

- Gordon, R.M. (2000). Sellars's Ryleans Revisited. *Protosociology* 14, 102-114.
- Heal, J. (1997). Indexical Predicates and their Uses. *Mind* 106, 619-640.
- Heal, J. (2001). On Speaking Thus: The Semantics of Indirect Discourse. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 51, 433-454.
- Heal, J. (unpublished). Lagadonian Kinds. Manuscript.
- Mitchell, P. (1997). *Introduction to Theory of Mind: Children, Autism, and Apes*. London: Arnold Publishers.
- Perner, J., T. Ruffman, and S. Leekam (1994). Theory of Mind Is Contagious: You Catch It From Your Sibs. *Child Development* 65, 1228-1238.
- Peterson, C. and M. Siegal (2000). Insights into Theory of Mind from Deafness and Autism. *Mind and Language* 15, 123-145.
- Premack, D. and G. Woodruff (1978). Does the Chimpanzee Have a Theory of Mind? *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 1, 515-526.
- Rorty, R. (1965). Mind-Body Identity, Privacy, and Categories. *The Review of Metaphysics* 19, 24-54.
- Sellars, W. (1997). *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sellars, W. (1963). *Science, Perception and Reality*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Wellman, H. M. (1990). *The Child's Theory of Mind*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Timm Triplett and Willem deVries

## IS SELLARS'S RYLEAN HYPOTHESIS PLAUSIBLE? A DIALOGUE

**ABSTRACT.** In order to provide an alternative to the Cartesian myth that knowledge of our thoughts and sensations is "given," Sellars posits a community of "Rylean ancestors" – humans at an early stage of conceptual development who possess a language containing sophisticated concepts about the physical world and about their own language and behavior, but who lack any concepts of thoughts or sensations. Sellars's presentation of this thought experiment leaves many important details sketchy. In the following dialogue, we offer our differing assessments of how well those details could be filled out. TT questions how the Rylean hypothesis could provide a plausible account of human thought and sensory experience at any stage of human conceptual development. WdeV responds to TT's challenge by filling out the picture of what the Ryleans' conceptual world would look like. TT and WdeV debate the merits and the plausibility of the resulting picture.

Wilfrid Sellars devotes the final sections of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1997, hereafter: EPM) to outlining and discussing a thought experiment about "our Rylean ancestors." After his famous critical attack on the traditional empiricist notion of the "given," Sellars turns to the Rylean scenario to provide the key positive element in his reconstruction of a post-empiricist account of mind and our epistemic access to its contents.<sup>1</sup>

In order to move from the Cartesian myth that knowledge of our thoughts and sensations is "given" – known by us first and best, immediately accessible to us epistemically by the mere fact of their occurrence, and the foundation or

<sup>1</sup> To be sure, the critique of the "given" itself includes a statement and defense of a positive account of knowledge in Part VIII of EPM. We discuss it in our commentary on EPM – "Knowledge, Mind, and the Given" (deVries and Triplett 2000, see especially pp. 77-107). But Sellars devoted many more pages of EPM (Parts XII through XVI) to discussing the Rylean scenario than to elaborating his Part VIII positive epistemic principle. And it is the former that has had the most subsequent influence. It had and continues to have a major influence on the course of developments in the philosophy of mind.

base out of which we construct our knowledge of physical objects and other persons – Sellars has us consider a community of humans in an early stage of conceptual development who possess a language containing an array of concepts about their physical world and about their own language and behavior, but who lack any concept of thoughts or sensations. They do not conceive of themselves as possessing inner mental states; indeed, they do not conceive that there are such things as mental states. And yet their language is otherwise quite sophisticated:

Its total expressive power is very great. For it makes subtle use not only of the elementary logical operations of conjunction, disjunction, negation, and quantification, but especially of the subjunctive conditional. Furthermore, I shall suppose it to be characterized by the presence of the looser logical relations typical of ordinary discourse which are referred to by philosophers under the headings 'vagueness' and 'open texture'. (1997, §48/p. 258)

Because this language allows for elaborate description, analysis, and prediction of human behavior (without, of course, referring to motivations, intentions, decisions or other mental events – unless behavioristically construed), Sellars dubs the members of his hypothetical community "Ryleans," in honor of Gilbert Ryle and his attempt in *The Concept of Mind* to analyze mental states and events in terms of behaviors and dispositions to behave (see Ryle 1949).

The Rylean scenario provides an approach to our conception of the mental that is diametrically opposed to that provided by the Cartesian "givenist." It suggests that human mental life need not be understood as something we are intimately and immediately acquainted with. Rather, from concepts pertaining to what is publicly observable – physical objects and events, bodily behavior, and linguistic utterances – the Ryleans develop concepts of the mind as something inner in a theoretical or quasi-theoretical way.<sup>2</sup>

In order to explain how this development of mental concepts can proceed, Sellars posits the genius Jones, a member of the Rylean community who conceives of and introduces mental concepts to the rest of the community. On the basis of his native Rylean concepts of publicly observable objects and events, Jones develops concepts pertaining to thoughts and sensations (called "impressions" by Sellars in the relevant later sections of EPM) by utilizing a

<sup>2</sup> Sellars says that mental concepts are analogous to the theoretical concepts introduced in, e.g. scientific discourse, but are not purely theoretical. See our commentary (deVries and Triplett 2000, pp. 154-55) for elaboration.

purportedly analogous model. The details of the developments of concepts of thoughts and concepts of impressions differ in significant ways.

In developing his concept of *thoughts*, Jones uses words and language as his model. We summarize Jones's specific theory-construction in our commentary on EPM as follows:

One day . . . Jones worries about how it can be that his fellow Ryleans exhibit intelligent behavior when they are not exhibiting overt verbal behavior. Since the Ryleans do have the capacity to conceptualize unobservable entities in an explanatory role, Jones does just this with respect to the problem he wants to solve. As his model for the new domain of entities that he is postulating, Jones adopts overt linguistic episodes and says that episodes *like* these occur within us, the normal effect of which is intelligent behavior, including the production of the very linguistic episodes that the inner episodes are modeled on. (This is not a vicious circle, any more than explaining the behavior of billiard balls in terms of tiny corpuscles modeled on such physical objects entails a circle.) (deVries and Triplett 2000, p. 142)

Jones then teaches this theory of inner speech to other Ryleans. It is important to understand that the way in which they first learn to recognize thinking within themselves is *not* by simply attending to some feature of the world – their thinking – that they had failed to notice but are able to readily and directly notice as soon as Jones draws their attention to it. Rather, an individual Rylean first recognizes thinking by observing others' behavior and by reasoning, like any good scientist, from that behavioral data to an unobserved cause. He notices that others (sometimes) act in complexly intelligent ways without engaging in outward verbal behavior and infers that they must be thinking – that events that are not publicly observable must be occurring within them that are in relevant ways like speech.<sup>3</sup> The individual Rylean can also apply this reasoning to observations of his own behavior and conclude that he himself is now thinking. Eventually, he can learn to recognize instances of his own thinking without going through this inferential process, much as a Renaissance astronomer comes to recognize – and perhaps even claims to "just see" – the moons of Jupiter without going through the inferential process taught him by Galileo. Here is Sellars's description of this final – non-inferential – stage:

<sup>3</sup> See our commentary on EPM for discussion of Sellars's cautions about what does and does not get carried over from the features of public language to the constructed theory of thought (deVries and Triplett 2000, pp. 144-145).

