

# The Missing Argument in Sellars's Case against Classical Sense Datum Theory in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind"

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Our objectives in this paper are, first, to identify several puzzling aspects of the "Trilemma Argument" of Section 6 against the Sense Datum Theory; second, to resolve these puzzles by reconstructing the Trilemma Argument; third to point to a distinction Sellars makes between two versions of the Sense Datum Theory, the "nominalist" version and the "realist" version; fourth, to reconstruct Sellars's arguments against both; and, finally, to find in an earlier paper, "Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?" that his argument against the second version, assumed but not actually given in EPM, is against property realism and depends on taking language expressing propositional perception as fundamental and language expressing non-propositional perception as incomplete and derivative from the former.

*Keywords:* Wilfrid Sellars, epistemology, sense data, foundationalism, the given, positivism, empiricism and the philosophy of mind, perception, empiricism, properties, realism, nominalism

## 1. Introduction

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

- (a) It is *particulars* which are sensed. Sensing is not knowing. The existence of sense data does not logically imply the existence of knowledge, or;
- (b) Sensing *is* a form of knowing. It is *facts* rather than *particulars* which are sensed.<sup>1</sup> (1963, 127-96)

Thus begins Sellars's famous attack on classical sense datum theory ("the Given") in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" ("EPM" hereafter). Our objectives in this paper are, first, to identify several puzzling aspects of the core argument (the "Trilemma Argument" as I will call it) of Section 6 against this theory; second to resolve these puzzles in the form of a reconstruction of the Trilemma Argument; third to point to a distinction Sellars makes between two versions of the Sense Datum Theory, the "nominalist" version and the "realist" version; fourth, to reconstruct Sellars's arguments against both; fifth, and finally, to find in an earlier paper, "Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?" the basis for his case against the second version, assumed but not actually given in EPM. Because Sellars's work has been less widely read in the original than is perhaps the case with the work of other authors of equal importance, and because his ideas are strikingly original and complex, we have quoted at

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more length and more extensively from original texts than we would otherwise be inclined to do.

*EPM* serves as a watershed in the generally downward fortunes of foundationalism in the latter half of the 20th century. However, starting with the growth of interest in externalist epistemology in the 1980's, there has been a resurgence of interest in foundationalism.<sup>2</sup> In the last few years, there have even been attempts to revive classical foundationalism.<sup>3</sup> Sellars's own epistemology is, of course, thoroughly internalist in the sense that if anything is to serve as epistemic grounds for anything else both have to be justified beliefs. Some defenders of foundationalism<sup>4</sup> have maintained that Sellars's argument against foundationalism rests on this premise. There is some plausibility to this claim but we shall not further investigate it here.

In the dilemma introduced by the passage quoted at the outset (the "Sense Datum Dilemma" as we shall call it), Sellars has offered proponents of foundationalism a choice between taking what is sensed as being a particular or as being a fact. If the former, then there is not a logical, hence not an epistemic, relation between sensing and believing that *p*. So that choice must be rejected. If the foundationalist chooses the only other option—sensing is of propositional objects—then sensing is knowing and cannot fall into the category of what is *given* because of an assumption of Sellars's that knowing is in the category of judging, and judging is an activity that depends on other activities and skills that no one, especially no empiricist, maintains is simply given in experience. But what of understanding knowing—that on the model of acquaintance, as a form of immediate awareness of a fact? Sellars emphatically denied that this is possible in many places but it will take a bit of detective work to see, among the as-I-will-shows and the as-I-have-showns, where he actually shows it. We maintain that the key argument is against property realism and originates in his discussion of a position he calls "Concept Empiricism" in his earlier article "Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?" The argument, not completed nor given in so many words in *EPM*, ultimately depends on taking language expressing propositional perception as fundamental and language expressing non-propositional perception as somehow incomplete and derivative from the former. This is the ultimate basis on which Sellars rejects the doctrine of immediate knowledge and with it the doctrine of the given.

## 2. The Trilemma Argument

Sellars spends relatively little time on disposing of the possibility that sensory foundations might involve a sensing of particulars. (His argument there centers on the complaint that this possibility severs the logical connection between sensing and knowing.<sup>5</sup>) He then moves in section 6 to his most explicit formulation of the case against seeing sensory foundations as a form of knowing. It is this argument which we call "The Trilemma Argument."

