history of modern philosophy, bringing together philosophers of diverse orientation from within the analytic and continental traditions.

McDowell definitely deserves to be credited for his effort to bring together the analytic tradition and the continental tradition in respect to the vexed problem of the subject-object relation, or again, mind-world relation.⁵⁰ By subverting the classic divide between the two traditions, McDowell demonstrates the unity of the philosophical problem. Specifically, he shows that whether approached from the standpoint of the analytic tradition or the continental tradition,

⁴⁹ See Freidman, "Exorcising Philosophical Tradition" in *Reading McDowell on Mind and World*, 25-56.

⁵⁰ See Bernstein, "McDowell's Domesticated Hegelianism," 9.

the problem of objectivity raises the same issue of how the idea-reality relation can be objectively validated.

This at least we can say from the way he uses Hegel to escape from the so called oscillation between the classic myth of the “Given” and coherentism.⁵¹ In this way he shows further that the key issue has to do with the need to reconcile idealism and realism. Yet while McDowell’s interest in using Hegel to deal with the oscillation between coherentism and the myth of the given is a crucial dimension of the architectonic of this rehabilitation of objectivity, it is important to keep in mind that this occurs against the backdrop of Rorty’s controversial reduction of objectivity to solidarity. Responding to Rorty’s challenge, particularly his deconstruction of epistemology, allows McDowell to bring realism, idealism and pragmatism into dialogue relative to the issue of objectivity and the predicament of epistemology.

⁵¹ Bernstein, “McDowell’s Domesticated Hegelianism,” 9.