And it now turns out – need it have? – that Dick [one of Jones’s pupils who has learned to ascribe the activity of thinking to himself based on his observations of his outward behavior] can be trained to give reasonably reliable self-descriptions, using the language of the theory, without having to observe his overt behavior. Jones brings this about, roughly, by applauding utterances by Dick of “I am thinking that *p*” when the behavioral evidence strongly supports the theoretical statement “Dick is thinking that *p*”; and by frowning on utterances of “I am thinking that *p*,” when the evidence does not support this theoretical statement. Our ancestors begin to speak of the privileged access each of us has to his own thoughts. *What began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role.* (1997, §59/pp. 106-107)

It is important to note that, for Sellars, Jones’s account of thinking is, while the unsophisticated “germ of a theory” (1997, §58/p. 267), nonetheless correct in its essentials (taking account of its sketchiness). Sellars has been misinterpreted as an eliminativist who treats thoughts and other mental states as the product of a *bad* theory that will be discarded come the scientific millennium. But for Sellars, thoughts are real enough – they are indeed the causes of our intelligent behavior. What is wrong with the traditional account of thoughts is the belief that our epistemic and conceptual access to our thinking is somehow directly and unproblematically presented to us – that the contents of our minds are transparent to us and the source of epistemically certain or incorrigible judgments that can found the rest of our knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

But Jones’s theory of thoughts is just half the story. As noted, Sellars (rightly) understands thoughts and sensory impressions to be quite distinct types of mental events. Sellars’s account of the Ryleans’ acquisition of the concept of a sensory impression is similar to his account of their acquisition of the concept of a thought in that the concept of an impression does not present itself to the mind directly and immediately upon the occurrence of an impression. Jones must exercise just as much theoretical ingenuity here as in the previous case. And, as in the case of thoughts, Sellars does not deny that the Ryleans *have* impressions. Ryleans are human beings with the sensory organs of human beings – they thus can see and hear, feel pain, taste their food and smell odors. They get hungry, experience the satisfaction attendant to relieving that hunger or quenching a thirst, and enjoy sexual pleasure. One can

<sup>4</sup> This is not all that is wrong with the traditional conception of thoughts – equally problematic is the traditional substance dualist ontology and its taking thoughts to be nonphysical. Sellars opts for a functionalist account of thoughts that can allow an ultimately neurophysiological account in the case of human thoughts. But regarding the Rylean scenario that is our concern here, it is the conception of thoughts rather than their ontology that is of primary relevance.

also presume that they can imbibe perception-altering substances that would cause them to believe in the presence of objects near them – pink elephants, say – that are not actually there. Also, they will be subject to the same perceptual illusions that we are (sticks half in the water, apparent lakes in deserts, etc.), though they will not describe or understand them *as* perceptual illusions, nor of course will they understand their visual perceptions, pains, etc. as having to do with inner, nonbehavioral states of themselves.

Jones’s theory of impressions, though, differs from his theory of thoughts in that the former are modeled not on anything linguistic but on physical objects.

The theory of impressions is interestingly more complex than the theory of thoughts, and it would take us further afield than we need to go here to include all the significant details (see our commentary on EPM 2000 for that). One detail only to be stated here rather than explained is that, as part of his theory of *thoughts* (not impressions), Jones develops an account of (veridical) seeing (and hearing, touching, etc.) that expands Rylean language to include such perceptual locutions as “Fred sees a boulder,” “Tom hears the thunder.” But these locutions are still explicable, in Jones’s theory, as referring to ways of *thinking* about things, i.e., as attributing thoughts to the perceiver. As long as the perception is veridical (there really is a boulder, the thunder really is occurring) there is not yet a need to add a second type of mental entity. It is only in order to explain the inevitable *nonveridical* perceptions – based on what *we* understand as perceptual illusions, hallucinations, etc. – that Jones needs to posit impressions as entities in addition to and distinct from thoughts. Our commentary again presents Jones’s specific reasoning:

Fred says that he sees pink elephants dancing in front of him. But Charlie, who, like Fred, meets all of Jones’s conditions for seeing, reports that he sees no pink elephants in that location. Yet Fred seems sincere (Jones can have *seems sincere* locutions or something close to them, given his already developed theory of thoughts), and he acts truly frightened. Since other Ryleans enter the scene and claim to see no pink elephants, it is a straightforward matter to conclude that no dancing pink elephants are in fact before them.

Jones concludes that sometimes a person can be in just that kind of internal state that he would normally be in if he saw pink elephants dancing in front of him, even though there are in fact no such pink elephants. It is for Fred just as if there were pink elephants. But how could this situation be? Clearly, it is not a case of Fred’s seeing that there are dancing pink elephants. Jones realizes that there is a need to adopt still further innovations in how we describe situations.

Because perceptual locutions take perceptual objects, Jones models the grammar of his new way of talking on this aspect of perception talk, and invents the term ‘impression’ to serve as the object when there is in fact no physical

object that is perceived. Thus, Fred has the *impression* of a dancing pink elephant.

The model for this idea of an impression is a physical object. An impression of a dancing pink elephant is in some ways like a dancing pink elephant, except, of course, that it is not an actual dancing pink elephant, and indeed it is not an external thing at all but rather, Jones hypothesizes, something internal to the perceiver that nevertheless shares certain structural similarities with physical objects. (deVries and Triplett 2000, p. 164)

Once Jones has introduced and taught his impressions theory to his fellow Ryleans, the concept *impressions* again progresses, as did the concept *thought*, from a theoretical to a reporting role:

As before in the case of *thoughts*, [the Ryleans] begin by using the language of impressions to draw theoretical conclusions from appropriate premises. . . . Finally [Jones] succeeds in training them to make a *reporting* use of this language. He trains them, that is, to say 'I have the impression of a red triangle' when, and only when, according to the theory, they are indeed having the impression of a red triangle.

Once again the myth [of the Ryleans] helps us to understand that concepts pertaining to certain inner episodes – in this case *impressions* – can be primarily and essentially *inter-subjective*, without being resolvable into overt behavioral symptoms, and that the reporting role of these concepts, their role in introspection, the fact that each of us has a privileged access to his impressions, constitutes a dimension of these concepts which is *built on* and *presupposes* their role in inter-subjective discourse. (1997, §62/p. 115)

Jones leaves his theory of impressions in a relatively sketchy form.

Although he initially presents his hypothesis of a Rylean stage of humanity as a myth, Sellars's final point in EPM is to suggest that we take it seriously, not as a myth but as a description of a stage in the development of human awareness and self-awareness:

I have used a myth to kill a myth – the Myth of the Given. But is my myth really a myth? Or does the reader not recognize Jones as Man himself in the middle of his journey from the grunts and groans of the cave to the subtle and polydimensional discourse of the drawing room, the laboratory, and the study, the language of Henry and William James, of Einstein and of the philosophers who, in their efforts to break out of discourse to an *arché* beyond all discourse, have provided the most curious dimension of all. (1997, §63/p. 117)

Sellars's Rylean hypothesis, with its story of the nature and development of mental concepts, is unquestionably innovative and important. It has had a continuing influence in the philosophy of mind. Sellars's functionalist account of the nature of thoughts has long been understood to have anticipated the

heyday of functionalism that began in the 1960s.<sup>5</sup> But what has not been recognized is that his insistence on treating impressions differently from thoughts also anticipated the later questions that arose regarding popular attempts to provide a *wholly* functionalist account of the mental. Sellars would have been surprised neither by the rise of functionalist accounts nor by the subsequent recognition by many philosophers that nonfunctionalizable "qualia" (the currently fashionable term for sensory impressions or sensory experience) create serious problems for functionalism.<sup>6</sup>

Sellars's Rylean hypothesis has not been without its critics.<sup>7</sup> We ourselves note in our commentary, regarding the move from the inferential to the noninferential stage of the Ryleans' ability to recognize thoughts, that "the means by which a Rylean introduced to Jones's theory comes directly to observe his thoughts, and the explanation for how he is able to do so remains rather troublingly mysterious in Sellars's telling of the story" (deVries and Triplett 2000, pp. 153-154). But this is only to note that there is an explanatory gap in that story. Many criticisms are much stronger in claiming that the hypothesis itself is incoherent: necessarily, there could not be human beings with just the conceptual abilities Sellars attributes to them – the Ryleans are logically or conceptually impossible. We have in progress a separate dialogue in which we consider one of the most sophisticated and fully developed of these incoherence arguments – that of Ausonio Marras (1973a, 1973b, 1977). Not unexpectedly, we disagree with each other regarding the cogency of Marras's critique.

