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UNIVERSITE D'OTTAWA ÉCOLE DES GRADUÉS

AN EXAMINATION OF THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN
THE CONTENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND THE OBJECT OF
KNOWLEDGE AS THE FOUNDATION OF ROY WOOD SELLARS'
THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

by

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INTRODUCTION

It was a fateful day in the history of philosophy when René Descartes, left alone with his stove in the comfort of his room, forgot the stove, and, conscious only of René Descartes, attempted to rebuild the whole of Western thought on the Cogito. This Cogito became the dogmatic assumption, either explicitly or implicitly, from which most subsequent major thinkers took their point of departure. This pure Cogito which was so arbitrarily superimposed upon reality was not confined to the class-rooms of academic philosophers; rather, it crept out of the lecture halls and text books into every other discipline, and eventually to the ordinary man in the street, with all the practical and stifling effects it consequently imposed upon a truly human dimension and experience.

"If I were asked what was the most disastrous moment in the history of Europe I should be strongly tempted to answer that it was that period of leisure when René Descartes, having no claims to meet, remained for a whole day 'shut up with a stove'... That many of our worst troubles, not only in philosophy, but also in politics and economics, with all this means for human happiness and misery, are closely associated with the habit of thought then established, I have no doubt." ¹

¹ William Temple, "The Cartesian Faux-Pas", in Nature, Man and God, p. 57; taken from God and the Unconscious, by Victor White, Meridian Books, New York, 1952, p. 118.

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The dark and sombre shadow of Descartes was to loom heavy upon the world for the next two or three centuries, with his Cogito placing an unbridgeable abyss between thought and reality, between knower and known, between man and nature, between the pre-reflexive demands of human experience and its adequate conceptual analysis.

It has only been in these recent times, recent as far as the history of philosophy is concerned, that we have begun to free ourselves from the effects of this Cartesian venture, which attempted to build thought upon an a priori Cogito which had no existential foundation. That we are now escaping from this Cartesian prison is in no small measure to be attributed to the Neo-thomist revival with its ever-valuable insights, and to the fresh and enlightening inquiries of existentialism and phenomenology.

Outside these major currents, however, there were other thinkers who, attempting to overcome the Cartesian bifurcation, advocated and professed a new and realistic approach to the problems of philosophy. Shortly after the turn of this century there flowed among this current of realism a wave of thinkers in America who, while expressing a general continuity in their thought, labelled themselves Critical Realists.²

² A volume of essays, explicating the respective positions of its authors, was published jointly in 1920 by the critical realist school whose members numbered, among Sellars, Durant Drake, A.O. Lovejoy, J.B. Pratt, A.K. Rogers, George Santayana, and C.A. Strong. It was entitled Essays in Critical Realism; cf. bibliography.

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Among this group was Roy Wood Sellars, regarded by many as its most eminent spokesman. Like many thinkers of his day, Sellars wanted to forget the fateful Cartesian Cogito and get behind the whole body of Cartesian and post-Cartesian presuppositions. "We must forget Cartesian dualism and start afresh on the basis of naturalism. Away with Transcendental Egos and things-in-themselves! The whole terminology must be forgotten".³

With this profession of naturalism Sellars establishes himself as an open enemy of Cartesian rationalism. Sellars' naturalism, with materialism, affirmed the importance of matter and man's continuity with nature; but with idealism it affirmed human ends, values and purposes, but these were to be found in and through nature.

It is with respect to man's continuity with nature that Sellars' naturalism raises its strongest objections to separations of any kind - spirit and matter, mind and body, man and nature, subject and object, knower and known. Sellars, like most naturalists, seems preoccupied and haunted by the ghost of Descartes, for every distinction of the kind just mentioned is seen in terms of the Cartesian bifurcation, that fatal gulf which ushered in modern idealism. To a naturalist like Sellars this was one of the most tragic moments in the history of philosophy, and he has resolutely dedicated himself to the task of eliminating separations wherever they may be found.

3 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 217.

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However, Sellars was convinced that if his naturalism was to adequately overcome the Cartesian bifurcation, and establish a re-integration of mind and body, man and nature, subject and object, his naturalism must be given a sound epistemological introduction, and realism - a critical realism - could only serve as such an introduction.⁴

It is the express purpose of this study to examine and evaluate the theory of knowledge, the critical realism of Roy Wood Sellars. His epistemological doctrine maintains the realistic position that we know things, that we know them directly, and that our knowledge must somehow be grounded in sense perception. But at the heart of Sellars' epistemology he postulates a distinction between the content of knowledge and the object of knowledge. In the light of this distinction, our study will attempt to ascertain whether Sellars overcame the Cartesian dualism and provided an adequate explanation for the "faith" that underlies realism; or whether this distinction ultimately led him unwittingly to embrace another form of subjective idealism. This is our task, but before turning to it we wish to make one more introductory comment.

⁴ Roy W. Sellars, "Realism, Naturalism, and Humanism", in Contemporary American Philosophy, ed. G.P. Adams and W.P. Montague, vol. II, p. 274. "The rejection of idealism in theory of knowledge, which had been coming apace, was already shaking objective idealism and spiritualism to their foundations. Critical realism implied physical realism, and physical realism is at least half-way to naturalism. Only the mind-body problem stood in the path. Achieve the idea of mind as intrinsic to the living organism, and naturalism is full-fledged. And, as I pointed out, I had always carried this problem in mind while I was working at theory of knowledge. Physical Realism, plus the rejection of dualism, spelt naturalism."

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Our purpose in choosing to work with the thought of Sellars was simply to understand a little better a certain trend, a movement in the history of philosophy, specifically, the history of contemporary American philosophy. He was outside the major philosophical currents of his time (e.g. Neo-thomism, Existentialism, and Phenomenology), and even in his own country, it was the work of William James, John Dewey and George Santayana which attracted the greater attention. Sellars was in fact a minor philosopher, not in the sense of unimportant, but of lesser influence. But not all can be a Plato, an Aristotle, a Thomas, a Descartes, a Kant, a Hegel, a Heidegger or a Maritain: the larger number of philosophers are minor figures. But quite often the historian of philosophy achieves access to the philosophical climate of an age or a movement through such minor figures. The main current does not necessarily always flow through the most eminent and famous minds of a given age; but even when it does it still must be supported by a gathering of "minor" philosophers if that thought is to be seen and comprehended in its fullest dimensions. Such is the role of the thought of Roy Wood Sellars, and to it we now turn.

CHAPTER ISELLARS' FUNDAMENTAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN
THE OBJECT AND CONTENT OF KNOWLEDGE

The history of philosophy testifies to the fact that the great thinkers from antiquity to the present have always been concerned with the problem of human knowledge. However, it is only since the Cartesian treatment of the problem that philosophers have dealt with the question as a problem in its own right. That is, they have occupied themselves in explicating and investigating, in a systematic presentation, the question of knowledge in its multi-dimensional character.

The history of modern philosophy since the Cartesian "experiment" has reaffirmed, time and again, that an initial and fundamental error in the answer given to any of the multiple questions involved in the problem of knowledge, will inevitably assume enormous proportions according as its implications are further and further unfolded. An error lurking in the roots of a system of thought can only mean a more intricate entanglement in error if that thought is consistent with itself.

At the root of Sellars' epistemology he postulates a cardinal principle, a fundamental distinction between the content of knowledge and the object of knowledge, upon which the totality of his epistemological edifice is constructed. Our question then is as follows: on the basis of this underlying distinction does Sellars adequately ground his professed realism, that is, does he provide a sufficient critical explanation to make the convictions underlying realism an

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intelligible fact; or in postulating this fundamental distinction is he perhaps taking an uncalculated risk of falling into a form of subjective idealism?

Sellars' own theory of knowledge, which he terms 'critical realism', is an attempt to mediate what to him are two extreme positions: namely, the extreme realism of common sense (what he refers to as natural or naive realism) and the tradition of subjective idealism since Descartes. His own theory does not attempt to mediate these two extremes after the manner of a compromise, but rather in the sense of rejecting the deficiencies of both while retaining their valid and legitimate insights.¹ Thus, it is his critical analysis and evaluation of both idealism and the extreme realism of common sense that provide the framework within which Sellars' fundamental distinction between the object and content of knowledge is evolved. Since this basic distinction is the key to any clear understanding of Sellars' theory of knowledge, it is essential to examine carefully the criticisms he makes of naive realism and idealism, paying special attention to how he arrived at his object-content distinction, along with the meaning and significance he attaches to it.

1 "We must appreciate subjectivism and yet be realists". Roy W. Sellars, "Knowledge and its Categories", in Essays in Critical Realism, London, 1920, p. 190.

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In developing this chapter to arrive at a clear and deeper understanding of Sellars' basic epistemological distinction, we shall adhere to the same methodology that he himself applies throughout his writings. That is, he first undertakes a descriptive analysis to uncover the elements present in the "knowledge-claim" at the level of common sense; then follows an examination of that claim to determine whether it can stand up to the claims of scientific (e.g. critical) thinking. This then leads to the differences between naive realism contrasted with Sellars' own critical realism, wherein the distinction between object and content of knowledge becomes manifest. For Sellars this distinction is not logical but very real. Therefore, lest anyone think that his position implies subjective idealism, he sets his own critical realism against that tradition, marking off the differences and distinctions. In so doing Sellars feels that he is providing a justification for his own theory, albeit in a negative fashion.

For Sellars the starting point for all philosophical investigation is the ordinary man's common-sense view of the world.² Philosophy, like any other discipline, can no more have an arbitrary beginning

² Roy W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, New York, MacMillan, 1926, p. 38-39.

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any more than an arbitrary ending. Like the empirical sciences it must grow out of ordinary experience as a supplementation and correction of it. Philosophy arises out of specific problems which must be faced, investigated, and answered. This setting thereby gives it strength and significance. Now one of the problems which philosophy is called upon to investigate is the nature of knowledge, or as Sellars would prefer to specify it, at this stage at least, as the nature of perception.

The ordinary man entertains a view of perception which is implicit in his general day-to-day outlook upon the world. He is convinced that he knows things such as trees, cars, rocks, etc., and he is equally convinced that he knows them as trees, cars, rocks, etc. In other words, he rests content in the comfortable assurance that he actually intuits or apprehends physical things as they exist in the external world. Moreover, in his knowledge of the physical world the ordinary man is most certain that physical things exhibit a trinity of factors which to him are rather evident: namely, that things are independent from myself or of my knowing them; that things are "public" - e.g., the way the ordinary man looks at things is shared in common with the rest of mankind; and finally, that things

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are permanent, they continue to endure or exist when we no longer see them or think of them.³

According to Sellars, this common-sense view of knowledge exhibits a profound truth despite its "impossible naiveté" and inadequacy. It contains the truth characteristic of all realism "that knowledge is distinct from the reality known, that is, that the reality known does not depend for either its nature or its being upon our knowledge of it".⁴ However, present with this profound truth, naive realism also harbors an illusion or "natural mistake":⁵ it is natural because of the exigencies of everyday living and for all practical purposes the outlook of common sense provides sufficient guides to behavior; it is a mistake because the ordinary man is deceived in his conviction that he inspects, intuits or apprehends external

3 "At the stage of common sense, knowledge is on the whole regarded as an intuition by the percipient of the things about him. He is aware of them; they are open to his inspection; they enter and pass from his field of experience. These given objects are regarded as things independent of this awareness. They are thought of as relatively permanent and executive. They are co-real with him, the organic individual who perceives them. It is within this setting and in relation to these meanings that the idea of knowledge is formed." R.W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, Open Court Publishing Co., Chicago, 1922, p. 24; cf. also, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 32, and "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World", in The Philosophical Review, vol. 27 (1918), p. 503.

4 R.W. Sellars, "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World", in The Philosophical Review, vol. 27 (1918), p. 503.

5 R.W. Sellars, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, New York, MacMillan, 1932, p. 63. For Sellars even the critical realist succumbs to the outlook of common-sense when he is not reflecting upon the question of knowledge.

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existent things. This mistake is consequent upon the unreflecting and uncritical character of naive realism.⁶

"Common sense has no reflective theory of the nature and conditions of the event which it calls perceiving a thing. Certainly there is no awareness of the activity of any particular ego or self from which energy goes forth to touch the thing, and as it were to light it up."⁷

Certainly in any perceptual experience there is an act of perceiving and a perceiving subject. These elements are included in the naive outlook but the ordinary man does not advert or attend to either of these dimensions in a reflective manner. For him perception is no problem but simply an accepted fact. He looks at and reacts to physical objects and to other persons without any reflex awareness of the conditions which make his view possible. Knowledge for him is direct and immediate (intuited, apprehended). Sellars maintains the directness of perception but will uphold a mediatory process.

⁶ In his description of the common-sense view of knowledge and the difficulties confronting it, Sellars does not wish to maintain that we possess a theory of knowledge at this level. He questions the attempt of the Neo-realist School to develop an epistemology which to him begins and terminates in common-sense. What Sellars is doing is simply articulating what seems to take place in this naive outlook. Only when naive realism becomes systematized and refined can it be considered a theory of knowledge. R.W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 36, 38, 41, 44; also, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 56-57.

⁷ Roy W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 33.

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At this point in his descriptive analysis of naive realism, Sellars gives a brief consideration to the positions of Berkeley and Hume, signalling them out for erroneously interpreting and undermining the data of common sense. They were led through their critical reflection "to doubt the independent reality of the world as presented",⁸ thus violating the common denominator of all realism that knowledge and the reality known are distinct.

When Berkeley articulated his unhappy phrase esse est percipi - being is dependent upon knowing, he was being consistent with and true to his Cartesian heritage. We know only our ideas. For Hume, all we know are our sense impressions which are simply faint copies. Here, then, is that fatal insertion violating the dictates of common sense by substituting ideas and sensations for the very object itself.

Completing his descriptive analysis of common sense the question now facing Sellars is whether or not it can be converted from a mere description to meet the demands of an adequate, scientific theory of knowledge. Here we arrive at, what to Sellars are, the six major difficulties confronting naive realism, difficulties which are not consequent upon its realistic outlook but upon its illusion of

⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

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intuition. They are accordingly in summary form: ⁹

(a) The fact that the content of perception seems to be a function of many processes both extra-organic and intra-organic.

What Sellars means here is that the object of perception in the common-sense view is experienced as if it were being perceived immediately and as it is in itself. However, when we begin to reflect we realize that the act of perception involves mediatory, causal processes. These mediatory processes are, in relation to the body of the percipient, both external and internal. These extra-organic and intra-organic facts are not taken into account or consistently maintained in the assumption that what is seen are physical things in themselves.

(b) The distinction between the physical thing and its appearances. The impression one gets of a tree is dependent upon the way it appears to him at any particular moment, and as viewed from a particular angle. However, the ordinary man will insist that what he sees is the thing (tree) itself. For Sellars, the ordinary man's conviction of the immediacy of perception is incompatible with the

⁹ Ibid., pp. 43-58; on page forty-four Sellars lists these six difficulties in capsule form while the remainder of the chapter treats of each one in a detailed manner under a clear heading for each. On account of this and in order to avoid inordinate multiplication of references we restrict our footnotes of said difficulties to this notation. Cf. also R.W. Sellars, Critical Realism, Chicago, Rand-McNally & Co., 1916, pp. 7-21 where the same difficulties are given extended treatment.

