# The Myth of the Taken: Why Hegel is Not a Conceptualist

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*International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 27:3 (July 2019): 399-421.

## Introduction

Despite the suspicion that still hovers over the thought of G.W.F. Hegel, one of his ideas that still widely fascinates is his critique of “immediate knowledge,” especially in its memorable portrayal in his chapter on “Sense-Certainty” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This feature of Hegel’s thought has found new appreciation in recent years due especially to the influence (however unwittingly) of the late Wilfrid Sellars, whose celebrated critique of the “Myth of the Given” in his “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (=*EPM*) closely resembles Hegel’s own challenge. Though the relevant texts of both thinkers are oriented negatively, aiming primarily to dismantle prevalent assumptions about the place of knowledge within perceptual experience, a common positive moral is frequently drawn from them as well: namely, that all the intentional content of an experience is *conceptual*. This means, for example, that sensations in experience are not represented except insofar as they are conceptualized. Such a position in the philosophy of perceptual experience is called *conceptualism.*[[1]](#footnote-1)Apart from conceptualism, the sensory given professes to play an independent justificatory role in our knowledge, the view Sellars and his followers have dubbed a “myth.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Sellars himself intimated that his views would invoke Hegel’s and – unsurprisingly, given Hegel’s reputation in analytic philosophy at the time – tried cautiously to soften the blow. But rather than the connection tarnishing Sellars’ name, it has helped to revive Hegel’s. When seen in light of Sellars’ critique of empiricism, the seemingly egregious additions of Hegel’s philosophy have seemed (to some) almost comprehensible. To put the issue simply, the clue taken from Sellars has been to interpret Hegel’s *idealism* as a *conceptualism*.[[3]](#footnote-3) Prominently, Robert Pippin and John McDowell have departed from Sellars’ reinterpretation of Kant’s concept-intuition distinction to show the path *von Kant bis Hegel*.[[4]](#footnote-4) If intuitions are simply singular uses of concepts, as Sellars says,[[5]](#footnote-5) then experience could be conceptual all the way down. Though in different ways, in the Sellars-inspired readings of Pippin and McDowell the conceptual “overreaches” (*übergreift,* as Hegel would say) the non-conceptual, so that for them no non-conceptual contribution to our empirical knowledge can be pried apart. This view is an “idealism” only in the sense that it confounds the attempt to posit something outside what Sellars called “the space of reasons.”

To be sure, the revival of Hegel as a Sellars-style Kantian has met with critics, especially those incredulous about the apparently deflated reading of Hegel’s metaphysics. However, I do not want to pursue any such consideration here. Instead, I wish to scrutinize what I will call the “remainder” theory of conceptualism, the view that if experience contains no immediate given, then what we take from it is therefore something *conceptual*. This is the “myth of the taken” of my title. While it is not clear that Sellars himself held such a view, it is something frequently claimed in Sellars-inspired readings of Hegel. Yet I hope to show that it is quite at odds with Hegel’s own way of thinking about conceptuality. Moreover, this difference is not merely a verbal one. The conceptualist reading of Hegel seems to import substantive commitments about concepts that are not only dialectically suspect, they occlude some of Hegel’s best insights about conceptuality. I will proceed by first examining “Sense-Certainty,” which is both popularly cited in support of Hegel’s conceptualism and a useful test-case for understanding the view in general. After seeing there why a conceptualist reading is not obligatory, we can explore some systematic features of Hegel’s view of conceptuality that help explain why this would be. I show that Hegel sees concepts as offering putative *understanding*, while the cases of apparent conceptuality in sense-certainty are merely *representational*. In the final section, I show that the issue is not merely equivocal by offering a prospective conceptualism starting from Sellarsian semantics. Here it becomes clear that the philosophical demands of conceptualism (at least of a Sellarsian variety) threaten distinctions both commonly accepted and central to Hegel’s own way of thinking.

