

Kant's Theoretical Philosophy: The 'Analytic' Tradition

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ABSTRACT: In a previous article (O'Shea 2006) I provided a concise overview of the reception of Kant's philosophy among analytic philosophers during the periods from the 'early analytic' reactions to Kant in Frege, Russell, Carnap and others, to the systematic Kant-inspired works in epistemology and metaphysics of C. I. Lewis and P. F. Strawson, in particular. In this chapter I use the recently reinvigorated work of Wilfrid Sellars (1912–1989) in the second half of the twentieth century as the basis for presenting some of the most familiar 'analytic Kantian' themes that continue to animate current debates. I also argue that the complex relationships between Sellars' philosophy and Kant's thought are often misunderstood. Overall the chapter examines Sellars' analytic appropriations of Kant in three topic-areas of significant current philosophical debate: (1) conceptual analysis and the structure of human knowledge; (2) laws of nature, the causal modalities, and the pragmatic or relative a priori; and (3) the disputes concerning Kant and nonconceptual content.

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Kant's complex relationship to what came to be known as the twentieth century 'analytic' tradition in philosophy might usefully be divided into three phases. (1) First, spanning roughly the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, there was predominantly, though not entirely, a rejection of Kant's theoretical philosophy, beginning with the Cambridge analysts Russell and Moore, followed also by the logical positivists, and then by the so-called 'ordinary language' philosophers at mid-century. (2) Secondly, however, during the 1960s several influential books on Kant by such Anglo-American philosophers as P.F. Strawson, Graham Bird, and Jonathan Bennett defended certain key arguments in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and thereby helped to stimulate a marked improvement in many analytic philosophers' estimation of the merits of Kant's theoretical philosophy. John Rawls' work on justice and the history of ethics at Harvard stimulated a similar revival of Kant's practical philosophy (see Chapter 39). (3) Finally, the subsequent decades from the mid-1960s to the present have witnessed a wide variety of striking uses made of broadly 'analytic Kantian' ideas in theoretical philosophy by such prominent analytically trained philosophers as Wilfrid Sellars, Gareth Evans, Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett, John McDowell, Rae Langton, and Robert Brandom, among others. In many cases these analytic-Kantian ideas have drawn upon the mid-century work of the later Wittgenstein; and also in many cases these Kant-influenced philosophers have encouraged the downplaying of any sharp or hostile distinction between the so-called 'analytic' and 'continental' streams in contemporary philosophy.

In a previous piece (O'Shea 2006) I have attempted to provide a concise overview of the reception of Kant's philosophy among analytic philosophers during the periods covered by (1) and (2) above: from the 'early analytic' reactions to Kant in Frege, Russell, Carnap and others, to the systematic Kant-inspired works in epistemology and metaphysics of C. I. Lewis (1929; cf. O'Shea 2015) and Strawson (1959, 1966), in particular, and ending with a very brief discussion of more recent figures. Kant's influence on the history of analytic philosophy across these periods has also been given helpful treatments by Coffa 1991, Friedman 2001, Hanna 2001, Macbeth 2014, Sluga

1980, and Westphal 2010. However, rather than directly presenting once again the influential analytic Kantian lines of argument in Strawson's work (for this see also Glock 2003, Cassam 2017), or their important further development by Gareth Evans (1980, 1982; cf. Cassam 1997, Kitcher 2011, and McDowell 1996), this chapter will use the recently reinvigorated work of Wilfrid Sellars (1912–1989) in the second half of the twentieth century as the basis for presenting some of the most familiar analytic Kantian themes that continue to animate current debates. Since as it happens the relationships between Sellars' philosophy and Kant are often misunderstood, in my view, this chapter also aims to clarify certain topics in current philosophical debates. In what follows I will consider just three such topic-areas among many: (1) conceptual analysis and the structure of human knowledge; (2) laws of nature, the causal modalities, and the pragmatic or relative a priori; and (3) the disputes concerning Kant and nonconceptual content.

