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Normativity with a Human Face: Placing Intentional Norms and Intentional Agents back in Nature

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Abstract

Many philosophers identify normativity as the distinctive mark of intentionality. Among them, John McDowell has underscored the need to overcome any form of dualism between reason and nature in order to properly account for the way in which such norms can be about the world around us, dubbing this project a "rehabilitation of empiricism." Steven Crowell argues that McDowell's notion of experience falls short in accounting for the way in which we can experience the world as normative and is hence insufficient for rehabilitating empiricism in McDowell's sense. In this chapter, we will contend that Crowell's attempt to provide a phenomenological account of intentionality goes quite far in the right direction but is nevertheless incomplete. If in fact Crowell succeeds in placing norms in nature through his phenomenological account of perceptual experience, he still shares with McDowell the idea that intentionality proper is to be identified with full-fledged normative contentful capacities. We argue that this commitment leads him to reject the possibility of accounting for the way in which intentional agents are themselves placed in nature. We will claim that placing intentional agents in nature is not only possible, but also necessary for bringing Crowell's and McDowell's respective projects of rehabilitating empiricism to completion. Finally, we sketch a strategy for successfully conducting this task.

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> One cannot simply posit a correlation between experience and nature, between seeing-as and seeing what-is; one must show what this sense of nature amounts to through an account of the evidence in which it is given as nature.
>
> —(Crowell 2001, 17)

Intentionality, Normativity, and the Space of Reasons

There is much agreement in the philosophical literature that intentional states, including beliefs, desires, intentional actions, and the like, are candidates for normative assessment. That is, they can be evaluated with respect to standards of propriety, such as success, fitness, accuracy, and, above all, truth. Intentional states are marked by the property of being directed toward objects and properties in the environment which they can be about and can also fail to adequately represent, thus becoming candidates for truth-assessment. Underscoring this point, John Haugeland claims that "to have intentionality is to have (semantic) content" (Haugeland 1990, 384).

Sellars has articulated this distinction further. According to Sellars, intentional states are distinctively characterized by belonging to what he labeled "the space of reasons." He described this space by contrasting it with the space of nature, claiming that they are governed by two different kinds of normativity. While the normativity of nomological generalizations, proper to scientific natural laws, characterizes the realm of nature, the normativity of reasons and rational principles is characteristic of human actions and performances and of intentional states, such as beliefs and desires in particular. Accordingly, the logical space of reasons is not the space in which we describe the psychology of the acts of thinking, but the space in which our justificatory credentials are at issue.

McDowell, following Sellars, claims that "[w]e must sharply distinguish natural-scientific intelligibility from the kind of intelligibility something acquires when we situate it in the logical space of reasons" (McDowell 1996, xix). Nevertheless, McDowell warns us, we must be

especially careful as to the implications of such a distinction. In particular, one must avoid the confusion that underlies its identification with "a dichotomy between the natural and the normative" (Ibid.). Such a confusion would amount to losing any possibility of accounting for the way in which the world has normative significance for us, e.g., the possibility that the world itself play a justificatory role for our beliefs. According to McDowell, both Davidson and Sellars, by sharply distinguishing the normative and the natural, end up endorsing a view "about experience [that] disqualifies it from intelligibly constituting a tribunal" (McDowell 1996, xvi).

Against Sellars's and Davidson's conception of the rational, McDowell surmises that in order to avoid, on the one hand, endorsing a form of dualism—i.e., separating causes from reasons—and, on the other, emptying our empirical beliefs from empirical content, we need "to place norms in nature." His strategy in this regard is both simple and bold: we must enrich our concept of nature so that it encompasses the normativity of rational demands.[1]

McDowell rightly calls his proposal a "rehabilitation of empiricism," the very empiricism that Sellars—who identified the empirical with an unacceptable notion of the Given—and Davidson—who rejected the view that we can make sense of experience as something other than a blind cause—had deemed untenable. According to McDowell, Sellars's and Davidson's conclusions depend on surrendering the notion of nature to the realm of pure causal law, a "disenchanted nature" that "does not embrace the space of reasons" (McDowell 1996, 84). If the notion of nature is so understood, only two options are left open: (1) to embrace what McDowell calls "bald naturalism" replacing reasons with pure causes or (2) to endorse a sort of dualism that conceives of reasons as belonging to a self-contained space that is only affected by causes from the outside. Sellars and Davidson embrace option (2). Resisting this dilemma, McDowell puts forward the idea that experiences are not mere sensations but "themselves cases of our sensory capacities at work, as opposed to being merely caused by our sensory capacities" (McDowell 2009, 158). According to McDowell, we can understand the world's impact on belief-formation as belonging already to the conceptual sphere. Experiences are "like beliefs in being actualizations of our conceptual capacities and so able, consistently with the basic principles that underlie Davidson's thinking here, to be rationally and not merely causally relevant to our thinking" (Ibid). The outcome of this thought is the idea that causal relations need not be exhaustively described as the "domain of physical fact." According to McDowell, only if beliefs and experiences can be about the world and thus be either correct or incorrect with respect to it, will we be in the position to account for how experience is actually capable of playing its role as a warrant for beliefs. Conversely, if experience could not be granted a rational role

in the formation of beliefs, then as Kant warned us, we would be left with empty concepts: without intuitions concepts would be "spinning in a void" (McDowell 1996, 11).