## 1. Sense-Certainty and Conceptualism

We begin by revisiting the famous passage that is so often cited when the Hegel-Sellars connection is invoked: the “Sense-Certainty” (*Die sinnliche Gewißheit*) chapter of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* (= *PhG*).[[6]](#footnote-6) Apart from the fact that this chapter is often used as evidence of Hegel’s conceptualism, it is also useful as an acid-test for a conceptualist position in general. For if “sense-certainty” of any kind is non-conceptual, then conceptualism will be false. Moreover, it is true that we find here a version of Hegel’s critique of the “Myth of the Given,” for it is evident that Hegel seeks to undermine the naïve view according to which knowing is “immediate knowing, *knowing* of the *immediate*, or of *what is*” (*PhG* 82/60, § 90). Hegel indeed says that the aim of such immediate knowing is to “keep our comprehending [*Begreifen*] of [the object] apart from our apprehending [*Auffassen*] of it” (ibid.; slightly modified). The aim of sense-certainty is to reach the object itself without any cognitive contribution on our part; Hegel wants to show that such a task fails on its own terms.

Hegel’s target bears a striking resemblance to the specific view of the “given” that Sellars thought was prominent in logical empiricism, which sought in sensory primitives the foundation of scientific knowledge. It is no surprise, then, that scholars make a connection between Hegel and Sellars on this point. McDowell writes, “One might expect at least a rough match with the first movement of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* [i.e., “Sense-Certainty”]” and Sellars’ *EPM* (2009a, 91).[[7]](#footnote-7) Robert Brandom announces yet more explicitly, “Exactly one hundred and fifty years before Sellars, in his opening chapter Hegel is making a point of just the same shape … *Sense Certainty* is, *inter alia*, an argument against the Myth of the Given” (Forthcoming, Part 2, Ch. 4). Paul Redding likewise speaks of the section as “quasi-Sellarsian” (2007, 188). Stating his interpretation of the passage, Redding says, “But of course as soon as we conceive of the object to which the empirical concept is applied in this way as something standing beyond the border of the conceptualizable, we have already *conceptualized* it” (186). And many more make a similar connection.[[8]](#footnote-8)

However, as the quotation from Redding already shows, interpreters frequently draw more than a negative conclusion from this passage. Now Hegel would be the first to say that a negative claim doubles as a positive one, so this itself is not surprising. What is surprising, however, is how the positive claim is characterized in unison as one affirming a form of conceptualism. DeVries claims, “[I]n the ‘Sense-Certainty’ chapter of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel gives us an argument to show that we cannot avoid the *this-such*. Every *this* is, in fact, already (if only implicitly) a *this-such*. And thus every *this* is conceptual in a fairly straightforward way” (2008, 68; underline added). Pippin summarizes his interpretation by saying “[Hegel’s] account [in ‘Sense-Certainty’] does what the Introduction said the *PhG* was going to do: demonstrate and justify the Notional nature of experience” (1989, 123). And though McDowell does not comment in depth on the passage, his view of Hegel as maintaining that “the conceptual is unbounded; there is nothing outside it” (1994, 44) clearly depends on conceptualist reading of this chapter of the *Phenomenology* if any.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Hegel’s negative argument in “Sense-Certainty” is almost always positively construed in terms of concepts; hence, Hegel’s denial of an immediate sensible given counts as affirming at best a conceptual given – better, a conceptual *taken* – and thus conceptualism about perceptual experience. This is a view of conceptualism as a *remainder* of the critique of givenness. It is what is left over, without further addition. But this does not seem an obvious lesson from the critique of the Myth of the Given. Why should an experience without an immediate given be one that must have a *conceptual* taken?

There are indeed some mitigating reasons – both Kantian and contemporary – that help explain why Hegel’s point would be interpreted this way. These will be discussed in the following sections. However, given that Hegel himself is in full possession of a “concept” vocabulary, it is noteworthy that he himself frames the conclusions of “Sense-Certainty” *without* using concept-talk to do so. Though it is worth considering that this could reflect a merely linguistic difference between Hegel and us, we should be clear about what the linguistic facts are.

