

Self, Language, and World

Problems from Kant, Sellars, and Rosenberg

Edited by

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*Dedicated by all the contributors
to the fond memory of our dear colleague,*

Jay F. Rosenberg

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Conceptual Thinking and Nonconceptual Content: A Sellarsian Divide¹

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I

Central to Sellars' account of human cognition was a clear distinction, expressed in varying terminology in his different works, "between conceptual and nonconceptual representations."² This particular Sellarsian divide, however, has sharply divided subsequent Sellarsian philosophers. Those who have come to be known as 'left-wing' Sellarsians, such as Richard Rorty, Robert Brandom, and John McDowell, have tended to regard Sellars' appeals to nonconceptual sensory representations as part of a retrograde package of scientific views from which Sellars' more enduring insights concerning the *myth of the given* and the *logical space of reasons* can, and ought, to be saved. By contrast, so-called 'right-wing' Sellarsians such as Ruth Millikan and Jay Rosenberg have embraced and developed aspects of Sellars' account of nonconceptual sensory representation, in particular the central underlying idea that human perceptual cognition involves a certain naturalistic 'mapping' correspondence or 'picturing' isomorphism between internal mental representations and the layout and behavior of objects in the surrounding environment.

That the topic of nonconceptual sensory representation has been one source of division among philosophers influenced by Sellars is perhaps not surprising given that the topic of nonconceptual content itself is a subject of heated controversy among philosophers of mind, language, and knowledge.³ Sellars, despite his careful and energetic defenses of nonconceptual representational content throughout his career, has through a curious inversion of history and with no small irony come to be cited as one of the "founding fathers of *conceptualism*," i.e. of the philosophical stance associated with John McDowell that steadfastly *rejects* the conception

¹ My thanks to the participants at the Chapel Hill memorial conference for Jay Rosenberg at which an earlier version of this paper was given; to Gina, for her support for these projects undertaken in memory of Jay; and to Eric Rubenstein, Bill Lycan, and Jeff Sicha for their tireless work in helping to bring them all to completion. And thanks, of course, to Jay Rosenberg, my teacher and friend.

² Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, p. 2, §4. Sellars defended the notion of nonconceptual sensory representations or 'sense impressions' throughout his works, including in his most famous essay, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (1956). For a more detailed examination of Sellars' complex views on nonconceptual sensory representation, see O'Shea (2007), *Wilfrid Sellars: Naturalism with a Normative Turn*, chapters five and six; and deVries, chapter eight.

³ For recent collections of essays on the dispute, see van Geen and de Vignemont (eds.), *The Structure of Nonconceptual Content*; Gunther (ed.), *Essays on Nonconceptual Content*; and Gendler and Hawthorne (eds.), *Perceptual Experience*.

of nonconceptual representational content.⁴

Sellars contended that Kant's contrast between the faculties of sensibility and understanding embodied a crucial recognition of the role of nonconceptual sensory representations in human cognition. However, Kant's own conception of 'sensory intuition', on Sellars' reading of Kant, was unclear in the way it sought to straddle both nonconceptual and conceptual aspects of sense perception:

Indeed, it is only if Kant distinguishes the radically non-conceptual character of sense from the conceptual character of the synthesis of apprehension in intuition...and, accordingly, the *receptivity* of sense from the *guidedness* of intuition that he can avoid the dialectic which leads from Hegel's *Phenomenology* to nineteenth-century idealism.⁵

Sellars' complex account of our noninferential perceptual responses to objects as *language entry transitions* simultaneously incorporates both nonconceptual sensory impressions of, and conceptualized demonstrative thoughts about, the objects thereby ostensibly perceived.⁶ His further contention is that the failure to recognize that nonconceptual sensory impressions play this role in human cognition encourages various forms of *idealism*, a claim which is no doubt as controversial as the notion of nonconceptual content itself.

In what follows I will first lay out some of the reasons that have led Sellarsians such as Rorty, Brandom, and McDowell to reject Sellars' account of nonconceptual sensory representation. In a reconciling spirit, however, in the discussions that follow I will attempt not to rely upon several of the more controversial views defended by Sellars that the left-wing Sellarsians are most concerned to reject: for example, concerning Sellars' Peircean 'ideal end of inquiry' version of scientific realism; or his ultimate ontology of 'non-physical₂ sensa' (both of those doctrines allegedly entailing the ultimate inadequacy of the 'manifest image of man-in-the-world'); or his Tractarian 'picture theory' of specifically *linguistic* representation and of truth as correspondence. I will argue that a central core of Sellars' account of nonconceptual sensory contents does not by itself fall afoul of

⁴ Van Geen and de Vignemont, p. 1: "...following Sellars and McDowell, the founding fathers of conceptualism, most of the conceptualists remain far from psychology and from the idiom of empirical studies." Not surprisingly as a result of this misconstrual, Sellars' repeated and elaborate defenses of nonconceptual content are generally overlooked in current debates. The contemporary notion is typically traced back to Gareth Evans' *The Varieties of Reference*, as for example in Bermúdez's generally helpful entry on 'Nonconceptual Mental Content' (2003/2008). See also Bermúdez (2007): "the notion of nonconceptual content was explicitly introduced into analytical philosophy by Gareth Evans (1982)."

⁵ Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, p. 16, §40. See also p. 29, §75: "Kant's failure to distinguish clearly between the 'forms' of receptivity proper and the 'forms' of that which is represented by the intuitive conceptual representations which are 'guided' by receptivity—a distinction which is demanded both by the thrust of his argument, and by sound philosophy—had as its consequence that no sooner had he left the scene than these particular waters were muddied by Hegel and the Mills, and philosophy had to begin the slow climb 'back to Kant' which is still underway."

⁶ For Sellars on language entry transitions, see 'Some Reflections on Language Games', §§22–3; *Science and Metaphysics*, chapter four, §§61–2; and *Naturalism and Ontology*, chapter four, §31. For further discussion see O'Shea (2007), chapter four, and Rosenberg (2008, index entries under 'linguistic roles').

the philosophical worries raised by the left-leaning Sellarsians, and that in fact it has significant merits in its own right. In section IV I focus in particular on the conception of nonconceptual content that figures centrally in Jay Rosenberg's remarkable book, *The Thinking Self* (1986).

II

In his influential 1979 book, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Richard Rorty enlisted Wilfrid Sellars as a key ally in his diagnosis of how Locke and Kant are supposed to have transformed philosophy into a misconceived foundationalist 'mirror polishing' enterprise. As Rorty puts it in his preface, "Sellars's attack on the Myth of the Given seemed to me to render doubtful the assumptions behind most of modern philosophy" (p. xiii).

Consider the sort of 'veil of ideas' view of perceptual experience typically taught in first year philosophy courses and attributed, in some form, to John Locke (I am not concerned here with the correctness of this attribution). On this view, when I perceive a red apple, what I am really directly aware of is only an 'idea' or sensory image or picture of a red apple in my own mind—a mental image which was caused by, and in various respects more or less accurately represents the real physical structure in space that is the apple. I know the qualities of my own idea or sense impression of the apple 'immediately' and indubitably, and in particular entirely independently of whatever inferences I might hazard concerning the nature of the independent material object that lies behind the perceptual veil or mirror. For obvious reasons this picture, or something like it, has been called the *causal representationalist* theory or 'copy theory' of empirical knowledge.