But if a sense-datum philosopher takes the ability to sense sense contents to be unacquired, he is clearly precluded from offering an analysis of *x senses a sense content* which presupposes acquired abilities. It follows that he could analyze *x senses red sense content s* as *x non-inferentially knows that s is red* only if he is prepared to admit that the ability to have such non-inferential knowledge as that, for example, a red sense content is red, is itself unacquired. And this brings us face to face with the fact that most empirically minded philosophers are strongly inclined to think that all classificatory consciousness, all knowledge that *something is thus and so*, or in logical jargon, all subsumption of particulars under universals, involves learning, concept formation, even the use of symbols. It is clear from the above analysis, therefore, that *classical* sense-datum theories... are confronted by an inconsistent triad made up of the following three propositions:

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

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

will he choose to abandon? (*EPM*, 132; my emphasis)

In the emphasized sentence, Sellars identifies “classificatory consciousness” with knowledge, then identifies classificatory consciousness with the subsumption of particulars under universals, only then arguing for his conclusion that the subsumption of particulars under universals is not given but is actively accomplished, drawing upon learning, concept formation, even symbols. The casualness of these identifications is astounding, justified only by reference to some unspecified “empirically minded philosophers” who are said to think these things. Sellars takes this casual approach presumably because he thinks that his readers will agree to this—will see that empiricists typically at least will endorse these assertions. One of the difficulties that we will encounter in our discussion of Sellars’s text is that the only developed version of empiricism that countenances a propositionally structured given, the version of Logical Positivism discussed in sections 33 and 34, is not a version of classical sense datum theory and its characterization is inconsistent with both horns of the Sense Datum Dilemma.<sup>6</sup> This is a difficulty which has not been sufficiently brought out by commentators,<sup>7</sup> and is significant for an accurate reconstruction of how Sellars’s reasoning eventually will go in subsequent sections. The only other version of Empiricism discussed in *EPM* is the Early Modern variety, British Empiricism. But here too the allusion to Empiricism causes confusion, centering on Sellars’s use of the term “classificatory consciousness” and the connection he makes between it and knowledge.

In the Cartesian tradition, consciousness and judgment are acts that fall on opposite sides of the division between passions (acts of perception) and actions (acts of the will).<sup>8</sup> The British Empiricists follow Descartes in this.<sup>9</sup> How then are we to take the notion of classificatory consciousness in light of this tradition? If we take it as a passive, non-judgmental act of perceptual consciousness, the connection with classification is then lost for empiricists in this tradition like Locke, since classifying for Locke is an activity, a rather busy one judging from the following description: “Such precise, naked appearances in the mind, without considering how, whence, or with what others they came to be there, the understanding lays up (with names commonly annexed to them) as the standards to rank real existences into sorts, as they agree with those patterns, and to denominate them accordingly” (xi, 9: 206-7).<sup>10</sup> But if we take it as an act of judgment, thus making an empiricist connection with classification, Sellars’s identification of classificatory consciousness with knowledge that something is thus and so (subject-predicate knowing) amounts to an equation of *judging* that something is thus and so with knowing that something is thus and so. Even if we were to allow that subject-predicate knowing entails subject-predicate judging, the converse does not hold (one can judge that something is thus and so without *knowing* that something is thus and so), so the equivalence asserted by Sellars fails. This is not a minor point, since the doctrine of the given is a doctrine about knowledge, either directly so—what is given is a kind of knowing itself—or indirectly, what is given provides the kind of justification needed to turn judgments into knowledge. The first of these is the form that seems to be at issue in section 6, the second in sections 32-34.

This difficulty can be resolved by a reformulation of the Trilemma Argument, explicitly making the connection between knowing and judging, as follows.

*Reformulated Trilemma Argument*

- (1) *X senses red sense content s* entails *x non-inferentially knows that s is red* (as A in original).
- (2) *X non-inferentially knows that s is red* entails *x non-inferentially judges that x is red*.
- (3) The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
- (4) The ability to make judgments of the form “x is F” is acquired.