1. Conceptual Analysis and the Structure of Human Knowledge

In his 1973 "Autobiographical Reflections" Sellars wrote that during his Rhodes scholarship at Oriel College, Oxford from 1934 to 1936, he studied Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* with H. H. Price as his tutor. Kant convinced him, Sellars tells us, that "a skeptic who grants knowledge of even the simplest fact about an event occurring in Time is, in effect, granting knowledge of the existence of nature as a whole. I was sure he was right" (Sellars 1975: 285). Kant would subsequently figure centrally in Sellars' thinking throughout the rest of his career. From 1947 to 1967 the influence was often more implicit than explicit, as for example in his two most famous articles "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (EPM, 1956), in which he argued against the "myth of the given," and his 1962 "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man" (PSIM, 1962), in which he memorably distinguished between the "manifest and scientific images of man-in-the-world" (both articles were collected in his *Science, Perception and Reality* in 1963). But it then became more explicit in *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (1968) and in a series of penetrating articles on Kant from 1967 to 1978, collected posthumously in *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics* (2002). But let us begin with the theme of that earliest conviction at Oxford, and consider what Sellars' subsequent works suggest about this insight of Kant's into the structure of human knowledge. For generally speaking these turn out to be the sorts of views shared by many other analytic Kantians from Strawson to today.

Unlike Kant, though reflecting Kant's revolutionary focus on *logical form* as the key to the nature of human understanding, it has been distinctive of Strawson, Sellars and subsequent analytic Kantians to attempt to clarify Kant's accounts of the understanding's necessary conceptual connections through a primary focus on our *linguistic* practices. This is not surprising given the key focus on language throughout much of twentieth century philosophy. This was certainly the case for Sellars, who developed a novel inferential role semantics during roughly the period when the later Wittgenstein was completing his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) (cf. Sellars' 1954 "Some Reflections on Language Games," in Sellars 1963). Sellars defended a holistic 'language game' conception of the meaning of linguistic expressions, and hence also, by extension, of human conceptual thinking in general.

On this view meaning and conceptual content are understood in terms of the norm-governed 'use' or functioning of linguistic expressions in accordance with the normative "ought-to-be" rules of criticism and "ought to do" rules of action that are implicit in a given community's social-linguistic behavior. In the transcendental deduction Kant had characterized the understanding as "the **faculty of rules**" (A126; A132/B171), with the twelve a priori categories and corresponding principles of pure understanding providing a conceptual "legislation for nature." Such conceptual connections are necessary, Kant famously argued, if any potentially self-

conscious experience is to be possible at all. Sellars sought to explicate and to update Kant's conception of the understanding and its necessary relation to our faculty of sensibility in terms of his own twentieth-century analytic conceptions of meaning, knowledge, and experience. As Sellars in one place put the relationship between his philosophy and Kant's:

Implicit in the above conception of language as a rule governed system are a number of important implications for a linguistically oriented epistemology. Instead, however, of developing these implications directly, I shall explore certain features of Kant's epistemology which will turn out to be their counterparts. For once it is appreciated that Kant's account of the conceptual structures involved in experience can be given a linguistic turn and, purged of the commitment to innateness to which, given his historical setting he was inevitably led, his theory can be seen to add essential elements to an analytic account of the resources a language must have to be the bearer of empirical meaning, empirical truth, and, to bring things to their proper focus, empirical knowledge. (Sellars 2002: 268, OAPK §31)¹

Methodologically, this passage sums up well the spirit of analytic Kantianism in the ways to be explored in this chapter.²

On Sellars' analytic reading, "the core of Kant's 'epistemological turn' is the claim that ... all so-called ontological categories are in fact epistemic. They are 'unified' by the concept of empirical knowledge because they are simply constituent moments of this one complex concept" (2002: 270, KTE II §9). In particular, Kant's categories are *meta*-concepts that serve to classify the epistemic powers or functions of the first-order concepts that exhibit the given logical form. For example, in the judgment that 'snow is white', *snow* is functioning as a *substance* concept, which is to say that it satisfies or exhibits the epistemic powers distinctive of the substance-attribute form of a judgment when applied to objects of possible experience. (The latter epistemic functions are spelled out in Kant's arguments for the Analogies and the other principles of understanding.) To so judge, Sellars explains, is "to be committed to the idea that the representable *snow* and the representable *white* belong together regardless of what anyone happens to think," and thus to be committed "to the idea that representings that snow is white are (epistemically) correct" (2002: 274, KTE III §21). Objective nature, accordingly, is "the system of those representable spatial and/or temporal states of affairs which *did*, *do*, or *will obtain*, whether or not they *were*, *are*, or *will be* actually represented" (2002: 270, KTE I §6).

On Sellars' interpretation of the aims and method of Kant's first *Critique* (for a defence of his reading, see O'Shea 2018), it turns out to "be an *analytic* truth that objects of empirical knowledge conform to logically synthetic universal principles" (2002: 270, KTE II §10), such as the synthetic a priori principle that every event has a cause, or that substance persists through all

¹ In references to Sellars' works I will also include the useful article abbreviations and part, section or paragraph references that are now standardly used for his works. In this case 'OAPK' refers to Sellars' 'Ontology, the A Priori and Kant', collected in Sellars 2002 by Jeffrey Sicha. Sicha explains (p. 261) that this was an unpublished typescript from the mid-1960's (apparently revised by Sellars in 1970) which was to be 'Part One' of a longer piece, 'Part Two' of which was published as "Kant's Theory of Experience" in 1967 (KTE, also in Sellars 2002).