Locke's account of knowledge in terms of a direct confrontation with sensory impressions and ideas was at its heart, according to Rorty, a confusion between empirical-causal *explanation* and rational *justification*. As Rorty put it by enlisting two famous passages from Sellars' 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (1956):

...why should we think that chronological or compositional 'relations between ideas', conceived of as *events* in inner space, could tell us about the logical relations between *propositions*? After all, as Sellars says:

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.⁷

How was it [Rorty continues] that Locke should have committed what Sellars calls "a mistake of a piece with the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics," the attempt to "analyze epistemic facts without remainder into non-epistemic facts"?⁸ Why should he have thought that a causal account of how one comes to have a belief should be an

⁷ Sellars, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', part VII, §36.

⁸ Sellars, *ibid.*, part I, §5.

indication of the justification one has for that belief?"

Similarly in relation to Kant, Rorty aims to expose “Kant’s confusion between predication (saying something about an object) and synthesis (putting representations together in inner space).”⁹ In particular, Rorty zeroes in on Kant’s “unquestioned assumption” of a pre-conceptual *sensory manifold* that allegedly stands in need of a unifying conceptual synthesis in order to be known:

The notions of ‘synthesis’ and the concept-intuition distinction are thus tailor-made for one another, both being invented to make sense of the paradoxical but unquestioned assumption which runs through the first *Critique*—the assumption that manifoldness is ‘given’ and that unity is made.

...But how, if we have not read Locke and Hume, do we know that the mind is presented with a diversity? Why should we think that sensibility ‘in its original receptivity’ (A100) presents us with a manifold, a manifold which, however, ‘cannot be represented as a manifold’ (A99) until the understanding has used concepts to synthesize it? We cannot introspect and see that it does, because we are never conscious of unsynthesized intuitions, nor of concepts apart from their application to intuitions.¹¹

Rorty’s challenge is a clear and familiar one. On Rorty’s criticism of Kant, nonconceptual sensory representations, as unconceptualized items, must evidently either be ‘blind’ and hence epistemically dispensable, or else they represent a retreat to pre-Kantian versions of the myth of the given.

On Rorty’s avowedly Sellarsian outlook, then, we must finally recognize that knowledge is not an empirically describable process or structure but rather a social-normative status: it is a matter of assessing the justifying reasons for one’s beliefs within a social space of reasons. For Rorty, psychological or neurological processes with their various internal mental upshots viewed along classical representationalist lines—whether as nonconceptual sensory intuitions or as conceptually structured representations—have nothing essential to do with the intersubjective normative reasonings that are constitutive of the space of epistemic justification. This is the direction in which Rorty would take Sellars’ claim that “Sensations are no more epistemic in character than are trees and tables... .”¹² Three of the main villains in Rorty’s overall Sellarsian critique of modern philosophy are thus:

representationalism: as an alleged mental or linguistic ‘mirroring of nature’;
foundationalism: as a defence of epistemically privileged representations (whether nonconceptual sense data or conceptual contents or claims); and
reductive naturalism: understood in particular as any attempt to explain normative statuses in non-normative, causal terms.

⁹ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, p. 141.

¹⁰ Rorty, *ibid.*, p. 148.

¹¹ Rorty, *ibid.*, p. 153–4.

¹² Sellars, ‘Some Reflections on Language Games’ (1954).

Rorty's version of pragmatism thus sought to replace the modern philosophers' portrayal of knowledge as accuracy of representation, and of truth as 'correspondence to reality', with what he takes to be the pre-philosophical conception of justification and truth in terms of the ongoing attempt to seek a social consensus.

In 1994 there appeared two groundbreaking books each of which claimed philosophical inspiration not only from Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and Sellars' 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' but from central doctrines of Kant and Hegel as well: namely, John McDowell's *Mind and World* and Robert Brandom's *Making It Explicit*.¹³ As Rorty had done, McDowell and Brandom recruit Sellars' conception of the normative and holistic space of reasons and his critique of the myth of the given in order to reject various traditional versions of semantic atomism, causal-representationalism, empiricist foundationalism, and reductive naturalism. Kant and Hegel are enlisted as historical allies in defending broadly Sellarsian anti-reductive themes pertaining to the pervasive and holistic normativity of conceptual understanding throughout anything that could qualify as human experience or empirical knowledge. As a convenient shorthand, let us refer to these general Sellarsian holistic themes collectively as the '*space of reasons*' view, which at a quite general level represents an outlook shared by nearly all Sellarsians, left and right, and which does indeed have important affinities with central themes in both Kant and Hegel. Of course, there are various sharp differences among the views defended by Rorty, Brandom, and McDowell, but for present purposes I am focusing on their shared embrace of the Sellarsian space of reasons view—combined, in particular, with their shared rejection of theories of nonconceptual sensory representation, including Sellars' theory.¹⁴

Let us pick up the theme of nonconceptual representation by returning to the strongly anti-representationalist theme in Rorty's thinking, which he interestingly expresses in relation to Sellars in the following response to Brandom (on 'facts') in *Rorty and his Critics* (2000):

...there is no test for whether a belief accurately represents reality except justification of the belief in the terms provided by the relevant community. So Occam's Razor suggests that we skip the representing and just stick to the justifying.

...I had assumed that we Sellarsians all agreed with Armstrong, Pitcher, Dennett, et al., that perceptual experience was simply a matter of physiological events triggering a disposition to utter various non-inferential reports. We all agreed, I

¹³ In the preface to *Mind and World* McDowell remarks that it was an "earlier reading of Rorty that put me on to Sellars; and it will be obvious that Rorty's work is in any case central for the way I define my stance here" (p. ix-x). Rorty was Brandom's teacher, and in *Making It Explicit* his debt to Sellars is also made clear: "The leading idea of the approach to content and understanding to be developed here is due to Sellars" (p. 89).

¹⁴ For further discussion of the views of these three 'Hegelian Sellarsians' in relation to the views of Sellars himself, see O'Shea, 'Revisiting Sellars on the Myth of the Given'. Rorty's part-critique, part-defense of Sellars' views can be found in chapter four of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. McDowell's extensive and complex engagements with Sellars' philosophy, particularly in relation to Kant, can be found in his *Having the World in View*. Brandom's commentary on EPM in Sellars (1997) is a good place to start for his interpretation of Sellars.

thought, that Wittgenstein was right to reply to the question ‘How do you know that that is red?’ with ‘I know English’.¹⁵

If we supplement Rorty’s pithy remark that “we Sellarsians all agreed... that perceptual experience was simply a matter of physiological events triggering a disposition to utter various non-inferential reports” with Robert Brandom’s twofold emphasis in *Making It Explicit* on the *reliability* and the *inferential embedding* dimensions of perceptual beliefs, then we have at hand the essential elements of what Brandom calls “Sellars’ Two-Ply Account of Observation.”¹⁶ John McDowell, while likewise rejecting nonconceptual content, takes a very different approach to perceptual experience from Rorty and Brandom, and also differs sharply in his interpretations of the views of Kant and Sellars. Before exploring these Sellarsian approaches to perception further, however, we need to have before us at least a brief sketch of the views of Sellars himself on perception, beginning with those (limited) aspects that might plausibly be thought to be captured by Rorty’s “we Sellarsians” remark above.

As noted earlier, Sellars modeled perceptual cognition on what he called *language entry transitions*, which are governed by implicit social-linguistic rules of correct use, or what Sellars called *ought-to-be* rules.¹⁷ One’s initiation into a linguistic form of life involves, *inter alia*, parents and other elders doing what they ought to do (Sellars called these *ought-to-do* rules, i.e. of intentional *action*) to help guide the child’s unreflective linguistic patterns of response and inference to be as they ought-to-be, whether such behaviors are themselves intentionally produced or not. As a result of coming to be a competent speaker of English, for instance, if Jones sincerely and unreflectively responds to the passing scene with the unstudied remark, ‘I see a red apple on that table’, then (other things being equal) we can rely on Jones’s observation to be a reliable indicator that, in all probability, there *is* a red apple on the table.

