

Sellars on the myth of the given



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Course: Philosophy of mind

Filosofia e Forme del sapere A.A. 2025/2026

Sellars on the myth of the given

- **Course Materials:**
- Main text:
 - Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press 1997, with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandom [Disponibile eventualmente in edizione italiana come segue: W. Sellars, *Empirismo e filosofia della mente*. Torino: Einaudi 2004, con introduzione di Richard Rorty e una guida allo studio di Robert Brandom].
- Secondary literature:
 - Willem deVries, *Wilfrid Sellars*, Chesham: Acumen 2005 (Chap. 5, “Knowledge and the given”). [Esiste in Italiano una utile introduzione di deVries alla lettura di “Empirismo e filosofia della mente”, nel volume, curato da G.Bonino, C.Gabbani e P.Tripodi “Biblioteca analitica: i testi fondamentali”. Roma: Carocci 2020, pp. 191-202).]
 - Willem deVries and Carl Sachs, “Wilfrid Sellars”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2024): <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sellars/>
- The slides will be publicly available to you at the end of the course. I can help providing some of the course materials, if needed (write at psalis@unica.it).

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- The texts:
- Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press 1997, with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a study guide by Robert Brandom.
- It is a classic text in twentieth-century analytic philosophy. Many contemporary philosophers regard it as pivotal in challenging key assumptions of the empiricist tradition—chief among them the idea that knowledge and meaning originate solely in experience, a view Sellars famously critiques as the ‘Myth of the Given’.
- For those interested, Sellars’s book is available in Italian translation by Einaudi, with the title *Empirismo e filosofia della mente* (also available in our library).

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- The texts:
- Willem deVries, *Wilfrid Sellars*, Chesham: Acumen 2005 (Chap. 5, “Knowledge and the given”, pp. 94-141).
- Chapter Five of deVries’s widely acclaimed monograph, considered pivotal in contemporary Sellars scholarship for shaping a renewed understanding of his work, examines Sellars’s critique of the ‘Myth of the Given,’ a central theme of this course.
- For those interested, there is a useful introduction by deVries to the reading of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” in the volume edited by G. Bonino, C. Gabbani, and P. Tripodi, *Biblioteca analitica: i testi fondamentali*. Rome: Carocci, 2020, pp. 191–202 (available in the library)
- These materials (deVries’s chapter and deVries and Sachs’ Stanford entry) could be the focus of students’ seminars* at the end of the course.

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- The texts:
- Willem deVries and Carl Sachs, “Wilfrid Sellars”, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2024): <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sellars/>
- deVries’s Stanford Encyclopedia (recently updated thanks to the help of Carl Sachs) entry on Sellars offers a clear synthesis of his monograph and includes an updated overview of recent scholarship.
- These materials could be the focus of students’ seminars* at the end of the course.

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- FROM THE SYLLABUS:
- https://unica.esse3.cineca.it/auth/docente/DefinizioneOfferta/DettaglioAttivitaDidatticaDocente.do;jsessionid=E10671E824036CAA9F1CF0ED5C76725C.esse3-unica-web-prod-esse3web396?AA_OFF_ID=2025&CDS_ID=11161&AD_ID=21921
- Written exam (optional):
- Argumentative skills (33%); Good writing in terms of syntactic correctness and proper terminology (34%); Text elaboration skills (33%);
- Oral exam:
- Mastery of the concepts and arguments of the course (30%); Understanding of the theoretical categories and key problems of the course (30%); Theoretical and contextual framing of the topic of the course (10%); The capacity to reason by means of the course's key categories (30%).
- Exams will be in Italian (apart from international students; in this case, exams will be in English).
- N.B. International students who master the Italian language may choose between Italian and English.

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- **Seminars***
- The final lecture of the course (Monday, 27 April 2026) will be dedicated to student seminars based on the secondary literature (deVries's chapters; deVries & Sachs, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry).
- Students who present a seminar will be exempt from the secondary-literature section of the exam.
- Those interested in participating should submit the list of presenters by the end of March.
- In case, also further materials could be selected.

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Wilfrid Sellars belongs to the analytic philosophy tradition and was influenced by critical realism, naturalism, neo-empiricism, and pragmatism (especially through C. I. Lewis).

His impact on 20th-century philosophy was enormous, particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, when—together with Willard Van Orman Quine—he was one of the leading figures in American philosophy, which during those years surpassed British philosophy and became globally dominant.

His most famous and influential essay, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, has in recent years been described as the most influential philosophical work in the United States during the 1950s, even more influential than Quine's *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* (Tyler Burge, *Language and Mind*, 2005).



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Willem deVries, one of Sellars's last students, is a leading figure in contemporary Sellars scholarship and a prominent voice in the analytic tradition. His work engages deeply with epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of mind, and he has played a crucial role in clarifying and extending Sellars's legacy. Influenced by pragmatism and naturalism, deVries combines historical insight with systematic analysis, making his interpretations widely regarded as authoritative.

His monograph *Wilfrid Sellars* (2005) is considered a cornerstone for modern readers, offering a comprehensive and accessible account of Sellars's thought and its relevance to current philosophical debates.



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The comment on the text

Robert Boyce Brandom (born 1950)

US analytic philosopher.

Works at the University of Pittsburgh (PA, USA)

His main interests include philosophy of language, philosophy of logic, and philosophy of mind.

His publications include *Make It Explicit* (Harvard 1994), *Articulating Reasons* (Harvard 2000), *Tales of the Mighty Dead* (Harvard 2002), *Between Saying and Doing. Towards an Analytic Pragmatism* (Oxford 2008), *Reason in Philosophy. Animating Ideas* (Harvard 2009), *Perspectives on Pragmatism* (Harvard 2011), *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars* (Harvard 2015), *A Spirit of Trust* (Harvard 2019), *Pragmatism and Idealism* (Oxford 2022) and numerous papers in peer reviewed journals.



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- **Main questions underlying the course topic:**
- Does perceptual experience provide an epistemic foundation by offering something immediately given, independent of conceptual capacities?
- Does all knowledge ultimately depend on such givens in experience?
- Sellars's answer to these questions is negative. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is a seminal work that rigorously explains why these assumptions about the given are mistaken.

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- **The book**
- *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (hereafter EPM) is a powerful direct attack on the so-called “Myth of the Given”: the idea that empirical data can, by itself, generate knowledge effectively and without the need for any prior assumptions.
- Sellars’s arguments put empiricist perspectives under serious strain, as they show that perception itself—understood by empiricists as delivering a neutral given—requires *certain presuppositions* in order to play a cognitive role, such as conceptual abilities. An uncategorized perceptual datum cannot fulfill the cognitive function we typically attribute to it.

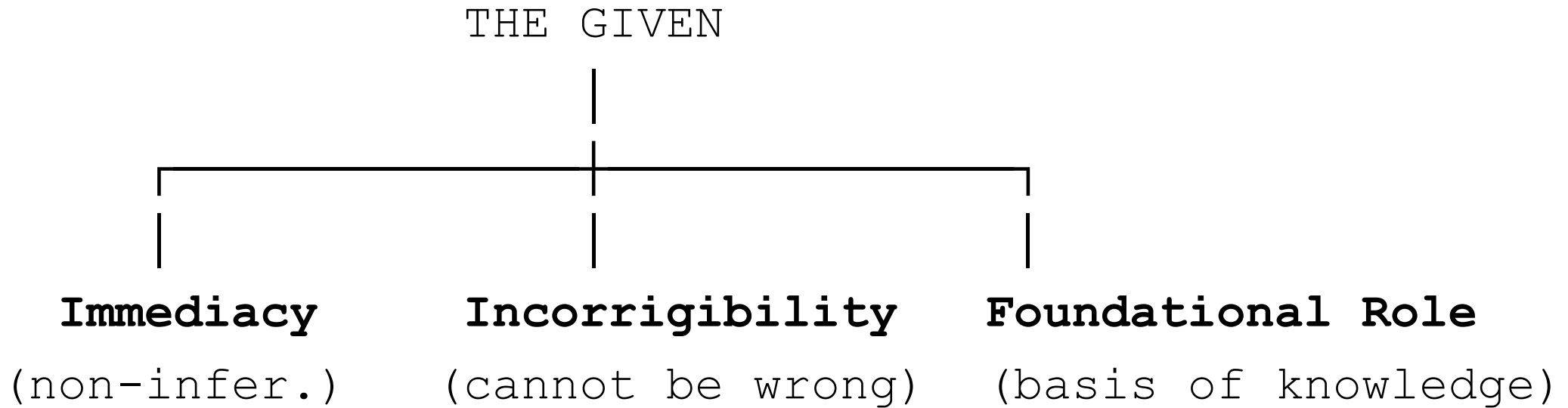
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- **Sellars's conception of philosophy**
- One of the fundamental starting points for understanding Sellars's theoretical path is his conception of philosophy:
- “The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term” (W. Sellars, *Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man*).
- This conception is far from obvious, as Sellars refers to analytic philosophy: a way of doing philosophy that employs the tools provided by advances in logic, semantics, pragmatics, cognitive science, and, to some extent, the natural sciences. Its goal is to achieve an understanding of reality guided by our best argumentative resources and generally respectful of the results coming from the various sciences. One of the cornerstones of AP is its commitment to clarity of exposition. According to AP, philosophy is an activity rather than a ‘doctrine.’

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- **Examples of the given: Sense-datum theories**
- A useful point of departure for approaching Sellars's critique of the Myth of the Given is the family of views known as sense-datum theories. These theories offer a model of perception that is **explicitly committed to a form of the given**—a commitment that Sellars will later challenge. We will return to the broader landscape of such commitments in due course; for now, sense-datum theories provide a clear and instructive example.
- According to these views, **perceptual experience is explained in terms of sense data**. Sense data are understood as mind-dependent items whose existence and properties are directly accessible to the subject. They are conceived as **primitive, unanalyzed elements of experience**—mental items that present themselves to later, more sophisticated cognitive operations exactly as they appear.
- In many formulations, sense data occupy a specific place in a temporal or causal sequence: they arise after the potential distortions introduced by our perceptual mechanisms but before the kinds of errors that can occur during higher-level conceptual processing. For this reason, they are often regarded as *in corrigible*. Sense data are thus sharply distinguished from the mind-independent objects of the external world, about which we can easily be mistaken concerning both their existence and their properties. Historically, such views have been defended by figures such as G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and C. D. Broad—and, in a somewhat different vein, by H. H. Price and A. J. Ayer.

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- THE ROADMAP
 - 1. *Ambiguity in sense-datum theories*
 - 2. *Analysis of sensing and sense contents*
 - 3. *The inconsistent triad*
 - 4. *Collapse of the sense-datum framework*
 - 5. *The broader “framework of givenness”*
 - 6. *Why sensing is not epistemic*
 - 7. *The space of reasons vs. the space of causes*
 - 8. *Sellars’s positive alternative*

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I. An Ambiguity in Sense-Datum Theories

I presume that no philosopher who has attacked the philosophical idea of givenness or, to use the Hegelian term, immediacy, has intended to deny that there is a difference between *inferring* that something is the case and, for example, *seeing* it to be the case. If the term "given" referred merely to what is observed as being observed, or, perhaps, to a proper subset of the things we are said to determine by observation, the existence of "data" would be as noncontroversial as the existence of philosophical perplexities. But, of course, this just isn't so. The phrase "the given" as a piece of professional - epistemological - shoptalk carries a substantial theoretical commitment, and one can deny that there are "data" or that anything is, in this sense, "given" without flying in the face of reason (p. 13).

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Many things have been said to be "given": sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself. And there is, indeed, a certain way of construing the situations which philosophers analyze in these terms which can be said to be the framework of givenness. This framework has been a common feature of most of the major systems of philosophy, including, to use a Kantian turn of phrase, both "dogmatic rationalism" and "skeptical empiricism." It has, indeed, been so pervasive that few, if any, philosophers have been altogether free of it; certainly not Kant, and, I would argue, not even Hegel, that great foe of "immediacy." Often what is attacked under its name are only specific varieties of "given." Intuited first principles and synthetic necessary connections were the first to come under attack. And many who today attack "the whole idea of givenness" - and they are an increasing number - are really only attacking sense data. For they transfer to other items, say physical objects or relations of appearing, the characteristic features of the "given." If, however, I begin my argument with an attack on sense datum theories, it is only as a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness (p. 14).

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2. Sense-datum theories characteristically distinguish between an *act* of awareness and, for example, the color patch which is its *object*. The act is usually called *sensing*. Classical exponents of the theory have often characterized these acts as phenomenologically simple" and "not further analyzable." But other sense-datum theorists - some of them with an equal claim to be considered "classical exponents" - have held that sensing is analyzable. And if some philosophers seem to have thought that if sensing is analyzable, then it can't be an *act*, this has by no means been the general opinion (p. 14).

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There are, indeed, deeper roots for the doubt that sensing (if there is such a thing) is an act, roots which can be traced to one of two lines of thought tangled together in classical sense-datum theory. For the moment, however, I shall simply assume that however complex (or simple) the fact that *x* is sensed may be, it has the form, whatever exactly it may be, by virtue of which for *x* to be sensed is for it to be the object of an act.

Being a sense datum, or *sensum*, is a relational property of the item that is sensed. To refer to an item which is sensed in a way which does not entail that it *is* sensed, it is necessary to use some other locution. *Sensible* has the disadvantage that it implies that sensed items could exist without being sensed, and this is a matter of controversy among sense-datum theorists. *Sense content* is, perhaps, as neutral a term as any (p. 15).

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There appear to be varieties of sensing, referred to by some as *visual sensing*, *tactual sensing* etc., and by others as *directly seeing*, *directly hearing*, etc. But it is not clear whether these are species of sensing in any full-blooded sense, or whether "x is visually sensed" amounts to no more than "x is a color patch which is sensed," "x is directly heard" than "x is a sound which is sensed" and so on. In the latter case, being a *visual sensing* or a *direct hearing* would be a relational property of an act of sensing, just as being a sense datum is a relational property of a sense content (p. 15).

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3. Now if we bear in mind that the point of the epistemological category of the given is, presumably, to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a 'foundation' of non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact, we may well experience a feeling of surprise on noting that according to sense-datum theorists, it is *particulars* that are sensed. For what is *known*, even in non-inferential knowledge, is *facts* rather than particulars, items of the form *something's-being-thus-and-so* or *something's standing in a relation to something else*. It would seem, then, that the sensing of sense contents cannot constitute knowledge, inferential or noninferential; and if so, we may well ask, what light does the concept of a sense datum throw on the 'foundations of empirical knowledge?' (pp. 15-16).

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The sense-datum theorist, it would seem, must choose between saying:

(a) It is particulars which are sensed. Sensing is not knowing. The existence of sense-data does not logically imply the existence of knowledge [**Non-epistemic version – P.S.**].

or

(b) Sensing *is* a form of knowing. It is *facts* rather than *particulars* which are sensed (p. 16) [**Epistemic version – P.S.**].

Option	Object of sensing	Nature of object	Epistemic implication
Particulars	Non-propositional items (patches, shapes, tones)	Concrete, non-repeatable	Sensing ≠ knowing
Facts	Propositional or structured items	Truth-apt, cognitive	Sensing = a kind of knowing

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Examples

[PARTICULARS]

- a red patch
- a C# tone
- this triangular shape

[FACTS]

- the patch is red
- the tone is C#
- the shape is triangular

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DEFINITIONS:

PARTICULARS: in this context, particulars are **individual items**—concrete, non-repeatable entities that one can **be directly aware of**. For a sense-datum theorist, these would be: a specific patch of red; a particular visual shape; the this-here-now sense-datum.

They are **not propositions, not truth-bearers, and not structured**. They simply are what they are. If sensing is directed at particulars, **then sensing is not a cognitive act**; sensing **does not entail knowledge**; the existence of sense data does not imply that the subject knows anything about them.

FACTS: in contrast, **facts are propositional or structured entities**—things that can be true or false, or at least **things that have a truth-apt structure**. Examples: the fact that there is a red patch; the fact that the shape is triangular; the fact that a sound is rising in pitch. **Facts are cognitive** in nature: they are the kinds of things one can know, believe, or judge. If sensing is directed at facts, **then sensing is already a form of knowing**; the immediate object of perception **is** something with propositional structure; **perception is epistemically loaded from the start**.

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On alternative (a) the fact that a sense content was sensed would be a *non-epistemic* fact about the sense content. Yet it would be hasty to conclude that this alternative precludes any logical connection between the sensing of sense contents and the possession of non-inferential knowledge. For even if the sensing of sense contents did not logically imply the existence of non-inferential knowledge, the converse might well be true. Thus, the non-inferential knowledge of particular matter of fact might logically imply the existence of sense data (for example, *seeing that a certain physical object is red* might logically imply *sensing a red content*) even though the sensing of a red sense content were not itself a cognitive fact and did not imply the possession of non-inferential knowledge. On the second alternative, (b), the sensing of sense contents would logically imply the existence of non-inferential knowledge for the simple reason that it would be this knowledge. But, once again, it would be facts rather than particulars which are sensed (pp. 16-17).

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4. Now it might seem that when confronted by this choice, the sense-datum theorist seeks to have his cake and eat it. For he characteristically insists *both* that sensing is a knowing and that it is particulars which are sensed. Yet his position is by no means as hopeless as this formulation suggests. For the 'having' and the 'eating' *can* be combined without logical nonsense provided that he uses the word *know* and, correspondingly, the word *given* in two senses (p. 17).

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He [the sense-datum theorist] must say something like the following:

The non-inferential knowing on which our world picture rests is the knowing that certain items, e.g. red sense contents, are of a certain character, e.g. red. When such a fact is noninferentially known about a sense content, I will say that the sense content is sensed *as being*, e.g., *red*. I will then say that a sense content is *sensed* (full stop) if it is *sensed as being* of a certain character, e.g. red. Finally, I will say of a sense content that it is *known* if it is sensed (full stop), to emphasize that sensing is a *cognitive* or *epistemic* fact.

Notice that, given these stipulations, it is logically necessary that if a sense content be sensed, it be sensed as being of a certain character, and that if it be sensed as being of a certain character; the fact that it is of this character be noninferentially known. Notice also that the being sensed of a sense content would be knowledge only in a stipulated sense of know. To say of a sense content - a color patch, for example - that it was 'known' would be to say that some facts about it was noninferentially known, e.g. that it was red (p. 17).

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This *stipulated* use of *know* would, however, receive aid and comfort from the fact that there is, in ordinary usage, a sense of know in which it is followed by a noun or descriptive phrase which refers to a particular, thus

Do you know John?

Do you know the President?

Because these questions are equivalent to "Are you acquainted with John?" and "Are you acquainted with the President?" the phrase "knowledge by acquaintance" recommends itself as a useful metaphor for this stipulated sense of *know* and, like other useful metaphors, has congealed into a technical term (pp. 17-18).

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5. We have seen that the fact that a sense content is a *datum* (if, indeed, there are such facts) will logically imply that someone has non-inferential knowledge *only* if to say that a sense content is given is contextually defined in terms of non-inferential knowledge of a fact about this sense content. If this is not clearly realized or held in mind, sense-datum theorists may come to think of the givenness of sense contents as the *basic* or *primitive* concept of the sense-datum framework, and thus sever the logical connection between sense data and non-inferential knowledge to which the classical form of the theory is committed. **This brings us face to face with the fact that in spite of the above considerations, many if not most sense-datum theorists have thought of the givenness of sense contents as the basic notion of the sense-datum framework (p. 18).**

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What, then, of the logical connection in the direction *sensing sense contents* → *having noninferential knowledge*? **Clearly it is severed by those who think of sensing as a unique and unanalyzable act.** Those, on the other hand, who conceive of sensing as an analyzable fact, while they have prima facie severed this connection (by taking the sensing of sense contents to be the basic concept of the sense-datum framework) will nevertheless, in a sense, have maintained it, if the result they get by analyzing *x is a sense datum* turns out to be the same as the result they get when they analyze *x is non-inferentially known to be red*. The entailment which was thrown out the front door would have sneaked in by the back (pp. 18-19).

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It is interesting to note, in this connection, that **those who, in the classical period of sense-datum theories, say from Moore's "Refutation of Idealism" until about 1938, analyzed or sketched an analysis of sensing, did so in *non-epistemic* terms.** Typically it was held that for a sense content to be sensed is for it to be an element in a certain kind of relational array of sense contents, where the relations which constitute the array are such relations as spatiotemporal juxtaposition (or overlapping), constant conjunction, mnemonic causation - even real connection and belonging to a self. **There is, however, one class of terms which is conspicuous by its absence, namely *cognitive* terms.** For these, like the 'sensing' which was under analysis, were taken to belong to a higher level of complexity (p. 19).

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Now **the idea that epistemic facts can be analyzed without remainder - even "in principle" - into non-epistemic facts**, whether phenomenal or behavioral, public or private, with no matter how lavish a sprinkling of subjunctives and hypotheticals **is, I believe, a radical mistake - a mistake of a piece with the so-called "naturalistic fallacy" in ethics**. I shall not, however, press this point for the moment, though it will be a central theme in a later stage of my argument. What I do want to stress is that whether classical sense-datum philosophers **have conceived of the givenness of sense contents** as analyzable in non-epistemic terms, or as constituted by acts which are somehow both irreducible *and* knowings, they have without exception **taken them to be fundamental in another sense** (pp. 19-20).

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6. For they have taken givenness to be **a fact which presupposes no learning, no forming of associations, no setting up of stimulus-response connections**. In short, they have **tended to equate** *sensing sense contents* with *being conscious*, as a person who has been hit on the head is *not* conscious whereas a newborn babe, alive and kicking, is conscious. They would admit, of course, that the ability to know that a *person*, namely oneself, is *now*, at a certain time, feeling a pain, *is* acquired and does presuppose a (complicated) process of concept formation. But, **they would insist, to suppose that the simple ability to *feel a pain* or *see a color*, in short, to sense sense contents, is *acquired* and involves a process of concept formation, would be very odd indeed** (p. 20).

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But if a sense-datum philosopher takes the ability to sense sense contents to be unacquired, he is clearly precluded from offering an analysis of *x senses a sense content* which presupposes acquired abilities. It follows that he could analyze *x senses red sense content s* as *x non-inferentially knows that s is red* only if he is prepared to admit that the ability to have such non-inferential knowledge as that, for example, a red sense content is red, is itself unacquired. And **this brings us face to face with the fact that most empirically minded philosophers are strongly inclined to think that all classificatory consciousness, all knowledge *that something-is-thus-and-so*, in logicians' jargon, all subsumption of particulars under universals, involves learning, concept formation, even the use of symbols [hence, it is acquired – P.S.](p. 20).**

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It is clear from the above analysis, therefore, that *classical* sense-datum theories - I emphasize the adjective, for there are other, 'heterodox,' sense-datum theories to be taken into account - are confronted by an inconsistent triad made up of the following three propositions:

- A. *X senses red content s entails x non-inferentially knows that s is red.*
- B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired .
- C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is φ* is acquired.

A and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B (pp. 20-21).

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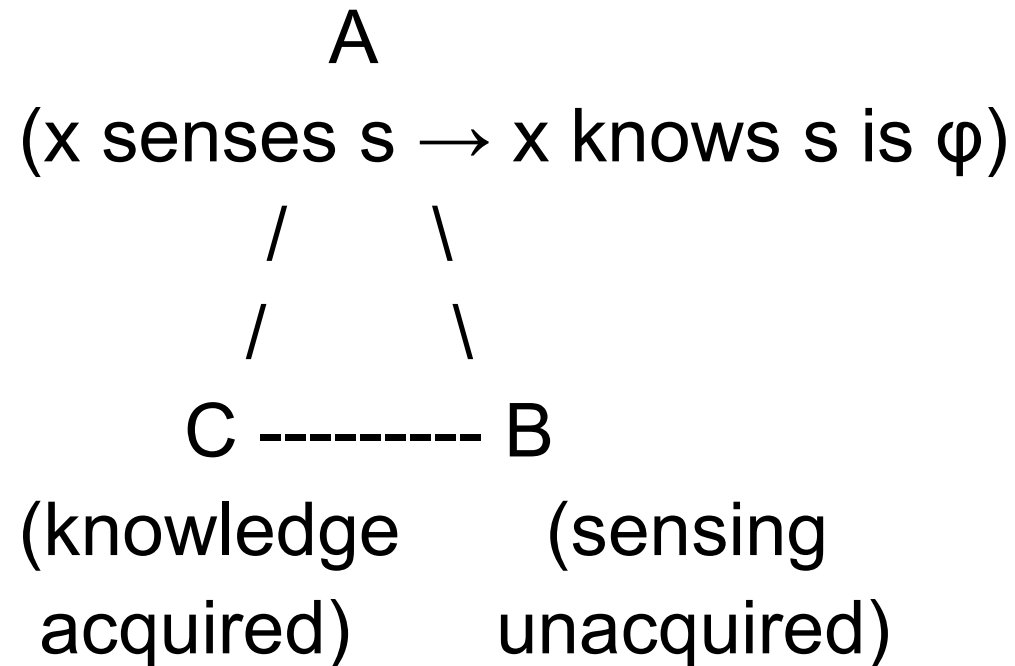
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Once the classical sense-datum theorist faces up to the fact that A, B, and C do form an inconsistent triad, which of them will he choose to abandon?

- 1) He can abandon A, in which case the sensing of sense contents becomes a noncognitive fact - a noncognitive fact, to be sure which may be a necessary condition, even a *logically* necessary condition, of noninferential knowledge, but a fact, nevertheless, which cannot *constitute* this knowledge.
- 2) He can abandon B, in which case he must pay the price of cutting off the concept of a sense datum from its connection with our ordinary talk about sensations, feelings, afterimages, tickles and itches, etc., which are usually thought by sense-datum theorists to be its common sense counterparts.
- 3) But to abandon C is to do violence to the predominantly nominalistic proclivities of the empiricist tradition (p. 21).

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THE INCONSISTENT TRIAD



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7. It certainly begins to look as though **the classical concept of a sense datum were a mongrel resulting from a crossbreeding of two ideas:**

(1) The idea that there are certain inner episodes - e.g. sensations of red or of C# which can occur to human beings (and brutes) **without any prior process of learning or concept formation**; and without which it would *in some sense* be impossible to see, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular, or *hear* that a certain physical sound is C#.

(2) The idea that **there are certain inner episodes which are the non-inferential knowings** that certain items are, for example, red or C#; and that these episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge as providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions (pp. 21-22).