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common-sense distinction between a thing and its appearances.

(c) The lack of complete correspondent variation between things and what is presented. The appearance of a thing changes while the thing remains the same. The percipient may be viewing a table which appears oblong but in fact he knows it is actually square.

(d) The differences between the experiences of individuals perceiving what they regard as the same object. This and the following two differences stress the intra-organic factors in perception - e.g., the mental or subjective factors. There are personal elements involved in the act of perception which common sense does not consider. The data of perception are partly determined by the percipient's interests, training, and education.

(e) The difficulty met with in explaining images, dream-life and memory on the basis of natural realism. The data of perception have an intangible character as soon as they are distinguished from things and regarded as appearances. The similarity between the datum of perception and the datum of memory now suggests that both are internal and are somehow bound up with the individual who is perceiving and remembering. In view of this, Sellars maintains that, in terms of naive realism, we cannot account for the imagined presence of the object in the event of a dream.

(f) The synthetic or constructed character of the perceptual field. What we see is in some sense a construct expressing stimulation

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and complicated response. And yet we all believe that we see an independent object. Our past perceptions of similar events are factors which determine our perception of an event in the present moment.

On a Sunday morning I hear a sound outside my front door and say that the morning paper has arrived. The sound is discriminated, recognized and interpreted. It means the dropping of a newspaper on the doorstep. The mind easily passes from sign to thing signified.

These, then, are the six difficulties confronting naive realism which, according to Sellars, constitute its breakdown. These objections are all interconnected but Sellars is satisfied that they refute any theory which upholds that the object of perception is that which is seen in itself. For Sellars an analysis of the act of perception reveals the presence in it of subjective elements which altogether forbid our regarding it as an intuition of the object. We cannot develop Sellars' ontology here, but we should keep in mind that when Sellars is referring to "subjective elements" he is doing so within his naturalistic framework; thus, any and all theories of "intuition" imply for Sellars the Cartesian cleavage between mind and body, and is therefore anathema. It is to Sellars' credit that he wished to overcome the Cartesian dualism, take mind and body from their state of isolation and restore their unity. In his attempt, however, to do so, Sellars appears to have little or no understanding of any traditional moderate realism which upholds an intuitive theory

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of knowledge in the sense that it subscribes to two co-principles actively engaged and integrated in a substantial unity. Intuition for Sellars is the child of Platonism and Cartesianism, and even the "forms" of Aristotle and Aquinas are "floating forms" and "barren virgins".¹⁰ At this early stage of our presentation these comments are in no way intended as a criticism of Sellars' position, even by way of anticipation. They are mentioned only to help specify the character of his own thought and indicate his ardent desire to avoid the pitfalls of subjectivism. One can, however, question his historical accuracy.

Thus far we have seen Sellars' insistence upon using the experience of everyday life as a starting point for philosophy. Yet, some of the claims of common-sense do not stand the test of scientific critical thinking, chief of which is the claim that we literally apprehend things in themselves.

¹⁰ Roy W. Sellars, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 44, 108-09, 287; and Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 58, 173 ff. Although Sellars only makes brief references to Aristotle and Aquinas throughout his writings he is not doing so in an unfavorable manner. He accepts the authority of Professor Etienne Gilson who tells us that St. Thomas was certainly a realist. But one distinctly gets the impression that Sellars doesn't take the pains to investigate this Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. The reason, however, is that Sellars sees it in terms of his "bête-noir" - e.g. no intuitionist theory of knowledge. Aristotle and Thomas may well have a realistic point of departure, but because they accept an intuitionist theory of knowledge, Sellars thinks they will be inevitably led to a form of subjective idealism. One cannot read Sellars for very long without realizing that an intuitionist theory of knowledge ipso facto implies a dualism of isolation or separation; he never considers a possible "dualism" of integration.

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From the very beginning of his inquiry Sellars appears to be faced with an insurmountable difficulty. How can he sacrifice the firm conviction treasured by common-sense that we really intuit things, and still maintain an epistemological theory which professes to be realistic? His whole knowledge-theory is in a sense an attempt to solve this fundamental question. He introduces important distinctions whereby he attempts to bridge the gap between naive realism and his own critical realism, but whether he succeeds or not remains to be seen.

According to Sellars there are two distinguishable elements in common-sense perception which he describes as:

"The affirmation of a co-real and the assigned set of characters or aspects. Suppose we call these respectively, the object of perception and the content of perception. The content is intuited; the object is reacted to and affirmed." 11

Here, in capsule form, we have a crystallization of Sellars' whole epistemological position. What follows is simply an explication of its implications. In the foregoing passage Sellars evidently maintains that naive realism implicitly recognizes a distinction or contrast between the extramental thing and its plurality of sensuous qualities. It is to the credit of the critical realist that he develops and expands this contrast through patient reflections. The effect of this developed contrast is to free naive realism "from its

11 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 196.

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prepossession that knowledge is, or can be, an intuition of the thing itself".¹² In order to comprehend Sellars' developed contrast between the object and content of perception we must examine the meaning he attaches to "intuition", and his distinction between sensation and perception.

When Sellars speaks of intuition in reference to his own position we have mentioned that his position entails a naturalistic ontology; that is, being is co-extensive with matter. The percipient, for Sellars, does not have a special immaterial or spiritual faculty whereby he is able to extricate the "essence" or "form" of a thing. Therefore, when Sellars speaks of the ordinary man's illusory conviction that he "intuits" things, intuit would better be understood in terms of somehow associated with, in contact with, or in "causal correlation" with the object. Sellars retains the use of the word "intuition" in developing his own epistemological position but here it means the subjective awareness of the content of perception.¹³

12 Ibid., p. 189.

13 Sellars isn't always exact in his use of terms, often multiplying terminology to achieve precision and clarity. For some enlightening insights and comments about Sellars' vocabulary, cf. Norman Paul Melchert, Realism, Materialism and the Mind, C.C. Thomas, Springfield, Illinois, 1968, p. 8-11.

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This meaning will become clearer in the distinction between sensation and perception.

For Sellars, sensation and perception are not to be identified although sensation is included as an elementary part of the total experience we call perceiving.¹⁴ At the level of sensation there are external stimuli impinging upon the sense organs of the percipient. These external stimuli cause¹⁵ or provide the "sense-data", "appearances" or "sensory presentations" which are the content of perception; the sense-data and the content of perception are one and the same, identical. This identity follows upon the fact that - and this is the important point for Sellars - the presented sensational content enjoys a subjective status. In other words, sense-data are "subjective occurrences" within the consciousness of the percipient.¹⁶

14 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 30.

15 Briefly, Sellars accepts a causal theory of sensations (sensations are given, caused) and a cognitive theory of perception (we know or respond to real external physical objects). How Sellars conceives this distinction will become manifest in our next chapter when we discuss his theory of the "levels of knowledge".

16 Other words and phrases Sellars uses to express the interiority of this presented sensational content are: 'personal', 'psychical', 'mental' 'bound up with the particular percipient organism'. cf. Roy W. Sellars, "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World", p. 505; Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 32.

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The subjective status of the sensory content of perception exhibits a two-fold dimension: existentially, in accord with Sellars' naturalistic ontology, and epistemologically, in accord with his critical realism.

"How, then must we adjudge the status of the presented content in perception? Existentially, as an intracortical occurrence to be correlated with the perceived object; epistemologically, as the contentual material out of which knowledge of the object can be gleaned." 17

When Sellars speaks of the sensory content as "contentual material" he does not mean that they are ideas in the cognitive sense. Rather "it is the cognitive use of these subjective events which makes them ideas".¹⁸ Sellars' criticisms of the idealistic thinkers are directed at them because they swung their attention away from the the cognitive use of this mental content to their mere givenness as subjective occurrences or events. In a more positive vein, the sense-data as the subjective presentational content serve a symbolic function or pragmatic role in the total act of perceiving. That is,

17 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 39; also "Concerning 'Transcendence' and 'Bifurcation'", in Mind, vol. 31 (1922), p. 34.

18 Ibid., p. 28; how the percipient makes such "cognitive use" of the content of perception will be discussed in the next chapter when we treat Sellars' notion of concepts and categories.

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the part they have to play is that of a provider, furnishing the material which the percipient uses to obtain knowledge about an object or thing.¹⁹

"The object of knowledge is identical with the object of perception; but whereas in perception we tend to clothe the object in the apprehended content, we now think of the content as material for obtaining knowledge about the object. We use the content in the critical knowledge claim."²⁰

For Sellars, then, the sensory aspects of things are apprehended and open to our intuitive inspection. Because of this the ordinary man, through his lack of reflective discrimination, confuses physical things with their sensuous characters and is convinced that the physical object is also open to this intuitive type of inspection. But "the physical existent is not a sensible thing".²¹ The percipient

19 A thing is not an object in its own right. It is made an object by what Sellars describes as the "selective activity" of the organism; that is, whatever the percipient is attentive to and adjusting to is an object. Being made an object is a kind of a dignity bestowed on the thing. The distinction is not important but because Sellars indicates it we mention it in passing. cf. Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 45.

20 Ibid., p. 34; "I am inclined to think that sensations take their place as sense-data and sensory appearances and symbols within perception". "Causation and Perception", in The Philosophical Review, vol. 53, p. 542-43; cf. also, "Critical Realism and its Critics", in The Philosophical Review, vol. 33, p. 382-83.

21. Roy W. Sellars, "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World", in The Philosophical Review, vol. 27 (1918), p. 504.

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apprehends only the qualities or characters of things and in so doing he does NOT apprehend the thing itself.²² "The percipient cannot apprehend the existent itself in the given content",²³ because reflection has shown the content and the object to be "numerically distinct".²⁴

Sellars, at this point, seems to have met with a paradoxical position. We grasp only a subjective sensory content while the illusive physical existent escapes us. What we grasp seems empty and hollow.

"... we are left with contentual objects hanging in the air, as it were, and yet masquerading at the least excuse as self-existent and substantial. We are led to ask ourselves whether being can be given. Is not all this objective content a peculiar substitute for being? The object of common sense breaks down into a self-existent reality, which cannot be given, and a content which is given."²⁵

The paradox for Sellars, however, is apparent rather than real. According to him the discovery that only subjective contents are given

22 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 195.
"The only realm we can intuit is the realm of (sense) data".

23 Roy W. Sellars, "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World", p. 504; cf. also Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 32-33.

24 Ibid., p. 504 and 507.

25 Ibid., p. 506; also Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 33.

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is a valid insight shared by all modern philosophy. But the point which Sellars emphasizes is that

"these subjective contents are objective within consciousness, that they are subjective only in the sense of in the individual experiencer, not a part of the physical environment to which the conscious individual is reacting." 26

The optimistic conclusion that Sellars draws from this assertion is that it only destroys the illusion of an apprehensional view of the physical world. "It proves that only mental contents can be given; it does not prove that we can know only phenomena."²⁷ Sellars accuses Kant of confusing these two principles. Kant, following Locke and Hume, maintained that only phenomena can be given and concluded that only phenomena can be known. For Sellars, the subjective sense-data or mental contents are the material of knowledge and not the object of knowledge. The mental content of perception provide the furnishings which the percipient uses to obtain knowledge about the external physical world. This does not mean either that we must infer a realm of physical existents co-real with ourselves; we affirm it through the instrumentality of the sense-data.

"Instead, then, of saying that the 'world we infer can only be made up of the matter of experience, that is can only be made up of mental pictures in new combinations', we should

26 Ibid., p. 506; also Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 33.

27 Ibid., p. 506.

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say that "the world we affirm can only be known in terms of the characters given in experience". In short, contents are given or intuited, while objects are known". 28

We now have the conditions comprising the total set of perception. It is through his notion of affirmation of co-real that Sellars clearly distinguishes perception from sensation. In perception we know a thing.

"There are many meanings and images on the content side of perception which raise it above the purely sensational level, and there is an act of affirmation directed toward this content. We perceive things and not sense-data. The category of thinghood, which is a very empirical category, has arrived and, with its arrival, sense-data has been interpreted into the sensuous qualities of things." 29

For Sellars, then, to know is not to grasp the essence or inner nature of a thing, but rather, to affirm some thing as real and as permanent as ourselves through the instrumentality of the subjective sense-data. Now, to know (affirm) in this manner is to understand what is meant by "transcendence". Sellars claims that it is one of his chief contributions in epistemology to have taken the mystery out of transcendence (e.g. no mysterious extrication of essences)

28 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 195.

29 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 30; (Emphasis ours) "Thinghood and perception go together", in Essays in Critical Realism, p. 197.

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and to have brought to light the notion of transcendence as affirmation, pointing to, referring to, or denoting an object.

"Thus independence gets an additional epistemological meaning, which is called transcendence, through the full realization that even elementary cognition is directed through sense-presentations and concepts at a selected object. The thing made the object of the act (of perception) is transcendent in that it is not given within experience as are the intuited sense-data and understood concepts but only cognitively given, that is known". 30

Thus far, we have seen enough of how Sellars' critical reflection has led him to develop and extend the distinction between the content of perception and the object of perception: the content being the subjective sense-data, that which is given, presented, intuited; the object of perception is that which is NOT given but affirmed or known. As a final point, it is on the basis of this distinction that Sellars labels himself an "epistemological dualist", and it is only in the light of this distinction that the phrase has any justification. 31

30 Roy W. Sellars, "Critical Realism and the Independence of the Object", in The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 34 (1937), p. 547-48; also "Causation and Perception", p. 539; The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 76-78.

31 Roy W. Sellars, "On the Nature of Our Knowledge of the Physical World", p. 507; also, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 23; "But the epistemological dualist comes to the rescue of the realist and points out that the object of knowledge is never given in knowledge but only the content of knowledge."

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We have noted throughout how Sellars' critical realism, like common-sense realism, consistently emphasizes the directness of knowledge (we know things). Simultaneously, his position purports to correct the natural mistake (intuitive grasp of essences) of common-sense, by upholding critical realism's mediatory processes (we perceive things in terms of the given content). Through Sellars' criticisms of naive realism and his insistence upon the mediatory processes in knowledge we might be led to think that perception is restricted to a knowledge of its contents thereby undermining realism itself with a resultant advocacy of idealism. However, Sellars cautions his reader against any such hasty conclusion.

"An important question of method arises here. Because of these difficulties confronting natural realism, many writers have swung entirely away from realism to what is called idealism. We must, I think, set our faces sternly against any such hasty step. We shall later see that philosophy took this hasty step for a while and has only in our own day returned to a reconsideration of idealism". 32

Sellars is adamant in his claim that his own position is essentially different from all forms of subjective idealism. His basis for making this claim is that the content of knowledge is material or means to knowledge and never an object in their own right. We turn now to

32 Roy W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 44; also, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, the chapter on "Idealism an Interlude", pp. 25-46.