Note that on this view not just any parroting of ‘There’s a red apple’ as a non-inferential response to a red apple will count as a candidate for perceptual knowledge. This is so only if one has a grip on the *concept* of an apple, which for Sellars is a normative, holistic matter of one’s having at least a minimally adequate grip on how to use the word ‘apple’ across a wider ‘logical space’ of linguistic responses, inferences, and actions. (One ‘knows how to go on’, to use a related Wittgensteinian phrase.) Finally, to put it very briefly, what goes for Jones’s overt linguistic utterances, according to Sellars’ famous ‘myth of genius Jones’ account of inner thinking and inner sensing in ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’ (parts XV–XVI), goes *by analogy* for his inner thoughts as well, whether they be inner

¹⁵ Rorty, in Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and his Critics*, pp. 185–6.

¹⁶ See Brandom, ‘The Centrality of Sellars’s Two-Ply Account of Observation to the Arguments of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind”’, chapter twelve of his *Tales of the Mighty Dead*. See also Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, chapter four.

¹⁷ For the important distinction between ‘ought-to-be’ rules of criticism and ‘ought-to-do’ rules of action, see Sellars ‘Language as Thought and as Communication’. For detailed examination of these matters in Sellars, see O’Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars*, chapter four, and deVries, *Wilfrid Sellars*, chapter two.

perceptions, inferences, or intentions.

Where the famous 'Myth of the Given' comes into this picture—to extract just one theme from a longer story¹⁸—has to do with Sellars' various arguments that, for example, there exists no domain of subjective, sensory appearances that is more certain to us, or with which we are 'acquainted' in some nonconceptual yet independently knowable manner, than the above account of our reliable but fallible, conceptually informed perceptual judgments about physical objects and their colors.

So on this Sellarsian view, perceptual knowledge has both a normative, conceptual dimension and an underlying causal or dispositional dimension. These are the two dimensions highlighted in Brandom's treatment of "Sellars' Two-Ply Account of Observation" mentioned above, and Brandom has developed these conceptions into a highly sophisticated account of the social-normative commitments and entitlements that he argues are involved in the relevant attributions of conceptual content and the relevant assessments of reliability. In Brandom, as in Rorty, references to sensations or sensory representations tends to drop out of the discussion except to note their necessary mediating role as physiological links along the causal chains that generate the relevant behavioral response dispositions.

In *Mind and World* and subsequent writings, John McDowell, like Brandom, appeals to Kantian and Sellarsian considerations in developing his characterization of perceptual experience with particular emphasis on the constitutive function of the normative space of reasons in relation to anything that could count as human perceptual experience, and likewise in his rejection of the idea of a 'nonconceptual given' as having any epistemic, intentional, or representational significance in human experience as such. In his attempt to retrieve our common sense conception of a direct experiential 'openness to reality' from what he regards as modern scientific philosophical distortions (including what he regards as Sellars' own lapses into scientism), McDowell argues that our conceptual capacities must be recognized to be already operative (as he puts it) in the passive deliverances of sensibility in response to objects. In particular, McDowell argues that philosophers fixating upon the scientific, objectifying account of the sensory mechanisms we share with other animals have continually been tempted to 'interiorize' the space of reasons. The result in such cases, he argues, has been that the space of normative reason-giving becomes detached from the domain of sensory intake from the world which was to be our source of normatively assessable empirical claims aiming at empirical knowledge. And so philosophers end up falling back, alternatively, on either a 'frictionless' internal rational coherence or on the myth of the nonconceptual given as putative sources of empirical knowledge. Again, the way out, for McDowell, is to recognize that the conceptual capacities which have their home in the space of reasons in some sense *already inform the receptions of sensibility* themselves. In *Mind and World* McDowell summed it up this way (he has modified the details of his view on these matters in important ways in more recent writings, but the overall

¹⁸ I have examined Sellars' views on the myth of the given in O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars*, chapter five, and his views on the myth of genius Jones in chapters four (as pertains to inner thinking), five, and six (in relation to inner sensory states).

outlook for present purposes remains the same):

The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experiences, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway and impress themselves on one's sensibility. (At any rate one seems to be open to facts, and when one is not misled, one is.) To paraphrase Wittgenstein, when we see that such-and-such is the case, we, and our seeing, do not stop anywhere short of the fact. What we see is: that such-and-such is the case.¹⁹

Without going into the details of McDowell's well-known 'disjunctive' account of the contents of experience ('disjunctive', roughly, in that *either* experience opens one up to the manifest facts themselves, *or*, as in cases such as hallucinations and other misleading experiences, there only *appears* to one to be an opening up to such facts),²⁰ it is clear that McDowell's way of appropriating Sellars is very different from Brandom's social inferentialist account. However, all three of the Hegelian Sellarsians agree in claiming that the idea of nonconceptual sensory representations encourages both the myth of the given and thereby various scientific distortions of the role of sense experience in relation to human conceptual activity in general. For to paraphrase Sellars' famous dictum again, to characterize any event or state as having an epistemic or intentional significance is not to empirically describe that event or state, but to place it within a conceptually articulate, normative space of reasons. Or as the Kantian slogan puts a closely related point, sensory intuitions without concepts are 'blind'. Whatever may be the case with the complex sensory and behavioral adjustments of non-rational animals to their environments, on McDowell's view any sensory awareness of objects that is fit to be a candidate for perceptual knowledge must itself, as sensory awareness, be informed by conceptual capacities that are possessed by the person undergoing the experience: "Experiences are impressions made by the world on our senses, products of receptivity; but those impressions themselves already have conceptual content."²¹

McDowell argues that philosophers who appeal to so-called 'nonconceptual contents' or 'nonconceptual informational states' as alleged components of perceptual experience ultimately end up "merely tipping the seesaw back to the Myth of the Given." As he put it in *Mind and World* in terms of the Kantian distinction between the receptivity of sensibility and the spontaneity of understanding, "we

¹⁹ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 29.

²⁰ For a recent statement, see 'The Disjunctive Conception of Experience as Material for a Transcendental Argument', chapter thirteen of McDowell's *The Engaged Intellect*, where (p. 231) he finds a disjunctive view of perception in Sellars' account of 'looks' (McDowell is of course aware that Sellars also invokes nonconceptual sensings, but that is not the aspect of Sellars' view of perceptual experience that McDowell wants to preserve): "The conception I have found in Sellars can be put ... as a disjunctive concept of perceptual appearance: perceptual appearances are either objective states of affairs making themselves manifest to subjects, or situations in which it is as if an objective state of affairs is making itself manifest to a subject, although that is not how things are." See also *Mind and World*, p. 113, and further references there.

