

The way out of the distinguishability problem

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The main aim of this presentation is to assess and compare McDowell's and Pritchard's responses to the distinguishability problem. According to the epistemological disjunctivism advocated by those philosophers, defective and non-defective exercises of perception yield epistemic states of different kinds. A non-defective exercise of perception gives a factive reason such as S sees that x is an F, while a defective

exercise of perception gives a reason less than factive such as it appears to S as if x is an F. The distinguishability problem arises if we accept at the same time that there may be defective and non-defective exercises of perception that look like the same to S. Since in this case they cannot be introspectively distinguishable by S, it sounds mysterious how they can give to S different kinds of epistemic support. So, the disjunctivist has to say something about this possible situation. Pritchard relies on a distinction independently defended between favoring and discriminatory evidence. For him, when S is in a good+ case, a case in which S sees that x is an F and has access to this factive reason, S can *reflectively* use this factive reason to dismiss the bare possibility that she could be having a defective experience that looks like the same as the experience she is having now. When S is in a good case, a case in which S sees that x is an F, but his access to this factive reason is blocked by the same possibility above, now epistemically motivated, S should offer favoring evidence against this possibility in order to sustain his knowledge claim. In both cases, S has to access reflectively reasons that rule out the skeptical possibility. Pritchard's disjunctivism sustains only that defective and non-defective exercises of perception can be reflectively distinguished. It is important to say that Pritchard seems to accept that something like the rule of attention governs our claims of knowledge (PRITCHARD, 2012, p. 91-100) . If a possibility against a knowledge claim is raised, even without any good reason, it should be ruled out. I think that this raises a problem for his position in the good+ case. It's not clear how S can maintain the *access* to the factive reason (PRITCHARD, 2012, p. 98) when the above bare skeptical possibility is raised. Pritchard just assumes that S maintains the access. But this assumption is illegitimate if he accepts the rule of attention. McDowell's response to the distinguishability problem is more straightforward. According to McDowell, when we conceive a cognitive capacity, we must conceive that it cannot be the case that all its exercises could be defective, otherwise it will not be a capacity at all. He rejects the rule of attention. For example, if a mere logical possibility could legitimately be raised against any exercise of our perceptual capacity and threaten its status as non-defective, then we would not have any perceptual capacity at all, since all of its exercises could conceivably be defective. A second feature of McDowell's position is that he thinks that perception and reason are integrated and this means that “ A rational perceptual capacity is a capacity not only to know certain kinds of things about the environment, but, on an occasion on which one knows something of the relevant kind through the exercise of the capacity in question, *to know that that is how*

one knows it” (MCDOWELL, 2011, p. 41). As to the distinguishability problem, if a rational perceptual capacity is a capacity at all, then necessarily some of its exercises will yield (a) non-defective perceptual states and (b) the knowledge of having that kind of state. Rational perception give us perceptual knowledge and self-knowledge at the same time. The bare logical possibility that there may be cases of non-defective perceptions introspectively indistinguishable from defective ones cannot be raised against each exercise of this capacity (rational perception). This possibility should be taken seriously only when raised with special and concrete reasons. However, in this case, it would be raised only against a particular exercise of the rational perceptual capacity. Since that possibility is special and concrete, it cannot be applied to each exercise of that capacity. This implies that, *in general*, defective and non-defective exercises of perception are distinguishable (introspectively or not). However, the way McDowell integrates reason and perception is problematic. I will argue that because of that integration McDowell faces a serious threat of regress. It is not clear what is more problematic, Pritchard's assumption or McDowell's regress. In the final section of this presentation, I will suggest an escape from this situation.

References

- PRITCHARD, Duncan 2012. *Epistemological Disjunctivism*. Oxford University Press.
- MCDOWELL, John 2011. *Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge*. Marquette University Press.