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Sellars' examination and criticism of the idealistic tradition. For Sellars, the importance of undertaking this criticism lies, not only in differentiating his critical realism from idealism, but in providing a negative defense of his position.

Idealism, for Sellars, since its Cartesian inception, was not an arbitrary "whimsical aberration", but rather a necessary interlude having its adequate causes.³³ Descartes' subjectivism was a reaction against the skepticism of Montaigne who had cast a spell of doubt over the validity of external sense knowledge, which is the anchor and foundation stone of realism. External sense knowledge is entirely dependent upon the real, upon what is outside of knowledge; moreover, it does not produce its object, but receives its object from outside. Descartes was unable to defend the validity of sense knowledge and the mathematical orientation of his mind made that defense hardly worth while.

Being a mathematician Descartes approached philosophy through mathematics and an unsound, mechanistic theory of physical nature. Mathematical reasoning, however, is purely logical in character concerning itself only with beings of reason; it is indifferent to really existing actual beings. Because of this preoccupation it is an

³³ Concerning the "adequate causes" of idealism, Sellars errs historically in his appreciation of those causes. cf. R.W. Sellars, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, pp. 108-109. We follow the historical interpretation of M. Etienne Gilson, The Unity of Philosophical Experience, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937, pp. 125-128.

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easy step for the mathematician to believe that he is not thinking about things (beings), but simply about thoughts. Such was the fate of Descartes. Demanding mathematical certitude as the only certitude, and casting a disastrous distrust over the validity of sense knowledge, it was easy for Descartes to dismiss the real existence of the sensible material world, including his own body. He looked at objective reality as though it were exclusively mathematical and was led to assume (an assumption which became the dogmatic starting point for all modern philosophy) that man in his thinking attains directly and immediately his own thoughts, his ideas and concepts. Man was a "thinking substance"; this was his nature and the totality of his ideas were derived from that nature.³⁴ But as Sellars effectively points out

"Some of these thoughts claim to represent material things external to the mind, but we have, as yet, no guaranty that their claim is true. Our minds seem isolated from things and shut up in themselves. Is there any way to judge these claims." ³⁵

He continues by showing how Descartes here appeals to the veracity of God as the guaranty that what is clearly and distinctly thought by him has an objective counterpart, an actual extramental existence.

³⁴ René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, translated by L.J. Lafleur, III, 1960, p. 33.

³⁵ Roy W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 63.

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"But after I have recognized the existence of a God, and because I have at the same time recognized the fact that all things depend upon him, and that he is no deceiver, and in consequence of that I have judged that all I conceive clearly and distinctly cannot fail to be true... no opposing reason can be brought against me which shall make me ever call it in question; and thus I have a true and certain knowledge of it." 36

In short, Descartes over-emphasized the immanence or interiority of thought and took the autonomy of the thinking subject as the point of departure for subsequent thinking. Consequently, he had to prove the objectivity of thought, he had to bridge the gap between interiority and extramental reality. It is an effort in futility and it is the merit of Cartesian philosophy to show that it cannot be done. Sellars states as much when he asks:

"And if the knower is in a very real sense limited to his ideas and needs some supernatural sanction before he can have any assurance that there is an external world and that his ideas reveal it, is not knowledge in a precarious position?" 37

Descartes, then, took his ideas to be the object of knowledge, and in Sellars' language, made an arbitrary identification between the content

36 Ibid., p. 63. This quote is taken from René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, V, p. 67.

37 Ibid., p. 64; also, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 32.

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and the object of knowledge. We now pass with Sellars to examine how Locke, Berkeley and Hume attempted to handle the Cartesian dilemma.

John Locke's English mentality rebelled against the too abstract indulgences of Descartes. Locke rejected the Cartesian theory of innate ideas, but while ardently refuting that doctrine he unwittingly and unquestionably accepted the spirit that begot it. He dismissed the clear-cut traditional distinction between intellection and sensation, between concepts and phantasms, and set down all the principles of sensism.³⁸ Locke, thereby, swung to the other extreme. While Descartes' "angeology" made man a disembodied "bloodless" subject, Locke made man a glorified animal. Both, however, regard ideas as objects immediately known. For Locke, an idea is "whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks."³⁹ Phantasm, notion, species, concepts, images are all ideas. When Locke is faced with the problem of the objectivity of knowledge we come face to face with his famous definition which seems to make knowledge of an external world impossible.

38 Ibid., p. 65. "On the whole, Locke is more of an empiricist than Descartes and seeks to lessen the gulf between sense and reason."

39 Ibid., p. 65; Quotation taken from John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Dover Publications, New York, 1959, vol. I, Introduction, p. 32.

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"Since the mind, in all of its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does and can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them." 40

Locke proceeds to defend a curious objectivity for certain sensible qualities. Those qualities which are perceived by more than one sense, such as figure and size, are truly and exactly as they are represented, but the proper sensibles, like color and sound are only causally objective. In other words, things possess the power to cause these sensations even though there is in them nothing like that which is sensed. Ideas which have their source in the senses Locke terms simple ideas and they furnish the materials of all our knowledge. From these the mind forms mixed or complex ideas which are of three kinds: modes, substances and relations.

Locke is extremely vague about the reality of substances. There is a pronounced agnostic element in his thought of substance and as Sellars puts it: "under Locke's hands substance becomes an unknown X to which we refer the contents of experience." 41 Locke eagerly wants substance but his sensist principles leave him no defense of it.

40 Ibid., p. 66; quotation taken from John Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, vol. II, p. 167.

41 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 138.

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The other two complex ideas of modes and relations exist only in thought having no objective counterpart.

"Complex ideas ... being archtypes of the mind's own making, not intended to be copies of anything, not referred to the existence of anything as to their originals, cannot want any conformity necessary to real knowledge. For that which is not designed to represent anything but itself can never be capable of wrong representation." 42

Locke further states that relations are "simply combinations of ideas which the mind by its free choice puts together without considering any connection they have in nature." 43 This is intellectual subjectivism, pure and simple, the thoroughly logical consequence of the prejudgment Locke accepted from Descartes.

"But, unfortunately, he (Locke) neither attempted to show how the causal mechanism of perception could reproduce characteristics of external things such as their order nor sought to analyze perceiving as an act of referential interpretation. The result of this neglect was that ideas became isolated mental states without a texture responsible to the external world and knowing became a purely subjective awareness." 44

42 John Locke, Essays Concerning Human Understanding, Vol. II, p. 230.

43 Ibid., p. 231.

44 Roy W. Sellars, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 32.

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Ideas become mental substitutes for physical things, but not being able to get at the external things of the world, our mental substitutes are but a "matter of faith".⁴⁵ Once again we have an identification of the content and object of knowledge.

George Berkeley, in his attempt to unravel this epistemological puzzle, reduced Descartes' rationalism and Locke's sensism to a complete acosmistic idealism. The thread of agreement with Descartes and Locke in this quilt of subjectivism is present in the assumption that man attains only to his own ideas. Berkeley agrees that certain so-called sensible qualities exist only in thought, but then, why strive to defend the objectivity of any sensible qualities? Why cannot the initial creation by God mean the production of minds and ideas? Nothing will be lost in discarding matter save a ready tool for the atheists and the enemies of religion. There is no need to defend the objectivity of the ideas of supposed things of the material world; their esse is percipi.

"It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers and in a word all sensible objects have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But

⁴⁵ Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 194.

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with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world, yet whoever shall find it in his heart to call it in question may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For what are the fore-mentioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And is it not plainly repugnant that any of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived?" 46

Their esse is percipi; with Berkeley's enunciation of this principle we have arrived at an extreme subjectivism. Descartes and Locke accept matter and spirit though they are in a state of complete or near-complete isolation. Berkeley rejects matter and founds a totally spiritualistic metaphysics. The thinking subject, however, is not wholly autonomous; he is dependent, not upon sensible realities, but upon God. Ideas are conceived as effects in us of a supreme mind.

(Berkeley's) "positive doctrine is that ideas are created in the finite mind by God and are there perceived. But is not this self, mind, spirit or soul, to which he appeals so confidently, a postulate or theory rather than an element in experience? It is true that he asserts that we have a notion of it. But what is the basis of this notion? Here he left a problem for his successors to examine." 47

46 George Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowing, Library of Liberal Arts Publication, New York, 1957, Part I, Section #4, pp. 24-25.

47 Roy W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 75.

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Berkeley was an impressionable young student when he read Descartes' dictum to the effect that he could have all of his ideas independent of an external physical world. With all the exuberance of a novel discovery he took the words literally and on the basis of his idealistic theory of knowledge built a spiritualistic metaphysics wherein only finite souls and God alone exist. The directness of knowledge was lost and again, for Sellars, the content (ideas) was identified with the object of knowledge.

When David Hume began his assault on the epistemological dilemma, he accepted the sensist principles of Locke wholeheartedly. The sole and exclusive contact which human knowledge has with the extramental world is through external sensation. Man has no distinct intellectual capacity for abstracting the intelligible in what the senses perceive. Ideas are merely faint copies of impressions, different not in kind but only in degree from the original impressions to which the ideas are really inferior.

Unable to discover a sense impression of which the ideas of substance, cause and effect, necessity and contingency, are faint copies, Hume reduced them to either figments of the mind, or ideas of a purely subjective origin and value. The ideas of cause and effect he regarded as copies of impressions of reflection, that is, they are consequent upon a subjective habit or custom begotten in the subject with the observation of a number of instances of objects

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related only by contiguity and succession. By so doing, Hume attacked the foundations both of religious belief and scientific knowledge: if the ideas of cause and effect have no objective validity, then no practical proofs can be given for the existence of God; and scientific knowledge which depends upon the reality of the cause and effect relation, is deprived of meaning and significance. Causality

"... in both common sense and science is applied to things and events in the external world. We are convinced that in an assertion of causal connection, we are dealing with a process in nature. And we are doing so apart from any law of uniformity.

The thing to do is to reject Hume's phenomenalism right at the start." 48

What Hume did was to develop the sensism of Locke to its logical term, and thus render the service of indicating where such principles lead - the reductio ad absurdum.

The foregoing, then, indicates very briefly, the development of idealism since Descartes, highlighting the pertinent criticisms which Sellars makes of that tradition. With the cogito ergo sum, Descartes erected an epistemological jail with Locke, Berkeley, Hume and Kant ⁴⁹ occupying respective cells. Human thought was thereby

48 Roy W. Sellars, The Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 211; also, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 83-89.

49 We have deferred Sellars' criticism of Kant until our next chapter for Sellars treats him when discussing his own theory of "categories" and his theory of "levels of knowledge".

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imprisoned within itself; it could not attain to a physical outside world but only to the cold isolation of its self-enclosed ideas.

For Sellars, common-sense realism and idealism made the same fundamental error, although they each arrived at it in a quite different manner. The ordinary man, in intuiting the content "mistakenly" believed that he was intuiting the object; he arbitrarily carried over the object of knowledge with the content of knowledge thereby identifying the two. Idealism, on the other hand, completely left aside the physical thing and took the content to be the object, again making an arbitrary identification.

"Unfortunately, idealism has always gone beyond this critical analysis (of the simplicity of common sense) to a denial of the independent existence of the object of perception. To my way of thinking, it has made about as bad an identification of the content and the object of perception as has naive realism. Only, in this swing of the pendulum, the object is identified with the content and declared to be mental because the content is." 50

Reflection, then, has led Sellars to develop a critical realism, wherein the shortcomings of idealism and common-sense are overcome by advocating a distinction between the content of perception (sense-data which are given) and the object of perception (which is not given but known or affirmed). We turn now to an examination of how Sellars applies this fundamental distinction to the other dimensions of his epistemology.

50 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 27.

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We are now in a position to give a fuller presentation to this fundamental distinction as it is developed and applied to the wider dimensions of Sellars' theory of knowledge. However, before making the transition to this presentation we wish to make a few general comments about the aim and direction of Sellars' critical realism.

From what we have seen thus far, Sellars' realism is certainly well-aimed. That is, he displays a certain appreciation for developing a balanced theory of knowledge desiring to do justice to the interiority of knowledge (the legitimate insight of the idealists) while maintaining and justifying certain realistic principles, namely: knowledge is concerned with co-real, physical objects, with extramental reality; we truly know material objects and their being known makes no difference to them; and all our knowledge of extramental reality must in some manner have an existential foundation in sensation, in sense perception. Hence, the direction of Sellars' critical realism is certainly most promising. Yet, on the basis of his fundamental distinction between the content of perception and the object of perception as this distinction is applied to the other dimensions of his epistemology, we must see whether the direction of his critical realism can sustain its promise. To this question we now turn.

CHAPTER IIEXTENSION OF THE OBJECT-CONTENT DISTINCTION
IN SELLARS' CRITICAL REALISM

In our previous chapter we have been examining Sellars' fundamental epistemological distinction between the object and content of knowledge, a distinction which for him overcomes the shortcomings of subjective idealism, and bypasses the excessive realism of common sense. We saw, but only briefly, that Sellars elicited this distinction from his reflective consideration about knowledge at its most elementary phase, namely, that of sense perception. The problem, however, demands extensive analysis; therefore, we now turn our attention to a consideration of what the object-content distinction involves, bringing to light its deeper meaning and implications, and paying special attention to how Sellars draws out and applies its consequences to the wider dimensions of his epistemology. The areas where Sellars' fundamental distinction bear most heavily upon his position concern his theory of the "levels of knowledge", the nature and criterion of truth, and his treatment of the categories.

Sellars' theory of the Levels of Knowing:

We have gained a sufficient insight into Sellars' position, thus far, to understand that the advent of his object-content distinction prohibited him from accepting an intuitive theory of knowledge in any form. Rather, sense-data are given to a percipient, thereby

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enabling him to use this content and affirm an extramental reality. Hence, the first consequence of the object-content distinction which Sellars' critical analysis has led him to, is a rejection of a precise and clear cut distinction between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge.

"It has often been the tendency in epistemology to regard the contrast between perception and conception as basic. We now see that the contrast between intuition and a non-intuitional interpretation of knowledge is profounder".¹

For any moderate realist who has been habitually accustomed to accept, and has been resolutely convinced that the fundamental principles of knowledge, should in some manner be critically articulated in terms of sensation and intellection, it is quite disconcerting and confusing to find Sellars rejecting a distinction between perception (sensation) and conception (intellection) in favor of what he calls "levels of knowing". Briefly, in the moderate realist tradition, specifically as informed by Aristotelian-Thomistic insights, man is a composite of body-soul, the two mutually interpenetrating co-principles which exist as a substantial unity. Because of this metaphysical foundation, man's intellect enjoys a native or inherent

¹ Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 197.

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ability to abstract the essence or form of a thing as given in sensation. In our knowledge of the external world, sensation and conception are mutually and spontaneously involved in the act of knowing. They are inseparable, but though inseparable, they are distinct in kind. Sellars rejects sense knowledge and conceptual knowledge as being distinct in kind and replaces it with a distinction of degree. In this scheme, intellection or conceptualization is simply a more accurate, sophisticated and controlled phase or level in the knowing process. The levels of knowing then are a hierarchy of sensation, perception and conception, each stage exhibiting more perfection and precision than its predecessor.