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And I think that once we are on the lookout for them, **it is quite easy to see how these two ideas came to be blended together** in traditional epistemology. The *first* idea clearly arises in the attempt to explain the facts of sense perception in scientific style. How does it happen that people can have the experience which they describe by saying "It is as though I were seeing a red and triangular physical object" when either there is no physical object there at all, or, if there is, it is neither red nor triangular? The explanation, roughly, posits that **in every case in which a person has an experience of this kind, whether veridical or not, he has what is called a 'sensation' or 'impression' 'of a red triangle.'** The core idea is that the proximate cause of such a sensation is *only for the most part* **brought about by the presence in the neighborhood of the perceiver of a red and triangular physical object;** and that while a baby, say, can have the 'sensation of a red triangle' without either *seeing* or *seeming to see that the facing side of a physical object is red and triangular*, there usually *looks, to adults, to be* a physical object with a red and triangular facing surface, when they are caused to have a 'sensation of a red triangle;' while *without* such a sensation, no such experience can be had (p. 22).

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I shall have a great deal more to say about this kind of 'explanation' of perceptual situations in the course of my argument. What I want to emphasize for the moment, however, is that, as far as the above formulation goes, **there is no reason to suppose that having the sensation of a red triangle is a cognitive or epistemic fact.** There is, of course, a temptation to assimilate "having a sensation of a red triangle" to "thinking of a celestial city" and to attribute to the former the epistemic character, the 'intentionality' of the latter. But this temptation *could* be resisted, and it *could* be held that having a sensation of a red triangle is a fact *sui generis* neither epistemic nor physical, having its own logical grammar. Unfortunately, **the idea that there are such things as sensations of red triangles** - in itself, as we shall see, quite legitimate, though not without its puzzles - **seems to fit the requirements of another, and less fortunate, line of thought** so well that it has almost invariably been distorted to give the latter a reinforcement without which it would long ago have collapsed. This unfortunate, but familiar, line of thought runs as follows (p. 23).

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The seeing that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular **is a *veridical* member of a class of experiences let us call them 'ostensible seeings' - some of the members of which are non-veridical**; and there is **no inspectible hallmark which guarantees that any such experience is veridical**. To suppose that the non-inferential knowledge on which our world picture rests consists of such ostensible seeings, hearings, etc., as *happen* to be veridical is to place empirical knowledge **on too precarious a footing** - indeed, to open the door to skepticism by making a mockery of the word *knowledge* in the phrase "empirical knowledge." Now it is, of course, possible to delimit subclasses of ostensible seeings, hearings, etc., which are progressively less precarious, i.e. more reliable, by specifying the circumstances in which they occur, and the vigilance of the perceiver. **But the possibility that any given ostensible seeing, hearing, etc., is non-veridical can never be entirely eliminated**. Therefore, given that the foundation of empirical knowledge cannot consist of the veridical members of a class not all the members of which are veridical, and from which the non-veridical members cannot be weeded out by 'inspection,' **this foundation cannot consist of such items as *seeing that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular*** (pp. 23-24).

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Thus baldly put, scarcely anyone would accept this conclusion. Rather they would take the contrapositive of the argument, and reason that **since the foundation of empirical knowledge is the non-inferential knowledge of such facts**, it does consist of members of a class which contains nonveridical members. But before it is thus baldly put, it gets tangled up with the first line of thought. The idea springs to mind that *sensations of red triangles* have exactly the virtues which ostensible seeings of red triangular surfaces lack. To begin with, the grammatical similarity of 'sensation of a red triangle' to "thought of a celestial city" is interpreted to mean, or, better, **gives rise to the presupposition, that sensations belong in the same general pigeonhole as thoughts** – in short, are **cognitive facts**. Then, it is noticed that sensations are *ex hypothesi* **far more intimately related to mental processes than external physical objects**. It would seem easier to "get at" a red triangle of which we are having a sensation, than to "get at" a red and triangular physical surface (p. 24).

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But, above all, it is the fact that it *doesn't make sense* to speak of unveridical sensations which strikes these philosophers, though for it to strike them as it does, they must overlook the fact that **if it makes sense to speak of an experience as veridical it must correspondingly make sense to speak of it as unveridical**. Let me emphasize that not *all* sense-datum theorists - even of the classical type - have been guilty of all these confusions; nor are these *all* the confusions of which sense-datum theorists have been guilty. I shall have more to say on this topic later. But the confusions I have mentioned are central to the tradition, and will serve my present purpose. For **the upshot of blending all these ingredients together is the idea that a sensation of a red triangle is the very paradigm of empirical knowledge**. And I think that it can readily be seen that this idea leads straight to the orthodox type of sense-datum theory and accounts for the **perplexities which arise** when one tries to think it through (pp. 24-25).

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- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- An Ambiguity in Sense- Datum Theories *Section 1*: Sellars announces that his project is to attack "the whole framework of givenness." By this he does not mean to be undercutting the distinction between judgments we arrive at noninferentially, paradigmatically through perception, and those that are arrived at as the conclusions of inferences. Indeed, one of the positive tasks of the essay is precisely to **tell us how to understand noninferential reports without insensibly sliding into the constellation of philosophical commitments that Sellars calls "the Myth of the Given."** Sense-datum theories, his immediate target, are important only as **prominent and influential instances** of the appeal to givenness. We will have to learn to recognize such appeals in many less obvious guises (p. 120).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- In these opening sections, the Myth of the Given shows up in the guise of the idea that **some kind of non-epistemic facts** about knowers could **entail epistemic facts** about them. 1 Epistemic facts about knowers are in the first instance facts about what someone *knows* (though we will come to see that facts about what one merely *believes* are equally 'epistemic' facts in Sellars's sense). One of Descartes's signal innovations was to define the mind in epistemic terms: **for a state to be a mental state is for *being* in that state to entail *knowing* that one is in that state** (transparency, ruling out ignorance) **and for *believing* that one is in that state to entail *being* in that state** (incorrigibility, ruling out error). The mind is the realm of what is known *immediately*, not just in the sense of noninferentially, but in the stronger sense that its **goings-on are given to us in a way that banishes the possibility both of ignorance and of error**. (Descartes's thought was that if anything is known to us *mediately*, that is, by means of representations of it, then something - some kind of representations - must be known to us *immediately*, on pain of an infinite regress.) Sellars will try to show us that the Cartesian way of talking about the mind is **the result of confusion about the distinction between epistemic and nonepistemic items**, and the roles they can play in various sorts of explanation (p. 121).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- In its most familiar form, the Myth of the Given blurs the distinction between **sentience** and **sapience**. This is the distinction between being aware in the sense of being merely *awake* (which we share with nondiscursive animals – those that do not grasp concepts), on the one hand, and, on the other hand, being aware in a sense that involves knowledge either by *being* a kind of knowledge, or as potentially serving to *justify* judgments that so qualify. **The "idea that a sensation of a red triangle is the very paradigm of empirical knowledge" [7] is a paradigm of the sort of conflation in question.** The Myth of the Given is the idea that there can be a kind of *awareness* that has two properties. First, it is or entails having a certain sort of knowledge - perhaps not of other things, but at least that one is in that state, or a state of that kind - knowledge that the one whose state it is possesses simply in virtue of being in that state. Second, it entails that the capacity to have that sort of awareness, to be in that sort of state, **does not presuppose** the acquisition of any *concepts* - that one can be aware in that sense independently of and antecedently to grasping or mastering the use of any concepts (paradigmatically through language learning). The conclusion of Sellars's critical argument is that **these two features are incompatible**: only what is propositionally contentful, and so conceptually articulated, can serve as (or, for that matter, stand in need of) a justification, and so ground or constitute knowledge. Davidson expresses a version of this thought with the slogan, "Nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief." Sellars's thought is better captured by changing this to "Nothing can count as a reason for endorsing a believable except another believable," where believables are the contents of possible beliefs, that is, what is propositionally contentful (pp. 121-123).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- Sellars understands propositional contentfulness, **what is epistemic** in the sense of being a candidate for knowledge, **in terms of role in what he calls "the game of giving and asking for reasons."** "In characterizing an episode or state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of *justifying* and being able to justify what one says" [36]. To treat something **as even a candidate** for knowledge is at once to talk about its **potential role in inference, as premise and conclusion**. Because a crucial distinguishing feature of epistemic facts for Sellars is that their expression requires the use of *normative* vocabulary, to treat something as a candidate for knowledge is also to raise the issue of its *normative* status. The Myth of the Given eventually appears as "of a piece with the naturalistic fallacy in ethics" - **the attempt to derive ought from is**. This is because talk of knowledge is inevitably talk of what (conceptually articulated propositional contents) someone is **committed to**, and whether he is in various senses **entitled to those commitments** (p. 123).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- *Section 2*: Here Sellars distinguishes between **the act** or episode of *sensing*, on the one hand, and **the content** of that act, what is sensed, which is called a sense content, on the other. When one hallucinates a pink elephant, doing so is sensing, and the sense-content is what makes it an of-a-pinkelephant hallucination, rather than, for instance, an of-a-green-Norway-rat hallucination. In ordinary perception, the contents sensed must be carefully distinguished from the external objects sensed (which are entirely absent in the case of hallucinations) (pp. 123-124).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- *Section 3*: Now consider the suitability of sensings of sense contents as foundations of knowledge and justification on the Cartesian model. The general idea of a foundation for knowledge can be sketched as follows. Our beliefs constitute knowledge only insofar as they are not only true, but *justified* - **lucky guesses don't qualify**. One claim or belief can justify another to which it is inferentially related. If one is justified in a commitment to the claim that p , and q may be inferred from p , then **one may for that reason be justified** in a commitment to the claim that q . To say this is to offer a mechanism whereby justification **can be inherited**. But, the thought is, **not all commitments that are justified can have inherited that status inferentially from others. There must be** some other mechanism for **acquiring positive justification status**, to give the inheritance mechanism something to pass along. If p_1 inherits its status from p_2 , and p_2 inherits it from p_3 , and so on, then either

at some point a claim is repeated (some p_n is identical with a p_m for $m < n$), in which case the 'justification' is circular,

or

there never is a repetition, in which case an infinite regress arises, in which each p_n has the anomalous status of an unjustified 'justifier,' which is not itself justified until an infinite number of other claims have been justified (pp. 124-125).

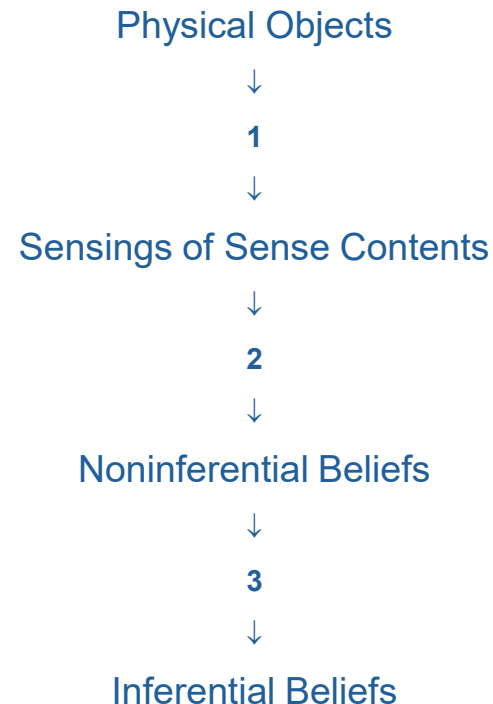
Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- The conclusion is that **there must be** some way of being justified without having to *be* justified. We ought to distinguish two senses of 'justification,' one indicating a status (being justified), and the other making reference to a process (justifying) that can result in possession of the status. Then the conclusion is that there must be some other way of acquiring positive justificatory status besides *justifying* it in the sense of offering a justification. Besides inferential inheritance, **there must also be some noninferential acquisition mechanism** for this epistemic status.

So far, so good. Descartes concluded from this line of thought that there is a kind of claim or belief, call it a *basic* belief, that forms the foundation of all other beliefs in the sense that these beliefs are the font from which the justificatory status of all the rest flows inferentially. This does not follow, but Sellars will not contest it. Descartes believed further that unless those beliefs were certain (the ultimate positive justificatory status), none of those inferentially based upon them could even be probable (as C.I. Lewis put it in *Mind and the World Order*) (pp. 125-126).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- Descartes gave philosophy a decisive epistemic turn which was, at least until Kant, confused with a subjective turn. The latter is a consequence only of Descartes's peculiar and optional way of working out the former. For he defined the mind by its epistemic status, as what is best known to itself by falling within the reach of the subject's incorrigibility and local omniscience. This epistemic definition is what motivates the assimilation of events whose contents are structured like *sentences*, such as thinking that Vienna is a city in Austria, and events whose contents are structured like *pictures*, such as imagining or seeming to see a red triangle inside a green circle. To return to the idea of using sensings of sense contents as a foundation of knowledge, then, a process is pictured something like this:



Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- In the standard perceptual case, it is *because* there is a red object with an octagonal facing surface in front of me that I find myself with a sensing of a red and octagonal sense content. It is *because* I have such a sense content that I acquire the noninferential belief that there is a red and octagonal object in front of me. And it is *because* I have this belief, together, perhaps, with other beliefs, that I am justified in the further inferential belief that there is a stop sign in front of me.

The point to focus on is the nature of the 'because's'. **The first (arrow 1) can be understood as a causal notion**, perhaps the sort studied by students of the neurophysiology of perception. As such, it relates particulars describable in a nonnormative vocabulary. This is a matter-of-factual, **nonepistemic** relation. **The final 'because' (arrow 3)**, on the other hand, indicates the sort of relation Sellars calls '**epistemic**.' It is an **inferential notion**, relating sententially structured beliefs (or believables) which are repeatable abstracta - **a matter of reasons rather than causes**. This justificatory relation is not a natural one, but a **normative** one; it is not the empirical scientist, but the logician or epistemologist who has the final say about it.

The question is, **what sort of relation is the middle one (arrow 2)?** Does it belong in a box with the first, causal relation, or in a box with the third, inferential relation? How are the sensings of sense contents to be conceived as related to (potentially foundational) noninferential beliefs? Here is where the distinction between the epistemic and the nonepistemic, between particulars specified in the language of causes and believables specified in the language of reasons, comes into play (p. 127).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- Suppose that one understands the sensing of a sense content to be the existence of a nonepistemic relation between one particular, the sense content, and another, the person doing the sensing. (This is the position Sellars himself eventually endorses.) If so, then **it is hard to see how the sensing of a sense content could entail or justify a claim, for instance, a noninferential belief.** For only things with sentential structure **can be premises** of inference, not nonepistemically specified particulars. For this reason **sensings, understood in terms of nonepistemic relations between sense contents and perceivers, are not well suited to serve as the ultimate ground to which inferentially inherited justification traces back.** Since the occurrence of such a sensing **does not** entail commitment to any claim, it would be possible to have one without coming to believe anything, and certainly without coming to know anything (for this latter requires positive justificatory status). So it seems the foundationalist who wants to appeal to sensings as foundational must take the sensing of a sense content **to be** an epistemic fact about the sensing agent. **But if so, what becomes of the particular?** (pp. 127-128)

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- *Sections 4 and 5*: The sense-datum theorist can treat sensings as epistemic noninferential beliefs, from which inferences may be made and justification status inherited, so that sensings can perform their foundational function. To retain a role for the mental particulars that are sensed (sense data, sense contents conceived as a kind of sensed object), that theorist must be willing to say the following: "The primitive notion is believing that sense content x has property F . To sense the sense content x is to believe that it has some (no matter what) characteristic F . The sense content, which is a particular, is the intentional object of the epistemic sensing." The important thing to notice about this analysis is that **epistemic notions are presupposed, not accounted for in terms of a supposedly antecedently understood nonepistemic notion of sensing a sense content** (thought of as a relation between a subject and a sense content, both of them particulars). In fact Sellars believes that **no such reduction of the epistemic to the nonepistemic is possible**, even in principle though his arguments will not depend on this claim (pp. 128-129).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- *Section 6*: At this point a further consideration is introduced: **the ability to stand in the passive causal relations to the physical world** envisaged by the fans of givenness is **not something that must be acquired** through experience or training. Organisms of the right sort get it just by being awake. But **the capacity to have beliefs of the form 'x is F' involves classifying unrepeatables or particulars under repeatables or universals**. It is natural to think that **the capacity to classify is acquired**, since one must learn by experience and training what the boundaries of the classes are. This line of thought results in the inconsistent triad of claims that the sense-datum theorist is committed to, and would like to be entitled to
 - A. 'S senses red sense content x entails 'S noninferentially believes (knows) that x is red.'
 - B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired .
 - C. The capacity to have classificatory beliefs of the form 'x is F' is acquired.
- **If A is given up, the sensing of sense contents becomes a nonepistemic event**, which can at best be a **logically necessary condition** of knowledge or noninferential beliefs, not a logically sufficient condition of it. To take this way out would be to discard the line pursued in [4] and [5]. **If B is given up**, the sense-datum theorist must either claim that **we need practice to feel pain, hunger, itches**, and so on when we are infants, **or claim that feeling these things is not sensing**. But then **what** is sensing? **If C is given up**, a story must be told about what universal concepts are innate (unacquired, inborn, wired-in) and which are not. **This would require much more than even latter-day innatists such as Chomsky have claimed**, since substantive concepts like red and tall not merely grammatical forms, would have to be innate. A is the Myth of the Given, in one of its forms, and Sellars will give it up. He'll then owe (and provide) us a **new account of both thoughts and sensations**, and of the origins (both in the order of causation and in the order of justification) of knowledge (pp. 129-130).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 1-7)
- Section 7: Sellars's diagnosis, which is not yet a treatment for the conceptual illness of givenness, is that **it results from confusing two trains of thought**, the first derived from **an attempt to give a scientific account of perception and the acquisition of empirical information**, and the second from **an attempt to give a foundational epistemological account on the Cartesian model** canvassed above in the discussion of [3]:
 1. The idea that there are certain inner episodes - e.g., sensations of red or of C# which can occur to human beings (and brutes) **without any prior process of learning or concept formation**; and without which it would in some sense be impossible to see, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular, or hear that a certain physical sound is C#.
 2. The idea that there are certain inner episodes which are **the noninferential knowings** that certain items are, for example, red or C#; and that these episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge as providing evidence for all other empirical propositions.
- The first class consists **of particulars**, picked out by their causal role. The second consists **of claimings structured like sentences**, picked out by their inferential or justificatory role. Sellars will offer an account (starting in [45]) of the genus, inner episode, to which these two species belong. He will call the first kind 'sense impressions,' and the second kind 'thoughts,' and will describe the roles they play. Finally, he will explain how they are related in human knowledge. (I have talked about belief so far, where Sellars talks about knowledge, in order to emphasize that the question of the *justification* of or warrant for noninferential beliefs has yet to be discussed.) The result of running together these two lines of thought is "the idea that a sensation of a red triangle is the very paradigm of empirical knowledge." That idea is subject to precisely those related 'perplexities' that Sellars has pointed out:
- Should we think of the sensation in question as a kind of *particular* (structured like a triangle), or as a kind of *belief* (structured like a sentence)?
- Is the capacity to have empirical knowledge like this acquired by experience, or prior to experience?
- Is it prior to the rest of our knowledge in the order of *causation*, or in the order of *justification* and evidence? (pp. 130-131)

Sellars on the myth of the given

- **SECTION II The Myth of the Given and “Another Language”**
- **Sellars’ Target:** The idea that there is a foundational “given”—non-inferential, immediately known items (e.g., sense data) that ground all empirical knowledge.
- **Key Move in Section II:**
Sellars considers the claim that reports like
 - “This is green”
 - are grounded in a more basic, private awareness—as if there were an *inner language* of immediate experiences.
 - He asks:
 - Are such reports simply expressions of raw awareness?
 - Or do they already presuppose conceptual capacities?
- **Central Thesis:** Even the most basic observational reports belong to a *public, rule-governed language*. There is no epistemically autonomous “inner language” underneath it.

Sellars on the myth of the given

- **SECTION II - Why the 'Given' Would Have to Be a Language**
- **Sellars' dilemma:**
- If something is to justify beliefs, it must:
- Stand in logical relations; Function as a reason; Be assessable as correct or incorrect
- But anything that plays this role must:
- Operate within rules; Belong to a conceptual framework; Be part of a language game
- So if the "given" is to justify beliefs, it would have to function like **another language**—a structured, rule-governed system, but then it is **no longer** pre-conceptual or foundational.
- **Conclusion:** Either the given cannot justify beliefs, or it is already conceptual—and thus not "given."

Sellars on the myth of the given

- **SECTION II - The Space of Reasons**
- Sellars introduces a crucial distinction:
- **Causal order** → sensations happen;
- **Logical (normative) order** → claims justify other claims.
- The Myth of the Given **confuses** being caused by an experience with being justified by it.
- Observation reports are non-inferential (we don't infer them), **but still** conceptual and rule-governed. They belong to what Sellars later calls "**the space of reasons.**"
- There is **no foundation of knowledge** in raw, pre-conceptual awareness. All justification occurs within a normative, linguistic practice.

Sellars on the myth of the given

- **Brandom on Section II: Why “Another Language” Matters**
- **Brandom’s Central Point:**
- Sellars’ attack on “another language” shows that there cannot be a **pre-conceptual, foundational layer** of awareness that plays a justificatory role.
- **1. The Normative Point**
- To count as a *reason*, something must stand in inferential relations; be governed by rules, be assessable as correct or incorrect.
- That already places it in what Brandom calls **the space of reasons**. So the “Given” would have to be conceptually articulated—which **contradicts** its supposed immediacy.

Sellars on the myth of the given

- **2. Noninferential ≠ Nonconceptual**
- Brandom stresses Sellars' crucial distinction:
- **Noninferential reports** (e.g., "This is green") are *not inferred* from other claims
- BUT
- They are still **conceptually structured performances**; They have a role in a public inferential practice; Observation reports are moves in a game of giving and asking for reasons.
- Brandom interprets Section II as showing that justification is not built on raw sensory items, it is built on **norm-governed social practices**; The Myth of the Given **mistakes causal impact for rational authority**.
- Sellars replaces epistemic foundationalism with an **inferentialist, socially articulated account of meaning and knowledge**.

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III. The Logic of 'Looks'

10. Before turning aside to examine the suggestion that the language of sense data is "another language" for the situations described by the so-called "language of appearing," I had concluded that classical sense-datum theories, when pressed, reveal themselves to be the result of a mismating of two ideas: (1) The idea that there are certain "inner episodes," e.g. the sensation of a red triangle or of a C# sound, which occur to human beings and brutes without any prior process of learning or concept formation, and without which it would -in *some* sense - be impossible to see, for example, that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular, or *hear* that a certain physical sound is C#; (2) The idea that there are certain "inner episodes" which are the noninferential knowings that, for example, a certain item is red and triangular, or, in the case of sounds, C#, which inner episodes are the necessary conditions of empirical knowledge as providing the evidence for all other empirical propositions. If this diagnosis is correct, a reasonable next step would be to examine these two ideas and determine how that which survives criticism in each is properly to be combined with the other. Clearly we would have to come to grips with the idea of *inner episodes*, for this is common to both (pp. 32-33).

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Many who attack the idea of the given seem to have thought that the central mistake embedded in this idea is exactly the idea that there are inner episodes, whether thoughts or so-called "immediate experiences," to which each of us has privileged access. I shall argue that this is just not so, and that the Myth of the Given can be dispelled without resorting to the crude verificationisms or operationalisms characteristic of the more dogmatic forms of recent empiricism. Then there are those who, while they do not reject the idea of inner episodes, find the Myth of the Given to consist in the idea that knowledge of these episodes furnishes *premises* on which empirical knowledge rests as on a foundation. But while this idea has, indeed, been the most widespread form of the Myth, it is far from constituting its essence (p. 33).

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Everything hinges on why these philosophers reject it. If, for example, it is on the ground that the learning of a language is a *public* process which proceeds in a domain of *public* objects and is governed by *public* sanctions, so that *private* episodes -with the exception of a mysterious nod in their direction -must needs escape the net of rational discourse, then, while these philosophers are immune to the form of the myth which has flowered in sense-datum theories, they have no defense against the myth in the form of the givenness of such facts as that *physical object x looks red to person S at time t*, or that *there looks to person S at time t to be a red physical object over there*. It will be useful to pursue the Myth in this direction for a while before more general issues are raised (pp. 33-34).

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11. Philosophers have found it easy to suppose that such a sentence as "The tomato looks red to Jones" says that a certain triadic relation, *looking* or *appearing*, obtains among a physical object, a person, and a quality. "A looks ϕ to S" is assimilated to "x gives y to z" -or, better, since giving is, strictly speaking, an action rather than a relation - to "x is between y and z," and taken to be a case of the general form" $R(x,y,z)$. "Having supposed this, they turn without further ado to the question, "Is this relation analyzable?" Sense-datum theorists have, on the whole, answered "Yes," and claimed that facts of the form *x looks red to X* are to be analyzed in terms of sense data. Some of them, without necessarily rejecting this claim, have argued that facts of this kind are, at the very least, to be *explained* in terms of sense data (p. 34).

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Thus, when Broad (4) writes "If, in fact, nothing elliptical is before my mind, it is very hard to understand why the penny should seem *elliptical* rather than of any other shape (p. 240)," he is appealing to sense-data as a means of *explaining* facts of this form. The difference, of course, is that whereas if x looks ϕ to S is correctly *analyzed* in terms of sense data, then no one could believe that x looks ϕ to S without believing that S has sense data, the same need not be true if x looks ϕ to S is explained in terms of sense data, for, in the case of some types of explanation, at least, one can believe a fact without believing its explanation.

On the other hand, those philosophers who reject sense-datum theories in favor of so-called theories of appearing have characteristically held that facts of the form x looks ϕ to S are ultimate and irreducible, and that sense data are needed neither for their analysis nor for their explanation. If asked, "Doesn't the statement ' x looks red to S ' have as part of its meaning the idea that s stands in some relation to something that *is* red?" their answer is in the negative, and, I believe, rightly so (pp. 34-35).

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12. I shall begin my examination of "X looks red to S at t" with the simple but fundamental point that the sense of "red" in which things look red is, on the face of it, the same as that in which things are red. When one glimpses an object and decides that it looks red (to *me*, *now*, from *here*) and wonders whether it really *is* red, one is surely wondering whether the color - red - which it looks to have is the one it really does have. This point can be obscured by such verbal manipulations as hyphenating the words "looks" and "red" and claiming that it is the insoluble unity "looks-red" and not just "looks" which is the relation. Insofar as this dodge is based on insight, it is insight into the fact that *looks* is not a relation between a person, a thing, and a quality. Unfortunately, as we shall see, the reason for this fact is one which gives no comfort at all to the idea that it is *looks-red* rather than *looks* which is the relation (p. 35).

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I have, in effect, been claiming that *being red* is logically prior, is a logically simpler notion, than *looking red*; the function "x is red" to "x looks red to y." In short, that it just won't do to say that x *is* red is analyzable in terms of x *looks* red to y. But what, then, are we to make of the necessary truth and it is, of course, a necessary truth –that

x *is* red $\cdot \equiv \cdot$ x would look red to standard observers in standard conditions? [$\cdot \equiv \cdot$ **stands for the spelling out of the conceptual role of something, in this case of "X is red"**]

There is certainly some sense to the idea that this is at least the schema for a definition of physical redness in terms of *looking red*. One begins to see the plausibility of the gambit that *looking-red* is an insoluble unity, for the minute one gives "red" (on the right-hand side) an independent status, it becomes what it obviously is, namely "red" as a predicate of physical objects, and the supposed definition becomes an obvious circle (p. 36).

