McDowell’s *Mind and World*

I. “Concepts and Intuitions” (Lecture I, 3-18)

A. McDowell begins by reflecting on some themes from the works of Donald Davidson and Immanuel Kant, neither of which we have encountered before. I will provide some background on these themes in class. But you should pay particular attention to Davidson’s idea of a dualism of (conceptual) scheme and (representational) content and Kant’s ideas of concepts and intuitions and how they align with spontaneity and receptivity. (#s 1-2)

B. What is the “worry” that the idea of a dualism of conceptual content and the given responds to? (#2, 5-6)

C. Why does McDowell believe “the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications?” (#3, 8)

D. What is the “interminable oscillation” or “seesaw” that McDowell mentions on p. 9? What are the two positions he believes we’re oscillating between?

E. What does McDowell mean when he suggests that “In experience one takes in, for instance, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge.”? How does this point challenge a key assumption about experience shared by Locke, Sellars, and Davidson that experience is pre-conceptual in character? (#4)

F. How does the passivity of experience satisfy our “craving for a limit to freedom”? (#5, 10-11)

G. What does Sellars mean when he says, at the end of #5, “even though experience is passive, it draws into operation capacities that genuinely belong to spontaneity.”? (#5, 11-13)

H. McDowell’s Critique of Davidson’s Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge

1. Why does McDowell believe Davidson’s coherence theory simply makes the idea of the given attractive? (#6, 14-15)

2. How does Davidson’s coherence theory lead to what McDowell calls “images of confinement”? (#6, 15-16)

3. How does “the Davidsonian response” to the idea that one might be “a brain in a mad scientist’s vat” underscore what McDowell sees as the
II. “The Unboundedness of the Conceptual” (Lecture II, 25-29)

A. What does McDowell mean when he says “the idea of conceptually structured operations of receptivity puts us in a position to speak of experience as openness to the layout of reality. Experience enables the layout of reality itself to exert a rational influence on what a subject thinks.”? (#2, 25-26)

B. McDowell insists that “reality . . . is not to be pictured as outside an outer boundary that encloses the conceptual sphere.” How does that position suggest to some (though not, of course, to McDowell) a form of idealism? (#2, 26-27)

C. What does McDowell mean when he says “there is no ontological gap between the sort of thing one can mean, or generally the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case.”? (#3, 27-28)

D. How does McDowell try to answer the charge of idealism by distinguishing between the act of thinking and the content of thinking and stressing that “The constraint (on thought) comes from outside thinking, but not from outside what is thinkable.”? (#3, 28)