Before undertaking an in-depth look at this position we should briefly consider the reasons why Sellars was led to adopt it. It is to Sellars' credit as a naturalist, and as he claims a realist, that he is attempting to overcome the Cartesian dilemma of the mind-body dualism. As a naturalist he wishes to reintegrate the unity of body and mind. Therefore, if this unity is to be effected, knowledge must be a matter of degree (levels of knowledge), for to postulate a difference of kind between sensation and conception is ipso facto, for Sellars, to postulate a dualism of isolation which must inevitably result in an intuitionist theory of knowledge. Consequently, his own theory of the levels of knowledge is not an arbitrary replacement of

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the sensation-intellection distinction, nor does he feel that this epistemological position is biased by his commitment to a naturalistic ontology. His position, rather, is demanded by the nature of the situation. "Such an approach is to me a valuable antidote to the old dualistic tradition which separated mind and body".² Hence, any restoration of the mind-body unity necessitates a replacement of knowledge in a naturalistic setting. With these considerations we are now better prepared to return to an examination of how Sellars unfolds the specific phases in his hierarchy of knowing.

Generally speaking, knowledge for Sellars is a common experience which is conditioned in a natural, or matter of fact manner by the environment with which the percipient, or self, interacts in his practical day to day affairs. Although human knowing is a natural and ordinary achievement, knowing is still a unique and specific operation unto itself. When the percipient interacts with his environment the external conditioning is in terms of certain stimuli to which the percipient is causally receptive. More precisely, in relating himself to another physical thing the percipient receives specific stimuli from it; these external stimuli cause sensory presentations or sense data to arise within the percipient and sense data are the terminus ad quem of stimuli.³ Although they are

2 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 84.

3 Roy W. Sellars, "Causation and Perception", in Philosophical Review, vol. 53, 1944, p. 542.

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internal, subjective and private, sense data do bear the characteristics of the object since they are the effect of its causal influx. This point will become clearer as we proceed but we must emphasize here the importance that Sellars attaches to it.

Because sense data have a cause, this cause is the real object of our perceiving, that which we affirm instead of inferring. This notion is of crucial importance for Sellars' epistemology as it provides, in his view, the ground or existential foundation out of which human knowing grows in a most natural manner. Sellars maintains that if human knowing were not anchored in this causal theory of sensation it would be as mysterious and non-natural as innate ideas and supernatural revelations. It is through sensation as causally mediated that we can break into the external world.

We have no good reason then for regarding the character of the sense data as arbitrary. On the contrary we must regard the sense data as legitimate material which actually reveals the external object. If, under apparently the same conditions, the data of sensation changed in a capricious way, it would be impossible to consider such data as material which could mediate knowledge of the object controlling the rise of such data. We would, therefore, be condemned to the acceptance of a world in flux. However, our experience indicates an actual, causally based correlation between the physical existent and the datum. We see one flower is white and another is blue. These

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differences in the content of the sensory presentations, Sellars maintains are correctly taken by all to reflect differences in the physical objects themselves.

What, however, is the exact nature of this correspondence? When Sellars asserts that sense data bears the characteristics of its object he is not maintaining that they are like the object in any naive copy sense. There is, however, a differential correspondence between the sense data and the object; that is, although there is something different, there still exists some kind of similarity, a minimal identity, a sufficient relationship between them which allows the sense data and the object to really correspond, permits the content to be valid material for knowledge of the physical world.

"The value of sense data as material for knowledge rests, therefore, upon this responsible, differential correlation between them and things. An element in the one does not need to be like an element in the other as representative perception supposes. The revelatory identity between the content of knowledge and the object of knowledge concerns the characteristics of things. It is this that is reproducible in another medium. Things must have structure and connections. In knowledge, our universals are contents which partly symbolize, partly reproduce this structure and these connections. The content of knowledge is, as it were, a translation of the characteristics of the thing; and, as in all translation, there is reproduction and yet difference. Working as it does, with sense data as its

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materials, the mind does exceedingly well. It grasps much about things, and this can be empirically stated. Yet knowledge can never be anything but a pale reflection of the object".⁴

For Sellars, then, it is clear that there is a real correspondence although it concerns itself only with the characteristics of things. But if the correspondence here involved is restricted to the characteristics of things, then it is limited to one in which only a correspondence of order and of pattern is reproduced. When we perceive an object we receive a complex stimulus "and in the sensory centers a sensory organization is worked out which includes, as a rule, meaning due to past experience".⁵ We shall see later that the ontological foundation for this meaning is what Sellars terms an enduring pattern in the brain. Suffice it for now to clarify precisely the notion of correspondence.

"My fundamental concept is that there is between idea and thing an identity of order and not of material. A thing is an

⁴ Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 37; also, Philosophy of Physical Realism: "We have seen, indeed, that the relations of neighborhood, of similarity, and difference among the stimuli, though these are indifferent to each other dynamically, are in some respects a copy of the corresponding relations among the surface-elements of surrounding objects".

⁵ Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 86.

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ordered material, and it is this order which may arise elsewhere under its control with no identity of material. It is a correspondence of pattern and not a likeness of stuff which I have in mind". 6

From the foregoing passage we have a clear indication that, for Sellars, knowledge is not being - e.g. to know is not somehow to be the thing known. We do not mention this by way of anticipating a criticism against Sellars, but simply to point out that his critical realism is bypassing moderate realism, and following a different lead. We will treat this theme at the end of this chapter.

Thus far we have been considering Sellars' causal theory of sensation wherein sense data mediately, but directly, reveal an external object, and this because of a valid correspondence of pattern and order between the data and the determined stimuli of the object.

While Sellars ardently upholds this causal theory of sensation he just as adamantly rejects a causal theory of perception. The difference for Sellars is of no small magnitude for a causal theory of perception leads to a passive view of mind and all the difficulties of the idealistic tradition against which he so strongly reacted, as we saw in our first chapter. It is over this issue that Sellars takes Kant to task.

6 Roy W. Sellars, "Concerning 'Transcendence' and 'Bifurcation'", in Mind, vol. 31 (1922), p. 36.

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We will recall that in Kant's view the contents of sensation, as derived from experience, furnish the mind with the contingent and particularized matter of sensations which is formless. Now Kant clearly saw that scientific laws are necessary and universal and he was perplexed as to the origin of this necessity and universality. Kant solved the problem through his doctrine of the subjective a priori forms. The mind fabricates reality; that is, when the mind is brought to bear upon the disorganized contents of sensation, it imposes necessity and universality upon these contents by reason of the a priori forms.

In Kant's epistemological theory the determining element of knowledge is not given in the contents of experience, but provided by the mind. Sellars sees this tendency in Kant, to impose mental laws upon the contents of experience, together with an over emphasis for the laws themselves instead of with the contents of experience, as constituting the underlying weakness of Kant's rationalism. By contrast, Sellars' own critical realism is opposed to such rationalism in a two-fold manner.

It (critical realism) looks upon the total contents of experience as empirical and is skeptical of the Kantian theory of the constitutive understanding; and it returns to the older tradition of knowledge as implying a reality independent of the ideas of it". 7

7 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 211; also Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 213; Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 94.

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What Sellars correctly opposes in the Kantian theory is the strong inclination to autonomize the intellect to the extent where it is completely undetermined by and greatly unrelated to the order of sensible experience as we actually find it. For Sellars, Kant was not a naturalist in his outlook and thus it was not the percipient organism which was active but a Transcendental Self.

Thus by his critical analysis of Kant's position, Sellars strongly emphasizes the necessity in his own theory for a causal theory of sensation but NOT a causal theory of perception. Rather, Sellars upholds the causal theory of sensation as an elementary aspect or condition which is taken up in the more inclusive, active, and intentional act of perception. "Sensation, by itself, in its own isolated right, in no way represents a case of knowing".⁸ Sensation is that out of which knowledge will evolve, arise, emerge. Perception is the primary instance of knowledge; it is the most fundamental noetic unit and sensations are revelations or cues within the perceptual field. In Sellars' view, it is only with effort that we attend to sensory data,⁹ for sensation is caught up

⁸ Roy W. Sellars, "Causation and Perception", in Philosophical Review, vol. 53, 1944, p. 538.

⁹ Roy W. Sellars, "A Statement of Critical Realism", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, vol. 1 (1938-39), p. 475.

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functionally in the more complex and inclusive act of sense-perception. By functional, Sellars simply means the role that sense data serve in the act of perceiving. They guide and direct the percipient enabling him to actively and adequately respond and adjust to things in the external world which are co-real with him. Moreover, it is the location of sense data (as internal, subjective to the percipient) which brings out their pragmatic or functional character, rather than their terminal character as the too simplistic empiricists believed.

"... sensations are not terminal, as they have been taken to be in traditional empiricism, but integral to a bio-psychological activity of a directed sort, called response. Their first function is that of guidance; and they are under the causal control of determined, patterned stimuli. Thus guidance is not an arbitrary affair but causally governed. In looking at a thing, or manipulating it, we are acting under its control. It is the location of sensations in this circuit which brings out their function, or role, and makes us understand that they are not terminal, as the purely introspective tradition in psychology and philosophy was led to hold. We look through our visual field - under control - at the object. As I see it, this situation is the foundation of referential transcendence". 10

10 Roy W. Sellars, "Referential Transcendence", in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, vol. 22 (1961), p. 2; cf. also, "Sensations as Guides to Perceiving", in Mind, vol. 68 (1959), p. 14. "But where are sensations? My answer is 'in' the brain-mind as a feature of cerebral activity".

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Sense data or appearances, then, because of the service they perform and their location in the percipient are regarded as having a background of a substantial executive sort. It is this background of objects which we perceive, actual existent physical things with which we are practically concerned in our daily behavior and language. The more inclusive act of perception, then, is a mediated operation, guided by sensations (the internal content of knowledge) but directly concerned with physical things (which are affirmed) in a framework of response. ¹¹

Hence, for Sellars, a mediate theory of knowledge need not be bound up in subjectivism. When perception is regarded as the fundamental unit of sensory stimulus and complex interpretative response, the "sense of existence" ¹² is felt to dominate the whole experience with the resultant overcoming of phenomenism and subjectivism. The act of perception is an expression of ourselves as existents and it is directed toward a non-I, another equally real and independent existent. We are concerned with something as

¹¹ Roy W. Sellars, "Sensations as Guides to Perceiving", in Mind, vol. 68 (1959), p. 9. "While the percipient has sensations and uses concepts the object perceived is regarded as co-ordinate with the percipient and something to adjust to".

¹² Roy W. Sellars, "Causation and Perception", in Philosophical Review, vol. 53, (1944), p. 539; "They (sensations) unite with feeling and awareness of organic operations to give the sense of existency. This sense of existency spreads outward to the denotables perceived and inward within the percipient".

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real as ourselves and no amount of clever argument can remove this dimension of the experience.

"As I see it, the sense of existence stems from sensations and feelings ... and wells up thence into perception and the organic operations which it reflects, where it is deepened by fusion with categorial meanings such as agency and endurance. That is, the feeling of existence becomes more dynamic and causal". 13

Thus far we have seen that Sellars' initial object-content distinction favors a non-apprehensional view of knowledge. Because of this position, the object is never given but only disclosed or revealed through the mediation of immanent sense data which furnish valid cues and hints enabling us to affirm a co-existential thing. The object can only be transcendent and transcendence for Sellars means only that the percipient is actively engaged and concerned with something other than himself which can be denoted, pointed to, characterized, affirmed. 14

13 Ibid., p. 546-547.

14 Roy W. Sellars, "A Statement of Critical Realism", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, p. 490. "All that transcendence means, accordingly, is concern with public things correlative to the embodied and acting self. The opposite of it is concern with what can be intuited, with the content of consciousness". Because of Sellars' non-apprehensional view of knowledge and its consequent conclusion that the object of perception can only be affirmed, he prefers the term 'reference' to 'transcendence'. First because it more precisely and accurately depicts the operation as Sellars analyzes it, and secondly, because the word transcendence carries the flavor of the mysterious, the intuitional. cf. Roy W. Sellars, "American Realism: Perspectives and Framework", in Self, Religion and Metaphysics, edited by G. Meyers, New York, MacMillan Co., 1961, pp. 182-83.

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With Sellars' non-intuitional view of knowledge, and his emphasis on knowing as a mediated (though direct) process through the instrumentality of sense data, we can now clearly ascertain his meaning of "levels of knowledge" as one of approximation. Rejecting intuition or apprehension he wants to develop a more flexible and empirical idea of human knowing.

"Absolutistic knowing fits in with what we may call intuitional, apprehensional views of knowing which are dominated by the thought that the object is literally grasped by a mental act and that there are no degrees of it. You either have knowledge or you do not. No mechanism underlies it; it is not dependent upon methods. Approximative knowing turns its back upon such absolutism. Knowing is an achievement having degrees; it can be improved as methods improve. What we aim to do is to get insight into the characteristics of physical systems. And insight is a matter of degree. We may misunderstand the significance of data at first; or again, we may not have sufficient data. Knowledge is an achievement to which we approximate". 15

At the level of perception knowing is primitive, elementary, foundational, implicit. Knowing has a practical orientation in regard to our behavior for the percipient is primarily dominated by needs and purposes. We recognize certain objects by specific features which stand out as cues for action. We delay our responses only long enough to be sure of its correctness. Sellars terms this

15 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 94.

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"quick" perception and it is a stage in a larger operation in which some specific personal, biocentric need is being met and satisfied. This does not mean that no knowledge is present at this level, but only that it is a servant to action and adjustment; it is being used rather than consciously attended to, and is, therefore, implicit. Because perception is geared to immediate service, it must present objects not absolutely but in terms of their relation to the percipient organism. The casual conditioning of perception makes this level of interpretation of objects valid and necessary to our relations with them.

"Now the mechanism of perceiving ... explains the inevitability of this correlation between things as perceived and the position of our body in relation to them. Our perceptual interpretation of objects is largely in terms of the sensory presentations controlled in us. As we move away from a body or as a body moves away from us, the sense data aroused in us become different. There are shifts not only in apparent size but in color and general appearance. The causal conditioning of perceiving makes the interpretation of objects relevant to our relations with them". 16

However, it is because perceiving is a knowing strongly affected by the locus of the percipient that it is at once practical but theoretically inadequate. It is but a beginning of knowing,

16 Ibid., p. 96.

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a point of departure for reason.¹⁷ At this level of quick perception the mechanism of knowing is not understood and it is only after this level that a theory of knowledge is possible. The question of human knowing arises as a result of definite problems such as illusions, the relativity of sense data, the conflict between the perceptual interpretation of things and the conclusions of empirical science. Consequently, in Sellars' epistemology one of his reasons for advancing his theory of the levels of knowledge is to demarcate the similarities and differences between common sense knowledge and scientific knowing, the latter being synonymous with conceptual knowledge or enlightened common sense.