² Note that there are important alternative or perhaps supplementary analytic appropriations of Kant that see him as a precursor of key insights in contemporary cognitive science: see in particular Brooks 1994. Note also that Sellars was quite happy to cast Kantian insights not only in terms of conceptual and pragmatic analyses but also as phenomenology, which he saw as complementary tasks (or in fact, when done well, as virtually the same projects).

change, or that all such changes take place within a single coherent system of spatial and temporal relations. According to Sellars, rather than attempting “to *prove* that there is empirical knowledge,” Kant’s analysis “is such as to rule out the possibility that there could be empirical knowledge not implicitly of the form ‘such and such a state of affairs belongs to a coherent *system* of states of affairs of which my perceptual experiences are a part” (2002: 272, KTE II 11, italics added).³ Kant’s transcendental analytic thereby “undercuts both the skeptic and the ‘problematic idealist,’” or indeed *any* epistemological view that raises “the illegitimate question of how one can justifiably move from” certain (alleged) items of experience “that seem to involve no intrinsic commitment to such a larger context” – such as the sense-datum appearances of an atomistic empiricist, for example – to “the larger context to which we *believe* them to belong” (ibid.), that is, to the objective nature of which they are a part. It is this systematic and holistic conceptual analysis that convinced Sellars during his Oxford days that Kant must be right: i.e., that “a skeptic who grants knowledge of even the simplest fact about an event occurring in ‘Time’ – even if it were simply the ‘immediate’ or ‘given’ experience of one’s own subjective state – “is, in effect, granting knowledge of the existence of nature as a whole.”

Chapter one of P. F. Strawson’s 1959 groundbreaking book, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* had in a broadly similar spirit attempted to show that the complex concept of a single spatio-temporal system of persisting material bodies forms the indispensable core or structure of our most basic and permanent conceptual scheme. Roughly put, Strawson argued that the possibility of even coherently raising a skeptical doubt about the existence of objective, reidentifiable particulars already presupposes the general idea that particulars are related within one spatiotemporal framework (as opposed to each stretch of experience constituting an isolated world, as it were); and he argued furthermore that our conception of the latter spatiotemporal framework itself already requires the concept of persisting, reidentifiable particulars (material bodies), given that – as Kant himself had stressed – space and time are not *themselves* objects of perception. In effect, then, as Strawson put it, the skeptic “pretends to accept a conceptual scheme, but at the same time quietly rejects one of the conditions of its employment” (1959: 35).⁴

Both Strawson and Sellars, in their different ways, attempted to make good on these general systematic claims by providing more specific accounts of why something like Kant’s account of our objectively valid, self-aware knowledge of one unified spatiotemporal nature, and of principles of causal lawfulness and material persistence in general (not to mention principles of moral freedom and rational agency), could be reformulated and defended using the insights of “modern analytical philosophy” (Strawson 1997: 232).

2. Laws of Nature, the Causal Modalities, and the Pragmatic or Relative A Priori

One core component of Sellars’ Kantian analysis lies in his various arguments since the early 1950s that Kant was essentially right in his contention that any possible empirical knowledge must be such as to represent the objective world as governed by necessary *laws of nature*. The

³ See also Sellars 2002: 338, “Toward a Theory of the Categories,” TTC § 53): “A transcendental argument does not prove that there *is* empirical knowledge – what premises could such an argument have? – nor that there are *objects* of empirical knowledge. It simply explicates the concepts of *empirical knowledge* and *object of empirical knowledge*.” Sellars argues, however, that Kant’s explication of the concept of empirical knowledge will thereby undermine any skeptical or classical empiricist attempt to restrict the objects of knowledge to something that falls short of a direct knowledge of external, physical objects in space.

⁴ Parts of this paragraph are adapted from O’Shea 2002.

following is an illustrative passage, in this case from Sellars' 1967 article, "Some Remarks on Kant's Theory of Experience":

To conceive of an event as occurring at a time is to commit oneself to the idea that the *concept* of that event and the *concept* of that time belong together regardless of what one happens to think. But there is nothing about the sheer concept of a particular time which requires that it be occupied by a certain event. The belonging must, Kant concludes, be a matter of the temporal location of the event relative to other events and, *as belonging*, be the inferability (in principle) of its occurrence at that location from the occurrence of the events to which it is thus related. (Sellars 2002: 279, KTE VI §36)

Thus, what "Kant takes himself to have proved is that the concept of empirical knowledge involves the concept of inferability in accordance with laws of nature. To grant that there is knowledge of the *here* and *now* is ... to grant that there are general truths of the sort captured by lawlike statements" (2002: 338, TTC §54; cf. KTE VI §36).

