

The Experiential Presence of Objects to Perceptual Consciousness: Wilfrid Sellars, Sense Impressions, and Perceptual Takings

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Discussion of W. Sellars's rediscovery of experiential presence continues with special reference to J. McDowell's and J.F. Rosenberg's recent articles on Sellars's understanding of perception, and a later effort by Sellars to cast light on the intimate relation between sensing and perceptual taking. Five main sections respectively summarize my earlier discussion of Sellars's account of experiential presence, draw on Rosenberg's explication of two Sellarsian modes of responding to sense impressions, consider McDowell's claim that Sellars's perceptual takings are shapings of sensory consciousness, introduce Sellars's Kantian late account of experiential presence, and return critically to McDowell's thesis: Sellars's perceptual takings, notwithstanding their being purely conceptual actualizations, give us awareness of the very pinkness of a pink ice cube.

Sellars's Rediscovery of Experiential Presence

In this journal not long ago, an article of mine (Natsoulas, 1999) focused on Wilfrid Sellars's "rediscovery of presence." I was working there from the published version of a paper about the experiential presence of objects to perceptual consciousness that Sellars (1978a) delivered at a meeting of the Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, although Sellars had been, throughout his long and important career, a practitioner of the analytic philosophy of knowledge, mind, and science. At the start, he interestingly expressed a belief that his audience would notice an affinity between his effort and phenomenology, and they would be more sympathetic to what he had to say than his analytic colleagues would expect.

In the abstract of my 1999 article, I used some of Sellars's terms in order to identify the phenomenon of experiential presence with which I would be concerned:

When we see Wilfrid Sellars's favorite object, an ice cube pink through and through, we see the very pinkness of it. Inner awareness of our visual experience finds the ice cube to be experientially present, not merely representationally present to our consciousness. Its pinkness and other properties are present not merely metaphorically, not merely in the sense that the experience represents or is an occurrent belief in the ice cube's being there before us. (Natsoulas, 1999, p. 17)

But Sellars accounted for the visual experiential presence of a pink ice cube by referring to two distinct and successive components belonging to, as he held, every veridical or nonveridical case of perceiving in which it is like having a pink ice cube present in person before one:

(a) a visual sensation (or visual sense-impression) produced in one's "sensorium" (a part of one's brain; Sellars, 1981) by certain specific sensory effects of photic stimulation or, in certain nonveridical cases, produced there in some other way;¹ and

(b) a conceptual response to the sensation that, although this response makes reference to the sensation, mis-takes the sensation for an environmental object that, through photic stimulation, is now producing or would produce the sensation.

I disagree with Sellars's (1978a) particular attempt to give an account for experiential presence. But his systematic acknowledgement of experiential presence is a welcome development indeed to discover in Sellars's sophisticated and influential body of thought pertinent to consciousness. Moreover, Sellars's rediscovery of presence is notable in the light of his generally behavioristic understanding of consciousness (e.g., Sellars, 1975). I have argued previously (Natsoulas, 1999) that his account is less than adequate on at least the two grounds that I review here next.

1. Even when they are free of error, our mental and our behavioral acts of representing a sensation (or, for that matter, representing anything else as being this or that) are limited with respect to the phenomena that psychologists can adequately explain in terms of them. Of course, these acts have reference to an inexhaustible number of different things. But such a response, an act that merely conceptualizes something as being such-and-such, no matter what it may be that the act is considered to be a case of responding to, does not suffice theo-

¹In my previous article, I consistently used the word *sensation* to refer to Sellars's first perceptual component, and I do so again in this introductory section, which is largely a summary of much of that article. In subsequent sections, I use *sense-impression* for the same component because this term corresponds more closely to the usages of the authors whose views I discuss. For all present purposes, *sensation* and *sense-impression* are terms equivalent.

retically in distinguishing between the experiential presence of something and the latter's having a merely representational presence: that is, its being represented as present in the same way that items absent from here are represented.

As Sellars (1978a) started to address the topic of experiential presence, he seemed himself to suggest that a presence of the experiential sort is not reducible simply to the conceptualizing of something as such-and-such or to judging or occurrently believing it to be such-and-such. Thus, his important statement: "*Something, somehow* a cube of pink in physical space is present in the perception other than as merely *believed in* (original emphases, p.178).² Earlier, Sellars (1975, p. 313) seemed to be criticizing his own account of experiential presence somewhat similarly to how I objected to it in my recent article. He frankly admitted that his conception of perceiving "leaves almost untouched the intimate relation which exists" between sensing and perceptual taking, between the two ingredients that he proposed successively constitute every instance of perceiving.

Later on, at a conference in 1979, Sellars is reported to have stated that "direct awareness" of one's sensations does take place, and that this mode of apprehending them makes it possible for us to respond to them conceptually (Lycan, 1987, p. 145). From this further admission, it would seem to follow that the visual experiential presence of an ice cube takes place because our experience of it involves a kind of apprehension that is more than a merely conceptualizing act, whether the latter be an occurrent belief or judgment or some other form of such an act.

Then, perhaps, according to Sellars's understanding, a case of visual perceiving is made up of three components: that is, not only a visual sensation and a conceptualizing act of responding to it, but also, before the act, an awareness that makes the pink ice cube experientially present, present in experience. The conceptualizing act caused to occur by the latter awareness could include reference to the ice cube's appearing to be there in the environment and a judgment to the effect that the ice cube is there in fact. But, although Sellars seems to have moved somewhat in the direction just indicated, he did not come to hold such a view. I did not have occasion to discuss this theoretical alternative in my previous article, but I shall come to discuss something like it here.

2. The second objection that I advanced (Natsoulas, 1999) contra Sellars's (1978a) specific effort to account for the experiential presence of a pink ice

²Sellars (1978b, p. 233) distinguished between (a) an occurrent perceptual belief-in (also called a "perceptual taking") and (b) an occurrent perceptual judgment, which has for its subject term an occurrent perceptual belief-in. A perceptual taking is representable by means of a demonstrative phrase such as *this brick with a red and rectangular facing surface*. A perceptual judgment that having such a perceptual taking as its subject term would be representable with the proposition *This brick with a red and rectangular facing side is too large for the job at hand*.

cube, by reference to a sensation and a conceptual response, consisted of the fact that something's being experientially present to one does not require in every case that one undergo, at the time of the experience, sensations directly corresponding to the particular item.³ There can be "amodal" experiential presence. Cases of this sort that I mentioned were ones Michotte, Thinès, and Crabbé (1964/1991) or their students and colleagues were able to demonstrate in the laboratory. From the Sellarsian perspective, their findings are summarizable in the following words: the sensations involved in certain perceptions do not possess all of the features that the environment is thereby perceptually taken to possess; these other features are present merely as believed-in, merely as conceptually represented in the perception.

