'Sellars's Interpretive Variations on Kant's Transcendental Idealist Themes'

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ABSTRACT: Sellars' career-long engagement with Kant's philosophy involved both readings of Kant and appropriations of Kant that are nuanced, original, and related in complex ways to Sellars' own philosophical views. In some ways similar to Strawson's classic reading, Sellars defended Kant's theory of experience and his analysis of human knowledge as essentially correct. This includes various views on the nature of conceptual cognition, the thinking self, practical reason, perceptual experience, and the lawfulness of nature. On the other hand, and again like Strawson, Sellars regarded Kant's transcendental idealism as involving a strong ontological commitment to unknowable but thinkable (and non-spatiotemporal) 'things in themselves'. However, whereas Strawson regarded such a position as deeply incoherent, Sellars argues that Kant's theological conception of things in themselves can coherently be replaced with a scientific realist conception of things in themselves as theoretically postulated imperceptible processes, which play a structurally similar role for Sellars in grounding the Kantian-phenomenal 'appearances' in the 'manifest image' of the world. Sellars' highly complex but sophisticated reading of Kant on sensibility and intuition, when combined with Sellars' own idiosyncratic views on sensory qualia, render it even more difficult to come to terms with Sellars' engagements with Kant's idealism. This chapter attempts to provide a concise presentation and evaluation of certain central themes in Sellars' complex philosophical dialogue with Kant.

Wilfrid Sellars' 1966 John Locke Lectures, *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes* (1968, 'SM') were delivered the same year as the publication of P. F. Strawson's groundbreaking book, *The Bounds of Sense: An Essay on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason* (1966). Both books are philosophically sophisticated and ambitious, both in the interpretation of Kant and in relation to expressing the authors' own philosophical views. As we shall see, however, Sellars' book presents some exceptional interpretive challenges for the reader, and I hope to provide some clarifying guidance to the terrain. In this chapter I will examine some of the main contours of Sellars' interpretation of Kant's theoretical philosophy, focusing on this occasion on its most controversial aspect: his complex engagements with Kant's *transcendental idealist* distinction between objects as 'appearances' and as 'things in themselves'. Whereas elsewhere I have primarily been concerned to isolate those aspects of Sellars' analytic Kantian or (as I call it) 'Kantian naturalist' theory of experience that I find most defensible, in what follows I want to explore Sellars' more full-blooded treatments of Kant's transcendental idealism in particular, both for its own sake and as an interpretation of Kant.

In *The Bounds of Sense* Strawson distinguished centrally between 'two faces of the *Critique*' (1966, cf. Part One). One face for Strawson is represented by Kant's deeply insightful 'Metaphysics of Experience,' which turned out, not surprisingly, to bear strong affinities to the 'descriptive

metaphysics' of our experience defended in Strawson's own classic work, *Individuals* (1959) (cf. 1996, part two). The other face, as Strawson sees it, is the 'incoherent' and 'disastrous model' of Kant's 'transcendental psychology' or 'transcendental subjectivism': the 'theory of the mind making Nature' as a realm of mere 'appearances' in what Strawson derides as Kant's 'Metaphysics of Transcendental Idealism' (1966, 16–23, and part four). The former, defensible a priori or 'transcendental' *theory of experience* 'is concerned with the conceptual structure which is presupposed in all empirical inquiries' (1966, 18), involving for both Kant and Strawson – and for Sellars, too – the conception of one unified consciousness of one directly perceivable and objective spatiotemporal world of lawfully interacting and persisting material substances. Sellars outlined his own interpretations and updated defenses of Kant's theory of experience not only in *Science and Metaphysics*, which tended to focus more heavily on Kant's transcendental idealism, but in particular in such articles as 'Some Remarks on Kant's Theory of Experience' (1967, KTE), '…this I or he or it (the thing) which thinks...' (1970, 'I'), 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism' (1976, KTI), and 'The Role of Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience' (1978, IKTE), all of which were collected posthumously in *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics* (KTM) in 2002.[1] I and many of the other authors referred to in this chapter (for example, Brandom, Landy, McDowell, Rosenberg, Sicha, and Westphal) have laid out and defended key aspects of Sellars' views on Kant's analysis or theory of experience, in relation to the thinking self, conceptual content, causal laws, perceptual knowledge, the refutation of (empirical) idealism, normativity, and so on. My present purpose, however, is to take a more careful look at Sellars' interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism as found primarily in that deep but enigmatic book, *Science and Metaphysics*.