The deeper grounds for Sellars' semantically updated defense of Kant on causal connections and other principles of objective lawfulness in nature were originally explored in detail in Sellars' long 1957 article, "Counterfactuals, Dispositions, and the Causal Modalities" (CDCM).⁵ In section §26 of the B-Deduction, Kant states that the "[c]ategories are concepts that prescribe laws *a priori* to appearances, thus to nature as the sum total of all appearances..." (B163). Without the conception of laws governing "everything (that can even come before us as an object)..., appearances could never amount to cognition of an object corresponding to them" (CPR A158–9/B197–8). The analogies of experience, for example, prescribe laws of material persistence, causal necessitation and mutual interaction that govern the existence of appearances in nature in their necessary temporal relations to one another. The result in Kant is that no empirical object of our cognition – in fact, no ostensible reality-directed intentionality or representational purport at all, however minimal, and whether 'inner' or 'outer' – is possible except within the "larger context" (to repeat Sellars' phrase) of an objectively valid conception of nature's general law-governed intelligibility.

In Sellars' updated "*transcendental linguistics*" version (2002: 281, KTE IX §40) of Kant's claim that our concepts of objects prescribe laws or rules governing their behavior, the idea is that the very possibility of a linguistic item having any empirically significant *conceptual content* at all requires that such terms are governed by counterfactual-sustaining, material-inferential norms of use (i.e., "extra-logical" inferences the validity of which depends on the *content* of the relevant terms, rather than on formal-logical relations alone). In his 1953 article "Is There a Synthetic '*A Priori*'?" Sellars put it this way:

Let me now put my thesis by saying that the conceptual meaning of a descriptive term is constituted by what can be inferred from it in accordance with the logical and extra-logical rules of inference of the language (conceptual frame) to which it belongs. [...] [W]here 'x is B' can be validly inferred from 'x is A,' the proposition 'All A is B' is unconditionally assertable on the basis of the rules of the language. Our thesis, then, implies that every primitive descriptive predicate occurs in one or more logically synthetic propositions which are unconditionally assertable – in short, true *ex vi terminorum* . . ., true by implicit definition. But a logically synthetic proposition which is true *ex vi terminorum* is, by the conventions

⁵ See my 2009 for a more detailed account of the following Kantian idea of *concepts as prescribing laws*, as that conception developed from Kant to C. I. Lewis, and Sellars, and most recently as defended in Brandom's "modal Kant-Sellars thesis" (cf. Brandom 2015).

adopted at the opening of the chapter, a synthetic a priori proposition . . . (Sellars 1963: 317, ITSA §9 ¶61)

Or as Sellars had put the claim in 1957, it “is only because the expressions in terms of which we describe objects . . . locate these objects in a space of implications, that they *describe* at all, rather than merely label” (Sellars 1957: 306–7, CDCM §108; cf. Brandom 2015, chapters 1 and 3, and O’Shea 2015, §III).

In the spirit of C. I. Lewis’s (1929) *pragmatic conception of the a priori*, however, and in light of pressing issues of systematic conceptual change in science and mathematics that had become ever more evident since Kant’s time, Sellars argued that “while every conceptual frame involves propositions which, though synthetic, are true *ex vi terminorum*,” as explained above, “every conceptual frame is also but one among many which compete for adoption in the marketplace of experience” (Sellars 1963: 320, ITSA §10 ¶68). In many ways Sellars’ resulting framework-relativized conception of Kant’s synthetic a priori can be compared with Michael Friedman’s more recent (2001) relativized conception of the “constitutive a priori,” in which Friedman fruitfully explores the legacy of Kant’s thought in relation to the logical empiricist and positivist traditions.