As I already mentioned, Hegel characterizes the intention of sense-certainty as trying to keep any “comprehending” (*Begreifen*) away from its “apprehending” (*Auffassen*: or simply “taking”) of the object. Since *Begreifen* is indeed the activity correlated with concepts (*Begriffe*),[[10]](#footnote-10) it is fair to say that sense-certainty is poised as an attempt at non-conceptual knowledge. Apart from this remark about comprehending, however, Hegel never states the argument of “Sense-Certainty” in terms of concepts or conceptuality.[[11]](#footnote-11) Perhaps he does this in order to be faithful to the claim of “natural consciousness” he is depicting, which is too much interested in reaching its object *directly* to worry about what *indirect* means of approach it will avoid – concepts presumably included. Be that as it may, much of Hegel’s text proceeds at a level removed from sense-certainty itself – from the perspective of the famous phenomenological “we” – which would provide Hegel occasion to interpret the first-level experience in his preferred vocabulary. Yet Hegel does not choose to state the failure of sense-certainty, or its succeeding though transitory remedy in “Perception,” in terms of conceptuality.[[12]](#footnote-12) Moreover, though sense-certainty is avowedly a form of non-conceptual experience, so long as it is not the only possible species of such knowledge, a negation of that non-conceptual species does not amount to an affirmation of the conceptual genus. There could be additional non-conceptual forms, or the conceptual and “aconceptual”[[13]](#footnote-13) might not be exclusive opposites. So we cannot conclude directly from Hegel’s allusion to the failed attempt at a *specific* form of non-conceptuality that experience must be conceptual.

Given the frequent claim that Hegel is intentionally responding to Kant’s concept-intuition distinction in this passage, it is odd, to say the least, that Hegel avoids mentioning one its members.[[14]](#footnote-14) This linguistic observation does not rule out the conceptualist interpretation of the passage, but if Hegel is affirming conceptualism in “Sense-Certainty,” it must be something inferred rather than found there “immediately.”[[15]](#footnote-15) How this inference is made has much to do with what a given interpreter thinks – now independently of Hegel – a concept is. It is probable that two components of Hegel’s argument have impressed readers to infer that concepts are at issue. First, Hegel indicates that the intended object of immediate certainty is something general or universal in nature.[[16]](#footnote-16) Even apart from the issue of the linguistic trappings of experience, the intention to know the *now*, Hegel says,converts immediately into the intention to know something more enduring. When Hegel claims that “[t]he universal is thus in fact the truth of sensuous-certainty” (85/62, § 96), he is alluding to the fact that the very temporal duration of the intended object of sense-certaintymakes it something universal. This universal is “mediated” at least in the sense that its momentary fragments (*now*’s and *here*’s) have to be related. Accordingly, if all objective generalities – especially the extension of space and duration of time – are conceptual, then the object of sense-certainty is necessarily a conceptual one.

This assumption would be hasty though, especially as it begs the question against Kant’s claim that space and time are universal forms of intuition without being general concepts (A 24/B 39).[[17]](#footnote-17) Moreover, as will come out later, Hegel himself takes universality to be a necessary but not sufficient mark of a genuine concept. However, this is not the feature of the text that is commonly used to support a conceptualist reading. The second, more common inference to conceptuality is tied to the role of language in Hegel’s argument, especially the significance of indexical expressions. Hegel says that as the subject attempts to explain the content of her “immediate knowledge” in the most direct way possible, she will, in an attempt to avoid concept-laden “anticipations” of her experience, rely on apparently non-descriptive indexical expressions to state her knowledge: “now,” “here,” “this” (87/63, § 102). However, though such expressions are meant only to unveil a purely immediate “singular” given, they prove to *convey* something different. Namely, rather than individuating their subject matter, they express something even more general or universal:

However, as we see, language is the more truthful. In language, we immediately refute what we *mean to say* [*unsere Meinung*], and since the universal is the truth of sensuous-certainty, and language only expresses this truth, it is, in that way, not possible at all that we could say what we *mean* [*meinen*] about sensuous being. (85/62, § 97)

It is controversial whether Hegel here *assumes* the need for sense-certainty to express itself in words, perhaps at least as a requirement on its scientific self-conception, or whether he uses language to illustrate sense-certainty’s deeper expressive problem.[[18]](#footnote-18) However, his basic point, that the universal form of language contradicts the singular intentions harbored by sense-certainty, is clear. And to the extent that this form of language is unavoidable within the specific intentions of sense-certainty, this point is crucial in his rejection of the latter’s “immediacy.”