But, "merely as believed-in" is not how such "amodal" features seemed to the subjects in the studies discussed by Michotte, Thinès, and Crabbé. The amodally perceived features were, in their experiential presence, remarkably like modally perceived features. Their similarity was such as to lead me to conclude as I spelled out (Natsoulas, 1999): that a conceptualizing act of the pure sort that Sellars (1978a) evidently had in mind as one component of a perception cannot explain amodal experiential presence any better than the modal kind. In their phenomenological reports, subjects distinguished knowing or believing in something from its experiential presence to them. In a later lecture, however, Sellars (1978b) made another attempt to explain experiential presence that in effect took my second criticism above into account. The fourth main section of the present article considers that further effort.

This first section, now concluded, largely summarizes my discussion of Sellars's (1978a) rediscovery of experiential presence (Natsoulas, 1999). I continue that discussion next with special reference to (a) two other authors' relevant recent articles (McDowell, 1998; Rosenberg, 2000) on Sellars's understanding of perception, and to (b) Sellars's (1978b) additional endeavor to cast light on "the intimate relation" between sensing and perceptual taking.

Two Sellarsian Modes of Responding to Sense Impressions: Can Either of These Conceptual Modes Explain Experiential Presence?

Jay F. Rosenberg (2000), who is a Sellars scholar, recently addressed the question whether Sellars allows for any awareness at all of "sense impressions as sense impressions" (p. 147). Sense impressions are the sensory states (called "sensations" above) that are crucially involved in Sellars's (1978a) effort to give an account of experiential presence. In introductory remarks

³Note my concomitant admission (Natsoulas, 1999) that it may be the case that sensations have a necessary part in all mental acts in which our experience is like having an item in person before us. Key to this qualification is the final clause of the sentence hereby footnoted.

Rosenberg quotes (a) from Sellars (1981, p. 67) the assertion that sense impressions (e.g., states of sensing bluely) do not present themselves *as such*, and (b) from Sellars (1963) the claim that “sense impressions do not mediate [perceptual judgments] by being known” (p. 91).

As will be seen, Rosenberg considers our possibly having in Sellars’s view direct awareness of our sense impressions in a way that bears on the problem of experiential presence for Sellars. Experiential presence is a problem, I should emphasize, for all of us who are committed to the psychological investigation of consciousness. Criticism of Sellars’s attempt as found here and in my prior article (Natsoulas, 1999) should not be taken to imply my having an adequate solution. One may know what cannot work without knowing what will work.

Responding in the Perceptual Mode to a Sense Impression

After a brief survey of some pertinent material from three of Sellars’s (1956, 1963, 1981) major works, Rosenberg (2000) proposes,

Sellars evidently acknowledges two paradigms of “direct awareness,” that is, two distinct ways in which someone, say Susanna, might noninferentially respond to one of her sense impressions, e.g., a sense impression of a red rectangle. She can, in the first instance, respond in *the mode of perception*, that is, with a perceptual judgment, for instance, “This thick red book is cluttering up the table.” The subject term [this thick red book] of such a judgment signals a perceptual *taking*. Here Susanna takes something, deictically indicated by the demonstrative “this,” to be (the facing surface of) a thick red book; she is aware of it as a thick red book. (p. 147)

Rosenberg is saying for Sellars that Susanna (“S”) has direct (noninferential) awareness of that to which S’s perceptual judgment is a response. In the example, S’s perceptual judgment regarding what is cluttering the table is a response to a sense impression that is produced in S by the effects of a certain thick red book on the light that the book’s facing surfaces are reflecting into her eyes. And that of which S is aware is, according to Sellars, a sense impression that S’s response to it takes to be a thick red book.

Rosenberg speaks not merely of S’s propositionally responding to her sense impression, but also of S’s being *aware* of the sense impression. However, S’s awareness is supposed to be simply a conceptual response, a response containing a kind of error. What S is aware of actually, what S is responding to in fact, is not something which is reflecting light to her “point of observation” (Gibson, 1979/1986). Rather, it is something that cannot reflect light and does not exist in the environment except within other individuals. What S is aware of is a sense impression that is produced in her sensorium by photic sensory effects of the book. Let me comment on this view in the form of four points.

1. The first point is one John McDowell (1998) makes in his detailed discussion concerning Sellars on perceptual experience. The perceptual judgment to which Sellars is referring, as being a part of having a perception, is not typically a matter of judging in the sense of “exercising control over one’s cognitive life”; rather it is an involuntary matter of “accepting that things are that way by a sort of default” (p. 439). For this reason, Sellars’s perceptual judgments are better described as being a kind of response that, with respect to the conceptual capacities actualized in its occurrence, resembles a judgment. McDowell quotes Sellars (1968, p. 14) to the effect that the conceptual representation that is involved in a perceptual judgment is, for example, of this kind: visually taking it that there is a red and rectangular physical object in front of one. And he corrects Sellars by returning to the above point. Thus, the implication that a claim is being made, that something is being taken by a subject in the perceptual case, that there is thus an exercise of cognitive freedom, is much too general, not being what typically occurs. Accepting McDowell’s point as being quite faithful to Sellars’s intentions, I proceed nevertheless using Sellars’s terms of perceptual takings and perceptual judgments, with the confidence that the reader will keep in mind that, as they typically occur in perceiving, the referred-to takings and judgments are in fact involuntary.

2. Sellars’s sense impressions and perceptual judgments are both occurrences in the brain.⁴ Therefore, there are brain occurrences that causally mediate between S’s response, said to be a conceptual response to her sense impression, and this sense impression. For example, there will surely be a more proximate neurophysiological cause of the conceptual response than is the sense impression to which the conceptual act is proposed to be a response.