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13. The way out of this troubling situation has two parts. The *second* is to show how "x is red" can be necessarily equivalent to "x would look red to standard observers in standard situations" without this being a definition of "x is red" in terms of "x looks red." But the *first*, and logically prior, step is to show that "x looks red to S" does not assert either an unanalyzable triadic relation to obtain between x, red, and S, or an unanalyzable dyadic relation to obtain between x and S. Not, however, because it asserts an analyzable relation to obtain, but because *looks* is not a relation at all. Or, to put the matter in a familiar way, one can say that *looks* is a relation if he likes, for the sentences in which this word appears show some grammatical analogies to sentences built around words which we should not hesitate to classify as relation words; but once one has become aware of certain other features which make them very unlike ordinary relation sentences, he will be less inclined to view his task as that of finding the answer to the question "Is looks a relation?" (pp. 36-37).

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14. To bring out the essential features of the use of "looks," I shall engage in a little historical fiction. A young man, whom I shall call John, works in a necktie shop. He has learned the use of color words in the usual way, with this exception. I shall suppose that he has never looked at an object in other than standard conditions. As he examines his stock every evening before closing up shop, he says, "This is red," "That is green," "This is purple," etc., and such of his linguistic peers as happen to be present nod their heads approvingly (p. 37).

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Let us suppose, now, that at this point in the story, electric lighting is invented. His friends and neighbors rapidly adopt this new means of illumination, and wrestle with the problems it presents. John, however, is the last to succumb. Just after it has been installed in his shop, one of his neighbors, Jim, comes in to buy a necktie.

"Here is a handsome green one," says John.

"But it *isn't* green," says Jim, and takes John outside.

"Well," says John, "it was green in there, but now it is blue."

"No," says Jim, "you know that neckties don't change their color merely as a result of being taken from place to place."

"But perhaps electricity changes their color and they change back again in daylight?"

"That would be a queer kind of change, wouldn't it?" says Jim.

"I suppose so," says bewildered John. "But we saw that it was green *in there*" (p. 37).

-John

-Jim

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"No, we didn't see that it was green in there, because it wasn't green, and you can't see what isn't so!"

"Well, this is a pretty pickle," says John. "I just don't know what to say."

The next time John picks up this tie in his shop and someone asks what color it is, his first impulse is to say "It is green." He suppresses this impulse, and, remembering what happened before, comes out with "It is blue." He doesn't see that it is blue, nor would he say that he sees it to be blue. What does he see? Let us ask him.

"I don't know *what* to say. If I didn't know that the tie is blue – and the alternative to granting this is odd indeed – I would swear that I was seeing a green tie and seeing that it is green. It is *as though* I were seeing the necktie to be green" (p. 38).

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If we bear in mind that such sentences as "This is green" have both a *fact-stating* and a *reporting* use, we can put the point I have just been making by saying that once John learns to stifle the *report* "This necktie is green" when looking at it in the shop, there is no other *report* about color and the necktie which he knows how to make. To be sure, he now says, "This necktie is blue." But he is **not making a *reporting* use** of this sentence. He uses it as the **conclusion of an inference** (p. 38).

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15. We return to the shop after an interval, and we find that when John is asked "What is the color of this necktie?" he makes such statements as "It looks green, but take it outside and see." It occurs to us that perhaps in learning to say "This tie *looks* green" when in the shop, he has learned to make a new kind of report. Thus, it might seem as though his linguistic peers have helped him to notice a new kind of *objective* fact, one which, though a relational fact involving a perceiver, is as logically independent of the beliefs, the conceptual framework of the perceiver, as the fact that the necktie is blue; but a *minimal fact*, one which it is safer to report because one is less likely to be mistaken. Such a minimal fact would be the fact that the necktie looks green to John on a certain occasion, and it would be properly reported by using the sentence "This necktie *looks* green." It is this type of account, of course, which I have already rejected.

But what is the alternative? If, that is, we are not going to adopt the sense-datum analysis. Let me begin by noting that there certainly seems to be something to the idea that the sentence "This looks green to me now" has a reporting role. Indeed, it would seem to be essentially a report. But if so, **what does it report**, if not a **minimal objective fact**, and if what it reports is **not to be analyzed in terms of sense data**? (pp. 38-39).

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16. Let me next call attention to the fact that the experience of having something look green to one at a certain time is, insofar as it is an experience, obviously very much like that of seeing something to be green, insofar as the latter is an experience. But the latter, of course, **is not *just* an experience**. And **this is the heart of the matter**. For to say that a certain experience is a *seeing that* something is the case, **is to do more than describe the experience**. It is to characterize it as, so to speak, **making an assertion or claim, and - which is the point I wish to stress - to endorse that claim**. As a matter of fact, as we shall see, it is much more easy to see that the statement "Jones sees that the tree is green" **ascribes a propositional claim** to Jones' experience and **endorses it**, than to specify how the statement *describes* Jones' experience. I realize that by speaking of experiences **as containing propositional claims**, I may seem to be knocking at closed doors. I ask the reader to bear with me, however, as the justification of this way of talking is one of my major aims. If I am permitted to issue this verbal currency now, I hope to put it on the gold standard before concluding the argument (pp. 39-40).

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16. **[Yes, there are two 16.]** It is clear that the experience of seeing that something is green is **not merely** the occurrence of the propositional claim 'this is green' - not even if we add, as we must, that this claim is, so to speak, evoked or wrung from the perceiver by the object perceived. [...]. The something more is clearly what philosophers have in mind when they speak of "visual impressions" or "immediate visual experiences." What exactly is the logical status of these "impressions" or "immediate experiences" is a problem which will be with us for the remainder of this argument. For the moment it is the propositional claim which concerns us.

I pointed out above that when we use the word "see" as in "S sees that the tree is green" we are **not only ascribing a claim** to the experience, but **endorsing it**. It is this endorsement which Ryle has in mind when he refers to *seeing that something is thus and so* as an *achievement*, and to "sees" as an *achievement word*. I prefer to call it a "so it is" or "just so" word, for the root idea is that of truth. To characterize S's experience as a *seeing* is, in a suitably broad sense - which I shall be concerned to explicate - **to apply** the semantical concept of truth **to that experience** (p. 40).

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Now the suggestion I wish to make is, in its simplest terms, that the statement "X looks green to Jones" **differs from** "Jones sees that x is green" in that whereas **the latter both ascribes a propositional claim** to Jones' experience **and endorses it**, the former ascribes the claim **but does not** endorse it. This is the essential difference between the two, for it is clear that two experiences may be identical *as experiences*, and yet one be **properly referred to as a seeing** that something is green, and the other **merely as a case of something's looking green**. Of course, if I say "*X merely looks green to S*" I am not only failing to endorse the claim, I am **rejecting it**.

Thus, when I say "X looks green to me now" **I am reporting the fact** that my experience is, so to speak, intrinsically, *as an experience*, indistinguishable from a veridical one of seeing that x is green. Involved in the report is the ascription to my experience of the claim 'X is green'; and **the fact that I make this report rather than the simple report "X is green" indicates** that certain considerations have operated to raise, so to speak in a higher court, the question **'to endorse or not to endorse.'** I may have reason to think that x may not after all be green.

If I make at one time the report "X looks to be green" - which is not only a report, but **the withholding of an endorsement** - I may later, when the original reasons for withholding endorsement have been rebutted, endorse the original claim by saying "I saw that it was green, though at the time I was only sure that it looked green." Notice that I will only say "I see that x is green" (as opposed to "X is green") **when the question "to endorse or not to endorse" has come up**. "I see that x is green" belongs, so to speak, on the same level as "X looks green" and "X merely looks green" (pp. 40-41).

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17. There are many interesting and subtle questions about the dialectics of "looks talk," into which I do not have the space to enter. Fortunately, the above distinctions suffice for our present purposes. Let us suppose, then, that to say that "X looks green to S at t" is, in effect, to say that S has that kind of experience which, **if one were prepared to endorse the propositional claim it involves**, one would characterize *as seeing x as green at t*. Thus, when our friend John learns to use the sentence "This necktie looks green to me" he learns a **way of reporting** an experience of the kind which, as far as any categories I have yet permitted him to have are concerned, he can only characterize by saying that as an experience it does not differ from seeing something to be green, and that **evidence for the proposition** 'This necktie is green' is *ipso facto* **evidence for the proposition** that the experience in question is *seeing that the necktie is green* (pp. 41-42).

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Now one of the chief merits of this account is that it permits a parallel treatment of 'qualitative' and 'existential' seeming or looking. Thus, when I say "The tree looks bent" **I am endorsing that part of the claim involved in my experience which concerns the existence of the tree**, but **withholding endorsement from the rest**. On the other hand, when I say "There looks to be a bent tree over there" I am **refusing to endorse** any but the most general aspect of the claim, namely, that there is an 'over there' as opposed to a 'here.' Another merit of the account is that it explains how a necktie, for example, can look red to S at t, without looking scarlet or crimson or any other determinate shade of red. In short it explains how things can have a *merely generic* look, a fact which would be puzzling indeed if looking red were a *natural* as opposed to *epistemic* fact about objects. The core of the explanation, of course, is that the propositional claim involved in such an experience may be, for example, either the more determinable claim 'This is red' or the more determinate claim 'This is crimson.' The complete story is more complicated, and requires some account of the role in these experiences of the 'impressions' or 'immediate experiences' the logical status of which remains **to be determined**. But even in the absence of these additional details, we can note **the resemblance** between the fact that x can look red to S, without it being true of some specific shade of red that x looks to S to be of that shade, and the fact that S can believe that Cleopatra's Needle is tall, without its being true of some determinate number of feet that S believes it to be that number of feet tall (pp. 42-43).

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18. The point I wish to stress at this time, however, is that the concept of *looking green*, the ability to recognize that something *looks green*, **presupposes the concept of *being green***, and that the latter concept involves the ability to tell what colors objects have by looking at them - which, in turn, involves **knowing in what circumstances to place an object if one wishes to ascertain its color by looking at it**. Let me develop this latter point. As our friend John becomes more and more sophisticated about his own and other people's visual experiences, he learns under what conditions it is as though one were seeing a necktie to be of one color when in fact it is of another. Suppose someone asks him "Why does this tie look green to me?" John may very well reply "Because it is blue, and blue objects look green in this kind of light." And if someone asks this question when looking at the necktie in plain daylight, John may very well reply "Because the tie *is green*" - to which he may add "We are in plain daylight, *and in daylight things look what they are.*" We thus see that

$x \text{ is red} \cdot \equiv \cdot x \text{ looks red to standard observers in standard conditions}$

is a necessary truth not because the right-hand side is the definition of "x is red," **but because "standard conditions" means conditions in which things look what they are**. And, of course, which conditions are standard for a given mode of perception is, at the common-sense level, specified by a list of conditions which exhibit the vagueness and open texture characteristic of ordinary discourse (pp. 43-44).

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19. I have arrived at a stage in my argument which is, at least *prima facie*, out of step with the basic presuppositions of logical atomism. Thus, as long as *looking green* is taken to be the notion to which *being green* is reducible, it could be claimed with considerable plausibility that fundamental concepts pertaining to observable fact have **that logical independence of one another which is characteristic of the empiricist tradition**. Indeed, at first sight the situation is *quite disquieting*, for if the ability to recognize that x looks green **presupposes the concept of *being green***, and if this in turn involves **knowing in what circumstances to view an object to ascertain its color**, then, since one can scarcely determine what the circumstances are without noticing that certain objects have certain perceptible characteristics – including colors - it would seem that **one couldn't form the concept of *being green*, and, by parity of reasoning, of the other colors, unless he already had them**.

Now, it just won't do to reply that to have the concept of green, to know what it is for something to be green, it is sufficient to respond, when one is *in point of fact* in standard conditions, to green objects with the vocable "This is green." **Not only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the color of an object by looking, the subject must *know* that conditions of this sort are appropriate**. And while this **does not** imply that one must have concepts before one has them, it does imply that **one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts** of which it is one element. It implies that while the process of acquiring the concept green may - indeed does - involve a long history of acquiring *piecemeal* habits of response to various objects in various circumstances, **there is an important sense in which one has no concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all** - and, indeed, as we shall see, a great deal more besides (pp. 44-45).

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20. Now, I think it is clear what a logical atomist, supposing that he found any merit at all in the above argument, would say. He would say that I am overlooking the fact that the logical space of physical objects in Space and Time rests on the logical space of sense contents, and he would argue that **it is concepts pertaining to sense contents which have the logical independence of one another which is characteristic of traditional empiricism**. "After all," he would point out, "concepts pertaining to theoretical entities - molecules, for example - have the mutual dependence you have, perhaps rightly, ascribed to concepts pertaining to *physical* fact. But," he would continue, "theoretical concepts have empirical content because they rest on - are coordinated with - a more fundamental logical space. Until you have disposed, therefore, of the idea that there is a more fundamental logical space than that of physical objects in Space and Time, or shown that it too is fraught with coherence, your incipient *Meditations Hegeliennes* are premature."

And we can imagine a sense-datum theorist to interject the following complaint: "You have begun to write as though you had shown not only that *physical redness* is **not to be analyzed in terms of *looking red*** - which I will grant - but also that physical redness is **not to be analyzed at all**, and, in particular, not to be analyzed in terms of the redness of red sense contents. Again, you have begun to write as though you had shown not only that observing that *x looks red* is not more basic than observing that *x is red*, but also that **there is no form of visual noticing more basic than seeing that *x is red*, such as the sensing of a red sense content**. I grant," he continues, "that the tendency of sense-datum theorists has been to claim that the redness of physical objects is to be analyzed in terms of looking red, and then to claim that *looking red* is itself to be analyzed in terms of *red sense contents*, and that you may have undercut this line of analysis. But what is to prevent the sense-datum theorist **from taking the line that the properties of physical objects are directly analyzable into the qualities and phenomenal relations of sense contents?**" (pp. 45-46).

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Very well. But once again we must ask, **How does** the sense-datum theorist **come by** the framework of sense contents? and **How is he going to convince us** that there are such things? For even if *looking red* doesn't enter into the analysis of physical redness, **it is by asking us to reflect on the experience of having something look red to us** that he hopes to make this framework convincing. And it therefore becomes relevant to note that my analysis of *x looks red to S at t* has not, at least as far as I have pushed it to date, revealed **any such items** as sense-contents. And it may be relevant to suggest that once we see clearly that physical redness is not to be given a dispositional analysis in terms of *looking red*, the idea that it is to be given *any* kind of dispositional analysis **loses a large measure of its plausibility**. In any event, the next move must be to press further the above account of qualitative and existential looking (p. 46).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- Part III [10]-[20]
- The Logic of 'Looks'
- *Section 10*: To get out of the trilemma of [6], it is necessary to "examine these two ideas [(1) and (2) in [7] and [7]] and determine how that which survives criticism in each is properly to be combined with the other." To begin with, consider the genus inner episode to which each subject has privileged access, which is common to sensations and thoughts.
- a) Logical positivists have denied that there could be such episodes, because their existence is not intersubjectively verifiable or falsifiable. This is the source of the traditional problem of other minds, and of the inverted spectrum. To avoid entertaining such unverifiable hypotheses, one can reject idea (1).
- b) Wittgenstein and some of his followers have attacked (2), the idea that inner episodes can be premises for inferentially based knowledge, because as private they escape the net of public discourse and language learning (the beetle in the box, and the private language argument).
- Sellars disagrees with both of these. We'll return to the first later under the heading 'behaviorism' ([54]-[55]). What one should reject in order to avoid the problem of other minds and the possibility of inverted spectra **is the Myth of the Given, not the notion of inner episodes**. Sellars will argue (in [45]-[47]) that (b) is **both too strong and too weak**. It is too strong in that **inner episodes need not escape** the net of public discourse. The second half of *EPM* has the task of showing us **how to think of inner episodes** - as theoretical entities that became observable. It is too weak in that **this repudiation of inner episodes is not** (as we see in the following sections) **sufficient to avoid Sellars's foe, the Myth of the Given** (pp. 134-135).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- *Section 11*: The problem is that noninferential beliefs of the form "X looks *F* to S" can be held to be given in the bad sense even if, for inverted spectrum and beetle-in-a-box reasons, one refuses to talk about intrinsic properties of these lookings. That is, even if one does not assume (as one ought not, see [21]) that if anything *looks F* to S, something is *F* (the "sense-datum inference"), one can still fall prey to the Myth. In order to attack this more insidious form of the Myth, then, **Sellars considers the notion of 'looks' talk independent of any relation** it might be taken to have to inner episodes as particulars.
- *Section 12*: The question is, Does *looks-red* **come before** *is-red* conceptually (and so in the order of explanation)? That is, could the latter be defined in terms of the former in such a way that one could learn how to use the defining concept (*looking-F*) first, and only afterwards, by means of the definition, learn how to use the defined concept (*is-F*)? **Descartes and his tradition claimed that *looks-F* talk, with which it is possible to form a class of statements about which subjects are incorrigible, is a foundation of knowledge, and so must be prior in this sense to *is-F* talk, with which it is possible to express only corrigible, inferred beliefs. This view is the essence of Descartes's foundationalism (pp. 135-136).**

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- Descartes was struck by the fact that the appearance/reality distinction seems not to apply to appearances. While I may be mistaken about whether something *is* red (or whether the tower, in the distance, *is* square), **I cannot** in the same way be mistaken about whether it looks red to me now. While I may legitimately be challenged by a doubter - "Perhaps the item is not *really* red; perhaps it only *seems* red" - there is no room for the further doubt, "Perhaps the item does not even seem red; perhaps it only *seems* to seem red." If it seems to seem red, then it really does seem red. **The looks, seems, and appears operators collapse if we try to iterate them.** A contrast between appearance and reality is marked by the distinction between *looks-F* and *F* for ordinary (reality-indicating) predicates *F*: **But no corresponding contrast is marked by the distinction between *looks-to-look F* and *looks-F*.** Appearances are reified by Descartes as things that really are just however they appear. He inferred that we do not know them mediately, by means of representings that introduce the possibility of *mis*-representing (a distinction between how they really are and how they merely appear, i.e., are represented as being). Rather, we know them *immediately* - **simply by having** them. Thus appearances – thought of as a realm of entities reported on by noninferentially elicited claims about how things look (for the visual case), or more generally seem, or appear - show up as having the ideal qualifications for epistemologically secure foundations of knowledge: **we cannot** make mistakes about them. Just having an appearance ("being appeared-to *F*-ly," in one of the variations Sellars discusses) counts as **knowing something**: not that something is *F*, to be sure, but at least that something *looks, seems, or appears-F*. The possibility accordingly arises of reconstructing our knowledge by starting out only with knowledge of this sort - **knowledge of how things look, seem, or appear -and building up in some way to our knowledge (if any) of how things really are** (outside the realm of appearance) (pp. 136-137).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- This project requires that concepts of the form *looks-F* be intelligible in principle in advance of grasping the corresponding concepts *F* (or *is-F*). Sellars is a linguistic pragmatist about the conceptual order; that is, for him, **grasp of a concept just is mastery of the use of a word**. So he systematically pursues the methodology of translating questions of conceptual priority **into questions about the relative autonomy of various language games**. He will argue that in this case, Descartes got things backwards. 'Looks' talk **does not form an autonomous stratum of the language** - it is not a language-game one could play though one played no other. **One must already be able to use 'is-F' talk in order to master 'looks-F' talk**, which turns out to be **parasitic on it**. In this precise practical sense, *is-F* is **conceptually** (Sellars often says 'logically') **prior** to *looks-F* (pp. 137-138).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- *Section 13*: The definition being considered for exploitation in a Cartesian order of explanation (and so, ultimately, of justification) is
- x is red = df x would look red under standard conditions.
- Sellars will show how to acknowledge that this claim is definitionally **true without countenancing the conceptual priority of 'looks' talk**, and hence **without giving aid and comfort to givenness** and the sort of foundationalism it supports.
- *Section 14*: Sentences can have **reporting (noninferential) uses** as well as **(merely) fact stating (inferential) uses**. For reliable reporters, one may infer from the fact that one is disposed to say that x is F and that the conditions are as far as one knows **standard** and that when under those conditions one is so disposed it is usually the case that x is F to the conclusion that x is *in fact* F . (The reporter's having to believe all of this, and so to understand it, is crucial to Sellars's later argument) . Understanding the possibility of systematic error in the responsive dispositions of reporters introduces **a new dimension** in the relation **between practices of reporting and those of inferring**. Here Sellars introduces the illustrative parable of young John in the tie shop (pp. 138-139).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- Section 15: Where collateral beliefs indicate that systematic error is likely, **the subject learns not to make the report 'x is F,'** to which his previously inculcated responsive dispositions incline him, but to **make a new kind of claim:** '*x looks (or seems) F.*' Of course it is tempting to take this as a new kind of report, indeed, a report of a special kind of particular, a sense datum. This report, then, is naturally thought of as reporting a minimal, noninferentially ascertainable, foundationally basic fact, about which each subject is incorrigible. There are two points here which might be distinguished. First, **it is a mistake in any case to treat what is reported as foundationally basic facts**, for the concepts needed to formulate them turn out to depend on other concepts, which are not formed using any analogue of a 'looks'-operator. (See [32].) Second, **it is a mistake to treat these as reports at all** - since they *evince* a disposition to call something F, but may not happily be thought of as *saying* that one has such a disposition. Sellars wavers on the second point, but he is firm on the first (p. 139).

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- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- Section(s) 16: Sellars's alternative analysis depends on distinguishing **two different dimensions of the use of a noninferential report**. First, each report **is the manifestation of some *reliable differential responsive disposition***. That is, it is the result of one's being **trained to behave in a certain way** when in certain environmental situations (like a pigeon trained to peck at the red square when the red light comes on). What is the difference between a parrot trained to utter "That's red!" when and only when confronted by the visible presence of something red, **and a genuine noninferential reporter** of the same circumstance? Having the differential responsive dispositions is **not enough to have the concept**, else a chunk of iron that rusts in wet environments and not in dry ones would have to be counted as having the concepts of wet and dry environments. What more, besides the parrot's *sentience*, is required for the *sapience* that consists in responding differentially by applying a *concept*? **Sellars's answer, invoking the second dimension of reporting, is that the response must be taking up a position in the space of reasons** - making a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons. The genuine noninferential reporter of red things has, and the parrot has not, mastered the *inferential* role played by reports of that type - **where inferential role is a matter of what conclusions one is entitled to draw from such a statement when it is overheard, what would count as a reason for it, and what is incompatible with it and so a reason against it**. This is a matter of the inferentially articulated content of the assertional commitment undertaken by the reporter in virtue of the performance that is the reporting: what the reporter is responsible for. Sellars's term for this second dimension is *endorsement*, a matter of what one is linguistically committed to (the inferential consequences of one's claims) or responsible for (how it could be justified) in virtue of one's assertional performance (pp. 139-140).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- This notion of *responsibility*, or of what *conclusions* one has given others the *right* to draw, or has *obliged* oneself to draw, and what other commitments would count as *entitling* one to the commitment one has undertaken is the **normative element** in linguistic conduct, whose **irreducibility to descriptive aspects** (such as responsive dispositions) lies **at the base of the epistemic/nonepistemic distinction**, and is the source of Sellars's remark about the naturalistic fallacy at the end of [5].
- On Sellars's understanding, the ability to use '*x looks green*' correctly appeals **to the same responsive dispositions** acquired in learning to use '*x is green*' correctly. But these two sorts of remarks elicited in accordance with those dispositions support **quite different inferences**. In particular, the parable of the tie shop shows that in saying that something merely *looks green*, **one can be understood to be doing two things**: expressing one's **noninferential differential responsive disposition to call it green** (to commit oneself to the claim that it is green, with all of its inferential consequences and justificatory obligations), and at the same time **explicitly withholding one's endorsement of that claim**. For collateral beliefs concerning the possibility of systematic error under the prevailing circumstances of observation have **undermined** the reporter's confidence in his reliability - that is, in the correctness of the inference from "X is disposed noninferentially to report the presence of something green (seen by electric lighting)," to "There is (probably) something green there."
- This analysis of what one is doing in using 'looks' **explains the incorrigibility of 'looks' talk**. One can be wrong about whether something *is green* because the claim one endorses, the commitment one undertakes, **may turn out to be incorrect**. For instance, its inferential consequences may be incompatible with other facts one is or comes to be in a position to know independently. But in saying that something *looks green*, one is **not endorsing a claim**, but **withholding endorsement from one**. Such a reporter is merely evincing a disposition to do something that for other reasons (e.g., suspicion that the circumstances of observation lead to systematic error) he is unwilling to do - namely, endorse a claim. **Such a reporter cannot be wrong, because he has held back from making a commitment**. This is why the *looks*, *seems*, and *appears* operators **do not** iterate (pp. 141-142).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- Their function is to **express the withholding of endorsement** from the sentence that appears within the scope of the operator. There is **no sensible contrast** between 'looks-to-look F' and 'looks-F,' of the sort there is between 'looks-F' and '(is-)F' because the first 'looks' **has already withheld** endorsement from the only content in the vicinity to which one might be committed (to something's being F). There is **no further withholding work** for the second 'looks' to do. There is nothing left to take back. Since asserting 'X looks F' is **not undertaking** a propositionally contentful commitment - **but only expressing an overrideable disposition to do so** - there is no issue as to whether or not that commitment (which one?) is correct.
- Sellars accordingly explains the incorrigibility of appearance-claims, which had so impressed Descartes. He does so in terms of the practices of using words, which are what grasp of the relevant appearance concepts must amount to, according to his methodological linguistic pragmatism. But once we have seen the source and nature of this incorrigibility - in down-to-earth, practical, resolutely nonmetaphysical terms - we see also **why it is precisely unsuited to use as an epistemological foundation for the rest of our** (risky, corrigible) **empirical knowledge** (p. 142).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- For, first, the incorrigibility of claims about how things merely *look* **simply reflects their emptiness**: the fact that they are **not really claims** at all. And second, the same story shows us that 'looks' talk is **not an autonomous language game** - one that could be played though one played no other. It is entirely **parasitic** on the practice of making risky empirical reports of how things actually are. Thus Descartes seized on a genuine phenomenon - the incorrigibility of claims about appearances, reflecting the non-iterability of operators like *looks*, *seems* and *appears* - **but misunderstood its nature, and so mistakenly thought it available to play an epistemologically foundational role** for which it is in no way suited.
- This analysis of "the logic of 'looks' talk," along with the consequent diagnosis of the errors of a foundationalism based on the incorrigibility of our epistemic access to appearances, is **the constructive core** of Sellars's critique of Cartesianism. It does not purport to be a knock-down argument; for it can only be as persuasive as its account of how 'looks' talk works, and alternatives are always possible. What it is meant to do is to **remove the temptation to go the Cartesian foundationalist route**, by explaining, without explaining away, the exact nature of that temptation (pp. 142-144).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- *Section 17*: (This line of thought is completed in [22]). We begin to look for some confirmation of the two-pronged account of 'looks' talk as expressing a differential responsive disposition to make a specified noninferential report, while withholding endorsement of that claim. The confirmation takes the form of explanations of otherwise **puzzling features of appearance-talk**. Consider the three sentences:
 - (i) The apple over there is red.
 - (ii) The apple over there looks red.
 - (iii) It looks as though there were a red apple over there.