Though Hegel does not mention conceptuality by name in his discussion of the dialectic of sense-certainty, proponents could argue that it is entailed by his description of the generality of the form of sense-certainty, or by the linguistic form of sensory experience (at least in the expression of its cognitive content). The linguistic connection makes it especially understandable why those of a Sellarsian bent would find evidence of conceptualism in this passage. For Sellars spoke of a conceptual competency as a *linguistic* capacity, in particular the ability to conform to regularities or *rules* of linguistic usage.[[19]](#footnote-19) As Brandom summarizes, for Sellars, “grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word” (2002, 350). In *EPM*, Sellars concluded that we use concepts in sensory experience by showing that a speaker reporting on a perception relies on inferential abilities based on (intersubjectively available) linguistic rules. It is this feature of Sellars’ thought that Brandom (esp. 1994) has expanded into an ambitious “inferentialist” theory of meaning and mindedness. McDowell, too, frequently relates the acquisition of conceptual capacities as learning to speak a language (1994, 125); he also seems to equate conceptual capacities to linguistic (often propositional) ones.[[20]](#footnote-20) If linguistic capacities are then taken to be conceptual ones (and not just vice versa), then conceptualism about perceptual experience is *built in* to the linguistic element of Sellars’ critique of the given. On this view, the use of a discriminatory linguistic capacity is itself evidence of the use of a concept or conceptual capacity, since the former is sufficient for the latter.[[21]](#footnote-21)

One can see immediately why this linguistic orientation towards concepts would make Hegel’s discussion of language in “Sense-Certainty” evoke conceptualism *à la* Sellars. Hegel, too, seems to rely on the fact that sense-contents are unavailable apart from a discriminatory activity that is based in language. However, it is worth pointing out that even if linguistic and conceptual capacities are equated, Hegel’s argument might not provide glowing support for conceptualism. I speak of “capacity” here, in conformity with some interpreters, but the upshot of Hegel’s critique involves a linguistic *incapacity*. Namely, language *cannot* express what it wants to in “Sense-Certainty”: “the sensuous This, which is what is meant, is *inaccessible* to the language which belongs to consciousness, or to what is in itself universal. … Those who began a description would not be able to complete it…” (91-92/67, § 110; underline added). Hegel’s point cannot simply be that language makes up for the same work that immediate sensuous certainty fails to carry out, since at the end of the chapter, the universal form of language has not expressed the supposedly singular content of sensibility. The attempt to deliver genuine sensory knowledge was not just a false start but a nonstarter.[[22]](#footnote-22) If so, even if linguistic awareness is ubiquitous in experience, it won’t follow that such awareness is thereby successful in delivering determinate content: for all we know, mere sensory experience could be simply nonrepresentational.[[23]](#footnote-23) The linguistic attempt to discriminate the content of sense-certainty does not necessarily yield the conceptual saturation that the conceptual reading would predict. Nevertheless, a conceptualist could still claim that the lack of content is not total; and thus linguistic involvement in sense-certainty implies conceptualism as a remainder of the critique of immediacy.

## 2. Hegelian Conceptuality: From Representation to Understanding

We have seen that the negative component of Hegel’s critique of immediacy seems inseparable from his suggestion that we cannot form a conception of “sense-certain” content except through linguistically shaped awareness, which then fails to express such “content” as it purports to be. A Sellarsian could take this to be a good expression of conceptualism, despite the problems just noted. However, the Sellarsian view that would equate such linguistic involvement with conceptuality involves quite a wide conception of what a concept is. I now want to show that Hegel does not accept such a wide view of conceptuality, so that he cannot be a conceptualist *sensu stricto.* Moreover, though the issue involves terminological preference, I will argue that Hegel’s view of concepts contains some insights that may be occluded by too wide a use of the term.

Since there is no space here to give a full view of Hegel’s theory of concepts, or what he calls “the concept” (*der Begriff*), I will have to take some points for granted.[[24]](#footnote-24) Though these points are controversial in the literature on Hegel, they appear to be shared by interpreters of a Sellarsian bent and should not cause much trouble in the present context. First, I will assume here that Hegel does not use “the concept” as a name for a metaphysical structure that is realizing itself in and as the world (as some read him),[[25]](#footnote-25) and that the language Hegel uses about the concept being “actualized” can be given a relatively benign reading.[[26]](#footnote-26) Second, I will assume that though Hegel’s singular use of “the concept”, does serve a unique function in his thought, it does not exclude a relation to concepts in the plural.[[27]](#footnote-27) It is right to speak of a Hegelian “theory of concepts,” because Hegel’s use of “the concept” involves a prominent overlap with other such theories.

