REVISITING THE MYTH: 
HUSSERL AND SELLARS ON THE GIVEN

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I

In Science, Perception, and Reality, Sellars marvels at the power of fashion in philosophy, which all too often offers us the spectacle of a stampede rather than a careful sifting of gold from dross.¹ Sellars was worried that the flight from phenomenalism would lead to the familiar pendulum effect and so thwart his effort to “usher analytic philosophy out of its Humean and into its Kantian stage,” as Rorty has put it.² Accordingly, Sellars’s critique of the Myth of the Given aimed to show that what was really wrong with phenomenalism was nothing particular to the sense-data of the positivists but the framework of givenness itself.

Sellars’s critique of the Given made an enormous impact, but did it not set off a new stampede? On the contemporary horizon, the dust is settling around numerous philosophies, including phenomenology, and the hoofprints look strikingly like those of the postpositivistic analytic philosophers who are Sellars’s progeny. And, some might think, not without good reason. Are not phenomenology and phenomenalism kindred cousins? Does not the notion of an immediate, private “given” lie so much at the core of the Husserlian enterprise that phenomenology is unthinkable without it? Does not Husserl wish to erect the edifice of objective knowledge on this unshakable foundation? Does not Sellars extend his critique of the Given to Chisholm and so to Brentano and Husserl?³ When we come to the essence of the matter,


can we not treat Husserl and Russell in one breath as an indivisible unity, as does Rorty throughout Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature?\footnote{Richard Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 4, 166–9, 369, 390.} In the wake of Sellars, Wittgenstein, Rorty, the linguistic turn, and the rest, would we not do well only to mention and not to use the word “given” in polite philosophical company?

According to the spirit if not the letter of Sellars, it is my hope in this paper to redimension the relationship between postpositivistic analytic philosophy and Husserlian phenomenology by revisiting some of the arguments advanced by Sellars against the Myth of the Given and in favor of the linguistic turn. One thesis advanced in this paper is that there is more common ground between Husserl and Sellars than is usually thought. For the main aim of Sellars’s critique is to attack the given as the immediate and to show that empirical knowledge requires concepts, inferences, and language. Here there is little if any disagreement with Husserl, who is hardly concerned with immediacy and makes very similar points about the mediacy of empirical knowledge, albeit in a different way.

However, certain divergences remain, and a second aim of this paper is to reconstruct and evaluate them. One important dispute concerns the relation between language and intentionality. For Sellars and his progeny, language is a precondition for attentive, object-directed consciousness; whereas on a phenomenological account, there are prepredicative, preverbal forms of intentionality. A second, related difference arises in the respective approaches to intersubjectivity. Sellars treats the attribution of intentionality to others as primarily a theory for the explanation of behavior; whereas for Husserl the “constitution” of the other is not primarily theoretical, and a relation to behavior does not belong to the very concept of intentionality.

Behind these disputes lie certain deeper differences concerning the nature of the mental and the relation between science and everyday life. For there is a secondary tendency in Sellars’s linguistic turn which shies away from the given not as the immediate but more generally as the subjective, experiential dimension of life, which Sellars sometimes associates with the Cartesian, “mind’s eye” view of consciousness. Sellars’s functional-linguistic approach to intentionality aims to define the mental without making any explicit reference to the
properly subjective dimension of mental life. This approach is meant to clear the way for an eventual reduction of the mental to the physical in neurophysiological terms. By contrast, according to phenomenology as well as antireductionists such as Nagel, Searle, and to some extent Chalmers, the experiential dimension is essential to conscious-ness. The experiential dimension cannot be eliminated, translated, or reduced, and any conception which lacks explicit reference to it is not a conception of consciousness but of its physical causes, its functional relations, or something else.

Sellars is motivated to accommodate his conception of the mental to physicalism by a belief that the manifest and the scientific images are ultimately incompatible. He argues that if we were to believe both the common sense and scientific descriptions of the world, then as in Eddington’s example, there would be two tables instead of one (that is, the table as described by common sense and the table as described by mathematical physics). Sellars concludes that since there is only one world, only one image can be true, and this is the scientific image. Much as the secondary properties of the manifest image were replaced by purely mechanical properties in seventeenth-century physics, so the perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of the common-sense experience of the world will be replaced by neurophysiological states in a more advanced scientific image.5

However, here I think Sellars is in error. As I have argued in detail elsewhere, Husserlian phenomenology can be used effectively to show that there is no either-or between the mathematized world of nature and the lifeworld: both the lifeworld and mathematized nature are real, albeit in different ways and according to different views of the real.6 There are not two tables but one “object” which is conceptualized in different ways, according to different frameworks, language games, and ontological attitudes. The scientific, naturalistic conception of the world can neither claim universal, absolute applicability nor invalidate the notion of the real appropriate to the manifest image (the natural attitude).

Thus, the general upshot of my analysis in this paper is that there is little or nothing in Sellars, the critique of the Given, or the linguistic

turn that could justify the superficial Rortean assessment of Husserlian phenomenology as “superseded” by contemporary philosophical developments. To the contrary, postpostivistic analytic philosophy has much to learn from Husserl, especially in the areas of the relation between language and thought and of intersubjectivity.

II

In mounting an Auseinandersetzung between Husserl and Sellars, we need to guard against certain facile interpretations, such as that Husserl believes there is a given, or that Husserl has a Cartesian view of the mind, whereas Sellars does not. That it is not a simple matter to pinpoint the differences is clear in Sellars’s correspondence with Chisholm, whose view of intentionality is relatively similar to Husserl’s. In this correspondence, we find a constant nuancing of differences, a veritable Sisyphean striving toward an agreement just out of reach. Even Chisholm’s blunt statement of his position in seven points, including the crucial sixth point, “thoughts are a ‘source of intentionality’,” does not elicit an outright rejection from Sellars but a hedging acceptance: “it isn’t so much that I disagree with your seven sentences, for I can use each of them separately, with varying degrees of discomfort, to say something which needs to be said. . . . It is rather that I am unhappy about the force they acquire in the over-all framework in which you put them.”

The initial obstacle to evaluating how phenomenology might fall into the “framework of givenness” is that Husserl and Sellars have fundamentally different conceptions of givenness itself. To see how much of the hostility to phenomenology on the part of Sellars’s progeny is based on mere equivocation, we must clarify how each thinker understands the term “given.”

For Sellars, the given is the immediate in the sense of the unlearned. It is the content of an awareness which does not require prior experience or training to be grasped but is simply “there,” in the

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7 According to Sellars, no philosopher would object to talk of the “given” in the sense of a distinction between what is perceived and what is inferred. See Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, 13. Further, in his correspondence with Chisholm, Sellars grants that thought is distinct from language and can occur in its absence. See Sellars and Chisholm, “Intentionality and the Mental,” 527–8.

8 Sellars and Chisholm, “Intentionality and the Mental,” 535.
raw. It is a type of awareness which does not presuppose language,\(^9\) concepts, or inferences. Sellars does not deny the existence of immediate contents of this form. Rather, what he opposes is the idea that this type of awareness can serve as evidence for empirical knowledge. For Sellars, the essence of the Myth of the Given is to think there is nonlinguistic, nonconceptual, noninferential awareness which either serves as evidence for or itself constitutes empirical knowledge. Indeed, according to Sellars, the whole point of the empiricists’ invention of the epistemological category of the given is to identify the type of awareness which: (1) does not require learning, concepts, or language; and (2) whose occurrence logically entails the existence of empirical knowledge.\(^10\)

Now it does not require a deep familiarity with Husserl to realize that this is not the point of the category of givenness for Husserl, and that he, like Sellars, denies there is anything to which both (1) and (2) apply. However, before coming to this in detail, it will be useful first to outline the nature and function of givenness for Husserl.

Although “given” and its cognates occur with remarkable frequency in Husserl’s writings, its ubiquity does not express a unitary conception of “the” given. We can differentiate at least three main senses of givenness in Husserl, none of which corresponds directly to Sellars’s notion of the immediate as the unlearned, the preconceptual, preinferential, and prelinguistic. (Indeed, for Husserl, conceptuality, linguisticality, and inferentiality are three separable features of

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\(^9\) Here and throughout this paper, I follow Sellars’s usage and employ “language” and its cognates to refer to specifically verbal behavior. Sellars does not present a general definition of language, but he takes speech as the central model, and seems to presuppose that language is: (1) propositional; (2) associated with a form of observable behavior; (3) something that adult human exhibit but animals and infants lack. Thus his conception of language excludes developmentally prior and passive communicative forms such as gestures, facial expressions, nonverbal vocalizations, and passive comprehension of speech. If Sellars had conceived of language more along the lines of Merleau-Ponty as (active and passive) corporeal intersubjective communication, and had held that the framework of intentionality presupposed language in this sense, then many of the reservations I will raise in what follows would have to be significantly qualified. But then the position of psychological nominalism would be about the fundamental role of intersubjective communication, not specifically of words.