3. A question naturally arises: why S’s conceptual response is not theoretically considered to be a noninferential response to (and a direct awareness of) any one of the causes that lead up to the conceptual response’s occurrence provided this cause is one which the conceptual content of the response has reference to. Sellars suggests the conceptual response to a sense impression includes a taking of the sense impression for something it is not (e.g., a thick red book). Thus, the conceptual response is, it would seem, a direct awareness of the sense impression because it is what is therein taken; the thick red book, for example, is not taken. Indeed, an environmental object cannot be perceptually taken because, I would gather, it is causally distant from the taking. An environmental object, while it may be part of the

⁴With the exception, perhaps, of judgments that are overt or covert behaviors. But behaviors can rightly be considered each to be in part a brain occurrence, for they are not occurrences simply in the muscles or glands.

causal sequence leading to the conceptual response, is not a sense impression and cannot be conceptually responded to.

4. Thus, the question becomes whether, in this instance, the sense impression is really what is taken and how a taking of the sense impression transpires rather than a taking of another cause in the sequence from the book-reflected light to the conceptual response. The alternative thesis comes readily to mind: the conceptual response is better considered to be a perceptual taking of the book, without implying that any of the other causes (between the book and S's noninferential awareness of it, including the sense impression) is taken in any way.

Continuing his explication of Sellars's first paradigm of direct awareness, Rosenberg (2000) brings out that it happens too that S's conceptual response to the same sense impression as above may be, instead, in a perceptual mode with a content expressible as "Lo! A red rectangle." The latter content, too, refers to something present to S, but without implying more than what follows from its being "an individuated volume of red stuff." Of course, this content is different from the one expressible as "This thick red book is cluttering up the table."

Rosenberg adds that perhaps the conceptual content of this perceptual case is communicated more adequately with the expression "*Lo and behold!* [*This is*] a red rectangle" (p. 147, brackets in original). Rosenberg so suggests because the conceptualizing component of the perception involves a *perceptual taking*: which is a certain dimension, called the "deictic" dimension, of the conceptual response. Accordingly, the perceptual-taking dimension has conceptual content to the effect that S "is responding to something *present to her* with the concept of a red triangle" (p. 147, italics in original). Rosenberg seems to be saying that the conceptual response identifies something not only (a) as its being a red rectangle (a rectilinear volume of red stuff), but also (b) as its being present to S and (c) as its being herein responded to conceptually.

Both conceptual responses, occurring in either perceptual mode, have a deictic dimension whose object (what each response indicates) is not the book. Rather, the "this-thick-red-book" component of the first content indicates something that S is perceptually taking to be a thick red book. The something thereby indicated, in Sellars's view, is a sense impression caused to occur in S by the book's existence in the part of her environment unoccluded relative to her point of observation. A sense impression is indicated too by the deictic dimension of the conceptual response expressible with "Lo! A red rectangle" or "*Lo and behold!* [*This is*] a red rectangle."

Consequently, Rosenberg proposes that the first kind of direct awareness, whether it be a response in the first or second perceptual mode, is not a case of awareness of a sense impression as a sense impression. Rosenberg so proposes

presumably for the reason that neither respective conceptual content mentions a sense impression. The first conceptual content is the content of an awareness of the sense impression as a book. The second content is the content of an awareness of the sense impression as a rectilinear volume of red stuff.

As I have argued, a Sellarsian conceptual response to a sense impression would seem to be an effect, also, of other causes to which S could equally be said to be responding. Whenever S's perceptual taking involves exercise of the concept of a red object, book, rectangle, or the like, why could she not be perceptually taking what she would say she is perceiving? She would most commonly say the book, rather than a more proximate cause of her perceptual judgment. After all, the perceptual judgment is noninferential; S is not inferring the presence of the red book at a certain place in her environment. To mis-take something perceptually for something else is a noninferential process. On Sellars's understanding, it would seem that awareness of the book is just as "direct" as is awareness of the sense impression that the book helps to produce.

Based on the above understanding of Sellars's conceptual responses to a sense impression, I suggest the following:

A visual perceptual taking, which is the deictic dimension of a visual perceptual judgment, does not do more than get caused to occur by the sense impression that it is said to mis-take. For S to have the thought (a) that a red rectangle (or book) is present at the moment to her and (b) that this thought of hers is a conceptual response to a red rectangle (or book) present at the moment to her, is not for the book or sense impression involved to be experientially present to S. As Sellars (1978a) himself insisted, there must be a presence of something in the perception other than as merely believed in; we know this from having perceptual experiences and being directly aware of them. And, to this point, except for bringing out that Sellars's perceptual takings are the deictic dimension of conceptual responses to sense impressions, Rosenberg does not further explicate them, as being something more than a certain part of a propositional judgment.

Responding to a Sense Impression in a Reporting Mode

The second paradigm of direct awareness that Sellars acknowledges according to Rosenberg (2000), the second way S might noninferentially respond to a sense impression, differs from the first way, described above, with respect to the propositional content of S's conceptual response. S may have learned to respond directly and noninferentially to her sense impression of a red rectangle in the form of a conceptual response with a content such as is expressible with "I am having a sense impression of a red rectangle."

Rosenberg expresses reluctance to say such a conceptual response is an awareness — even that it is an awareness of the sense impression, let alone an awareness of the sense impression as a sense impression. He states,

The key point, I think, is that this sort of [conceptual response] is not, in Kant's sense, a *schematized intuition*. In the sense in which there is something present in Susanna's perceptual experience — namely, a sense impression of a red rectangle — of which she judges that *it* is a red rectangular physical object, there is nothing present in her [conceptual response] of which she judges that *it* is a sense impression. (Rosenberg, 2000, p. 148)

He goes on to explain that the form of the conceptual response “I am having a sense impression of a red rectangle” is not deictic, as is the form of the following two responses (and the two mentioned in the preceding subsection of the present article): “*This* is a sense impression of a red triangle.” “Lo! a sense impression of a red rectangle.”

Thus, Rosenberg (2000, p. 149) seems to imply that those conceptual responses to a sense impression of a red triangle that do possess a deictic dimension, such as the other four instances mentioned above, do include within themselves a sense impression of a red triangle, which two of the four instances take to be a certain physical object in the environment. This would make the four conceptual responses more than mere thoughts. They would be experiences, each of them having a phenomenology, a descriptive content, not just a propositional content. There would be something it is like to have any one of them.