Utterances of these sentences can express the same responsive disposition to report the presence of a red apple, **but they endorse** (take responsibility for the inferential consequences of) **different parts of that claim**. (i) endorses both the existence of the apple and its quality of redness. (ii) endorses only the existence of the apple. The 'looks' locution explicitly cancels the qualitative commitment or endorsement. (iii) explicitly cancels both the existential and the qualitative endorsements. Thus, if someone claims that there is in fact no apple over there, he is asserting something incompatible with (i) and (ii), but not with (iii). If he denies that there is anything red over there, he asserts something incompatible with (i), but not with (ii) or (iii). **Sellars's account** of the practice of using 'looks,' **in terms of the withholding** of endorsement when one suspects systematic error in one's responsive dispositions, **can account** for the difference in scope of endorsement that (i)-(iii) exhibit. But how could that difference be accounted for on a sense-datum approach? (pp. 144-145)

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- In this section Sellars points out **another virtue** of his account, as opposed to sense-datum theories, namely, the possibility of reporting **a merely generic** (more accurately, merely determinable) **look**. (Recall that Sellars introduced this phenomenon already in [9].) Thus it is possible for an apple to look red, without its looking any specific shade of red (crimson, scarlet, etc.). It is possible for a plane figure to look many-sided without there being some particular number of sides (say 119) which it looks to have. But if 'looks' statements are to be understood as reports of the presence before the eye of the mind of a particular which *is* F, how can this possibility be understood? Particulars are completely determinate. A horse has a particular number of hairs, though as Sellars points out, it can look to have merely 'a lot' of them. It is a particular shade of brown (or several shades), even though it may look only darkly colored. **So how are such generic, merely determinable, looks possible?** Sellars's account is in terms of scope of endorsement. One says that the plane figure looks 'many-sided' instead of '119-sided' just in case one is willing only to endorse (be held responsible for justifying) **the more general** claim. This is a matter of how far one is **willing to trust** one's responsive dispositions, a matter of the epistemic credence one feels they deserve or are able to sustain. **Particulars**, even if they are sense contents, **cannot be colored without being some determinate color and shade**. How then can the sense-datum theorist who wants to say that when something *looks F to S*, something in *S is F* - account for the fact that something can look colored without looking to be any particular color, or look red without looking to be any particular shade of red? So Sellars's account of 'looks' talk in terms of endorsement **can account for two aspects** of that kind of discourse that **no theory that invokes a given can explain: the scope distinctions between qualitative and existential lookings, and the possibility of merely generic or determinable lookings** (pp. 145-146).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- *Section 18*: On this account, then, one must first acquire the practice of reporting red objects (getting both the appropriate responsive dispositions and an understanding of what one is endorsing by making such a claim), and only then can one learn to make reports expressing those same dispositions, but which are more guarded in their endorsement. As the argument of the previous section has shown, the mastery of different endorsements required can be quite sophisticated. One may, for instance, discriminate existential and qualitative lookings, and various grades of determinability. Thus **to know when something looks red, one must understand what it is to lie red, and a good deal besides**. We can see at this point that the sentence we worried about in [13] is true because it is a definition, not of *is red*, but of **standard conditions**. For standard conditions are just **those in which one's responsive dispositions can be trusted**, and ought to be fully endorsed. Given such a definition, one can investigate empirically what those conditions are (pp. 146-147).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 10-20)
- *Sections 19 and 20*: These sections return to the question of the acquisition of various capacities involved in mastering an observation concept, the question that set up the trilemma of [6]. We now know that these capacities involve both **regular responsive dispositions** and a capacity to **manipulate endorsements** inferentially, a nonepistemic and an epistemic skill respectively. The specifically inferential articulation required for endorsements to qualify as conceptually contentful introduces at least a **limited holism** into Sellars's picture: **one could not have one concept unless one had many others to which it is inferentially related**: "The essential point is that even to have the more rudimentary concept [of *green*, say] presupposes having a battery of other concepts." This entails rejecting the idea that "fundamental concepts pertaining to observable fact have that logical independence of one another which is characteristic of the empiricist tradition." These sections do not present Sellars's argument in a perspicuous, or even linear, fashion, and the argument is repeated in more satisfactory form at [33]-[37], where we will discuss it (p. 147).

Sellars on the myth of the given

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IV. Explaining Looks

21. I have already noted that sense-datum theorists are **impressed by the question** "How can a physical object look red to S, unless something in that situation *is* red and S is taking account of it? If S isn't experiencing something red, how does it happen that the physical object looks *red*, rather than green or streaky?" There is, I propose to show, *something* to this line of thought, though the story turns out to be a complicated one. And if, in the course of telling the story, I shall be led to make statements which resemble *some* of the things sense-datum theorists have said, this story will amount to a sense-datum theory only in a sense which **robs this phrase of an entire dimension of its traditional epistemological force**, a dimension which is characteristic of even such heterodox forms of sense-datum theory as the "another language" approach (pp. 46-47).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Let me begin by formulating the question: "Is the fact that an object looks to S to be red and triangular, or that there looks to S to be a red and triangular object over there, to be explained in terms of the idea that Jones has a sensation – or impression, or immediate experience - of a red triangle? One point can be made right away, namely that **if these expressions are so understood** that, say, **the immediate experience of a red triangle implies the existence of something** - not a physical object - which *is* red and triangular, and **if** the redness which this item **has is the same** as the redness which the physical object **looks to have**, then the suggestion runs up against the objection that the redness physical objects look to have is the same as the redness physical objects actually do have, so that items which *ex hypothesi* are not physical objects, and which radically, even categorically, differ from physical objects, **would have the same redness** as physical objects. And while this is, perhaps, not entirely out of the question, it certainly provides food for thought. Yet when it is claimed that "obviously" physical objects can't *look* red to one unless one is experiencing something that *is* red, **is it not presumed** that the redness which the *something* has is the redness which the physical object looks to have? (pp. 47-48).

Sellars on the myth of the given

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Now there are those who would say that the question "Is the fact that an object looks red and triangular to S to be explained - as opposed to notationally reformulated – in terms of the idea that S **has an impression** of a red triangle?" simply doesn't arise, on the ground that there are perfectly **sound explanations** of qualitative and existential lookings which **make no reference** to 'immediate experiences' or other dubious entities. Thus, it is pointed out, it is perfectly proper to answer the question "Why does this object look red?" by saying "Because it is an orange object looked at in such and such circumstances." The explanation is, in principle, a good one, and is **typical of the answers we make to such questions in everyday life**. But because these explanations are good, **it by no means follows** that explanations of other kinds might not be equally good, and, perhaps, more searching (p. 48).

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22. On the face of it there are at least two ways in which additional, but equally legitimate explanations *might* be forthcoming for such a fact as that *x looks red*. The first of these is suggested by **a simple analogy**. Might it not be the case that just as there are **two kinds of good explanation** of the fact that this balloon has expanded, (a) in terms of the Boyle-Charles laws which relate the empirical concepts of volume, pressure, and temperature pertaining to gases, and (b) in terms of the kinetic theory of gases; **so there are two ways of explaining the fact that this object looks red to S**: (a) in terms of **empirical generalizations** relating the colors of objects, the circumstances in which they are seen, and the colors they look to have, and (b) in terms of **a theory of perception in which 'immediate experiences' play a role** analogous to that of the molecules of the kinetic theory.

Now there is such an air of paradox to the idea that 'immediate experiences' **are mere** theoretical entities - entities, that is, which are postulated, along with certain fundamental principles concerning them, to explain uniformities pertaining to sense perception, as molecules, along with the principles of molecular motion, **are postulated to explain** the experimentally determined regularities pertaining to gases - that I am going to lay it aside until a more propitious context of thought may make it seem relevant. Certainly, those who have thought that qualitative and existential lookings are to be explained in terms of 'immediate experiences' thought of the latter **as the most untheoretical of entities**, indeed, as *the observables par excellence* (pp. 48-49).

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Let us therefore turn to a second way in which, at least *prima facie*, there might be an additional, but equally legitimate explanation of existential and qualitative lookings. According to this second account, when we consider items of this kind, we *find* that they contain as components **items which are properly referred to as**, for example, **'the immediate experience of a red triangle.'** Let us begin our exploration of this suggestion by taking another look at our account of existential and qualitative lookings. It will be remembered that our account of qualitative looking ran, in rough and ready terms, as follows:

'x looks red to S' has the sense of 'S has an experience which involves in a unique way the idea *that x is red* and involves it in such a way that if this idea were true, the experience would correctly be characterized as a seeing that x is red.'

Thus, our account implies that the three situations

- (a) Seeing that x, over there, is red
- (b) Its looking to one that x, over there, is red
- (c) Its looking to one as though there were a red object over there

differ primarily in that (a) is so formulated as to involve an endorsement of the idea that x, over there, is red, whereas in (b) this idea is only partially endorsed, and in (c) not at all. Let us refer to the idea *that x over there is red* as the **common propositional content** of these three situations (pp. 49-50).

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The propositional content of these three experiences is, of course, but a part of that to which we are logically committed by characterizing them as situations of these three kinds. Of the remainder, as we have seen, part is a matter of the extent to which this propositional content is endorsed. It is the **residue** with which we are now concerned. **Let us call this residue the *descriptive content*.** I can then point out that it is implied by my account that not only the *propositional content*, but also the *descriptive content* of these three experiences **may be identical**. I shall suppose this to be the case, though that there must be some factual difference in the *total* situations is obvious.

Now, and this is the decisive point, in characterizing these three experiences as, respectively, a *seeing that x over there is red*, *its looking to one as though x, over there, is red*, and *its looking to one as though there were a red object over there*, **we do not specify this common *descriptive content* save indirectly**, by implying that *if the common propositional content* were true, then all these three situations would be cases of *seeing that x, over there, is red*. Both existential and qualitative lookings are experiences **that would be *seeings*** if their propositional contents were true.

Thus, the very nature of "looks talk" is such as to raise questions to which it gives no answer: **What is the *intrinsic character* of the common descriptive content of these three experiences?** and **How are they able to have it** in spite of the fact that whereas in the case of (a) the perceiver must be in the presence of a red object over there, in (b) the object over there need not be red, while in (c) there need be no object over there at all? (pp. 50-51)

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23. Now it is clear that if we were required to give a more direct characterization of the common descriptive content of these experiences, we would begin by trying to do so **in terms of the quality red**. Yet, as I have already pointed out, we can scarcely say that this descriptive content **is itself something red unless we can pry the term "red" loose from its prima facie tie with the category of physical objects**. And there is a line of thought which has been one of the standard gambits of perceptual epistemology and which seems to promise exactly this. If successful, it would convince us that *redness* – in the most basic sense of this term - is a characteristic of items of the sort we have been calling sense contents. It runs as follows:

While it would, indeed, be a howler to say that we don't see chairs, tables, etc., but only their facing surfaces, nevertheless, although we see a table, say, and although the table has a back as well as a front, **we do not see the back** of the table as we see its front. Again, although we see the table, and although the table has an 'inside,' **we do not see the inside** of the table as we see its facing outside. Seeing an object entails seeing **its facing surface**. If we are seeing that an object is red, this entails seeing that **its facing surface is red**. A red surface is a **two-dimensional red expanse** - two-dimensional in that though it may be *bulgy* and in *this* sense three-dimensional, it has no *thickness*. As far as the analysis of perceptual consciousness is concerned, a red physical object is **one that has a red expanse as its surface**.

Now a red expanse is **not a physical object**, nor does the existence of a red expanse entail the existence of a physical object to which it belongs. (Indeed, there are "wild" expanses which do not belong to any physical object.) The "descriptive content" - as you put it - which is common to the three experiences (a), (b) and (c) above, is **exactly this sort of thing, a bulgy red expanse** (pp. 51-52).

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Spelled out thus baldly, **the fallacy is, or should be, obvious**; it is a simple **equivocation** on the phrase "having a red surface." We start out by thinking of the familiar fact that a physical object may be of one color "on the surface" and of another color "inside." We may express this by saying that, for example, the 'surface' of the object is red, but its 'inside' green. **But in saying this we are *not* saying that there is a 'surface' in the sense of a bulgy two-dimensional particular**, a red 'expanse' which is a component particular in a complex particular which also includes green particulars. The notion of two-dimensional bulgy (or flat) particulars is **a product of philosophical (and mathematical) sophistication** which can be *related to* our ordinary conceptual framework, **but does not belong in an analysis of it**. I think that in its place it has an important contribution to make. (See below, Section 61, (5), pp. 113-115.) But this place is in the logical space of an ideal *scientific* picture of the world **and not** in the logical space of ordinary discourse. **It has nothing to do with the logical grammar of our ordinary color words**. It is just a mistake to suppose that as the word "red" is actually used, **it is ever surfaces in the sense of two-dimensional particulars which are red**. The only particular involved when a physical object is "red on the outside, but green inside" is **the physical object itself**, located in a certain region of Space and enduring over a stretch of Time. The **fundamental grammar** of the attribute *red* is *physical object x is red at place p and at time t* (pp. 52-53).

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Certainly, when we say of an object that it is red, we commit ourselves to no more than that it is red "at the surface." And sometimes it is red at the surface by having what we would not hesitate to call a "part" which is red through and through - thus, a red table which is red by virtue of a layer of red paint. But the red paint is not itself red by virtue of a component - a 'surface' or 'expanse'; a particular with no thickness - which is red. There may, let me repeat, turn out to be **some place in the total philosophical picture** for the statement that there "really are" such particulars, and that they are elements in perceptual experience. But this place is **not to be found by an analysis of ordinary perceptual discourse**, any more than Minkowski four-dimensional SpaceTime worms are an *analysis* of what we mean when we speak of physical objects in Space and Time (p. 53).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 21-23)
- Part IV [21]-[23]
- Explaining Looks
- *Sections 21 and 22*: [17] discussed the issue of the scope of endorsement, which is treated in the third paragraph of [21]. Sellars reformulates that account in terms of the events that are lookings and seeings, where earlier we discussed the reports causally occasioned by those events. The first two paragraphs of [22] and the third paragraph of [21] then present a preliminary account of a distinction between two ways in which some phenomenon can be explained:
 - (i) By deducing it from some empirical generalization formulated entirely in terms of observables (things that can be noninferentially reported). Explaining a change in pressure of a gas sample by appealing to the law $PV = kT$, together with suitable background conditions, is an example.
 - (ii) By postulating unobservable entities, and subsuming the phenomenon under laws involving those theoretical entities. Explaining the change in pressure of a gas by appealing to the kinetic theory of gases and its postulated molecules and their interactions is an example.
- Once again, this discussion is really out of place here, serving merely as a dark foreshadowing of a line of argument that will be pursued in more detail later (beginning at [39]-[44]). Sellars does here raise the important question that remains even after we have understood existential, qualitative, and unqualified 'looks' statements in terms of scope of endorsement (as in [17]), namely, what is it that is common to the three cases? The answer, we will see, is "sense impressions of red." But that is an answer we will not be able to understand until the very end of the essay ([62]) (pp. 147-148).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (sect. 21-23)
- *Section 23*: This section discusses the question of what things can literally be red. Sellars's claim is that only physical objects can, and that it is a mistake to think that even facing surfaces can, except in a derivative sense. The discussion as it stands is unsatisfactory, since criteria of primacy of sense and literalness of attribution are not forthcoming. Once again, a later discussion is being prefigured, in this case concerning the 'of-red'ness of sensations in [60]-[61].
- Parts V and VI (Sections [24]-[29]) offer a discussion of the British Empiricists' treatment of impressions. They fill in some of the historical background of Sellars's discussion, but **are not central** or essential to the development of his argument (pp. 148-149).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM — Part V (Summary)

Part V — The status of “givenness” in sense-datum theories

Sense-datum theorists often treat *givenness* as a **primitive**, basic feature of experience.

But Sellars argues that “the given” only makes sense **if defined in terms of non-inferential knowledge**.

When this is forgotten, theorists mistakenly assume that **sensing itself is epistemic**.

Attempts to analyze sensing in non-epistemic terms often end up **smuggling epistemic content back in**.

This confusion prepares the ground for the **inconsistent triad** that follows.

Sellars on the myth of the given

Brandom on Part V — Summary

In Part V, Sellars warns that many sense-datum theorists misunderstand their own commitments. Brandom highlights three key points:

- 1. “Givenness” is not a primitive notion:** Brandom stresses that Sellars insists the concept of *the given* only makes sense **if defined in terms of non-inferential knowledge**. If you forget this, you start treating “given” as a basic feature of experience — which is precisely the mistake Sellars wants to expose.
- 2. Sense-datum theorists slide between two roles for ‘the given’:** Brandom emphasizes Sellars’s diagnostic point: sometimes “given” is treated as a **non-epistemic** feature of experience (a bare sensory occurrence), sometimes as an **epistemic** one (a piece of knowledge). This equivocation is what allows the sense-datum theorist to “have his cake and eat it too.”
- 3. Analyses of sensing often smuggle epistemic content back in:** Brandom underlines Sellars’s observation that even when theorists try to analyze sensing in purely non-epistemic terms, the analysis ends up **reintroducing epistemic notions implicitly**. This is the “front door/back door” problem: epistemic content sneaks back in.
- 4. Part V prepares the ground for the inconsistent triad:** Brandom’s main interpretive point is that Part V is a **transitional clarification**: it shows why classical sense-datum theorists are committed to the three claims that will form the inconsistent triad in Part VI.

In other words, Part V is not a new argument but a **diagnosis of conceptual confusion** that sets up the collapse of the sense-datum framework.

Sellars on the myth of the given

Sellars, EPM VI — “Impressions and Ideas: A Historical Point” (Summary)

In this short historical interlude, Sellars examines the **classical empiricist distinction** between *impressions* and *ideas*, especially as found in **Hume**. His goal is not to defend the distinction but to show **why empiricists introduced it** and how it shaped the traditional picture of the mind.

Empiricists like Hume held that the mind contains two basic kinds of items: **Impressions**: vivid, immediate sensory episodes; **Ideas**: faint copies or derivatives of impressions.

This distinction was meant to explain how **knowledge begins in experience**; how **concepts** arise from more primitive sensory elements; why ideas can be **associated**, combined, or abstracted.

Sellars argues that this historical framework is important because it **sets the stage for the “Myth of the Given”**: empiricists assumed that impressions provide a **non-conceptual, foundational** layer of knowledge from which all conceptual content is derived. He stresses that the classical distinction is **not merely psychological** but **epistemological**: impressions were thought to justify beliefs because they were taken as **immediately known**.

The section ends by preparing the reader for Sellars’s critique: the empiricist model fails because it treats impressions as **epistemically privileged “givens”**, a view Sellars will dismantle in the following sections. **In essence** Section VI shows how the traditional empiricist picture — impressions as foundational givens, ideas as their conceptual offspring — historically shaped the very notion of a sensory “given” that Sellars intends to reject.

Sellars on the myth of the given

Brandom on Part VI — Summary

In §VI, Sellars pauses his argument to make a **historical clarification** about the classical empiricist distinction between *impressions* and *ideas*. Brandom's guide highlights why this matters for Sellars's overall attack on the Myth of the Given.

1. The empiricist background: Brandom explains that Sellars wants the reader to understand **why empiricists introduced the distinction** in the first place. For Hume and others: **Impressions** = vivid, immediate sensory items. **Ideas** = faint copies of impressions. This distinction was meant to explain how **all conceptual content derives from sensory originals**.

2. Why Sellars brings this up: Brandom stresses that Sellars is not endorsing the distinction. He is showing that the classical empiricist model: treats impressions as **epistemically foundational**, and ideas as **derivative conceptual contents**. This is the historical root of the **Given** — the idea that some items in experience are *non-inferentially known* and serve as the foundation for all knowledge.

3. The key Sellarsian point: According to Brandom, the real purpose of §VI is to prepare the ground for Sellars's critique: The impression/idea distinction **smuggles in** the assumption that impressions are *already* epistemically meaningful. But Sellars will argue that **nothing can play a justificatory role unless it is conceptually articulated** — and impressions, as traditionally conceived, are not. Thus, §VI is a **diagnostic** section: Sellars is showing where the Myth of the Given historically comes from.

4. The transition to the critique: Brandom notes that Sellars uses this historical point to pivot toward his central claim: The empiricist model mistakenly treats sensory episodes as if they were *already* items in the logical space of reasons. Section VI is therefore a bridge: it connects the historical empiricist picture to the philosophical error Sellars is about to dismantle.

In essence Brandom reads §VI as a brief historical excavation: Sellars shows how the classical distinction between impressions and ideas *generated* the Myth of the Given, setting the stage for his critique that follows.

Sellars on the myth of the given

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VII. The Logic of 'Means'

30. There is a source of the Myth of the Given to which even philosophers who are suspicious of the whole idea of *inner episodes* can fall prey. This is the fact that when we picture a child - or a carrier of slabs - learning his first language, we, of course, locate the language learner in a structured logical space in which we are at home. Thus, we conceive of him as a person (or, at least, a potential person) in a world of physical objects, colored, producing sounds, existing in Space and Time. But though it is we who are familiar with this logical space, we run the danger, if we are not careful, of picturing the language learner as having *ab initio* some degree of awareness - "pre-analytic," limited and fragmentary though it may be - of this same logical space. We picture his state as though it were rather like our own when placed in a strange forest on a dark night. In other words, unless we are careful, we can **easily take for granted** that the process of teaching a child to use a language is that of teaching it to discriminate elements within a logical space of particulars, universals, facts, etc., **of which it is already undiscriminatingly aware**, and to associate these discriminated elements with verbal symbols. And this mistake is in principle the same whether the logical space of which the child is supposed to have this undiscriminating awareness is conceived by *us* to be that of physical objects or of private sense contents (pp. 64-65).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

The real test of a theory of language lies not in its account of what has been called (by H.H. Price) "thinking in absence," **but in its account of "thinking in presence"** - that is to say, its account of those **occasions** on which the fundamental connection of language with nonlinguistic fact is **exhibited**.

And many theories which look like **psychological nominalism** when one views their account of thinking in absence, turn out to be quite "Augustinian" when the scalpel is turned to their account of thinking in presence (p. 65).

Sellars on the myth of the given

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31. Now, the friendly use I have been making of the phrase "psychological nominalism" may suggest that I am about to **equate concepts with words**, and thinking, in so far as it is episodic, with verbal episodes. I must now hasten to say that I shall do nothing of the sort, or, at least, that if I do *do something* of the sort, the view I shall shortly be developing is only in a relatively Pickwickian sense an equation of thinking with the use of language. I wish to emphasize, therefore, that as I am using the term, the primary connotation of "psychological nominalism" is **the denial that there is any awareness of logical space prior to, or independent of, the acquisition of a language.**

However, although I shall later be distinguishing between *thoughts* and their verbal expression, there is a point of fundamental importance which is best made before more subtle distinctions are drawn. To begin with, it is perfectly clear that the word "red" would not be a predicate if it didn't have the logical syntax characteristic of predicates. Nor would it be the *predicate* it is, unless, in certain frames of mind, at least, we tended to respond to red objects in standard circumstances with something having the force of "This is red." And once we have abandoned the idea that learning to use the word "red" involves antecedent episodes of the *awareness of redness* - not to be confused, of course, with *sensations of red* - there is a temptation to suppose that the word "red" means the quality red by virtue of these two facts: briefly, the fact that it has the *syntax* of a predicate, and the fact that it is a *response* (in certain circumstances) to red objects (pp. 65-66).

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But this account of the meaningfulness of "red," which Price has correctly stigmatized as the "thermometer view," would have little plausibility **if it were not reinforced by another line of thought** which takes its point of departure from the **superficial** resemblance of (In German) "*rot*" means *red* to such relational statements as

Cowley adjoins Oxford.

For once one assimilates the form

"..." means - - -

to the form

$x R y$

and thus **takes it for granted that meaning is a relation between a word and a nonverbal entity**, it is tempting to suppose that the relation in question is that of association (pp. 66-67).

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The truth of the matter, of course, is that **statements of the form "' . . .' means - - -" are *not* relational statements**, and that while it is indeed the case that the word "*rot*" could not mean the quality red unless it were associated with red things, it would be misleading to say that the semantical statement "'Rot' means red" says of "*rot*" that it is associated with red things. For this would suggest that the semantical statement is, so to speak, definitional shorthand for a longer statement about the associative connections of "*rot*," which is not the case. The rubric "' . . .' means - - -" is **a linguistic device for conveying the information that a *mentioned* word**, in this case "*rot*," plays the same role in a certain linguistic economy, in this case the linguistic economy of German-speaking peoples, as does the word "red," which is not *mentioned* but *used*-used in a unique way; *exhibited*, so to speak - and which occurs "on the right-hand side" of the semantical statement. We see, therefore, how the two statements

"*Und*" means *and*

and

"*Rot*" means *red*

can tell us quite different things about "*und*" and "*rot*," for the first conveys the information that "*und*" plays **the purely formal role** of a certain logical connective, the second that "*rot*" plays in German the role of the observation word "red" - in spite of the fact that ***means* has the same sense in each statement**, and **without having to say** that the first says of "*und*" that it stands in "the meaning relation" to Conjunction, or the second that "*rot*" stands in "the meaning relation" to Redness (pp. 67-68)

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These considerations make it clear that **nothing whatever can be inferred** about the complexity of the role played by the word "red" or about the exact way in which the word "red" is related to red things, **from the truth of the semantical statement** "'red' means the quality red." And no consideration arising from the 'Fido'-Fido aspect of the grammar of "means" precludes one from claiming that the role of the word "red" by virtue of which it can correctly be said to have the meaning it does is a complicated one indeed, and that one cannot understand the meaning of the word "red" - "know what redness is" - unless one has a great deal of knowledge which classical empiricism would have held to have a purely contingent relationship with the possession of fundamental empirical concepts (p. 68).

Sellars on the myth of the given

The “fido-fido fallacy” in Sellars (EPM §31)

Sellars uses the label “fido-fido fallacy” to expose a mistake in traditional empiricism: the assumption that to know what a word means is to associate it with *a mental item* or *inner episode* of the same “kind” as the thing it names. The nickname comes from the idea that someone learns the word “Fido” by having an inner “Fido-idea,” so that meaning is a matter of pairing a word with a mental counterpart—fido → fido-idea.

What the fallacy amounts to:

It collapses meaning into a relation between a word and a mental particular, as if understanding “dog” required having a private “dog-idea” tokened in the mind.