1. Sellars' Manifest Image 'Appearances' and Scientific Image 'Things in Themselves'

Whereas Strawson rejected as entirely incoherent Kant's distinction between objects (and persons) as appearances to us in nature as opposed to as non-spatiotemporal things in themselves, Sellars takes Kant's transcendental idealism to be a near-miss that can be successfully reformulated in terms of Sellars' own famous distinction between the manifest (MI) and scientific (SI) images of the human-being-in-the-world:

> As I see it, in any case, a consistent scientific realist must hold that the world of everyday experience is a phenomenal world in the Kantian sense, existing only as the contents of actual and obtainable conceptual representings, the obtainability of which is explained not, as for Kant, by things in themselves known only to God, but by scientific objects about which, barring catastrophe, we shall know more and more as the years go by. (SM VI, §61)

Having explored Sellars' scientific realism and his distinction between the 'two images' elsewhere (2007, 2016), I will present the key points succinctly here without full textual justification. The "world

[1] Thanks to the work of Jeffrey Sicha, KTM and Sellars' other publications continue to be available at very affordable prices at www.ridgeviewpublishing.com, and Sicha has also been at work (together with Pedro Amaral among others) making Sellars' publications available in electronic editions. Also important for understanding Sellars' views on Kant are his 1975–76 lectures to students at the University of Pittsburgh, Sellars' KPT. For book-length interpretations of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* strongly influenced by Sellars, see especially Rosenberg 2005; and influenced by both Sellars and Rosenberg on Kant are Powell 1990, O'Shea 2012, and Landy 2015 (all students of Rosenberg). See also Sicha's substantial introduction to Sellars' KTM. Also deeply influenced by Sellars and Kant, and central to current debates (including on Sellars' reading of Kant) are Brandom 2015 and McDowell 2009. For more on Sellars as a pivotal figure in the history of Kant-influenced analytic philosophy, see Westphal 2010.

of everyday experience" or manifest image (MI) for Sellars is defined in terms of (1) the nature of *persons* as concept-using thinkers and intentional agents,[2] and (2) the nature of the 'strictly' perceptible[3] physical *objects* that are basic in our common sense conceptual framework (Sellars PSIM, *passim*).

Regarding (2), let us follow Sellars and use visually perceived expanses of color – for example, the redness of an apple's surface – as our main example of the sorts of ordinary *sensible qualities* that characterize the everyday objects of our experience. I will not present or evaluate his arguments on this particular matter, but it is well known that Sellars argued throughout his works (e.g., PSIM) that, phenomenologically considered, MI physical objects possess 'homogeneous' color-contents as their constituent content-characters in a way that he contends is ostensibly *incompatible* with the 'postulational' scientific image (SI) conception of physical objects as exhaustively composed of colorless particles or fields as conceived by ongoing modern scientific theoretical explanations. Through a long journey of highly sophisticated categorial-ontological and phenomenological analyses (cf. Rosenberg 2007, Ch. 9, and deVries 2005, Ch. 8), Sellars argued that the expanses of colour that populate the MI-world of common sense physical objects must eventually be *reconceived* (ontologically 'relocated', as it were) as the contents *solely* of the sensory states of the perceivers' central nervous systems when they are *sensing-redly*. That is, such a perceiver is having a sensation of red in the manner that is typically caused either by the visible presence of (what in MI is responded to as) a 'red' physical object, or, in the case of hallucinations, non-standard lighting, etc., by some other stimulation of the visual cortex that is responsible for the experience.

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[2] There is an important sense in which for Sellars, as for Kant, *persons* as *thinking* selves and intending agents are in crucial, normative-functional respects not 'objects' in such a way as to render them candidates for ontological elimination and replacement by more adequate scientific successor conceptions of their nature. This is compatible with there also being many other aspects of ourselves as embodied persons that *are* subject to such explanatory reconceptions in the ongoing development of the scientific image. The distinction between persons and objects is in fact the key to Sellars' *synoptic fusion* or integration of the MI and SI ontologies: crudely, the MI-objects get replaced by SI-processes, Kantian-thinking agents remain through the integration, albeit with enormously significant reconceptions of their nature. In particular our understanding of *qualitative sensory consciousness* (e.g., color consciousness) will have been radically transformed, but along many other dimensions as well (cf. Christias 2016, all of whose recent writings on Sellars I highly recommend). See O'Shea 2007 *passim* and 2016, chapter 7 for the textual support for these and other characterizations of Sellars' overall views appealed to in this chapter.

[3] It is seldom appreciated that Sellars' distinction between MI and SI rests *definitively*, as far as the 'objects' of those images or conceptual constructs are concerned, on a *twofold* understanding of the nature of 'perception' (e.g., SRII V, §55–8; O'Shea 2007, 33–8): crudely put, (1) a 'strict' or 'manifest' sense in which what we directly perceive are the Aristotelian 'proper and common sensible qualities' (e.g., color and shape) possessed by ordinary physical objects in the constitutive way discussed briefly in the main text here (call these 'manifest perceptible' physical objects); as opposed to (2) an all-inclusive 'pragmatic' conception of perceptual observation or detection developed by Feyerabend and Sellars, and inherited by Rorty and Brandom, as any reliable, non-inferential response to objects (any 'language-entry transition', in Sellars' terms).

Call the latter, i.e. (2), any 'reliably observed' objects or processes. This pragmatic conception covers all non-inferential perception for Sellars, whether it be the 'strict' perception of MI-objects, or the observational detection of SI-processes (for example, 'there goes an electron' uttered by a trained physicist as a reliable non-inferential response to a streak in a cloud chamber). The objects of MI are defined or stipulated by Sellars to be those that are strictly manifest perceptible, whereas the SI is defined in terms of those evolving theories of modern science that incorporate the 'postulation' of new basic objects, processes, fields, etc., that are manifestly *imperceptible*. The latter (manifestly) 'unobservable' processes not only may, but Sellars argues *must* become directly 'reliably observable' in sense (2), e.g., in the manner of the electrons example given above (but successfully 'gone global', as it were), if *scientific realism* is to be fully vindicated (cf. SM V, §90–1; SRII V, §§55–8, VII §§72–4, VIII §§89–91. Sellars' conception of scientific realism was in this last respect unusual by standard post-1970 Putnam-Kripke lights (for further discussion, cf. O'Shea 2007, Chs. 2, 6, 7).