But Sellars separates the descriptive content from the propositional content of a perceptual episode, assigning them respectively to a sense impression and a cognitive response to the sense impression. The theoretical consequence would seem to be: the perceptual taking or judgment cannot be a perceptual experience with something present in it which it apprehends. So too, the sense impression would lack a cognitive content, would not be an awareness of something, even as though of something, and so fail to qualify as an experience. The perceptual episode would therefore not be a perceptual experience; at most it would be a mere thought produced by a sense impression. The inclusion of a deictic dimension, a perceptual taking, in a conceptual response to a sense impression would seem not to have saved the day. Given Sellars's scheme, there is nothing that is present to S of which she can perceptually judge that it is a sense impression or anything else. My discussion of Sellarsian direct awareness in the perceptual mode came to a like conclusion (see subsection prior to this one).

Are Sellars's Perceptual Takings Already Shapings of Sensory Consciousness? The Notion of a Form of Conceptual Activity that Provides Experiential Presence

In my previous article, I asked rhetorically whether Sellars (1978a) meant that the somehow presence in a perception of a cube of pink in physical space is a literal presence, rather than just a metaphorical presence wherein

the perception is (includes) an awareness of the physical object but does not contain the latter. I concluded that he meant: something with a special resemblance to an object in physical space is sometimes literally present in an awareness. Consistently with this, McDowell (1998) understands the role of sense impressions in Sellars's account as being the production somehow of conceptual effects more than mere thoughts. Sellars's portrait of perceptual experiences purportedly requires non-concept-involving sense impressions. Judging from Sellars (1978a), the grounds for this requirement, I gather, are phenomenological.⁵

We see the very pinkness of a pink ice cube. Its pinkness has experiential presence for us. We do not merely think the pinkness to be there, to be one of the features of the cube of ice we believe exists there before us. Perceptual takings require something that, in their special way, they take to be there. Perceptual takings are individual "actualizations of cognitive capacities" (McDowell, 1998) that, having a sense impression for their object and cause, somehow render the sense impression experientially present.

Their being such actualizations does not, on McDowell's view, belie the central role which sensibility must play in the mental's directedness to objects, its intentionality. Indeed, Sellars's perceptual takings are in themselves more than mere conceptual responses; sense impressions are not needed to introduce sensibility into perceptual consciousness. About Sellars's conception, McDowell (1998) writes:

Conceptual episodes of the relevant kind are already, as the conceptual episodes they are, cases of *being under the visual impression* that such-and-such is the case. It is not that as conceptual episodes they are phenomenologically colorless, so that they would need to be associated with visual sensations in order that some complex composed of these conceptual episodes and the associated visual sensations can be recognizably visual. These conceptual episodes are already, as the conceptual episodes they are, shapings of visual consciousness. If we need a below-the-line [i.e., non-concept-involving] element in our picture, it is not in order to ensure that the picture depicts states or episodes of visual consciousness. (p. 442)

Sellars's (1978a) view is that a sense impression is not literally present in, it is not itself a literal part of, any conceptual response to it. A distinct component of each perception is a sense impression that is the object or actual referent of a conceptual response to that sense impression, a response that is also a component of the perception. The relation between the two components of a perception is causal, the cause being in addition the direct object of the effect (Natsoulas, 1999). Indeed, McDowell interprets Sellars to main-

⁵Sellars (1978b) states elsewhere, "Phenomenological reflection on the structure of perceptual experience . . . should reveal the categories, the most generic kinds and classes, to which [the] objects [of the external world] belong, as well as the manner in which objects perceived and perceiving subjects come together in the perceptual act" (pp. 231–232).

tain that the external relation between sense impressions and the conceptual responses to them is noninferentially apprehensible: “that the flow of one’s conceptual representations . . . is being guided into ‘containing’ the relevant claim by the flow of one’s [sense] impressions” is “appceptively available” (McDowell, 1998, p. 450).

Mention of the causal relation between the two components of any perception repeatedly recurs in Sellars’s writings, for example, in his book of lectures with the subtitle *Variations on Kantian Themes* (Sellars, 1968). Thus, regarding the manifold of outer sense, he states,

It is only if the manifold is mistakenly construed as belonging to the conceptual order that it *makes sense* to suppose that it, so to speak, bodily or literally becomes part of the resulting intuitive representation. If it is, as I take it to be, non-conceptual, it can only guide “from without” the unique conceptual activity which is representing of *this-suches* as subjects of perceptual judgment. (p. 16)

On what grounds, therefore, does McDowell insist the second component of each of Sellars’s perceptions is not merely a conceptual act but is also a “shaping of sensory consciousness?”

To indicate what he means by the latter claim, McDowell calls our attention to a volume of his own work (McDowell, 1994). The notion of experience which he there advances involves “states or episodes in which conceptual capacities are operative in sensibility” (McDowell, 1998, p. 441).⁶ McDowell claims Sellars shows us how to conceive thusly of perceptual experiences. Sellars does so by introducing, I take McDowell to be saying, perceptual impressions that have both conceptual and qualitative content (cf. Natsoulas, 1998). McDowell insists that, according to Sellars, perceptual takings are “impressions” that, although they are actualizations of cognitive capacities, are not colorless phenomenologically.

Expressing Sellars’s view of the perceptual takings as he understands it, McDowell (1998) states, “In a visual experience an ostensibly seen object ostensibly impresses itself visually on the subject” (p. 441). Evidently, this statement refers to that deictic dimension of a perceptual taking’s content to which, as we have seen, Rosenberg too refers. A perceptual taking’s object is therein thought by the subject (“S”) to be visually present to S here and now.

⁶McDowell (1998, pp. 447–448) finds a suggestion in Sellars (1968) that he seems to welcome perhaps because of its resembling his own view (McDowell, 1994). The basic notion is that when the sense impressions are performing their usual role in perceiving, they are not the objects of any consciousness; they are not objects of the conceptual responses they evoke, which are components of the respective perceptions. Rather, the sense impressions function so as to enable the conceptual responses to reach the corresponding items in the environment cognitively, those very items out there that, e.g., by reflecting light into one’s eyes cause a corresponding visual sense impression to take place.

Clearly, Sellars did have to give an account of the taking component of the perceptual act, the conceptual response to a sense impression, and he had to do it *not* solely in terms of the act's conceptual content, so as not to have excluded from his account the firsthand-so-very-familiar experiential presence of, for instance, the very pinkness of a pink ice cube. McDowell (1998, p. 444) understands Sellars's introducing sense impressions as owed to Sellars's inability to see how, what McDowell calls, "the conceptual shaping of sensory consciousness" could be explained without them. I would say Sellars believes sense impressions are necessary in order to have sensory consciousness, which is more than just a phenomenologically colorless consciousness.