Returning to the fundamental Kantian idea of concepts of objects as involving the prescription of laws of nature, Robert Brandom has in recent years offered detailed pragmatic analyses and defenses of Sellars’ material inference-license or “space of implications” conception of the causal modalities. Defending what he calls the (modal) Kant-Sellars thesis, Brandom’s contention, drawing on his Sellarsian inferentialist semantics, is that the practice of “deploying any ordinary empirical vocabulary,” however simple (e.g., “this is red”), already presupposes “*counterfactually robust inferential practices-or-abilities* – more specifically, the practical capacity to associate with materially good inferences *ranges of counterfactual robustness*” (Brandom 2015: 160, italics in original). Put crudely, the wider upshot of Sellars’ and Brandom’s analytic reflections on inference and causal necessity is that empiricists in the Humean tradition have been wrong to suppose that there is any alleged stratum of *modally uncommitted* or necessity-free empirical discourse, whether in a sense-datum or a physicalist language. To the contrary, Kant was basically right on target: the very possibility of any empirically significant concepts or terms presupposes that such terms are already embedded within a framework of lawful inferences governed by natural necessities or other modal constraints. The empiricist-leaning skeptic about causal necessity and other modalities, if this Kantian view is correct, has no place to stand.

One finds the above characteristically holistic, empirically realist, and modally rich views about the necessary conceptual structure of human knowledge not only in such analytic Kantians as Strawson, Sellars, and Brandom, but also in the robustly Kantian and Hegelian themes defended in John McDowell’s rightly influential 1994 book, *Mind and World*. The following Sellarsian reflections by McDowell on the conceptual prerequisites of even the most simple human cognitions (here, for example, of color qualities) will provide a convenient transition to the next section:

[N]o one could count as making even a directly observational judgment of colour except against a background sufficient to ensure that she understands colours as potential properties of things. The ability to produce ‘correct’ colour words in response to inputs to the visual system (an ability possessed, I believe, by some parrots) does not display possession of the relevant concepts if the subject has no comprehension of, for instance, the idea that these responses reflect a sensitivity to a kind of state of affairs in the world, something that can obtain anyway, independently of these perturbations in her stream of consciousness. The necessary background understanding includes, for instance, the

concept of visible surfaces of objects and the concept of suitable conditions for telling what colour something is by looking at it. (McDowell 1994: 12)

McDowell argues that Kant's account of the necessary interconnections in human knowledge between sensory intuition and conceptual understanding, as reflected, for instance, in Kant's famous dictum that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75), should convince us that "even though [sensory] experience is passive, it draws into operation [conceptual] capacities that genuinely belong to spontaneity" (McDowell 1994: 12, and 2016). However, McDowell's particular way of defending the Kantian view that conceptual capacities are necessarily drawn into operation in sense experience has become a focal point of heated debates in its own right, both in the interpretation of Kant's philosophy and in the philosophy of perception and theory of knowledge more generally. It turns out that on this important topic, too, Sellars has been a crucial, if controversial and often misunderstood figure within the broadly 'analytic Kantian' tradition, as we shall now see.

3. Perception, Intuitions, and Concepts: Nonconceptualism and Conceptualism

Kant holds that "intuition and concepts constitute the elements of all our cognition" (A50/B74). Concepts have their origin in our active understanding and are representations of *general* properties, relations, and rules that can pertain to more than one object. Intuition has its source in our passive sensibility and is that by means of which *singular* (roughly, particular) objects are "immediately" or directly "given" to our cognition. The latter is possible for finite beings like ourselves only insofar as we are affected by such objects through the "receptivity of impressions" of those objects by means of sensation (A19/B33; A50/B74). Sensible intuition "contains only the way in which we are affected by objects," while concepts contain the various ways in which we think and make judgments about objects. Kant of course famously argued that the experience of any objects at all is possible for us only if such objects are structured, a priori, by the two pure forms of sensible intuition, space and time, and by the twelve pure forms of conceptual understanding, the categories.

What has led to interpretive controversies, at least on one crude way of setting up the issue, is that Kant appears both to hold that we *cannot* have sensible intuitions of particular objects in space and time *without* concepts, but also to hold the opposite, i.e. that nonconceptual sensible intuition in its own right either *does* or could give us and other animals sensible intuitions of particular objects.

In support of the former "conceptualist"-leaning readings, Kant holds as noted above that "intuitions without concepts are blind" (A51/B75). Similarly, among the conclusions of his transcendental deduction are that "the manifold in a given intuition . . . necessarily stands under categories" (B143), and that "everything that may ever come before our senses must stand under the laws that arise a priori from the understanding alone" (B160), since an "**object**" of our cognition is precisely "that in the *concept* of which the manifold of a given intuition is **united**" (B137, italics added; cf. A109, A112, etc.). Such passages certainly seem to suggest that concepts *are* necessary for any sensible intuition of an object.