\(^10\) “[T]he point of the epistemological category of the given is, presumably, to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a ‘foundation’ of non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact”; Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 15.
consciousness and should not be lumped together under a single heading.)

In the broadest sense, the given for Husserl is what is experienced, as it is experienced, even where this experience presupposes concepts, language, or inferences. Husserl uses this very general sense of givenness to emphasize that phenomenology is concerned with a descriptive analysis of experience, as opposed to, for example, a hypothetico-deductive explanation of its physical causes.

The second, narrower sense of givenness is best captured by Husserl’s technical notion of immanence. A content or a process is immanent if and only if it cannot be thought as existing apart from consciousness. In Husserlian terminology, the immanent is a non-independent part or abstract moment of consciousness itself. For example, a table that exists in the world is not immanent, but an Abschattung of a table is, and so are a memory of the table, the blurry image I see when I press on my eye while looking at the table, and so forth.

Immanence is the sense of givenness in Husserl’s notion of das Wie des Gegebenheit (the subjective mode of givenness), which delineates the phenomenological research program of constitutive analysis. According to Husserl, the world as we experience it, the world as meaningful, does not exist “in itself” but becomes constituted for us through the involvement of subjects and communities of subjects. The task of phenomenology is to bring to reflective awareness the specific subjective elements and processes (the immanent) required for experience of various types of objects. The notion of das Wie des Gegebenheit emerges from the insight that experience exhibits a dual structure: on the one hand, we have objects and their properties; on the other, we have the strictly subjective components of experience (the immanent) on whose basis experience of objects is possible. For example, enduring three-dimensional objects are experienced on the basis of fleeting, partial perspectival views (Abschattungen and their syntheses). Similarly, we experience the past and an objective time order on the basis of subjective apprehensions which take place in the present (for example, memories, reports of others). In ordinary life, our attention goes right through the subjective modes of manifestation and concentrates itself on things, so that the subjective side of

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experience vanishes from view. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the crux of phenomenology is to thematize the largely hidden role of subjectivity in experience and to give a precise account of the way in which our experience of things as objective depends upon it. It is for this reason that Husserl characterizes the epoché as a turning of one’s regard from the objects of the world to the objects in their mode of givenness (das Wie des Gegebenheit). A closely related view is expressed in Heidegger’s notion in Being and Time that phenomenology shifts attention from beings to their Being.

Here again, there is no correspondence between Husserl’s conception of givenness as immanence and Sellars’s notion of immediacy. A content is immanent when it is an intrinsic part of consciousness, independently of whether occurrence of the content presupposes concepts, language, learning, and so forth. For example, a table-Abschat tung is immanent, but the ability to experience it is clearly acquired, and, depending upon its epistemic sophistication, could require concepts and even language.

A third sense of givenness goes under Husserl’s term Selbstgebenheit (self-givenness or original givenness) and is associated with his analysis of Evidenz (self-evidence). As a first approach, we can correlate original givenness with self-manifestation, in contrast to depiction through resemblances or indication through symbols. An object is originally given when it is perceived, as opposed to merely thought. For example, if I look out a window and see a blackbird flying by, the flying blackbird is originally given. By contrast, if I judge “There is a blackbird flying outside the window” without looking (for example, because someone told me so), the blackbird is not originally given.

The concept of original givenness would be banal if not for its relative nature. One experience makes the object manifest in comparison to another experience, and there is a wide spectrum of degrees. At one extreme lies purely conceptual thought, trains of reflection which are unaccompanied by images, memories, or perceptions of the subject matter being contemplated. This type of empty representation is characterized by Husserl as symbolic since there is no resemblance between the medium by which we are related to the matters under consideration (for example, the words of one’s thoughts) and the

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matters themselves (for example, states of affairs in the world).\footnote{14} Further along the spectrum of originality we find pictures, images, and memories: here we are related to subject matters by means of copies and resemblances rather than merely by symbols. Toward the far end of the spectrum we find perception, which is characterized by an encounter with the thing itself, in the flesh, the original rather than a picture, copy, or symbol of the thing.\footnote{15} Of course Husserl’s assertion that in perception we encounter the thing “itself” has nothing to do with the idea that all (or any) perception is veridical or that perception is unmediated by concepts or language, much less that in perception we encounter the Kantian Ding an sich. It is simply a way of characterizing the difference between what it is like to hear a piano sonata being played or to see a friend and what it is like to see a picture of these events or to imagine, think, or read about them. In perception, it “appears” that the thing itself stands before us, or in Husserlian terms, we judge that it does so.

Perception as well is not monolithic but makes objects manifest in different ways and to different degrees. According to Husserl’s analysis, perceptual acts have “parts” in the sense that they contain numerous explicit and implicit judgments about the object perceived.\footnote{16} For example, when we see a table, we implicitly judge what it would feel like if touched, how it would look from alternate locations, how it would be perceived by other persons under similar conditions, whether its material would be durable under normal wear-and-tear, whether it is large enough to use for writing, and so forth. In most perceptions, only some of the properties attributed to the object have the character of self-givenness (in the sense outlined in the previous paragraph). For example, when one looks at a hammer, one judges that it would be resistant to the touch (for otherwise one would experience that one is seeing a phantom rather than a solid object), and perhaps even that this is precisely the tool for the task at hand. However, while the visual aspect of the hammer is originally given by merely looking, its tactile quality and its suitability for hammering are not. These latter would be originally given in grasping the hammer and hammering with it.

The merely partial originality of perception motivates Husserl’s limit idea of maximal original givenness, or adequate Evidenz, which

\footnote{14} Husserl, \textit{Logical Investigations}, vol. 2, Sixth Investigation, §14a.  
\footnote{15} Ibid.  
\footnote{16} Ibid., §12.
is a perception in which all the properties attributed to the object are self-given, or in Husserl's terminology, all the implicit judgments are fulfilled. In adequate self-evidence, there is nothing judged or implied about the object which is not also perceived. The object manifests itself exactly and completely as it is judged.\textsuperscript{17} For Husserl, adequate self-evidence is givenness in the strict sense.

Having completed our sketch of adequate self-evidence, we should note that Husserl's use of this sense of givenness is completely consistent with Sellars's attacks against the sense-data of the logical empiricists. According to Husserl, empirical sense-data cannot be adequately self-evident.\textsuperscript{18} The Ayersian exemplars of givenness attacked by Sellars, such as "I see a red surface" or "the tomato presents a red sense-datum to me," contain numerous implicit judgments which remain unfulfilled. The assertion "the tomato presents a red sense-datum" is generally accompanied by the implicit judgment that the tomato is a three-dimensional physical object with an appropriately colored back side (for example, red or green), a certain taste and tactile quality, and numerous other properties. We might try to formulate a judgment without unfulfilled implicit assumptions by asserting, "something, which appears to be a tomato, presents a red sense-datum," or "red here now." However, even the minimalist report "red here now" is not adequately self-evident if "red" is taken with its usual meaning, according to which red-experiences are intersubjectively shared. When taken with its usual meaning, "red here how" includes the implicit judgment that the red I am now seeing is the same color you see when you say "red," an implicit judgment which is merely posited, not fulfilled. Ultimately, any implicit reference to intersubjectivity or existence in the world comports expectations of future perceptions whose realizability is merely presupposed. For this reason, Husserl concludes that even to approach adequate self-evidence, an object or content has to be taken as it appears to me in the here-and-now apart from any positing of objective reality or intersubjectivity; that is, as it appears under the phenomenological reduction.

Thus we see that Husserl's concept of givenness as adequate self-evidence has little to do with Sellars's notion of immediacy as the absence of conceptuality or language. Quite the contrary, Husserl's analysis makes much the same point generally associated with Sellars:

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., §37.
\textsuperscript{18} Edmund Husserl, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology, trans. Frederick Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980), §44.
even seemingly very simple perceptions involve quite complex implicit judgments, which in turn generally require learning, concepts, and language.

Together with their different conceptions of givenness, there is a significant divergence between Husserl and Sellars over the purpose of the category of the given. For Sellars, the point is to found empirical knowledge, to identify the noninferential bases for inferences. By contrast, for Husserl the category of the given serves to thematize the subjective elements of experience (the immanent) and to show how what is taken by us to be knowledge presupposes and emerges out of these subjective elements. This exploration reveals the origins and presuppositions of empirical knowledge and clarifies the motives for belief. But what we find in the case of empirical knowledge is that the motives are always insufficient to yield certainty. No empirical truths follow as consequences of this type of analysis of the given. Indeed, the given as the immanent does not in general provide an inferential basis for empirical knowledge but rather motivates it. For example, one does not infer from a series of table-Abschattungen that there is a table, the Abschattungen do not serve as evidence that there is a table, one cannot justify the claim “there is a table” by asserting “I have a series of table-Abschattungen.” Rather, the justifying evidence for the claim that there is a table is that one sees the table. The function of the Abschattungen is not to justify but to give rise to the perception of the table by motivating it, based on subjective mechanisms of association, among others.