TT: But here, as a foundationalist and a critic of Sellars, I would like to take a different approach from Marras in criticizing Sellars's Rylean hypothesis. Even if the hypothesis was conceptually coherent, its plausibility would seem questionable to me. One can weave a fairy tale or science fiction story that is logically possible and internally coherent, but entirely unlikely as a story about actual human beings in the real world. Whatever the ultimate success of incoherence arguments like Marras's, I suspect that the particular combination

<sup>5</sup> Less positively, eliminativists such as Paul Churchland took the cue for their view of mental entities as posits of a false folk theory of psychology from Sellars's account of mental concepts as theoretical, though their treating Sellars himself as an eliminativist is in our judgment a serious misreading of the Rylean hypothesis.

<sup>6</sup> See Jackson (1982) for one of the most influential early works critical of functional treatments of qualia.

<sup>7</sup> The first and best known criticism is that of Roderick Chisholm in his correspondence with Sellars shortly after EPM was published (Chisholm and Sellars 1957). See also Marras (1973ab, 1977), Young (1973), Gordon (2000), Lehrer and Stern (2000), and Rosenberg (2000).

Sellars requires of the concepts that the Ryleans have and those that they lack is too implausible to count as a realistic description of any human life. It is important to take account of implausibility arguments because, if cogent, not only would they provide an independent line of criticism in addition to the incoherence arguments, but they would also tell us something important about the nature of sensations and thoughts. The conclusion would not necessarily be that the traditional Cartesian account has to be true after all. But we could conclude that our concepts of ourselves as thinking and sensing beings are at least on the same evidential level as, if not more fundamental evidentially than, our concepts of ourselves as linguistic beings in a physical world.

Certainly, Sellars's Rylean hypothesis as it stands cries out for some further elaboration. For the Ryleans' conceptual world is manifestly different from ours, and it is reasonable to ask: can the details of that conceptual world be plausibly worked out? The question is a natural and forceful one because Sellars grants that the Ryleans *are* just like us in that they *have* sensations and thoughts. They just do not recognize those states as such. How can they be so like us constitutively and so unlike us conceptually? Sellars needs to say more about this than he does, and, as a Sellarsian and a student of Sellars, you are in as good a position as anyone to help him out. Specifically, given that a Rylean has sensations<sup>8</sup> – to focus on these rather than thoughts for the moment – and that these are inner episodes, what conceptual alternatives are open to the Sellarsian? Clearly, one alternative is that the Rylean has no concept at all in any way analogous to our concept of sensation. The very idea just never enters her consciousness. I suppose this is conceptually possible, but it seems to me like the proverbial Thurber characters who somehow manage to get through their days without ever acknowledging the elephant that one day just appears in their bedroom and takes up residence there.

A second alternative is to conceive of sensations as external objects like tables, publicly accessible to all, and presumably existing, like the table, when everyone has left the room. But no one could get things *this* wrong. Surely the Ryleans would be aware that the

<sup>8</sup> Here and in what follows we use the more common term 'sensation' rather than Sellars's term 'impression'.

phenomena we identify as sensations are more closely connected to individuals than this.

In fact, it seems to me that the Ryleans would have to understand sensations as aspects of an individual's behavior. On this third alternative, the pain sensation *is* the sudden bodily movement or vocalization ("Ouch!"). Now, while this is more plausible than the other alternatives, it still does, by Sellars's own account, get things wrong. For Sellars, these inner episodes exist, it is just that the Ryleans never grasp that these episodes are the cause of these behaviors. Sellars acknowledges that, prior to Jones's conceptual innovations, the Ryleans have a bad theory of themselves, just as in human history there have been bad theories of mental illness, such as the demon hypothesis. But it does baffle me how the Ryleans could get this sort of thing wrong. Is it really just that, lacking any concept of pain, they simply notice that they and others "react differentially" (to use some behaviorist jargon) to a hand too close to the fire by a very quick move of that hand away from the fire? The hand moves away because of an intense sensation. It seems clear to me that anyone who knows what pain is like from the inside understands why there *is* a differential reaction! Do you at least see why some of us find the Sellarsian alternative implausible?

**WdeV:** Things are getting jumbled here. First, it is not clear that the hand moves away because of the pain: there is evidence to indicate that the hand begins to move away before the pain is registered. The reflex uses a shorter pathway than the pain signal.

**TT:** Touché. There are indeed cases like this where the pain does not cause the movement. But in many or most cases, surely sensations *do* play a causal role. Reflex actions probably appear early from an evolutionary perspective, but I do not think that organisms could have evolved very far if they had only reflex actions to cause them to get out of harm's way or to undertake activities necessary to their survival. I would think that the experience of pain immeasurably improves (over the more primitive reflex action mechanism) the taking of appropriate action.

In addition, not all pains are of the instantaneous-onset type that best fit the sorts of cases you have in mind. The onset of the sensation of hunger, for example, arises and increases gradually.

**WdeV:** I do not know what you mean by "improves the taking of appropriate action" in your above scenario. The evolution of pain certainly makes possible the insertion of other forms of behavioral control that is more flexible and sophisticated than a reflex. But we should not engage in

armchair biology here. Nor should we assume that in order to perform its job, a pain must be conceptualized as a pain, as something inner. Let us get back to the alternatives you have offered for how the Ryleans think of the sensations they have.

The alternatives you propose really break into two categories:

- (1) The Ryleans have no concepts that apply to inner states, either pains or other sensations;
- (2) They have some concepts that apply to inner states and treat them as belonging to a category already familiar to them – either:
  - (a) the category of external public objects (tables, trees, etc.), or
  - (b) the category of externally observable behaviors and dispositions to such behaviors.

Your essential point is that even in case (2) the Ryleans make at best an ongoing category mistake: inner states are necessarily neither external public objects nor external behaviors nor mere dispositions to such behavior.

Now, there is no problem with the Ryleans having concepts of behavioral complexes or syndromes. In Sellars's story, Jones develops an explanatory theory for such things by developing a new category of concepts *modeled on* (but not identified with or belonging to the category of) external public objects (for sensations) and public verbal behavior (for thoughts). So your alternatives have the right elements. You think the chronology could not plausibly orchestrate the way Sellars says it might. As I now understand your point, you do not think that the Ryleans could ever plausibly have a self-understanding (a theory of themselves) that is so faulty that (from the perspective of its successor theory), it is absolutely pervaded with category mistakes.

TT: What I called the third alternative, which you reformatted as your (2b), can, considered abstractly, perhaps seem reasonable. But if we look more closely, its implausibility seems to me manifest. Let us look specifically at the story Sellars has to tell about something like the sensation of hunger:

#### How Humans Discovered Hunger

Humans, of course, have always *been* hungry, in that they have had the sensations we now identify as hunger from time immemorial. But, although they thought about many other items,

features, and relationships in their world and communicated about these matters via an elaborate language, they never knew they were hungry or had any conception or idea of hunger as an inner state. They did notice correlations between types of behavior: for example, that if an individual went without food for a time, this was typically followed by unusual persistence and vigor in the stalking and killing of game or other food-acquiring behavior. But they never had the thought that they experienced hunger or any other sort of inner episode in such contexts. This situation continued for generations. Then one day Jones came along. After living, and thinking, into his adulthood much as his compatriots lived and thought, he one day grasped a brilliant new idea, reasoning as follows: "I notice that sometimes going without food does not result in the usual correlated behavior, for example when I eat just a bit of the leaf of this plant (suppose it contains an appetite-suppressing drug) I do not engage in the usual stalking and killing behavior even when I have been without food for quite awhile, and when I have a bite of the root of this other plant (an appetite-enhancer) I engage in such behavior even when I have recently had a nice meal. This has happened regularly enough that the mere fact of going without food cannot be the full explanation for the presence or absence of the usually associated food-acquiring behavior. I speculate that there is some episode inside me that is more directly responsible for this behavior." And this is how humans first got the idea that what we now know and describe as hunger existed.