We now need to consider Sellars's claim that no satisfactory way to break the trilemma (inconsistent quartet in the reformulation) exists for classical sense-datum theorists. Before turning to that task however, there is one further difficulty with the Trilemma Argument that we briefly want to mention. Even if we accept the restriction of foundational knowledge to cognitive knowledge, Sellars considers only cognitive knowledge of subject-predicate propositions. Yet not all forms of foundationalism make this assumption. Cartesian foundationalism, for example, in some of its formulations takes existentially general judgments of the form, "There is something having certain properties" as foundational judgments.<sup>11</sup> Judgments of this kind are not subject-predicate, and are not in any obvious way classificatory, so they escape Sellars's Trilemma Argument altogether.

It is difficult to assess Sellars's contention that no way consistent with "classical sense datum" theory is available to break the inconsistent quartet since Sellars is here concerned with only a certain version of classical sense datum theory. Indeed, we are about to see that Sellars himself will later countenance a version of classical sense datum theory that does break the inconsistent quartet. With the version at issue here, however, we seem to be able to say the following: (1) is definitive of the second horn of the Sense Datum Dilemma which we are currently investigating, so it has to stay. We shall stipulate that (2) is true by definition of the type of empiricism at issue here, as is (3): they both stay too. What of denying (4)—(C) in the original? Sellars says, "But to abandon C is to do violence to the predominantly nominalistic proclivities of the empiricist tradition" (*EPM*, 132). Call the variety of classical sense data theory ("the empiricist tradition") understood here by Sellars's the "nominalist variety." Brandom takes the reference to nominalism here to be a reference to the doctrine of concept empiricism present in the British Empiricists.<sup>12</sup> The doctrinal contrast apparently intended by Sellars here between classical sense-datum theory of the nominalist variety and its alternative is, then, that between the doctrine of concept empiricism and some form of innatism.

This seems to us to be a reasonable interpretation and, if it is accepted, we will construe Sellars's argument for keeping (4) in the reformulated Trilemma Argument to be made through the notion of "classificatory consciousness" and articulated as follows: All (subject-predicate) judging is classifying, classifying is the comparison of a particular idea with a general idea and general ideas are acquired (by abstraction). So, on the stipulation that the version of classical sense datum theory is nominalist, (4) gets to stay as well. This keeps the set of statements (1)-(4) inconsistent, thus showing classical sense datum theory of the nominalist variety to be inconsistent, as Sellars intends.<sup>13</sup>

However, there is another version of classical sense datum theory that Sellars later introduces in passing. He does this in section 29, in his discussion of the doctrine he calls "Psychological Nominalism," the culmination of his discussion of empiricism in its Early Modern form:

Even more obviously, if the formation of the association [of words with classes of resembling particulars, a theory he derives from Hume] involves not only the occurrence of red particulars, but the awareness *that they are red*, then the conceptualist form of the myth has merely been replaced by a realistic version, as in the classical sense-datum theory. (*EPM*, 160; our emphasis; our interpolation)

The "realistic version" of the classical sense datum theory contrasts with the "conceptualist form of the myth"—what I have called classical sense datum theory of the nominalist variety—disposed of in the Trilemma Argument of Section 6. The realist version amounts to a classical doctrine of immediate knowledge. Without calling it "knowledge," non-conceptual awareness of facts is also what the proponents of Positivism (discussed

by Sellars in section 34) treat as a foundation.

What objection does Sellars see to the classical-*realist* doctrine of immediate knowledge? The only indication that he gives in section 29 is that with such a view we have “the givenness of facts,” and therefore are “back with an unacquired ability to be aware of repeatables...” (*EPM*, 160). “Repeatables” is Sellars’s term for properties, applying to specific properties—this shade of red—as well as general properties, introduced in connection with his discussion of the British Empiricists in sections 26-29.

There are three difficulties internal to Sellars’s account that we wish to identify and address. The first is that it does not include an explanation why a doctrine of immediate knowledge should depend on a doctrine of the givenness of properties. The second is that it is not clear why we are “back with an unacquired ability to be aware of repeatables:” We were never there to begin with. Sellars does not specifically say here where the doctrine of the givenness of properties has been refuted but the implication is that it is in section 6: We are “back with an unacquired ability to be aware of repeatables...” The third difficulty, consequent on the second, is that we are without any indication of how Sellars would propose to argue that an unacquired ability to be aware of repeatables is disallowed: Section 6 is the place where Sellars refutes the other version of the sense datum theory, the nominalist version, by showing that the position, as he stipulates it, is internally inconsistent. He makes no such argument for the realist version, nor is it obvious what argument could be made.