III

In the previous section I argued that Husserl is not committed to the Myth of the Given in its basic form. However, for Sellars the Myth is a veritable hydra, turning up from classical empiricism to logical

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20 “No objective truth, whether in the prescientific or in the scientific sense, that is, no claim about objective being, ever enters into our scientific sphere, whether as a premise or as a consequence (Keine objektive Wahrheit, ob in vorwissenschaftlichem oder wissenschaftlichem Sinne, bzw. keine Feststellung für objektives Sein tritt je in unserem Kreis der Wissenschaftlichkeit, ob nun als Prämisse oder also Folgerung)”; Husserl, Crisis of the European Sciences, §52.
positivism, from Descartes to Hegel. In particular, Sellars holds that rejecting the Myth of the Given means affirming that language is the precondition for the most basic forms of cognition and perceptual awareness of objects. He defines his psychological nominalism as the view that prior to language, there is no awareness of the logical space of particulars, sorts, resemblances, facts, and so forth. Without language, one cannot even notice a certain sort of thing or property because noticing something presupposes possessing the concept of that thing, and this in turn presupposes a complex network of other concepts and social initiation into preexisting language games.

We [have to] give up the idea that we begin our sojourn in this world with any—even a vague, fragmentary, and undiscriminating—awareness of the logical space of particulars, kinds, facts, and resemblances, . . . [I]nstead of coming to have a concept of something because we have noticed that sort of thing, to have the ability to notice a sort of thing is already to have the concept of that sort of thing, and cannot account for it.22

On this basis Sellars argues that the abstractive theory of concept formation of classical empiricism is another version of the Myth of the Given.23 Concepts cannot be formed on the basis of perceptions of particulars because without concepts one cannot see particulars, and indeed properly speaking one does not see at all because seeing is cognitive and cognition requires concepts and language.24

Husserl's account of concept formation differs in important ways from the classical empiricist ones, as well as from the Thomistic-Aristotelian notion of abstraction also attacked by Sellars. Nonetheless, Husserl shares the empiricist view that the noticing of individuals and their individual features occurs prior to and as a condition of the formation of general concepts.

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21 Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, 66.
22 Ibid., 87.
23 "[T]he coming to see something as red is the culmination of a complicated process which is the slow building up of a multi-dimensional pattern of linguistic responses (by verbal expressions, by meta-linguistic expressions to object-language expressions, etc.) the fruition of which as conceptual occurs when all these dimensions come into play in such direct perceptions as that this physical object (not that one) over here (not over there) is (rather than was) red (not orange, yellow, etc.)"; Sellars, "Phenomenalism," in Science, Perception and Reality, 90.
24 "Seeing is a cognitive episode that involves the framework of thoughts"; Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, 110.
However, here again we need to be careful. For whether there really is a clash depends upon how one interprets Sellars’s phrases, “perceiving something as red” and “concept of red.” In contrast to Sellars and those under the influence of his linguistic turn, Husserl painstakingly differentiates among many different degrees of epistemic complexity of perceptions and concepts. Seen in light of such distinctions, phrases such as “perceiving something as red” and “concept of red” are highly ambiguous and could refer to a wide range of phenomena, many of which would indeed presuppose verbal language and/or concepts, even on a Husserlian account. For example, “perceiving something as red” could refer to a perceptual judgment where:

(1) an individual color instance is subsumed under a general color concept (that is, “this instantiates the general color concept, red”);  

(2) an individual object which has already been subsumed under a general concept then receives a predication of an individual color (“this apple is that”);  

(3) the individual color of an individual object which has already been subsumed under a general concept is now itself subsumed under a general color concept (“this apple is red”);  

(4) a perceptual judgment where an individual color is predicated of an individual object (“this is that”);  

(5) a perceptual judgment in which the colored object stands out from the perceptual background but there is no separate noticing or predication of its color (“this-such”);  

(6) a perceptual judgment in which the colored object is experienced as part of the perceptual background (for example, peripherally, subliminally) but is not thematically noticed.  

(7) perceptual judgments in which the individual color is associated with a previously seen individual colors or individual objects (as similar, as identical, as different, as related), and this with or without thematic attention.  

(8) the same as (7), only involving subsumption of some or all of the individuals under general concepts.

Similarly, the epistemic complexity of concepts varies greatly, also as a function of social-linguistic interaction. The fact that verbal linguistic interactions affect concepts as soon as these interactions begin implies neither that there are no concepts prior to language nor that concept formation logically presupposes verbal interactions.
While in general Sellars adopts an overly simplistic all-or-nothing notion of conceptuality, upon occasion he admits that there is a distinction between rudimentary and sophisticated concepts. For example, in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, Sellars imagines a tie salesman, John, with two different types of color concepts. John begins with simple color concepts lacking any reference to standard conditions or standard observers. At first John does not distinguish between being and appearing and even thinks a green tie is blue when it looks blue under artificial lighting. Through imitation and selective verbal reinforcement, John learns that colors do not always look like what they are and that they look like what they are when they are in natural daylight, viewed by eyes in good condition, and so forth. That is, he learns what type of conditions count as standard conditions and what type of observers count as standard observers for the viewing of colors. In this way, he arrives at more sophisticated color concepts. If $b_n$ is John’s naïve concept of blue, and $b_s$ his sophisticated blue concept, we can say that something is $b_s$ if and only if it looks $b_n$ to a standard observer in standard conditions.

Now Sellars uses the tie salesman example to argue that noticing shades of blue requires a vast network of concepts and hence a socially reinforced language game. Yet in fact the example of the tie salesman shows only that $b_s$ (the concept involving notions of standard observers and conditions) presupposes language and a network of other concepts, including $b_n$. The example does nothing at all to show that $b_n$ (the initial, primitive concept that equates being and appearing) requires language or that noticing of individual blue-shades require any concept of blue, even a rudimentary one.\(^{25}\) Thus, although Sellars here distinguishes between different degrees of conceptual sophistication, he fails to realize the implications of this distinction for his position.

It is clear that some concepts, and virtually all concepts employed by normal adults in everyday life, are shaped in part by social reinforcement, which occurs especially (although not solely) in the form of verbal communication. For example, normal adult concepts of sensible qualities are at least as complex as John’s sophisticated version of the concept of blue and thus depend upon verbally reinforced notions of standard observers and standard conditions. Similarly to

\(^{25}\) For the argument involving the tie salesman, see Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 37–46.
Sellars, Husserl shows how a complex notion of normality is fundamental to mature object-perception and that what counts as a normal perception or observer in a given context evolves with intersubjective interaction, and so with verbal communication. It is also clear that "perceiving something as red" presupposes the concept of red for the type of perceptions to which normal adults would usually refer with this phrase (for example, (1), (3), and (8) above). Thus if when we speak of perceiving something as red we have in mind a type of perception involving subsumption under a general concept, and if this concept is understood by us to be of at least average adult sophistication, then the perception of something as red presupposes the concept of red, a vast network of other concepts, and social initiation into verbal language games.

However, this still leaves some senses of perceiving something as red that do not obviously presuppose any concept of red. This would include perceptions of individual reds or red things which are not predicatively elaborated, with or without attention and association (for example, (2), (4), (5), (6), and (7) above). It remains a debated interpretative issue whether for Husserl there is any sensible experience wholly free of conceptual order laid down by the intellect. Many commentators believe that Husserl has a Kantian, antiempiricist view, according to which even the genetically most primitive sensibility is shaped in terms of certain basic conceptual distinctions, such as sameness and difference, whole and part, feature and thing, presence and absence, and so forth. But if a conceptual framework does occur at the genetically most primitive level, it must be innate since the results of social reinforcement would not belong to the genetically most primitive level. Thus, whatever his position on primal sensibility, Husserl holds that there is some form of perception which is not

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26 For an extensive discussion of the concept of normality in Husserl, see Anthony Steinbock, Home and Beyond (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

27 Husserl’s term for the genetically most primitive level of experience is “primal sensibility,” sensibility prior to the operations of synthesis, association, learning, and so forth. His views on primal sensibility are provocative but sketchy and do not affect the argument advanced here. For a discussion of the possible penetration of concepts to the level of primal sensibility, see Robert Sokolowski, Presence and Absence (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979); Iso Kern, Idee und Methode der Philosophie: Leitgedanken für eine Theorie der Vernunft (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976); and James Hart, “Agent Intellect and Primal Sensibility,” in Issues in Husserl’s Ideas II, ed. Thomas Nenon and Lester Embree (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1996).
predicatively shaped and does not presuppose socially transmitted verbal language.