Steven Crowell's work is to be praised for highlighting how the phenomenological tradition can contribute to the aforementioned debate concerning intentionality and normativity. And while Crowell shares many of McDowell's main tenets and his general aim of integrating experience into the space of reasons, he questions the lack of an adequate phenomenological account of how perceptual experience can be normatively informed. In his view, McDowell lacks "the necessary theory of perception or intuitive givenness to remove the appearance of dogmatism in its appeal to the space of meaning" (Crowell 2001, 19). Crowell argues that phenomenology offers a remedy for this problem, namely, the best strategy for placing norms in nature. In this sense, phenomenology would be the best way to pursue the project of rehabilitating empiricism while simultaneously acknowledging the distinctive character of normatively contentful intentionality. That is what would be required for an empiricism "that recognizes not only quarks and trees, but numbers, battles, and passions" and is in a position to resist not only skepticism, but reductionism as well" (Crowell 2001, 19).

In this chapter, we will follow Crowell's path and explore to what extent such a project can be carried out. We will contend that Crowell's attempt to provide a phenomenological account of intentionality makes important progress but is nevertheless incomplete. Phenomenology does indeed offer the best strategy for approaching this project. Unlike McDowell's proposal, phenomenology does not commit to the idea that intentionality is always conceptual and hence, as we will show, it offers the right tools for avoiding some important shortcomings of McDowell's position. But if Crowell succeeds in placing norms in nature through his phenomenological account of perceptual experience, he still shares with McDowell and Haugeland the idea that intentionality proper is to be identified with full-fledged normatively contentful capacities. This leads him to reject the possibility—a possibility actually explored by Husserl and other phenomenologists—of accounting for (i) the role that biological constraints play in the exercise of rational capacities, and (ii) the way in which the world we are directed to is shared by other creatures that themselves disclose the world in different ways. Lacking resources for accommodating (i) and (ii), Crowell's view turns out to be incapable of making sense of how intentional agents are themselves placed in nature. We will claim that placing intentional agents in nature is not only possible, but also necessary if we are to bring Crowell's and McDowell's project of rehabilitating empiricism to completion.

We will proceed as follows. In the next section, we will analyze McDowell's attempt to place norms in nature, highlight its shortcomings, and follow Crowell in providing a phenomenological alternative

to his view. In the third section, we will analyze both McDowell's and Crowell's approaches to the problem of placing intentional agents in nature. We will diagnose how and why they fall short. In the final section, we will sketch an alternative strategy for successfully "rehabilitating empiricism," namely, by placing both norms and intentional agents in nature.

Placing Intentional Norms in Nature

Crowell concurs with McDowell on the idea that "the challenge is to say how the world can be independent of our thinking while still having a rational—and not merely causal—bearing on what we think" (Crowell 2010, 153). This challenge can be put in terms of two generally accepted conditions for establishing what counts as contentful normativity: (1) the objectivity condition: that contentful states must be about an independent world they can fail to adequately represent, and (2) the first-person condition: that intentional states must not be merely cases of acting "according to a norm"—the kind of normativity that applies to phenomena under scientific nomological generalizations—but rather cases of acting "in virtue of a norm," i.e., states of subjects who are conscious of, responsive to, and responsible for the norms specified by said states. It is this first-personal kind of normative relation that holds for states in the space of reasons.

Crowell (2008, 2012a) himself acknowledges the need for accommodating these conditions in accounting for perceptual states. According to Crowell, unlike Sellars and Brandom for whom "perception plays no justificatory role but is just an entry move into the realm of inferentially governed conceptual relations" (Crowell 2010, 150–1), McDowell correctly saw that experience, along with other rational states, belongs in the space of reasons. But, in his view, accommodating (1) and (2) is paramount for reclaiming a role for the notion of "experience" as conceived in the phenomenological tradition and not merely in the way McDowell seeks to incorporate it.

Notably, both McDowell and Crowell agree that a correct account of intentionality involves a commitment to some form of empiricism (McDowell 1996, xviii; Crowell 2001, 19). However, it is at this point that Crowell introduces his criticism of McDowell's position, namely, that the latter fails to provide an adequate notion of experience:

> McDowell seems to hold that perceptual content must have a conceptual structure since only predication, an operation with concepts, establishes the object as a norm, places it in the space of reasons. But just this point makes McDowell's position elusive, for in perception no such predication takes place.
>
> (Crowell 2013, 126)

Thus, McDowell's commitment to a conceptual understanding of the space of reasons leads to a propositional conception of perceptual states that Crowell deems inadequate. The problem is that McDowell, following Sellars, thinks of this space of reasons in purely conceptual terms. He thereby wrongly identifies *seeing a cat* on the mat and *seeing that the cat is on the mat*.[2] According to Crowell, McDowell is unable to draw the relevant distinction between *seeing something* and *seeing that something is the case*, for he lacks a non-conceptual notion of experience. While after *Mind and World* McDowell seems to have discarded that propositional notion of the content of experience, he still holds that experience should be conceived as informed by "conceptual capacities at work." Crowell acknowledges such a shift in McDowell's thinking but argues that the problem remains, since "both kinds of content remain conceptual" (see Crowell 2013, 127n3).[3] Crowell argues that an adequate notion of experience must be able to explain how a perceptual state can be meaningful and thus normative without being conceptual.

At this juncture, Crowell introduces his more general claim, namely that phenomenology is uniquely suited to provide an encompassing picture of the normativity of experience that accommodates the aforementioned conditions (1) and (2), i.e., that it is capable of accounting for the way in which we are first-personally responsive to objective norms in experiencing the world, while not understanding such norms as involving conceptual capacities.