At the level of quick perception, we saw that knowledge was implicit, used, oriented to action. At the level of scientific or conceptual knowledge, perception becomes "aided" and "contemplative". By contemplative Sellars means that knowledge begins to become explicit as action passes into critical reflection. "Man, the conceptualist and linguist, lifts perceiving to the level of demonstrative and descriptive terms, and in so doing arriving at

¹⁷ Having seen Sellars' rejection of any intuitional theory of knowledge, note the meaning he attaches to reason. "At any rate, we must not think of reason as a faculty of an intuitive and absolute sort. The goal of knowing is disclosure; and reason stands for all those methods and operations which help in the solution of problems... Reason is a term which covers the way the mind works in systematic investigation". Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 99.

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explicit knowing".¹⁸ There is a mental lingering upon things because of curiosity or because of a particular hovering uncertainty about them in relation to our needs. Perception is then aided by the means provided by scientific measurements and instruments (e.g. microscope). For Sellars, then, primitive perception

"... has become observation in the context of scientific method and theory and is limited to the attainment of facts of observation to be employed in a critical, conceptual interpretation of physical things".¹⁹

Critical reflection, then, works within the framework of primitive knowing in order to correct it and expand it, and for Sellars, the history of science and philosophy is simply the history of implementing such correction. In all this there is an attempt to reach greater objectivity by making things speak in terms of each other as units, and to eliminate the correlation between position (the locus of the percipient organism) and interpretation (which is biocentric, personal, pragmatic) so natural to perceiving. In this manner the characteristics of things can be disclosed more adequately.

18 Roy W. Sellars, "Sensations as Guides to Perceiving", in Mind, vol. 68 (1959), p. 14.

19 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 91.

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"As conception replaces perception, we build up a construction of an external world the parts of which can be measured and located with reference to each other and not merely with reference to a particular percipient... The technique of such systems of reference is familiar to all these days. And we know how it has been developed by physics and astronomy. The object thus selected is interpreted in terms of certain predicates which are now consciously assigned to it. In this way, I think the object. We may say that knowing an object at this level is thinking it in terms of predicates. These predicates are supposed to give the actual characteristics and relations of the object". 20

Sellars at this juncture appears faced with the difficulty of reconciling knowledge of two worlds, for the world as conceived differs markedly from the world as perceived. Sellars grants the difference but does not view it as an occasion for skepticism, but an instance of critical progress. "The impulse, which we noted at the level of perception, to assign characters to objects continues, even though the assignment is made more critically".²¹ On the perceptual and conceptual levels of knowing we are dealing with one and the same real external world. This world most certainly manifests itself at the perceptual level, but darkly, vaguely. The scientist

20 Roy W. Sellars, Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 128.

21 Ibid., p. 128.

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by controlling his data and using perception in a critical way, attains a closer approximation to external fact. As the higher levels of knowing with their more adequate techniques gradually and progressively deepen, clarify, and extend our preliminary perceptual knowing, to that extent the meagerness and poverty of this level should vanish, or at least be greatly enriched.

"Just as we perceive an object in terms of its appearance, so we conceive it in terms of its corrected appearance, which may be called the predicates of judgment. There is no doubt, then, that I am capable of distinguishing an external realm from my thoughts and beliefs. It is the constant aim of the scientist to apply the proper predicates to the object of his thought. What are the proper predicates? Surely the predicates which reveal its structure, comparative size and behavior. We are convinced that when we think objects in certain ways, we think them as they are. We are trying to do in a sophisticated way what perception has suggested to us". 22

Hence, for Sellars, there is no conflict between the conceptual-scientific view of the world and the perceptual outlook. Even the ultra-microscopic does not present a problem so long as we understand perceptible in this realm to mean "capable of reporting itself directly or indirectly, in the sensory field".²³ We can easily pass from sheep to electron. In short, science sets up what

22 Ibid., p. 129. (Our emphasis)

23 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 101.

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can be referred to as a microscopic view of the world for the world as perceived; the organic, biological technique of perception is supplemented by the instrumental and mathematical technique of conception. In both instances, therefore, Sellars claims that the realism of knowledge is maintained for both are directly concerned with the one external world.

"To me, at least, atoms are as real as chairs which they compose. I do not see by what logic I can be a physical realist in regard to molar things and cease to be one in regard to microscopic things." 24

Therefore, for Sellars, there is no distinction in kind between sense knowledge and conceptual knowledge involving a knower who has an inherent native ability to abstract an essence or quiddity. Rather, knowledge is an affair of stages, phases, levels, a question of more or less, wherein a percipient organism, by degrees, attains a more approximate clarification of external reality. It is an achievement constantly progressing and capable of improvement in the same proportion as better and better empirical methods and techniques evolve and improve.

With the advent of these noetic phases in Sellars' theory of knowledge, we come face to face with the question of the truth of knowledge claims peculiar to any one of the specific stages. To this question of truth we now turn.

24 Ibid., p. 100.

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The Nature and Criterion of Truth:

Before embarking on an exposition of Sellars' doctrine of truth, we should first briefly consider his thoughts about the status of concepts and universals. For, according to Sellars, truth and falsity are properly applied to our ideas or concepts which are expressed in our propositions, our acts of judgment.²⁵ Consistent with his non-apprehensional view of knowledge, Sellars rejects the notion of a universal as a common property which is applicable to many at once.

"I believe in concepts but I do not believe in universals as a peculiar kind of entity in external things which may be in many things at once and gives them an identity of nature. Thus I desire to do justice to concepts, or meanings, as instruments of thought and of knowing, while keeping to similarity as a fact about things which are built up in corresponding ways out of the chemical elements. Each thing has its existential nature as a determinant continuant; and the existential nature of one thing may be like the existential nature of another thing." 26

Here we have a capsulized version of what Sellars holds regarding concepts, meanings, universals, identity and similarity.

25 Sellars regards the following as essentially synonymous terms: concept, meaning, belief, assertion, knowledge-claim, and judgment. Ibid., p. 130.

26 Ibid., pp. 155-56.

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According to Sellars only particularized, individual things exist and the difficulty about universals arises from observing that different physical objects can share characteristics. Briefly, two individuals, say, Plato and Aristotle, are not the same individuals yet they possess a common property - "manhood" - which is identical in both. Aristotle and Plato are obviously not the same men (otherwise they would not be two), but they are both men, they possess "manness", an identical common property. It is this relation of identity, this belief in universals, which Sellars considers to be unfounded.

Sellars, then, is faced with the following problem. Concepts, meanings, ideas are to be found in our thought and it is undeniable that we often have the same concept, e.g. redness. Each time we make use of the concept, how, without positing a 'timeless' universal, can one say that the concept is the same?

First of all, for Sellars, perception (either primitive or conceptual) is a singular event, a particular happening wherein a sensibly experienced content, the concept, is embedded in certain mental operations, thinking, judging, appraising, etc.²⁷ Consequently, all concepts are singular, particular, individual, and numerically distinct. But the percipient in his cognitive acts is not attentive

27 Ibid., p. 177.

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to the concept or idea as an event or occurrence; rather, he is concerned with characterizing the object of his perception. "Thus to think an object is to think it in terms of a predicate, to characterize by means of the predicate as a content and not as an event. The event merely carries the logical content".²⁸ In other words, the concept is a sensibly experienced content, but this experience as an event does not hold the percipient's attention; as a result the singularity, the numerical distinctness of each concept is irrelevant because ignored.²⁹ The percipient is much more concerned with concepts as an intrinsic content which will serve to disclose something about the object. It is this use which justifies the term identical. Hence, two concepts can be said to be the same or identical when they perform the same function, serve the same purpose. Two particular instances of the meaning or concept "red" are counted as a repetition of the same concept because either equally well describes and is applicable to blood samples but not birch trees.

"Suppose that I am dealing with sense
data and suppose these are to be regarded as
particulars. What then do I mean when I apply

28 Ibid., p. 176.

29 Ibid., p. 176; "Particularity is ignored because unimportant for the task ... The temporal nature of my thoughts does not involve their intrinsic difference."

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the concept red to two sense data? Clearly I am not denying their particularity, but I am saying that with respect to a feature of the one I can rightly apply the concept red and that with respect to a feature of the other I can likewise apply the concept red. Each feature is an instance of red. But do we mean more by the expression 'instance of red', than we mean by the expression 'the concept applies'? I doubt it." 30

From the foregoing analysis of 'concept' one can readily understand why Sellars takes the position he does regarding the universal. Concepts are not the same but only similar, yet because they perform the same purpose they can be said to be identical. Not taking account of the numerical difference we feel "as if" there were universals. ³¹ It is the mode of operation of the mind which suggests the projection into nature of logical identity.

"We have admitted that both our experience and our world are as if there were universals. We find sameness of content in sensory presentations and sameness of content in concepts. And we are forced to judge external things in terms of the same predicate. Sensed content and predication

30 Ibid., p.161.

31 Ibid., p. 165-66; "My argument in short is that the very mechanism of thought causes the sameness of meaning of the predicate to be projected upon the objects which we think in terms of it ... It was, accordingly, from the fact of predicative meaning, which did not appear on the face of it to be a particular like a sense datum or an image or a physical thing, that the theory of universals are entities arose".

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suggest recurrence and repetition. But note that we must reckon also with numerical plurality in space and time. It is this factor that suggests similarity as the ontological way out.

And so we are led to reject the theory of universals as unnecessary...

Ontologically similarity is sufficient". 32

On the basis of his position concerning concepts and universals, Sellars labels it logical conceptualism and ontological nominalism: logical conceptualism because he rejects universals as a peculiar kind of entity in external things which is proper to many simultaneously, giving them an identity of nature; ontological nominalism because only particular, individual things are real though they exhibit similarity.

With this brief examination of Sellars' notion of concepts and universals we are now in a better position to bring to light his

32 Ibid., p. 182. Sellars describes the ontological foundation of concepts (universals) as follows: "Universals are meanings in experience connected with the operation of interpretation and associated with symbols. Their ontological foundation is a cerebral pattern which integrates with cognitive responses. In this sense, meanings are always potential predicates. Every occurrence of a meaning in an individual's experience is a new event based on the functioning, or activation of this cerebral pattern. It is because the enduring pattern is activated and is expressed in consciousness that the meaning recurs. We speak of recurrence because the event as such seems to us secondary to the content ... It is, after all, the enduring self that knows an enduring object by means of an enduring pattern and in terms of an apparently recurring meaning. And yet the meaning as experience is an event." Ibid., p. 194; cf. also, p. 163-64.

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theory of truth, specifically with regard to its meaning, correspondence and criteria.

We have seen that at the level of perceiving or scientific conceiving the mind employs meanings, concepts, ideas and the per-
cipient thinks external objects in terms of these same. According to Sellars it is within this setting that ideas are thought of as deserving either the adjective true or false. "To regard a statement as true is to regard it as an achievement expressing the objective state of affairs in terms of descriptive facts about it".³³ In this description Sellars wishes to emphasize that "knowledge as an achievement of objective import is the primary category".³⁴ Truth is merely adjectival, secondary, parenthetical. In our everyday assertions we claim to have knowledge about things. To say that our assertions or propositions are true is to regard our knowledge-claim as a valid achievement, we are simply issuing a verdict of "true" about the knowledge-claim, which acts as an official stamp, so to speak.

33 Roy W. Sellars, "True as Contextually Implying Correspondence", in The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 56 (1959), p. 719.

34 Ibid., p. 719.

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"To say a statement is true is to endorse it. A statement, it would seem, is like a cheque. It is a claim for money in the bank. In endorsing the cheque, we assert the claim... To endorse a statement as true is to regard it as a cognitive achievement". 35

We have seen how knowledge is a matter of degree for Sellars, a progressive approximation. What we do is accumulate facts, and a fact is simply a bit of knowledge about an object, a piece of information. Therefore, when we claim to have knowledge about an object, our claim, as stated in a proposition, does not so much correspond to the facts as much as it expresses them or conveys them. 36

If, however, a proposition conveys knowledge, that is, if it is true, then the proposition must be such that it can accomplish this task. Now it is the suchthatness (Sellars' term) which is important for it involves us in some type of a correspondence theory of truth. 37

The question then is, how can a proposition give knowledge of a certain state of affairs? The answer lies in Sellars' causal theory of sensation. Knowledge is quarried or extracted from a

35 Ibid., p. 718.

36 Ibid., p. 719.

37 Roy W. Sellars, "A Correspondence Theory of Truth", in The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 38, (1941), p. 650.

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sensory content which discloses or reveals certain features and characteristics of an object. Moreover, there is an identity of order and pattern between external stimuli and sense data, for the stimuli govern and control the rise of the sensory content. It is on account of this mechanism of knowing (as existentially grounded in sensation) that Sellars upholds a correspondence between a given proposition and the facts it can disclose. In other words, correspondence between a proposition and an external state of affairs, rests solely upon the disclosure-value of sensory data as appearances of the object as well as upon the concepts founded upon those sensory data. ³⁸

Hence to say a statement is true is to imply this type of correspondence; that is, if a proposition conveys or expresses a valid knowledge claim, it is true, but to say it is true is to say that the proposition corresponds (discloses) to the external facts or state of affairs. "In short, because of its contextual linkage with knowledge as an achievement of objective import, truth implies correspondence". ³⁹

It remains now to look at what Sellars regards as the tests or criteria of truth. It appears that his critical realism meets a difficulty here because of his doctrine of transcendence. How can one

38 Ibid., p. 653.

39 Roy W. Sellars, "True as Contextually Implying Correspondence", in The Journal of Philosophy, vol. 56 (1959), p. 719; also "The Meaning of True and False", in Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, vol. 5 (1944-45), p. 102-03.

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check up on an idea if the object is not given? For Sellars the solution lies in the test of praxis wherein action becomes the test of truth, or rather the test of knowledge-claims.⁴⁰ We can apply our knowledge which consequently has a guidance-value. This fact is most evident from the level of perceiving through to scientific conceiving. Perceiving guides our actions and behavior, and the application of science dominates modern industry and technique. Knowledge which works or applies in this fashion does so because it is knowledge. Sellars will have nothing to do with William James' notion of truth which would make action the measure of truth.⁴¹ We do not project a plan of action and carry it out in order to discover the truth value of our statements. Rather, knowledge, from the very start, is true and of use to the percipient because it first conforms to the world, being grounded in a causal theory of sensation. If what claims to be knowledge does not work in the long run, then it was not a valid claim in the first place.

"But let it not be forgotten that the capacity of a statement to disclose its object is mediated by the fact that the sensory particulars upon which it is ultimately founded are causally controlled appearances

⁴⁰ Roy W. Sellars, "Causation and Perception", in The Philosophical Review, vol. 53 (1944), p. 540.

⁴¹ Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 113 ff; "I reject the pragmatic escape", p. 117.

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of the denoted object. Nor must we forget that a generic confirmation of the fact that we have knowledge of our world is that we can exercise control of its routine in terms of our ideas. Knowledge is power and power confirms knowledge". 42

Truth, then, for Sellars, is simply an endorsement, a ratification of our knowledge claims. It implies correspondence between our propositions and the external state of affairs because the existentially grounded sensory content has a disclosure value, it reveals its source. Consequently, our ideas which we think to be true, to have this disclosure capacity, can safely be put to the test by application. We turn now to Sellars' doctrine about the categories.