On the other hand, Kant also holds that "objects are given to us by means of sensibility" (A19/B33), not understanding. In the case of sensibility and intuition (as opposed to what he indicates needs to be shown in the transcendental deduction in relation to the categories of understanding), Kant writes that "objects can indeed appear to us without necessarily having to be related to functions of the understanding"; for in such a case "[a]pppearances would nonetheless

offer *objects* to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking” (A89–90/B122–3, italics added). These passages certainly seem to suggest that concepts are *not* necessary in order to have sensible intuitions of objects per se, though perhaps they are necessary for the sort of full-blown, self-aware perceptual experience of objects at play in the transcendental deduction (cf. Allais 2015, 2016). The issue is a fundamental one because it concerns how to understand the crucial relationship between our sensory and intellectual faculties in Kant’s philosophy.

Not surprisingly commentators have sought to reconcile the ostensible inconsistencies or tensions in Kant’s text on this matter by means of a wide variety of distinctions: for example between different senses of ‘intuition’, or between cognition, or experience, or perception, and the mere sensory-intuitive presentation of particulars; or between different textual contexts and purposes, and so on (for comprehensive recent discussions, see the articles in Schulting, ed., 2016).⁶ Here I can only summarily sketch how Sellars grappled with (and in part, originated) this complex interpretive issue in Kant in ways that have in retrospect turned out to be groundbreaking if controversial in their own right, though I think their significance has often been misunderstood in the subsequent literature.

It must be admitted that the issue is complicated by the fact that in chapter one of his *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (SM 1968), Sellars argues that Kant is pulled in two different but insightful directions on this topic, and that Kant unfortunately fails to harmonize his view satisfactorily without further distinctions being drawn, some of which are peculiar to Sellars (and controversial). The interesting fact is that Sellars anticipated and defended central contentions of *both* sides in the current dispute between conceptualists and nonconceptualist interpreters.

In the literature Sellars is almost universally, but misleadingly classified in this debate as a *conceptualist*, usually cited along with the well-known Sellars-influenced and more straightforwardly conceptualist Kantian-Hegelian philosophers, John McDowell and Robert Brandom. This is partly for good reason, since all three philosophers build on Sellars’ “logical space of reasons” passage to argue that our conceptual capacities must be operative in any state that is to constitute an instance not only of perceptual *knowledge* (as in this famous passage) but of any object-directed human intentionality whatsoever:

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. (EPM VIII, §36)

These three analytic Kantians all agree with Kant that, for beings like us, the possibility of our representing any empirically mind-independent object of experience at all requires the sorts of conceptual syntheses that Kant articulates throughout the transcendental analytic, though of course they differ from Kant and from each other on important details. McDowell (1996, 2009, 2016) in particular argues quite strongly that while passive sensibility (sensible intuition) is indeed

⁶ The contributions by the various authors in the Schulting, ed., 2016 volume on *Kantian Nonconceptualism* provide an excellent resource for those interested in the most recent and best work on this topic. Two other helpful recent contributions to the debates concerning Kant and conceptualism vs. nonconceptualism are Golob 2016 and Allais 2015, chapter 7. These and the Schulting volume will provide more extensive background than I can provide here to the general interpretive and philosophical disputes concerning Kant on this particular topic, and each also offers a detailed take on the matter based on careful analyses of a variety of key passages from Kant’s works. See also Ginsborg 2008, Hanna 2011, and from a Sellarsian-Kantian perspective, Rosenberg 1986/2008, Ch. 4, and Landy 2015, Ch. 3.

ultimately required in order for any empirical object to be given to us as thinkable or knowable by us, the *representational content* of any such cognition for a rational animal is *entirely conceptual* content. McDowell (1996, Ch. 3) argued in particular against the coherence of Gareth Evans' (1982) conception of "non-conceptual" representational content, and his idea, for example, that the sensory information that is systematically generated in response to objects typically constitutes a dimension of nonconceptual representation of those objects that is independent of, though essential to, their rational integration into our higher-level conceptual cognition of empirical objects in our perceptual experiences. It is primarily due to the fact that McDowell's conceptualism, as it came to be known, highlighted genuine affinities with Sellars' "space of reasons" conception of the role of our conceptual capacities in human perceptual knowledge and intentionality that Sellars is almost invariably cited as a conceptualist on this issue.