Phenomenology fares better than McDowell's view in accounting for the way in which experience is norm-governed because it characterizes perception in normative terms without recourse to conceptuality. Indeed, "phenomenologists concerned with the question of the normative in perception have tried to go further" in characterizing experience (Crowell 2013, 127). A paradigmatic example of the kind of perceptual-yet-not-conceptual normative constraint that belongs to experience thematized by phenomenologists is the relation that holds in perceptually experiencing an object, for example in vision, between an actually observed aspect of the object and other aspects of the same object, which are not in view. When I see a matchbox in front of me, my experience is not the mere experience of the seen side of the matchbox but a case of seeing the matchbox as such, including the sides that are hidden from view. The unseen aspects of the matchbox are part of my actual perception of the matchbox even though they are not directly perceived. This is shown by the fact that there are several further actions that I can perform with respect to the object that can confirm the presence of such hidden aspects, e.g., I can turn the object around and see the other sides, and I can then see if they look more or less like the one I had previously seen, and so on. Alternatively, if, for instance, I turned the matchbox around and its backside mysteriously disappeared, I would think that something is wrong, that it was not a matchbox after all: maybe it was a hallucination or a

trompe l'oeil. These relations between the seen and unseen aspects of objects of perceptual experience are not merely causal but normative: the unseen aspects of the same object are normatively relevant for my actual perception of it and for its epistemic credentials. This network of normative relations that govern perceptual experience is at the center of Crowell's "quasi-inferentialist" account of perceptual normativity. In his words, "the way the world and things in the world are taken in experience is, for each, a function of (as Husserl puts it) their 'intentional implications' or (as Heidegger puts it) the 'referential totality of significance' " (Crowell 2008, 341).[4]

In sum, the phenomenological strategy put forward by Crowell fleshes out the normativity governing our experiential relation to the world in terms of "quasi-inferential" relations that are disclosed by intentional agents as they experience such a world. He claims that having such experiences—in contrast to McDowell—does not require deploying any concepts.

So far so good. McDowell provides a framework for placing norms in nature and reconciling experience and normativity. Crowell's phenomenology lets us move further in specifying how to understand the normative character of experience without being committed to a problematic form of conceptualism. But contrary to all appearances, the task of rehabilitating empiricism remains essentially incomplete. For to reclaim a form of empiricism which is compatible with a normative account of reasons—which both McDowell and Crowell aim to do—requires not only showing how norms can be part of experience but also how intentional agents are sensitive to such norms, i.e., how they are governed by such norms and how those norms inform their behavior in action and perception. While Crowell insists that intentional agents must be capable of such norm-guided behavior, the question remains as to whether we can account for the capacities of the agents at issue in a naturalistic vein. Reconciling norms and nature requires not only placing experience in the space of reasons but normative agents in nature. When intentionality is understood in normative terms, the motivation for such a subjective dimension of a "rehabilitated empiricism" becomes clearer: a normative account of intentionality could not get off the ground if it failed to account for the way norms have a grip on us as natural beings, i.e., how they inform the behavior of natural intentional agents. In order to demystify these relations—not only norms but normative agential capacities—we need to be in a position to intelligibly place intentional agents within a conception of the natural and relate them to the capacities of other animals belonging to nature. These are two interrelated demands of an adequate empiricism in McDowell's and Crowell's terms, two sides of the same coin: placing experience in the space of reasons is one side, placing the capacities of experiencing subjects in nature, the other.

As it turns out, Husserl already underscored this point in his criticism of Kant. Husserl's contention is that Kant's notion of subjectivity is no more than a "mythical construction"; it is "his own sort of mythical talk, whose literal meaning points to something subjective, but a mode of the subjective which we are in principle unable to make intuitive to ourselves, whether through factual examples or through genuine analogy" (Husserl, 1976, Hua VI, 116). According to Husserl, phenomenology, on the other hand, focuses also on *concrete subjectivity* (Husserl 1974, Hua XVII, 33/30): i.e., factical features such as "the use of objects, the role of cultures and specific make-up of bodily motility" (Nenon 2008, 437) as well as the particular sense through which the *hyle* is apprehended and the peculiar temporal form of experience. Such elements of concrete subjectivity, according to Husserl, do have an explanatory role in the transcendental constitution of the world. The biophysical makeup of the body, affectivity, and instincts come into a description of intentionality once such an idea of concrete subjectivity is endorsed.[5] This idea can be traced back to the very early *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, where Husserl claims that "the necessary use of the understanding is, all the same, a use of the understanding and belongs, with the understanding itself, to psychology" (Husserl 1975, Hua XVIII, 66).

In sum, an account of intentionality that seeks to do justice to experience needs to be complemented by an account of the capacities of the intentional agents that are able to experience the world in the ways they do, a psychological account that makes sense of these normative capacities as natural and placed in a natural world in a continuum along with the intentional, normative capacities of other animals. Such an account should be able to answer questions such as, What capacities should a creature capable of normative contentful behavior exhibit? How do such capacities emerge and develop in ontogeny and phylogeny? Are these capacities inherited or acquired through enculturation and training? How do they relate to those of other animals?

In view of this, it becomes clear that phenomenology is ideally suited not only to address one side of the coin but also to complete the task of rehabilitating empiricism, that is, of placing intentional agents in nature. This is so, not only because of its focus on experience, but crucially, as Crowell notes, because it does not identify human cognitive capacities with conceptual capacities. Nevertheless, Crowell rejects in principle, as we will see, the possibility of providing a phenomenological account of rational capacities as human natural capacities.

In the next section, we explore the corresponding strategies that McDowell and Crowell utilize to place agents in nature and find both ill-suited for the task; while McDowell introduces a gap in nature, Crowell denies that any possible account can be given of a subject's rational capacities in natural terms. After explaining how and why this is so in the next section, in the final section we present an alternative view that

allows us to overcome this problem and show how both norms and intentional agents can be placed in nature, as they should if the task of rehabilitant empiricism is to be completed, without losing the normative dimension that McDowell and Crowell underscore as the distinctive feature of human minds.