McDowell, in contrast, is saying: perceptual takings or judgments possess a phenomenology because of how they "contain" their claims about the environment. Being conceptual occurrences of a certain special kind, they "contain" claims in a certain distinctive way: that is, "as ostensibly required or impressed upon their subject by an ostensible seen object" (p. 451). Thus, owing to its comprising a further claim, a perceptual taking succeeds not only in cognitively reaching its target but doing so in a way that is a qualitative awareness of that segment of the environment.

I mention once more McDowell's repeated assertion that Sellars's perceptual takings or judgments are conceptual shapings of sensory consciousness in order to comment that it is not clear to me how this is theoretically achieved, nor even how McDowell means it. I understand that sense impressions are supposed to help determine the respective actualizations of conceptual capacities. But the claim that there is "guidance" of perceptual judgments from the outside by sense impressions seems to me to say no more than that a perceptual judgment is the particular perceptual judgment it is because a certain sense impression was among its determinants. The component of each perceptual judgment that the sense impressions so "guide" is the perceptual taking, understood as "the unique conceptual activity which is [a] representing of *this-suches* as subjects of perceptual judgment" (Sellars, 1968, p. 16). Notwithstanding its being an exercise of concepts in a non-predicative way, a perceptual taking is a case of conceptual activity no less so than the rest of the perceptual judgment of which the perceptual taking is the subject term.

How does ostensible seeing (i.e., seeing or seeming to see) that there is a red cube in front of one differ from judging there to be a red cube in front of one? McDowell answers by stating that the two do not differ in the cognitive capacities they actualize but only in how they actualize the relevant capacities: "In the judgment, there would be free responsible exercise of the conceptual capacities; in the ostensible seeing, they would be involuntarily drawn into operation under ostensible necessitation from an ostensibly seen object" (p. 458).

Sellars's Kantian Late Account of Experiential Presence: A Perception Still Possesses Two Mutually Distinct Components

Rosenberg (2000) discusses another Sellars account of perception pertinent to the matters of special interest here. This account can be found in a lecture published the same year as Sellars's talk to the phenomenologists but delivered two years after the latter. McDowell (1998, p. 454) mentions the lecture but says he cannot go into it although Sellars (1978b) does give a detailed picture there of the role played in perception by Kant's faculty of the productive imagination.

Under Kant's influence, Sellars seems to have moved to what Rosenberg considers a "three-level" account, superceding his "two-level" account. There would be more to a perception itself than those two components about which Sellars (1978a) told the phenomenologists, that is, more than the evocation of a certain kind of conceptual response by a nonconceptual sense impression. The new account revises Sellars's previous descriptions of the sense impressions and modifies in part the relation between his two components of perception.

Because of the role played by the productive imagination according to the new account, the relation between Sellars's two components of a perception is no longer causal, but their relation remains referential in the same direction as before. As Rosenberg explains, crucially involved in the process of producing a perception, a certain constructive synthesizing activity now proceeds. The productive imagination responds to sense-receptor stimulation and exercises, among others, cognitive capacities, yielding both (a) the deictic conceptual representation that is part of a perceptual judgment, expressible for example as "this thick red book facing me frontwise" (cf. Sellars, 1968, pp. 4–5), and (b) a sense-image model of the respective external object (Sellars, 1978b, pp. 236–237).

Sellars introduces the latter component phenomenologically. He makes use of a familiar perceptual object as an example, insisting that even when an apple is uncut, its volume of white flesh is "present as actuality" in a visual perception of the apple. But such presence does not mean one literally sees the inside of the uncut apple, that we have X-ray vision. Although we do see the apple as white inside, Sellars agrees that we do not see the very whiteness of its flesh. Thus, the experiential presence of this whiteness is not the same as that which belongs to the redness of the apple's near side. Thus, Sellars acknowledges a "legitimate" sense according to which we do not see the white flesh although it is present as actuality in the perception. The flesh has experiential presence owing to an operation of the productive imagination. Which produces the experiential presence, also, of the red skin of the apple's hidden side.

Both sensing and imagining make features of the apple actually present in perception. The uncut apple's white flesh and other side are not merely believed in. Imagining them perceptually is not a matter of merely taking them to be there. By their being imagined, they have experiential presence as does the red skin of the apple's near side, which, as all agree, is "literally seen." The point is generalized by Sellars: the coolness and juiciness of the flesh of the uncut apple are also present in the visual perception by being imagined. Accordingly, we see it as having an unbroken red skin all the way around, as being white inside, as being juicy, and as being cool. And, Sellars (1978b) states, all of these features of the apple are "actualities actually present" (p. 234) in the visual perception.

Clearly, the image-models of the late account are those occurrences in the brain that Sellars has been calling sense impressions. Not only do the image-models consist of patterns of sensory states (occurring centrally; i.e., not to be understood as patterns of sensory stimulation or sensory activity); but, also, image-models are the direct objects of perceptual awareness. They function so in place of, so to speak, the objects in the environment responsible for the occurrence of the image-models by their effects on the sense receptors and thereby on the synthesizing activity of the productive imagination.

But what is this operation of imagining that Sellars proposes is involved in ordinary visual perception? Again, Sellars (1978b) distinguishes two components of a visual perceptual episode. He states that seeing a cool juicy apple as such is a matter of

(a) *sensing-cum-imagining* a unified structure containing as aspects images of a volume of white, a sensed half-apple shaped shell of red, and an image of a volume of juiciness pervaded by a volume of white; (b) *conceptualizing* this unified sense-image structure as a cool juicy red apple. Notice that the proper and common sensible features enter in both [of the components] by virtue of being actual features of the sense-image structure and by virtue of being items conceptualized and believed in. (p. 236)

Sellars adds: although we see the apple as an apple, its applehood is only conceptualized, that is, it is not among the features of the sense-image structure. Its applehood cannot be imagined, not being an occurrent proper or common sensible feature, which its juiciness and coolness are. The same for the solubility of sugar and a penny's copperness. These features too are not in themselves seen, although we can see a cube of sugar as soluble and see a penny as being made of copper. Sellars (1978b) generalizes his point as follows:

We do not perceive of the object its character as a *substance* having *attributes*, its character as belonging with other substances in a system of interacting substances, its

character as conforming to laws of nature. In short, we do not perceive of the object what might be called "categorical" features.¹⁷ (p. 241)

The productive imagination synthesizes both of the components of a perceptual episode. It constructs and conceives, respectively. Thus, the productive imagination generates "[a] the complex demonstrative conceptualization This red pyramid facing me edgewise and [b] the simultaneous *image-model*, which is a point-of-viewish image of oneself confronting a red pyramid facing one edgewise" (Sellars, 1978b, p. 239). Sellars emphasizes the perceptual character of the image-models. They are constructions of oneself in the environment. Thus, pyramids and so on are sensed and imaged from one or another point of view.