Furthermore, Sellars argued that since our MI-experiences of colored physical objects are of bounded *regions* or expanses of color – put crudely, since Berkeley was right that perceived color and perceived shape (extension) go seamlessly together in our experience – the sensory states of perceivers must somehow preserve (that is, coherently be conceived as the 'true home' of) *both* color and shape, as for example when we have a sensation in the 'of-a-red-rectangle' manner. So finally, since it is not coherent to suppose that such sensory states of perceivers are *literally* colored and shaped in the way that MI-physical objects are conceived to be, the sensory states or 'sense impressions' of the perceiver must be reconceived (and will be, in a future, more adequate SI-neurophysiological theory) to have corresponding intrinsic qualities and geometrical relationships that are *analogous to* and *systematically represent* the qualities and relations that we conceive (within MI) as their standard physical causes. 'Succinctly put, impressions have attributes and stand in relations which are counterparts of the attributes and relations of physical objects and events' (SM I, §65).

In the end, crudely put, Sellars' view is that our common sense MI-conception of colored physical objects reflects the fact that our sensory systems evolved to get us around our environment and to avoid poisonous berries, not to reveal to us directly the ultimately correct categorial ontology of the natural world. This is one main source of Sellars' famous (or infamous) *scientia mensura* view, that is, his Feyerabendian thesis (SRII V, §48) that, strictly speaking, the ordinary perceptible objects of the manifest image *do not really exist*, i.e., *as so conceived within MI* – they are 'mere appearances' or objective 'representables' in the Kantian sense of being 'actual' (cf. SM II, KTE, IKTE, KTI). They really exist *per se*, i.e., as the things they are 'in themselves', only as radically ontologically *reconceived* in the ongoing theoretical or postulational scientific image of the human being and its world. Within the 'ought-to-be' rules that implicitly govern the language of our ordinary MI-conceptual framework, it is of course true to assert that bananas are yellow and apples are red (i.e. true *with respect to* MI, as opposed to what is 'really' or 'ultimately' true: cf. SM V).

> But, *speaking as a philosopher*, I am quite prepared to say that the common-sense world of physical objects in Space and Time is unreal – that there are no such things. Or, to put it less paradoxically, that in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is and of what is not that it is not. (EPM IX, §41)

If we now look back to the passage from *Science and Metaphysics* quoted earlier, we have seen one main reason why Sellars believed "that a consistent scientific realist must hold that the world of everyday experience is a phenomenal world in the Kantian sense" (SM VI, §61).

It is important to recognize, however, that the above argument from the nature of MI-color and other sensible qualities is not the only sort of consideration that Sellars mobilizes in order to support his contention that our ordinary MI-conception of objects is merely 'phenomenal' in the Kantian sense. As Sellars argues in SM lectures V–VI as well as in PSIM and all of his other writings pertaining to scientific realism, there are many other dimensions in which the ongoing scientific image of the world, with its postulation of processes, fields, and particles that are strictly speaking *not perceivable in principle* in terms of the MI-ontology of colored physical objects, provides demonstrably more adequate explanations of the nature of MI-phenomena *than the MI-ontology can provide of itself*. This applies not only to the nature of perceived color and other sensible qualities, no matter how carefully they are phenomenologically analyzed within the 'life-world' of MI; it applies also to the explanation of how it is that we ourselves became concept-users and rational agents in the first place. Furthermore, Sellars argues that even our ongoing scientific conceptions of the world, too, are continually being

shown to be 'mere appearances' that are better explained by being reconceived in *more adequate* scientific theories of the world. For example, Einstein's relativity theory reconceived the very nature of space, time, mass, velocity, and so on, so as to explain precisely why and how Newton's theory and its accompanying object-ontology *both succeeded and failed to the extent that it did*, thereby revealing Newton's world to be one of 'mere appearances in the Kantian sense' relative to *its* grounding in the real Einsteinian nature of 'things in themselves', which, as Sellars put it in the passage above on Kant (SM VI, §61), grounds the 'obtainability' of those regularities that are captured (and those that are *not* captured) by Newton's laws. And so on.

With this initial background understanding of Sellars' wider philosophical views in place, we can roughly put it that he offered two main reasons for regarding the MI-world of common sense perceptible objects to be 'transcendentally ideal' phenomenal appearances in Kant's sense: firstly, (a) there is the (allegedly) required ontological 'relocation' or explanatory reconception of perceived color-shape-expanses and other MI-constitutive proper and common sensible qualities 'from' MI-objects 'to' states of MI-perceivers (this is putting it very crudely), and then further SI-reconceiving such sensory states in a future, radically revised SI-neurophysiology that will preserve, analogically, the initial consciously experienced colour-shape qualitative characters and structure; and secondly, (b) Sellars appeals to the demonstrably more adequate explanations of the nature of reality that have already occurred, and will continue to occur, not only in relation to (a), but in the ongoing scientific theory-replacements themselves. Crucially, an explanatory burden placed on SI-explanations in both cases is that their resulting reconceived ontologies, which reveal how things are 'in themselves', explain *why things approximately lawfully appeared as they did*, both in our ordinary MI perceptual world, and in the progress of superseded SI-ontologies such as Newton's that are successfully corrected and incorporated within more adequate SI-theories such as Einstein's.