In the next section, I propose a reconstruction of an argument that Sellars could make against the realist version of the sense datum theory and that I think he would make if he were pressed to make it. The argument draws on some other doctrines of Sellars’s that are related to the doctrine of Psychological Nominalism, though not specifically asserted as such in section 29. As we have seen, Sellars’s text provides few data points for a reconstruction, so much of the reconstruction will be speculative, though speculative in a way that conforms to the spirit of Sellarsian doctrine in *EPM*. I then, in section 3.3, consider writings other than *EPM* to show that Sellars there gives arguments that are closely analogous to the reconstruction offered in sections 3.1 and 3.2. I take this to provide some independent confirmation of the adequacy of the reconstruction in these sections.

### **3. A Reconstruction of Sellars’s Case against the Realist Version of Classical Sense Datum Theory**

The reconstruction needs to address the first and the third difficulty identified with the exposition in section 29. It needs to show, first, why the doctrine of immediate knowledge depends on a doctrine of the givenness of repeatables, and, second, what is wrong with this doctrine. What follows in section 3.1 is an argument presented from Sellars’s point of view, in italicized font, beginning with a characterization of the concept of immediate knowledge, showing why it depends on a doctrine of the givenness of repeatables. Section 3.2 addresses the second point: what is wrong with a doctrine that countenances the givenness of repeatables. Commentaries on the reconstruction are offered in indented paragraphs following the reconstructions.

#### *3.1. The Dependence of Immediate Knowledge on the Awareness of Repeatables*

Sellars’s argument as I reconstruct it.

*Immediate knowledge in the classical sense is acquaintance with facts, e.g., the fact that that apple is green, the fact that that sense content is red, rather than acquaintance with particular things. On behalf of the realist sense datum theorist, we shall take facts to be complex entities consisting of an object (or objects),*

*properties (or relations), and the instantiation of the former by the latter. Facts, thus understood, are taken to depend on properties realistically construed so we shall call these facts r-facts to distinguish them from facts otherwise construed. We shall take properties to be "repeatables" in my language, ("universals"<sup>14</sup>) and repeatables are multiply-instantiatable entities. We shall take specific-property nominalism to be the doctrine that there are no repeatables. For those who think that facts are true propositions rather than complexes of this kind, the latter of which are states of affairs, they may substitute "actual states of affairs" for "facts" in what follows.*

*Since facts, as we have been construing them, contain properties as elements, the dependence of r-facts on properties is clear. Since properties are constituents of facts, the awareness of facts may reasonably be supposed to depend on the awareness of properties. This gives us the first element of the argument: The awareness of facts depends on the awareness of properties. The doctrine that there is awareness of properties is the doctrine of the givenness of repeatables—the Myth of the Given in the form of Classical Realist Sense Datum Theory.*

My commentary:

Our investigation of Sellars's argument against immediate knowledge has taken us fairly quickly to the question of Sellars's philosophical treatment of properties in *EPM*, a treatment that rests on a surprising reading of the British Empiricists in sections 26-29.

The British Empiricists are generally regarded as nominalists—Locke, for example, says that "all things that exist [are] particulars."<sup>15</sup> So one might expect that Sellars's purpose in discussing the Empiricists would be to accept an account of Locke as a nominalist (an anti-realist about universals) as a starting point and then move to his own version of nominalism. Not so, for we are soon told that the British Empiricists believe in the existence of multiply-instantiated entities—"repeatables" in Sellars's terminology, "universals" in more standard usage. They are not specific-property nominalists. According to Sellars, Locke's claim that everything is *particular* means that everything is *specific*, including properties. What Locke regards as problematic is *generic* properties—red in general as opposed to a specific shade of red (section 26). If we now introduce a special notion of "universals" that applies only to generic properties, since the Empiricists deny the existence of universals in this special sense, they can thus be called "nominalists" in a special sense—general-property nominalists. On this interpretation, the empiricists develop a line of thinking that reaches a dénouement in Hume's idea that general properties are similarity-classes of specific properties grouped by association with specific words (section 29). This account then serves as the inspiration for Sellars's own account of universals,<sup>16</sup> a nominalist account that sees universals as similarity classes of predicates grouped by the linguistic roles they play (sections 30 and 31). What is of interest to us is not so much what Sellars says about universals but what he does not say about the Empiricists's position that specific properties are the immediate objects of sense perception: He does not say how this position goes wrong.