When we are commonsensically described as seeing a pink ice cube, the pink ice cube in the environment reflects light into our eyes, which evokes sensory activity affecting the activity of the productive imagination, which produces (synthesizes) the particular instance of seeing the pink ice cube. However, what we are actually aware of, in this or any instance of seeing, or in any kind of perceiving, is a sensory-image model, not the external object that, by means of the effects it has on the sense receptors, gives direction to the synthesizing activity of the productive imagination, which is determined as well by sensory input and background belief, memory, and expectation. The image-models, Sellars (1978b) states, are the "'phenomenal objects.' Their *esse* is to be *representatives* or *proxies*. Their *being* is that of being complex patterns of sensory states constructed by the productive imagination" (p. 237).

It would seem that Sellars has again attempted a "two-level" account. Each of our perceptual episodes consists of two distinct components. It consists of both an image-model — which is its "complex image component" — and a perceptual taking — which is its "demonstrative thought component." The relation between the two components is, however, now more complex. Among other things:

(a) it is the productive imagination that generates both of these components, rather than a sense impression's evoking a perceptual taking after being itself evoked by sensory activity, and

(b) the conceptualizing activity of the productive imagination that produces the perceptual taking also has a determinative influence on the properties of the respective image-model.

However, Sellars's later account has the actual components of a perception remaining dual and mutually distinct.

¹⁷Sellars goes on to explain that the object of perception, which always is an image-model, does not possess categorical features. The next indented quotation from Sellars (1978b, p. 241) further on in the present text is a continuation of this passage.

The perceptual taking or demonstrative thought component would seem to be the perceptual awareness per se, the very act of seeing, the visual experience. And the object of the awareness is the image-model, what the awareness is about in the first place. Sellars identifies the relation between the two components as a relation of "reference"; the image model is the "referent" of the perceptual taking. Image-models are the objects of all instances of perceptual awareness and are not themselves any kind of awareness. Note in this connection Sellars's (1978b) negative description of the image-models:

For the image construct does not *have* categorial features. It has an *empirical structure* which we can specify by using words which stand for perceptible qualities and relations. But it does not have logical structure; not-ness, or-ness, all-ness, some-ness are not features of the image-model. They are features of judgment. More generally we can say that the image-model does not have grammatical structure. (p. 241)

In contrast, the perceptual taking, for instance, one that is expressible with the phrase *this cube facing me edgewise*,

brings a particular object before the mind for its consideration . . . is a demonstrative representation which has conceptual content and grammatical form . . . contains the form and content of the judgment "This is a cube" . . . contains in embryo the concept of a physical object *now*, over *there*, interacting with other objects in a system which includes *me*. (p. 243)

Surely, this forces the same question as before (Natsoulas, 1999) concerning what I call the qualitative content of a perception, for example, the experiential presence of the pink ice cube's very pinkness.⁸ The thesis that a perceptual taking actually brings the very pinkness before the mind means that a purely conceptual act (which is what, for Sellars, a perceptual taking remains after it is interpreted as having been synthesized by the productive imagination) is being proposed as able to do the job from a distance, albeit a lesser distance than between a perceptual taking and its environmental cause. The construction of an inner counterpart of an environmental object, a nonconceptual image-model possessing proper- and common-sensible qualities and relations that we seem to perceive to belong to outer objects does not speak to the phenomenological fact that a perceptual experience has a content that is different from the content of an act in which one merely occurrently believes in something.

⁸Still very much on Sellars's (1978b) mind is the "very pinkness" that is experientially present to us when we are properly said to be seeing a pink ice cube. Thus, in a footnote, he describes the neurophysiological process that is the image-model resulting from the retinal stimulation that is affected by a pink ice cube in the environment as involving "the actual existence of a volume of sensory pink" (p. 244).

Do Sellars's Perceptual Takings Possess a Qualitative Dimension? Further Consideration of McDowell's Fundamental Claim About Them

Having seen how Sellars's understanding of his two components of a perception developed, let us return to McDowell's construal of Sellars's perceptual takings (and judgments) as having a qualitative dimension and thus not being purely conceptual occurrences. My return at this point to the latter claim is motivated by an interest in Sellars's thought and by the potential superiority of a different view, one that might succeed, as I believe Sellars did not, in the integration of the qualitative and the conceptual dimensions of a perceptual act. I am very much drawn to the sort of view that was mentioned in the first section of the present article. According to such a view (a) the objects of straightforward perceptual consciousness are not sense impressions, and (b) sense impressions are a dimension of individual perceptual takings, a dimension belonging to them that makes possible the experiential presence of outer objects.

Let me first provide a brief statement of McDowell's view: there is no theoretical need for sense impressions, which Sellars proposes to guide the flow of perceptual takings and judgments from without. The relevant conceptual representations' subject matter, what they are about, supplies the needed guidance. Conceptually represented in a certain distinctive way, the ice cube itself thereby becomes immediately present, present to the subject's sensory consciousness. External guidance of conceptual representations is by the stimulative effects of environmental objects on a conceptual system that includes at its periphery, so to speak, a kind of conceptual representation that renders its objects in the environment experientially present by representing *this-suches* (or *that-suches*). This is McDowell's construal of Sellars's perceptual takings, a construal into which I now enter in greater detail.