In fact, however, Sellars' own complex conception of perceptual experience, reflected in his reading of what he thinks Kant *almost* got entirely right (Sellars 1968, SM Ch. 1), was a hybrid or mixed view that sought to defend the essential roles in human perceptual cognition of both conceptual representation *and* a substantive, integrated form of object-directed nonconceptual sensory representational content. Sellars argued that Kant tends to use terms such as "intuition" and "sensible intuition" in two different ways in different contexts. Paradigmatically in the transcendental aesthetic, Kant seeks to characterize the role of sensory intuition in abstraction or "isolation" from (A22/B36), but anticipating, the necessarily combined role of sensibility and understanding in our actual perceptual cognitions of empirical objects as articulated throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason* (cf. Rosenberg 2005, Ch. 3, Conant 2017). Sellars takes the primary uses of "intuition" and "sensible intuition" to occur in the latter contexts, and thus models our *singular intuitions* of objects on such indexical perceptual subject-terms as *this red apple*. I will consider this "conceptualist" aspect of Sellars' view first.

Intuitions in this primary sense, for Sellars and for Sellars' Kant, are thus our directly object-evoked (i.e., non-inferential) but conceptualized sense-perceptual responses to being affected by objects through sensation, as for example in the singular perceptual thought, *this red apple (here-now)* is such and such. On this reading Kant's key insight into our empirical cognition was to see that concepts figure in our perceptual experience not only as explicitly general representations in the predicate position of our judgments, as it were, but also in the very subject-terms that *give* us any objects of thought and judgment in the first place. This is roughly the way in which Sellars and McDowell⁷ interpret such pivotal passages as the following from the so-called "metaphysical deduction" of the categories in the first *Critique* ("The Clue to the Discovery of all Pure Concepts of the Understanding"), with the "same function" in this passage referring to *conceptual* synthesis, a synthesis which also governs what Kant later in the *Critique* will call the "productive imagination":

The same function that gives unity to the different representations **in a judgment** also gives unity to the mere synthesis of different representations **in an intuition**, which expressed generally, is called the pure concept of understanding. (A79/B104–5)

For Sellars and Sellars' Kant, then, singular and immediate sensible intuitions of objects, in this primary sense, are a certain kind of passively and sensorily evoked singular *thought* arising in direct response to, and directly *about*, the given object of the kind thus classified in the conceptual response (e.g. *this red apple*). Note that this singular conceptualized intuiting, as the subject-term of a perceptual thinking or judging, is "to be distinguished from the conceptual synthesis of

⁷ See, for example, Sellars 1968 SM Ch. 1, §10), and McDowell 2009, pp. 29ff., 70, 94, 109, 148, 260–1, 265–6, 271. See also Conant 2017.

recognition in a concept, in which the concept occupies a predicative position” in a judgment (Sellars 1968 SM Ch. 1, §40).

Unlike McDowell and other conceptualists, however, Sellars *also* thinks that Kant was right to regard sensibility as providing, in its own right, and as an essential part of the explanation of why our full-blown sensible intuitions of objects in the above primary sense have the character that they do, a qualitatively rich and spatially (or quasi-spatially) structured form of “nonconceptual representation” of objects. For Sellars, it was a crucial insight of Kant’s distinction between sensibility and understanding to break the sensory-cognitive continuum that had characterized both Locke’s sensualizing of the understanding and Leibniz’s intellectualizing of the appearances (cf. A271/B327), and thereby to distinguish between nonconceptual sensory representations of objects and conceptual representations of objects.⁸

Suppose that one sees (visually perceives) two physical objects on the table, a red ball next to a green cube. In normal adult human perception, for both Kant and Sellars, to sensibly intuit these physical objects *as* a red ball next to a green cube requires that one’s direct, non-inferential sensible intuition or perceptual response be structured *inter alia* by the *conceptual* rules or representations *red, ball, cube, square, next to*, at a minimum, and these empirical concepts will themselves be structured instances (involving the productive imagination) of the a priori forms and laws of space, time, and the categories. But Sellars argues, and he finds this in Kant, too, that this explanation in terms of intuitions as object-evoked singular conceptualized thoughts is *insufficient* to explain both the qualitative and the systematic character of our perceptual responses. The latter requires that such intuitions are systematically generated and informed also by *nonconceptual* sensory representations of the objects, both qualitative and relational, which will involve structured forms and qualities of sensing that systematically reflect the subject’s or animal’s sensory faculties rather than its intellectual abilities (e.g., Sellars 1968, SM I, §§43–7; cf. Rosenberg 2005, Ch. 3, and Landy 2015, Ch. 3).⁹ Sellars argues that to make this distinction clearly, however, one has to distinguish, as Kant almost did but did not, the sense in which *the manifold of sense or receptivity in the subject is itself (analogously) ‘spatial’*, for instance, from the literal sense in which *the outer physical objects thereby intuitively and conceptually represented are spatial*. Our sensings must in some systematic nonconceptual manner encode the geometrical spatial information about the outer objects thereby represented, e.g., the physical cube next to the ball (as opposed to on top of a pyramid, etc.), without such sensory states of the perceiver being themselves literally square and spherical, and so on. Sellars sums up this key aspect of his reading of Kant on sensibility this way:

⁸ For Sellars it is crucial to distinguish (a) the *intentionality* of conceptual representation – for example, in the singular conceptualized intuition *of* a red apple (intuition in the primary sense), which is at bottom based on concepts as rules or law-prescribing functions, from (b) the *intensionality* but *non-intentionality* of the nonconceptual sensible intuition or sensory representation (‘sense impression’) *of a red bulgy-shaped sphere*, which explains the occurrence and the character (relational and qualitative) of that same overall perceptual response (cf. Sellars 1992, EPM IV, §24, and 1968 SM I, §58). Both contexts are non-extensional, i.e. one can’t infer either from “Jones is conceptually representing (i.e., thinking *of*) *O*,” or from “Jones (or some other animal) is having a visual sense impression *of O*,” that the empirical object *O* exists as represented. On Sellars’ adverbial account, one can sense *in-the-of-an-O-manner* (for example, sensing-red-square-ly, i.e. in the way *normally* caused by red square objects), without there actually being a red, square empirical object in one’s environment. Space does not permit further details here on Sellars’s views on sense perception.

⁹ See in particular Landy 2015 for more detail and a sympathetic analysis of Kant’s views on sensibility as inspired by Sellars’ reading of Kant. For my own part I suspect that Sellars, Rosenberg, and Landy in the end read a bit too much of Sellars’ own views about sense impressions (and counterpart sense-impression manifolds in the scientific image, etc.) back into Kant’s own actual views about sensations and “impressions,” though Sellars himself was highly circumspect and qualified in this particular regard (see O’Shea 2016).

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. (Sellars 1968, SM I, §75)

That is, with post-Kantian philosophers Hegel and J. S. Mill, et al., we were unfortunately subsequently back to the ill-fated sensory/cognitive continuum in either the rationalist Leibnizian intellectualizing direction (Hegel), or the empiricist Lockean sensualizing direction (the Mills).

For reasons of space I can only take us to this beginning of Sellars' story about the role of nonconceptual forms of sensory representation and its role in Kant's critical philosophy. But I hope this is sufficient nonetheless to encourage the detailed reassessment of Sellars' originating contribution to this current debate among analytic Kantians and contemporary philosophers of perception. In particular it should give pause to the unqualified designation of Sellars as a conceptualist, while nonconceptualism is standardly traced back to its first origin in the similarly robust nonconceptual/conceptual combined view of Gareth Evans (1982) some years later. Sellars himself ultimately took his defense of nonconceptual sensory representations, and in particular certain problems pertaining to the place of color qualities in the natural world, in rather radical directions that need not be swallowed whole in order to preserve key aspects of all of the insights that I have hoped to bring out in this chapter, including his attempt to embed a substantive Kantian nonconceptualism within the strongly conceptualist aspects of his view (cf. O'Shea 2016, and Landy 2015, "Postscript on Transcendental Idealism").

The main point I wish to stress in closing, however, is that here in the case of the philosophy of perception, just as we saw earlier in the case of questions concerning knowledge and scepticism, conceptual analysis, a priori knowledge, and causal laws, as well as a host of other topics in ontology, epistemology, action theory, and philosophy of mind not mentioned here, philosophers such as Sellars, Strawson, and a long list of others have continued to make important contributions not only to the understanding of Kant's theoretical philosophy and its lasting significance, but also to the development of distinctively "analytic Kantian" approaches to some of the most hotly contested philosophical disputes of our own time.¹⁰

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¹⁰ One other major contribution made to contemporary philosophy by analytic Kantians that I must at least mention has to do with the nature of *the thinking self* and focuses on the insights contained in Kant's views on this topic in the transcendental deduction and the paralogisms of pure reason. See for a start: Strawson 1966, Sellars 2002 [1972], 403–18, Evans 1982 Ch. 7, Rosenberg 1986/2008 Chs. 2–3 and 2005 Ch. 12, Brooks 1994, Cassam 1997, and Kitcher 2011.

In the last few decades there have also been an increasing number of works on Kant making notable use of the tools and distinctions characteristic of contemporary analytic metaphysics and ontology. One influential example of this was Rae Langton's *Kantian Humility* (1998), which ably defended an interpretation of Kant's central distinction between appearances and (Leibnizian) things in themselves in terms of a conception of intrinsic vs. relational properties that she had adapted and developed from with David Lewis at Princeton.

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