However, given these two assumptions about Hegelian conceptuality, it is still worth registering some critical trends in Hegel’s discussion of concepts. In several places, Hegel does suggest that there is a difference between his understanding of concepts and an ordinary one. For example, Hegel writes: “What is usually understood by ‘concepts’ are *determinations* of the *understanding*, or even just general *notions* [*Vorstellungen*]; hence such ‘concepts’ are always *finite* determinations (cf. § 62)” (*EL* 310/239, § 162R). And just later: “What are also called concepts, and, to be sure, determinate concepts, e.g. human being, house, animal, and so forth, are simple determinations and abstract representations [*Vorstellungen*], – abstractions that, taking only the moment of universality from the concept, … are thus not developed in themselves and accordingly abstract precisely from the concept” (*EL* 314-15/242, § 164R).[[28]](#footnote-28) Hegel indeed puts his view at a distance from a sense of “concept” commonly recognized.[[29]](#footnote-29) Rather than concluding, as some commentators do,[[30]](#footnote-30) that these differences preclude Hegel from addressing a common subject matter from the ordinary use of “concept,” I see them as prefacing Hegel’s revisionary, but not equivocal view of conceptuality. But the revisionary take on conceptual content Hegel accepts puts him at odds with conceptualist views.

What we see Hegel rejecting specifically in the passages just quoted is that a concept is a mere universal representation. This separates his view from Kant, who would regard it as sufficient to have an empirical concept to be able to represent a “mark” (*Mermale*) common between two objects: “An empirical concept arises from the senses through comparison of objects of experience and attains through the understanding merely the form of universality” (1992, 590; Ak. 9: 92). For Kant, the “function” of a concept is “the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one” (A 68/B 93). This view of conceptuality, of course, makes empirical concepts quite “easy” to come by, so long as several representations of a sensible mark are available. Moreover, though Kant speaks of the faculty to have concepts in this sense as “the understanding” (*der Verstand*), there is little one need *understand* to have a concept in this way.[[31]](#footnote-31) Kant sees concepts primarily in terms of the ability to *subsume* intuitions (A 51/B 76; A 147/B 176), rather than to explain or “understand” them in a colloquial sense.

By contrast, a point that Hegel wants to stress is the relationship between having a concept and “comprehending” something (recall the linguistic connection between *Begriffe* and *Begreifen*). A concept is not merely a repeatable representational device, “universal” only in the sense of a general name. Thus, Hegel frequently speaks of some things, especially certain aspects of nature as “*ohne den Begriff*” (‘without the concept’) or “*begrifflos*” (‘conceptless’).[[32]](#footnote-32) He uses similar expressions to characterize faulty philosophical or epistemological methods.[[33]](#footnote-33) Here is a striking case:

Even the object that is richest in content, as for example spirit, nature, world, even God, when non-conceptually [*ganz begrifflos*] apprehended in a simple representation of the equally simple expression: “spirit,” “nature,” “world,” “God,” is of course something simple at which consciousness can stop short without proceeding to extract the proper determination or a defining mark. But the objects of consciousness ought not to remain so simple, ought not to remain abstract representations or abstract thought determinations, but should rather become *conceptualized* [*begriffen*], that is, their simplicity should be determined together along with their inner distinction. (*WL* II: 291/542)

Even if Hegel didn’t make the point explicitly here, it would be obvious that his speaking of something as “*begrifflos*” he would not be saying that it was not representable, or even not general. But in this quotation, it is clear that Hegel thinks that we can have some facility with a word or simple representation yet not have “conceptualized” it. Moreover, his suggestion that some things are themselves “*begrifflos*” indicates that we may never have an adequate concept of those things – they will be remain unintelligible to us (that Hegel does not regard “everything” as intelligible should be an open secret by now).