It mistakes the functional, rule-governed role of linguistic expressions for a simple correlation between words and inner episodes.

It treats concepts as mental images or impressions, rather than as abilities manifested in inferential and linguistic practices.

The ‘fido’-fido fallacy is presupposed in empiricist views of concept acquisition:

- a. Non-inferential knowledge (e.g., “This is green”) is grounded in inner episodes that *already have* conceptual content.
- b. These inner episodes are *supposed to explain* how one learns the concept “green.”
- c. But *this explanation presupposes the very conceptual capacities* it is meant to account for.

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (30-31)
- Pint VII [30] -[31]
- The Logic of 'Means'
- *Section 30*: Anyone whose account of the prelinguistic awareness that makes language acquisition possible assigns it an inferential structure (Sellars says 'logical, ' but that is just 1950s talk for 'conceptual,' which for Sellars can be parsed as 'inferential') and is committed to the Myth of the Given. Such conceptual awareness involves not only classification, but making the classifications significant in inferences. It is at this point that statements of fact are made, particulars referred to and classified under universals. On the sort of account Sellars opposes to the Myth, conceptual content is inferentially articulated. But inference is a process arising only within the "game of giving and asking for reasons," which essentially involves beliefs. This is a normative realm, of commitment and entitlement to claims, of endorsement and justification. It is what Sellars has been calling the 'epistemic.' The Myth is to think that anything could intrinsically, naturally, or necessarily possess a particular significance, for this realm, independent of the acquisition or deployment of concepts by the one for whom it has that significance. Acts of awareness as traditionally conceived, as entailing the existence of something sufficiently belief-like to serve as the ultimate inferential ground of empirical knowledge (never mind as themselves constituting knowledge), would have to have just such a property (pp. 151-152).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (30-31)
- *Section 31*: So learning a meaning ought not to be understood as associating something one is already aware of with a verbal symbol. But isn't this the natural way to understand statements like "'Rot' (in German) means red"? How else can Sellars understand this sentence except as expressing an association between one's awareness of the determinable repeatable quality and the word 'rot'? His answer is that meaning claims like this really assert that the mentioned expression ('rot') plays the same conceptual functional role as the used expression ('red'). "These considerations make it clear that nothing whatever can be inferred . . . about the exact way in which the word 'red' is related to red things, from the truth of the semantical statement "'red" means the quality *red*" (p. 152).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- EPM
- VIII. Does Empirical Knowledge Have a foundation?
- In §32, Sellars deepens his critique of the “Myth of the Given,” targeting the idea that there are immediate, non-inferential items of knowledge that can serve as the ultimate foundation for empirical knowledge. He argues that this notion rests on a **confusion between two distinct roles**: having **an experience** and having **knowledge about that** experience.
- Sellars emphasizes that while it is true that subjects **can have non-inferential episodes** (for example, being appeared to redly), **it does not follow that such episodes constitute knowledge or can justify beliefs independently of conceptual capacities**. In order for a perceptual report like “this is red” to count as knowledge, the subject **must possess and be able to use the relevant concepts** (such as “red”) within a rule-governed linguistic framework.
- Thus, even so-called “immediate” knowledge is **not epistemically primitive**. It **presupposes participation** in what Sellars calls **the “space of reasons,”** where claims can be justified, challenged, and connected inferentially to other claims. The authority of observational reports **does not stem from their being given**, but from their **role within this normative structure**.
- Sellars also draws a distinction between **causal and justificatory relations**: sensory experiences may **causally prompt** beliefs, but **they do not**, by themselves, **justify** them. Justification requires conceptual articulation and inferential integration.
- The conclusion of §32 is that there is no foundational layer of knowledge consisting of raw, uninterpreted data. All knowledge claims, including observational ones, are **conceptually mediated and embedded within a holistic system of justification**. This undermines classical empiricist foundationalism and replaces it with an inferentialist and anti-foundationalist account of knowledge.

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

33. Let us explore this picture, which is common to all traditional empiricisms, a bit further. How is the authority of such sentence tokens as "express observational knowledge" to be understood? It has been tempting to suppose that in spite of the obvious differences which exist between "observation reports" and "analytic statements," there is **an essential similarity** between the ways in which they come by their authority. Thus, it has been claimed, not without plausibility, that whereas *ordinary* empirical statements can be *correctly* made without being true, **observation reports resemble analytic statements in that being correctly made is a sufficient as well as necessary condition of their truth**. And it has been inferred from this - somewhat hastily, I believe - that "correctly making" the report "This is green" is a matter of "following the rules for the use of 'this,' 'is' and 'green'" (pp. 71-72).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Three comments are immediately necessary:

(1) First a brief remark about the term "report." In ordinary usage a report is a report made *by* someone to someone. To make a report is to *do* something. In the literature of epistemology, however, the word "report" or "*Konstatierung*" has acquired a **technical use** in which a sentence token can play a reporting role (a) without being an **overt verbal performance**, and (b) without having the character of **being "by someone to someone"** - even oneself. There is, of course, such a thing as "talking to oneself" - *in foro inferno* - but, as I shall be emphasizing in the closing stages of my argument, it is important not to suppose that all "covert" verbal episodes are of this kind (p. 72).

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- (2) My second comment is that while we shall **not assume** that because 'reports' in the *ordinary sense* are actions, 'reports' in the sense of *Konstantierungen* **are also** actions, the line of thought we are considering **treats them as such**. In other words, it interprets the correctness of *Konstantierungen* as analogous to the rightness of actions. Let me emphasize, however, that **not all ought is ought to do, nor all correctness the correctness of actions**.
- (3) My third comment is that if the expression "following a rule" is taken seriously, and is not weakened beyond all recognition into the bare notion of exhibiting a uniformity in which case the lightning, thunder sequence would "follow a rule" - then **it is the knowledge or belief that the circumstances are of a certain kind, and not the mere fact** that they are of this kind, which contributes to bringing about the action (p. 72-73).

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34. In the light of these remarks it is clear that if observation reports are construed **as actions**, if their correctness is interpreted as the **correctness of an action**, and if the authority of an observation report is construed as the fact that making it is "following a rule" **in the proper sense** of this phrase, **then we are face to face with givenness in its most straightforward form**. For these stipulations commit one to the idea that the authority of *Konstantierungen* **rests on nonverbal episodes of awareness - awareness that something is the case**, e.g. *that this is green* - which **nonverbal episodes have an intrinsic authority** (they are, so to speak '**self-authenticating**') which the verbal performances (the *Konstantierungen*) properly performed "express." One is committed to a stratum of **authoritative nonverbal episodes** ("awareness") the authority of which accrues to a superstructure of *verbal actions*, provided that the expressions occurring in these actions are properly *used*. These self-authenticating episodes would constitute **the tortoise on which stands the elephant on which rests the edifice of empirical knowledge**. The essence of the view is the same whether these intrinsically authoritative episodes are such items **as the awareness that a certain sense content is green** or such items **as the awareness that a certain physical object looks to someone to be green** (p. 73).

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35. But what is the alternative? We might begin by trying something like the following: An overt or covert token of "This is green" in the presence of a green item is a *Konstantierung* and expresses observational knowledge if and only if it is a **manifestation of a tendency** to produce overt or covert tokens of "This is green" - given a certain set - if and only if a green object is being looked at in **standard conditions**. Clearly on this interpretation the occurrence of such tokens of "This is green" would be "following a rule" only in the sense that they are **instances of a uniformity**, a uniformity differing from the lightning-thunder case in that it is an **acquired causal characteristic of the language user**. Clearly the above suggestion, which corresponds to the "thermometer view" criticized by Professor Price, and which we have already rejected, won't do as it stands. Let us see, however, if it can't be revised to fit the criteria I have been using for "expressing observational knowledge" (pp. 73-74).

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The **first hurdle** to be jumped concerns the *authority* which, as I have emphasized, a sentence token must have in order that it may be said to express knowledge. Clearly, on this account the only thing that can remotely be supposed to constitute such authority is **the fact that one can infer the presence of a green object from the fact that someone makes this report**. As we have already noticed, the correctness of a report **does not have to be** construed as the rightness of an action. A report can be correct as being an instance **of a general mode of behavior** which, in a given linguistic community, it is reasonable **to sanction and support** (p. 74).

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The **second hurdle** is, however, the decisive one. For we have seen that to be the expression of knowledge, a report must **not only** *have* authority, this authority must *in some sense* **be recognized by the person whose report it is**. And this is a steep hurdle indeed. For if the authority of the report "This is green" lies in the fact that the existence of green items appropriately related to the perceiver can be inferred from the occurrence of such reports, it follows that only a person who is able to draw this inference, and therefore who has **not only the concept *green*, but also the concept of uttering "This is green"** - indeed, the concept of certain **conditions** of perception, those which would correctly be called 'standard conditions' - could **be in a position to token "This is green" in recognition of its authority**. In other words, for a *Konstantierung* "This is green" to "express observational knowledge," not only must it be a *symptom* or *sign* of the presence of a green object in standard conditions, but the perceiver **must know** that tokens of "This is green" are **symptoms of the presence of green objects in conditions which are standard** for visual perception (p. 75).

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36. Now it might be thought that there is something obviously absurd in the idea that before a token uttered by, say, Jones could be the expression of observational knowledge, Jones **would have** to know that overt verbal episodes of this kind are reliable indicators of the existence, suitably related to the speaker, of green objects. I do not think that it is. Indeed, I think that **something very like it** is true. The point I wish to make now, however, is that if it *is* true, then it follows, as a matter of simple logic, that **one couldn't have observational knowledge of any fact unless one knew many other things as well**. And let me emphasize that the point is not taken care of by distinguishing between *knowing how* and *knowing that*, and admitting that observational knowledge requires a lot of "know how." For the point is specifically that **observational knowledge of any particular fact, e.g. that this is green, presupposes that one knows general facts of the form *X is a reliable symptom of Y*** (p. 75).

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And to admit this requires an **abandonment of the traditional empiricist idea** that observational knowledge "stands on its own feet." Indeed, the suggestion would be anathema to traditional empiricists for the obvious reason that by making observational knowledge *presupposes* knowledge of general facts of the form *X is a reliable symptom of Y*, it runs counter to the idea that we come to know general facts of this form only *after* we have come to know by observation a number of particular facts which support the hypothesis that X is a symptom of Y.

And it might be thought that there is an **obvious regress** in the view we are examining. Does it not tell us that **observational knowledge at time t** presupposes **knowledge of the form X is a reliable symptom of Y**, which presupposes *prior* **observational knowledge**, which presupposes **other knowledge of the form X is a reliable symptom of Y**, which presupposes still **other**, and prior, **observational knowledge, and so on**? This charge, however, rests on too simple, indeed a radically mistaken, conception of what one is saying of Jones when one says that he *knows that p*. It is not just that the objection **supposes that knowing is an episode**; for clearly there are episodes which we can correctly characterize as knowings, in particular, *observings*. The essential point is that **in characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says** (pp. 75-76).

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37. Thus, all that the view I am defending requires is that **no tokening** by S *now* of "This is green" **is to count as** "expressing observational knowledge" **unless it is also correct to say of S that he now knows the appropriate fact of the form *X is a reliable symptom of Y***, namely that (and again I oversimplify) utterances of "This is green" are reliable indicators of the presence of green objects in standard conditions of perception. And while the correctness of this statement about Jones requires that **Jones could now cite prior particular facts as evidence** for the idea that these utterances are reliable indicators, it requires **only that it is correct to say that Jones now knows**, thus remembers, that these particular facts ***did* obtain**. It **does not** require that it be correct to say that at the time these facts did obtain he then knew them to obtain. And the regress disappears.

Thus, while Jones' ability to give inductive reasons today is built on a long history of acquiring and manifesting verbal habits in perceptual situations, and, in particular, the occurrence of verbal episodes, e.g. "This is green," which is superficially like those which are later properly said to express observational knowledge, **it does not require that any episode in this prior time be characterizable as expressing knowledge**. (At this point, the reader should reread Section 19 above.) (pp. 76-77).

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38. The idea that observation "strictly and properly so called" is constituted by certain self-authenticating nonverbal episodes, the authority of which is transmitted to verbal and quasi-verbal performances when these performances are made "in conformity with the semantical rules of the language," is, of course, **the heart** of the Myth of the Given. For the *given*, in epistemological tradition, is **what is *taken* by these self-authenticating episodes**. These 'takings' are, so to speak, the **unmoved movers** of empirical knowledge, the 'knowings in presence' which are presupposed by all other knowledge, both the knowledge of general truths and the knowledge 'in absence' of other particular matters of fact. **Such is the framework** in which traditional empiricism makes its characteristic claim that the perceptually given is the foundation of empirical knowledge (p. 77).

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EPM

Let me make it clear, however, that if I reject this framework, **it is not because** I should deny that observings are *inner* episodes, nor that, *strictly speaking* they are **nonverbal** episodes. It will be my contention, however, that **the sense** in which they are nonverbal - which is also the sense in which thought episodes are nonverbal - is one which gives **no aid or comfort to epistemological givenness**. In the concluding sections of this paper, I shall attempt to **explicate the logic** of inner episodes, and show that we can distinguish between observations and thoughts, on the one hand, and their verbal expression on the other, **without making the mistakes of traditional dualism**. I shall also attempt to explicate the logical status of *impressions* or immediate *experiences*, and thus bring to a successful conclusion the quest with which my argument began (p. 78).

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One final remark before I begin this task. If I reject the framework of traditional empiricism, it is not because I want to say that empirical knowledge has no foundation. For to put it this way is to suggest that it is really "empirical knowledge so-called," **and to put it in a box with rumors and hoaxes**. There is clearly *some* point to the picture of human knowledge as resting on a level of propositions – observation reports – which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them. On the other hand, I do wish to insist that **the metaphor of "foundation" is misleading** in that it keeps us from seeing that **if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports**, there is another logical dimension in which **the latter rest on the former**.

Above all, the picture is misleading because of its **static** character. One seems forced to choose between the picture of an **elephant which rests on a tortoise** (What supports the tortoise?) and the picture of a **great Hegelian serpent of knowledge** with its tail in its mouth (Where does it begin?). Neither will do. For empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, **is rational, not because it has a foundation but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once** (pp. 78-79).

Sellars on the myth of the given

SPACE OF CAUSES

- physical events
- stimuli
- sensations as non-epistemic
- causal explanations

SPACE OF REASONS

- justifications
- inferences
- beliefs as norm-governed
- conceptual articulation

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- Part VIII[32]-[38]
- Does Empirical Knowledge have a foundation?
- *Section 32*: Another incorrect, foundationalist account is described here. Sellars disagrees with only one bit of this story, though it turns out to be an important bit. Foundationalism is the claim that there is a structure of particular beliefs such that
 - (1) Each one is noninferentially arrived at.
 - (2) The beliefs in (1) presuppose no other belief, either particular or general.
 - (3) These noninferentially acquired beliefs constitute the ultimate court of appeal for all factual claims.Sellars accepts (1) and (3), but denies (2). His project at this point is to show how a bit of knowledge (belief) can, and indeed how all of it does, **presuppose other knowledge** (belief), **even though it is not inferred from that other knowledge or belief**. This possibility was not seriously examined by the classical epistemological tradition. It is a certain hierarchical picture of *understanding* (at this level a necessary condition of believing) that Sellars rejects. He does not object to a hierarchical picture of *justification*, once that has been suitably disentangled from bad foundationalism concerning the nature and acquisition of belief (pp. 152-153).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- For Sellars, there is no such thing as a noninferential belief, **if by that one means a belief one could have without grasping its inferential connection to at least some other beliefs**. For to understand a sentence, to grasp a propositional content (a necessary condition of having a belief) is **to place it** in the space of reasons, to assign it an inferential role in the game of giving and asking for reasons, as entailing some other contents and being incompatible with others. A noninferential report or belief can properly be called 'noninferential' only in the sense that the reporter's commitment to an essentially inferentially articulated content is elicited noninferentially on this occasion - that is, that it is elicited as a response to some nonlinguistic, nonepistemic environing circumstance, rather than as a response to another belief or assertion. **Noninferential beliefs do not form an autonomous discursive stratum**: there could be **no** language game consisting entirely of noninferential reports. (Notice that this is a stronger claim than that made above in connection with 'looks'-talk. For this claim concerns **any kind** of noninferential report, whether what they report is inner or outer, appearances or empirical realities.) For any sentence to have noninferential uses, **some sentences must have inferential ones**. For the conceptual content expressed by a sentence (what is believed) essentially involves its potential as a premise and as a conclusion of inferences. Unless one can employ noninferentially acquired beliefs as the premises of inferences leading to further beliefs, their acquisition does not qualify as acquiring *beliefs* (something propositionally contentful) at all. **On this inferentialist picture of conceptual content, one cannot have one concept without having many inferentially interrelated ones**. This does not mean that there could not be a language consisting only of expressions for observables, however. For the concepts of observables are concepts that have noninferential, reporting, uses. The requirement is only that the concepts that can be used to make noninferential reports **must also be available to be applied inferentially**, as the conclusions of inferences **whose premises** are the noninferential applications of other concepts (pp. 153-154).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- Sellars begins by asking about the nature of **the authority (a patently normative notion) of noninferential beliefs**, that is, their capacity to justify other claims. A distinction is needed first between **sentence types and sentence tokens**: the type is repeatable and can be instantiated on different occasions, whereas the token is unrepeatable. It is the utterance or inscription of the sentence on a particular occasion. So if the distinction is applied to letters instead of sentences, the sequence 'aeaaaea' contains two letter types and seven letter tokens, four of one type and three of the other. Now it can be seen that it is sentence tokens whose justification is at issue. For though there are some sentences that are justified, if they are justified at all, whenever they are tokened, such as '2+2=4,' and 'Red is a color,' **there are others that can be justified (and true) on one occasion and not justified or true on another**. Then only the tokens and not the types can be said to be justified. These are sentences like 'That car is red,' or 'I'm hungry now,' which contain words whose reference is determined by the actual circumstances in which the sentence is tokened. These are called **"token reflexive"** expressions. **Many, though not all**, of the non inferential beliefs putatively described in (1)-(3) above **are** token reflexive. **Authority or credibility** (positive justification status) is either extrinsic, coming from something else, in this case by inferential inheritance, or intrinsic. Intrinsic credibility **may be associated with types**, as in meaning-analytic statements such as 'All bachelors are unmarried males,' **or with tokens**, as in 'This is red' (or, given Sellars's account of 'looks,' 'This looks red') (pp. 154-155).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- *Section 33*: Sellars now considers a line of thought according to which intrinsically credible types and intrinsically credible tokens, analytic claims and observation reports, are similar in that they are both types such that their being correctly tokened, that is, tokened according to the *rules* for the use of all the component expressions, **is a sufficient, not just a necessary, condition** of their being true and justified (hence not just believed but known). Sellars can swallow all of this except the bit about rules. The idea that he will reject is that analytic statements are true by virtue of discursive definition (definition of a linguistic expression in terms of other linguistic expressions), while observation reports are true by virtue of ostensive definitions. Ostensive definitions are the only sort we can give of terms like 'red.' They consist of defining the expression by **exhibiting samples** of the things it applies to (pointing to red objects). The usual foundationalist infinite regress argument can be applied to show that not all expressions of the language can be discursively defined on pain of circularity or infinite regress (in either case no definition is achieved) (pp. 155-156).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- So there must be ostensive definitions in the language. These definitions, just like the discursive ones, codify the rules of appropriate usage of the expressions they define. Just as following those rules is sufficient for the truth of analytic statements, so following the 'rules' of ostensive definition is to be sufficient for the truth of observation reports. (Such a rule might look like the definition in [13].) **At this point Sellars disagrees.** One can imagine following the rules for the use of 'this,' 'is,' and 'green' **only if one has some idea of prelinguistic awareness of green - the Myth.** For Sellars it is incoherent to talk of ostensive definitions setting up rules for using 'green,' for **there is no language available in which such rules could be stated.** Ostensive definitions establish practices; **they are regular, but not rule governed** (p. 156).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- *Section 34*: The notion that the authority of noninferential reports rests **on episodes of nonverbal, hence *nonconceptual*, awareness**, which verbal performances express, **is a version** of the Myth. From Sellars's point of view, such episodes are **the tortoise** underneath the elephant.
- *Section 35*: Here Sellars presents his alternative view. It begins with the observation that " . . . a token of 'This is green' in the presence of a green item . . . expresses observational knowledge [only if] it is a manifestation of a tendency to produce tokens of 'This is green' -**given a certain 'set'** (context of collateral commitments and circumstances) **if and only if a green object is being looked at in standard conditions**" That is, it must be the expression of a reliable differential responsive disposition. But photocells and parrots could satisfy this condition, which shows that so far **only the responsive dispositions** part of the observation report has been specified. It remains to **add conditions to capture the epistemic side**, the dimension of endorsement, of undertaking inferentially articulated commitments, of producing a performance with a distinctive kind of authority (pp. 156-157).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- To have the authority of knowledge, the report **must not only be reliable; it must be taken to be reliable**. In fact Sellars claims that it must **be known by the reporter** to be reliable (and in this he perhaps goes too far): ". . . the perceiver must know that tokens of 'This is green' are symptoms of the presence of green objects in conditions which are standard for visual perception." 'Justification' has the 'ing/ed' ambiguity (cf. [24]): justifying, a practical **activity**, or being justified, a normative **status**. Sellars claims that one cannot have the status except when it is possible to redeem that claim to authority and epistemic privilege by engaging in the activity of justifying it. This claim of the priority of practice over status is a specific variety of pragmatism, to which Sellars adheres. The difference between a noninferential reporter and a photocell, or a parrot trained to utter 'It's getting warmer' as the temperature rises, **does not lie in the reliability** or range of their responsive dispositions. **It lies in the capacity of the reporter to redeem the commitment undertaken**, the authority claimed by the reporting, by justifying the claim (if challenged) **by giving reasons** for it. The by now familiar basic point is that in order to count as making a claim (expressing a belief) at all, the reporter must be "in the space of giving and asking for reasons," in addition to having the right responsive dispositions. The further claim being forwarded here is that for a noninferential report to express knowledge (or the belief it expresses to constitute knowledge), the reporter must be able to justify it, by exhibiting reasons for it. This is to say that the reporter **must be able to exhibit it as the conclusion of an inference**, even though that is **not how** the commitment originally came about (pp. 157-158).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- The inference in question is what might be called a "reliability inference." **One justifies a noninferentially elicited report that something is red by noting that one was disposed noninferentially to apply the concept red to it, and pointing out that one is a reliable reporter of red things in these circumstances.** To say that one is reliable is just to say that the inference from one's being disposed to call something red to its actually being red is a good one. Thus the reliability of one's differential responsive dispositions, together with the report's being an exercise of those dispositions, justifies –offers good reasons for-the report. In insisting that in order properly to be credited with knowledge a reporter **must be** able to offer an inferential justification of the belief in question, **Sellars is endorsing an epistemological internalism** that puts him at odds with more recent reliabilist externalists in epistemology. Their claim is that the real function of the traditional justification condition on knowledge is to **rule out accidentally true beliefs**. If so, then the rationale for engaging in assessments of whether various beliefs qualify as knowledge is perfectly well-served **by insisting only that candidate beliefs result from reliable belief-forming mechanisms** - that is, mechanisms that are **likely to lead** to truths, **whether or not** the reporter knows that they are. Forming beliefs that one can justify then appears as one reliable mechanism among others (pp. 158-159).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- Of course, from Sellars's point of view it **would be a mistake** to conclude from this line of thought **that one could trade** inferential justification for reliable belief-formation in a wholesale fashion. For that it is *beliefs* that one is forming, that what one is doing is applying *concepts* is a matter of their specifically *inferential* articulation - their role in the game of giving and asking for reasons, justifying and demanding justifications. Against that background of inferential practice, however, **it is not obvious why Sellars should resist the reliabilist's suggestion**. Why isn't it enough that the attributor of knowledge know that the reporter is reliable, that the attributor of knowledge endorse the inference from the reporter's responsive disposition noninferentially to apply the concept red to the thing's (probably) being red? Why should the reporter herself have to be able to offer the inferential justification for her noninferential report? (This is the thought behind the qualification offered parenthetically early in the second paragraph above.) (p. 159).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- *Section 36*: The moral is that on the true view "one could not have observational knowledge of any fact **unless one knew many other things as well.**" This is not to say that observation reports are somehow results of inferences after all, but only that, though noninferential, they **must be justifiable to be justified.** The false view thinks it is supposed to give a causal description of how knowledge is possessed, but "... in characterizing an episode or state as that of knowing we are **not giving an empirical description** of that episode or state: **we are placing it in the logical space of reasons**, or justifying and being able to justify what one says." Thus everything irrelevant to justification, either to knowing what would be a justification or to being entitled to produce one, is a **noncognitive causal antecedent**, perhaps a necessary condition of empirical knowledge, but not one that is constitutive of it. Nor is the general point specific to the normative, epistemic status of knowledge - though Sellars does not point this out. He could as well have said that in characterizing an episode or state as one of *believing, applying concepts, or grasping propositional contents* we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state but placing it in the logical space of reasons, or justifying and being able to justify what one says. **For only what is inferentially articulated is conceptually contentful** (and hence qualifies as a believable or claimable) at all. As we saw in the previous section, however, Sellars does want to insist further that one cannot *know* noninferentially that something is green unless one also *know* that one is a reliable reporter of green things under the prevailing circumstances (pp. 159-160).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- *Section 37*: This view -the one Sellars endorses - **seems to involve** an infinite regress. For how could we have acquired knowledge that tokens of 'This is green' are reliable symptoms . . . unless we had had knowledge of such facts as 'This is green,' and "This is a token of 'this is green'" beforehand? Sellars's answer is that **we can acquire knowledge of facts of these three types simultaneously**, but that **we can know facts that bear on events that occurred before** we acquired any of this knowledge. Thus: ". . . it requires only that it is correct to say that **Jones now knows, thus remembers**, that these particular facts **did** obtain. It does not require that it be correct to say that at the time these facts did obtain he then knew them to obtain. And the regress disappears." Thus children at the age of six can know that at four they saw – in the sense of reliably responded to - a fire, although at the age of four all they could do was say 'fire' parrot-fashion, without knowing there was a fire. The important difference is not one of responsive disposition but one of capacity to endorse. The six-year-old has **moved into** the space of giving and asking for reasons; he can commit himself to a claim and be treated as authoritative; he is responsible for the claim he undertakes. For this he must at least be able to tell what he is thereby committing himself to and what evidence would entitle him to it, that is, he must understand his claim. But even that is not sufficient. For this new **normative status is socially** conferred (pp. 160-161).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- No nonepistemic description of the candidate reporter **suffices** for the conferral of this status, **unless and only insofar as the community** conferring that status, treating the individual as responsible, reliable, and so on, **takes it to be sufficient**. Compare achieving one's majority and being able for the first time to undertake contractual obligations. This status consists in **the community's recognition** of it. Some minors are more reliable at carrying out the commitments they undertake than many over the age of twenty-one, but this fact does not make their signature mean that they have entered into a contract. This is how "the light dawns slowly over the whole": at some point one masters the moves, inferential and noninferential, sufficiently that one's noises come to be taken by one's community as having the significance of making claims, undertaking commitments, giving reasons (pp. 161-162).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (32-38)
- *Section 38*: The only sense in which there is no foundation for empirical knowledge is the sense in which the observation reports, which in a certain sense are its foundation, **themselves rest** (not inferentially, but in the order of *understanding* and sometimes of justification) **on other sorts of knowledge**. Observation reports, whether of inner episodes or outer happenings, **do not constitute an autonomous stratum** of the language - a game one could master though one had as yet not mastered the inferential use of any expressions. That is, **Sellars rejects only claim (2)** of the three foundationalist theses considered in [32]. But there is no need for a foundation in this sense: "Empirical knowledge is rational, **not because it has a foundation** but because **it is a self-correcting enterprise** which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not all at once" (p. 162).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