With the rough outlines of Sellars' own big picture in place,[4] we can now take up some central and perplexing themes that arise particularly in chapters one and two of Sellars' *Science and Metaphysics*. Certain features of Sellars' interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism should be clear from what we have seen already, however. Whereas Graham Bird had already published his book on *Kant's Theory of Knowledge* in 1962 (and cf. Bird 2006, Ch. 23), arguing that Kant's first *Critique* was not in fact committed to the real existence of 'things in themselves' (though we are of course, for Kant, committed to the indispensable but problematic *idea* or empty thought of such a grounding); and Henry Allison would later develop his highly influential 'two standpoint' interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism, which would similarly render problematic any straightforward ontological interpretations of the real significance for Kant of our admittedly indispensable idea of 'things in themselves'; both Strawson and Sellars, by contrast, interpreted Kant's non-spatiotemporal things in themselves in a straightforwardly ontological manner, as Kant's view on what *really* exists. Strawson

[4] In O'Shea 2016, Ch. 7, 'What to Take Away from Sellars's Kantian Naturalism', I have indicated how I would reject certain aspects of the picture above, retaining both Sellars' outlook on Kant's *theory of experience* and central components of his *scientific naturalism/scientific realism*, but rejecting his contention that problems pertaining to sensible qualities and the nature of scientific progress must entail the falsity 'strictly speaking' of our common sense ontology of colored, persisting substantial kinds. The latter contention I regard in fallibilist terms as a hypothesis that, in light of debates both in the philosophy of perception and concerning the status of the 'special sciences' over the last four decades, is neither inconceivable nor mandatory, but unlikely to provide the best explanation of how all things 'hang together' (PSIM I, §1). See Landy 2011, including his concluding 'Postscript to Transcendental Idealism', for a recent fruitful investigation of many of the same issues in Kant and Sellars that I am exploring in this chapter. I will not attempt to sort out the similarities and differences between our two accounts on this occasion, but I am happy to note that there are substantial aspects of similarity.

reached the more usual conclusion at the time of finding Kant's transcendental idealism, so interpreted, to be hopelessly problematic. On his reading, furthermore, Kant's own conception of the 'appearances' was infected as a result with the sort of implausibly subjectivist phenomenalism (unlike the better 'face' or analysis of objectivity and the unity of experience that Strawson *also* found in Kant) that Bird had already diagnosed as the typical absurd consequence of traditional strongly ontological conceptions of Kant's idea of 'things in themselves'. Sellars' interpretation was unusual among English-language interpreters of Kant at the time in defending a more plausible *non-phenomenalist*, intentionalist interpretation of Kant's own empirical realism (that is, in contrast to the more usual senses of 'phenomenalism' typified in some respects by Bennett (1966) and revitalized in more recent times by Van Cleve, 1999),[5] but nonetheless conjoined (pace Bird and Allison) with a strongly ontological reading of Kant's own things in themselves.[6] An important example of Sellars' attempt to merge *something* like both of these 'faces' of Kant together is provided by the topic of the next section, which focuses on chapter one of *Science and Metaphysics*, 'Sensibility and Understanding'.[7]

2. Nonconceptual Sensibility, Conceptual Understanding, and Singular Intuitions

For Sellars, it was a crucial insight of Kant's to recognize 'the need for a sharp distinction between sensibility and understanding' (SM I, §3), and thus to break the classical empiricist and rationalist sensory-cognitive continuum that Kant had correctly diagnosed as characterizing both Locke's sensualizing of the understanding and Leibniz's intellectualizing of the appearances (cf. A271/B327). Central to Sellars' own philosophy, correspondingly, was a complex but firm distinction between the (intensional, but *not* intentional) *nonconceptual sensory* representation 'of' objects and the (intentional, and so intensional) *conceptual* representation 'of' objects, with *both* dimensions of 'aboutness' being integrated in adult human sense perceptual knowledge (cf. SM I, §§56–9; EPM V, §§24–5). On Sellars' view, which he finds 'implicit in' and regards as philosophically required by Kant's account, the two different sorts of *states*, conceptual and nonconceptual, possess different types of object-representational *content*, both of which are integrated in human perception. The first chapter of *Science and Metaphysics* partly defends and partly criticizes Kant's version of this distinction by seeking to expose and clarify its ambiguities when presented in terms of Sellars' own distinctions. The result presents challenges for the reader along multiple dimensions that I hope to clarify. I will begin first

[5] In O'Shea 2015 I support the claim that Kant and Sellars both defended non-phenomenalist conceptions of empirical realism, causal lawfulness, and objectivity, despite the perennial temptation to read Kant in such phenomenalist terms. When Sellars writes of 'Kant's phenomenalism' he is not interpreting Kant's 'phenomena' or appearances in a way that is inconsistent with Sellars' own well-known critiques of phenomenalism, which he regarded as based on an *incorrect*, non-Kantian analysis of the conceptual structure of the (Kantian) manifest image. The issue is a delicate one, since Sellars' characterizations of Kant's appearances 'as the contents of actual and obtainable conceptual representings' (SM VI, §61, quoted earlier) obviously bear a surface resemblance to typical phenomenalist 'if...then' analyses of our experience. In the article cited I clarify the distinction between Kant's view and the 'phenomenalist temptation' with reference to Kant, Strawson, C. I. Lewis, Sellars, and Brandom.