Unlike Kant, Hegel does not regard concepts as species of a genus of “representation” (*Vorstellung*).[[34]](#footnote-34) Without going into detail on what Hegel means by representation, its distinction from conceptuality can become relatively clear. Hegel uses “representation” to refer to general meanings (*EL* § 164 R) as well as “determinacies of feeling, of intuition, of desire, of willing” (*EL* § 3). (The term thus seems to retain in Hegel’s usage its function of translating the multivalent “idea” from early modern English philosophers like Locke and Hume.[[35]](#footnote-35)) Hegel does see concepts as resulting from a reflective development that *begins* with representations. This can be seen strikingly in the first paragraph of his *Encyclopedia*: “[I]n the order of time consciousness produces *representations* of objects before it produces *concepts* of them; … the thinking spirit only advances to thinking cognition and comprehension by going *through* representation and by converting itself *to* it” (*EL* 41/24, § 1). Just later, though, Hegel speaks of philosophy putting concepts “in the place of representations” (§ 3). Thus, though representations, even general ones, can be genetically linked to concepts, conceptuality involves a *transformation* of representation. Namely, representation transformed into an expression of “comprehension” (*Begreifen*).

Hegel thus divides linguistic labor differently than Kant, and his use of “representation” allows for something to be a general representation without it being a concept. Maybe Hegel would grant that ‘intuitions without *general representations* are blind,’ but this does not mean that he thinks that intuitions suited with such representations can *speak* – this seems evident from the “silence” of sense-certainty. This linguistic difference also separates Hegel’s usage from the contemporary use of “concept” in psychology and the philosophy of mind. Hegel’s use of the term more closely resembles its use in mid-twentieth-century philosophy, where the concept of *mind* or *law* could fill up whole monographs of a Ryle or a Hart, rather than a single if unwieldy biconditional sentence. However, for Hegel unlike these analytic philosophers, it is not that we already *have* concepts that need only to be further explicated, but that concepts are *produced* in the reflective activity that works over our representations. Concepts are the *outcome* of our thinking, rather than its merely formal basis. This, and not any metaphysical reason, is why Hegel says “ordinary life has no concepts, only representations” (*WL* II: 406/628). We do not need the outcome of a sophisticated reflective process (the one that constitutes philosophy itself)[[36]](#footnote-36) to navigate the everyday world, even if the very notions *involved* in our everyday world stand in need of conceptualization.

Hegel distinction between concepts proper and representations in no way precludes that concepts are of a linguistic form. In fact, he argues this very point (cf. *WL* I: 20/12). On several occasions, he suggests that conceptuality and *Vorstellung* speak two different languages, though in both cases these “languages” can be expressed in, say, German or English.[[37]](#footnote-37) This linguistic expressibility of concepts, moreover, helps confirm my starting assumption that Hegel is not simply equivocating on “concept” so that it refers primarily to some metaphysical structure (a view which would also make my thesis utterly facile). On the other hand, Hegel does not assimilate conceptuality to linguistic usage, not even its universal representational dimension. This would imply, quite straightforwardly, that the fact that the subject of “Sense-Certainty,” though failing to express the intended object of knowledge because of her reliance on language, does not thereby “succeed” (if begrudgingly) in relating conceptually to experience, or even harboring conceptually shaped *beliefs* about her experience. Since Hegel demands that concepts proper involve a rich (though only putative)[[38]](#footnote-38) understanding of something, the necessary condition (assuming it is one) of language-involvement in experience is not a sufficient condition for a conceptually structured experience.

**3. Sellarsian ConceptualismRevisited**

I have so far argued that, besides the absence of concept-talk in the “Sense-Certainty” chapter, Hegel’s systematic views about conceptuality would seem to forbid him from thinking that, in the place of a raw sensory given, our relation to the world is *conceptually* mediated. This is because Hegel holds (as we might put it) a high standard for the “possession conditions” of a concept. To possess a concept involves more than even a discriminatory representational attitude. We may not think “comprehendingly” in our typical engagement with the world, even if we do engage linguistically or representationally. Hegel even says, in lectures given between the *Phenomenology* and the *Science of Logic*, “To the extent that we apprehend the sensory manifold, *we do not yet think*, but rather only the relating of that manifold is thinking. We call the immediate apprehending of the manifold feeling or sensing” (W 4: 163; emphasis added). It seems to me that Hegel separates the reflective component of thought (not to mention conceptuality proper) from the demonstrative or representational element that may be involved most primitively in sense-perception.