²¹ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 46.

must not suppose that receptivity makes an even notionally separable contribution to its co-operation with spontaneity.²² More specifically, while McDowell is not concerned to object to scientific hypotheses concerning subpersonal informational states *per se*, he contends that

it is a recipe for trouble if we blur the distinction between the respectable theoretical role that non-conceptual content has in cognitive psychology, on the one hand, and, on the other, the notion of content that belongs with the capacities exercised in active self-conscious thinking—as if the contentfulness of our thoughts and conscious experiences could be understood as a welling-up to the surface of some of the content that a good psychological theory would attribute to goings-on in our cognitive machinery.²³

The important objection that McDowell is in this context raising to Gareth Evans' defense of nonconceptual content is essentially that Evans cannot make intelligible his idea that our conceptually contentful and potentially self-conscious perceptual experiences are *based upon* nonconceptual representational contents in such a way that the latter (basing) relation is supposed to be essential to the *reason-constituting* character of our sense-perceptual experiences. On McDowell's account, our conceptually informed *seeing* that such and such is the case by itself gives us *reason* to believe or judge that such and such is the case, if indeed things are as they appear. What he finds lacking in the views of those who posit nonconceptual contents is a plausible account of how "the non-conceptual content attributable to experiences can intelligibly constitute *a subject's reasons for* believing something."²⁴

Whether or not McDowell is right about Evans' view—I will not examine that question here—I think he is right to characterize his objection to Evans in terms of Sellars' idea of the myth of the given. For as I have argued elsewhere, the key to Sellars' own arguments against nonconceptual versions of the Given, as it figures for instance in classical sense-datum theories, concerns precisely the failure of such theories to make intelligible the sort of justificatory relation that they themselves implicitly assume to hold between the nonconceptual sensory and the conceptualized aspects of perceptual experience.²⁵ It goes without saying that Sellars considered his own account of nonconceptual sensory content to be immune to his own attack on the myth of the nonconceptual given. It remains to consider some of the reasons that Sellars offered in favor of the notion of nonconceptual content, and to consider how they might stand in relation to the views of the left-wing Sellarsians briefly considered above. For the latter purpose I will not be developing *all* of

²² McDowell, *ibid.*, p. 51. Elsewhere (see Lindgaard, p. 144) McDowell has apparently indicated that he is not happy with this particular formulation of his view ('not even a notionally separable contribution'), but I will not be exploiting this particular way of putting the matter here.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁴ Cf. *Mind and World*, p. 163; and cf. pp. 52–5. Here McDowell is discussing Christopher Peacocke's account of nonconceptual content in *A Study of Concepts*.

²⁵ See O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars*, pp. 106–18.

Sellars' various reasons for positing nonconceptual sensory contents; in fact, it turns out that the ones that are most promising for my purposes here are the ones that were developed by Rosenberg in *The Thinking Self*. To these latter tasks I now turn.

III

So far I have concentrated on the epistemic and intentional aspects of Sellars' account of perception, which pertain to the responsive norm-grounded causal reliability that is involved in language entry transitions governed by 'ought-to-be' rules. Objects reliably evoke appropriate unreflective conceptual responses ('this cube is red') in perceivers who have been sufficiently initiated into a wider conceptual framework or *space of reasons*. However, Sellars thought that his account of the conceptual content and reliability of our perceptual responses needed to be supplemented with an explanatory theory of inner sensory contents (sensations, or sense impressions—ultimately conceived as event-like 'pure processes' or 'sensa').

In his famous 1956 work, 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind', Sellars concentrated in particular, although not exclusively, on the problem of explaining the intrinsic qualitative content of such non-veridical perceptual experiences as vividly hallucinating, or there appearing to be, a red object over there. As he recalled his account later in 1971, in 'The Structure of Knowledge':

I have argued in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' that the non-propositional feature common to cases where

One sees that the object over there is red and triangular on the facing side;
The object over there looks to be red and triangular on the facing side;
There looks to one to be an object which is red and triangular on the facing side in front of one,

is primarily identified simply as this common non-propositional feature. I called it the descriptive (i.e., non-propositional) core.

So far we would be little better off than if we simply said that *ostensibly seeing* that there is in front of one an object which is red and triangular on the facing side differs from *merely thinking that* there is an object in front of one which is red and triangular on the facing side, by virtue of being a thinking which is *also* an ostensible seeing. But we can say more. For, phenomenologically speaking, the descriptive core consists in the fact that *something in some way* red and triangular is in *some way* present to the perceiver *other than as thought of*.²⁶

On Sellars' view the mentioned 'ostensible seeings' on the one hand share a *common conceptual content*: what is evoked in the perceiver in all three experiences is the thought or conceptual representation of a red triangular object over there. On the other hand, all three ostensible seeings also share, according to Sellars, a *common non-propositional content*, and on the view he proceeds to defend this turns out

²⁶ Sellars, 'The Structure of Knowledge', lecture I, sections 54–5.

to be the *nonconceptual* content of a sensation or sense impression of a red triangle, as a state of the perceiver. According to Sellars' famous 'myth of genius Jones' account of inner thoughts and sensations in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (parts XII–XVI), or what he calls the 'sense impression inference' (as opposed to the classical 'sense-datum inference') in *Science and Metaphysics* (chapter one, §42–5), sense impressions of red are theoretically postulated states of perceivers designed to explain, among other facts, the intrinsic quality of the *actually experienced red* that Sellars contends is undeniably present in, for example, the vivid hallucination of a red object.²⁷ As he suggests in the passage above, in the non-veridical and veridical cases alike there is "*something in some way red...in some way present to the perceiver other than as thought of,*" i.e. other than as *conceptually* represented. However, since in the two cases of non-veridical ostensible seeing there is no red physical object—no "physical redness," as Sellars puts it²⁸—anywhere either in the perceiver or in his immediate environment, Sellars argues that the postulated nonconceptual sense impressions must be understood to be intrinsically red (and triangular, etc.) in a sense that is *analogous* to the redness that common sense conceives to be an intrinsic feature of red physical objects (i.e., the inner nonconceptual sensory state itself is postulated as "*something, in some way red*").

In the third of his Carus lectures, *Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process*, entitled 'Is Consciousness Physical?', Sellars leaves no doubt that the 'analogical qualities' of his postulated sense impressions are bearers of intrinsic phenomenal qualities in a strong sense that will raise familiar problems associated with non-physicalist accounts of 'qualia':

The pinkness of a pink sensation is 'analogous' to the pinkness of a manifest pink ice cube, not by being a *different quality* which is in some respect analogous to pinkness (as the quality a Martian experiences in certain magnetic fields might be analogous to pink with respect to its place in a quality space), but by being *the same 'content'*

²⁷ There are several qualifications and clarifications that would have to be entered here in a more complete account of Sellars' 'myth of genius Jones' and the postulation of sense impressions as states of the perceiver: for example concerning the qualified sense in which the posit of sense impressions is a *theoretical* postulation, despite taking place within the manifest (rather than the scientific) image. Note also that although 'non-propositional' need not entail 'non-conceptual', Sellars' writings overall (e.g., in *Science and Metaphysics* chapter one) clearly show that he has the latter in mind here. See also Sellars' Carus Lectures, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process', Lecture I, 'The Lever of Archimedes', for his contention that it is "a phenomenological fact" that in experiences such as vividly hallucinating a red object, or seeming to see an object to be red, the perceiver "has an experience which is intrinsically like that of seeing the object to *be* red" (section 69). Furthermore, in such cases, "whatever its 'true' *category* status, the expanse of red...has *actual existence* as contrasted with the *intentional inexistence* of that which is believed in *as believed in*" (FMPP I.88). Sellars' nonconceptual sense impressions are the bearers of intrinsic qualitative content in this strong sense, which entails the rejection of 'intentionalist' accounts of sensory qualia. For a full discussion, see my *Wilfrid Sellars*, chapters five and six.

²⁸ Sellars, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process', Lecture I, 'The Lever of Archimedes', *passim*.

