

Anna Tomaszewska

Słowo wstępne redakcji

Diametros nr 27, 1-3

2011

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Foreword from the Editor

The aim of this special issue of *Diametros* is to present the reader with selected issues from the debate initiated by the well-known and widely discussed (mostly in the English-speaking philosophical world) book by John McDowell – *Mind and World* (1994, 1996). The book spells out the concerns and identifies the tensions inherent in some currents of thought that dominate the present-day philosophical scene. These concerns and tensions can be traced back to modern dualisms, among them the dualism between the “realm of law” (nature) and the “space of reasons” (human rationality), that have beset philosophy since the times of Descartes and Galileo. These concerns, which continue to perplex contemporary thinkers, spring, as Wilfrid Sellars once put it, “from the attempt to take both man and science seriously”¹, and have been articulated most distinctly by Kant. Kantian inspirations underlie McDowell’s project aiming at the “dissolution” of the problems faced by analytic philosophy in the wake of logical empiricism, establishing a dichotomy between the way we think about the world and the way the world interacts with our cognitive capacities to produce experience.

It is by means of an account of experience that McDowell seeks to carry out the required dissolution. The account, which draws upon the Kantian notions of spontaneity and receptivity, can be summarized by the claim that concepts constitute the content of experience. Thus, there is no nonconceptual content which is cognitively relevant. A number of distinguished authors working in the area of epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of perception have contested McDowell’s claim. For instance, York Gunther’s anthology *Essays on Nonconceptual Content* (2003) presents a host of arguments for the existence and explanatory role of nonconceptual content which undermine the conceptualist stance. While taking account of the rich bibliography of the problem, this special edition of the journal focuses on the Kantian inspirations behind the debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism and offers insightful critiques of McDowell’s enterprise.

Leslie Stevenson suggests rethinking Kant’s idea of the Copernican revolution by closely examining the notion of the object of representation that figures in

¹ W. Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics. Variations on Kantian Themes*, Ridgeview, Atascadero 1992 (second edition), p. 1.

the text of the first *Critique*. Stevenson's reading, by bringing out the distinction between representation as the intentional content of cognitive acts and the object which the content is supposed to represent, shows how to free Kant from the charge that he endows the mind with the power to "make up" the world. Indeed, what conforms to the a priori conditions of cognition are objects but understood as the intentional content of cognitive acts, and the content can be mind-independent and publicly shareable, though grounded in common practices.

Robert Hanna, against a widely accepted reading of Kant as the predecessor of conceptualism, argues that the Königsberg philosopher, with his theory of intuition (*Anschauung*), can equally well be regarded as the founder of the nonconceptualist stance. The latter does not have to entail the notorious "Myth of the Given", as McDowell quite erroneously thought, since he endorsed a "sensationalist" view on sensory content. Hanna offers an alternative view in that he attributes to non-conceptual content the function of mediating our, i.e. embodied human subjects', pre-reflective, proto-rational intentional encounters with the world of objects. In his argument for the concept-independent character of perceptual experience, Hanna appeals to Kant's doctrine of incongruent counterparts as one of his main inspirations.

Willem deVries, without settling who is the better interpreter of Kant, points to the shortcomings of McDowell's attempt to undermine Sellars' two-component theory of experience. DeVries shows that Sellars, who espouses what he calls transcendental naturalism, has convincing reasons to opt for a substantive account of sensory content. Reference to sense impressions plays a significant role both in empirical and transcendental arguments. The former makes it possible to explain phenomena such as illusions, hallucinations or blindsight in terms of perceptual errors. The latter makes it possible to justify the claim that our intentional states and experiences are of worldly objects, the subject matter of our observational reports and beliefs.

Christopher Norris situates McDowell's project against the background of the philosophical tradition – in the English-speaking world as well as (and even more importantly) on the Continent – and envisions it as encompassing far more issues than the nature of empirical cognition. Norris pictures McDowell's (in his view) failed attempts to establish a "second-nature naturalism" in response to the types of naturalism that encourage the badly dualist accounts of transactions between mind and world. Opening analytic philosophy to the influences of the Continental philosophical tradition allows one to expect that the dualisms will ultimately be overcome and human rationality will be given back its place in a reality governed by the laws of physics. However, McDowell downplays the fact that his

concerns are neither uniquely his nor specific to analytic philosophers: they have been dealt with in a much more thoroughgoing manner by Edmund Husserl and other phenomenologists. Last but not least, as Norris points out, McDowell wavers between his predilection for the Kantian idea of free, self-reflective, and critical thought, on the one hand, and a tendency to lean on communitarian ideas developed by thinkers as diverse as Aristotle, Hegel, Wittgenstein, or Gadamer.

I have been invited to prepare this special edition of *Diametros* by Professor Włodzimierz Galewicz and would like to express my gratitude for his supporting and encouraging the project.

Anna Tomaszewska