Why does not he do so? In their otherwise illuminating discussion of this portion of Sellars's argument de Vries and Triplett suggest an explanation:

Sellars is concerned with classical empiricist accounts of being aware of x as F—that is with accounts of conceptual awareness. Thus, the question of whether there might also be a form of non-conceptual awareness does not enter into the issues at hand.<sup>17</sup>

This is not a satisfactory answer since one of "the issues at hand" from the discussion of classical empiricism is the realist version of the classical sense datum theory. The question whether there is awareness of

specific properties of some kind is relevant to that issue, and the issue whether there is awareness of specific properties of some kind is a species of the issue whether there is non-conceptual awareness of specific repeatables.

One way to argue against this possibility is to attack the existence of specific repeatables directly and then argue that if there are no repeatables, there is no awareness of repeatables, so the realist version of the classical sense datum version of the Myth of the Given would be refuted. On this interpretation, Sellars would be giving an independent anti-realist argument for repeatables in section 29, but he does not appear to do this: If anything, the argument is in the reverse order. Since there can be no awareness of repeatables, there is no compelling reason to believe in them, at least not in the sense that the classical empiricists understood them, so we should not believe in them. This leaves room for an alternative analysis of all property attributions, specific or general. The next part of the reconstruction adheres to this order of argument.

### 3.2. *Refuting the Givenness of Repeatables*

Sellars's argument as I reconstruct it.

*A classical empiricist will defend the existence of awareness of properties on the grounds that it is intuitively obvious that we perceive properties. Saying, "I see the whites of their eyes," is intuitively natural and commits us to the existence of the whites of their eyes. The whites of their eyes are repeatables, repeatables are properties, so there are properties. Because of their surface logical form, locutions of this kind assert a relation between a perceiver and a property. If their surface form is allowed upon analysis to stand as their ultimate form, then there will indeed be a strong intuitive case for the doctrine of the given in its classical sense datum realist form. But it cannot be allowed to stand because what we call "the seeing of objects" is implicitly the seeing of objects as being a certain way, and implicitly what we call "the seeing of properties" is implicitly the seeing of properties as instantiated by something, both of which amount to the same thing: seeing that something is a certain way. And that is propositional perception, the canonical formulation of which does not require the mention of properties. Thus, for the statement "I see whiteness in the snow" which mentions the property whiteness, a canonical propositional paraphrase, "I see that snow is white" can be produced which contains no name for whiteness; thus, what we call "the perception of properties," when properly formulated, does not commit us to awareness of properties; thus, does not commit us to the doctrine of the given in its classical realist sense datum form.*

My commentary:

The key premise in Sellars's case in Section 29 of *EPM* against the realist form of classical sense datum theory is the unacceptability of "the unacquired ability to be aware of repeatables..." Sellars seems to think that he has already disposed of this possibility earlier, presumably in the Trilemma Argument of Section 6, but, as we have seen, he has not done so. His arguments there are intended to apply only *nominalist* form of Classical Sense Datum Theory and are, in any case, ineffective against the realist form of the theory and the doctrine of brute awareness of repeatables (properties) upon which it depends. There is, therefore, an argument Sellars owes the reader of *EPM*. That missing argument is one that my reconstruction is intended to supply.

### 3.3. *Analogous Versions of This Argument in Other Writings*

We have not thus far offered much exegetical evidence that Sellars actually does argue in the way just reconstructed. However, in sections 7 and 8 of his paper, "Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?"<sup>18</sup> Sellars presents

arguments that seem to us to contain some of the key elements of our hypothetical reconstruction. This paper is a “revised version” of a paper first presented in 1951,<sup>19</sup> thus antedating *EPM* by five years, and contains themes and arguments that are strikingly similar to those developed in *EMP*. The arguments of Section 7 (“Concept Empiricism: The Conservative Approach”) seem to cover the same ground as the Trilemma Argument and its supporting arguments in *EPM*, the arguments of Section 8 (“Concept Empiricism, Syntactics, Semantics and Pragmatics”) seem to anticipate the arguments of sections 32-34 in *EPM*. Both, “agree, however, in concluding that the basic concepts in terms of which all genuine concepts are defined are concepts of qualities and relations exemplified by particulars in what is called ‘the given’ or ‘immediate experience.’”<sup>20</sup>