In the remainder of this section I will review Sellars’s account of prelinguistic consciousness and argue that it does not effectively support his claim that there can be no prelinguistic intentionality. Sellars’s positive account of prelinguistic consciousness is contained in his theory of sensory awareness. According to this, the conceptual framework of sensations does not arise from first having sensations, then reflecting on them, then forming a concept of them by abstraction. To the contrary, for Sellars sensations give a hypothetical explanation of object perception. The hypothesis of sensations serves especially to explain illusions, as when people report that they see a green object while they are looking at a blue one. Using the sensation hypothesis, we say that under normal conditions a blue object causes a blue sensation and a green object a green sensation, but under certain unusual lighting a blue object causes a green sensation. More precisely, the theory of sensations asserts that:

(1) a sensation is a state of the subject and not a relation of the subject to something else. Thus to sense is not to perceive a particular (that is, the sense impression itself) but to be in a certain state; 28

(2) sensations are caused by physical objects impinging on the body;

(3) a sensation is a theoretical entity conceived on analogy with the external object which in normal circumstances is its physical cause;

(4) sensations are not conceived as possessing the same intrinsic properties as the physical objects that normally cause them. In Sellars’s terminology, sensations have properties which are “formally analogous” (which correspond in their similarities and differences) to the similarities and differences of the properties of their normal objective causes. The properties of sensations and the properties of their normal objective causes have analogous logical spaces. If Φ1, Φ2, ..., Φn are properties of physical things, then the sense impressions normally caused by physical objects with these properties possess another set of properties Ψ1, Ψ2, ..., Ψn such that Ψ1, Ψ2, ..., Ψn resemble and differ from one another in a way formally analogous to the way Φ1, Φ2, ..., Φn resemble and differ from one another.

To see the weakness of Sellars’s argument against prelinguistic intentionality, it is important to notice the asymmetrical dual role of his theory of sensation. For it acts both as a causal-functional

28 Sellars, “Phenomenalism,” in Science, Perception and Reality, 92; and Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, 110.
explanation of the perception of objects in linguistically mature adults; and as an account of the experience of conscious beings lacking verbal language. Now in the case of object perception, the theory of sensation is an empirical theory: there are certain observational data to be explained (for example, illusions), a hypothesis is mounted in terms of other existing theories (for example, causal theories of perception, physical reductionism), the theory is confirmed by predictive-explanatory adequacy, and so on. However, in the case of non-verbal experience, the theory of sensation is not an empirical account. Here the empirical data (such as the behavior of preverbal infants and animals, the neurophysiology of prelinguistic beings) play no essential role in the mounting of the theory. Instead, the theory that prelinguistic consciousness consists of sensation is a philosophical position resulting from Sellars's psychological nominalism, according to which language is the condition for concepts, awareness of particulars, kinds, and so forth. Since prelinguistic beings have bodies but not verbal language, and since according to psychological nominalism there cannot be perception without verbal language, it follows, as it were by default, that there can only be sensations, the same physically caused states that in linguistic beings result in object perception. The burden of just-ification for the theory of sensation as an account of prelinguistic consciousness thus falls squarely on Sellars's arguments for psychological nominalism. I have suggested above that in fact Sellars's arguments for psychological nominalism do not show that there are no concepts or perceptions without language but only that there cannot be concepts and perceptions of a certain epistemic sophistication without language. If this is the case, then the brute equation of prelinguistic consciousness with Sellarsian sensation is also unjustified.

A related difficulty stemming from this philosophical derivation is that the theory can come to be, and in fact is, in contradiction with prevailing empirical theories. Sellars works within the context of behaviorism and shares its presupposition that noncognitive stimulus-response mechanisms can successfully explain even the most sophisticated behavior and learning exhibited by infants and animals.29 However, today most empirical researchers find that behaviorism is not a successful research program and that many preverbal behavioral phenomena (including language acquisition itself) are much bet-

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ter explained and predicted by attributing perceptions, recognition, rudimentary inferential processes, desires, and even beliefs to infants and animals.\(^{30}\) Now according to Sellars, to have good reason for espousing a theory is to have good reason for saying that the entities it postulates really exist.\(^{31}\) Since superior explanatory and predictive power are as good reasons as any for espousing a theory, then following Sellars we should say that preverbal children and animals really have intentionality.\(^{32}\)

A more fundamental question concerns whether Sellarsian sensations, as in the case of all functionally defined states, are rightly characterized as states of “consciousness.” Following Nagel and Searle, I would argue that if something is a conscious state, it must have a first-person experiential aspect, there must be something that it is “like” (in the Nagelian sense) to be in this state.\(^{33}\) The subjective, experiential

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\(^{32}\) The changing tide against behaviorism within empirical research has been registered by Sellars’s successors in various ways. Similarly to Sellars, Dennett is attracted by the promise of a possible reduction of the mental to the physical held out by stimulus-response explanations of behavior. However, unlike Sellars, he acknowledges the relative explanatory power and irreducibility of intentional explanations (explanations attributing beliefs and desires), even for nonverbal “systems” such as children and animals. He is able to combine his physicalism with the assertion of the irreducibility of intentional explanation by jettisoning Sellars’s scientific realism in favor of an instrumentalist interpretation of intentionality. See, for example, Daniel Dennett, *Content and Consciousness* (New York: Routledge, 1993). More directly, although Brandom limits his mammoth analysis in *Making it Explicit* to linguistic intentionality, he concedes that this is only its “fanciest” form. Unlike Sellars, he admits that animals and children have a simpler, nonlinguistic intentionality and notes that it would be important to explain how the fancier, linguistic form emerges from the simpler, nonlinguistic ones. See Robert B. Brandom, *Making it Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, & Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 7. It goes without saying that Husserl’s analysis of prepredicative judgment addresses precisely this latter issue.

dimension is an essential feature of consciousness, it belongs to its very definition as conscious. This does not mean that a conscious state must be directed to an object or that a conscious state cannot be subliminal: some conscious feelings may not be “of” anything, some conscious states may be unaccompanied by attention or thematization. However, it does mean that there is always and necessarily (by definition) an experiential dimension of a conscious state for the being who is in that state, and that it is possible to give some account of this experiential dimension. If this is impossible, then it is simply empty and misleading to apply the term “conscious” to this type of state. It is not enough to say, as does Sellars, that sensations are in the mind in the same way that molecules are in a gas. A molecule is a physical entity which is in a gas and causally affects its behavior independently of any experience on the part of the gas. If a sense impression is a conscious rather than a physical state, it should have a conscious mode of inherence and causality, which means that there is something it is “like” to be in such a state.

What then is the properly subjective, experiential dimension of sensation, according to Sellars? What is it “like” to sense? Sellars characterizes sensations as nonphysiological, conscious, and even

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34 “These episodes are ‘in’ language-using animals as molecular impacts are ‘in’ gases, not as ‘ghosts’ are in ‘machines’”; Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 104.

35 I cannot agree with Chalmers, who allows that there are two equally valid concepts of consciousness, the phenomenal one (where conscious states are characterized by experience), and a “psychological” one (where conscious states are characterized functionally by the causal role they play in producing behavior). If there is something that has no experience (that is, if it is a zombie), nothing useful is added by calling its functional states “psychological.” Chalmers argues that many human conscious states are best understood in this functionalist way, but I find his examples unconvincing. For example, Chalmers holds that we usually understand learning functionally, as pure, experience-empty adaptation to the environment. To the contrary, it seems to me only the reductive distortions of cognitive science or artificial intelligence would lead one to accept the very sad equation of human learning with unconscious stimulus-response conditioning or, even worse, the alteration of behavior via direct physical intervention (for example, brain surgery). Precisely what distinguishes learning is the conscious, experienced apprehension and comprehension of the material on the part of the student. Otherwise we do not have learning but behavior modification via conditioning, physical intervention, or changes in programming. For the opposing view of Chalmers, see David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11 and following.
“perceived.” But he denies that they can be apperceived, noticed, or observed.\textsuperscript{36} As with most theoretical entities, once one has learned the theory (the language game), sensations can be directly known, in the sense that it is possible noninferentially to report their presence. For example, the sophisticated tie salesman, John, can noninferentially report that he is having a green sensation when he looks at the blue tie in artificial light. However, in this case John is not seeing or describing a green sensation. Rather, he is seeing qualitatively the same thing as when he sees a green object, withholding his endorsement of what he sees, and giving a theoretical interpretation of his experience in terms of the language game of sense impressions. Here “I have a green sense impression” means “I am in the state that is ordinarily caused by a green object under standard conditions, and this state is formally analogous to the visible surface of the green object.” However, having a green sense impression is not “like” seeing a green object or a green patch on the surface of an object. Sellars emphasizes that a green sense impression is not itself green, a sense impression of a triangle is not itself triangular.\textsuperscript{37} Having a green sensation is not like seeing a patch of green, because then sensing would be relational, intentional, cognitive and so would be in contradiction with psychological nominalism. For Sellars, patches of green are seen only by linguistically mature persons, and seeing the patch of green is the result of sensation plus language and concepts. This is why he insists that the model for a green sensation is not seeing the patch of green but the green surface itself. Thus the model for a sensation,