*in a different categorial 'form'.*²⁹

In fact, Sellars' final controversial suggestion as to the ultimate ontological nature and location of colors and other sensory qualities is that such 'sensa', as ultimate pure processes that partly constitute what goes on in the central nervous systems of humans and other animals on occasions of sensory consciousness, are 'physical₁' but not 'physical₂' phenomena (and as such, in a carefully qualified sense, they are 'emergent' phenomena):

Roughly, those features of objects are physical₂, which are, in principle definable in terms of attributes exemplified in the world before the appearance of sentient organisms, i.e., attributes necessary and sufficient to describe and explain the behavior of 'merely material' things. Physical₁ features, on the other hand, are any which belong in the causal order.³⁰

Among the difficult consequences of this non-epiphenomenalist yet non-physicalist (i.e., non-physical₂-ist) position is evidently that the laws of physics holding outside the context of sensory events will be violated (or be different) in contexts affected by the occurrence of *sensa*—a consequence which Sellars embraced in bold defiance of what he characterized as the modern "scientific ideology of the autonomy of the mechanical."³¹

From the perspective of the 'left-wing' Sellarsians these latter doctrines are dubious contentions which there are no compelling grounds to embrace. Not unreasonably, they will view Sellars' speculative theory of non-physical₂ 'sensa' as his comeuppance for having trafficked at the philosophical level with the general notion of 'inner nonconceptual sensory representations' in the first place. McDowell's disjunctive conception of experience, briefly mentioned earlier, explicitly denies that the three ostensible *seeings* discussed above should or must be viewed as sharing a 'common factor' of the sort embodied in Sellars' conception of common nonconceptual content. On McDowell's disjunctive conception of experience, in cases of hallucination, for example, there *merely seems to be* the sort of sensory consciousness of an object that is present in the veridical case.³² Some critics of the disjunctive conception will reply, as I think Sellars would, that perceptual illusions and hallucinations are not cases of being subject to the illusion *that there is an actual case of sensorily experienced content* of the relevant kinds during such experiences. Rather, Sellars holds that 'wild' sensory contents of this kind (to use H. H. Price's term) *are* in 'some way' actual constituents of those particularly vivid nonveridical visual experiences. The illusion does not consist in being mistaken that

²⁹ Sellars, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process', Lecture III, 'Is Consciousness Physical?', section 47, second set of italics added.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, lecture III, endnote 15. For more on this distinction, which Sellars held throughout his career, see my *Wilfrid Sellars*, chapter six, pp. 167ff.

³¹ Sellars, 'Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process', Lecture III, section 109. Cf. O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars*, pp. 168–75.

³² Cf. McDowell, 'Sensory Consciousness in Kant and Sellars', pp. 122–4.

there is a case of experienced sensory redness, but rather in being mistaken as to its nature and location, to put it roughly. The illusion consists in the fact that in such cases the relevant qualitative contents do not represent qualities in the relevant external physical objects. McDowell, not surprisingly, holds that this sort of reply simply begs the central question at issue.³³

However, Sellars' commitment to the 'non-physical₂' nature of sensings, though certainly central to his entire account of perceptual qualities and sensory consciousness, is not the issue on which I want to focus here; and neither is either Sellars' or the contrasting disjunctive treatment of nonveridical experience *per se*. A brief look back to the wider grounds for Sellars' 'sense impression inference' in *Science and Metaphysics* will bring out the aspects of his conception of nonconceptual sensory representation that I want finally to explore in relation to their particular further development in Rosenberg's work. In this context Sellars notes that his case for postulating nonconceptual sense impressions is not based solely or even primarily on cases of nonveridical perception (though again, that plays an important role), but more basically concerns a certain structural *mapping and tracking* relation that is posited to obtain between objects and inner sense impressions as part of an explanation of certain aspects of normal perceptual cognition:

For even in normal cases there is the genuine question, 'Why does the perceiver *conceptually represent* a red (blue, etc.) rectangular (circular, etc.) object in the presence of an object having these qualities?' The answer would seem to require that all the possible ways in which *conceptual representations* of colour and shape can resemble and differ correspond to ways which their *immediate non-conceptual occasions*, which must surely be construed as states of the perceiver, can resemble and differ.

Thus, these non-conceptual states must have characteristics which, *without being colours*, are sufficiently analogous to colour to enable these states to play this guiding role.³⁴

Or as Sellars comments on the nature of the analogical postulation involved here in the earlier context of the culmination of his 'myth of Jones' in 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind' (part XVI, section 61):

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

³³ McDowell in Lindgaard, ed., pp. 213–14.

³⁴ Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, lecture I, section 44–5. For an attempt to preserve central aspects of Sellars' views in this area while rejecting Sellars' famous (or infamous) 'grain argument', see Rubenstein, 'Sellars without Homogeneity'. For important criticism of Sellars' grain argument concerning the homogeneity of color, see Lycan's *Consciousness* and references therein. At any rate, here I do not engage the issue of homogeneity and focus primarily on the 'mapping' issues pertaining to nonconceptual sensory representations.

in which the colors and shapes of visible objects resemble and differ.³⁵

According to Sellars, then, it is part of the best explanation of aspects of our normal visual cognition of objects (to take the case of vision) that it includes a kind of second-order structural isomorphism or ‘mapping’ relation. The relation is second-order, roughly, in that it involves “a relation between two relational structures,” as Sellars puts it in relation to his general account of ‘picturing’ in *Science and Metaphysics*.³⁶ In particular, the mapping and tracking relations obtain (or at any rate *ought* to obtain, as it can be put on Sellars’ full story)³⁷ between the properties and relations of inner sensory representations and the properties and relations of corresponding objects and events in the perceiver’s environment. Sellars further developed this aspect of his view in ‘Mental Events’ in 1981, one of his last essays, in terms of a general account of primitive (as opposed to ‘logical’) “*representational systems* (RS)” or “cognitive map-makers.”³⁸ It is this aspect of Sellars’ account that I want to highlight by looking at some closely related themes in Rosenberg’s *The Thinking Self*, ending with some reflections on the extent to which the left-wing Sellarsian worries concerning philosophical conceptions of nonconceptual sensory representation should be taken to be applicable to the sorts of accounts offered by Sellars and Rosenberg.

IV

Rosenberg’s *The Thinking Self* develops an account of human cognition that fully respects the general Sellarsian themes also stressed by the left-wing Sellarsians. In particular Rosenberg puts center stage the holistic ‘space of reasons’ thesis and its wider implications concerning the nature of meaning, knowledge, and intentional phenomena in general, along with the consequent rejection of a variety of atomistic and reductionist views as discussed above. Rosenberg follows Sellars in developing in particularly impressive detail the insights contained in Kant’s

³⁵ Sellars, ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’, part XVI, section 61. David Rosenthal has also developed this specific aspect of Sellars’ view in relation to his own comprehensive ‘higher-order thought’ (‘HOT’) theory of consciousness. See Rosenthal’s *Consciousness and Mind*, p. 168, where he puts the relevant structural mapping this way (with an accompanying footnote quoting the passage in the main text from Sellars): “As a first pass, we can describe the family of color properties of visual sensations as resembling and differing from one another in ways homomorphic to the ways the color properties of physical objects resemble and differ from one another.” (In mathematics, a homomorphism is in effect a partial or ‘many-one’ isomorphism between two relational structures; roughly put, all the structures in one system are reflected in corresponding structures of the other system, but not necessarily vice versa. I shall use the more familiar term ‘isomorphism’ to cover both cases hereafter.) I hope to examine Rosenthal’s theory on another occasion, including its aspects of similarity and difference in relation to Sellars’ views.

³⁶ Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, chapter five, section 56.

³⁷ See O’Shea (2007), ch. 6, on Sellars on picturing, meaning, and reference.

³⁸ Sellars, ‘Mental Events’, section 57.