IX. Science and Ordinary Usage

39. There are many strange and exotic specimens in the gardens of philosophy: Epistemology, Ontology, Cosmology, to name but a few. And clearly there is much good sense - not only rhyme but reason - to these labels. It is not my purpose, however, to animadvert on the botanizing of philosophies and things philosophical, **other than to call attention to a recent addition** to the list of philosophical flora and fauna, **the Philosophy of Science**. Nor shall I attempt to locate this new specialty in a classificatory system. The point I wish to make, however, can be introduced by calling to mind the fact that **classificatory schemes**, however theoretical their purpose, **have practical consequences**: nominal causes, so to speak, have real effects. As long as there was no such subject as 'philosophy of science,' all students of philosophy **felt obligated** to keep at least one eye part of the time on both the methodological and the substantive aspects of the scientific enterprise (p. 79).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

And if **the result was often a confusion** of the task of philosophy with the task of science, and almost equally **often a projection** of the framework of the latest scientific speculations into the common-sense picture of the world (witness the almost unquestioned assumption, today, that the common-sense world of physical objects in Space and Time must be *analyzable* into spatially and temporally, or even spatiotemporally, related *events*), at least it had the merit of ensuring that reflection on the nature and implications of scientific discourse was an integral and vital part of philosophical thinking generally. But now that philosophy of science has nominal as well as real existence, **there has arisen the temptation to leave it to the specialists**, and to **confuse the sound idea** that philosophy is not science **with the mistaken idea** that philosophy is independent of science (pp. 79-80).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

40. As long as discourse was viewed as a map, subdivided into a side-by-side of sub-maps, each representing a subregion in a side-by-side of regions making up the total subject matter of discourse, and as long as the task of the philosopher was conceived to be the piecemeal one of analysis in the sense of definition -the task, so to speak, of "making little ones out of big ones" - one could view with equanimity the existence of philosophical specialists - specialists in formal and mathematical logic, in perception, in moral philosophy, etc. For if discourse were as represented above, where would be the harm of each man fencing himself off in his own garden? In spite, however, of the persistence of the slogan "philosophy is analysis," we now realize that **the atomistic conception of philosophy is a snare and a delusion**. For "analysis" no longer connotes the definition of terms, but rather the clarification of the logical structure - in the broadest sense - of discourse, and discourse no longer appears as one plane parallel to another, but as **a tangle of intersecting dimensions** whose relations with one another and with extra-linguistic fact conform to no single or simple pattern. No longer can the philosopher interested in perception say "let him who is interested in prescriptive discourse analyze its concepts and leave me in peace." Most if not all philosophically interesting concepts are **caught up in more than one dimension of discourse**, and while the atomism of early analysis has a healthy successor in the contemporary stress on journeyman tactics, the grand strategy of the philosophical enterprise is once again directed toward **that articulated and integrated vision of man-in-the-universe** - or, shall I say discourse-about-man-in-all-discourse -which has traditionally been its goal (pp. 80-81).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

But the moral I wish specifically to draw is that **no longer can one smugly say** "Let the person who is interested in scientific discourse analyze scientific discourse and let the person who is interested in ordinary discourse analyze ordinary discourse." Let me not be misunderstood. I am not saying that in order to discern the logic - the polydimensional logic -of ordinary discourse, it is necessary to make use of the results or the methods of the sciences. Nor even that, within limits, such a division of labor is not a sound corollary of the journeyman's approach. My point is rather that **what we call the scientific enterprise** is the flowering of a dimension of discourse **which already exists** in what historians call the "**prescientific stage**," and that failure to understand this type of discourse "writ large" - in science – may lead, indeed, has often led to a failure to appreciate its role in "ordinary usage," and, as a result, to a failure to understand the full logic of even the most fundamental, the "simplest" empirical terms (p. 81).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

41. Another point of equal importance. The procedures of philosophical analysis as such **may make no use** of the methods or results of the sciences. But **familiarity with the trend of scientific thought is essential to the *appraisal* of the framework categories of the common-sense picture of the world.** For if the line of thought embodied in the preceding paragraphs is sound, if, that is to say, scientific discourse is but a continuation of a dimension of discourse **which has been present** in human discourse **from the very beginning**, then one would expect there **to be a sense in which the scientific picture of the world *replaces* the common-sense picture**; a sense in which the scientific account of "what there is" ***supersedes*** the descriptive ontology of everyday life (pp. 81-82).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Here one must be cautious. For there is **a right way and a wrong way to make this point**. Many years ago it used to be confidently said that science has shown, for example, that physical objects **aren't really** colored. Later it was pointed out that if this is interpreted as the claim that the sentence "Physical objects have colors" expresses an empirical proposition which, though widely believed by common sense, has been shown by science to be false, then, of course, this claim is absurd. The idea that physical objects aren't colored **can make sense only as the (misleading) expression of one aspect of a philosophical critique of the very framework of physical objects located in Space and enduring through Time**. In short, "Physical objects aren't really colored" makes sense only as a clumsy expression of the idea that there are no such things as the colored physical objects of the common-sense world, where this is interpreted, **not as an empirical proposition** - like "There are no nonhuman featherless bipeds" - *within* the common-sense frame, **but as the expression of a rejection (in some sense) of this very framework itself**, in favor of another built around different, if not unrelated, **categories** (p. 82).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

This rejection **need not, of course, be a *practical* rejection**. It need not, that is, carry with it a proposal to brain-wash existing populations and train them to speak differently. And, of course, as long as the existing framework is used, it will be *incorrect* to say - **otherwise than to make a philosophical point *about the framework*** - that no object is really colored, or is located in Space, or endures through Time. But, ***speaking as a philosopher*, I am quite prepared to say that the common-sense world of physical objects in Space and Time is unreal** - that is, that there are no such things. Or, to put it less paradoxically, that **in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not** (pp. 82-83).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

43. There is a **widespread impression** that reflection on how we learn the language in which, in everyday life, we describe the world, leads to the conclusion **that the categories of the common-sense picture of the world have, so to speak, an unchallengeable authenticity**. There are, of course, different conceptions of just what this fundamental categorial framework is. For some it is sense contents and phenomenal relations between them; for others physical objects, persons, and processes in Space and Time. But whatever their points of difference, the philosophers I have in mind **are united in the conviction that** what is called the "ostensive tie" between our fundamental descriptive vocabulary and the world **rules out of court as utterly absurd** any notion that there are no such things as this framework talks about (p. 83).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

An integral part of this conviction is what I shall call (in an extended sense) **the *positivistic conception of science***, the idea that the framework of theoretical objects (molecules, electromagnetic fields, etc.) and their relationships is, so to speak, **an *auxiliary framework***. In its most explicit form, it is the idea that theoretical objects and propositions concerning them are "**calculational devices**," the value and status of which consist in their systematizing and heuristic role with respect to confirmable generalizations formulated in the framework of terms which enjoy a direct ostensive link with the world. One is tempted to put this by saying that according to these philosophers, the objects of ostensibly linked discourse behave as *if* and *only* as *if* they were bound up with or consisted of scientific entities. But, of course, these philosophers would hasten to point out (and rightly so) that

X behaves as if it consisted of Y's

makes sense only by contrast with

X behaves as it does because it *does* consist of Y's

whereas their contention is exactly that **where the Y's are *scientific* objects, no such contrast makes sense** (pp. 83-84).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

The point I am making is that as long as one thinks that there is a framework, whether of physical objects or of sense contents, **the absolute authenticity of which is guaranteed by the fact that the learning of this framework involves an "ostensive step,"** so long one will be tempted to think of the authority of theoretical discourse as entirely derivative, that of a calculational auxiliary, an effective heuristic device. It is one of my prime purposes, in the following sections, to convince the reader that **this interpretation of the status of the scientific picture of the world rests on two mistakes:** (1) a misunderstanding (which I have already exposed) of the **ostensive element** in the learning and use of a language –the Myth of the Given; (2) **a reification** of the *methodological* distinction between theoretical and non-theoretical discourse into a *substantive* distinction between theoretical and nontheoretical existence (p. 84).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

44. One way of summing up what I have been saying above is by saying that there is a widespread impression abroad, aided and abetted by a naive interpretation of concept formation, that philosophers of science deal with a mode of discourse which is, so to speak, **a peninsular offshoot** from the mainland of ordinary discourse. The study of scientific discourse is conceived to be a worthy employment for those who have the background and motivation to keep track of it, but an employment which is fundamentally **a hobby divorced from the perplexities of the mainland**. But, of course, this summing up **won't quite do**. For all philosophers would agree that no philosophy would be complete unless it resolved the perplexities which arise when one attempts to **think through the relationship of the framework of modern science to ordinary discourse**. My point, however, is not that any one would reject the idea that this is a proper task for philosophy, but that, by approaching the language in which the plain man describes and explains empirical fact with the presuppositions of *givenness*, **they are led to a "resolution" of these perplexities along the lines of what I have called the positivistic or peninsular conception of scientific discourse** a "resolution" which, I believe, is **not only superficial, but positively mistaken** (pp. 84-85).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (39-44)
- Part IX[39]-[44]
- Science and Ordinary Usage
- *Sections 39-44*: Here Sellars sketches his Scientific Realism. He includes this discussion because if science is viewed in the opposite, positivist fashion, the notion of inner episodes as theoretical entities, which he is about to introduce, is incoherent. Thus [41] claims that "science is the measure of all things" This is a view about the authority of claims couched in scientific vocabulary relative to the authority of claims couched in other vocabularies. [43] briefly indicates the positivist view. According to the positivist scheme, there is an observation language in which data are formulated and the results of experiments expressed. All we directly know about are the objects of observation (observation reports are the *Konstatierungen* of [33]). According to this account, a theoretical language is introduced in order to systematize our observations and facilitate prediction and control. But the objects the theory postulates are **virtual, mere calculational devices or instruments** for the expression and systematization of observations. Theories are instruments, and their assertions should **not be taken as** entailing the existence of the objects they postulate. Sellars points out that only someone who thought that the observations themselves were given, not the product of the learning of concepts with which to report, would be tempted by this picture. Once it is discarded, another way of thinking about the distinction between theoretical and observable objects and concepts comes into view (pp. 162-163).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (39-44)
- According to Sellars's view, the distinction between purely theoretical objects and observable objects is *methodological* rather than *ontological*. That is, theoretical and observable objects are **not different kinds of things**. They differ **only in how we come to know about them**. Theoretical objects are ones of which we can only have *inferential* knowledge, whereas observable objects can also be known *noninferentially*; theoretical concepts are ones we can be entitled to apply only **as** the conclusions of inferences, whereas concepts of observables **also have noninferential uses**. But the line between things to which we have only inferential cognitive access and things to which we also have noninferential cognitive access can shift with time, for instance, as new instruments are developed. Thus when first postulated to explain perturbations in the orbit of Neptune, Pluto was a purely theoretical object; the only claims we could make about it were the conclusions of inferences. But the development of more powerful telescopes eventually made it accessible to observation, and so a subject of noninferential reports. Pluto did not undergo an ontological change; all that changed was its relation to us. (Notice that this realism about theoretical entities **does not entail scientific realism in the sense that privileges science over other sorts of cognitive activity**, although Sellars usually discusses the two sorts of claims together.) (pp. 163-164)

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (39-44)
- It might be objected to this view that when the issue of the ontological status of theoretical entities is raised, they are not considered merely as objects in principle like any others save that they happen at the moment to be beyond our powers of observation. They are thought of as *unobservable* in a much stronger sense: permanently and in principle **inaccessible to observation. But Sellars denies that anything is unobservable in this sense.** To be observable is just to be noninferentially reportable. Noninferential reportability requires only that there are circumstances in which reporters can apply the concepts in question (the dimension of inferentially articulated endorsement) by exercising reliable differential dispositions to respond to the objects in question (the causal dimension), and know that they are doing so. **In this sense, physicists with the right training can noninferentially report the presence of mu mesons in bubble chambers.** In this sense of 'observation,' nothing real is in principle beyond the reach of observation. (Indeed, in Sellars's sense, one who mastered reliable differential responsive dispositions noninferentially to apply normative vocabulary would be directly observing normative facts. It is in this sense that we might be said to be able to hear, not just the noises someone else makes, but their *words*, and indeed, what they are saying—their *meanings* (pp. 164-165).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (39-44)
- Once one sees that **observation is not based on some primitive sort of preconceptual awareness** (the tortoise beneath the elephant), the fact that some observation reports are riskier than others and that when challenged we sometimes retreat to safer ones from which the originals can be inferred will not tempt one to think that the original reports were in fact the products of inference from those basic or minimal observations. The physicist, if challenged to back up his report of a mu meson, may indeed justify his claim by citing the distinctively hooked vapor trail in the bubble chamber. This is something else observable, from which the presence of the mu meson can, in the right circumstances, be inferred. But to say that is not to say that the original report was the product of an inference after all. It was the exercise of a reliable differential responsive disposition keyed to a whole chain of reliably covarying events, which includes mu mesons, hooked vapor trails, and retinal images. What makes it a report of mu mesons, and not of hooked vapor trails or retinal images, **is the inferential role** of the concept the physicist noninferentially applies. (It is a consequence of something's being a mu meson, for instance, that it is *much* smaller than a finger, which does not follow from something's being a hooked vapor trail.) If *mu meson* is the concept the physicist applies noninferentially, then if he is sufficiently reliable, when correct, that is what he sees. His retreat, when a question is raised, to a report of a hooked vapor trail, whose presence provides **good inferential reason** for the original, noninferentially elicited claim, is a retreat to a report that is **safer in the sense that he is a more reliable reporter of hooked vapor trails than of mu mesons**, and that it takes less training to be able reliably to report vapor trails of a certain shape, so that is a skill shared more widely. But the fact that an inferential justification can be offered, and that the demand for one may be in order, no more undermines the status of the original report as noninferential (as genuinely an observation) than does the corresponding fact that I may under various circumstances be obliged to back up my report of something as red by invoking my reliability as a reporter of red things in these circumstances - from which, together with my disposition to call it red, the claim originally endorsed noninferentially may be inferred (pp. 165-166).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

X. Private Episodes: The Problem

45. Let us now return, after a long absence, to the problem of how the similarity among the experiences of *seeing that an object over there is red*, *its looking to one that an object over there is red* (when in point of fact it is *not* red), and its looking to one as though there were a red object over there (when in fact there is *nothing* over there at all) is to be understood. Part of this similarity, we saw, consists in the fact that they all involve the idea - the proposition, if you please - that the object over there is red. But over and above this there is, of course, **the aspect which many philosophers have attempted to clarify** by the notion of *impressions* or *immediate experience* (p. 85).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

It was pointed out in Sections 21ff. above that there are *prima facie* two ways in which facts of the form *x merely looks red* might be explained, in addition to the kind of explanation which is based on empirical generalizations relating the color of objects, **the circumstances in which they are seen, and the colors they look to have**. These two ways are (a) the introduction of **impressions or immediate experiences as theoretical entities**; and (b) **the discovery, on scrutinizing these situations, that they contain impressions or immediate experiences as components**. I called attention to the **paradoxical** character of the first of these alternatives, and refused, at that time, to take it seriously. But in the meantime the second alternative, **involving as it does the Myth of the Given, has turned out to be no more satisfactory** (p. 86).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

For, in the first place, how are these impressions to be described, if not by using such words as "red" and "triangular." Yet, if my argument, to date, is sound, physical objects alone can be literally red and triangular. Thus, in the cases I am considering, there is **nothing to be** red and triangular. It would seem to follow that "impression of a red triangle" could mean nothing more than "impression of **the sort which is common to those experiences** in which we either see that something is red and triangular, or something merely looks red and triangular or there merely looks to be a red and triangular object over there." And if we can never characterize "impressions" intrinsically, **but only by what is logically a definite description, i.e., as the kind of entity which is common to such situations**, then we would scarcely seem to be any better off than if we maintained that talk about "impressions" is a **notational convenience, a code, for the language** in which we speak of how things look and what there looks to be (p. 86).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

And this line of thought is reinforced by the consideration that once we give up the idea that we begin our sojourn in this world with **any** - even a vague, fragmentary, and indiscriminating - **awareness** of the logical space of particulars, kinds, facts, and resemblances, and recognize that even such "simple" concepts as those of colors are **the fruit of a long process of publicly reinforced responses to public objects** (including verbal performances) **in public situations**, we may well be puzzled as to how, even if there are such things as impressions or sensations, we could come to know that there are, and to know what sort of thing they are. For we now *recognize that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it* (pp. 86-87).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Indeed, once we think this line of reasoning through, we are struck by the fact that if it is sound, we are faced **not only** with the question "How could we come to have the idea of an 'impression' or 'sensation?'" **but by** the question "How could we come to have the idea of something's looking red to us, or," to get to the crux of the matter, "of seeing that something is red?" In short, we are brought face to face **with the general problem of understanding how there can be inner episodes** - episodes, that is, which somehow **combine privacy**, in that each of us has privileged access to his own, **with intersubjectivity**, in that each of us can, in principle, know about the other's. We might try to put this more linguistically as the problem of **how there can be a sentence** (e.g. "S has a toothache") of which it is *logically* true that **whereas anybody can use it to state a fact, only one person, namely S himself, can use it to make a report**. But while this is a useful formulation, it does not do justice to the supposedly **episodic character** of the items in question. And that this is the heart of the puzzle is shown by the fact that many philosophers who would not deny that there are short-term hypothetical and mongrel hypothetical-categorical facts about behavior which others can ascribe to us **on behavioral evidence**, but which **only we can report**, have found it to be **logical nonsense to speak of non-behavioral episodes** of which this is true (pp. 87-88).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Thus, it has been claimed by Ryle (17) that the very idea that there are such episodes is a **category mistake**, while others have argued that though there are such episodes, they **cannot be characterized in intersubjective discourse**, learned as it is in a context of public objects and in the 'academy' of one's linguistic peers. It is my purpose to argue that **both these contentions are quite mistaken**, and that not only are inner episodes *not* category mistakes, they are quite "**effable**" in intersubjective discourse. And it is my purpose to show, positively, how this can be the case. I am particularly concerned to make this point in connection with such inner episodes as **sensations and feelings**, in short, with what has unfortunately, I think - been called "immediate experience." For such an account is **necessary to round off** this examination of the Myth of the Given. But before I can come to grips with these topics, the way must be prepared by a discussion of inner episodes of quite another kind, namely *thoughts* (p. 88).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (45)
- Part X[45]
- Private episodes: The Problem
- *Section 45*: Sellars starts by setting the problem that will occupy him for the rest of the essay: "the problem of how the similarity among the experiences of *seeing that an object over there is red*, *its looking to one that an object over there is red* (when in point of fact it is *not* red), and *its looking to one as though there were a red object over there* (when in fact there is *nothing* over there at all). Part of this similarity, we saw, consists in the fact that **they all involve the . . . proposition . . . that the object over there is red**. But over and above this there is, of course, **the aspect which many philosophers have attempted to clarify by the notion of *impressions* or *immediate experience***." Sellars's response to this problem will not be fully in place until [62]. Next Sellars summarizes [32]-[38] (the meat of his epistemological discussion): we now recognize that **instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice requires already having the concept, and cannot account for it**. For to notice something - **to be aware of it in the sense relevant to assessments of sapience, rather than of mere sentience** - is to respond to it by applying a concept, making a noninferential judgment about it. So **until one has the concept 'green,' one cannot notice or be aware of green things**, though one can respond differentially to them - obviously, in ways other than by applying the concept *green*. The title of this essay is "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," but Sellars never comes right out and tells us what his attitude toward empiricism is (pp. 166-167).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (45)
- One might think he endorses it, misled by remarks such as he offers in [6] in discussing the inconsistent triad of commitments characteristic of classical sense-datum theories. For there he dismisses the option of rejecting the third element of the trilemma by doing no more than observing that to abandon it would "do violence to the predominantly nominalistic proclivities of the empiricist tradition" (proclivities that he discusses in more detail in [24]-[28]). But to interpret this remark as an endorsement by Sellars of the nominalistic proclivities of empiricism that he invokes here **would be to mistake the role the remark plays in his argument**. It is often hard to tell when Sellars is speaking in his own voice, and **this is one of the occasions** on which he is not. It is the classical sense-datum theorists who are committed to this tenet of empiricism, not Sellars -although, as will emerge just below, **he does as a matter of fact share with empiricists the belief that** "the capacity to have classificatory beliefs of the form 'x is F' is acquired"(p. 167).

Sellars on the myth of the given

Brandom's comment (45)

Indeed, we can see at this point that one of the major tasks of the whole essay is to **dismantle empiricism**. For traditional empiricism **depends on episodes of nonverbal, nonconceptual awareness**, which serve both as the raw material for a process of abstraction by which concepts can be formed and grasped, and as our warrant for the ground-level (noninferential) applications of those concepts. (Compare [34].) **This whole picture depends essentially on the Myth of the Given**. Sellars's own view is one he is elsewhere happy to call 'rationalist': **conscious experience presupposes that the experiencer already has concepts, and so cannot account for their acquisition**. In this claim, Sellars aligns himself with the Leibniz of the New Essays, writing against his Lockean target. Sellars's task in the rest of the essay is to **show how the philosophy of mind can understand inner episodes** once one has **rejected both Cartesianism and empiricism**, having recognized that **both depend upon the Myth of the Given**.

The classical pre-Kantian rationalists, having won their way through to the realization that awareness in the sense that distinguishes us from prerational animals **presupposes the possession of concepts**, took it that that claim **committed them to seeing concepts as innate** - perhaps not all concepts, but at least the most basic or general ones. Sellars shows that that is not so. For he shows how to put together

- a) reliable differential responsive dispositions, causally keyed to things; and
- b) inferential uses of concepts, which actually apply to those things,

each of which can be **acquired separately**, to get the capacity for conscious conceptual awareness of things. He shows us how to build out of those ingredients non-inferentially elicited reports in which the concepts are applied to the things that causally elicit the reports. In this way he can explain how concepts such as red and green can be acquired, **by a route that does not presuppose preconceptual awareness of red and green things** (though it does require the preconceptual capacity to discriminate them, and so to learn reliably to respond differentially to them) (pp. 168-169).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (45)
- That allows him to agree with the empiricists (without indulging in their 'nominalist proclivities' - see [24]-[29]) that "the capacity to have classificatory beliefs of the form "x is F is acquired," as he puts the point in [6]. In the rest of the essay, he is going to tell a corresponding story about the concepts *thought* and *sense impression*, ending with our capacity to be directly (in the sense of noninferentially) aware of them.
- His question at this point is, if this rationalistic 'psychological nominalism' is right (and Sellars insists that it is), **how could we come to have the idea of an inner episode?** Descartes thought it a satisfactory answer to this question that we get the idea **just by having inner episodes**. But this must now be rejected as a sufficient condition of our noticing (being aware of, believing that we have) them, for that is **just the Myth**. The empiricists thought we could get the concept of thoughts and impressions **by abstraction** from the thoughts and impressions **we were already in any case aware of**. That too is **a version of the Myth**. "In short, we are brought face to face with the general problem of understanding how there can be inner episodes - episodes that is, which somehow combine privacy in that each of us has privileged access to his own, with intersubjectivity, in that each of us can, in principle, know about the other's." In other words, how could we ever have come to know that reports of the form 'I'm seeing something that looks red,' or 'I am thinking that Vienna is in Austria,' were reliable signs of certain inner facts, given that we can make no empirical correlation by induction as we can with 'This is red'? **The Jones myth is the answer** to this question - indeed, **the only answer available once we have given up both the self-authenticating nonverbal episode notion of Descartes and the empiricists, and the anti-inner-episode strain in Ryle and Wittgenstein** (as promised in [10]) (pp. 169-170).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (45)
- Sellars will "use a myth to kill a myth" [63]. He will tell a story about how a community that turns out always already to have had thoughts and sense impressions **might work its way up to having the concepts** *thought* and *sense impression*, **and then come to be able to apply them noninferentially and so for the first time to notice and be aware of those thoughts and sense impressions**. This is explicitly put forward as a myth. Sellars is not claiming that things actually happened this way, that we really had Rylean ancestors, or owe our concepts to a primitive genius (never mind one called 'Jones'). Sellars's pragmatism dictates that issues of conceptual priority be translated into questions of the **relative autonomy of different strata of language** - that is, into questions concerning what language games can be played independently of and antecedently to which others. Telling an as-if historical, developmental story is **a way of exhibiting those relations** of conceptual dependency and presupposition (p. 170).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

XI. Thoughts: The Classical View

46. Recent empiricism has been **of two minds** about the status of *thoughts*. **On the one hand**, it has resonated to the idea that insofar as there are episodes which are thoughts, **they are verbal or linguistic episodes**. Clearly, however, even if candid overt verbal behaviors by people who had learned a language *were* thoughts, **there are not nearly enough of them** to account for all the cases in which it would be argued that a person was thinking. Nor can we plausibly suppose that the remainder is accounted for **by those inner episodes which are often very clumsily lumped together under the heading "verbal imagery."** **On the other hand**, they have been tempted to suppose that the *episodes* which are referred to by verbs pertaining to **thinking include all forms of "intelligent behavior," verbal as well as nonverbal**, and that the "thought episodes" which are supposed to be manifested by these behaviors are **not really episodes at all, but rather hypothetical and mongrel hypothetical-categorical facts about these and still other behaviors**. This, however, runs into the difficulty that whenever we try to explain what we mean by calling a piece of *nonhabitual* behavior intelligent, we seem to find it necessary **to do so in terms of thinking**. The uncomfortable feeling will not be downed that the dispositional account of thoughts in terms of intelligent behavior is **covertly circular** (pp. 88-89).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

47. Now the classical tradition claimed that there is a family of episodes, neither overt verbal behavior nor verbal imagery, which are *thoughts*, and **that both overt verbal behavior and verbal imagery owe their meaningfulness to the fact that they stand to these *thoughts* in the unique relation of "expressing" them.** These episodes are introspectable. Indeed, it was usually believed that they could not occur **without being known** to occur. But this can be traced to a number of **confusions**, perhaps the most important of which was **the idea that *thoughts* belong in the same general category as sensations, images, tickles, itches, etc.** This mis-assimilation of thoughts to sensations and feelings was equally, as we saw in Sections 26 ff. above, a mis-assimilation of sensations and feelings to thoughts, and a falsification of both. The assumption that if there are thought episodes, they must be immediate experiences **is common both to those who propounded the classical view and to those who reject it**, saying that they "find no such experiences." If we purge the classical tradition of these confusions, it becomes the idea that **to each of us belongs a stream of episodes**, not themselves immediate experiences, **to which we have privileged**, but by no means either invariable or infallible, **access** (pp. 89-90).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

These episodes can occur without being "expressed" by overt verbal behavior, though verbal behavior is - in an important sense – their **natural fruition**. Again, we can "hear ourselves think," **but the verbal imagery** which enables us to do this **is no more the thinking itself than is the overt verbal behavior** by which it is expressed and communicated to others. It is a mistake to suppose that we must be having verbal imagery- indeed, any imagery -when we "know what we are thinking" – **in short, to suppose that "privileged access" must be** construed on a perceptual or quasi-perceptual model.