You would agree that this is how Sellars would characterize the Ryleans' situation in this case?

WdeV: Agreed.

TT: You do not find this story implausible on the face of it?

WdeV: Not at all.

TT: Hmm. Let me try to get at my sense of its implausibility by asking you some questions about your own experience, OK?

WdeV: Fire away.

TT: You feel pains, and you get hungry, right?

WdeV: Sure.

TT: And you, as a conceptually sophisticated adult in this culture, think of a sharp pain or a gnawing hunger as an inner episode of some kind?

- WdeV:** Of course, although there will typically be correlations, sometimes suppressible, between these inner sensations and observable behaviors.
- TT:** Fine. In fact, sometimes these sensations are so intense that it is hard to attend to anything else, right? And it might be nearly or even totally impossible to suppress the behavior because of that intensity.
- WdeV:** All right.
- TT:** And sometimes thoughts can be similarly intrusive, especially the emotionally powerful ones?
- WdeV:** OK, I grant all this. So are you thinking that this means that anything so intrusive has to be conceptualized in one particular way? That does not follow.
- TT:** Well, I'm trying to set up a comparison between external physical objects and events, on the one hand, and internal sensations and thoughts, on the other. Sometimes you attend to external items and features, like the waves on the pond outside your house, or the words on the page. And you have a choice about what to attend to, and whether to attend to anything at all. But sometimes the external events command your attention, like the truck suddenly rounding the curve and bearing down on you as you try to cross the street.
- WdeV:** OK.
- TT:** And one can say the same about sensations and thoughts. Sometimes one can choose to conjure up an image, or to revel in a pleasant sensation. Other times, as with strong pains or gnawing hungers or emotionally laden thoughts, they make it difficult to attend to anything else or they even positively preclude attention to anything else.
- WdeV:** I still do not see what this has to do with how we conceptualize them. You cannot assume that how we now conceptualize these things is the only plausible way it could be done.
- TT:** My point is that some sensations and thoughts are just as dominating and intrusive as some physical objects or external events. So why should we form concepts of physical objects and not of sensations and thoughts?
- WdeV:** Large electrical discharges between the sky and the ground are sometimes dominating features of our experience. But that does not mean that it is implausible that minimally sophisticated thinkers might lack concepts of electricity. The only thing you can conclude is implausible is that there is *no* concept at all in the repertoire of the relevant group which they can utilize in attending to this feature of

their experience. And we can assume that the Ryleans have a concept of food deprivation they can use to notice their state.

The difference between our conceptual awareness of external physical objects, events, and features, on the one hand, and such awareness of thoughts and sensations, on the other, is that our entire orientation, evolutionarily speaking, has been toward perception of objects and features of the physical world. Phylogenetically, there is every reason to think that humans came to form concepts of the physical world first. Perception of physical objects, events, and conditions, whether outside of the body or within it, is what is essential to our survival, and what evolution has selected for. Reflection on and awareness of the mental processes by which we come to have such awareness of the physical world is an evolutionary afterthought, something it is reasonable to expect humans came to late phylogenetically. As Nick Humphries has suggested, such meta-awareness probably became important in adapting to changing and complex social structures.

**TT:** We react not to an electrical discharge per se but to a brilliant flash of light and a loud noise – if there were the discharge without the sensory manifestations, there would be no dominating feature of our experience. So it is not surprising that we can have the concept of a brilliant light or a loud noise without having the concept of an electrical discharge. Similar points could be made about the underlying neurophysiology of pain. It is not hard to understand how we could lack the concept of a neuron – what *is* hard to understand is how we, as adults who possess other concepts, could lack the concept of pain.

**WdeV:** You're treading close to the notion of a given here. The concepts of light flashes or loud noises are not concepts of sensory states, so I do not think they help you very much. The Ryleans do have concepts with which to attend to and deal with those states we think of as hunger or pains. You just want to insist that the concepts they have must be the concepts we have. But the only reason you've given is that you cannot imagine it otherwise.

**TT:** I'd like to think that by this stage I have offered something a bit more substantive than a subjective appeal to my imaginative powers. I am posing the question of what specifically the Ryleans do conceptualize – with respect to the phenomenon of hunger sensations, the existence of which we both acknowledge – given that they do not conceptualize the sensation of hunger itself. And your most recent answer – that they have a concept of food deprivation – seems quite unsatisfying.

For the fact of food deprivation, while clearly associated with the phenomenon of hunger, does not track it all that well. Did you ever notice how, if you go without food long enough, the hunger moderates and eventually disappears? Early human cultures must have noticed this frequently as they dealt with the inevitable famines and scarcities. Conversely, there can be hunger in the midst of plenty; even hunger immediately after a meal (think of the appetite-enhancing drug mentioned in my story). The upshot of the significant non-tracking of the two phenomena is that it is reasonable to think that the Ryleans would notice the hunger as something distinct from the fact of food deprivation.

As for flashes of light and noises, while it is obvious that electrical discharges and neuron firings can occur in a normal adult human's immediate environment throughout that person's lifetime without him ever having the concept of an electrical discharge or a neuron, this is not so clear in the case of flashes of light or noises. My point does not depend on the claim that concepts of flashes and noises are *sensory* concepts. I'm just saying there are cases and there are cases. We need to see whether the hunger case is closer to the electrical discharge and neuron model or to the flash of light and noise model. And one can see some problems here for Sellars's hypothesis. Humans have probably all experienced flashes of light which obviously occur without external causes, for example when one rubs one's closed eyes. It hardly seems to require an innovative conceptual leap to understand that such visual images occur within oneself, not in the world outside.

**WdeV:** That's a measure of the distance between us. I think that combining a grasp of the difference between the internal and the external with a fine enough sense of the typical forms of external causation so that one can conclude that some particular events must be internal and not external requires a tremendous amount of conceptual sophistication.

I think you're misconstruing what's really in question here: you say above that you're "posing the question of what specifically the Ryleans do conceptualize." But that's not really the question we're after; we both think they're conceptualizing hunger. The question for us here is *how* Ryleans conceptualize it. Focusing on *what* they conceptualize, the "object" they are dealing with, makes it sound as if there could not be any difference between them and us, since everyone is concerned with the same thing, hunger. But the manner in which they conceptualize hunger could easily be very different from the way we find so obvious.

The Ryleans certainly do have concepts available to track hunger, for besides the concept of food deprivation, they would have subjunctive constructs thereof. They could say that someone acts *as if* food-deprived, even though he's just eaten, or that someone else, despite not having eaten for a long time in the famine, no longer is or acts food-deprived. They could say of someone who is in the midst of a fast that if he were to hold out a bit longer, the obsession with food would pass. Behaviorists that they are, there is no reason the Ryleans cannot realize that food-deprivation behavior (that is, behavior *typically* caused by food deprivation) is not *always* correlated with food deprivation. They can do a great deal without a concept of hunger as an inner state.

And do not forget: the Ryleans are unsophisticated behaviorists: their "theory of mind" is a bad one and leaves a great deal unexplainable. That's why Jones's contribution is so valuable.

**TT:** Do not forget, either, that the Ryleans are not stupid. You're right that Ryleans can refer to food deprivation in counterfactual situations. But what's more likely: that they will still keep thinking only in terms of food deprivation – even when there are often puzzling disparities between perception and reality forcing them to use complex subjunctive conditionals – or that they will know exactly what's going on: they feel hungry!