The Categories:

To undertake an examination of the categories is to enter the corridor which leads directly to Sellars' ontology. Such an endeavor, though, is far beyond the scope of this present study,⁴³ and we therefore limit ourselves to but a few general considerations, and this for two reasons: to see how they are related to Sellars' epistemology, and to enable us to give a fairer criticism of his position.

42 Roy W. Sellars, "A Statement of Critical Realism", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, vol. 1, (1938-39), p. 491.

43 Sellars' doctrine of the categories (his ontology) has been analyzed in detail by Cornelius Delaney, Norman Melchert, and Robert Kreyche, whose works are listed in our bibliography.

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Periodically throughout our study we have met the category of thinghood. In treating Sellars' theory of the levels of knowledge we saw that his analysis committed him to acknowledging a sense of things, co-real with the percipient organism, which could be known in terms of the sense data they cause. It is this all embracing sense of being, a thing over against other things independent of the self, which is the foundation for and justification of the category abstracted from it. It is this category of thinghood which qualifies or characterizes all our other knowledge as knowledge of the physical world.

"I maintain, then, that the categories express, and are reflections of the felt attitudes of the organism toward its environment. Our experience manifest to us the organic self as acting toward similar wholes which we call external things or the not-self. This means that the categories have an existential foundation and significance". 44

It is because the categories have this existential ground that Sellars undercuts the Kantian notion of the categories; they are not a priori, whereby the external realm is somehow fabricated,

44 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 145; cf. also pp. 215-16; and Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 125. Sellars divides his categories into primary and secondary. The primary he lists as space, time, thinghood and causality; the secondary as mass, energy, conservation, organization, activity and substance. cf. Evolutionary Naturalism, pp. 80-82.

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constituted, or established by the mind.⁴⁵ On the contrary, the categories apply or respond to the external world because they are first derived from that world through the experience of the percipient organism. The categories perform the service of revealing the most characteristic features or fundamental elements of the physical world; they are instances of our most general knowledge of extramental reality.

"The categories are cases of general knowledge about resting upon the control by nature of the objective data of consciousness, a control actively furthered by the organism".⁴⁶

We have seen, however, that concepts also serve to provide instances of knowledge, though more restricted and specific, which have their existential foundation in the causal theory of sensation. Hence, for Sellars, there is a mutual involution of concepts, categories, and sense data. "Categories and sensory presentations and classificatory concepts grow up together".⁴⁷

Because categories, like concepts, originate and unfold at the level of perception, they tend to arise uncritically in a very naive form. Consequently, they require the purifying effect of critical

45 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 72-74; and Principles and Problems of Philosophy, pp. 98-101.

46 Ibid., p. 81.

47 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 215.

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reflection, both philosophically and scientifically, in order to become efficient and suitable concepts capable of serving us in our more general and developed knowledge.⁴⁸ Once this is accomplished our categories become at once both discoveries and standards: discoveries, because they are anchored in external reality through sensation; standards, because so grounded in nature or reality, that we can apply them, thereby allowing us control, mastery and adjustment over nature.

"Our past experience assumed the temporal and spatial pattern and fell into things causally interacting. Whereupon science marked these features for her domain and formulated her laws in terms of such universal characters. Any thing or any event is expected to obey this framework which has been built up from a wide experience. A thing is assumed to have mass and to be in a definite position or in motion from one position to another; an event is assumed to be a function of antecedent conditions. In this sense, the categories are postulated to apply to all possible experience. They are guides for the mastery of new instances, of complex and tangled fields. Particular laws cannot be decided beforehand, but it can be maintained that these laws will come under the categories. In this sense, they apply to all possible experience".⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 80; "It has taken much reflection on the part of both philosophy and the sciences to separate the objective essentials from the more subjective ingredients and so to achieve categories which are cases of general knowledge about the physical world. The history of causality is, perhaps, the most instructive example of this clarification".

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

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We are not to think, however, that we have an infallible guaranty that nature will recognize our categories, that external reality is constrained in some manner to be such that the categories will apply. Kant saw this problem and attempted to solve it by making the categories fabricate reality; but he had no guaranty that the Transcendental Ego and its forms would not change. As a critical realist, Sellars feels he is in a position to solve the dilemma. We have seen that the categories are cases of the most general knowledge about nature, anchored in the control which nature exercises of the objective data of consciousness. Therefore, in order to invalidate the categories, nature itself would have to change. Sellars doesn't rule this out as a theoretical possibility but it causes him no consternation. Falling back on his theory of the levels of knowledge he would simply hold that the scope of application of any category is something to be scientifically established. Moreover:

"While we must admit that we cannot demonstrate that nature may not abruptly change its objective order, this thought is essentially unmotivated and can hardly be entertained seriously by anyone who realizes the massiveness of nature and the fact that particular changes are expressions of that which changes". 50

50 Ibid., pp. 81-82; also Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 216; "It follows from all this that there is no mental legislation for nature if we mean by mental something coming from outside nature. The mind is the brain and its pattern developed under control and in relation to the organism as a whole. Our categories are valid because they are well founded. I cannot imagine a whole new set being either discovered or created. Nature conforms to them because nature is their foundation".

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For Sellars, then, this hypothetical situation is groundless and any gradual change in nature would be reflected in the categories anyway. Consequently, we can rest secure in the knowledge that our categories are apt standards which control, guide, and govern our expectations; and this is so because they are empirically (existentially) grounded in nature and are first discovered there.

The foregoing exposition of Sellars' epistemology - his theory of the levels of knowledge, his doctrines about concepts, universals, truth, and the categories - constitutes the heart of his position; it uncovers what was implied in his most fundamental distinction between the object and content of knowledge. Having seen these dimensions of his epistemology in detail, we will briefly consider his views about knowledge in general, irrespective of any of the levels on which it is found. From there we will turn to our final chapter, a critical evaluation of the matter at hand.

Sellars' considerations of Knowledge in General:

Briefly, the general conditions of knowledge for Sellars are twofold: first, the presence of sensory data which are adaptive to the percipient organism and potentially revelatory responses to things; secondly, the intelligent use and interrogation of these data in the way of analysis and synthesis, the formation of hypotheses, the construction of concepts, etc. Sellars assigns the capacity for

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both these conditions to the brain as raised to the level of conscious functioning.

We have seen that the sensory content of knowledge, though subjective, is causally governed and controlled from its source, thereby allowing us to claim a genuine conformity between it and the physical existents known. It is this setting which marks knowledge as an act of peculiar singularity.

"The situation is, of course, unique, and metaphors will not much help us. We are confined to the subjective side and can never have in consciousness the existent known, though we can literally grasp it with our hands. Penetrative intuition of the physical world is impossible just because we are what we are, organisms stimulated by external things. Physical being is determinate, and knowledge patterns after it in accordance with its own medium". 51

This, then, is the natural, empirical setting for knowledge; we are not disembodied knowers but a brain-mind, minded-organisms stimulated by external things. In Sellars' view, this natural setting should dictate, from the very beginning, the direction along which all epistemological investigations should be conducted.

Therefore, taking his point of departure from this setting, and from the self-evident fact that we really do know things, Sellars proceeds to analyze the factors involved in the act of knowledge. It

51 Ibid., p. 39-40.

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is this analysis which comprises the essence of Sellars' critical approach and he articulates it accordingly.

"The factors of knowledge are now apparent: (1) the affirmation of an object or ideatum; (2) the idea or content given to the knowing self; and (3) the interpretation of the first in terms of the second. To these three on the subjective side, there must correspond the affirmed existent with its determinate nature on the objective side". 52

These factors need no further elucidation for our previous pages have given them ample exposition. Suffice it to recall that interpretation in no way weakens the sense of affirmation; interpretation involves the features and characters of a thing which the knower assigns to a real, physical object by means of the sensory content. And subjective, although it rules out objective identity, is not to be understood as totally arbitrary for the sensory content is causally correlated to its source.

Finally, from the foregoing presentation, it becomes clear that, for Sellars, knowledge is not being but only a peculiar substitute for it. This conclusion is logically consequent upon the consistent and thoroughgoing application of the underlying distinction of his epistemology between the object and content of knowledge. Rejecting any intuitional theory of knowledge on the

52 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 197-98; also, Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 125 and 128; Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 42; Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 79.

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basis of this distinction, it follows that "knowledge should not claim to be being".⁵³ If our knowledge does not lay hold of being, then what does it grasp? Simply, the form, not the aristotelian-thomistic form, but only those features and aspects of the object which constitute Sellars' form.

"If knowledge is a grasping of the temporal order of events, the relative sizes of things, their causal, and spatial relations, their internal structure and their behavior, it is seemingly only these characteristics of the physical world which can be reproduced and mentally grasped ... These characteristics constitute the form of the physical world and the form, alone, can be reproduced and thus revealed".⁵⁴

What is known then is the form, the characteristics of the thing through the mediation of a sensory content. But this content does not reproduce in an existential manner the characteristics of the thing itself. The percipient, as knower, makes no existential contact with the object; the sensory content are simply internal substitutes whereby the external object is revealed.

"It is this recognized difference between characters and the physical object which lies at the foundation of the belief in

53 Roy W. Sellars, Evolutionary Naturalism, p. 37.

54 Roy W. Sellars, Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 133; also, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 218.

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substantial existence. Stuff is but another term for existence... Now we have sought to demonstrate that to know is not to be, that cognitive apprehension is not existential apprehension, that knowledge grasps the characteristics of things but must fall short of being the things. Things are formed stuff, and it is the form which we cognitively apprehend or which is revealed. Nevertheless, we must recognize that knowledge is not an existential givenness, or intuition, of the object. It is a cognitive apprehension, if you will, but not a literal apprehension of the sort natural realism gives the human mind at first the illusion of." 55

Sellars could not be any clearer or more articulate about his position than in this passage. His stand, however, carries serious consequences for philosophy since it ultimately reduces and restricts human knowledge to scientific knowledge: to know is to know scientifically. Sellars is fully aware of this implication and is not at all shy about emphatically stating it in one of his essays.

"Knowledge embraces essentially what science has worked out - structure, relative dimension, relative mass, energy-content, behavior. Theory of knowledge does not so much dictate to science as interpret it." 56

55 Ibid., p. 134.

56 Roy W. Sellars, "Realism, Naturalism and Humanism", in Contemporary American Philosophy, ed. G.P. Adams and W.P. Montague, New York, 1930, vol. II, p. 273.

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We have now made the complete circle. On the basis of his object-content distinction Sellars was led to reject any and all intuitionist theories of knowledge. Man's mind or intellect was not capable of grasping existence, but only features and characteristics of things through the mediation of a sensory content which was causally grounded in an existential source (the object). Consequently, a clear-cut distinction between sense and intellectual knowledge evaporated in favor of different "levels" of knowledge wherein knowledge was a matter of degree, of gradual approximation. Within this hierarchy, science reigned as "king of the castle" but itself subject to further development as methods improved. We gained information about things, facts, pieces of knowledge about which enabled us to affirm an independent, co-real, physical thing. Consequently, knowledge is transcendent but transcendent only by way of denotation; the object can be affirmed, pointed to, referred to. Hence Sellars' realism is a referential realism called referential transcendence.

On the basis of his referential realism, Sellars is convinced that he has overcome the insufficiencies of the idealistic tradition and common sense. We turn now to a critical appraisal of his position to determine whether we have grounds for sharing his optimism, or whether we must endure another "epistemological" disappointment.

CHAPTER IIICRITICAL EVALUATION OF SELLARS' THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Before embarking upon our critical evaluation of Sellars' epistemological theory, we wish to mention, by way of a brief preamble, a few comments which should be considered and kept in mind when launching a critical investigation.

We are not simply undertaking a critical analysis in the sense of trying to prove a point; that is, placing one position (Sellars' critical realism) against another position (moderate realism) and giving an absolute refutation of the one and upholding the other as infallibly correct.

The nature of a sound critical evaluation will attempt to uncover points of agreement about fundamental issues, and proceed from there to demarcate and discuss any differences which may ensue. The purpose, then, is to determine which theory provides a more adequate explanation of certain given facts. Facts can never be compressed or made to fit a theory; rather, the theory must fit the facts, that is, adequately uncover them and explain them.

Therefore, in our critical commentary, we wish to determine whether the critical realist approach to the problem of knowledge is more adequate than the moderate realist approach, or whether both are substantially the same with only minor or linguistic differences. But if there are substantial differences one or the other position must be involved in inherent contradictions for both cannot be

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correct at the same time. Indeed they may both be wrong, but if so, the nature of the epistemological problem will reveal the error(s) on the basis of objections which will arise from an insufficient analysis or inadequate explanation of the knowledge question itself.

Now the problem at hand, which we are attempting to analyze, is the theory of knowledge as Roy Wood Sellars has purported to explain it. The question then is: Does Sellars' epistemological analysis provide a reconciliation between the pre-reflexive convictions about human knowledge which are found in everyday experience, with a sound, reflexive, critical conceptual theory? In other words, does his position adequately explain how we know things?

We have seen that Sellars' realism professes to reject all forms of idealism, subjectivism and representative realism, a rejection which a (Thomistic) moderate realist would be only too willing to support. Moreover, Sellars' critical realism claims to have no artificial or arbitrary beginning. Rather, like all investigation, an analysis of human knowing must take its point of departure from the pre-reflexive certitudes of common sense: we know things, we know them directly and we simultaneously know that we know them. This is the primary certitude, an immediate, obvious, self-evident fact. To doubt it or question it is ipso facto to involve oneself in the inherent contradiction of skepticism whose adherents are condemned to silence from the outset.

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Consequently, when Sellars states that we directly know things which are just as independent and co-real as ourselves, the moderate realist cannot but give his full-fledged assent to this assertion. This is the fundamental factual certitude with which the philosopher must begin, which common sense so easily and naturally perceives, grasps and accepts.

In addition, Sellars claims, and likewise the moderate realist, that our knowledge is somehow grounded in sense perception, and that sensations and ideas are not that which I primarily know, but that by which I know real being. Sellars' further qualification, however, that our knowledge of physical reality is never a direct intuition or apprehension, but only a comprehension or affirmation through the mediation of subjective contents, brings his position to a head-on collision with that of the moderate realist. There can be no compromise on this issue, for it is of crucial importance and a cardinal principle of Sellars' epistemological orthodoxy that the object is affirmed, but never intuited, not even at the level of sense perception. It is our contention that Sellars' objections to an intuitionist theory of sense perception stem from a failure on his part to distinguish first between the intra-organic object (the esse intentionale, the impressed species) and the extra-organic object (the esse physicum) of sense perception; second, between the sense-datum as such and the subsequent judgment which the intellect makes

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concerning the sense-datum; and third, between the essential and accidental sensible objects. He could not, however, uncover such distinctions for any attempt to develop them was thwarted at the outset as a result of naturalistic pre-suppositions which guided his epistemological investigations.¹ Therefore, before developing the above distinctions we must first ascertain why he rejected an intuitionist theory of sense perception.²

1 In our introduction and periodically throughout our exposition we saw that it was Sellars' aim to "forget Cartesian dualism and start afresh on the basis of naturalism", a naturalism whose fundamental postulate maintained that being is co-extensive with matter. Sellars realized, however, that in order to develop an adequate naturalism, it would depend to a great extent upon the validity of his solutions to the problems of epistemology. He therefore grounds his naturalism on his epistemological investigations, yet, as will be shown, his epistemology is developed within the framework of certain naturalistic presuppositions. One can justifiably question, with A. Hoernle, whether this is invalid procedure, a circular argumentation. cf. R.F. Alfred Hoernle, "Idealism and Evolutionary Naturalism", in The Monist, vol. 36, (1926), p. 561-76.