The Greater Specificity of a Perceptual Taking's Content

McDowell (1998) interprets Sellars to hold that each perceptual taking involves sensibility as well as understanding; thus, perceptual takings are "shapings of sensory consciousness . . . by the faculty of concepts" (p. 452) — just as McDowell himself contends perceptual takings to be. In developing his proposal regarding the perceptual takings, McDowell arrives at a point where he brings out the fact that the content of an ostensible seeing of a red cube in front of one will have greater specificity than *that there is a red cube in front of one*, assuming it does have the latter as content. The italicized proposition would not specify the particular ostensible seeing's full content. That is,

the apparent red cube will be *placed* more determinately than just somewhere in front of one. From the standpoint of the subject of such an ostensible seeing, its content will

be expressible by saying something like "There is a red cube there." Here we have to imagine a use of "there" that has a determinate significance by virtue of the subject's directing it in a specific way at the ostensible layout of the ostensibly seen environment. (McDowell, 1998, p. 459)

If there actually is a red cube at the place in the environment meant by "there," then the red cube is itself "directly in the subject's view . . . as *that red cube*." And this perceptual taking has a more specific content than that there is a red cube in front of one because it is directed at the actual red cube in its environmental location. Thus, McDowell states, he has arrived at a conception of an immediate sensible representation, a conception of the immediate presence of an object to sense.

This is very much like suggesting that Sellars's perceptual takings are all that one needs to account for seeing the very pinkness of a pink ice cube. For a pink ice cube to have experiential presence to one, what is basically needed, it would seem, is one's undergoing an occurrent belief in the ice cube (and in its pinkness, etc.) as being at a certain determinate environmental location. The solution to the problem of perceptual experiential presence is proposed to emerge from taking the subject's perspective and relating the subject's conceptualization using *there* to his or her meaning a certain particular place thereby, that is, his or her "directing" the conceptualization to that place. The subject sees the very pinkness (of a pink ice cube) by thinking it with reference to a specific location in the environment.

The following passage from McDowell (1998) puts to use the notion of *objects' coming into view for us*. We are assured by his uses of the latter phrase that McDowell is also proffering at this point an account of the experiential presence to the subject of an environmental object, the identical phenomenon regarding which Sellars (1978a) spoke to the phenomenologists.

It does not take cognitive work for objects to come into view for us. Mere synthesis just happens; it is not our doing, unlike making judgments, deciding what to think about something. This is quite consistent with holding that objects come into view for us in actualizations of capacities that are fully conceptual, capacities whose paradigmatic mode of actualization is in the exercise of cognitive responsibility that judging is. (p. 462)

In this context, McDowell suggests that one take the subject's perspective so as to arrive at McDowell's conclusion. From the subjective perspective, however, it would seem clear that the required environmental location cannot be one which the subject merely thinks of, any more than the seen pinkness of Sellars's ice cube is merely something the perceiver occurrently believes in (cf. Sellars, 1978a). There is an additional kind of presence involved: an experiential presence of the place meant by *there* or its inner

counterpart in mentales. Experiential presence cannot be equivalent to the merely conceptual content of the perceptual taking involved.

The great specificity of the exact place thereby meant is, usually if not always, impossible immediately to conceptualize as fully as necessary to single the place out from other, nearby places. To pick it out directly requires that the place be experientially present to one. This is the reason, I believe, that McDowell keeps asking us to imagine ourselves in the subject's viewpoint so that we might grasp how *there* or its mental counterpart gets applied in the particular instance. By imagining ourselves to occupy the viewpoint of the subject, we can better grasp the content of the perceptual taking than if we simply underwent a thought having the same propositional content as the subject's respective perceptual judgment.

The same can be said for picking out, as one indeed perceptually can, from among a large number of identical red balls all of which are physically there before one, one of the red balls distinguished only by its particular spatial relation to oneself and to the rest. In this context, *that ball* (in speech or thought) means the ball picked out from all of the identical red balls that have already now experiential presence to one.

What Is Conceptually Shaped in a Perceptual Taking?

McDowell (1998) describes a perceptual taking as being an *immediate* representation, for, as Sellars suggests, a perceptual taking is a representation of "*thises* (or *thats*); more fully, of *this-suches* (or *that-suches*)" [p. 460]. A perceptual taking is an actualization of conceptual capacities that includes the "conceptual shaping of a sensory (e.g., visual) consciousness." Thus, although an actual pink ice cube may be the immediate object of visual perceptual awareness, evidently it can be the immediate object because a perceptual taking represents the pink ice cube in such a way that involves something else therein that is "conceptually shaped." This would seem to say that the descriptive content of a perception, as Sellars called it assigning it to the respective sense impression (or image-model; Sellars, 1978b), McDowell would locate instead in the perceptual taking itself.⁹

Concepts Involved in Perceptual Taking Belong to a World View

McDowell (1998, p. 465) acknowledges that "we still need to understand how the categories make experience possible" — understood as "the immediate presentness of objects to subjects" that occurs in perceiving the environ-

⁹Compare footnote 6 in the present article.

ment. And he provides a hint regarding how this amazing phenomenon is accomplished. It takes place because of the existence of the larger conceptual framework of which the concepts exercised in perceiving are a part: "We can make sense of objects coming into view in [visual experience] only because we can see how objects fit into a view of the world" (p. 465). McDowell does not go any further than this in a footnote that he appends at this point and I partly quote as follows:

We can put Sellars's [1956] thought . . . in Kantian terms: acquiring one's first conceptual capacities is necessarily acquiring many conceptual capacities, interlinked in such a way that the totality amounts to a conceptual repertoire that exemplifies the necessary forms of the understanding. It comes to the same thing to say [as McDowell does] that acquiring one's first conceptual capacities is necessarily acquiring a world view that conforms to the associated principles of pure understanding. (p. 466)

Consequently, I have doubts concerning whether the "coming into view of objects" is as I have interpreted it, namely, equivalent to objects' being experientially present. According to my view, the latter occurs whether or not an object having experiential presence is apprehended as being an object, as opposed to its being merely distinguished as something there. That the acquiring of a world view is prerequisite to experiential presence troubles me, however simple the necessary world view may be, because acquiring a conceptual capacity would seem to require perceptual experience (e.g., visual, auditory, or tactual) and the experiential presence of happenings to one.

Notwithstanding Sellars's above thought, as I quoted from McDowell (p. 466), Sellars relied on phenomenological evidence, he found experiential presence to be a real problem, and he tried to account for it by introducing sense impressions or, later, image-models, neither one of which was proposed to possess categorial features. Thus, as Sellars clearly saw, ascribing to a subject a conceptual system and the capacity to make moves in the system does not theoretically bestow upon the subject perceptions wherein, for example, the very pinkness of a pink ice cube is seen.