[6] The last two decades have witnessed a resurgence of strongly ontological interpretations of Kant's things in themselves (including non-phenomenalist readings), particularly viewed as developing out of, but preserving in key metaphysical respects, Kant's pre-critical Leibnizian heritage. Rae Langton (1998) was a particularly influential book along those lines.

[7] For a probing discussion of Sellars' SM chapter one, see McDowell 2009, chapters 1 and 2. I have examined McDowell's conceptualist outlook in that book in detail elsewhere.

with the topic of nonconceptual sensory representations, which picks up on a central theme from section §1 above.

Having a sense impression or nonconceptual representation of a red rectangle is to sense in the manner *normally* and *reliably* caused by red rectangles (for example, by facing sides of bricks), which explains the logical non-extensionality that is involved in our (and other animals') being able to have such an impression 'of' or sensorily *represent* a red rectangle when there is in fact no red rectangular physical object in the environment (SM I, §§56–9). For Sellars, here knowingly going well beyond anything in Kant, it was important that such 'mediating' nonconceptual sensory states of the perceiver are not *merely* characterized in topic-neutral functional terms ('a state *of the kind normally caused by*...' etc., as for example in J. J. C. Smart's physicalism). Rather, the theorist must introduce 'new predicates' that provide positive *intrinsic* characterizations of such conscious, qualitative sensory states (cf. SM I, §55; EPM IV and XVI; PSIM VI). Such contents are conceived by *analogy* with the colors, shapes, and other attributes and relations of their (normally) corresponding physical causes, which such sense impressions thereby nonconceptually track and represent (or 'picture': cf. SM V). Sellars also defends the further controversial thesis, which I will not explore here, that such qualitative sensings, though they are indeed broadly 'physical' in the sense of being fully located and causally operative within the natural world (partly constituting central nervous systems), they cannot according to Sellars be 'physical' as that term has most often been (he thinks, over-restrictively) understood by physicalists.[8]

In key respects outlined above I believe that Sellars ought to be classified in contemporary philosophy of perception and in relation to the recent Kant literature (cf. Schulting, ed., 2016) as a defender of *nonconceptual (object-representational) content*, though one who sought, perhaps in some ways similar to Gareth Evans (1982) subsequently, to embed such nonconceptual sensory-informational 'tracking' content within, and as having 'a strong voice in' (SM I, §39) the integrated outcome of an otherwise strongly *conceptualist* understanding of adult human perceptual knowledge. For understandable reasons, however, Sellars has to the contrary almost universally been classified in these debates through the lens of John McDowell's subsequent *conceptualism*: the position, crudely put, that the representational *content* of adult human perception is exhaustively conceptual content. Robert Hanna, for example, writes of Sellars' (alleged) 'rejection of non-conceptual content' due to his (and later, McDowell's) rejection of the Myth of the Given. Hanna thus takes it as obvious that 'Davidson and Sellars are both clearly thoroughgoing conceptualists *avant la lettre*' (Hanna 2006, 82, 89). While we cannot enter here into the complex details of the contemporary debates about nonconceptual content, both in general and in Kant (Schulting, ed., 2016 is a good place to start),[9] Brady Bowman in the following passage provides a useful snapshot of the typical roles of some of the main players in the current debates concerning Kant and nonconceptualism (my interpolations added):

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[8] Sellars notoriously held the view that such qualitatively contentful sensings or sense impressions (of a red cube, for example), while they are 'physical' in the all-inclusive sense of being natural spatio-temporal-causal items (Sellars' '*physical*$_1$'), they must in another, narrower sense ('*physical*$_2$') be *non-physical*$_2$ states of consciousness, in that the physical$_2$ primitives defined as those adequate to explain inorganic, insensate life, are in principle (Sellars contended) inadequate to explain the intrinsic contents of qualitative sensory consciousness. Sellars' philosophical hypothesis is thus that a future physics of neurophysiological processes will need to introduce *new (non-physical*$_2$*) primitives* in order to explain sensory consciousness. This further analogical hypothesis is operative in SM I, but Sellars is well aware that it goes beyond anything explicitly in Kant.

[9] I am not convinced, for instance, that the recently much discussed distinction between 'state' vs. 'content' nonconceptualism makes it more plausible to deny that Sellars is a nonconceptualist in any interesting sense (I take it that Hanna holds this with regard to Sellars), but I cannot engage that particular issue here.