2 We will see in the course of our critical analysis that Sellars' naturalistic pre-conceptions led him to superimpose his object-content distinction upon common sense, rather than eliciting it from an accurate analysis of naive realism's "knowledge-claim". Note the remark of Robert Kreyche in this connection: "While entirely agreeing with Sellars' rather accurate description of the outlook of common sense, I find it necessary to observe in connection with this last remark (e.g. that the outlook of common sense is based upon the exigencies of biological and practical life) that there is a hint of a prejudice in favor of the view that knowledge ultimately is a function whereby the organism reacts to its environment. It is true, of course, that knowledge, especially knowledge in the order of sense perception, does have its practical implications and is a perfectly 'natural event'; yet I think it a mistake, especially at this early stage of the

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From our previous exposition of Sellars' thought, especially his analysis of the nature of knowledge in general, it should be evident that the underlying motive for his rejection of an intuitionist theory of sense perception is the plain impossibility for the object to be "literally present" to consciousness; intuition would entail "... the leaping of spatial and temporal barriers in an unnatural fashion".³ Sellars' insight has made a genuine discovery here, what a moderate realist would call the incommunicability of matter, but this insight is enlarged out of proportion and given an absolute status. Hence, Sellars correctly declares that the object cannot be present to or in consciousness only if he means that the material object cannot be physically present to the knower (the intellect) in the same way it is physically present to itself. Obviously when I know a tree, this existential physical tree is not in my head; for an object to be known it need not undergo some kind of mysterious physical compresence or bilocation.

analysis for the author (Sellars) to favor any sort of exclusive consideration of it, even if only by way of incidental remark. The problem as to what it is ultimately that underlies men's realistic outlook upon the world, whether in the order of our sensible or of our intellectual experience, is one which must be examined within the context of the general problem as to the nature of knowledge itself." cf. Robert Kreyche, The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars, p. 26-27 (Our emphasis)

3 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 200.

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The moderate realist, however, while upholding the incommunicability of matter, still maintains, in another way, that to know is to become the known, to become the non-I, the other. Yet neither the knower, nor the object known loses its being. If either entity did lose its being a tertium quid would result rather than a union wherein the knower becomes the known itself. How then is it possible for an object which is not physically present in consciousness, to be immediately intuited? Only through the medium of a non-physical likeness of itself, what the moderate realist calls an intentional form, an impressed species. In other words, knowing is a process which involves an immaterial becoming, an immaterial identification, thereby making knowledge a dependent variable of immateriality.

The incommunicability of matter, therefore, led Sellars to an immediate rejection of an intuitionist theory of sense perception. We must determine whether or not the incommunicability of matter provided Sellars with a sufficient justification for this conclusion. Thus, the situation between Sellars and the moderate realist is tantamount to saying that either intuitive knowledge is impossible or else intentional forms must exist. The intelligibility of these respective positions must be developed within the framework of our aforementioned distinctions: first, that between the intra-organic object (esse intentionale) and the extra-organic object (esse physicum).

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For the moderate realist who upholds an intuitionist theory of sense perception, it must be clearly understood that he does not claim to immediately sense an object in its extra-organic physical existence but only as the object is present to the organ of sense; the object, therefore, is intuited or received through the medium of the sense organ(s). The fundamental principle underlying this assertion is that whatever is received in the knower is received according to the mode of the knower. The moderate realist, moreover, in maintaining that the object of perception, although it is received through the medium of the sense organs, is one and the same object as that which exists outside the knowing faculties, even though as known, as sensed, it has received a new mode of existence, an esse intentionale⁴. Hence, what is immediately intuited is NOT a sensation or sense-datum, but a real trans-subjective object, the object which is in contact with a real external sense organ.

The moderate realist is also convinced that our acts of sense perception are valid and to be trusted so long as certain pre-requisite conditions are fulfilled. Namely, the object must be directly in contact with the external sense organs, or else a reliable objective

⁴ Sellars never had a clear understanding of what was meant by the moderate realist's esse intentionale and always interpreted it in terms of his own understanding of the content of knowledge: "The idea which gives the content of knowledge (the esse intentionale of the scholastics) is other than the object of knowledge". Ibid., p. 190. (our emphasis)

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medium must be present in order that the senses can grasp the object. As a pertinent example of such a medium one need only think of the broadcasting industry - radio, television, cinema, and satellite communications. In addition, the sense-organs themselves must not be impaired or diseased, thereby giving a distorted impression of the object of sense perception, or no impression at all. Given these prerequisite conditions the moderate realist rests secure that what he perceives through the senses, he intuits. Sellars, of course, wouldn't accept that the object is intuited. Given the conditions the object itself could still only be affirmed, assigning to it the contents of sensation which are subjective. Sense perception, like all knowledge, is merely denotative, referential and hence non-intuitional.

The second distinction which Sellars fails to make is that between the sense-datum as such and the subsequent judgment which the intellect pronounces about it. The external senses are not faculties of judging: they are receptive instruments or capacities which are completely determined and specified by their object. Consequently they do not properly affirm or deny what is given to them but only register or report that which is given to them. Also, there is no question of assigning properties to an object by the senses. Sense-data are simply what they are, data or evidences, something given and not imputed by the senses to their object.

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When a person senses an object in its concrete, particularized existence, he senses it as colored, shaped, with a certain texture, etc. In this situation, the moderate realist accepts the fact that the senses actually attain to and know their object and that in this sense-perceptual knowledge there is a measure of conformity between the object as internally given in sensation and the object which exists materially outside the senses. Moreover, once the senses reveal and report what is given to them, it is only then that the intellect proceeds by way of formulating a judgment through reflection and critical analysis to ascertain what the specific nature of this conformity is. One may, like Sellars, pronounce the judgment that the sense-data are only causally correlated to their external cause. But can Sellars thereby legitimately conclude, on the basis of his present judgment, that the object of sensation is not intuited? He is so justified only if by object of sensation he means the object disjoined or separated from sensation and then he is involved in an inherent contradiction.

In analyzing the object of sensation the object must be understood as it is actually revealed in and given to sensation, that is, in its concrete, individualized existence. It is a purely arbitrary device on Sellars' part to substitute here for the object of sensation the object as it exists separated from sensation. Only the intellect can possibly make such a distinction, not the external

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senses. Moreover, only the intellect can judge the measure of conformity that exists between the object of sensation proper and the object as abstracted (conceived as "separated" from sensation).

In view of these distinctions, then, Sellars' rejection of an intuitionist theory of sense perception is consequent upon his failure to recognize what the object of sensation is - e.g. not a sensation or sense-datum, but a real, external, trans-subjective object. Granting the object of sensation has an extra-organic physical existence distinct from the intra-organic (*esse intentionale*) object, this is insufficient to conclude that the object of sensation proper is not intuited or for saying that it is only affirmed by the senses. Sellars' failure to realize this fact follows upon his failure to develop an adequate distinction between sense knowledge proper and the intellectual act of judgment which involves predication. Instead of explicating a theory of sense perception in its own terms he confuses sensations and judgmental pronouncements. This error takes on gigantic proportions in Sellars' epistemology and as we proceed, we shall see that it not only allies him with Kant, but also renders his position null and void on the grounds of its own critical realism.

It will be recalled that for Sellars, sensation is enveloped or taken up in the more complex act of perception and this act of perception involves denotation, selection, reference, and organic

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response on the part of the percipient knower.⁵ As a form of knowledge it is NOT knowledge of universals or essences, but simply knowledge of or knowledge about. Moreover, the act of perception has meaning or meanings which cannot exist apart from an event, an occurrence. The role of sense-data is that of a guiding stimulus, and this stimulus with its proper cerebral effect "is just the starting point of all sorts of directed and massive operations."⁶ In this way intellection is given "operational activity".

The emphasis of Sellars' epistemology, therefore, is that sense-data are not enough to acquaint us with the external world. There is much more involved, namely, intellection, which he understands as the operational, meaning-giving, responsive, referential activity of the percipient organism.⁷ In the act of perception the percipient organism is concerned with everyday practical, empirical, existential affairs, wherein he pronounces certain judgments. "The knower is concerned with things, events, and actual affairs. Such knowing

5 It is through his principle of "selectivity" or "organic response" that Sellars attempts to do justice to the knower's activity in the act of knowledge. We shall see later how successful he was.

6 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 202-03.

7 In perception intellection is involved because "we are aware of relations, comparison, meanings, attitudes, references". Ibid., p. 202.

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involves judgments and the use of ontological categories such as space, time, thinghood, causality, event." ⁸ In our analysis of the act of perception we saw that knowledge for Sellars is extracted, gleaned, quarried from sense-data. Sense-data, then, are the raw material which is worked on, as it were, by the intellect (minded-brain) when it is concerned with its practical affairs, and the instruments of such intellection are these ontological categories. They represent the natural equipment of the organism to deal with what would otherwise be an unintelligible world. This doctrine is indistinguishable from pure Kantianism. Accordingly, as a result of this categorial intellection, our world resolves itself into a system of concepts. Fortunately for us the organism as so equipped is provided with an organic act "with characteristics of a unitary synthetic act." ⁹ It is clear, then, that objects do not announce themselves either as qualities or existences, but are what they are because of the judgmental synthetic activity of the organism. ¹⁰

8 Ibid., p. 207.

9 Ibid., p. 209.

10 Remembering Sellars analysis of the two essential elements in perception - e.g. - the affirmation of a co-real and the assigned set of characters or aspects - notice the emphasis he puts upon assigned.

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"In the perceptual experience I denote and characterize an external thing made an object of my perceiving. It is equally clear that, for this position, concepts are not mere copies of sense-data but they are more of the nature of operative patterns." 11

In the above passage concepts are used synonymously with categories, (we have seen how, for Sellars, categories are our most fundamental concepts) and they are not to be viewed as ideational products. In this way Sellars believes that he escapes David Hume's causal theory of phenomenalism. He may or may not succeed, but even if he does, he accomplishes this feat at a tremendous sacrifice; for while he may refute phenomenalism, he simultaneously falls into a form of subjective idealism, something which he avowedly denounces.

Sellars, however, feels that he does not fall into the trap of subjective idealism because sense-data are causally correlated to their external cause. The raw material of sense-data are given in and by the sensory field even though they must be interpreted, related and organized by use of categorial meanings which are a property of the physical organism.¹² Yet because sense-data are anchored in an external cause, Sellars insists that his is a theory of direct knowledge. "We mean independent objects and we interpret

11 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 209.

12 Ibid., p. 210;

The judgmental character of the perceptual experience means "only to perceive the spatial, temporal and executive order of molar bodies. This means that I employ categories of this type in my interpretation of things."

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these objects in terms of ideas."¹³ But we have seen that Sellars makes it a cardinal principle that only sense-data, not the object, is intuited from the physical realm. In Sellars's mind, therefore, we must certainly draw a distinction between the given content of knowledge and the ungiven physical object of knowledge. But this in no way compels us to only infer the realm of physical existence; it is affirmed.

Sellars, however, does not adequately escape subjective idealism through his theory of "causal correlation" for he remains involved in an inherent contradiction. The content of knowledge allegedly has an objective foundation in external reality and is therefore apart from or outside the percipient. Yet it is somehow mysteriously intuited or given to the known self, but as intuited, it is subjective, internal to the percipient himself. The content is at once objective, and hence other than the percipient, and at once subjective, and is hence the percipient's own operational product being subsequently assigned or imputed to the object itself.¹⁴ Sellars felt that by drawing this object-content distinction he would be able to repudiate the shortcomings of naive realism and the

13 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 194.

14 "Knowledge is just the insight into the nature of the object that is made possible by the contents which reflect it in consciousness." Ibid., p. 200; (our emphasis). How do we know or get an insight into the nature of the object?

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neo-realist school which attempted to base an epistemology solely on common sense. While admitting the fact of causal mediation he proclaimed that the object affirmed and intended is known in terms of the content presented to the knowing self. But presented by what? Certainly not by the object, since Sellars draws such a complete cleavage between the subjective content and the physical object itself,¹⁵ nor by God, for that would be to lapse back into Berkeleyanism. Then by what is it presented? Sellars appeals to experience: the physical object is affirmed "through the very pressure and suggestion of our experience".¹⁶ But is this enough?

15 Note the devastating criticism of Richard Baker concerning this cleavage between the content of knowledge and the object of knowledge. "For if at least, in our basic contact with reality through sense experience, the object is not immediately intuited, the knowledge claim rests solely on a faith that subjective effects resemble objective causes. And for Sellars even this foundation is shaky, in as much as he has stated that 'as a matter of fact, the effect should not be like the cause'. On his own principle ... the stimulus which a sentient organism receives from without is only the occasion for perhaps an altogether new and different response on the part of the organism. The correlation between subjective datum and external stimulus, therefore, might be extremely poor or even absent entirely." cf. Richard R. Baker, "The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars", in The New Scholasticism, vol. 24 (1950), p. 160 (our emphasis). This position seems hardly distinguishable from the representative realism of John Locke; moreover, it is rather baffling to attempt to understand how Sellars fell into such an error when he levelled almost the same criticism at Locke which Baker made of him. "The usual criticism of Lockean realism is interrogatory: How can you know physical things if your primary knowledge terminates upon mental objects? You cannot get at physical things to compare them with your ideas. You assert that ideas are mental substitutes; but that is a matter of faith. And besides, is it very likely that mental objects can be satisfactory substitutes for non-mental realities?" cf. Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 194. (our emphasis)

16 Ibid., p. 195.

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If Sellars could prove that "the content is relevant to the object, that it has a sort of revelatory identity with the object, that it contains its structure, position, and changes", ¹⁷ in other words, if he could prove that sense-data actually reveal their object then his realism need not be questioned. But we have seen it is a fundamental principle of Sellars that the content is not the object, for the object is never given in perception. Yet if the content is to apply, be assigned, or be causally correlated, is it not necessary to have some measure of insight or glimpse, in the sense of intuition, apprehension, into the object itself? But with such a cleavage between the object and content of perception Sellars does not and can not give an adequate guarantee in the order of knowledge itself for a causally controlled correspondence between the sense-data (content) and its external cause (object), between the categories of nature and the categories of our own thinking. It is useless to appeal to the "pressure and suggestion of experience" for such an appeal remains just what it is - an appeal, an undemonstrated, or inadequately demonstrated, assertion. The claim to have knowledge, then, remains merely a claim and not an intelligible fact.