Placing Intentional Agents in Nature

McDowell directly acknowledges the need to place intentional agents in nature. This is precisely the role that the notion of "second nature," appropriated from Aristotle, is meant to play. Second nature is a specific form of life in which we come to live insofar as we are introduced by others in a language and a tradition: "A rational animal could not have acquired the conceptual capacities in the possession of which its rationality consists except by being initiated in a social practice" (McDowell 2009, 287). The central idea is that human rational capacities depend for their exercise on individuals being initiated in an understanding of the articulation of reasons which comes with their upbringing and which molds their thinking (McDowell 1998, 185). The space of reasons is a space we come to inhabit as linguistic creatures. While language enables us to make ourselves intelligible to others and others intelligible for us, it also underlies the possibility of self-understanding and of having a genuine conceptual engagement with the world.

Furthermore, in focusing on the phenomena of meaning and understanding, McDowell takes these to be wholly natural phenomena despite the fact that they have an irreducibly normative character—a character which, for McDowell, cannot be explicated in non-normative terms. By McDowell's lights, it is simply a fact that certain creatures—those that have benefited from being initiated into special kinds of social practices—become capable of having meaningful or contentful states of mind. According to McDowell, it is through a social process of enculturation that creatures come to have a second nature, and it is by that token that they enter into the space of reasons (see McDowell 2009, 287).

But having sharply separated second nature from first nature—i.e., the kind of stance someone has by being placed in the space of nature as described by natural science—McDowell argues that we are not capable of explicating or explaining how it is that capacities for contentful thought come to exist in nature so understood. Foregoing explanation, we can only simply affirm "our right to the notion of second nature" (McDowell 1996, 94–5). Thus, despite his claim that the space of nature and that of reasons should be integrated to avoid mythical conceptions of how the world impacts our senses and is related to our beliefs and other cognitive states, McDowell dichotomizes our understanding of nature when it comes to understand the capacities of the agents that have

such experiences, leaving us with two senses of nature which are forever divided. Following a similar line of thought, Michael Thompson (2017, 32) argues that McDowell's proposal amounts to surrendering the notion of first nature to bald naturalists while reclaiming a notion of second nature for proper accounts of human rationality. As Rouse nicely put it, this leaves us with "a second nature disconnected from any explicable relation to first nature" (Rouse 2015, 185).

As a consequence of such a disconnection, McDowell's account of second nature is unable to place intentional agents in nature. On his view, no account can be given of the capacities that allow an agent to grasp the normative structure of the space of reasons as themselves belonging to nature. In particular, no natural history of such capacities can be given since that attempt would place them outside the space of reasons. Both capacities for second nature and the world of second nature itself remain primitive posits, not intelligibly connected with humans' first nature and the natural world they seem to inhabit. This follows from the impossibility of making sense of how second nature connects to first nature. But if the capacities at stake were not possibly seen as emerging from and enacted in a natural world, the project of reconciling the rational with the natural would fail.

Phenomenology seems better equipped to deal with the problem of placing intentional agents in nature. Since it does not assume that cognitive capacities and normative abilities require language and conceptual capacities, it seems that it could provide a picture of how sophisticated conceptual normative capacities emerge and develop from more basic capacities we share with other animals and young children, capacities that do not require the ability to apply concepts. This is precisely what Husserl's phenomenological analyses of instinctive-intentionality, affection, and passivity attempts to accomplish. But Crowell rejects such a strategy. According to him, phenomenological accounts of such pre-personal, non-rational processes—carried out in so-called genetic phenomenology—rest on an "an illicit 'naturalistic' assumption" that underlies the "identification of the person with the human being"[6] (Crowell 2012b, 26). Crowell's argument runs as follows: "when we 'situate' the subject in 'natural processes' we always do so already privatively, by conceiving those processes on the model of our first-person understanding of what it is for me to be" (Crowell 2014, 40). As John Haugeland puts it, "we can understand animals as having intentional states, but only relative to standards that we establish for them. This makes animal intentionality exactly analogous to biological teleology" (Haugeland 1998b, 303). That means that "biological systems have only ersatz teleology and normativity," and this itself can only be understood "privatively," in terms of their lacking something. This is so because "animals do not commit to constitutive standards, hence do not submit themselves to norms, and do not understand anything" (Haugeland 1998b, 304).

Crowell endorses Haugeland's "existential holism" (see Haugeland 1998a, 55ff), the idea that full-fledged contentful intentionality, unlike animal behavior, "is a norm-governed trying to be" (Crowell 2016, 232), i.e., a capacity that is essentially linked to first-personal responsibility, and thus, it is only possible for rational beings. In Crowell's hands, this is the idea that a proper account of intentionality must ground normativity on agents' capacities to entertain practical identities in terms which they understand and respond to particular norms. In this way, a fundamental distinction is drawn between rational agents, those that live up to and through practical identities and (nonhuman) animals who don't.[7] Crowell's claim here can be seen as fitting with the widespread agreement among contemporary philosophers that there is an important distinction between biological beings, subject to biological norms, and rational persons, subject to properly contentful norms. Many authors hold that biological normativity falls short as a candidate for accounting for the kind of responsiveness that an agent capable of grasping truth-evaluable mental contents would be capable of: "Evolution won't give you more intentionality than you pack into it" (Putnam 1992, 33). This is because there is a crucial distinction between "functioning properly (under the proper conditions) as an information carrier and getting things right (objective correctness or truth)" (Haugeland 1998b, 309). There is "a root mismatch between representational error and failure of biological function" (Burge 2010, 301), since "natural selection does not care about truth; it cares about reproductive success" (Stich 1990, 62); that is, "evolution doesn't care about veridicality" (Burge 2010, 303). Truth is not always adaptation, and adaptation does not necessarily track truth. Thus, even if we can speak of biological norms in terms of naturally selected functions specifying what a given organism is meant to do, and hence rule out certain performances of those organisms as incorrect in relation to the fulfillment of their selected functions, those norms are fundamentally different from the kind of norms that apply to intentional items. Intentional states can be assessed as correct or incorrect with respect to what they represent, and this is not to evaluate them in terms of norms of evolutionary success, survival, and organismic fitness. While certain kinds of organismic responses can be normative in a biological sense, this does not mean that they are sensitive to the kind of correction that truth-assessable states and responses are sensitive to, and no account can be given of the latter in terms of the former.