> Like the more recent figurehead Gareth Evans [1982], Kant figures ambiguously in the debate between conceptualists and non-conceptualists, being claimed as an illustrious predecessor by both sides. For example, some of McDowell's more recent [2009] discussions of the content of sense experience are framed as interpretations of Kant that elicit from him a more consistent and nuanced conceptualism even than that propounded by Sellars, thus vindicating [Kant] against Sellars's criticisms [in SM I]. Apparently with equal plausibility, Hanna [e.g., 2006] interprets Kant as a powerful theoretician of non-conceptual content, drawing on Kant's doctrine of the specific difference between intuitions and concepts. While Hanna acknowledges the famous passages that seem to place Kant unambiguously in the conceptualist camp [e.g., 'intuitions without concepts are blind' (A51/B75)], he also draws attention to remarks in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that seem equally unambiguously to state that objects can appear to us without having any relation to the functions of the understanding, i.e. to concepts [e.g., 'appearances would nonetheless offer *objects* to our intuition, for intuition by no means requires the functions of thinking' (A89–90/B122–3)]. (Bowman 2011, 419)

Let us examine the aspects of Sellars' view as expressed in SM chapter one that make it plausible to classify him as a conceptualist, which I contend he sought to integrate with his substantive conception of nonconceptual, distinctively sensory-representational content. Sellars' view was that Kant *nearly* succeeded in expressing a view having this shape (i.e., the shape of Sellars' own position), but that he crucially failed to clarify the relevant distinctions required.

Sellars throughout his works stresses Kant's view that, for beings like us, the possibility of our representing any empirically mind-independent object of experience at all – that is, in such a way that we are capable of representing the object as located and persisting independently of our representing it – requires the sorts of conceptual syntheses in judgment that Kant articulates throughout the transcendental analytic. In particular, both Sellars and subsequently McDowell interpret Kant's claim in such a way that it extends the requirement of conceptualization to Kant's account of the *singular* and *immediate* sensible *intuition* of any objects that may appear to us. Sellars focuses, for instance, on this well-known passage from Kant's 'metaphysical deduction' or 'clue' to the transcendental deduction (cf. Sellars SM I, §10, and McDowell 2009, Ch. 14: 'Avoiding the Myth of the Given'):

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

Sellars explains (in particular in KTI) that it is the 'same function' of *conceptual* synthesis that governs what Kant later in the transcendental deduction calls the 'productive imagination', which is involved constitutively in all our perceptual cognitions. Hence our 'immediate' sensible *intuitions* of objects in perception are, in this primary sense of 'intuition' on Sellars' reading of Kant, a distinctive kind of *singular, indexical* (this-here-now), *conceptualized thought of* the given empirical object that directly evokes this non-inferential response in the perceiver (e.g., *this red cube*). Such a singular intuitive perceptual 'taking-to-be' involves the productive imagination's 'intimate blend of sensing *and* imaging *and* conceptualization' (IKTE II, §23). This aspect of Sellars' reading of Kant on sensible intuition is plausibly regarded as 'conceptualist' in at least the sense that it takes our most basic and immediate sensory awarenesses *of objects* (as the intuited *subject-terms available for judgment*) to be constituted by a certain kind of conceptual representational content. In this way such sensible intuitions or immediate

perceptual takings are thus shown *already to involve the categories* in our cognition of 'whatever objects may come before our senses' (B159), and this is the linchpin of Kant's transcendental deduction.

What Sellars further argues in SM I, however (and similarly in the 'Appendix' to SM as far as the form of *time* rather than space is concerned), as we have already seen, is that 'our conceptual representations of the spatial structure of physical states of affairs are guided by [analogous] "counterpart" features of our [nonconceptual] sense impressions' (SM Appendix, §3, my interpolations added). And as we have seen, the same account holds for such intrinsic qualitative sensory contents as the perceived red and rectangular surface of a brick: our conceptualized perceptual responses in such cases are 'guided by' the counterpart quasi-red, quasi-rectangular nonconceptual contents of the corresponding sense impressions. That the 'guiding' nonconceptual sensory states that have a 'strong voice in the outcome' are genuinely intensional *representational contents*, for Sellars, has to do not only with the postulated theoretical (for Sellars' Kant, 'transcendental') hypothesis that 'impressions have attributes and stand in relations which are counterparts of the attributes and relations of physical objects and events' (SM I, §65). It also has to do with the further fact that these substantive sense impression/outer object isomorphisms normally 'track' objects and thus 'guide us' reliably in our actions and in our judgments.

On Sellars' own wider views (cf. Sellars MEV, 1981), these animal and logical representational or isomorphic 'picturing' achievements are thanks both to our bodily *nature* (for Sellars, our proper biological functioning due ultimately to natural selection) and our *conceptual capacities* (reflecting a logical *space of reasons* derived from culturally inherited norms or 'ought-to-bes' of assertional practice). He sees Kant as essentially having put forward a nativist faculty version, involving Kant's pure a priori forms of sensibility ('Space and Time') and understanding (the categories), of an outlook on cognition that otherwise is very close to Sellars' own integrated conceptualist and nonconceptualist picture. Sellars characterizes the nonconceptual aspect of Kant's views on sensible intuition as a 'sheer receptivity' (e.g., SM I §§9–10, 17–19, 73–8), in contrast to Kant's fully developed conception of intuitions as singular conceptualized thought-responses to objects that are guided by and incorporate such nonconceptual contents. However, it is important to bear in mind that such sensible contents are 'sheer' only in the sense of 'being in no sense conceptual' ((SM I §16). They are *not* 'sheer' in the sense of lacking those reliable patterns of specific counterpart relational structures and intrinsic characters that make them the nonconceptual representations *of objects* of corresponding kinds and structures that they are.