Our focus will be on the former, conservative version. According to Sellars,

... the concept empiricist of this brand conceives of such symbols as “red” and “between” as acquiring meaning by virtue of becoming associated with such abstract entities as redness and between-ness, the association being mediated by our awareness of these entities. His attention is thus focused on the question, “How, and in what circumstances, do we become aware of abstract entities.”<sup>21</sup> (309)

This kind of empiricist makes “an underlying presupposition of a distinction between the pure awareness of an abstract entity, on the one hand, and the linguistic... expression of this pure awareness on the other.” Sellars himself used to be a “convinced concept empiricist,” as he tells us at the outset,<sup>22</sup> so we might take the story that he tells of the fate of concept empiricism in these passages as part of a dialectic with himself that he also tells, with more twists and complexities, in *EPM* itself. Here, as in *EPM*, Sellars does not explain what, exactly, is wrong with the idea that we can have awareness of universals like redness that is not linguistic awareness—“In view of the widespread acceptance of the thesis in question, there is little need to construct one more argument in its defence”<sup>23</sup>—but he does give what may be part of an argument that fits our hypothetical reconstruction above. He does this in the course of characterizing the conservative concept empiricist as one who thinks that “the process whereby we come to be aware of universals is played by particulars which exemplify these universals.” Sellars continues the story thus:

In its more coherent form, the primary ground of this conviction seems to have been a metaphysical conviction to the effect that that abstract entities exist only *in rebus*, that is, in particulars, so that only through particulars could mind enter into relations with them... all awareness of universals is derived from the awareness of instances.<sup>24</sup> (309)

The conservative concept empiricist is saying that we cannot be aware of redness unless we are aware of something’s being an instance of redness. It is here that Sellars makes his argument that all propositional awareness is a form of linguistic awareness. According to our reconstruction, he does so in two key additional steps. (1) He provides a logical paraphrase of the statement *we are aware of something’s being an instance of redness* as “we are aware that something is red” thus eliminating the grammatical basis for affirming the existence of the universal redness. He does not give this step in the present paper but does give it, as part of a general theory of ontological commitment, in “Grammar and Ontology”<sup>25</sup> delivered as two lectures at Yale in 1958,<sup>26</sup> the same year as “Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?” was published. (2) He argues that statements which do not name universals but introduce them grammatically only as adjectives—subject-predicate statements—must be understood as assertions in a language game rather than as some kind of immediate grasping of a proposition. The following passage is from section 7 of “Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?” but could just as well as come from the Trilemma Argument of *EPM*.



Let us assume, then, that the situation which obtains when it is true to say that Jones is aware of a quality or relation or possibility or, even, a particular, can (in principle) be exhaustively described in terms of dispositions relating to the use of linguistic symbols... In other words, we are committed to the abandonment of what has happily been called the metaphor of the mental eye...<sup>27</sup> (310)

It seems to us that the argument of Section 7 of "Is There a Synthetic *A Priori*?" is the "missing argument" of *EPM* against the doctrine of the brute awareness of repeatables.

This is not the only form of foundationalism under attack by Sellars in *EPM* for, even if successful, the argument against the sense datum theories leaves standing another important form of foundationalism, the form in which the foundations of empirical knowledge are expressed in the language of "looks." This brings us to one of the most influential and innovative ideas of Sellars, his account of the "logic of 'looks,'" developed in *EMP* in sections 10-22. But this is a topic for another time.

## Notes

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1. Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," reprinted as chapter 5 of *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 127-96. Hereafter references will be given in the text as "*EPM*."

2. See for example, Hilary Kornblith, "Beyond Foundationalism and the Coherence Theory." *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1980): 597-612. For a combined externalist/internalist account see W. P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), Part III.

3. See e.g., Timothy McGrew, *The Foundations of Knowledge* (Lanham: Littlefield Adams, 1995).

4. See W. P. Alston, "What's Wrong with Immediate Knowledge" in Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, 57-80 (see 65-72); and "Sellars and the 'Myth of the Given,'" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2002): 69-86. (Hereafter referred to as "Immediate Knowledge" and "Myth," respectively.)

5. Sellars puts the point this way:

"What then of the logical connection in the direction *sensing sense contents*→*having non-inferential knowledge*? Clearly it is severed by those who think of sensing as a unique and unanalysable act" (*EPM*, section 5, 130).