Drawing from Heidegger's take on organisms in a 1929/1930 lecture course, Crowell expands on this idea by arguing that "a phenomenology of meaning requires a distinction that cannot be drawn within the conceptual horizon of a metaphysics of life" (Crowell 2016, 230). While "the metaphysics of life" characteristic of biological accounts of nature calls upon a third-person methodology to distinguish regions of being and their relations, meaning makes essential appeal to the first-person point

of view. If contentful norms are to be sharply distinguished from bio-logical norms, Crowell claims, the biological nature of human existence becomes irrelevant for an account of intentionality: "The fact that higher animals are much more similar to us than are robots physiologically, eth-ologically, and even phylogenetically, is not necessarily significant when considering intentionality" (Haugeland 1998b, 304). Moreover, biologi-cal and behavioral similarities that could be found between us and other higher animals—such as bonobos and chimps, our closer relatives in the great ape lineage—cannot ground any claim about cognitive similarities between us and them, for any perceived similarity in this domain would be dependent on *our own understanding* of our conceptual capacities, that is, on our bringing them inside the space of reasons, a move that cannot be legitimately justified when the capacities to bring one's own response under a first-personally construed practical identity is missing. Because of this, conversely, there is no straightforwardly legitimate way of seeing our own capacities as having emerged from those of other ani-mals in a natural evolutionary process, for that would amount to drag-ging our own capacities outside the space of reasons, into the space of nature, thus stripping those states of their defining characteristics.

This opens up a gap between proper rational intentionality and animal ersatz intentionality, and between ourselves conceived in the light of our "second nature"—as already responsible rational agents—and us under-stood in the light of our natural history and our early upbringing, in the context of which practical identities are not yet at play. We find a similar point in Davidson's work:

> The difficulty in describing the emergence of mental phenomena is a conceptual problem: it is the difficulty of describing the early stages in the maturing of reason, the stages that precede the situation in which concepts like intention, belief, and desire have clear appli-cation. In both the evolution of thought in the history of mankind and the evolution of thought in an individual, there is a stage at which there is no thought followed by a subsequent stage at which there is thought. To describe the emergence of thought would be to describe the process which leads from the first to the second of these stages. What we lack is a satisfactory vocabulary for describing the intermediate steps.
>
> (1997/2001, 127)

Davidson thinks that we lack the requisite vocabulary because he is committed to the idea—in line with his views on the holism of the mental—that minds can only be discerned and characterized by ascrib-ing propositional contents to them. Let us call this the "characterization problem." In his view, "words, like thoughts, have a familiar meaning, a propositional content, only if they occur in a rich context, for such a

context is required to give words or thought a location and a meaningful function" (Davidson 1997/2001, 127). *A fortiori*, for him, nonverbal thought cannot be characterized as a form of thought because it lacks the necessary links with contentful attitudes—it stands outside of the network of propositional attitudes. For this reason, Davidson doubted that there could be "a sequence of emerging features of the mental . . . described in the usual mentalistic vocabulary" (Ibid.), since thought/the mental can only be present when a sufficiently rich set of rational connections and propositional attitudes can be thought to be present, and this only happens when someone speaks a language (Davidson 2001; for criticism see Hutto and Satne 2017).

As a consequence of this lack of adequate vocabulary—the characterization problem—Davidson thinks we are left without the resources for making sense of the connections between contentful attitudes and the rest of nature. In his way of setting things out, the characterization problem leads to a "connection problem": the mental as intentionally contentful and the natural are forever divided. This precludes the possibility of describing human rationality as located in nature, thus leading to an emergence problem as a particular instance of the connection problem, as Davidson rightly acknowledges.

McDowell follows Davidson in his holism of the mental and in the idea that conceptual capacities cannot be given a genetic understanding in the natural world of the sort that evolutionary theory privileges for exactly the aforementioned reasons. And while Crowell disagrees with Davidson's and McDowell's claim that concepts are the mark of the mental, he shares their skepticism about the prospects of telling an evolutionary story about human intentional capacities. He agrees that we can't step out from the point of view of our human form of life and recognize other capacities as capacities that, qua different from our own, are intentional for their own sake. In his view, this is because (other) animals lack the first-personal responsiveness that is characteristic of our engagement with reasons, which is given to us in the form of the construal of practical identities. In the best case, we can adopt a privative approach toward (other) animals and attribute as-if intentional capacities to them. Thus, he claims,

> I can employ teleological modes of explanation in understanding nonhuman animals not because I recognize that they and I share an ontological region, "life," but because I constitute them as possessing abilities that I possess, but privatively or in modified form.
>
> (Crowell 2014, 35)