**WdeV:** You keep insisting that there is just something so obvious about sensations as inner experiences that they must manifest themselves to human beings as such.

**TT:** I'm not simply insisting that something is obvious; I'm saying that you owe us an account that shows how the Ryleans can intelligently explain their world and themselves without having concepts of inner episodes. Since *we* have these concepts, Sellars needs to fill out his story of the Ryleans who do not. Just what are the Ryleans thinking in a specific case such as the hunger episode? Just how can a sensory feeling intrude on one's consciousness, as you acknowledge, and yet be conceived by the Ryleans not as anything inner but as a set or pattern of behaviors?

**WdeV:** I *have* been giving you an account of how the Ryleans can intelligently explain their world without having concepts of inner episodes. They cannot do so as well as we can; they miss some things that seem obvious to us, but that's only to be expected at their early stage of development.

How feelings can affect them yet not be conceived of as inner is easily explained. Given that humans do conceptualize features in the



physical world and that they *must* form concepts of such features if their conceptualizations are to have any survival value, a sensation can be transparent to conceptual attention. For example, if a Rylean is attacked – struck with a weapon, say – he may indeed feel great pain, but not focus at all on the pain as an inner experience. All his attention would presumably be focused on the external object that threatens him – his enemy – or on the physically inner state – the damage done to his body. The evolutionary point of such sensations, again, is to allow the organism to respond to features of the physical environment (including, again, spatially inner states of one's body) that are significant to that organism's survival.

In fact, we have to be trained to focus on our sensations themselves, as opposed to the physical objects or conditions that our sensations are meant to direct our attention to. Being able to appreciate and compare the particular sensory features of fine wines, for example, is a skill that takes considerable time and effort to acquire.

TT: The idea of the transparency of sensations is an interesting one, and I think that the phenomenon does occur. But I think that you've selected your specific examples with some care. Yes, in the case of a physical object in the form of a weapon-wielding enemy, one focuses directly on the object that is a threat to one's life. And in the case of mild and very subtle sensory differences, such as the wine-tasting example, we would all agree that sensory discrimination can be a matter of skill and practice.

But remember, I'm not saying that every instance of sensory experience is conceptually manifest to a person as an inner sensation. So let's stick with the examples I have been working with, though I would note that even in the enemy-with-the-weapon example, the Rylean who experienced the attack, assuming he survives it, could very well focus after the fact on the pain caused, and get angry and/or frightened all over again.

Hunger is a common enough experience, and unlike the cases you noted, it is both a strong sensation and one that can occur over an extended period of time and that often does not require or allow immediate physical action.

Such a case is I believe difficult to accommodate to your transparency scenario. Temporally, there is often a long gap in the case of hunger between behavioral cause and behavioral effect. One is hungry, but cannot go hunting because of weather or famine or threats from rivals. So one sits at home and feels hungry. It is very hard to

see how the feeling could be transparent and how the Rylean would always think only in terms of some behavior that is not even occurrently manifest.

Consider the differences between the behavior and its sensory cause: one is external, the other internal; one publicly observable, the other not; one is a sequence of macro movements of the body occurring during one temporal sequence, the other is caused by neurological episodes within the body having, most frequently, quite a different temporal sequence (think of the time spent hungry at home, not engaged in any hunger-resolving behavior). So it cannot be that the behaviors and the sensation are so similar that the transparency of the sensation could be explained in terms of a natural failure to notice the one because of its similarity to the other.

On those grounds alone, the idea that the sensation will always be entirely transparent – that one just sees through the sensation, as it were, and does not recognize its presence – seems quite incredible.

WdeV: The Rylean is not confusing the sensation of hunger with a pattern of behavior. Certainly not because they're similar, for they are not. She does not have the concept of a sensation of any kind, so she is certainly not committing a massive category mistake. The Rylean may well be obsessively thinking "I have to get some food, I have to get some food" (not that she realizes that what she is doing is thinking), she may be made greatly uneasy by her hunger, tempted to take ever more drastic action in order to obtain food.

TT: I grant that there is no confusion. I am saying that the sensation of hunger is categorially distinct from the behavior, and yet it is, I would argue, just as striking a feature of experience as features of the physical world. So, like those features, the sensation itself will be an object of conceptual attention.

The inner episode occurring to the Rylean is just as intense, as a sensation, as any intense hunger we experience, and we all know that that this can be a very strong sensory feature of our experience. I guess I'd like to hear from you, while you're thinking about the strongest hunger pangs you've felt, that you think it is entirely plausible to hold that, for generations, humans could have had such pangs and yet thought only of correlated patterns of behavior and never directed any conceptual attention to those hunger pangs at all.

WdeV: Just as we see *via* our sensations, but it is wrong to say we *see our sensations*, I think that we are at first and primarily aware of the world *via* our sensations. And it requires a very significant shift for us to change our focus to the sensations themselves. Consider, for

example, what it takes to be a good representationalist artist: one has to work incredibly hard to unlearn one's assumptions about what one sees. One has to learn to see the world anew. I was terrible at it, try as I might. So, no, I have no trouble thinking that for generations humans connected transparently to their world through their sensations and only later began to develop the ability to focus on those sensations themselves. I take it to be virtually self-evident that a transition like this has to occur somewhere in animal development, for few, if any, other animals are aware of their sensations as such.

**TT:** Obviously, sensations can occur without conceptions of them, because animals low on the evolutionary ladder and human infants have sensations yet presumably possess no concepts. But I am not arguing here that concepts of sensations must have been the first concepts to have occurred in the evolution of minds (human or animal) or in the development of the individual; only that, for any human with the conceptual capacity to understand subjunctive conditionals, for example, it is implausible to maintain that she would never understand that she has inner experiences like hunger. Your learning-to-paint example again draws attention to subtle aspects of sensory discrimination, which, I have already noted, is a diversion from the point at hand. The row you have to hoe requires otherwise conceptually sophisticated humans to *never* conceptually notice *any* of their sensations: they must *always* remain transparent.

**WdeV:** The learning-to-paint example is not a highfalutin\*\* case that draws attention only to the "subtle aspects of sensory discrimination." I think it is striking evidence of the extent to which understanding and appreciating the structure of the sensory manifold as such is a *learned* ability. And since one cannot grasp the *nature* of the sensory manifold unless one also has some grasp of its structure, grasping its nature, I conclude, is also a learned ability.

Have you ever read Julian Jaynes's book *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind?* (1976) A lot of it is pretty implausible, even for me, but the first part, where Jaynes discusses at great length how competent in the world a being without a consciousness of its inner states can be, is a very valuable antidote to Cartesian prejudices.

\* Editors' note: Meaning, in colloquial American English, something like "overly pretentious and academic."

**TT:** It may be a good exercise in rethinking prejudices, but Jaynes's speculations are evidentially very thin.

**WdeV:** Jaynes's evidence for the specific thesis that humans gained self-consciousness around the time of Homer is thin, but the evidence behind the claim that we are capable of a great deal of cognitive competence without self-consciousness is very strong, with plenty of laboratory documentation. And that is the aspect of his project of interest here.

I take it that the principal way in which we can and do become aware of our sensations as inner is by becoming aware that the (objective) structure of the world does not coincide with the (subjective) structure of our representations (to use the Kantian lingo). And we usually gain that kind of awareness in cases of representational failure. Sellars's proposal is plausible, it seems to me, because it asks us to think about the Ryleans as not yet being able to account for such representational failures. Being able to account for representational failure is an order of magnitude more sophisticated than having representational success, so it seems clear to me that there might have been a stage in our development where we had achieved significant representational power (like the Ryleans) but were not yet able to account for our representational failures.

**TT:** Given the differences between kinds of sensations, your claim that "the principal way in which we can and do become aware of our sensations as inner is by becoming aware that the (objective) structure of the world does not coincide with the (subjective) structure of our representations" is not properly supported by your painting example. Why could not it be, instead, that sensations like pain give us the clue to understanding the inner nature of all sensations, including visual ones?