We think that this is not so clear, for it may be that,

(1) x senses y, where y is a particular, entails;

(2) There is a property F such that x senses that y is F where instances of "x senses that y is F" is understood to be immediate knowledge of the fact that y is F. (Sellars will object to a doctrine that countenances immediate knowledge, but that criticism comes later, in section 6—it is not the point of the present criticism.) In this case, the unanalysability and particular-relatedness of sensing does not preclude a logical relation to knowledge. Indeed, we think that something very like this entailment is present in Descartes's epistemology, of which more below.

6. According to Sellars's reconstruction of the Logical Positivist doctrine of protocol sentences in sections 32-34, epistemic foundations are a complex of two elements, a foundation of sensory awareness, a basic statement, plus an epistemic relation between the two which Sellars calls "authority:"

For these stipulations [of the positivist doctrine] commit one to the idea that the authority of *Konstatierungen* [protocol sentences] rests on nonverbal episodes of awareness—awareness that something is the case, e.g., that this is green—which nonverbal episodes have an intrinsic authority... which the verbal performances (the *Konstatierungen*) properly performed "express." (167)

Since the objects of the non-verbal episodes are propositional entities, not particulars, Positivism does not satisfy the first horn of the dilemma. It would be reasonable to take the propositional objects to be facts, indeed, that is how Sellars characterizes the second horn: "Sensing is a form of knowing. It is facts rather than particulars that are sensed." (From passage quoted at the outset.) In this formulation, Sellars collapses the distinction between sensing as knowing and sensing as a fact-taking relation. But it is just these two things that Sellars insists on distinguishing in his account of Positivism: in Positivism the term "knowledge" is applied to the protocol sentences (basic statements) when authorized by the awarenesses, not to the awarenesses themselves:

... if some statements pertaining to this level are to express noninferential knowledge, they must have a credibility which is not a matter of being supported by other statements... namely such statements as would be said to report observations, thus, "This is red." (165)

A similar point is made in section 34:

[The Positivists are] committed to a stratum of authoritative nonverbal episodes ("awarenesses"), the authority of which accrues to a superstructure of *verbal actions*, provided that the expressions occurring in these actions are properly *used*. The self-authenticating episodes would constitute the tortoise on which stands the elephant on which rests the edifice of human knowledge. (167)

This way of putting things implies that the self-authenticating episodes are not themselves cases of "knowledge," that term is applied to the "edifice" standing upon the self-authenticating episodes. The sense in which the known propositions "stand upon" the foundations is that a proposition asserting the foundations ("S is aware that p") entails the known proposition, that p. If we identify the authorizing awarenesses with the sensing of a certain sense content, then the sensing of sense contents is not a case of knowledge either: it fails to satisfy the second horn of the Sense Datum Dilemma. Positivism is thus not covered by either horn of the Sense Datum Dilemma.

7. The difficulty of relating Sellars's account of Positivism to the Trilemma Argument mentioned in the previous note would not by itself provide difficulties if Sellars had offered an independent refutation of Positivism. However, this he does not do. Brandom simply says that what Sellars finds wrong with the position is that there is no such thing as the primitive propositional awareness that the position depends on: believing that there is constituted a form of the Myth of the Given (Brandom, "Study Guide," 156-7). If so, one must suppose that Sellars has shown this before or provided an argument that can readily be adapted to this version of the given, or at least provided the premises that fairly obviously lead to this conclusion. This is the view De Vries and Triplett also take (de Vries and Triplett, *The Given*, 71-72): They note the abruptness of the transition between section 34 and section 35, where Sellars begins to develop his own positive epistemology, and the lack of any summarizing passage, nevertheless assuring their readers that previous argumentation contains the refutation. Both leave the impression that the argument against the existence of immediate knowledge is given in the Trilemma Argument of section 6. This assessment is partly right—Sellars does there allude to an argument (the argument from nominalism to the rejection of immediate knowledge) that would be relevant. But he does not give the argument there. He gives it (or starts to give it), if at all, in the sections devoted to the British Empiricists, sections 26-29. We present our account of this argument below. But the assessment is also partly wrong: the argument in section 6 proceeds from the assumption that sensing is a kind of knowing, an assumption which, we have just seen, is denied by Positivism.