The foregoing doctrines of Sellars would certainly be acceptable to most idealists. In fact, his position is that of absolute idealism until, apparently faced with the problem of

17 Ibid., p. 200.

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explaining the relational and organized character of experience, he betrays his previous position. Instead of saying that it is the physical, percipient organism or the mind-brain which is responsible for the world announcing itself as an organized whole, Sellars turns around and says that things are in dynamic relations "because they are so disclosed by our data."¹⁸ This is vacillation pure and simple. There are two points of criticism here: one concerning the active spontaneity of the mind itself; the other concerning our propositional or predicative judgments which the mind pronounces.

First, Sellars did not wish to make the knower, the percipient, completely passive in the act of knowledge, but sought to do justice to the knower's spontaneous activity which is also a factor in the act of knowledge.¹⁹ However, his principle of selectivity, creativity, or organic response was insufficient to explain the knower's activity, the dynamic character of the mind. First, Sellars claims that the mind-brain is responsible for the world announcing itself as an organized whole, that the mind-brain is the totality, the complex, the matrix of objects. This, however, results from the selective activity or response of the percipient organism to a given object or objects in the act of perception. But this is

18 Roy W. Sellars, Philosophy of Physical Realism, p. 211.

19 Ibid., p. 215; "The human mind-brain is creative and this creativity is causally controlled and socially conditioned."

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impossible. By definition, there is nothing to respond to, no prior object to initiate selectivity, for it has not yet come into existence. If response, creativity or selectivity is made the condition of a matrix being found, then there is a certain prior "something" unaccounted for on realistic grounds; if response to and selectivity are discarded as the condition, then, on the grounds of Sellars' own critical realism, the matrix could never come into being at all.

Our second point concerns our predicative judgments. First, Sellars maintains that relations are categorial, that means judgmental, coming from the subjective side, the subjective whole of experience. Then he says that these dynamic relations are so disclosed by our data. Furthermore, even though our interpretative judgments possess objective reference, in no way is this to be construed as literally intuiting the object of perception. Sellars agrees with Hume that although propositions are causally controlled, that is, although they are empirical and synthetic, Sellars also maintains over Hume that propositions are also perceptual and transcendent. In them we are judging perceptually the relation between things and events." ²⁰ In brief, Sellars is saying that causal propositions are not a priori in any sense of the word, but they are referentially objective. Having seen, however, the cleavage Sellars draws between the content and object of perception with an inadequate justification for any

20 Ibid., p. 212.

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causal correlation, it makes little difference whether propositions are a priori or "referentially objective": in either case they are to be rejected.

It is through this theory of knowledge, as thus far set forth and evaluated, that Sellars felt that he escaped both phenomenalist empiricism and the Platonic-Cartesian rationalism. Taking the perceptual experience as he found it he claimed to have discovered in it simultaneously, "sense-data, concepts, categories, all of which are founded on the organism and its situation".²¹ He felt that the categories had an objective reference to being and that this objectivity was adequately accounted for in his causal theory of sensation. The categories arise in us as expressions of ourselves as operationally "immersed in the sea of being. Our categories are valid because they are well founded ... Nature conforms to them because nature is their foundation".²² How we can possibly know this conformity remains Sellars' secret and is left to the imagination of the reader. For, by definition, all knowledge is judgmental and therefore, as with the idealists, a complex of ideas due to subjective patterns and categories, and consequently a matter of the knower's imputative powers.

Nor does Sellars solve the problem by arguing that the mind is the brain and that its patterns are developed under control and

21 Ibid., p. 213.

22 Ibid., p. 216.

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in relation to the organism as a whole. What Sellars is saying, and means, is that the organism is a part of the physical world and that he is consequently compelled to reject that sort of dualism which would make mind alien to the body, and the world of nature. We can certainly agree that this is a most commendable endeavor, but Sellars' own attempt still fails to explain the integral relationship between the categorial equipment of the percipient organism and the world as a whole. By definition, Sellars could never accomplish this, for with his object-content cleavage we cannot know the world as such. In addition, Sellars never satisfactorily answers the problem of why we as human beings have such categorial instruments of knowledge, while it is very obvious, judging from their behavior, that other creatures do not possess them.²³ In effect, his object-content

²³ In this connection Robert Kreyche undermined Sellars' theory of the "levels" of knowledge by showing how Sellars, contrary to his intentions, destroyed the uniqueness of knowledge. Knowledge is not a 'function' of a unique and higher order (e.g. an immaterial intellect) but simply a function based upon the biological act of response. cf. Robert J. Kreyche, *The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars*, pp. 114-119; "While Sellars would, of course, not only admit, but insist that knowledge is unique, he nevertheless attempts to explain this uniqueness by relegating knowledge merely to a higher 'level' on the plane of organic, biological existence. Yet the simple truth is that between the supposed 'level' or 'levels' of knowledge and the lower levels of biological function, the differences that exist would be differences of degree and not of kind, since every biological function, however complex it might be, would always be explicable in terms of biological laws.

To me it is clear that the nature of knowledge is such that it demands an explanation which is commensurate only with the laws of being itself, and not of any of its specialized modes. Or must it possibly

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distinction, by preventing him from drawing an adequate distinction between the knowing faculties of sense and intellect, forced Sellars to a reductionist view of the higher capacities of the intellect and an erroneous view of what the senses themselves actually reveal.

From the foregoing conclusions which we have until now established it should be evident that we cannot accept Sellars' position that epistemology only "interprets" science, and that all knowledge, including sense perception embraces "essentially what science has worked out".²⁴ The scientist, of course, undertakes his own investigations according to the peculiar method of his given empirical discipline. Moreover, in carrying out his scientific, experimental investigations he is not concerned with any philosophical or metaphysical problems, and he is perfectly within his right in

be accepted as a dogma that all reality is co-extensive with the various so-called levels of physical existence? On this point I might remark that a naturalistic view of knowledge, or for that matter, of reality, is tenable only on the assumption that no other view is necessary...

To revert at this point to an explanation of knowledge in terms of physical or biological laws ... is to leave hopelessly unexplained the basic question ... What is it that gives knowledge its distinctive character?" pp. 116-118.

²⁴ Roy W. Sellars, "Realism, Naturalism and Humanism", in Contemporary American Philosophy, vol. II, p. 273.

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excluding such questions from his inquiry. This does not mean, however, that the scientist is not unconsciously influenced by certain philosophical presuppositions which underlie and effect his subsequent interpretation of those facts which he has discovered in his experimental investigations. In spite of this, however, by the very nature of his empirical aims and methods, philosophical matters lie outside the scientist's field of inquiry. His concern is solely with the description of phenomenal regularities, the expression of the quantitative relations between these same regularities, and the discovery of the physical patterns and organizations with which the phenomena are connected. He explains, not after the manner of bringing to light ultimate causes and foundations, but by showing how a given process, by referring it to another given process or pattern, has been found to be its invariable antecedent. The ultimate 'what' and 'why' of things is obviously not discoverable by such an empirical method, and no one who recognizes the distinction between science and philosophy expects the scientist to provide such ultimate explanations. Therefore, it is illegitimate for any naturalist to maintain that the proximate causes known by science are the only causes which the human mind can attain, or worse, that these are really the ultimate causes of the events and processes in nature. Consequently when Sellars affirms that "if you would really know the world, it is felt that you should find out what

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science has to say about it,"²⁵ or that, "the physical is but another term for being, for existence,"²⁶ he distorts, and shows himself to be ignorant of the true nature of both science and philosophy.

From our critical evaluations, it should now be clear that the root of the errors in Sellars' epistemological investigations lie in his fundamental distinction between the object and content of knowledge. This distinction constituted the "achilles heel" in his theory of knowledge. Moreover, this distinction was not necessitated by an accurate analysis of the knowledge-claim as given in common-sense, but rather a distinction which was imposed upon his analysis due to his naturalistic pre-conception - e.g. being is co-extensive with matter and hence the knower was simply a percipient organism, with the resultant effect that knowledge was ultimately reduced to a complex biological function. By way of explicating this

25 Roy W. Sellars, Essays in Critical Realism, p. 191.

26 Roy W. Sellars, The Principles and Problems of Philosophy, p. 134. In dealing with Sellars' "levels" of knowing we saw that scientific conceiving is a more perfect approximation of knowledge than perceptual knowing. But both deal with one and the same external world. Yet given the basis of our previous criticism of the complete cleavage he draws between the content of knowledge and the object, one may ask Sellars how science is able to get to its object in order to endow us with the gift of a "more perfect knowledge?"

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last point we wish to draw attention to a few final considerations about Sellars' object-content distinction as such, considerations which flow simply from the demands of human experience.

We know that everyday experience makes demands, legitimate demands, upon us which must be respected in any philosophical inquiry. One of those demands is that the senses actually achieve their proper object - e.g. sight achieves color, hearing, sound, etc. Certainly, there may be errors of sense but if so they are not in relation to the intra-organic (*esse intentionale*) essential object of sense but in relation to characters which are outside the range of immediate sense perception, sense intuition, and only in regard to accidental sensibles. Moreover, with Sellars, we can agree that it is a demand of human experience that we know things and that we know them directly. But is it not equally a demand of human experience that we do in fact intuit the object, that is, does not the knowing experience tell us that the content is somehow the object itself? Otherwise what is it that we know? Sellars rightly saw the incommunicability of matter but he was not justified on that account to claim that we intuit only contents, and simply affirm the object and assign predicates. True, the ordinary man does not make a distinction between the content and object of knowledge, but the reason cannot legitimately be attributed to a lack of critical reflection or a natural mistake; it is attributable to the inherent unity of content

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and object, between knower and known. In this connection we would like to quote the insights of a contemporary thinker concerning this unity with being which the ordinary man achieves in common sense knowing.

"But it (e.g. common sense knowledge of reality) is not yet that being as the metaphysician is to see it and disengage it. Just now when I was speaking of the sciences inferior to metaphysics, I spoke of particularized being, masking and enveloping the metaphysical concept of being. In this case it is vague being that masks it. The metaphysical concept of being is present. But it is not disengaged but disguised, invisible. This vague being of common sense renders it possible to work upon what is really (though the user does not know it) the metaphysical notion of being, and thus reach true pre-philosophical conclusions about certain fundamental problems which the metaphysician will settle scientifically and philosophically. That is to say, we are here confronted with an imperfect state of knowledge and at the same time with a species of philosophy corresponding with it, which is not yet philosophy, not yet perfect knowledge, but the prefiguration and preliminary sketch of philosophy." 27

It would seem then, from these reflections about common sense, that Sellars fell into the same trap that engulfed Hume and Berkeley - and for which, as we saw in our first chapter, he criticized them - namely, at the outset of his epistemological investigations he inserted an initial contradiction in human experience.

27 Jacques Maritain, A Preface to Metaphysics, p. 38, (our emphasis). Note also the comment of Robert Kreyche: "I can, of course, and sometimes do, distinguish between the subjective elements which are present in my act of knowledge and the object which I know.

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By means of his object-content²⁸ distinction Sellars established an unbridgeable abyss between mind and reality, between the knower and the known, between the pre-reflexive demands of human experience and its adequate conceptual analysis. Consequently, Sellars, from the very beginning of his inquiry, was condemned to avoid the very thing which was required to provide his epistemology with an unshakable foundation - namely, an intuitive theory of sense perception. Had Sellars been more attentive and docile to the demands of common sense, the demands of human experience, he may have discovered the necessity of admitting such an intuitive theory. But, alas, his naturalistic pre-suppositions were too strong to allow him to uncover the latent insights, the preliminary epistemological sketch in common sense.

But never do I draw this distinction with a view toward establishing a dualism between my knowledge of a thing and the thing itself which I know. Yet it is precisely this sort of dualism which characterizes the object-content distinction of Sellars. From the standpoint of knowledge then, as I really experience it, I find, not only the need for rejecting a dualism of object and contents, but for positively insisting upon a kind of identity between the object which I know and the contents of my knowledge." cf. Robert J. Kreyche, The Naturalism of Roy Wood Sellars, p. 99.

²⁸ We have not given an extended criticism of Sellars' theory of truth for the arguments against it are basically the same as those against the object-content distinction. We saw that truth is adjectival, parenthetical, secondary to knowledge. It is a seal or endorsement as to the authenticity of a knowledge-claim, that is, it implies a causally based correspondence between the knowledge-claim (the judgment) and reality. But once again, if the knower is restricted to the datum, the content, what adequate guarantee is there for this causally based correspondence? Moreover, the tests or criteria of

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His naturalism may indeed have permitted him to overcome the dualism of mind and body, but it also, through his object-content distinction, sentenced him to a different dualism of isolation: namely, that between the perceived object-as-known (affirmed) and the (unknowable, ungiven) physical object as it is in itself. Consequently, Sellars employed the categories to explain how the inadequacy of sense data was overcome in perception. The categories, however, were an arbitrary device, an element foreign to reality, utilized to explain knowledge of, knowledge about. In the end, then, it appears that we are forced to conclude that Sellars' dualism of isolation amounted to a contradiction; for, at the same time and with respect to the same object, it is known (for the knower affirms it) and it is not known (for the knower is confined to the content, the sense data). Once Sellars divorced the subject from the object, once he placed that unbridgeable abyss between what appears in sensibility and the object as cause of that appearance, no successful attempt could ever be made to reconcile or re-unite them.

truth, of knowledge-claims does not justify the conclusion that "Knowledge is power". Although there is a practical knowledge which tends toward action - not power - knowledge by its very nature tends toward truth, the intellect's actual grasp or taking hold of being. cf. Jacques Maritain, The Range of Reason, p. 15-16.

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In the final analysis and in the light of the objections raised, then, it would seem, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion, that Sellars' whole theory of knowledge became committed and oriented to subjective idealism at its inception and was clothed with the pragmatic necessity of affirming co-real objects. His realism was certainly well placed and well directed inasmuch as it stated the following principles: we truly know real, extramental, physical objects; their being known makes no difference to the objects themselves; and all our knowledge of extramental reality must have some foundation in sense perception. But although Sellars strongly professed these fundamental realistic principles they never received an adequate conceptual analysis, in the order of knowledge itself, for the underlying convictions that a realistic position maintains. In other words, Sellars' own critical realism was itself affirmed but never proved, explained; it was only assumed due to "the very pressure and suggestion of our experience". It appears, then, on the basis of the evidence and the grounds of Sellars' own principles, that we may accept the conclusion that Sellars unwittingly and unintentionally succumbed and fell into the tradition of subjective idealism, a tradition whose shortcomings and difficulties he ardently attempted to overcome.

All thinkers in the Cartesian tradition tried to bridge the gap from thought to reality by means of some illogical strategy or

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irrational feelings. Descartes tried to solve the dilemma by relying upon the veracity of God, whose existence he had proven by an illicit transition from the ideal to the real order. Kant attempted to solve the problem by emphasizing those realities necessary for the moral order through his categorical imperative. Fichte appealed to the voice of conscience and Sellars to "referential transcendence".

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