Critique of Pure Reason for any correct account of human perceptual cognition.³⁹ Human perception involves an easily misconstrued combination of passive sensibility and active conceptualization, and this is yet another focal point that is shared with the accounts of perceptual knowledge and human rationality in Brandom and McDowell as well. Within this shared Kantian and Sellarsian framework, however, Rosenberg also followed Sellars in putting forward a robust theory of inner nonconceptual representations along lines that we have seen are rejected by the left-wing Sellarsians. In this section, (1) I will briefly sketch Rosenberg's Sellarsian account of nonconceptual content as an explanatory hypothesis (without claiming to present a conclusive argument in favor of that hypothesis here); and then (2) I claim that this Sellarsian hypothesis does not fall afoul of the legitimate worries raised by the left-wing or 'Hegelian' Sellarsians.

The central aim of Rosenberg's *The Thinking Self* is to articulate and resolve what he calls the "problematic of apperception," where apperceptive consciousness is "consciousness of the self as self-conscious subject of its own experiences" (*TS* 7).⁴⁰ From the first-person perspective of the subject of experience, the self, as the experiencing *subject* of all of one's own experiences, is strictly speaking not the *object* of any of those inner experiences. Husserl and Sartre, according to Rosenberg, recognized that the intending self, as subject, is necessarily *other* than its various posited or intended objects (whether inner or outer), and that the attempt to represent oneself as thus representing objects invites a vicious regress (see *TS* chapter one, 16–19). In this way Sartre "succeeded in capturing an important thesis: *Reflective* consciousness must somehow be grounded in *non-reflective* consciousness" (*TS* 28). However, Rosenberg argues that Sartre's own move in response to this problem, involving the conception of a *pre-reflective* consciousness of *self*, saddles us with an unsatisfactory ontology of the self as (to use the Sartrean phrase) 'being what it is not and not being what it is' (cf. *TS* 22). For Rosenberg, by contrast, the non-reflective basis out of which reflective apperception develops is ultimately to be found in the nonconceptually structured yet contentful sensory awarenesses that human beings possess in virtue of their animal heritage.

What emerges from Rosenberg's 'Dionysian' historical analysis across chapters one to three is a Kantian account of our apperceptive self-consciousness as based neither on a problematic (Sartrean) pre-reflective awareness of the self nor on a problematic (Cartesian) ontology of the reflective self. Rather, the possibility of self-consciousness turns out to consist in a complex structure of actual and possible intentional awarenesses that is strictly correlative to (i.e., is both a necessary consequence and condition of) our ordinary intentional modes of conceptual representation of persisting, causally interacting *objects* as constituting a mind-indepen-

³⁹ Rosenberg published a polished version of his Kant seminar notes/lectures, which were delivered yearly to Chapel Hill graduate students for several decades, in his *Accessing Kant: A Relaxed Introduction to the Critique of Pure Reason* (Oxford, 2005). (It is far more rigorous and probing than 'Relaxed' might imply.)

⁴⁰ References to Rosenberg's *The Thinking Self* will be given in the text by 'TS' followed by the page number.

dent spatiotemporal world. This conception is embodied in what Rosenberg calls Kant's *mutuality thesis*:

In other words, the conditions according to which an experienced world was constituted as an intelligible synthetic unity were [on Kant's view] *at the same time* the conditions by which an *experiencing consciousness* was itself constituted as a unitary self. That an experiencer represents the encountered world as categorially structured in space and time, Kant claimed to show, was a condition of the very possibility of his representing *himself* as a unitary subject of his experiences of that world – or indeed of any world at all.

At the center of Kant's 'critical philosophy', then, lies a thesis of the *mutuality* of self and world. ... Subject and world are two inseparable poles of a single dynamic process of representation. (*TS* 6)

While I am not concerned to assess Rosenberg's Kantian mutuality thesis here, it is precisely in an attempt to make that claim plausible—that is, the thesis that “conceptual representation of an objective world is possible only for self-conscious, apperceptive subjects” (*TS* 24)—that Rosenberg develops his extended account of the underlying non-reflective, nonconceptual sensory representation of objects which is an integral part of human perceptual experience. For the correct way to understand how our *reflective* consciousness is grounded in *non-reflective* consciousness, according to Rosenberg, is “to understand our own form of self-conscious consciousness as an *elaboration* of” what he calls “pure positional awarenesses” (*TS* 103): the sorts of nonconceptual yet representationally directed (hence ‘positional’) awarenesses of objects that he argues are in a sense the common possession of non-rational and rational sense-perceptive animals alike. The distinction between nonconceptual and conceptual representations or modes of awareness of objects thus enables Rosenberg to maintain, on the one hand, that Kant's highly demanding mutuality thesis (compare the Sellarsian ‘space of reasons’ view) holds only in relation to conceptual and not nonconceptual modes of positional awareness. On the other hand, Rosenberg simultaneously offers a plausible account of the sense in which nonconceptual animal cognition, both in us and in other animals, does succeed in representationally mapping and tracking a world of propertied objects in space and time. In particular, I want to suggest, we are able to see how a robust conception of nonconceptual sensory representation can be embedded within an account of apperceptive human cognition that fully respects the ‘space of reasons’ conception of our irreducibly normative rationality that is shared by all Sellarsians, left and right.

Rosenberg's account of the nature of nonconceptual sensory representation and its relationship to conceptual cognition begins in chapter four of *TS*, ‘Perceptual Experience and Conceptual Awareness’, with “the case of a man, Bruno, who mistakes a bush for a bear” (*TS* 72). These initial stages in Rosenberg's account will have to suffice for present purposes. Clearly influenced by the general ‘outside-in’ postulational and analogical methodology of Sellars' famous ‘myth of Jones’ in ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’ (recast in *TS* in the guise of ‘*logical*

phenomenology'), Rosenberg proceeds to consider what sorts of inner representational capacities should be attributed to Bruno in an attempt to explain his verbal and nonverbal behavior.

When we conceive Bruno as mistaking a bush for a bear we want to say that in one sense what he actually *sees* is a bush—for there is nothing else *there* to be seen. But we also want to say that what he sees it *as* is a bear, for that is what Bruno mistakenly takes the bush to *be*; that is what he sees it *as*. Modelled on Bruno's capacity to *say* such things as 'Look, a bear!', Rosenberg follows Sellars in attributing to Bruno's perceptual experience, as one of its aspects, an inner analogue of the ordinary linguistic representation 'bear', a concept that both we (attributing the experience) and Bruno (having the experience) are presumed to have an adequate grip on. Thus we say that Bruno's perceptual state of mistaking a bush for a bear is informed by Bruno's *conceptual representation* of a bear, the *intentional content* of which is understood by analogy with the public, norm-governed 'language entry/inference/language exit' role of the word 'bear' in English. Considered *extensionally*, on the other hand, this same state of the perceiver is hypothesized to be a complex neurophysiological state of Bruno, in accordance with Sellars' well-known functional role semantics for both language and inner thought, which itself provides the backbone for the general 'space of reasons' view discussed earlier.

So Bruno mistakenly takes the concept *bear* to be instantiated by an object in his nearby environment. We who are describing Bruno's situation apply the concept *bush* to the object he sees, but we also posit that the concept *bear* is playing a role in informing Bruno's perceptual state in a way that is analogous (for example, in its semantic dimensions) to how the word 'bear' functions in our linguistic practices.

But what about the sense in which what Bruno sees is, in fact, a bush? That is, how does the bush figure in *Bruno's* perceptual experience? Rosenberg argues (*TS* 72–9) that it will not suffice to say merely that the bush is the external *cause* of Bruno's perceptual awareness, without taking into account the specific role played *within that awareness* (i.e., on this view, as somehow *represented* within Bruno's awareness) by the bush in contrast to the host of other concomitant causal factors in the chain of events, both internal and external, that jointly give rise to Bruno's perceptual state. As Rosenberg remarks, "We have now arrived at a point of considerable delicacy" (*TS*, p. 76), and he asks that we perform the following thought-experiment:

Holding constant all other causal factors in Bruno's perceptual situation insofar as possible, let us imagine substituting different objects (a boulder, a sapling, a raccoon, ...) in place of the bush.