The question is: how much of Sellars' own robust conception of such nonconceptual sensory representations, as I have sketched it in this chapter, can one actually find in Kant? How much goes beyond anything in Kant? And how much does *Sellars himself* recognize goes beyond Kant's own views?

In relation to 'sheer receptivity' Sellars refers us to Kant's characterizations (e.g., A99ff.) of sensory receptivity as providing us with a '*manifold of representations*, but not with a *representation of a manifold*, which latter [Kant] proceeds to equate with *representation of a manifold as a manifold*' (SM I, §19), i.e., with intuition in the conceptualized sense. But here Sellars argues that Kant, unlike Sellars' own view of the structured counterpart sensory relations that are isomorphic to the outer spatial relations of the physical objects they (nonconceptually) represent, was unfortunately committed to the following dead-end claim:

> [Kant is committed to the claim] that what the representations of sheer receptivity are *of* is in no sense complex, and hence that the representations of outer sense as such are not representations of spatial complexes. If I am right, the idea that Space is the form of outer sense is incoherent. Space can scarcely be the form of the represent*ings* of outer sense [JOS: hence the need for Sellars' *own* theory of *analogous counterpart* relations for sense-manifolds]; and if it is not the form of its represent*eds*, i.e. if nothing represented by outer sense as such is a spatial complex, the idea that Space is the form of outer sense threatens to disappear. (SM I, §19)

Contemporary interpreters who have defended the view that Kant is a nonconceptualist (again, cf. Schulting, ed. 2016) might well step in with other arguments to bolster Sellars' contention that nonetheless 'Kant "implicitly" gives some such account' as Sellars has outlined of the nonconceptual intuitional representation of space (and of time, and of the sensible 'particulars' that occupy them), or that Kant 'must have done so' (SM I, §78). But the actual 'cash' that Sellars provides for finding such a story *in Kant* is minimal by his own admission, and his main conclusion is that Kant's failure to make the distinction clearly (in particular by 'overlooking the importance of analogical concepts – save in theological contexts') had the unfortunate effect of sending subsequent philosophers on a nineteenth century reprise of the sensory-cognitive continuum of Locke and Leibniz:

> Kant's failure to distinguish clearly between the 'forms' of receptivity proper and the 'forms' of that which is represented by the intuitive conceptual representations which are 'guided' by receptivity – a distinction which is demanded both by the thrust of his argument, and by sound philosophy – had as its consequence that no sooner had he left the scene than these particular waters were muddied by Hegel and the Mills, and philosophy had to begin the slow climb 'back to Kant' which is still underway. (SM I, §75)

§3 Conclusion: Sellars' Variations on Kant's Appearances and Things in Themselves

Sellars' strongly ontological reading of Kant's things in themselves has stressed Kant's use of analogical thinking 'in theological contexts', no doubt thinking of Kant's various ways of spelling out reason's experience-transcending ideas of the 'unconditioned' (God, freedom, a community of souls) as 'ground of the appearances' in nature, in both morally-practical and regulative-theoretical terms. Occasionally Sellars, as we have seen, and his student Jay Rosenberg after him, suggest that Kant also held *something* like Sellars' own view of the analogical structure of 'things in themselves' and possibly even its Sellarsian reflection in the theoretically postulated analogical structure of our *sensings* 'in themselves' (i.e., Sellars' analogically spatial and analogically temporal sensory σ-manifolds and τ-manifolds: e.g., SM Appendix §§17–23). Thus both of them refer to Kant's reference to a 'duration' that is 'not a time' (B149, Sellars SM II.17, Rosenberg 2005, 78–9; Sellars there also cites Kant's reference at B798 to the concept of 'a presence that is not spatial' as at least 'non-contradictory'). Sellars, however, is very cautious in this regard, since he also holds that 'Kant's treatment of sensation is notoriously inadequate and inept' (KTE I, §3*n*; cf. SM II, §39*n*). And in fact, in his own lectures on Kant at Pittsburgh (reproduced in Sellars 2002b KPT 131), Sellars in fact makes clear that "Kant himself never says" that the manifold of sense is "quasi-spatial, *somehow spatial*," that is, analogously spatial in Sellars' postulated sense, in contrast to (but on Sellars' view undergirding) the form of space that we conceptually represent via the transcendental imagination.

Or again, at SM II, §72 Sellars remarks that:

> it would still have been open to Kant to say that things-in-themselves, in so far as they affect our sensibility, have, like sense impressions, attributes and relations which are *in their own way* analogous to those of perceptible things, and by virtue of which they elicit sense impressions which are in their *different* way endowed with Space-like characteristics (confused by Kant with the form of outer intuition), and perform the guiding role described above. That Kant implicitly accepted some such view of things-in-themselves is, I think, clear. Yet if the fact had been brought to his attention he would most certainly have claimed that this transcendental use of analogy is *empty*. The abstract concept of such Space-like characteristics could have 'cash value' only for God. (SM II, §72)