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{36} “Sense impressions are non-conceptual states of consciousness. . . . The phrase ‘object of consciousness’ is itself highly ambiguous but for the moment, at least, I shall use it as roughly equivalent to ‘noticed.’ Like bodily sensations, visual impressions were construed as not only states but as, at least on occasion, objects of consciousness. Whatever Descartes himself may have thought, there is nothing absurd in the idea that states of consciousness occur which are not apperceived, a fact which was appreciated by Leibniz. More startling, and to many absurd, is the idea that there are broad classes of states of consciousness none of the members of which are apperceived. Startling or absurd, the idea is at least not obviously self-contradictory. . . . In any case, I shall push it to the hilt”; Wilfrid Sellars, \textit{Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes} (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968), 9–10.
\textsuperscript{37} Sellars, \textit{Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind}, 112–14.
\end{quote}
supposedly something mental and conscious, turns out to be something physical.38 But what does this analogy tell us about the experiential dimension of sensation, about what it is like to have a sensation? It would be absurd to say that having a green sensation is like being a patch of green since there is no experiential dimension to being an inanimate physical object.

I would argue that interpreted strictly, Sellars’s theory of sensations methodologically excludes any answer to the question of what it is like to have a sensation. The theory does not allow a specification of the experiential properties but only of the formal-logical relations among the properties (that is, these formal-logical relations have to match the formal-logical relations obtaining among the corresponding models). Indeed, on Sellars’s view, this is an essential feature and merit of the functional definition of sensation, since the exclusion of any reference to experience leaves open the possibility of an eventual reduction of sensations to purely physical states. If it were essential to sensations to be experiences, rather than merely to preserve the same formal-logical relations as experience, then no physicalistic reduction of sensation would be possible.39

38 "Here it is essential to note that the analogy is between sense impressions and physical objects and not between sense impressions and perceptions of physical objects. Failure to appreciate this fact reinforces the temptation to construe impressions as cognitive and conceptual which arises from the assimilation of the ‘of-ness’ of sensation to the ‘of-ness’ of thought. It is also essential to note that the analogy is a trans-category analogy, for it is an analogy between a state and a physical thing”; Sellars, “Phenomenalism,” in Science, Perception and Reality, 93.

39 According to Sellars, the chief obstacle to a physicalistic reduction of the mental is that neurophysiological processes as currently understood do not display the same kind of logic as the manifest models of sensations. For example, colored patches are continua, whereas neurons are discrete, so it is not clear what brain state would correspond to the infinitesimally small colored patches of a visible colored surface. Sellars does not see the experiential dimension of sensations as a problem for a physicalistic reduction. On his account, the experiential dimension belongs only to the manifest image, and so is not “really real.” See Sellars, “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” 35. In contrast to Sellars’s physicalist version of scientific realism, in the Crisis and Ideas II, Husserl argues that the assertion of the reality of the world of science presupposes the assertion of the reality of the lifeworld, and that the absolutization of physical nature typical of naturalism and Cartesian-Galilean science is one of the most spiritually and morally perilous developments in the history of European thought. See Husserl, The Crisis of the European Sciences, §§9h, 36, 55; Gail Soffer, “Phenomenology and Scientific Realism."
If we accept the view that experience is essential to conscious states, then the same doubt about whether Sellarsian sensations count as states of consciousness applies equally to Sellarsian thoughts. These are also characterized functionally as states formally analogous to acts of speech.40 There is nothing in this theoretical concept of a thought that makes it necessary for thought to have an experiential dimension for the being who has the thought. But thought for Sellars includes perception, desire, and all other intentional states, and thought together with sensation exhaust the sphere of consciousness. This means that Sellars’s entire theory of consciousness systematically renders inessential what, according to thinkers such as Nagel, Searle, and Husserl, is its most important distinguishing feature.41

Husserl also proposes an analysis of sensations, and the differences between his account and that of Sellars are illuminating. First and foremost, this account respects the crucial notion that conscious experience has an experiential dimension. Thus Husserl emphasizes that sensations (Empfindungen) have a dual nature and can be conceptualized and studied in two different ways: either as stimulus-response reactions of the body to material events (for example, in physiology) or as the psychic “stuff” worked over by psychological mechanisms of reproduction, association, and so forth (for example, in psychology). Psychic sensations are the result of many processes of synthesis but are “stuff” in the relative sense that they are at a stage of constitution that falls short of perception of fullfledged physical objects. Psychic sensations are not usually noticed, but as states of consciousness they remain possible objects of notice. For example, we could say that when a painter uses many different, widely ranging colors to depict a solid colored object, he is noticing and painting the sensations which would be sensed under the relevant environmental conditions. Sellars’s claim that red sense impressions are not themselves red (or any other color) but only have properties formally analogous


41 The tendency to eliminate the experiential dimension from the mental is particularly clear in the Sellars–Chisholm correspondence: “My claim is that the categories of intentionality are nothing more nor less than the metalinguistic categories in terms of which we talk epistemically about overt speech as they appear in the framework of thoughts construed on the model of overt speech”; Sellars and Chisholm, “Intentionality and the Mental,” 522.
to the experiential qualities of things would apply at most to sensations in the physiological sense, which are physical states of the body.\textsuperscript{42}

Even greater difficulties face the Sellarsian theory of sensation taken as an account of prelinguistic consciousness. Minimally, this would entail that without verbal language there could not be coherent awareness or the attentive perception of individual objects. I have already pointed out that this is not the prevailing view in empirical research involving prelinguistic children and intelligent animals. In concluding this section, I will raise three further doubts about this position: (1) If we generally explain certain behavior of linguistic beings by appealing to their attentive perception of objects, why should we not explain the very same behavior in prelinguistic, physiologically similar beings in the same way? (2) How can verbal language confer attentive perceptions, inferential processes, and so forth, upon a being who does not already possess them? (3) How can we plausibly explain the way children in fact acquire language without attributing to them the attentive perception of objects and certain other rudimentary forms of rationality?

It is undeniable that the acquisition of language brings about crucial changes in behavior and experience. Sellars is quite right to argue against classical empiricism that language does not merely supervene upon a solipsistically completed logical space of meaning. Similarly to classical empiricism, Husserl fails to elucidate the role of verbal language at the lower levels of object constitution. It is also clearly correct to insist with Wittgenstein and Sellars, and contrary to classical empiricism, that in the case of many $\phi$’s, first we learn to speak about $\phi$, and only later acquire the concept of $\phi$. It is also true that the meaning of many words and phrases cannot be analyzed except in terms of their role in language games.\textsuperscript{43} However, the acquisition of conventional verbal speech does not bring about the universal transformation in behavior and experience one would expect with a first acquisition of attentive perception of objects. Thus, Sellars goes too far when he holds that there is no logical space of meaning prior to verbal language. Some prelinguistic behavior is of the same type as


\textsuperscript{43} Along the lines of Sellars’s view that “means” functions as in “Rot means red in German.” In this case, “x means y” means that x plays the same role in the language as y.
the nonverbal behavior of linguistic beings that we generally explain by appealing to object perception and various forms of cognition. For example, prelinguistic infants smile at the approach of their mothers (but not at strangers), startle and cry at loud noises, stare at objects, follow them with their gazes, point at them, reach for them, bring about and prepare for future events. When linguistically mature persons do the same, we say that they see the objects they are looking at, they recognize them, they have desires, they anticipate, infer, and so forth. If there really is a dramatic difference in the logical coherence of verbal and preverbal experience, should there not be a corresponding difference in behavior? Why should the very same behavior have an intentional explanation in the one case but not in the other? 44

Further, if there is no object perception behind seemingly intelligent prelinguistic behavior, then what is its explanation? If we attempt a stimulus-response explanation, we cannot appeal to the individual's perceiving the stimuli for, by hypothesis, the individual does not notice anything, not even his own sensory states. We cannot say, for example, that a newborn infant settles more quickly when picked up by his own mother because he sees his mother's face, feels her arms, recognizes that this is his mother (for example, the same face and touch he usually perceives when being held). When he cries before eating, we cannot say that he feels pangs of hunger. Similarly, when he fixes his eyes on a moving object and follows it with his gaze, we cannot say that he is focusing his eyes and turning his head because he sees the object and wants to continue seeing it.