This does not rule out the possibility of providing a third-personal description of our biological constitution and of finding similarities with the biological capacities of other animals or such construal of the evolutionary

history of our own rational capacities, but such a description would be irrelevant for an account of intentionality and intentional agents proper. As he argues against the project of genetic phenomenology,

> [Husserl] believes that he is entitled to the idea that the sense, 'human being', carries with it reference to natural kinds—not merely in some culturally relative sense in which the pre-given world contains various familiar 'types' of organism, but in the strict sense of scientific naturalism. . . . But the importation of this sort of third-person assumption into transcendental phenomenology is pernicious, because it makes it seem as though the *pre-personal processes characteristic of consciousness conceived as a natural function could somehow be 'reconstructed', in the absence of first-person evidence, as constitutive abilities of transcendental subjectivity.*
>
> (Crowell 2012b, 41, our emphasis)

However, this seems to conflict with the project of philosophical empiricism to which Crowell claims to be committed. Even if Crowell is right that those pre-personal processes cannot per se be identified with rational intentional abilities—i.e., that first-personal endorsement cannot be eschewed—that does not mean that the description of those contingent, psychological and biological features becomes irrelevant, nor does it mean that our self-understanding as humans is philosophically irrelevant for our concept of ourselves. As we have argued elsewhere,

> given the contingency of the starting point, the question concerning rational grounding becomes all the more pressing. Such a question would take the following form: how can the norms that govern rationality, the very norms that can be first-personally endorsed, actually inform the behavior of contingent, factual and concrete subjects? How can they inform their bodily movements, their passive associations, their attentional shifts?
>
> (Ainbinder forthcoming)

Crowell argues that describing such contingent features of our makeup and natural history would amount to abandoning the point of view of contentful—objective and first-personal—intentionality. Thus, in his view those features do not belong to an account of intentionality proper. To include them would just mean changing the topic of discussion entirely. But to follow this path is to end up with a new version of the gap between first and second nature which we found in McDowell's and Davidson's work, making it impossible to place agents in natural history and in relations of natural continuity with (other) animals. Specifically, it leaves us unable to describe the intermediate steps between agents that are capable of first-personal responsibility and those who are not. As a consequence

of this lack of adequate vocabulary—a particular form of the characterization problem—we are left without the resources for making sense of the connections between normatively contentful first-personal attitudes and the rest of nature. In his way of setting things out, again, this characterization problem leads to a "connection problem": the mental as first-personal assessable and the natural are forever divided. This precludes the possibility of describing human rationality as located in nature, thus leading to an emergence problem as a particular instance of the connection problem. If this is the case, then the Husserlian project of a phenomenological description of the natural origin of our cognitive capacities and of the relevance of our biological makeup—i.e., instincts, affects, and certain features of embodiment—for rational contentful intentionality cannot get off the ground, and, as we have seen, the project of placing rationality in nature, and nature in the space of reasons, remains unfinished and fundamentally incomplete.

Crowell's motivation for opening up the gap derives directly from his understanding of the phenomenological method: any form of intentionality is thought to be available to first-person reflection and evidential fulfillment. Any attempts to characterize alternative forms of intentionality would be inferential or speculative, beyond the reach of phenomenological clarification grounded on first-person evidence.[8] As a consequence, he leaves no room for features of intentionality that are not first-personally accessible.[9]

In sum, McDowell and Crowell both rule out placing rational agents in nature. In McDowell's case this was because conceptual capacities cannot be given a genetic understanding along the lines that evolutionary theory privileges. In Crowell's case, this is because of the unique character of rational beings' "form of life" and the way this is given to us in the form of practical identities, and its incommensurability with (other) animals' forms of life.

We believe that the distinctive character of normative intentional capacities emphasized by Crowell and McDowell can be maintained while simultaneously elucidating how these capacities can be placed in nature, both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. There is indeed a strategy available that could reintroduce intentional agents into the natural world without reducing the space of reasons to that of nature and thereby changing the topic altogether. It consists not in reducing normative contentful intentionality, the kind proper to the space of reasons, to simpler forms of intentionality—for example those governed by biological norms—but rather in providing the genetic and ontogenetic origins of such capacities by having recourse to different capacities, tools, and platforms, such as social practices that contribute to their emergence and maintenance (see Hutto and Satne 2015; Satne and Salice forthcoming; Rouse 2015; Okrent 2017). But, to do so, we would need first to overcome a crippling assumption that underlies the characterization

problem in its different forms, the very same assumption that is behind Haugeland's claim quoted at the beginning of this chapter, i.e., "to have intentionality is to have (semantic) content" (Haugeland 1990, 384). This is the idea that intentionality comes only in one form. This is a uniformity assumption: that all intentionality is unified by a defining feature—propositional form in the case of Davidson, conceptual struc- ture in McDowell's view, and first-personal responsibility by Crowell's lights. The problem with this assumption is that "restricting intentional- ity to a small domain [characterized by a defining feature], one proper to intentional agents . . . is the royal road to conceiving of intentional patients in mere 'as if' terms [Crowell's privative approach, Haugeland's ersatz intentionality]" (Hutto and Satne 2015, 532). If intentionality is uniquely identified with a privileged kind of intentionality under what- ever of the descriptions that is preferred, the characterization problem immediately arises and with it the connection and emergence problems that are linked to it, leading to the impossibility of properly placing intentional agents in nature. For even if McDowell, Crowell, and David- son acknowledge the intelligence of certain nonhuman animals, they claim that any such ascription of intelligence would require speculation on our part about the kind of thinking that is available to them, some- thing that could not be grounded either in radical interpretation and ascription—as Davidsonian methodology suggests—or by means of the first-personal methods of phenomenology—as Crowell's account recom- mends. This being the case, our own biological nature becomes a matter of speculation.