Now, it is my purpose to defend such a revised classical analysis of our common-sense conception of thoughts, and in the course of doing so **I shall develop distinctions which will later contribute to a resolution, in principle, of the puzzle of *immediate experience***. But before I continue, let me hasten to add that it will turn out that the view I am about to expound could, with equal appropriateness, be represented **as a modified form of the view that thoughts are *linguistic episodes*** (p. 90).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (46-47)
- Part XI[46]-[47]
- Thoughts: The Classical View
- *Section 46*: The previous section explained (contra Ryle) that **there really are** impressions to be accounted for. This section just says the same thing about thoughts. There isn't much in the way of argument here: Sellars points out that **it is hard to explain these things away**, and we may agree that **a theory that can keep them is**, other things being equal, **superior to one that must deny them**.
- *Section 47*: This bit is directly addressed to Ryle, and dismisses his claims that
 - a) 'privileged access' must mean invariable access which Sellars rejects because often someone else can tell what I must have been thinking, even when I am not aware of having thought it; and
 - b) introspectible thoughts are just *sotto voce* verbal imagery: words running through one's head, 'perceived' as if the words were either heard or seen. (This point is discussed further in [56].)
- We have to free ourselves from these preconceptions if we are to understand Sellars's positive story about thoughts and sense impressions (pp. 170-171).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

XII. Our Rylean Ancestors

48. But, the reader may well ask, in what sense can these episodes be "inner" if they are not immediate experiences? and in what sense can they be "linguistic" if they are **neither overt linguistic performances, nor verbal imagery** "*in foro interno*"? I am going to answer these and the other questions I have been raising by making **a myth of my own**, or, to give it an air of up-to-date respectability, by writing a piece of **science fiction -anthropological science fiction**. Imagine a stage in pre-history in which humans are limited to what I shall call a Rylean language, a language of which **the fundamental descriptive vocabulary speaks of public properties of public objects located in Space and enduring through Time**. Let me hasten to add that it is also Rylean in that although **its basic resources are limited** (how limited I shall be discussing in a moment), **its total expressive power is very great**. For it makes subtle use not only of the elementary **logical operations** of conjunction, disjunction, negation, and quantification, but especially of the subjunctive conditional. Furthermore, I shall suppose it to be characterized by the presence of the **looser logical relations typical of ordinary discourse** which are referred to by philosophers under the headings "vagueness" and "open texture" (pp. 90-91).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

I am beginning my myth *in media res* with humans **who have already mastered a Rylean language**, because the philosophical situation it is designed to clarify is one in which we are **not puzzled by** how people acquire a language for referring to public properties of public objects, **but are very puzzled** indeed about how we learn to speak **of inner episodes and immediate experiences**.

There are, I suppose, still some philosophers who are inclined to think that by allowing these mythical ancestors of ours the use *ad libitum* of subjunctive conditionals, we have, in effect, enabled them to say **anything that we can say** when we speak of *thoughts, experiences* (seeing, hearing, etc.), and *immediate experiences*. I doubt that there are many. In any case, the story I am telling is designed to show exactly how the idea that an intersubjective language *must* be Rylean rests **on too simple a picture** of the relation of intersubjective discourse to public objects (pp. 91-92).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

49. The questions I am, in effect, raising are **"What resources would have to be added to the Rylean language of these talking animals in order that they might come to recognize each other and themselves as animals that *think*, observe, and have *feelings* and *sensations*, as we use these terms?"** and "How could the addition of these resources be construed as reasonable?" In the first place, the language would have to be **enriched with the fundamental resources of semantical discourse** - that is to say, the resources necessary for making such characteristically semantical statements as "*Rot* means red," and "*Der Mond ist rund* is true if and only if the moon is round." It is sometimes said, e.g., by Carnap (6), that these resources can be constructed out of the vocabulary of formal logic, and that they would therefore already be contained, in principle, in our Rylean language. **I have criticized this idea** in another place (20) and shall not discuss it here. In any event, a decision on this point is not essential to the argument (p. 92).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Let it be granted, then, that these mythical ancestors of ours **are able to characterize each other's verbal behavior in semantical terms**; that, in other words, they **not only can talk about each other's predictions** as causes and effects, and as indicators (with greater or less reliability) of other verbal and nonverbal states of affairs, **but can also say of these verbal productions that they mean thus and so, that they say that such and such, that they are true, false, etc.** And let me emphasize, as was pointed out in Section 31 above, that to make a semantical statement about a verbal event is not a shorthand way of talking about its causes and effects, although there is a sense of "imply" in which semantical statements about verbal productions do *imply* information about the causes and effects of these productions. Thus, when I say "*Es regnet*" means it is raining, my statement "implies" that the causes and effects of utterances of "*Es regnet*" beyond the Rhine parallel the causes and effects of utterances of "It is raining" by myself and other members of the English speaking community. **And if it didn't imply this, it couldn't perform its role.** But this is **not** to say that semantical statements are definitional shorthand for statements about the causes and effects of verbal performances (pp. 92-93).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

50. With the resources of semantical discourse, the language of our fictional ancestors has acquired a dimension which gives considerably **more plausibility to the claim that they are in a position to talk about *thoughts* just as we are.** For characteristic of thoughts is their *intentionality*, *reference*, or *aboutness*, and it is clear that semantical talk about the meaning or reference of verbal expressions **has the same structure** as mentalistic discourse concerning what thoughts are about. It is therefore all the more tempting to suppose that **the intentionality of *thoughts* can be traced to the application of semantical categories to overt verbal performances,** and to suggest a **modified Rylean account** according to which talk about so-called "thoughts" is shorthand for hypothetical and mongrel categorical-hypothetical statements about overt verbal and nonverbal behavior, *and* that **talk about the *intentionality* of these "episodes" is correspondingly reducible to semantical talk about the verbal components** (p. 93).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

What is the alternative? **Classically** it has been the idea that not only are there overt verbal episodes which can be characterized in semantical terms, but, *over and above these*, there are **certain inner episodes which are properly characterized by the traditional vocabulary of *intentionality***. And, of course, the classical scheme includes the idea that semantical discourse about overt verbal performances is **to be analyzed in terms of talk about the intentionality of the mental episodes** which are "expressed" by these overt performances. My immediate problem is to see if I can reconcile the classical idea of thoughts as inner episodes which are neither overt behavior nor verbal imagery and which are properly referred to in terms of the vocabulary of intentionality, **with the idea that the categories of intentionality are, at bottom, semantical categories** pertaining to overt verbal performances (pp. 93-94).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (48-50)
- Part XII[48]-[50]
- Our Rylean Ancestors
- *Section 48*: Sellars introduces the notion of 'our Rylean ancestors,' who **have and can talk about dispositional traits** that are relatively long term, the sort of thing for which Ryle's account works well: beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, plans, moods, character traits, etc. Ryle got these more or less right (we'd still have to put holist qualifications on his atomistic approach), but he injudiciously thought that his success at giving dispositional-behavioral accounts of this sort of mental phenomenon **meant that anything that could not be explained this way must be metaphysical and illegitimate**. Sellars, via Jones, will show that **this is not so**. Sellars insists (on the basis of the distinction between dispositions and episodes) that having subjunctive conditionals of the Rylean sort **does not yet give the Ryleans the ability to talk about thoughts and experiences**. Sellars is going to show **what additional conceptual resources they need** to develop the concept of *thoughts*, and then on that basis, the concept of sense impressions (pp. 171-172).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (48-50)
- *Section 49*: The problem is, what would have to be added to the Rylean language so that those who speak it "might come to recognize each other and themselves as animals that think, observe, and have feelings and sensations as we use the terms." (The last clause is meant to eliminate the merely dispositionally analyzable bits of mentalistic discourse--items, paradigmatically such propositional attitudes as beliefs and desires, that are psychological, but do not qualify as mental *episodes*.) The **first requirement is semantic discourse** (see [30]). Semantic discourse falls on the side of the epistemic. It is not "definitional shorthand for statements about the causes and effects of verbal performances," although it may have such statements as contingent consequences. Semantic discourse is **a kind of normative discourse, discussing how expressions ought to be used, or are properly or correctly used**. This is one of Sellars's most fundamental ideas, appearing in nearly all of his earliest essays. ([51] and [52] will tell us about the second requirement.) (p. 172)

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (48-50)
- *Section 50*: "My immediate problem is to see if I can reconcile the classical idea of thoughts as inner episodes which are neither overt behavior nor verbal imagery and which are properly referred to in terms of the vocabulary of intentionality, with the idea that the categories of intentionality are, at bottom, semantical categories pertaining to overt verbal performances." This latter idea is that **thought must be understood by analogy to talk**, in the sense that the concepts we put in play to talk about the meanings or contents of our thoughts are **understood in terms of their role in their original or 'home' language game of talking about what we say** rather than about what we think. (Compare Dummett's commitment to **understanding judging as the interiorization of an act of asserting**, rather than understanding asserting as the exteriorization of an act of judging.) (pp. 172-173)

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

XIII. Theories and Models

51. But what might these episodes be? And, in terms of our science fiction, how might our ancestors have come to recognize their existence? The answer to these questions is surprisingly straightforward, once the logical space of our discussion is enlarged to include a distinction, central to the philosophy of science, **between the language of *theory* and the language of *observation***. Although this distinction is a familiar one, I shall take a few paragraphs to highlight those aspects of the distinction which are of greatest relevance to our problem.

Informally, to construct a theory is, in its most developed or sophisticated form, **to postulate a domain of entities which behave in certain ways** set down by the fundamental principles of the theory, and to correlate - perhaps, in a certain sense to identify - **complexes of these theoretical entities with certain non-theoretical objects or situations**; that is to say, with objects or situations which are either matters of observable fact or, in principle at least, describable in observational terms (pp. 94-95).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

This "correlation" or "identification" of **theoretical with observational states of affairs** is a tentative one "until further notice," and amounts, so to speak, to **erecting temporary bridges** which permit the passage from sentences in observational discourse to sentences in the theory, and vice versa. Thus, for example, in the kinetic theory of gases, empirical statements of the form "Gas *g* at such and such a place and time has such and such a volume, pressure, and temperature" **are correlated** with theoretical statements specifying certain statistical measures of populations of molecules. These temporary bridges are so set up that inductively established laws pertaining to gases, formulated in the language of observable fact, are correlated with derived propositions or theorems in the language of the theory, and that no proposition in the theory is correlated with a falsified empirical generalization. Thus, a good theory (at least of the type we are considering) "explains" established empirical laws **by deriving theoretical counterparts** of these laws from a small set of postulates relating to unobserved entities (p. 95).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

These remarks, of course, **barely scratch the surface** of the problem of the status of theories in scientific discourse. And no sooner have I made them, than I must hasten to qualify them -almost beyond recognition. For while this by now classical account of the nature of theories (one of the earlier formulations of which is due to Norman Campbell (1920), and which is to be found more recently in the writings of Carnap (1953), Reichenbach (1928, 1938), Hempel (1952), and Braithwaite (1953)) **does throw light** on the logical status of theories, it emphasizes certain features **at the expense of others**. By speaking of the construction of a theory as the elaboration of a postulate system which is tentatively correlated with observational discourse, **it gives a highly artificial and unrealistic picture of what scientists have actually done** in the process of constructing theories. I don't wish to deny that logically sophisticated scientists today might and perhaps, on occasion, do proceed in true logistical style (pp. 95-96).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

I do, however, wish to emphasize two points:

(1) The first is that the fundamental assumptions of a theory are usually developed not by constructing uninterpreted calculi which might correlate in the desired manner with observational discourse, **but rather by attempting to find a model, i.e. to describe a domain of familiar objects behaving in familiar ways such that we can see how the phenomena to be explained would arise if they consisted of this sort of thing.** The essential thing about a model is that it is accompanied, so to speak, **by a commentary which *qualifies or limits*** - but not precisely nor in all respects - **the analogy** between the familiar objects and the entities which are being introduced by the theory. It is the descriptions of the fundamental ways in which the objects in the model domain, thus qualified, behave, which, transferred to the theoretical entities, correspond to the postulates of the logistical picture of theory construction (p. 96).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(2) But even more important for our purposes is the fact that the logistical picture of theory construction **obscures the most important thing of all**, namely that the process of devising "theoretical" explanations of observable phenomena **did not spring full-blown from the head** of modern science. In particular, it obscures the fact that not all common-sense inductive inferences are of the form

All observed As have been B, *therefore (probably)* all A's are B.

or its statistical counterparts, and leads one mistakenly to suppose that so-called "hypothetic-deductive" explanation is limited to the sophisticated stages of science. The truth of the matter, as I shall shortly be illustrating, is that **science is continuous with common sense**, and the ways in which the scientist seeks to explain empirical phenomena **are refinements of the ways in which plain men, however crudely and schematically, have attempted to understand their environment and their fellow men since the dawn of intelligence**. It is this point which I wish to stress at the present time, for I am going to argue that **the distinction between theoretical and observational discourse is involved in the logic of concepts pertaining to inner episodes**. I say "involved in" for it would be paradoxical and, indeed, incorrect, to say that these concepts are theoretical concepts (pp. 96-97).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

52. Now I think it fair to say that some light has already been thrown on the expression "inner episodes"; for while it would indeed be a category mistake to suppose that the inflammability of a piece of wood is, so to speak, a hidden burning which becomes overt or manifest when the wood is placed on the fire, **not all the unobservable episodes we suppose to go on in the world are the offspring of category mistakes.** Clearly it is by no means an illegitimate use of "in" -though it is a use which has its own logical grammar to say, for example, that "in" the air around us there are innumerable molecules which, in spite of the observable stodginess of the air, are participating in a veritable turmoil of episodes. Clearly, the sense in which these episodes are "in" the air is to be explicated in terms of the sense in which **the air "is" a population of molecules**, and this, in turn, in terms of the logic of the **relation between theoretical and observational discourse.**

I shall have more to say on this topic in a moment. In the meantime, let us return to our mythical ancestors. It will not surprise my readers to learn that **the second stage in the enrichment of their Rylean language is the addition of theoretical discourse.** Thus we may suppose these language-using animals to elaborate, without methodological sophistication, **crude, sketchy, and vague theories to explain why things which are similar in their observable properties differ in their causal properties, and things which are similar in their causal properties differ in their observable properties** (pp. 97-98).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (51-52)
- Pdr I XIII[51]-[52]
- Theories and Models
- *Section 51*: Here Sellars returns to the discussion of theoretical language (discussed under the heading "Scientific Realism" in Part IX). Theoretical discourse is just **a sophistication of a dimension of ordinary empirical language**. One way it can arise is by **model and commentary**. Sellars is telling us this because "the distinction between theoretical and observational discourse **is involved** in the logic of concepts pertaining to inner episodes."
- *Section 52*: So "the second stage in the enrichment of their Rylean language is **the addition** of theoretical discourse." This matters because Sellars claims that "the distinction between theoretical and observational discourse is involved in the logic of concepts pertaining to inner episodes" (p. 173)

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

XIV. Methodological versus Philosophical Behaviorism

53. But we are approaching the time for the central episode in our myth. I want you to suppose that in this Neo-Rylean culture there now appears a genius - let us call him Jones who is an unsung **fore-runner of the movement in psychology**, once revolutionary, now commonplace, **known as Behaviorism**. Let me emphasize that what I have in mind is Behaviorism **as** a methodological thesis, which I shall be concerned to formulate. For the central and guiding theme in the historical complex known by this term has been a certain conception, or family of conceptions, of how to go about building a science of **psychology**.

Philosophers have sometimes supposed that Behaviorists are, as such, committed to the idea that our ordinary mentalistic concepts are *analyzable* in terms of overt behavior. But although behaviorism has often been characterized by a certain metaphysical bias, **it is not** a thesis about the *analysis* of *existing* psychological concepts, but one which concerns **the construction of new concepts** (pp. 98-99).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

As a methodological thesis, it involves **no commitment whatever** concerning the logical analysis of common-sense mentalistic discourse, **nor does it involve a denial** that each of us has a privileged access to our state of mind, **nor that these states of mind** can properly be described in terms of such **common-sense concepts** as believing, wondering, doubting, intending, wishing, inferring, etc. If we permit ourselves to speak of this privileged access to our states of mind as "introspection," **avoiding** the implication that there is a "means" whereby we "see" what is going on "inside," as we see external circumstances by the eye, **then we can say that Behaviorism**, as I shall use the term, **does not deny that there is such a thing as introspection**, nor that it is, on some topics, at least, quite reliable. The essential point about 'introspection' from the standpoint of Behaviorism is that ***we introspect in terms of common sense mentalistic concepts***. And while the Behaviorist admits, as anyone must, that **much knowledge** is embodied in common-sense mentalistic discourse, and that **still more can be gained** in the future by formulating and testing hypotheses in terms of them, and while he admits that it is perfectly legitimate to call such a psychology "scientific," he proposes, for his own part, to make **no more than a heuristic use of mentalistic discourse**, and to **construct his concepts "from scratch"** in the course of developing his own **scientific account of the observable behavior** of human organisms (p. 99).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

54. But while it is quite clear that scientific Behaviorism is *not* the thesis that common-sense psychological concepts are *analyzable* into concepts pertaining to overt behavior – a thesis which has been maintained by some philosophers [Ryle] and which may be called 'analytical' or 'philosophical' Behaviorism - it is often thought that Behaviorism is committed to the idea that the concepts of a behavioristic psychology must be so analyzable, or, to put things right side up, that properly introduced behavioristic concepts **must be built** by explicit definition - in the broadest sense - from a basic vocabulary pertaining to overt behavior. The Behaviorist would thus be saying "Whether or not the mentalistic concepts of everyday life are definable in terms of overt behavior, I shall ensure that **this is true of the concepts that I shall employ.**" And it must be confessed that many behavioristically oriented psychologists **have believed themselves committed to this** austere program of concept formation.

Now I think it reasonable to say that, *thus conceived*, the behavioristic program would be **unduly restrictive**. Certainly, nothing in the nature of sound scientific procedure requires this self-denial. **Physics**, the methodological sophistication of which has so impressed - indeed, overly impressed – the other sciences, **does not lay down a corresponding restriction** on its concepts, nor has chemistry been built in terms of concepts explicitly definable in terms of the observable properties and behavior of chemical substances. The point I am making should now be clear. The behavioristic requirement **that all concepts should be introduced in terms of a basic vocabulary pertaining to overt behavior is compatible with the idea that some behavioristic concepts are to be introduced as theoretical concepts** (p. 100).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

55. It is essential to note that the theoretical terms of a behavioristic psychology are **not only not defined in terms of overt behavior**, they are also **not defined in terms of nerves, synapses, neural impulses, etc.** A behavioristic theory of behavior is not, as such, a physiological explanation of behavior. The ability of a framework of theoretical concepts and propositions successfully to explain behavioral phenomena is **logically independent** of the identification of these theoretical concepts with concepts of neurophysiology. What *is* true - and this is a logical point - is that each special science dealing with some aspect of the human organism operates **within the frame of a certain regulative ideal, the ideal of a coherent system in which the achievements of each have an intelligible place**. Thus, it is part of the Behaviorist's business to keep an eye on the total picture of the human organism which is beginning to emerge. And if the tendency to premature identification is held in check, there may be considerable heuristic value in speculative attempts at integration; though, until recently, at least, neurophysiological speculations in behavior theory have not been particularly fruitful. And while it is, I suppose, noncontroversial that when the total scientific picture of man and his behavior is in, **it will involve some identification of concepts in behavior theory with concepts pertaining to the functioning of anatomical structures**, it should **not be assumed that behavior theory is committed *ab initio* to a physiological identification of all its concepts**, - that its concepts are, so to speak, physiological from the start (pp. 100-101).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

We have, in effect, been distinguishing between two dimensions of the logic (or 'methodologic') of theoretical terms: (a) their **role in explaining** the selected phenomena of which the theory is the theory; (b) their role **as candidates for integration in what we have called the "total picture."** These roles are equally part of the logic, and hence the "meaning," of theoretical terms. Thus, at any one time the terms in a theory will carry with them as part of their logical force that which it is reasonable to envisage -whether schematically or determinately -as the manner of their integration. However, for the purposes of my argument, **it will be useful to refer to these two roles as though it were a matter of a distinction between what I shall call *pure theoretical concepts*, and hypotheses concerning the relation of these concepts to concepts in other specialties.** What we *can* say is that **the less a scientist is in a position to conjecture** about the way in which a certain theory can be expected to integrate with other specialties, **the more the concepts of his theory approximate to the status of pure theoretical concepts.** To illustrate: We can imagine that Chemistry developed a sophisticated and successful theory to explain chemical phenomena **before either electrical or magnetic phenomena** were noticed; and that chemists developed as pure theoretical concepts, certain concepts which **it later became reasonable to identify with concepts belonging to the framework of electromagnetic theory** (pp. 101-102).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (53-55)
- Part XIV[53]-[55]
- Methodological versus Philosophical Behaviorism
- *Section 53*: Jones is a forerunner of methodological behaviorism (which is clarified below, and which Sellars endorses).
- *Section 54*: Behaviorists need not present their accounts as analyses of the concepts we already employ; nor need they introduce their theoretical notions by means of explicit definitions. The former would be analytic or logical behaviorism, the latter a kind of instrumentalism. **Both are mistakes.** Instead, the behavioristic requirement that all concepts should be introduced in terms of a basic vocabulary pertaining to overt behavior is compatible with the idea that some behavioristic concepts are to be introduced as theoretical concepts, relative to a behavioral observational vocabulary. This view becomes available once one sees (as we did in [39][44]) that the distinction between theoretical and observable objects is **methodological, not ontological**, i.e., that it has to do with our access to those objects, either purely inferential or also noninferential, and says nothing about the kind of object involved. To say that they are theoretical concepts in this sense is to say that (at this stage in the development of the language game) they can only be applied as the conclusions of inferences. Thus they are not equivalent to any descriptions of behavior (which could be applied observationally). This idea is one of Sellars's cardinal innovations (p. 174).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (53-55)
- *Section 55*: Behaviorism in this methodological sense is compatible with physicalism, since the theoretical concepts it employs **might turn out to refer to neurophysiologically describable items** (just as 'Pluto,' introduced as a name for whatever is perturbing the orbit of Neptune, might have turned out to apply to an astronomical ball of cheese). **But it is also compatible with denying such physicalism.** Behaviorism and physicalism are two different and independent sorts of commitment (pp. 174-175).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

XV. The Logic of Private Episodes: Thoughts

56. With these all too sketchy remarks on Methodological Behaviorism under our belts, let us return once again to our fictional ancestors. We are now in a position to characterize the original Rylean language in which they described themselves and their fellows as **not only a behavioristic language**, but a behavioristic language which is **restricted to the nontheoretical vocabulary of a behavioristic psychology**. Suppose, now, that in the attempt to account for the fact that his fellow men behave intelligently **not only when their conduct is threaded on a string of overt verbal episodes** - that is to say, as we would put it, when they "think out loud" - **but also when no detectable verbal output is present**, Jones develops a theory according to which **overt utterances** are but **the culmination of a process which begins with certain inner episodes**. *And let us suppose that his model for these episodes* which initiate the events which culminate in overt verbal behavior *is that overt verbal behavior itself*. *In other words, using the language of the model, the theory is to the effect that overt verbal behavior is the culmination of a process which begins with "inner speech" (pp. 102-103).*

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

It is essential to bear in mind that what Jones means by "inner speech" is **not to be confused** with *verbal imagery*. As a matter of fact, Jones, like his fellows, does not as yet even have the concept of an image.

It is easy to see the general lines a Jonesean theory will take. According to it **the true cause** of intelligent nonhabitual behavior is "inner speech."

Thus, even when a hungry person overtly says "Here is an edible object" and proceeds to eat it, the true - theoretical - cause of his eating, given his hunger, is not the overt utterance, but the "inner utterance of this sentence" (p. 103).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

57. The first thing to note about the Jonesean theory is that, **as built on the model of speech episodes**, *it carries over to these inner episodes the applicability of semantical categories*. Thus, just as Jones has, like his fellows, been speaking of overt utterances **as meaning this or that**, or being *about* this or that, so **he now speaks of these inner episodes as meaning this or that**, or being *about* this or that.

The second point to remember is that although Jones' theory involves a model it is **not identical with it**. Like all theories formulated in terms of a model, it also includes a commentary on the *model*; a *commentary* which **places more or less sharply drawn restrictions on the analogy** between the theoretical entities and the entities of the model. Thus, while his theory talks of "inner speech," the commentary hastens to add that, of course, the episodes in question **are not** the wagging of a hidden tongue, nor are any sounds produced by this "inner speech" (pp. 103-104).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

58. The general drift of my story should now be clear. I shall therefore proceed to make the essential points quite briefly:

- (1) What we must suppose Jones to have developed is the germ of a theory which permits many different developments. We must not pin it down to any of the more sophisticated forms it takes in the hands of classical philosophers. Thus, the theory **need not** be given a Socratic or Cartesian form, according to which this "inner speech" is a function of a separate substance; though primitive peoples may have had good reason to suppose that humans consist of two separate things.
- (2) Let us suppose Jones to have called these discursive entities *thoughts*. We can admit at once that the framework of thoughts he has introduced **is a framework of "unobserved," "nonempirical" "inner" episodes**. For we can point out immediately that in these respects they are **no worse off than the particles and episodes of physical theory**. For these episodes are "in" language-using animals as molecular impacts are "in" gases, not as "ghosts" are in "machines." **They are "nonempirical" in the simple sense that they are *theoretical*** - not definable in observational terms. Nor does the fact that they are, *as introduced*, unobserved entities imply that Jones could not have good reason for supposing them to exist. Their "purity" is not a *metaphysical* purity, but, so to speak, a *methodological* purity. As we have seen, **the fact that they are not introduced as physiological entities does not preclude the possibility that at a later methodological stage, they may, so to speak, "turn out" to be such**. Thus, there are many who would say that it is already reasonable to suppose that these *thoughts* are to be "identified" **with complex events in the cerebral cortex** functioning along the lines of a calculating machine. Jones, of course, has no such idea (pp. 104-105).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(3) Although the theory postulates that overt discourse is the culmination of a process which begins with "inner discourse," **this should not** be taken to mean that overt discourse stands to "inner discourse" *as voluntary movements stand to intentions and motives*. True, overt linguistic events can be produced as means to ends. But **serious errors** creep into the interpretation of both language and thought if one interprets the idea that overt linguistic episodes *express* thoughts, on the model of the use of an instrument. Thus, it should be noted that Jones' theory, as I have sketched it, is **perfectly compatible with the idea that the ability to have thoughts is acquired in the process of acquiring overt speech** and that **only after overt speech is well established, can "inner speech" occur** without its overt culmination.