I think, *pace* Sellars, that it was *not* 'clear' that Kant 'implicitly accepted some such view of things-in-themselves', indeed partly for the reason of *emptiness* that Sellars here cites. Or again, Sellars remarks that Kant 'nowhere denies, and is not committed to denying, that the manifold of external sense as such is a relational structure. Indeed, the more general point can be made that Kant nowhere denies or need deny that the in-itself has a relational structure' (SM I, §76). In these passages and elsewhere I find the cited evidence to be extremely thin that Kant actually held or implicitly believed anything like the (non-theologically) analogical conception of either things in themselves or of our sense impressions that Sellars and Rosenberg suggest Kant either held, or implicitly held, or at least did not deny and had it 'open' to him to hold. Sellars himself clearly wants to find this more committal 'analogical' view to be 'implicit' in Kant's views on sensibility, but it is in fact, I conclude, nowhere to be found in Kant. Rosenberg, who along with Sellars has taught me more truths worth preserving from Kant's *theory of experience* than any other Kant commentator, asserts these doubtful claims concerning Kant's things in themselves more strongly than Sellars did, asserting straightforwardly that 'Kant's story of spatial experience' (2005, 80) in effect includes *all* of the analogical elements conjectured by Sellars to have implicitly informed Kant's views on sensibility and things in themselves.

Sellars concludes his remark above that Kant 'nowhere denies' that things in themselves or our sense impressions have structures analogous to those we perceive in physical objects, by stating that what Kant 'does deny, whether for good reasons or for bad, a topic for subsequent discussion, is that the relations we conceptually represent are the relations which the in-itself exemplifies' (SM I, §76). Sellars in fact goes on to argue in SM Chapter II, 'Appearances and Things in Themselves: 1. Material Things', that *Kant's own* reasons for denying that 'the relations we conceptually represent are the relations which the in-itself exemplifies' were indeed *unsound* arguments. However, Sellars also indicates that there exists a sound argument 'for the transcendental ideality of the [MI] perceptual world', one which 'lies in the distinction between perceptible physical objects and the objects of theoretical science, a distinction which was blurred by Kant' (SM II, §71*n*; cf. Landy 2011, 'Postscript'; O'Shea 2016, Ch. 7). The subsequent discussion (SM II, §§72–4) shows that Sellars here has in mind, of course, his own arguments pertaining to the ontological relocation and theoretical reconception of color-expanses that we rehearsed briefly in section §1 above. This, Sellars concludes, is an 'argument for the transcendental ideality of perceptible things which really works, and is the one I shall espouse' (SM II, §69).

My own view is that Sellars' general suggestion in *Science and Metaphysics* that Kant may have sought, as did Sellars himself, to integrate the conception of a certain kind of nonconceptual sensory representation of objects within an otherwise strongly conceptualist outlook on our perceptual cognition, represented an important anticipation of later 'nonconceptualist' views both in general and

in the interpretation of Kant. Furthermore, I have argued elsewhere that one can retain Sellars' 'Kantian naturalist' hypothesis of a middle way on that and other topics without accepting Sellars' (which is *not* Kant's) radical 'transcendental idealist' thesis that the manifest image or common sense world of colored objects 'is radically false, i.e., there *really are* no such things as the physical objects and processes of the common sense framework' (though of course Sellars emphasizes that there are scientifically reconceived *counterparts* to those objects) (SRII V, §23). Sellars' arguments specifically based on color and other sensible qualities rest on premises and qualia intuitions that have increasingly been shown to be highly contentious.

Furthermore, while I am also sympathetic to Sellars' outlook on conceptual change in science and to his anti-instrumentalist scientific realism in general, the idea that the paradigms of scientific progress provided by the revolutionary shifts from Newton to Einstein, or from the Charles-Boyle phenomenal gas law to the kinetic theory of gases, should lead us to conclude that *all* scientific progress (including in all the 'special sciences') will or must be characterized by this ontological replacement model, strikes me as just the sort of matter that Sellars' Peircean fallibilism ought to have left open. So with respect to both the problem of color and the fact of scientific revolutions, I resist Sellars' *philosophical* contention that either of them entails the 'strictly speaking' falsity of higher-level ontologies, including our common sense conception of persisting colored objects.

I conclude that Sellars' and Rosenberg's attempts to preserve the core truths in Kant's theory of experience, and to *integrate* them with an overall scientific naturalist outlook on the nature of things – including the nonconceptual representational dimension of perceptual experience examined in this chapter – can and should survive the rejection of some of their more doubtful interpretations and adaptations of Kant's 'transcendental idealism' in particular. Perhaps the perplexities arising from Sellars' interpretive replacement of Kant's transcendental idealism by his own manifest image/scientific image distinction should also lead us to reassess wholesale, once again, the strongly ontological reading of Kant's own views on our largely empty thought of 'things in themselves' as the 'ground of appearances'. It may well be that Kant's own 'empirical realism', which included within it, *for Kant*, whatever lawfully successful scientific postulations might happen to fall outside the particular limits or thresholds of our sense organs (A225–6/B272–3),[10] is realism enough for any plausible scientific realism. It is certainly realism enough, I believe, to support the sort of Kantian naturalist outlook on human beings and the world that Sellars sought to envision.[11]

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[10] See also Kant's 1790 reply to Eberhard (*On a discovery...*), *Akademie* edition, 8:210, *Kant's Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, p. 302.

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