What is of interest to us, he continues, are not the

causally mediating variations in the inputs to Bruno's perceptual state [intervening patterns of light, etc.] but rather the ways in which that total resultant ('internal') state itself will vary as different objects are substituted for the bush in our original situation.

(TS 78)

Furthermore, Bruno's resulting internal perceptual states will of course also be affected or "mediated" by his own wider *experiential history*, and in particular by those changes in his cognitive architecture that are the result of his having acquired such *concepts* as those of a bush and of a bear. To loosely summarize Rosenberg's more precise development of his thought-experiment: Some aspects of Bruno's total resultant inner perceptual states will co-vary with the object depending on what concepts Bruno brings to bear on the situation (for example, as a result of his linguistic upbringing Bruno is *ceteris paribus* disposed to have correct perceptual responses to bushes, i.e. responses that are structured by the concept *bush* rather than, as in this case, by the concept *bear*). But other aspects or elements of Bruno's inner perceptual state

will vary 'directly' with the object-substitutions we have hypothetically introduced into one terminus of our input causal-chains: they will vary...in ways which are independent of Bruno's individual experiential history, the specific history of his causal-perceptual transactions with his ('external') environment since his birth (although not, presumably, in ways which are independent of the evolutionary history of the *species* to which the organism Bruno belongs).

Call the maximal elements of Bruno's total internal perceptual state which vary in this way *directly* with our hypothetical object-substitutions, independently of Bruno's specific experiential history, the 'internal counterparts' of those objects. In particular, then, the bush which is the occasion of Bruno's perceptual *awareness*, the bush which he mistakes for a bear, will have some internal counterpart in Bruno's perceptual state. This notion of an internal counterpart is purely extensional. It has been introduced, that is, simply in terms of 'stimulus and response', the causal covariation of aspects of Bruno's perceptual state with differences of the object which lies at the other terminus of the causal chain issuing in that state. (TS 78–9)

It seems plausible to hypothesize, for example, that when Bruno mistakes a bush for a bear, there is something about the overall *shape* of the bush that causes a corresponding specific variation in the inner receptive states of Bruno involved in his visual cognition, states which will differ in a systematic and in principle empirically discoverable way from the sorts of states that would be produced by substitution of objects of very different shape in that situation, and which causally covary, in the ways described above, with the substitution of objects of shapes that closely resemble the bush when viewed from Bruno's location. This hypothesis is reasonable even if in our present state of knowledge we can only specify such an 'internal counterpart' or *representative* of the bush *analogically*, in something like the way we have seen Sellars similarly attempt to do in his account of the isomorphic 'mapping' that he suggests is involved in sense perception:

. . .the manners of sensing are analogous to the common and proper sensibles in that they have a common conceptual structure. Thus, the color manners of sensing form a family of incompatibles, where the incompatibilities involved are to be understood

in terms of the incompatibilities involved in the family of ordinary physical color attributes. And, correspondingly, the shape manners of sensing would exhibit, as do physical shapes, the abstract structure of a pure geometrical system.⁴¹

On this view, then, when Bruno mistakes a bush for a bear, he is in a certain neurophysiological state that is correctly characterized both (1) *intentionally*, as realizing a certain responsive conceptual role conceived by analogy with the 'entry' and other roles that the predicate 'bear' plays in Bruno's linguistic behaviour (this is the conceptual representation involved in the perceptual awareness); and (2) *extensionally*, as an 'internal counterpart' of the bush that causally covaries with and is analogically structurally isomorphic to or 'maps' features of the actual object of which Bruno is aware.⁴² Rosenberg proposes that in this second sense the bush is "*non-conceptually represented*" in Bruno's perceptual experience (*TS* 76).

From an ontological point of view, there is just one item that constitutes Bruno's state of perceptual awareness: a certain complex neurophysiological state of Bruno's central nervous system. But as an object-evoked state that is essentially caught up in a certain wider normative network of material inferences, on this Sellarsian functionalist view this same neurophysiological item is a token of a type of *conceptual* representation. It is an awareness the intentional content of which is an object—*this* object, i.e. the object evoking this conceptual response—conceived as a *bear*. It is the ostensible perception of (or the seeming to see, the appearing to one to be) a bear over there. In addition, however, relevant aspects of that same complex neurophysiological state not only were caused by but systematically causally covary with and are (analogically theorized to be) structurally isomorphic to corresponding properties of the facing side of the bush. As thus caught up in this set of naturalistic extensional relationships, the same complex state that is Bruno's ostensible perception of a bear is also the *nonconceptual representation or sensory awareness* of the bush that caused it. On Rosenberg's view, as on Sellars' original suggestion (and likewise on many traditional readings of Kant on concepts and intuitions), human perceptual cognition is thus a subtle but explainable unification of elements involving both a conceptual representation and a nonconceptual sensory representation of the object in view.

Sellars and Rosenberg clearly envisioned a complex and fruitful interplay between such logico-phenomenological explanatory posits and ongoing empirical-scientific enquiry into whether and how such postulated representational resources are actually instantiated in the cognitive processes of human beings and other animals. Having given a taste of the initial stages of Rosenberg's Sellarsian conception of nonconceptual sensory representation, however, it is time to conclude by reflecting on the merits of this sort of approach, in particular in relation to some of the general worries raised by the left-wing Sellarsians discussed earlier. For while this

⁴¹ Sellars, 'The Structure of Knowledge' (Lecture I, 'Perception'), p. 313.

⁴² More accurately, the physical patterns and isomorphisms involved in Sellars' 'picturing' or mapping relation are themselves naturalistic, extensional relations, but representational contents are picked out as such in terms of counterfactual sustaining causal relationships that introduce the non-extensional contexts traditionally confused with intentional content (e.g., in a sensation of a red triangle).

conception of nonconceptual content will likely inherit whatever general merits or defects one thinks attach to that notion in relation to the current overall debates about nonconceptual content noted earlier, for present purposes we are interested in particular in how that conception bears on the specific issues that have sharply divided broadly Sellarsian attitudes toward nonconceptual representational content.⁴³

V

I will close by briefly considering two of the most important questions that will no doubt be raised in response to the Sellars-Rosenberg account of nonconceptual sensory representation.

First, in what sense are such nonconceptual sensory states really *contents* or *representations*? Recalling the views of McDowell discussed earlier, it might seem that such states either (a) do not themselves have representational content, or (b) they merely register or carry ‘information’ in a ‘sub-personal’ manner that may be useful in cognitive scientific theorizing but cannot account for the normatively assessable sensory directedness toward objects that characterizes potentially self-conscious human perceptual experiences *per se*.⁴⁴

In response the Sellars-Rosenberg view insists that such nonconceptual sensory states are representations *of* objects, but in a sense of ‘of’ that is neither conceptual representation (the intentionality of *thought*) nor merely mindless causal co-variation (in the way that tree rings carry information about age, or metal reliably rusts in rain). Sellars in ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’ (Part V, ‘Impressions and Ideas: A Logical Point’) argued that sensory representations are characterized by *intensionality* rather than intentionality. For example, ‘S has a sensation of a red triangle’ is similar to the conceptual representation or thought of a red triangle in that it does not entail the actual existence of a corresponding red physical triangle (S could be hallucinating, etc.). But the ‘of-ness’ of sensation is not that of thought:

...this assimilation of sensations to thoughts is a mistake. It is sufficient to note that if ‘sensation of a red triangle’ had the sense of “episode of the kind which is the common descriptive [JOS: and on Sellars’ view, nonconceptual] component of those experiences which *would be* cases of seeing that the facing surface of a physical object is red and triangular if an object *were* presenting a red and triangular facing surface” then it would have the nonextensionality the noticing of which led to this mistaken assimilation.⁴⁵

⁴³ For an interesting passage in which Brandom comments favorably on Ruth Millikan’s systematic attempt to show how linguistic “intentionality is built on more basic, non-linguistic varieties,” and in which he suggests that such an account, if interpreted non-reductionistically as opposed to how Millikan herself often presents it, might in fact be compatible with his own social-inferentialist view of linguistic intentionality, see Brandom in Stekeler-Weithofer (ed.), pp. 212–13. This would be in the same spirit as the argument I am putting forward in this paper.