(4) Although the occurrence of overt speech episodes which are characterizable in semantical terms is explained by the theory in terms of *thoughts* which are *also* characterized in semantical terms, **this does not mean that the idea that overt speech "has meaning" is being analyzed in terms of the intentionality of thoughts**. It must not be forgotten that *the semantical characterization of overt verbal episodes is the primary use of semantical terms, and that overt linguistic events as semantically characterized are the model for the inner episodes* introduced by the theory (p. 105).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(5) One final point before we come to the denouement of the first episode in the saga of Jones. It cannot be emphasized too much that **although these theoretical discursive episodes or *thoughts* are introduced as *inner* episodes** –which is merely to repeat that they are introduced **as theoretical** episodes- they are ***not* introduced as *immediate experiences***. Let me remind the reader that Jones, like his Neo-Rylean contemporaries, **does not as yet have this concept**. And even when he, and they, acquire it, **by a process which will be the second episode in my myth**, it will only be the philosophers among them who will suppose that the inner episodes introduced for one theoretical purpose - thoughts - **must be a subset of immediate experiences**, inner episodes introduced for another theoretical purpose (pp. 105-106).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

59. Here, then, is the denouement. I have suggested a number of times that although it would be most misleading to say that concepts pertaining to thinking are theoretical concepts, yet **their status might be illuminated by means of the contrast between theoretical and non-theoretical discourse**. We are now in a position to see exactly why this is so. For once our fictitious ancestor, Jones, has developed the theory that overt verbal behavior is the expression of thoughts, and taught his compatriots to make use of the theory in interpreting each other's behavior, **it is but a short step to the use of this language in self-description**. Thus, when Tom, watching Dick, has behavioral evidence which warrants the use of the sentence (in the language of the theory) "Dick is thinking 'p'" (or "Dick is thinking that p"), Dick, using the same behavioral evidence, can say, in the language of the theory, "I am thinking 'p'" (or "I am thinking that p"). And it now turns out - need it have? - that Dick **can be trained to give reasonably reliable self-descriptions**, using the language of the theory, **without having to observe his overt behavior**. Jones brings this about, roughly, by applauding utterances by Dick of "I am thinking that p" when the behavioral evidence strongly supports the theoretical statement "Dick is thinking that p"; and by frowning on utterances of "I am thinking that p," when the evidence does not support this theoretical statement. Our ancestors **begin to speak of the privileged access** each of us has to his own thoughts. *What began as a language with a pure theoretical use has **gained a reporting use*** (pp. 106-107).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

As I see it, this story helps us understand that concepts pertaining to such inner episodes as thoughts **are primarily and essentially intersubjective**, as intersubjective **as the concept of a positron**, and that the reporting role of these concepts - the fact that each of us has a privileged access to his thoughts - constitutes **a dimension of the use of these concepts** which is *built on* and **presupposes** this intersubjective status. My myth has shown that the fact that language is essentially an *intersubjective* achievement, and is learned in intersubjective contexts -a fact rightly stressed in modern psychologies of language, thus by B. F. Skinner (1945), and by certain philosophers, e.g. Carnap (1933), Wittgenstein (1953) – is **compatible with the "privacy" of "inner episodes."** It also makes clear that this privacy is **not an "absolute privacy."** For if it recognizes that these concepts have a reporting use in which one is not drawing inferences from behavioral evidence, it nevertheless insists that the fact that overt behavior *is* evidence for these episodes *is built into the very logic of these concepts*, **just as** the fact that the observable behavior of gases is evidence for molecular episodes is built into the very logic of molecule talk (p. 107).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (56-59)
- Part XV[56]-[59]
- The Logic of Private Episodes: Thoughts
- *Section 56*: Jones's model for thinking is inner speech. His commentary ensures that this is **not** conceived of as verbal imagery. What is objectionable about the verbal imagery proposal (introduced in [47]) is that it consists in the use of a quasi-perceptual model: hearing the wagging of an inner tongue.
- *Section 57*: The model carries the applicability of semantical categories **over from overt utterances to thoughts**; so thoughts can be 'about' things (p. 175).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (56-59)
- *Section 58:*
- (1) This Jonesian theory is **compatible with dualism** as well as with materialism.
- (2) Inner episodes are to be unobservable **the way molecules or the cause of the crack in the dam are**, not the way ghosts are. That is, we happen (at this stage in the story) not to be able to report them noninferentially, though there is nothing that rules out such observation in principle. Thus they might turn out to be identical to physiological events. Nevertheless, **at this point** only the third-person use is available, even for characterizing our own episodes.
- (3) One can't think until one has learned to speak – one can't assert anything 'mentally' (think to oneself that...) until one **has caught on to the social practice of public assertion**. Thus talk is prior to thought **in the order of explanation**. Once one has learned simultaneously to talk and think, however, thought often precedes talk in the order of causation.
- (4) So the notion of language having a meaning, being 'about' things, is not to be explained in terms of thoughts having meanings (for instance, in the Cartesian or Lockean fashion). The project must explain the meaning of thoughts **in terms of the meaning of talk**, which must be explained some other way (e.g., in terms of social practices).
- (5) Jones does not think of these episodes **as immediate experiences**, that is, things to which thinkers have privileged access, since he doesn't have this concept yet. His episodes are 'inner' only in the mundane sense of 'under the skin' (pp. 175-176).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (56-59)
- *Section 59*: But it turns out that when Jones teaches his theory to other people, they "can be trained to give reasonably **reliable self-descriptions**, using the language of the theory, without having to observe [their own] overt behavior." That is, one can **develop a conditioned reflex in someone** (perhaps depending on some ultimately discoverable neurophysiological event related to his thought) **to report noninferentially what heretofore could only be inferred**. "What began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role." It might not have turned out this way. But insofar as Jones's theory is a good one (a question in principle independent of the eventual identifiability of these episodes with ones characterizable in neurophysiological terms), his fellows were *already* reliably differentially responding to these episodes. So one would expect that they would be able to learn to expand their differential responses to include reports. This story explains why: recognizing "that these concepts have a reporting use in which one is not drawing inferences from behavioral evidence, [the account] nevertheless insists that the fact that overt behavior is evidence for these episodes is built into the very logic of these concepts, just as the fact that the observable behavior of gases is evidence for molecular episodes is built into the very logic of molecule talk" (pp. 176-177)

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

XVI. The Logic of Private Episodes: Impressions

60. We are now ready for the problem of the status of concepts pertaining to immediate experience. The first step is to remind ourselves that among the inner episodes which belong to the framework of *thoughts* will be perceptions, that is to say, *seeing that the table is brown*, *hearing that the piano is out of tune*, etc. Until Jones introduced this framework, the only concepts our fictitious ancestors had of perceptual episodes **were** those of overt verbal *reports*, made, for example, in the context of looking at an object in standard conditions. *Seeing that something is the case* is an inner episode in the Jonesean theory which has as its model *reporting on looking that something is the case*. It will be remembered from an earlier section that just as **when I say** that Dick *reported* that the table is green, I commit myself to the truth of what he reported, so to say of Dick that he *saw* that the table is green is, in part, **to ascribe** to Dick the idea 'this table is green' **and to endorse** this idea. The reader might refer back to Sections 16 ff. for an elaboration of this point (pp. 107-108).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

With the enrichment of the originally Rylean framework to include inner perceptual episodes, I have established contact with my original formulation of the problem of inner experience (Sections 22 ff.). For I can readily reconstruct in this framework my earlier account of the *language of appearing* both *qualitative* and *existential*. Let us turn, therefore to the final chapter of our historical novel. By now our ancestors speak a quite un-Rylean language. But it **still contains no reference to such things as impressions, sensations, or feelings** - in short, to the items which philosophers lump together under the heading "immediate experiences." It will be remembered that we had reached a point at which, as far as we could see, the phrase "impression of a red triangle" could only mean something like "that state of a perceiver – over and above the idea that there is a red and triangular physical object over there -which is common to those situations in which

- (a) he sees that the object over there is red and triangular;
- (b) the object over there looks to him to be red and triangular;
- (c) there looks to him to be a red and triangular physical object over there."

Our problem was that, on the one hand, **it seemed absurd to say that impressions, for example, are theoretical entities**, while, on the other, the interpretation of impressions as theoretical entities seemed to provide **the only hope of accounting for the positive content and explanatory power that the idea that there are such entities appears to have**, and of enabling us to understand how we could have arrived at this idea. The account I have just been giving of *thoughts* suggests how this apparent dilemma **can be resolved** (pp. 108-109).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

For we continue the myth by supposing that Jones develops, in crude and sketchy form, of course, **a theory of sense perception**. Jones' theory does not have to be either well articulated or precise in order to be the first effective step in the development of a mode of discourse which today, in the case of some sense-modalities at least, is extraordinarily subtle and complex. We need, therefore, attribute to this mythical theory **only those minimal features** which enable it to **throw light on the logic of our ordinary language about immediate experiences**. From this standpoint it is sufficient to suppose that the hero of my myth **postulates a class of inner -theoretical - episodes** which he calls, say, *impressions*, and which are **the end results of the impingement of physical objects and processes on various parts of the body**, and, in particular, to follow up the specific form in which I have posed our problem, **the eye** (p. 109).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

61 . A number of points can be made right away:

(1) The entities introduced by the theory are **states of the perceiving subject**, *not a class of particulars [something in the epistemic order and not something in the causal order]*. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the particulars of the commonsense world are such things as books, pages, turnips, dogs, persons, noises, flashes, etc., and the Space and Time - Kant's *Undinge* **[absurd thing]**- in which they come to be. What is likely to make us suppose that *impressions* are introduced as particulars is that, as in the case of thoughts, this ur-theory is formulated in terms of a model. This time the model is the idea of a **domain of "inner replicas"** which, when brought about in standard conditions, **share the perceptible characteristics of their physical source**. It is important to see that the model is the **occurrence "in" perceivers of replicas**, not of *perceivings of replicas*. Thus, the model for an impression of a red triangle is **a red and triangular replica**, not a *seeing of a red and triangular replica*. The latter alternative would have the merit of recognizing that impressions are not particulars. But, by misunderstanding the role of models in the formulation of a theory, it mistakenly assumes that if the entities of the model are particulars, the theoretical entities which are introduced by means of the model must themselves be particulars -**thus overlooking the role of the commentary**. And by taking the model to be *seeing a red and triangular replica*, it smuggles into the language of impressions the logic of the language of thoughts. For seeing is a **cognitive episode which involves the framework of thoughts**, and to take it as the model is **to give aid and comfort** to the assimilation of impressions to thoughts, and thoughts to impressions which, as I have already pointed out, is **responsible for many of the confusions** of the classical account of both thoughts and impressions (p. 110).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(2) The fact that *impressions* are theoretical entities enables us to understand how they **can be *intrinsically characterized*** - that is to say, characterized by something **more than** a *definite description*, such as "entity of *the kind which* has as its standard cause looking at a red and triangular physical object in such and such circumstances" or "entity of *the kind which* is common to the situations in which there looks to be a red and triangular physical object." For although the predicates of a theory owe their meaningfulness to the fact that they are logically related to predicates which apply to the observable phenomena which the theory explains, the predicates of a theory are **not shorthand for definite descriptions** of properties in terms of these observation predicates. When the kinetic theory of gases speaks of molecules as having *mass*, the term "mass" is **not the abbreviation of a definite description** of the form "the property which..." Thus, "impression of a red triangle" does not simply mean "impression such as is caused by red and triangular physical objects in standard conditions," though it is true – *logically* true -of impressions of red triangles that they are of that sort which *is* caused by red and triangular objects in standard conditions (pp. 110-111).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(3) If the theory of impressions were developed in true logistical style, we could say that the intrinsic properties of impressions are "implicitly defined" by the postulates of the theory, as we can say that the intrinsic properties of subatomic particles are "implicitly defined" by the fundamental principles of subatomic theory. For this would be just another way of saying that one knows the meaning of a theoretical term when one knows (a) how it is related to other theoretical terms, and (b) how the theoretical system as a whole is tied to the observation language. But, as I have pointed out, our ur-behaviorist does not formulate his theory in textbook style. He formulates it in terms of a model.

Now the model entities are entities which do have intrinsic properties. They are, for example, red and triangular **wafers**. It might therefore seem that the theory specifies the intrinsic characteristics of impressions **to be the familiar perceptible qualities of physical objects and processes** (pp. 111-112).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

If this were so, of course, the theory would be **ultimately incoherent**, for it would attribute to impressions -which are clearly not physical objects -characteristics which, if our argument to date is sound, **only physical objects can have**.

Fortunately, this line of thought overlooks what we have called **the commentary** on the model, which qualifies, restricts and interprets the analogy between the familiar entities of the model and the theoretical entities which are being introduced. Thus, **it would be a mistake** to suppose that since the model for the impression of a red triangle is a red and triangular wafer, the impression itself is a red and triangular wafer. What can be said is that **the impression of a red triangle is *analogous* to** an extent which is by no means neatly and tidily specified, to **a red and triangular wafer**. The *essential* feature of the analogy is that visual impressions stand to one another in **a system of ways of resembling and differing** which is structurally similar to the ways in which the colors and shapes of visible objects resemble and differ (p. 112).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(4) It might be concluded from this last point that the concept of the impression of a red triangle is a **"purely formal" concept**, the concept of a "logical form" which can acquire a "content" only by means of "ostensive definition." One can see why a philosopher **might want** to say this, and why he might conclude that in so far as concepts pertaining to immediate experiences **are intersubjective**, they are **"purely structural,"** the "content" of immediate experience being incommunicable. Yet this line of thought is but **another expression of the Myth of the Given**. For the theoretical concept of the impression of a red triangle would be **no more and no less "without content"** than *any* theoretical concept. And while, like these, it must belong to a framework which is logically connected with the language of observable fact, the logical relation between a theoretical language and the language of observable fact has **nothing to do with the epistemological fiction of an "ostensive definition"** (pp. 112-113).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

(5) The impressions of Jones' theory are, as was pointed out above, **states of the perceiver, rather than particulars**. If we remind ourselves that these states are **not** introduced as physiological states (see Section 55), a number of interesting questions arise which tie in with the reflections on the status of the scientific picture of the world (Sections 39-44 above) but which, unfortunately, there is space only to adumbrate. Thus, **some philosophers have thought it obvious that we can expect that in the development of science it will become reasonable to identify all the concepts of behavior theory with definable terms in neurophysiological theory, and these, in turn, with definable terms in theoretical physics**. It is important to realize that the second step of this prediction, at least, is **either a truism or a mistake**. It is a truism if it **involves a tacit redefinition** of "physical theory" to mean "theory adequate to account for the observable behavior of any object (including animals and persons) which has physical properties." While if "physical theory" is taken in its **ordinary sense** of "theory adequate to explain the observable behavior of physical objects," it is, I believe, **mistaken** (p. 113).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

To ask how *impressions* fit together with *electromagnetic fields*, for example, **is to ask a mistaken question**. It is to mix the framework of molar behavior theory with the framework of the *micro*-theory of physical objects. The proper question is, rather, "What would correspond in a *micro*-theory of sentient organisms to *molar* concepts pertaining to impressions?" And it is, I believe, in answer to this question that one would come upon the *particulars* which sense-datum theorists profess to find (by analysis) in the common-sense universe of discourse (cf. Section 23). Furthermore, I believe that in characterizing these particulars, the micro-behaviorist would be led to say something like the following: "It is such particulars which (from the standpoint of the theory) are being responded to by the organism when it looks to a *person* as though there were a red and triangular physical object over there." It would, of course, be incorrect to say that, in the ordinary sense, such a particular is red or triangular. What *could* be said," however, is that whereas in the common-sense picture physical objects are red and triangular but the impression "of" a red triangle is neither red nor triangular, in the framework of this micro-theory, the theoretical counterparts of sentient organisms are **Space-Time worms** characterized by two kinds of variables: (a) **variables which also characterize the theoretical counterparts of merely material objects**; (b) **variables peculiar to sentient things**; and that these latter variables are the counterparts in this new framework of the perceptible qualities of the physical objects of the commonsense framework (pp. 113-114).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

It is statements such as these which would be the cash value of the idea that "physical objects aren't really colored; colors exist only in the perceiver," and that "to see that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular is to *mistake* a red and triangular sense content for a physical object with a red and triangular facing side." Both **these ideas clearly treat what is really a speculative philosophical critique** (see Section 41) **of the common-sense framework of physical objects and the perception of physical objects in the light of an envisaged ideal scientific framework, as though it were** a matter of distinctions which can be drawn *within* the common-sense framework itself (pp. 114-115).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

62. This brings me to the *final* chapter of my story. Let us suppose that as his final service to mankind before he vanishes without a trace, Jones teaches his theory of perception to his fellows. As before in the case of *thoughts*, they begin by **using the language of impressions to draw theoretical conclusions from appropriate premises**. (Notice that the evidence for theoretical statements in the language of impressions will include such introspectible inner episodes *as its looking to one as though there were a red and triangular object over there*, as well as overt behavior.) Finally he succeeds in **training them to make a reporting use** of this language. He trains them, that is, **to say** "I have the impression of a red triangle" **when, and only when**, according to the theory, **they are indeed** having the impression of a red triangle.

Once again the myth helps us to understand that concepts pertaining to certain inner episodes - in this case *impressions* - can be **primarily and essentially intersubjective**, without being resolvable into overt behavioral symptoms, and that **the reporting role of these concepts, their role in introspection**, the fact that each of us has a privileged access to his impressions, constitutes a dimension of these concepts **which is built on and presupposes their role in intersubjective discourse**. It also makes clear why the "privacy" of these episodes is **not the "absolute privacy" of the traditional puzzles**. For, as in the case of thoughts, the fact that overt behavior is evidence for these episodes is **built into the very logic of these concepts** as the fact that the observable behavior of gases is evidence for molecular episodes is built into the very logic of molecule talk (pp. 115-116).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

Notice that what our "ancestors" have acquired under the guidance of Jones is **not "just another language" - a "notational convenience" or "code"** -which merely enables them to say what they can already say in the language of qualitative and existential looking. They have acquired another language, indeed, but it is **one which**, though it rests on a framework of discourse about public objects in Space and Time, **has an autonomous logical structure, and contains an *explanation of*, not just a code for, such facts as that there looks to me to be a red and triangular physical object over there.** And notice that while our "ancestors" came to notice impressions, and the language of impressions embodies a "discovery" that there are such things, the language of impressions was no more tailored to fit antecedent noticings of these entities than the language of molecules was tailored to fit antecedent noticings of molecules.

And the spirit of Jones is not yet dead. For it is the particulars of the micro-theory discussed in Section 61(5) which are the solid core of the sense contents and sense fields of the sense-datum theorist. Envisaging the general lines of that framework, even sketching some of its regions, he has taught himself to play with it (in his study) as a report language. **Unfortunately, he mislocates the truth of these conceptions, and, with a modesty forgivable in any but a philosopher, confuses his own creative enrichment of the framework of empirical knowledge, with an analysis of knowledge as it was.** He construes as data the particulars and arrays of particulars which he has come to be able to observe, and **believes them to be antecedent objects of knowledge** which have somehow been in the framework from the beginning. It is in the very act of *taking* that he speaks of the *given* (pp. 116-117).

Sellars on the myth of the given

EPM

63. I have used a myth to kill a myth - the Myth of the Given. But is my myth really a myth? Or does the reader not recognize Jones as **Man himself in the middle of his journey** from the grunts and groans of the cave to the subtle and polydimensional discourse of the drawing room, the laboratory, and the study, the language of Henry and William James, of Einstein and of the philosophers who, in their efforts to break out of discourse to an *archè* beyond discourse, have provided **the most curious dimension of all** (p. 117).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (60-63)
- Part XVI[60]-[63]
- The Logic of Private Episodes: Impressions
- *Section 60*: Jones now does for sense impressions **what he previously did** for thoughts. This category **presupposes** the category of thoughts. We start from a sub-class of thoughts called 'perceptions.' Seeing that something is the case is an inner episode in the Jonesian theory, which has **as its model reporting on looking that something is the case**. But these perceptions are not yet sense impressions, not a kind of *particular*, something in the causal order. **We still have a kind of claim, something in the epistemic order**. To get sense impressions we need the notion of a 'state of the perceiver' common to those occasions **when the perceiver is right** and those occasions **when he's wrong** about there being something red and triangular. This will be the 'intrinsic characterization' of impressions that Sellars talks about in the third paragraph of [45], and in [22]. Here is an outline of the theory of perception on the causal side that was appealed to in [7] (pp. 177-178).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (60-63)
- *Section 61*: Whereas **thoughts were modeled on sentences**, impressions are **modeled on pictures or, more generally, replicas**, which are particulars. The essential feature of the model is that visual impressions stand to one another in a **system of ways of resembling and differing** that is structurally **similar to the ways in which the colors and shapes of visible objects resemble and differ**. That is, there are states of the perceiver which, though neither red nor triangular, have **features** (call them 'of-red' and 'of-triangular') that are **isomorphic to the kinds of features visible physical objects have**. This is a sort of **functionalism about sense impressions**. The occurrence of these replicas is to be understood **as a nonepistemic relation of particulars** (which neurophysiology or dualistic mind science might further specify for us). "Thus the model for an impression of a red triangle is a red and triangular replica, not a *seeing* of a red and triangular replica," which would be an epistemic affair. Their overall explanatory role can be summarized thus: **It is sense impressions "which (from the standpoint of the theory) are being responded to by the organism when it looks to the person as though there were a red and triangular physical object over there"** (p. 178).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (60-63)
- *Section 62*: This section **just does** for sense impressions what [59] did for thoughts. It points out that **people can be trained to develop conditioned reflexes for reporting these theoretical entities** called 'impressions.' (Perhaps some neurophysiological mechanism will be discovered eventually that explains the acquisition of such responsive dispositions.) At this point, since Jones's students **can make noninferential reports of their sense impressions** as well as of their thoughts, they are directly (in the sense of noninferentially -the only sense available once the Myth of the Given has been rejected) **aware of both sorts of inner episode**. In the case of sense impressions, this is awareness of the impressions "of the sort which is common to those experiences in which we either see that something is red and triangular, or something merely looks red and triangular, or there merely looks to be a red and triangular object over there"[45]. Such noninferential reports of sense impressions, reports of the form "I am now sensing a sense impression of a red triangle," are **quite different from those made using 'looks,'** which were considered in the first half of the essay. A noninferential report using 'looks' takes a 'that' clause as its content-specification, and indicates the inferential potential that is being forwarded as a candidate for endorsement. A noninferential report of a sense impression takes **a description of a particular of a sort modeled on replicas** as its content-specification, **and indicates the causal antecedent common to reports of how things are and of how things look**. (Recall the diagnosis of [7].) Running the two together **would re-enact** the Myth of the Given (pp. 178-179).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (60-63)
- These two essentially derivative and parasitic strata of language, both centering on noninferential uses, express different aspects of perceptual experience. The conceptual awareness of sense impressions that Sellars has now made available in **an unmysterious and unthreatening way is the "something more" that** (according to the opening sentences of [16]) **our perception involves**, besides endorsement of propositional contents "wring [non inferentially] from the perceiver by the object perceived." They are what was promised in the first paragraph of [45]. The sense impressions of which we are aware (once both the concept of sense impressions and the corresponding noninferential reporting practices are fully in place) **explain the fact that "when I say 'X looks green to me now'... my experience is, so to speak, intrinsically, as an experience indistinguishable from a veridical one of seeing that "x is green [16]."** For both sorts of speech act arise as the result of exercising reliable differential **dispositions** to respond to the presence of sense impressions - as they did already before Jones gave us the concepts without which we could not be aware of them. All that needed to be added to those responsive dispositions was **the new concept *sense impression*, with the kind of inferential articulation appropriate to its model of replicas of, e.g., visible surfaces.**
- Sellars has now completed his task. We now have recipes telling us **how to diagnose and treat the Myth of the Given in all its multifarious manifestations**, whether what is given shows up in the guise of particulars whose occurrence entails knowing or believing something (e.g., sense-datum theories), or in the form of noninferentially acquired propositionally contentful beliefs (e.g., what is expressed by 'looks' talk). Epistemologically foundationalist appeals to the given of the Cartesian sort have been shown to **fail** because *noninferential* uses of concepts (no matter whether their subject matter is construed as 'inner' or 'outer') **turn out to presuppose inferential** uses of concepts (pp. 179-180).

Sellars on the myth of the given

- Brandom's comment (60-63)
- Empiricist appeals to the preconceptual given to explain concept acquisition (whether by abstraction or otherwise) **fail** because "we now recognize that instead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it"[45]. Nonetheless, Sellars has shown us **how we can make sense of the idea that we have direct awareness of mental episodes** (the applications of inferentially articulated *concepts* of thoughts and sense impressions elicited noninferentially by thoughts and sense impressions), including the limited but very real privileged access each of us has to such inner episodes, **without committing ourselves to the Myth of the Given** (pp. 180-181).

Sellars on the myth of the given

The Myth of Jones (inner episodes as theoretical entities)

Stimulus–response capacities: these provide raw behavioral data (discriminative and responsive dispositions)

Explanatory gap: some behavior cannot be predicted/explained within a purely behavioristic, Rylean framework

Expressive enrichments:

Theoretical vocabulary introduces *unobservables* defined by functional roles and causal–inferential structure

Semantic vocabulary introduces content, truth, meaning, reference (intentionality; “that-clauses”)

Jones’s model posits inner episodes as *theoretical* states to explain/predict behavior

Functional roles: inner states are individuated *by their place in causal–inferential patterns* (input → state → output; inferential links among states)

Public learning: the community adopts the model and learns to use the new vocabularies for explanation and prediction

Self-ascription: reflexive, noninferential application of the same rules to one’s own inner episodes (*non-introspective*; reporting use, not introspective detection)

Mental vocabulary: becomes a *norm-governed* theoretical framework for ascription, explanation, prediction, and self-ascription (*space of reasons*)