Rorty (Rorty, *Mirror*) takes a somewhat different approach. He says that the "crucial premise" of Sellars's argument against the given is "that there is no such thing as a justified belief which is non-propositional, and no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions" (183). This is a crucial premise in the Trilemma Argument, specifically in establishing Part C: Knowledge is acquired. But this is not a crucial premise in the case against the doctrine that there is a primitive form of awareness-that, the case made by Positivism, since Positivism, as Sellars's characterizes it, is compatible with both conjuncts of the premise. The justified entity for Positivism is a proposition asserted by means of protocol sentences, the justification relation (authorization) is a propositional relation—entailment. (The entailment is between the proposition that S is aware that p and the proposition that p.) So Rorty also fails to see that the case against primitive awareness is not made by the premises of the Trilemma Argument.

8. See *The Passions of the Soul*, I, 17 (CSM I, 335); *Meditations* IV, CSM II, 39. ("CSM" refers to Rene Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. I-II, J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-5).

9. See, e.g., John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Vol. I and II, A. Fraser, ed. (New York: Dover Press, 1959). For the passivity of perception see Vol. I, Bk. II, i, 3: 122-3; for the activity of judgment see Vol. I, Bk. II, xi, 9: 206-7.

10. Locke, *Essay*, Vol. I, Bk. II, xi, 9: 206-7.

11. See, for example, the following passage from *Principles of Philosophy* I, 52: "Thus, if we perceive the presence of some attribute, we can infer that there must also be present an existing thing or substance to which it may be attributed" (CSM I, 210). The perception is what is given, the existential proposition, "there is a substance..." is the judgment that arises from what is given in case what is given is clear and distinct. A perception acquires this status as a result of a level of understanding requiring conceptual awareness of the perception. A principle asserting the causal connection between clear and distinct perception and judgment is made in Meditation IV:

I could not but judge that something which I understood so clearly was true; but this was not because I was compelled so to judge by any external force, but because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will... (AT VII, 58-59; CSM II, 41)

This formulation is not vulnerable to the Trilemma Argument because the content of the judgment is provided *de re* (a property is perceived and there is something that has it) rather than conceptually, as is required in Sellars's account in the Trilemma Argument of how predicates acquire their meaning.

12. Explaining Sellars's objection to dropping option C Brandom says: "If C is given up, a story must be told about what universal concepts are innate (unacquired, inborn, wired in) and which are not. This would require much more than even latter day nativists such as Chomsky have claimed..." (Brandom, "Study Guide," 130).

13. It is not perhaps entirely clear that there is, indeed, an inconsistency in either the original formulation or the reformulation of the trilemma by themselves, since some principle to the effect that the status of a cognitive state as unacquired penetrates to

logical implications of the (obtaining of) the state is also required. We shall assume such a principle for the sake of the argument.

14. This is denied by trope theorists. Tropes are properties but are not multiply-instantiable entities, hence not universals. See K. Campbell, *Abstract Particulars* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1990).

15. Locke, *Essay*, Vol. III, iii, 1.

16. We have mentioned trope theory in note 14, referring to Campbell's *Abstract Particulars*. In the Preface to that work Campbell says, "Sellars recognized tropes by another name" (xii) but does not give a reference. If Campbell has Sellars's discussion of the British Empiricists in mind,\* while there are similarities between the two accounts, there is this fundamental difference: for Campbell tropes are particulars, not multiply-instantiated entities (3), hence not universals in his sense (12 ff). But for Sellars, the specific qualities talked about by the Empiricists are multiply-instantiable—that is what calling them "repeatables" signifies. So they are universals in Campbell's sense (in the standard sense), not particulars. Sellars is not, thus, a trope theorist. (\*Thanks to an unknown commentator who has suggested, alternatively, that Campbell might have Sellars's writings on Aristotelian metaphysics in mind here.)

17. De Vries and Triplett, *Given*, 54, n.

18. This paper is reprinted as chapter 10 of *SPR*, 298-320.

19. The paper was first published in 1958: *SPR*, viii.

20. *SPR*, 309.

21. *SPR*, 309.

22. *SPR*, 308.

23. *SPR*, 310.

24. *SPR*, 309.

25. This paper is reprinted as Chapter 8 of *SPR*, 247-81. See 247-9.

26. *SPR*, viii. This paper is reprinted as Chapter 8 of *SPR*.

27. *SPR*, 310.