⁴⁴ See, for example, McDowell in *Mind and World* (p. 53) on Gareth Evans’ allegedly “fraudulent” use of “the word ‘content’” in his account of nonconceptual content.

⁴⁵ Sellars, ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’, Part V, Section 35.

This is a delicate point, I think, for there are several senses in which the nonconceptual sensory representation of a red triangle is 'of' a red triangle:

First, the sensation is 'of a red triangle' in that the content of the sensation is theoretically conceived (e.g., in Sellars' 'myth of Jones') by analogy with its *typical physical cause*: it is an 'of-a-red-triangle' type of sensation, i.e. the type of sensation normally (but not always) produced by visual encounters with physical red triangles. (I return to 'typically' and 'normally' below.)

Secondly, accordingly, the structure and intrinsic content of the sensation itself is also theoretically conceived by analogy with its typical physical cause, on the sort of isomorphic 'mapping' account discussed earlier. But of course, as philosophers put it, 'isomorphisms are cheap' in that *anything* in nature can be construed as isomorphic to anything else, under *some* scheme of interpretation. Hence:

Thirdly, we must recognize that nonconceptual sensory contents represent objects as being a certain way only within some wider framework that has established within it the sort of patterns that are referred to in the passage from Sellars above: the sensory component of a perceptual thought *would be* a correct representing of a red triangle, *if* a corresponding red triangle *were* present to the perceiver. The sensation as theoretically specified has the right intrinsic content and structure to be a representing of that kind of corresponding object, but it *is* a representing of that kind of object—successfully or not—only in the context of a wider, counterfactual sustaining pattern of events in nature. This raises the question: what kind of pattern? Finally, then:

Fourthly, the relevant wider patterns are of two basic kinds: either (a) they consist in the sorts of 'ought-to-be's that characterize a certain conceptual-linguistic form of life constituting a 'logical space of reasons' in the Sellarsian sense; or (b) such patterns consist in the sorts of evolutionary 'proper functioning' based on natural selection that underwrites such hypotheses as that the frog's tongue-lashing response is 'designed' to be directed at small flying edible objects.⁴⁶ Adult human perceptual responses will typically be characterized by both kinds of patterns in different respects, and nonconceptual sensory states can accordingly be representations in *both* of those senses.

For example, consider a sensation of a red triangle that is a constituent of a conceptualized perceptual response, such as 'That red triangular object over there is a toy building block'. The constituent sensation of a red triangle is the minimal nonconceptual content (corresponding to the 'proper and common sensibles') characterizing such an experience whether it is veridical or not, and which *would be* a successful representing of a red triangle *if* there is or were in fact a corresponding red triangular physical object. The perceptual experience as a whole is intentionally directed at a certain red triangular toy building block, thanks to the concepts embedded in the perception as a conceptual 'entry' response conforming to the normative 'ought-to-be's of a given space of reasons. The constituent sensation of a red triangle is accordingly a nonconceptual representation of that kind of object (and of

⁴⁶ See Rosenberg's extended discussions of *a cat stalking a quail* in *The Thinking Self*, in particular the connection with action and evolutionarily 'hardwired' 'goals' discussed at TS 101–5.

that object in particular, if successful), thanks to its occurring within a conceptualized perceptual response in sense (a) above. The words ‘typical’ or ‘normal’ used to specify the ‘typical cause’ of the sensation, where the latter is used to theoretically characterize the content of the sensation by analogy, are here dependent for their sense on a wider pattern of *conceptual* norms; but this does not mean that the sensory representation is itself a *conceptual* representation, which it is not.⁴⁷

That same sensation, furthermore, also nonconceptually represents a red triangle in the more basic sense (b), which corresponds to what Sellars in his 1981 article ‘Mental Events’ called the ‘proto-propositional’ contents characteristic of *animal representational systems* in general. Our visual systems with their complex evolutionary history, for example, are in an intelligible (if controversial) sense ‘built to’ generate the sensation of a red triangle, if properly functioning, when we have a red triangular object in plain view. Both Sellars and Rosenberg emphasize the action-oriented importance of having sensory representations that enable animals *to locate objects* in their environment, so that the evolutionary ‘ought-to-be’s in sense (b) are proto-propositional analogues of all three of the language ‘entry-inference-exit’ rules of a normative space of reasons proper. Sellars describes such animal representational systems this way:

56. Indeed, I propose to argue that to be a representational state, a state of an organism must be the manifestation of a system of dispositions and propensities by virtue of which the organism constructs *maps* of itself in its environment, and locates itself and its behavior on the map.

57. Such representational systems (RS) or cognitive map-makers, can be brought about by natural selection and transmitted genetically, as in the case of bees. Undoubtedly a primitive RS is also an innate endowment of human beings. The concept of innate abilities to be aware *of* something *as* something, and hence of pre-linguistic awarenesses is perfectly intelligible.⁴⁸

This leads naturally to a reply to a second question that will no doubt be raised in response to this Sellars-Rosenberg defense of nonconceptual sensory content: namely, how is this view not an instance of the Myth of the Given, in particular in the classical empiricist form of the myth of the nonconceptual-sensory-yet-epistemic Given, which Sellars himself and the left-wing Sellarsians are so concerned to avoid?

Surely at this stage *that* question can get a grip on us, and will make us worry, only if we succeed in ignoring all of the ways just described in which the nonconceptual sensory representation is the representation that it is only by being embedded in the kinds of wider patterns that make animal cognitive life in general,

⁴⁷ See Susanna Schellenberg’s ‘Sellarsian Perspectives on Perception and Non-Conceptual Content’ (2006) for an insightful treatment of some of the central issues discussed in this paper. Her ‘form/matter’ Kantian construal of the relationship between (conceptualized) intuitions and sensations is one that I would take my own account to support, but in a way that preserves Sellars’ own defense of *nonconceptual representation* more straightforwardly than Schellenberg seems to think is warranted.

⁴⁸ Sellars, ‘Mental Events’, Sections 56–7.

and human conceptual cognition in particular, possible. Nonconceptual sensory representations in the sense defended by Sellars and Rosenberg do not serve as epistemic premises or atomistic apprehended contents in the way that Sellars was concerned to reject in his account of the myth of the given. Nor, as they occur within human perceptual experience, do such nonconceptual contents occur in a separable 'first stage' of cognition that somehow problematically 'wells up' into conceptual cognition proper, as suggested by some of the criticisms put forward by the left-wing Sellarsians noted earlier. There are several aspects of Sellars' own theory of sensory contents or 'sensa' that I would not want to defend, and I noted some of these earlier. But it is time to put to rest the idea that putting forward theoretical hypotheses concerning nonconceptual contents in the form of sensory representations at the properly human level of self-conscious perceptual cognition must somehow automatically condemn one to falling prey to the Myth of the Given. That was not Sellars' own view, and Sellars is surely among the more reliable though admittedly fallible sources of information concerning the implications of his own famous rejection of the Given.

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