So, keeping the focus on the hunger example, I want to return to your answer to my question: In spite of the intrusiveness of the sensation of hunger, which you acknowledge, in spite of its temporal and categorical distinctness from patterns of observable behavior, or from facts such as food deprivation, you insist on the plausibility of a scenario in which the hunger is always perfectly transparent and never becomes the object of the Ryleans' conceptual attention. It is an answer which I cannot fathom.

**WdeV:** My assertion that our awareness of our sensations depends on a mismatch between the objective structure of the world and the subjective structure of our sensations is not touched by what I guess you take to be a counterexample. It could well be that pains in fact

“give us the clue” to developing a conception of sensations, but how could they do that? – Because of some form of representational failure: pains without corresponding bodily damage or bodily damage without corresponding pain. Pains would lose their “transparency” in a breakdown in the normal connection between bodily state and pain.

You say that pains could give us the clue to the nature of sensation. That is, of course, perfectly compatible with Sellars’s story. Since pains can also be involved in a kind of representational failure, they will raise questions that a theoretical move like Jones’s could respond to. But if we come to understand and notice our sensations by such a theoretical move, then Sellars’s Rylean myth is vindicated, not impugned. And the only significant alternative I see on the horizon is the Cartesian insistence that pains are necessarily self-intimating, which you disavow.

**TT:** Any full assessment of this issue is going have to closely compare alternatives. There may be alternatives to the Rylean story Sellars tells that do not take us all the way back to traditional Cartesian assumptions about the self-intimating, incorrigible nature of our thoughts and sensations. That’s one of many interesting questions we cannot explore here, since our focus is on filling out the all-too-sketchy story in EPM of the Ryleans’ conceptual world.

So far, though, our discussion of the plausibility of a fuller explanation of the Ryleans’ conceptual scheme has focused on sensations rather than thoughts. But because Sellars, rightly, treats sensations and thoughts as distinct types of mental events, it is important to discuss the plausibility of the Ryleans’ conception of thoughts as well. Our discussion of sensations suggests how my own challenge would go regarding thoughts: Some thoughts, particularly those connected with powerful emotions, will, like sensations, not be amenable to moves like your transparency thesis. Consider a Rylean man who is head-over-heels in love with an unattainable woman. She rejects his advances utterly – her reasons do not really matter here. Once rejected, our lustful Rylean never expresses or acts on his love – the shame of rejection is too great to advertise his fate. It seems reasonable to think that such a Rylean would both be aware of his beliefs and desires and of their inner and private nature. He would not, I would claim, be likely to identify them with linguistic utterances which he has never even articulated, and he would be aware that sometimes at least he could prevent others from knowing his real thoughts and desires.

**WdeV:** I think there is a perfectly coherent way to tell such a story consistent with the Rylean hypothesis. It might read a bit Sartrean, for the unrequited lover would experience the woman as attractive, as drawing him to her almost magnetically, while other forces – e.g. the shame of rejection were he to act on that attraction – pull in the opposite direction. He feels himself torn: impelled towards the woman, yet impeded by the certainty of rejection. Clearly, *we* would say that he is in emotional turmoil, riven by the conflict between his desire for the woman and his shame at rejection. But *he* need not experience or understand it that way. He may well see himself as torn, but as torn, not by anything internal, but by the purely external facts of the situation: the attractiveness of the woman and the shame of rejection or the scorn of his fellows.

That our emotions are originally transparent to us, that we experience them as ways in which the world is organized for us, and that we need to acquire the ability to objectify them and become aware of them *as* emotions, has been argued by several philosophers, not just Sartre. So one cannot assume that conflicting emotions either *must* or *naturally* are experienced as internal states.

**TT:** This may be the first time in the history of philosophy that Jean-Paul Sartre has been invoked in the defense of Wilfrid Sellars! Certainly, such cross-pollination between the traditions is often insightful – perhaps it can be so here as well.

But still, let’s look at the details. The Sartrean psychology is suggestive, but it is only that at this point. It is not clear how it can explain significant elements of the unrequited Rylean’s conceptual situation.

You say the lustful Rylean sees himself torn only by the external facts. But it is hard to see how he can make this kind of mistake, since typically nothing in the external world will correspond at all closely with his internal situation. Notice that the facts that you cite in explaining what the lustful Rylean sees himself being torn by are all unchanging *background* facts: the attractiveness of the woman, and societal norms. (By background facts I just mean facts that are unchanging relative to some changing facts in the foreground.) But these facts in themselves represent no conflict. If he weren’t in love with the woman, there would be no threat of rejection, and, of course, her attractiveness is something that can be noted without inducing love. Suppose that he accepted all these background facts without qualm until one day he saw or thought that he saw her glance at him in a suggestive way. Suddenly he cannot get her out of his mind.

Something has decisively and overwhelmingly changed in his life, and he cannot reasonably attribute this entirely to facts, which have not changed. His thoughts (and not *just* his emotions, which your last remarks reduce the discussion to without warrant) will be constantly changing in relation to the background facts. One minute he's hatching a plot, the next he realizes it would never work, and so on. He's about as likely to attribute these features of his life to the background facts as he is to take a hummingbird for a tree sloth.

**WdeV:** I think this is just wrong: the facts in terms of which he understands and explains his behavior are not all unchanging background facts. That he is enduringly torn he sees as a function of enduring facts, e.g. the attractiveness of the woman and the danger of rejection; the shorter-term states and changes in his plans and activities he sees as functions of shorter-term states and changes in the world, e.g. changing possibilities of access, new opportunities to curry favor, possible changes in the strength of her disposition to reject his advances. The world is so rich that externally-based explanations of one's behavior could be quite satisfying to someone who altogether lacks our notion of intentional explanation.<sup>9</sup>

**TT:** That's just what I am questioning. Your move here is to point out (correctly) that there are lots of quickly changing external facts relevant to our Rylean's plight that are part of his understanding of the world and to suggest (vaguely) that he will understand his situation solely in terms of *those* sorts of facts and never in terms of any internal facts.

But I do not see how you can tell a plausible story to that effect. Exactly which (set of) these constantly changing or just-changed external facts could constitute a reasonable explanation of his situation? Could it be the woman's suggestive glance mentioned above? Unlikely. Whether it was real or imagined, it will not track the lovelorn Rylean's obsessive thoughts in the typical case. The glance occurs in an instant; his obsession lasts for weeks or months. And he cannot use his speech acts as the external facts by which he could explain to himself what we understand to be his obsessive thoughts, if he is unable to confide in anyone. He does a lot of his stewing, fretting, and plotting in silence.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Gordon is currently writing some interesting things emphasizing how seldom we actually (that is, outside of philosophical discussions) cite our beliefs and desires in explaining our actions. See also his (2001).

Could he associate his changing states with the changing likelihood of rejection or with the changing degrees of loveliness of the woman? Again unlikely in typical cases. His shame might make him avoid the woman at all costs. Taken individually or collectively, these external facts – or our Rylean's knowledge of them – will very often radically fail to correspond to the temporal changes in his thinking. His obsession and its swirl of thoughts is the major feature of his life, almost constantly present, and there is no external fact to hook it on to. He will surely understand that it is an internal feature of himself.

**WdeV:** You demand explanation of our hypothetical lover's "situation" and claim I cannot give one, but that's very vague. I claim that for any particular legal explanandum you want, I can produce a plausible explanation. What I mean by a "legal" explanandum is one that is not characterized mentalistically. Why does he alternate between boldly making ready to claim his love for his own and dejectedly hunkering at home? Because different aspects of his environment evoke in him different responses. For instance, the (possibly misinterpreted) glance he caught from his beloved clearly changed his dispositions towards her. It does not need to "track" anything. It caught his attention and interest, it began a cascade that changed him profoundly, but it is all changes in his dispositions.