One possibility would be to give a purely physical account of the causation of behavior, as in the case of reflexes. However, an obvious objection to the physicalist account of prelinguistic differential behavior is that some of the behavior of prelinguistic infants and animals, unlike reflexes, evolves very rapidly and takes on forms highly adapted to the environment, while the underlying physical structure of the brain and body is relatively fixed. Thus, it is unclear how a purely

44 In his correspondence with Chisholm, Sellars maintains that attributions of intentionality to animals are always qualified to such an extent that they are not really attributions of intentionality in the same sense as we attribute to humans. See Sellars and Chisholm, “Intentionality and the Mental,” 527. However, even if we concede that intentionality is affected by language, it is not the case that we never attribute the same intentionality to prelinguistic beings as to mature persons. For example, who feels tempted to say of an infant attentively focusing upon and clamoring for an object, “He sees it and wants to touch it, but he doesn't really see it and doesn't really want to touch it?”
physical mechanism could give rise to adaptive, learned behavior. Further, if a sufficiently adaptive neurophysiological mechanism could be found, then it could be used to explain the intelligent behavior of linguistic beings as well, so the differentiation between linguistic and nonlinguistic beings would again be lost.45

A second question concerns how the acquisition of verbal speech could confer perception and attentive awareness upon a being who did not already possess it, thereby transforming experientially inchoate sensory states into attentive perceptions of things. Indeed, at the stage where there is only sensation, we should not even speak about the acquisition of language but about the acquisition of the physical behavior corresponding to language. On Sellars’s model, we must assume that at the start the production of wordlike sounds is unaccompanied even by hearing in the usual sense since hearing involves noticing sounds, reidentifying them over time, recognizing that the phoneme heard today in a high pitched tone is the same phoneme as the one said in a low voice yesterday, and other cognitive functions which, according to Sellars, presuppose language. Thus the infant’s first word production is not even at the level of a parrot, which we usually think of as hearing sounds without understanding them (that is, in a way similar to the way adults hear speech in an unknown foreign language). Rather, Sellars’s infant seems closer to a tape recorder or a speech synthesizer, producing sounds with no or only inchoate auditory experience. Yet if language acquisition begins in this way, how can language get intentionality off the ground? How can even the most rule-governed sound production without coherent, attentive hearing move the infant across the abyss to sound production with coherent, attentive hearing? Following Dennett’s evolutionary

45 Dennett, for example, defends physicalism by arguing that the brain itself evolves, so that new behavioral response mechanisms can be as a result new or altered afferent-efferent connections, without appealing to consciousness or its causality. See Daniel Dennett, Content and Consciousness and Consciousness Explained (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1991). A related view is presented by Churchland. See Paul Churchland, A Neurocomputational Perspective (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992). However, Dennett and Churchland offer more of a research program than a convincing argument. Further, their approaches drop Sellars’s essential distinction between pre- and postlinguistic consciousness and his insistence that intentionality requires language.
model of the brain, we might argue that the acquisition of linguistic
physical behavior changes the neural wiring of the brain, and this in
turn gives rise to attentive awareness. However, this claim rests not
only on a research program but on a moribund research program
since no empirical research supports a distinction between attentively
aware brains and inattentively aware brains in correlation with the de-
velopment of the linguistic centers of the brain.

Similar problems arise for the explanation of language acquisition
itself. Language acquisition in humans is a complex process which
contemporary researchers have found impossible to explain without
appealing to many cognitive skills, such as attention direction, pattern
recognition, and predictive inference. In order to learn how to use a
word in socially instituted language games, one has to hear it spoken.
Phonemes have to be reidentified over a vast range of different
pitches, accents, voices, and environmental conditions. Children have
to learn not just to produce and recognize regularly patterned sounds
but also that specific sounds refer to specific objects and that specific
sounds can be used to bring about specific events in the world. The
ability to understand that verbal sounds refer to things in the world
presupposes the ability to understand the referentiality of nonverbal
gestures, such as points and attentive directing of the gaze.46 If lan-
guage is a game, learning to play a game itself requires inferential
skills, such as the ability to predict the next appropriate move, the
move that will bring about the desired result.47 Children require a pre-
linguistic ability to recognize a situation as a certain stage of the game
and to infer which move should be made next, in order to be able to
learn the game of language at all. There is no empirical evidence that
children could acquire language unless they already possessed these
forms of perception and rational skills.48

It seems to me that these considerations raise significant doubts
about Sellars's position that prior to language there are only raw

46 See Bruner, “The Growth of Reference,” in Child’s Talk: Learning to
47 For a discussion of the inferential skills required for game-playing, and
their relevance to language acquisition, see Bruner, “Play, Games, and Lan-
guage,” in Child’s Talk: Learning to Use Language.
48 Whether a computer could simulate or even “acquire” language skills
without intentionality is not relevant in this context. However a computer
might do it, the point is that this is not how children do it.
sensory states without attention, recognition, inference, or intentionality.\textsuperscript{49} However, if there is any prelinguistic intentionality at all, then language cannot be the essence of intentionality. The problem with Sellars’s interpretation of the linguistic approach to intentionality is not merely that it misconstrues the experience of infants and animals, or that it overlooks the prepredicative level of adult experience. Rather, the deeper problem is that it tends to obscure the fundamental experiential dimension of intentionality. In the concluding section, I will trace the roots of this flight from experience to a flawed understanding of intersubjectivity typical of postpositivistic analytic philosophy.

IV

If positivistic analytic philosophy was dominated by Cartesian anxiety, the anxiety for absolute certainty about the world, a certain portion of contemporary analytic philosophy of mind remains under the sway of another anxiety. For we must wonder, what really is behind the ubiquitous flight from consciousness, from subjectivity, from the experiential sphere? Why is subjectivity reduced if not to neurophysiology or behavior, then to language, but in any case to something third person at any cost?

Here we can distinguish a wide range of overlapping motives coming from different directions and influencing different strands of thought. Within empirical psychology, the turn to behaviorism arose as a reaction to the controversies over introspective descriptions of experience.\textsuperscript{50} In this case the flight from subjectivity is a flight to the relative objectivity and publicity of the third person domain. Searle, on the other hand, explains the popularity of physicalism in the contemporary philosophy of mind in terms of the fear of Cartesian dualism and its well-known paradoxes, especially as outlined by Ryle.\textsuperscript{51} In thinkers such as Heidegger and Gadamer, the turn away from consciousness to language represents a practical-historical critique of  


\textsuperscript{51} Searle, The Rediscovery of the Mind, 2 and following.
Cartesianism, emphasizing that thought is neither purely theoretical reflection nor a solipsistic first beginning but a historically and socially conditioned engagement with the world. A similar stress on the social, practical, and historical nature of the mind emerges from the Marxist tradition, resulting in a linguistic turn in figures such as Habermas and Vygotsky. Clearly, all these various motives come together in the thought of Sellars.

However, I would suggest that the idea of the nonobjectivity and even unfathomability of the subjective receives an additional existential impetus from a certain type of encounter with the other. This encounter has been described well by Sartre, with his usual exaggerations and theatricality, in his discussion of the Look in *Being and Nothingness.* According to Sartre, in the encounter with the other as Look, the other’s subjectivity as subjectivity, the other’s experience as experience, appears completely inaccessible. The other appears to be a drainhole in my world sucking up everything, especially my own objective being. For Sartre, the other as Look is the source of a particular kind of anxiety which we might call “alterity anxiety.” It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that a certain measure of alterity anxiety reinforces some of the contemporary flight from the subjective dimension of consciousness, in its various manifestations.

According to Sartre’s analysis, the experience of the other as Look gives rise to a number of typical strategies to get the genie of the other’s subjectivity back into the bottle, to stop the hemorrhaging of the world. The most straightforward such strategy is the objectification of the other. The widespread view in the philosophy of mind that intentionality is primarily a theory for the explanation of behavior fits well under the Sartrean rubric of objectification of the other. The idea that the other’s mental life is a theoretical hypothesis ensures that the subjectivity of the other is externalized, knowable, and dependent upon the subjectivity of the self for its reality (if real at all). However, as already seen by Sartre, such strategies generate their own dialectic, and this one is no exception. For applied to the self, it results in the paradoxical conclusion that one’s own intentionality is a theoretical hypothesis, thus essentially transforming, not to say eliminating, the experiential dimension.

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The conception of intentionality as a theory for the explanation of behavior plays an important role within the philosophy of mind in general, and in the thought of Sellars in particular. This conception reaches its most extreme form with Dennett's notion of the intentional stance, according to which a system (including a computer system) is intentional if and only if its behavior can be successfully explained and predicted by attributing it thoughts, desires, beliefs, and so forth. Sellars's version of this position differs from Dennett's in certain important respects. In particular, Sellars distinguishes between intentionality itself or the having of mental states, on the one hand, and the conceptual framework of intentionality or the attributing of mental states, on the other. For Sellars, it is only the conceptual framework of intentionality (folk psychology) that is a theory for the explanation of behavior (especially verbal behavior).