The Explanation of Perceptual "Display"

Indeed, Sellars could not see how the pink ice cube itself could be experientially present, as distinct from the respective sense impressions: that is, the sense impressions (a) that, photically, the ice cube causes to occur, (b) that each contain a volume of pink, and (c) that, in perception, are mis-taken to be the ice cube in the outside world. Thus, not even the following figurative expression of McDowell's (1998) view could be acceptable to Sellars:

A seen object as it were invites one to take it to be as it visibly is. It speaks to one; if it speaks to one's understanding, that is what its speaking to one comes to. "See me as I

am," it (so to speak) says to one; "namely, as characterized by *these* properties" — and it displays them. (p. 468)

Sellars would consider the above to be a suitable phenomenological description but, although it does identify the source of the problem of experiential presence, it does not express an adequate solution. Conceptual representation of the object and of its properties is not sufficient to explain their perceptual "display," which involves more than identifying the properties and describing them as there, or thinking about the object along these lines.

Extending McDowell's metaphor, I would add: experiential presence is not wholly a matter of objects speaking to us in a human language, as we know from how objects present themselves to us perceptually: they do so other than as thought of. For example, our visual experiences of a sunset that we are witnessing are readily distinguished from thoughts about it that we are having at the same time, and it is clear to us firsthand that the differences between the two sorts of inner events are not simply differences in the concepts being exercised respectively.

In order to distinguish perceptions from thoughts, we need an understanding of experiential presence or "how objects can be immediately present to sensory consciousness in intuition" (McDowell, 1998, p. 473). An inadequate answer is to say as McDowell does: the actualization of cognitive capacities responsible for a perception's propositional content also constitutes its being the kind of mental occurrence in which an object is immediately present to the subject. This is like saying the productive imagination is what does the whole job without making any effort to explain how — unless what is intended is a view I brought out earlier in the present article. That is, experiential presence of an object would be a matter of a certain distinctive way wherein perceptions "contain" their claims. These claims would be "ostensibly required from or impressed on their subject by an ostensible seen object." And simply by a perception's comprising this additional claim, the perception would not only succeed in cognitively reaching its target but would do so in such a manner that part of the environment would have experiential presence. In the present article and its predecessor, I have proffered criticism that I expect to be applicable to any account of experiential presence that invokes only conceptual means.

In the Case of Illusory Perceptual Takings

McDowell (1998, p. 475) recognizes that the immediate presence of environmental objects is "threatened" by the introduction into the respective perceptions of an extra conceptual content that pertains to their objects' role in producing the perceptions. McDowell is in agreement with that part of

Gareth Evans's (1982) account of perceptually demonstrative thoughts according to which they are linked to their respective objects informationally and not by involving a thought about the link. Thus, if an ostensible perception is only ostensible, if it is actually not linked to its apparent object in the required, informational manner, then this object only seems to be but is not actually immediately present to the subject. One undergoes instead an illusory perceptual taking, which is itself no less real an occurrence than a non-illusory perceptual taking. What is illusory about an illusory perceptual taking is its apparent object's presence at a location in the environment that is perceptually taken to be occupied by this object.

At this point, McDowell (e.g., 1998, p. 477) could be misconstrued as follows:

Such an illusory perceptual taking as has been described above, that is, a perceptual taking the object of which is merely apparent, does not possess a content corresponding to its apparent object. Lacking an object, an illusory perceptual taking is not a perceptual taking, and it does not have the content of a perceptual taking. A perceptual taking's content is just the taking's standing in a certain relation to its object. An illusory perceptual taking is unable so to stand if it lacks an object. In order for a relation between two matters to be instantiated, both of them must have existence, although not necessarily at the same time.

Against such a no-content view, it may well be argued that, from the perspective of the subject, not every illusory experience is introspectively distinguishable as such from an experience that is not illusory. Therefore, (a) the first must resemble the second with respect to the possession of content. And, in some cases, (b) the two experiences may be mutually indistinguishable with respect to the particular content that they have.

McDowell (1998) suggests we do suffer an illusion about the contents of illusory perceptual experiences:

If one is under the illusion of being perceptually confronted by an object, then one is liable to a counterpart illusion that there is available to one, for employment in conceptual activity, content expressible by a perceptual demonstrative reference to the supposed object — the content one might think one could express, in such a situation, by using a phrase such as "that red cube." This is just what the immediacy of intuitions [i.e., perceptual takings] comes to; if there can be conceptual shapings of sensory consciousness in which objects are immediately present to subjects, then illusions that objects are present to one that way, which obviously can happen, are at the same time illusions about the contents of one's conceptually shaped consciousness. (pp. 475–476)

But McDowell does not mean such an illusory perceptual taking lacks all conceptual content. He accepts that the illusory perceptual taking of his example actualizes the conceptual capacities that correspond to *red*, *cube*, and *there* in verbally expressing the perception's content. And he adds, "The

content in question is the same as the content of a judgement the subject might express by saying 'There is a red cube *there*'" (p. 476).

What then is the illusion of content in this case? McDowell seems to mean this: whereas, in a certain respect, the content of an illusory perceptual taking differs from the content of the corresponding non-illusory perceptual taking, this difference is not noticed. How then are the two contents mutually different? McDowell states that in one case there *seems* to be a red cube. I would say, instead, that such seeming is true in both cases; in both cases, a red cube seems to be immediately before the subject. The illusory perceptual taking and the non-illusory perceptual taking need not have different contents. They may differ from each other just in how they came to occur or whether the object that seems to be there is there. As McDowell states, there *merely* seems to be a red cube there, at the location in the environment, in the illusory case. Although the red cube is only ostensibly seen, the cube is, from the viewpoint of the subject, as though it is immediately present. I would say that, in the instance of an illusory perceptual taking, there is instantiated an illusory experiential presence. It is an illusory experiential presence of the object to the subject although it is in itself no less real for being "illusory." I would be implying that the illusory perceptual taking has the same qualitative and conceptual content as does the respective non-illusory perceptual taking.

I am suggesting, contrary to McDowell, that an illusory perceptual taking of an object actually possesses "intentional content" no less than the corresponding non-illusory perceptual taking does. Having content is not a matter of an experience's standing in a relation to its object, whether the latter is there in the world or only seems to be there. Someone who is the subject of an illusory experiential presence can take notice of the reality of his or her experience and of the presence of its apparent object. Indeed, one need not believe in the object's existence to have an experience of its presence.

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