I also think you're selling the Sartrean approach to emotions (and strong beliefs) short. Love and fear are experienced, on the Sartrean story, as particular ways in which the world is organized. In love, one finds, at every turn, things that emphasize the attraction of the loved one, one's need of the beloved. A particular smell, a glimpse of a color that reminds one of her hair, virtually anything can be the occasion of a tear or a love-sick sigh, some sign of one's striving to attain the beloved. But any number of things can also evoke a fear-of-rejection response.

Thus, the Ryleans will have a different way of thinking about such turmoil. Even without trying to discover constant changes in the external situation, we can imagine the young swain saying "I'm in turmoil. At one and the same time I'm ready to run to her and proclaim my love, and yet I could not bear the burden of another rejection. I am not sleeping, for in the night it is often as if she is before me, and then I am drawn to her, heart aflutter, while simultaneously unable to move, lest she scorn me yet again. I cannot do my work, I cannot sit still, I cannot bring myself to peace. Oy Vey!" What you see as conflicting thoughts, the Rylean understands

as conflicting dispositions. What you see as rapidly changing plans, attempts to think of a way to satisfy his desires, the Rylean understands as changing dispositions to act supplanting each other, none of them holding forth the promise of success. There is simply nothing implausible about this.

**TT:** Perhaps not. But look at the position you have arrived at here. You began by saying that the Rylean will see himself as torn “not by anything internal, but by the purely external facts of the situation” like the woman’s attractiveness or the proscription against adultery. But you end by maintaining that the Rylean understands his conflicted situation as changing dispositions to act. You have significantly switched your ground here, for these dispositions are not external facts – not part of the furniture of the world external to the Rylean. They are characteristics of the Rylean himself. And, unless he is insane or delusional, it is reasonable to think that the Rylean will understand this. You yourself have him noting that it is “as if she is before me.” He is not so deluded as to think she is really there. Similarly for his disposition to make certain utterances: “It is as if I were proclaiming my love to her,” he says (to himself). But he knows all too well that this as-if-proclaiming does not occur at his beloved’s feet, nor even as a spoken utterance in his own home, lest the woman of the house boot him out.

And if he understands these imagined but not acted-upon scenarios as silent, private features of himself, then he is already in effect a Jonesian. Jones says that something is going on within him that is like speech and yet is clearly not publicly observable behavior. Our Rylean has come to the same conclusion. But if you have to grant that the ordinary Rylean will have this conception of his situation, you are depriving the Jones story – and thus Sellars’s Rylean hypothesis – of its force. The point of the hypothesis was that Ryleans could live in ignorance of inner thoughts and sensations for generations until Jones arrived with his genius-level insight. In fact, it looks hard to maintain that the typical Rylean living the typical life would not already understand what Jones understands.

**WdeV:** I do not believe I have switched my ground at all. We’ve always agreed that the Ryleans had a conception of dispositions. Sometimes, especially when the underlying disposition is stable, the explanation of an event is best accomplished by reference to the new conditions that evoke the manifestation of the disposition. Sometimes, though, an explanation is accomplished by reference to the disposition, especially when the dispositions of the objects involved change. The

fact that a machine part does not break under a certain force may be explained by saying that the steel is tempered. When the tempering process was first developed, no one knew exactly why it worked, what it did to the microstructure of the metal; they just knew that tempered steel had different dispositional properties (tensile strength, etc.) from untempered steel. There is no reason to deny the Ryleans the full use of their acknowledged conceptual resources.

From this point of view, Jones does not just exploit his knowledge of human dispositions to explain the behavior of his fellows, he offers a theory about the structure underlying our dispositions, what’s going on inside us that accounts for why our dispositions work as they do.

**TT:** So you say you can produce a plausible explanation, but you haven’t offered a specific explanation for the situation I described, where the Rylean understands all too well that his dispositions do not manifest themselves in terms of his actual behavior. He knows that his loving conversations, the visions of his beloved, are not real. Given that his thoughts and imaginings are very intense, constantly changing and, we are supposing, the most important thing in his life, it seems practically inevitable that his attention will turn to them, and he will understand that there are active, constantly changing nondispositional features of his inner life. Indeed, he would understand that these are the causes of his conflicting dispositions, now to approach, now to retreat, and so on.

**WdeV:** I think you are projecting too much of who *we* are and how *we* conceive matters onto the Ryleans. You seem to think that the Rylean will, on any plausible account, have to understand his imagined conversations as internal states of himself. But even actual human cultures have failed to understand what *we* know to be internal mental states in that way. Dreams, for example, have been taken in some cultures to be travels to other worlds. There is no reason why the Rylean could not suppose that his conversations with the object of his affection actually do take place in a different and, for him, much happier world.

**TT:** You are supposing, in other words, that he is deluded.

**WdeV:** In the sense of insane, no; in the sense of systematically mistaken, sure. But Sellars builds the possibility of such systematic error into his account, and there is nothing unrealistic in general about supposing whole human cultures can get things systematically wrong, even in their broad conceptions of the nature of the world they live in. Indeed, there are plenty of examples in the actual history of human cultures.

TT: You make a good point. I do think that the case I have been imagining is different from the dream case. In a dream, one is presented with a seemingly self-contained world and oneself in it. One can see how a culture might take that to be a separate but equally real world. It is much harder to imagine how, in waking life, invented conversations, deliberate plotting, conjured visual images of the object of affection could be taken either to be a separate world or an externalized aspect of this world. There is no presentation of a self-contained world, and there are too many close-to-hand features of the immediate environment that tell against the reality of the imagined objects of thought (or the very acts of thinking). So it does not seem a reasonable possibility to me. And yet I understand that this could simply be a failure of imagination on my part. While I think arguments from implausibility have a place, they also have their limits, and one of them is the danger of just such failures of imagination. At this level of speculation, it is difficult to argue either side of the case regarding what is a plausible conceptual world for human beings. I think we've arrived at a draw here.

I do think, though, that this applies only to Sellars's account of the Ryleans' conceptions with respect to thoughts, and not to sensations. The reason that I cannot press my case for the implausibility of the Ryleans failing to have the concept of thinking is because, as you point out, it is possible to give a dispositional analysis of thinking when such thinking does not manifest itself in actual behavior. But Ryle himself was dissatisfied with his attempt to give a dispositional analysis of sensations, and for a good reason. While I have to concede that it is hard to argue the plausibility or implausibility of the Rylean projecting his imagined conversation onto the actual world, there is no analogue in the case of the sensation of hunger. Since thoughts are *about* situations and objects, it is always possible to imagine the Rylean projecting these thoughts as actual features of the external world. But hunger is not about anything, and so your move is blocked in that case.

WdeV: I'd noticed that your arguments tended to rely on the *phenomenology* of thought to reveal thoughts to us, and was going to remark on that. Classically, thought itself does not have a phenomenology, and that's a major reason why a functional-dispositional analysis of thought has been convincing. The Ryleans have the concepts crucial to dispositional analyses, so they seem to be able to do a more thorough job in explaining the kinds of things we explain by reference to thoughts than of those things we explain by reference to sensory or

qualitative states. I wonder whether, if your argument here worked, it wouldn't really get you the categories of *imagination* and *verbal imagery*, rather than that of thought proper.

TT: It is true that I have been assuming that the Ryleans have a phenomenology associated with their thinking. (I take it by 'phenomenology' here you mean, for example, the stream of silent words that courses through many people's minds as they go through a typical day – see Joyce's *Ulysses* – or the visual images a person refers to in saying, for example, "I can vividly recall the expression on her face even though it was years ago.") But I'm not "relying on the phenomenology of thought to reveal thoughts to us" if you mean by that making the argument that the very existence of the phenomenology entails the awareness of it as an inner experience. Sensations are inner experiences but I haven't presupposed that they are, simply by virtue of that fact, conceptualized as such. I gave Sellars the benefit of the doubt that it was possible for sensations to exist without being conceptualized as what they are, and I'm making the same assumption here – there is some phenomenology, but by hypothesis it is not conceptualized as such. I then have tried to show that reflection on the details of what such a conceptual world would look like lands us in some implausible scenarios.