Nonetheless, I believe the Sellarsian conception is seriously flawed and fails to do justice to significant insights regarding intersubjectivity found in the phenomenological tradition. This distorted approach to intersubjectivity in turn supports the flight from experience typical of the linguistic/functionalist conception of consciousness. In particular, Sellars claims to solve the problem of other minds by building the fact that behavior is evidence for mental states ("inner episodes") into the very logic of the concept of a mental state. To the contrary, I will argue that a correct approach to intersubjectivity shows that the problem of other minds cannot be solved, and a relation to behavior does not and should not be made to belong to the concept of a mental state.

In order to support my position in detail, it will be useful briefly to review the Jones myth from *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, which contains Sellars's account of intersubjectivity and "solution" of the problem of other minds. In this myth, Sellars opposes the traditional empiricist genetic account, according to which we first form the concept of an inner episode by reflecting upon our own "immediately given" inner episodes. On the classical account, we have reflective access to our thoughts independently of initiation into the socio-linguistic sphere, whose role is reduced to fixing the conventional sounds and marks to be attached to our solipsistically constituted thoughts. Part and parcel of this view is the classical theory of meaning, "S means that p" means "S expresses the thought that p." Since knowledge of inner episodes is conceived as essentially solipsistic, this view gives rise in turn to the problem of other minds. We know our own inner episodes by solipsistic introspection. How are
we to know the inner episodes of others, or that others have inner episodes at all?

All of this, argues Sellars, belongs squarely within the Myth of the Given. Sellars opposes this view by constructing his own mythical account of the origin of the language and conceptual framework of mental states ("inner episodes"). According to Sellars's account: (1) semantic language occurs prior to the concept of an inner episode, so there is a concept of meaning which does not involve reference to thoughts; (2) the concept of an inner episode derives from and presupposes language and the social sphere; and therefore (3) there is a essential link between inner episodes and public behavior, so the problem of other minds does not arise.

The Jones myth is well known, so a few brief remarks will suffice. Sellars imagines a population possessing a Rylean, behavioristic language with terms referring to physical objects and events, including behavior and overt speech acts but no mental terms. At the second stage, Jones introduces the concept of a thought as a theoretical hypothesis for the explanation of behavior. He conceives of thoughts as formally analogous to acts of silent speech, and he theorizes that they cause intelligent behavior and sometimes result in acts of overt speech.53 Jones then teaches the other Ryleans how to use this explanatory strategy, so that at the third stage each person regularly draws inferences from the behavior of others to their thoughts and similarly draws inferences about his own thoughts by observing his own behavior. At the fourth stage, the Joneseans can noninferentially report their own thoughts, perceptions, and other intentional states without observing their own behavior. At the fifth stage they arrive at the notion of sense impressions as part of a causal theory of perception, in the manner described in the previous section.54

Now no one, including Sellars, would be tempted to see the Jones myth as a plausible historical or individual developmental account. He is not claiming that first we have semantic language without mental language and only later develop the language of mental states. He is also not claiming that intentionality itself is or presupposes a

53 "Clearly the episodes in which we are interested are not shifting behavioral properties; they are connected with such shifts, but the connection is synthetic, as in the connection of molecular motion with the shifting propulsive propensities of a volume of gas"; Sellars, Science and Metaphysics, 73 n. 29.

54 Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, 91–3.
theoretical explanation of behavior, since in the myth the Ryleans have thoughts without knowing that they have thoughts even before they develop the theoretical framework of thoughts.\textsuperscript{55} However, he does claim that:

(1) it is at least possible that people could live together and develop a semantic language without attributing intentionality to others or to themselves,\textsuperscript{56} and

(2) the inferential, theoretical attribution of intentionality (that is, to explain the behavior of others) precedes the noninferential attribution of intentionality (that is, to oneself).\textsuperscript{57}

We should be clear about the importance of each of these two points within Sellars's position as a whole. The first point supports his claim that the concept of meaning does not require reference to mental states but can be elucidated as a metalinguistic concept.\textsuperscript{58} The second point insures that even where intentional states can be reported or "introspected," they retain an essential relation to outward behavior and so are public. As Sellars puts it, the fact that behavior is evidence for inner episodes is built into the very logic of the concept of an inner episode.\textsuperscript{59}

However, I will argue that both (1) and (2) are false and based on an inadequate analysis of intersubjectivity. Moreover, it is not possible first to encounter the other as intentional via inference or theoretical hypothesis; and Sellars does not show that it possible for a population to develop a Rylean language or even to live together in society without already attributing intentionality to others.

\textsuperscript{55} "They think, but they don't know that they think. Their use of language is meaningful because it is the expression of thoughts, but they don't know that it is the expression of thoughts; that is to say, they don't know that overt speech is the culmination of inner episodes of a kind which we conceive of as thoughts"; Sellars and Chisholm, "Intentionality and the Mental," 526.

\textsuperscript{56} "I have argued that it is in principle possible to conceive of the characteristic forms of semantical discourse being used by a people who have not yet arrived at the idea that there are such things as thoughts"; Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} There seems to be some wavering on Sellars's part between holding that inferential attribution of intentionality does precede its noninferential attribution, at least as a logical precondition, and holding that it could precede it in time. My argument is not affected by this ambiguity.

\textsuperscript{58} "The argument presumes that the metalinguistic vocabulary in which we talk about linguistic episodes can be analysed in terms which do not presuppose the framework of mental acts"; Sellars and Chisholm, "Intentionality and the Mental," 522.

\textsuperscript{59} Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, 107.
Many philosophers in the phenomenological tradition, including Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Scheler, have argued convincingly that the other is perceived as an other, and have attacked the view that access to the intentional life of the other is or could be primarily inferential. According to Scheler and Merleau-Ponty, inferences from behavior to mental states only occur in limit cases of puzzling or unusual behavior, where the intentional life of the other must be reconstructed through scientific-rational procedures. More significantly, following Lipps, these thinkers have shown that analogical inference can never ground the belief in the existence of another, which is to say the belief that the other is a being with mental states with an experiential dimension. Rather, analogical inferences can occur only where the existence of the mental life of another person is already presumed, and we make a conjecture about what he or she is thinking, feeling, or perceiving in a particular instance.\(^{60}\) I will return to this argument in more detail in what follows.

Although Sellars presents an inferential account of intersubjectivity, he claims to reject the analogical inference model as incoherent. Reasoning from one's own case, he holds, is not the basis for the attribution of mental states to others. On his view, mental states are theoretical entities conceived on the model of overt speech and then used to explain and predict behavior. Yet without some sort of analogy, how can the Ryleans ever come to attribute experiences to others? How can the Ryleans ever move from their initial experience of others as automatons to experiencing others as others, as beings that it is something to be “like”? For it should be emphasized, when the notion of a thought is first introduced in the myth, it must lack any reference to experience, to the Nagelian what it is “like” to think. According to Sellars, prior to possessing the concept of \(\phi\) one cannot notice \(\phi\) or attend to \(\phi\). In the Jones myth, at first the Ryleans only have concepts of physical objects and events, so they can neither attend to the experiential dimension of speech nor refer to it when they first form a theoretical concept of a thought. At first, “thought” means only “a state formally analogous to an act of overt speech, which causes typical patterns of behavior” but emphatically not “an experiential state.” Even the term “overt speech” must at first be conceived in a rather unusual

behavioristic sense, as a certain rule-governed production of sounds. "Speech" in the strictly behavioristic sense cannot be distinguished from the buzzing of a saw by the accompanying mental processes of the agent producing the speech but only by the way it fits into the context of the agent's other behavior, since by hypothesis there is not yet any notion that agents have mental processes.

What happens to the concept of thoughts in the further development of the myth? One possibility is that "thought" never comes to refer to the experiential dimension. If we accept the view that experience is an essential element of the consciousness, then the Joneseans never emerge from the conceptual framework of behaviorism, and the problem of other minds is not solved (at least not as traditionally understood, that is, as the problem of justifying the attribution of experiences to others). Another possibility is that "thought" comes to refer to one's own experience at stage four, when each Jonesean surprisingly discovers his own typical experiences accompanying the functionally defined theoretical states. But how can a Jonesean come to attribute similar experiences to others reporting functionally defined theoretical states? We need to keep in mind that on Sellars's account, at the first stage, Jones experiences others as automatons lacking mental states. Let us suppose that at the second stage Jones attributes the thought "I see the moon" to the automaton Bill as a theoretical hypothesis when Bill looks at the moon without speaking. At the third stage, Jones attributes a similar thought to himself when he looks at the moon. At the fourth stage, Jones notices that this attribution is accompanied by his own experience of perceiving the moon. How would Jones come to attribute a similar experience to the automaton Bill (and so no longer perceive him to be an automaton)?