In the next section, we claim that in order to place intentional agents in nature—i.e., to illuminate the role played by our biological constitution in our intentional capacities and to bring to light their developmental and phylogenetic roots—we need to make room for many different forms of intentionality, overcoming the characterization problem, i.e., the conclu- sion that forms of intentionality that do not belong to the privileged kind cannot be properly characterized. This involves dropping the uniformity assumption. Assuming, on the contrary that (1) there are different kinds of intentionality, this is something that Davidson, Crowell, and McDow- ell seem to acknowledge while at the same time claiming that we some- how fail to adequately account for them; and (2) all such forms cannot be unified by identifying some core common features they all exhibit. As we argued, the uniformity thesis that makes intentionality the "exclusive province of semantic content" is problematic. In fact, its endorsement is the main reason why one is led to assume the impossibility of placing agents in nature. Once we remove such an assumption, we claim that there is no remaining obstacle in reconciling the rational with the natural. This requires showing how understanding "life" in a non-metaphysical phenomenological way makes room for "forms of life" in the plural and showing why acknowledging that normative contentful capacities cannot

be reduced to anything else does not imply that our proposal falls prey to the characterization problem that haunted other theories.

Pluralizing Intentionality, Pluralizing Life

The first step toward a rehabilitation of empiricism capable of accounting for the biological nature of intentional agents is revising the notion of nature as it was thematized by Sellars. On Sellars's account, first nature is characterized on the model of one particular natural science, physics, in which phenomena fall under nomological generalizations proper to scientific natural laws. It comes as no surprise then that nature so characterized cannot encompass facts of meaning and first-personal responsibility. In recent years, a number of philosophical naturalist projects[10] have challenged that picture of nature, claiming that nature should be thought of as including values, interests, and consciousness; that is, that facts in nature are facts of experience, not of physics. In the same vein, relaxed naturalism (see Hutto and Satne 2015, 2017) claims that the philosophical agenda for a naturalist should not be concerned with reducing facts of meaning to the restricted domain of the natural sciences—that is, to facts to be found in biology, chemistry, and ultimately physics—but that its aim should rather be to clarify the nature of some *explanandum*—for example, intentionality—by investigating it in a way that draws on and seeks to harmoniously integrate the findings of a wide range of relevant empirical sciences, including anthropology, developmental psychology, comparative psychology, cognitive and phenomenological psychology, cognitive archaeology, and so on. The relevant point to note is that Relaxed Naturalists do not unnecessarily restrict the tools by which those illuminating explanatory connections might be forged, and by this token they allow social and normative facts along with those explored by the relevant empirical sciences in their account of nature. Importantly, relaxed naturalists do not divide up nature into two realms, but rather seek to integrate facts of nature studied in different sciences, including physics, into one single unified reality, in which these are harmoniously integrated (Hutto and Satne 2017, 2018).

Once the conception of nature is broadened in this way, it becomes possible to show how intentional agents can be thought to be part of nature. It becomes possible, for example, to tell a developmental story about how children are initiated into social practices in which they learn how to follow norms from others: they became enculturated and initiated into narratives in terms of which they make sense of themselves, others, and the world around them. At the same time, the phylogeny of the rational capacities required to engage in the training of mind-shaping practices can be addressed in this framework by reflecting on the evolution of culture and cooperation in the evolutionary trajectory of hominids (see Tomasello 2014; Sterelny 2012; Rouse 2015; Haugeland 1998b).

The central idea behind that explanatory strategy is that the space of reasons can be thought to be "extensionally equivalent to our discursive biological niche" (Rouse 2015, 158; see also Satne and Salice forthcoming).

This approach holds that we can only make sense of contentful normative intentionality in the context of shared forms of life in which social norm compliance is developed, maintained, and stabilized through shared practices. Such practices are not only based on our shared biology but on social engagements and cultural devices that evolved over time, especially linguistic tokens, the primary bearers of semantic content. Accordingly, the capacity to have contentful normative intentionality depends essentially on engaging in sociocultural practices in which biologically inherited capacities are scaffolded in open-ended ways. As is apparent, this view shares much with McDowell's and Crowell's views of rational subjects, but it differs crucially from them on two counts.

First, as opposed to McDowell's view, in this account the emergence of second nature is not a mystery and no commitment to an explanatory or evolutionary gap follows, for nature is not divided up into two realms. In a story like this, it is possible to describe the empirical makeup of the subjects as biologically and psychologically constrained by interactions with the world and other beings, a world where sophisticated intentional agents coexist along with other creatures intending the same shared natural world. These forms of life can be intelligibly described as succeeding each other in phylogeny, leading to human forms of life. These last are characterized by mutual engagements in which different agents respond to each other and the world rationally in the context of naturally evolved sociocultural practices and this is where practical identities have their proper milieu. It is in this sense that our form of life is properly called human, and not merely that of a rational agent, in that it appears to itself as situated and contextual, itself conditioned by instincts, by the body, and by the biological constitution that comes with it.