If you are suggesting that the Ryleans have *no* phenomenological accompaniment to the type of thinking under discussion here, I think that you'll find that a very hard row to hoe. If, as has been known to happen with human beings, one person's sexual attraction to another is primarily physical, then it is hard to imagine how the one person could think about the other in the other's absence without visual imagery of that person's body and features. Or suppose our hapless Rylean plots how he might contrive to place himself where he will cross paths with the woman. He would rely on visual memory of the layout of his village and its buildings and of the pattern of her comings and goings among them, as he considers how he might engineer an encounter. It is reasonable to assume that specific visual imagery based on this memory would accompany his plotting.

If my argument only shows that the Ryleans have concepts of visual and verbal imagery rather than concepts of "thought proper," that does not weaken my case at all. I myself took verbal imagery to be an example of thought proper and did not encounter arguments against this until I began studying Sellars. I imagine that most people who are not philosophers and cognitive scientists take their verbal and visual imagery to be instances of thinking. If my arguments show that

Ryleans will most likely conceive of themselves as having inner, private verbal and pictorial images, I have made my case: they have a concept of thinking that is pretty much like that shared by most actual persons.

**WdeV:** That's a conception of thought like the conception that everything yellow and sparkly is gold. These arguments return to the theme that the qualitative aspects of mind – what you'd tend to call the "What it is like" aspects – are somehow too obvious for someone to have them and not conceptualize them. I do think that most people recognize that there *need* be nothing that it is like to have a thought, even though they often, and sloppily, equate thinking with internal imagery. So I do not think your arguments show that there is anything implausible about Sellars's story concerning thoughts.

Let me try another tack that might reveal something important about our disagreement. You're willing to grant that mental states are not self-intimating, that it takes some (though minimal) inferential work or theoretical creativity to develop a conception of subjectively inner states, and that the spur to such work would be the need to explain and understand our behavior. But Sellars's own story seems implausible to you because it makes this move too difficult: you think that once someone has the conceptual artillery to pose the explanatory question, the conception of subjectively inner states would propose itself virtually immediately. Now, I notice that in all your examples, you are concerned with a subject's understanding/explaining his *own* situation. Is the self-reference here essential? Is your complaint ultimately that Sellars's myth seems implausible to you because he has not taken account of the first-person perspective, and that when a first-person point of view is countenanced, things look entirely different? If so, we've been navigating around another important issue: the status of the first person.

**TT:** I disagree with the claim that most people have taken their concept of thinking as far as you assume they have, but even if they did, I believe that any Rylean who acquired the merely qualitative conception of thought based on verbal and visual imagery would have abandoned behaviorism and already have adopted the key ingredients of Jones's insight.

Regarding your question about self-reference as essential to my argument, 'essential' is used in many ways. But if the question is whether the first-person perspective is an important part of the story to be told, I would say "yes." A story about humans that completely ignores or dismisses the first-person perspective is, in my view, one

that simply fails to account for all that needs to be accounted for. According to many philosophers, this effectively means that one has to abandon a physicalist or broadly naturalist account of the mind. I disagree. But any such account must provide an adequate explanation for how the world is experienced from the perspective of the subject, not just from the objective point of view. Such a perspective seems notably lacking in Sellars's myth of Jones. And when one tries to fold that perspective into the myth, it starts looking deeply implausible in important respects.

**WdeV:** I see now better than I did before both why you find Sellars's story implausible and why you think it is a philosophically troubling, and not a merely empirical, implausibility. I do not recall any passages where Sellars explicitly considers the first-person perspective, so whether he's got an adequate story about it that could assuage your concerns is something we'd have to work out. And it wouldn't be an easy piece of work, so I think that's another discussion.

*Timm Triplett*

Department of Philosophy  
University of New Hampshire  
Durham, NH 03824  
United States of America  
*e-mail:* tat@cisunix.unh.edu

*Willem deVries*

Department of Philosophy  
University of New Hampshire  
Durham, NH 03824  
United States of America  
*e-mail:* willem.devries@unh.edu

Visiting Fellow, Philosophy Programme  
University of London  
London WC1E 7HU  
United Kingdom

## REFERENCES

- Chisholm, R.M. and W. Sellars (1957). Intentionality and the Mental. In: H. Feigl, M. Scriven and G. Maxwell (eds.), *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 2, pp. 507-539. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- deVries, W.A. and T. Triplett (2000). *Knowledge, Mind and the Given: Reading Sellars's 'Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind'*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Gordon, R.M. (2000). Sellars's Ryleans Revisited. *Protosociology* 14, 102-114.
- Jackson, F. (1982). Epiphenomenal Qualia. *Philosophical Quarterly* 32, 127-136.
- Jaynes, J. (1976). *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lehrer, K. and D.G. Stern (2000). The "Dénouement" of "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 17, 201-216.
- Marras, A. (1973a). Sellars on Thought and Language. *Nous* 7, 152-163.
- Marras, A. (1973b). On Sellars's Linguistic Theory of Conceptual Activity. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 2, 471-483.
- Marras, A. (1977). The Behaviourist Foundation of Sellars's Semantics. *Dialogue* 16, 664-675.
- Rosenberg, J.F. (2000). Perception vs. Inner Sense: A Problem about Direct Awareness. *Philosophical Studies* 101, 143-160.
- Ryle, G. (1949). *The Concept of Mind*. New York: Barnes and Noble.
- Sellars, W. (1997). *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (with an introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Young, J. (1973). Intentionality. *Review of Metaphysics* 26, 696-722.

David Forman

**LEARNING AND THE NECESSITY OF  
NON-CONCEPTUAL CONTENT IN SELLARS'S  
"EMPIRICISM AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MIND"**

**ABSTRACT.** For Sellars, the possibility of empirical knowledge presupposes the existence of "sense impressions" in the perceiver, i.e., non-conceptual states of perceptual consciousness. But this role for sense impressions does not implicate Sellars' account in the Myth of the Given: sense impressions do not stand in a justificatory relation to instances of perceptual knowledge; their existence is rather a condition for the possibility of the *acquisition* of empirical concepts. Sellars suggests that learning empirical concepts presupposes that we can remember certain *past* facts that we could not conceptualize at the time they obtained. And such memory presupposes, in turn, the existence of certain (past) non-conceptual sensory states that can be conceptualized.

Parents never teach children language without the children themselves inventing it simultaneously. The parents simply bring distinctions between things to the attention of the child by means of certain signifying terms; and so they do not, as it were, *put* the use of reason into them, but rather *facilitate* and *promote* it for them through language.

J.G. Herder (1985, I.2, p. 727)

### Introduction

In *Mind and World*, John McDowell argues that traditional attempts to explain our cognitive relation to the world result in an oscillation between two opposing epistemological pitfalls. Following Sellars, he calls the first pitfall the "Myth of the Given": the Myth that cognitive episodes can find justification outside the realm of the conceptual. According to the most common version of the Myth, our beliefs about the world are justified not solely by other beliefs, but ultimately by non-conceptual experiences forming the interface between mind and world. McDowell claims that Sellars's celebrated attack on this Myth in his essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1997, henceforth: EPM) leads him to "renounce empiricism" and instead embrace the opposing epistemological pitfall: "frictionless

In M.P. Wolf and M.N. Lance (eds.), *The Self-Correcting Enterprise: Essays on Wilfrid Sellars (Poznań Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities, vol. 92)*, pp. 115-145. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi 2006.