The problem of other minds is therefore not in the least bit solved because we only just reach its usual starting point at stage four. At this stage, there is awareness of one's own experiences but no attribution of experiences to others. The traditional solution would be to proceed from stage four to the experiences of others by way of analogical inference. This solution is emphatically rejected by Sellars, for whom reasoning from one's own case would presuppose solipsistic cognition of one's own inner life and so would fall into the Myth of the Given. Thus, if we accept that experience belongs to the definition of consciousness, then Sellars does not solve the problem of other minds. What he solves is the problem of other linguistic-functionalist systems.
Is not alterity anxiety at the root of this substitution of a linguistic-functional system for the other, and of functionalist states for experience? Would this not explain the peculiarly urgent need to solve the problem of other minds at any cost? On my view, the truth to be gleaned from Sartre’s analysis of the Look and from Husserl’s Fifth Cartesian Meditation is that the problem of other minds cannot be solved. It is impossible to demonstrate with certainty either the existence or the content of other minds. As noted above, Lipps and Husserl point out fatal logical flaws the analogical inference solution (which they reject for reasons quite different from those of Sellars). They point out that this sort of inference is supposed to have the form of an induction: A (outward behavior) has always been accompanied by B (an inner state) in the past; therefore when A occurs anew I can infer the existence of B. Following Husserl, we can see the absurdity of this induction in the case of another mind by using the example of smoke and fire. Suppose every time I have seen smoke in the past, I look around and find a fire. I therefore form the induction, where there’s smoke, there’s fire. Now suppose one day I see smoke but there is no fire to be found. The only inductively valid conclusion to draw is that sometimes smoke is accompanied by fire and sometimes not. There is no inductive justification for concluding that there exists some funny kind of virtual fire which I cannot perceive. Similarly, suppose I form various inductive links between my outwardly observed behavior and my inward experience. For example, whenever I hear a coughing sound, it is accompanied by a scratching sensation in my throat. Now suppose one day I hear a similar coughing sound and it is not accompanied by any scratching sensation in my throat. The only inductively valid conclusion is that sometimes coughing sounds are accompanied by scratching sensations and sometimes not. There is no inductive justification for concluding that there must be some funny kind of virtual scratching sensations. If we really perceived the behavior and speech of other persons as purely physical events, then these would provide no proof that these automatons also have experiences.

According to phenomenological approaches to intersubjectivity, the attribution of intentionality to others is based on psychological mechanisms far more primitive than theoretical inference. For example, Husserl’s theory of intersubjectivity relies upon analogical pairing and empathetic apperception, which are forms of association and projection. According to the Fifth Cartesian Meditation, the perception of a thing similar to my living body awakens in me the perceptions, kinestheses, sensible fields, and so forth which I associate with
that location, orientation, and comportment in space. My body and the other object are linked by association, and I project upon the other the intentional life I associatively anticipate I would have if I were over there, in the location of the other body. Thus the noematic sense, “other living body” arises from an associative transfer of my own past or anticipated experience to a physically similar body, in the specific mode of appresentation.\textsuperscript{61}

Scheler traces the first encounter with the other to even more primitive psychological mechanisms, such as introjection, identification, and emotional infection. Far from experiencing the world as inanimate, young children tend to identify with and imaginatively project their feelings and thoughts even onto physical things. Infants do not experience the other simply as a behavioral other, as though it were a mental being only in the Rylean sense of displaying certain characteristic types of behavior and dispositions to behavior, without any “inner” life. To the contrary, infants extend (or project, to use the usual term) their own perceptual and emotive experiences to the other. Thus the first appresentation of the mental life of the other is that the other is experiencing just what the self is experiencing.\textsuperscript{62}

If we grant the existence of the psychological mechanisms of projection and empathetic appresentation, then it follows that the attribution of mental states to others requires no more conceptual or linguistic sophistication than does having the mental states oneself. In particular, in contrast to the Jones Myth, it is necessary to have neither a general concept of a mental state nor a theory of the causes of behavior in order to perceive others as having experiences. Sellars suggests that the main reason we do not begin life as methodological behaviorists is that we are taught to be Strawsonians right away, at our mothers’ knees.\textsuperscript{63} This overlooks the primitive psychological functions of infection, identification, and projection, and it supports the erroneous view that the attribution of intentionality to others is a theory, even if an old and well entrenched one, but one that could, one day, be replaced by a better account. For it to be possible to first come to attribute intentionality to others in the Jonesean way, as a theoretical explanation of behavior, it would not be enough to transform our mothers into Ryleans. We would also have to hypothesize

\textsuperscript{61}See the Fifth Cartesian Meditation in \textit{Cartesianische Meditationen}.

\textsuperscript{62}For a more detailed discussion of this claim, see Gail Soffer, “The Other as \textit{Alter Ego}: a Genetic Approach,” \textit{Husserl Studies} 15 (1999): 151–66.

\textsuperscript{63}Wilfrid Sellars, \textit{Science and Metaphysics}, 72.
beings lacking the fundamental psychological mechanisms of projection, identification, and infection. Sellars does not even begin to explore the implications of removing these basic forms of intersubjectivity. Would such beings live in society capable of passing on language from one generation to the next? Would they be sufficiently motivated to develop language at all? How would intersubjective relations and the social structure be maintained? How would they ever come to attribute intentionality in the sense of experience to others at all? Sellars’s claim that there could be a population with thoughts and a semantic language, but no mental terms or notion of the mental states of others, is based on highly artificial and implausible presuppositions.64

We can hypothesize that Sellars, similarly to certain other philosophers of mind, is motivated to posit these implausibilities by the desire to guarantee the public dimension of the mental, the desire to build the fact that behavior is evidence for inner episodes into the very logic of the concept of an inner episode. However, although he rejects Rylean behaviorism, his own account still ties intentionality too closely to outward behavior and reflects an unwillingness to accept a certain privacy of the mental life of others. This privacy is described in an extreme way in Sartre’s account of the Look, in which the mental life of the other is completely unreachable in its pure subjective form. It is described in a more moderate way in Husserl’s Fifth Cartesian Meditation, according to which we can only appresent the mental lives of others, which entails that our knowledge of the experiences of others is always fallible and even more fallible than our knowledge of physical things.65

Even on this kind of approach to intersubjectivity, there remains an important relation between behavior and the mental: the behavior

64 Even Chisholm overlooks this implausibility and grants that such a population is possible. See Sellars and Chisholm, “Intentionality and the Mental,” 529.

65 I would therefore argue that it is completely mistaken to read the Fifth Cartesian Meditation as a solution to the problem of other minds, in the form of a proof of the existence of the other. Rather, the Fifth Meditation starts from the fact of our experience (which appears to be) of others and analyzes how this experience comes about and what makes it possible. This latter analysis reveals that the experience of others is constructed in a highly uncertain and even “irrational” or at least “pre-rational” way. There is no proof in the Cartesian Meditations that others in fact exist, and there is an implicit argument that the experience we have of others does not and cannot prove their existence.
of the other is what provides the motivating stimulus for the associative projections, appresentations, and infections produced by the self. Yet while there is a necessary or "logical" (motivational) connection between the behavior of the other and the self's perception of the mental life of the other, there is no necessary, logical connection between the behavior of the other and the other's mental life itself. The other's mental life retains its independent, nonrelative nature. There is no guarantee of any particular correlation between thought and outward behavior or of the correctness of the self's appresentations of the other. Empirical research can increase the motivational base for the representation of the other, but no amount of theoretical refinement can alter this fundamental situation or build a relation to behavior into the very concept of thought. The Sartrean drainhole cannot be closed.

These reservations about Sellars's theory of intersubjectivity should not lead us to overlook its merits. Sellars is quite right to oppose the classical view, according to which the concept of an inner episode emerges from solipsistic reflection upon one's own inner episodes, and to insist upon the critical role of language, intersubjectivity, and social reinforcement in establishing reflective access to one's own mental life. His account of the genesis of the language of inner episodes correctly emphasizes that one has inner episodes and attributes them to others before one knows that one has them oneself. He is close to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty when he holds that there is an essential relation between intentional states and outward behavior and that mental life has a public dimension. However, Sellars's account is far less satisfactory when he suggests that because there is no reflective grasp of one's own intentional life prior to intersubjective discourse, one's own case does not play any role at all in the first attribution of intentionality to the other. He thereby obscures the prepredicative, prereflective functions of identification, infection, and projection, and conceives of access to the other primarily along the lines of scientific reflection, as theoretical inference. Finally, Sellars does not seem to notice that one can reject the absolute priority of the private to the public and avoid its aporiae without falling into the equally absurd assertion of the priority of the public to the private. Much as postpositivistic philosophers have come to accept uncer-

66 This point is emphasized also by Nagel. See Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?" in Mortal Questions.
tainty as inextricable from knowledge, so should they acknowledge a certain privacy as intrinsic to the nature of the other and call a halt to the flight from experience.

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