This takes us to the second way in which this view differs from McDowell's, and to the key distinction that separates Crowell's account of intentionality from our own. Namely, to allow for a variety of forms of intentionality that are not unified by a set or a single common feature. Some of these are contentfully normative—involving the ability to grasp truth-evaluable contents—while some, more basic, are characterized by mere intentional directedness and the ability to respond to the environment in intelligent ways without apprehending it in terms of truth and falsity or being subject to first-personal assessment and responsibility. Furthermore, primitive kinds of intentionality—such as simple forms of social cognition and perceptual experiences of a basic non-linguistically permeated kind, lacking the normative contentfulness of conceptual intentionality, give a platform for the sort of engagement with others that leads and has led humans to construe and inherit sociocultural discursive niches in the context of which practical identities and full-fledged

norm-following develops and unfolds (Sáne forthcoming). Having said this, there is still one final obstacle to overcome to allow for such pluralism about intentionality. That is showing that our proposal does not fall prey to the characterization problem, thus answering the question of how are we in the position to describe these different forms of intentionality, some of which are not contentful or even accessible in the first person.

Following Wittgenstein, we propose to embrace the idea that "forms of life," or "life-forms" in Thompson's terms (2007, 2017), come in many varieties and that intentional capacities can be understood contextually in connection with such life forms. More importantly, and in contrast to McDowell's and Crowell's views, each of these domains is not defined by a common feature but rather there are a number of different activities and capacities that are part and parcel of a "form of life." Thus, as Wittgenstein says in PI 23 and PI 25, requesting, thanking, cursing, and greeting are practices of our forms of life as are eating, walking, and playing. These very different activities "hang together" as part of our form of life.

Furthermore, what makes it possible to understand other animals as intentionally directed to the world, albeit sometimes in a different way than ours, is that their capacities are also contextually situated in complex pattern of activities, some of which they share with us. This, we claim, is a fact that is exhibited in our own experience in our life-world. This claim does not however involve a commitment to the idea of "an ontological region 'life' " that we share with other animals, a "metaphysics of life" and the associated third-personal methodology that grounds it, that Crowell (2016, 230) rightly rejects. The idea of "form of life" does not refer to a metaphysical substratum, defined in terms of a fixed set of properties, properties that other animals and we share. Rather, we propose that "form of life" should be understood in terms of what Heidegger called a "mode of being," which is not defined in terms of a set of properties but as a way in which a domain of beings and their properties are understood, specifying conditions for their individuation and recognition.[11] Thus, "life" in our view, as in Crowell's, is a phenomenological concept, not a metaphysical one.

But even if such a pluralism of forms of life is granted, it is still true that in describing other forms of life, there is no alternative than to start from our own experience. We see the world from our own perspective and according to our own capacities for social interaction and cognition. But, crucially, this does not entail the impossibility of cognizing other forms of life or our own as belonging to natural history along with such other forms. This is because one's own form of life appears as one among many others of which one might have more or less understanding, and more or less in common. These facts of experience can be further studied by a number of different sciences and at different levels of complexity, uncovering similarities and lineages that are not first-personally accessible. This is the methodological recommendation of relaxed naturalists

who seek a unified conception of reality that is jointly construed by the different sciences, as well as from the point of view of philosophy. In sum, on this view, there is no impossibility of placing intentional agents in natural history and accounting for our own biological and psychological nature, for the latter are part of our own nature as we experience it, something that we can further explore with the tools of different natural sciences.

Pursuing this path that we have developed within the framework of relaxed naturalism allows one to place humans in nature together with other animals while nonetheless maintaining the uniqueness of the kind of engagement that we, as animals who have normative self-understanding, enjoy.

Notes

1 McDowell characterizes this move as two-fold, involving both placing reasons in nature and allowing experience into the space of reasons (McDowell 1996, xv ff). Unless otherwise noted, all emphases in quotations reproduce the original.
2 See Crowell 2010, 160, who follows Travis 2007, 227.
3 Unfortunately, McDowell does not further elaborate on how such non-propositional yet still conceptual capacities function. This should come as no surprise, since as Crowell rightly notices, "McDowell is relatively uninterested in explaining how conceptual capacities can be drawn on in receptivity. His aim is therapeutic rather than constructive" (Crowell 2013, 127).
4 Crowell draws on Brandom's inferentialism to coin his own concept of quasi-inferentialism. Nevertheless, unlike Brandom's inferentialism, Crowell's quasi-inferentialism makes room for first-personal access to such normative relations. For the lack of a distinctive first-personal dimension in Brandom's inferentialism, see Rödl 2010.
5 This is, indeed, what grounds Husserl's genetic interest in instincts and pre-egological strata in the constitution of the self. See Ainbinder forthcoming for an argument along these lines and against Crowell's negative reading of genetic phenomenology.
6 Crowell attributes such an assumption both to those, such as Searle, who hold "that the mind (consciousness) is intrinsically intentional and that it is in some sense nothing but the brain" and to those who look "for the emergence of intentionality in the evolutionary explanation of the organism and its behavior more generally" (Crowell 2012 b, 37n17).
7 In Crowell's words, "one might imagine that the *for-the-sake-of* [i.e., the kind of responsiveness to norms proper to practical identities] belongs to the teleological structure of animal action. But this would be wrong. Instead, the for-the-sake-of corresponds to practical identity" (Crowell 2007, 5).
8 We are grateful to Matthew Burch and Irene McMullin for pushing on this point.
9 It is worth noticing that Crowell's insistence on the first-personal character of phenomenological inquiry is not directly related to the problem of *Evidenz* (if we understand this in verificationist terms) but rather to the problem of responsibility; facts of experience are facts to which we are responsive and for which we are responsible. It is in these terms that Crowell defines the first-personal character of phenomenological inquiry (see Crowell 2007).

10 In particular, enactivist projects of a phenomenological kind: see e.g., Varela, Rorsch, and Thompson 1992; Nöe 2004.
11 For a way of understanding Heidegger's "mode of being" in this sense, see Ainbinder, under review.

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