However, it may not be not clear that my account of Hegel’s views involves much more than a *choice* about how to use the term “concept” – perhaps systematically or dialectically significant, but potentially arbitrary on its own. Hence, it may not necessarily point to a substantive disagreement between Hegel and contemporary conceptualists. That is, I have shown that Hegel is not a conceptualist on his own terms, but might he be on some other terms? This seems at least possible with a wider sense of “concept,” according to which the sufficient conditions for a conceptual capacity are said to involve, for example, only the proper use of a word or a representational device. After all, it is not as if the conceptualists I have considered thought that the barest of receptive experience contained conceptuality in the richer Hegelian sense I described in the last section.[[39]](#footnote-39) Perhaps Hegel could qualify as a conceptualist “*de re*,” even if not “*de dicto.*”[[40]](#footnote-40)

It is at this stage that Sellars’ own view of concepts and its resulting conceptualismshould detain us. Whether and in what sense Sellars is a conceptualist is a controversial issue in its own right, and I do not intend to settle that interpretive issue here.[[41]](#footnote-41) Rather, I will reconstruct the conceptualism that is most consistent with Sellars’ own semantics. Such a position is certainly available. Sellars offers a candidate for a wide sense of conceptuality that makes conceptualism about experience at least coherent. This wider sense depends on Sellars’ theory of linguistic *picturing.* Though this aspect of Sellars’ semantics has not provided the basis for Sellarsian interpreters of Hegel, I aim to show that only picturing makes a *thoroughgoing* Sellarsian conceptualism plausible. For picturing provides a way of showing how language and experience are inseparably intertwined in a way that is needed to make a linguistic version of conceptualism plausible in general, and in the interpretation of Hegel in particular.

It is important to note that Sellars’ most influential work, *EPM*, despite its relevance for contemporary conceptualism, is not well-suited to provide an argument for conceptualism. For it does not need to do so to achieve its critique of the Myth of the Given. Since Sellars is concerned there to show that the Given cannot play an independent role in empirical *knowledge*, and since knowledge in the relevant sense is propositional (*EPM* §§ 3-4), he has only to show that no basis for *propositional* knowledge can be found in “sense-data” or other givens. To show this, it is sufficient to show the inferential role required for the *predicates* that make up such propositional claims; and this is indeed Sellars’ main focus.[[42]](#footnote-42) He shows, for example, that predicates that seem to represent features of immediate experience, such as “looks green,” derive their meaning from predicates that depend on intersubjective standards of evaluation (i.e., “is green,” which is subject to public standards regarding lighting conditions, etc.) (*EPM* § 19). In similar works, predicative meaning remains Sellars’ focus. In “Is There a Synthetic A Priori?” he states that “the conceptual status of descriptive as well as logical—not to mention prescriptive—predicates is constituted, *completely* constituted, by syntactical rules” (1991, 292). Predicates cannot have been abstracted from a raw acquaintance with things, but from a prior ability to follow (at first unwittingly) the rules of intersubjective linguistic practice.

Sellars’ conception of predicative meaning in these works is sufficient for his critique of standard empiricism. For he shows that no empirical *claim* can be justified by immediate experience alone, since no predicate can have a primitive representational function without having an inferential one. This entails that no veridical awareness *without* conceptual articulation is possible, but not that *all* empirical content is conceptual. But the latter is the conceptualist claim, and it is also the kind of conceptualism needed to interpret a case like “Sense-Certainty” accordingly. For sense-certain consciousness does not make propositionally structured claims involving predicates, but only points out what is “here,” “now,” etc. The Hegelian conceptualist will concede that these demonstratives do not amount to *claims* and thus cannot constitute propositional knowledge, but she will say they have *conceptual content* nonetheless. What matters here is not factual knowledge, but mere intentionality.

So Sellars’ critique of the Myth of the Given is not sufficient to support conceptualism in this wider sense, which covers all intentionality and is not restricted to predicates. However, we have already seen that Sellars’ broad, linguistic conception of concepts demands only that a concept involves mastering the use of a *word*; there is thus no reason to expect its restriction to predicate terms. Indeed, not only *can* Sellars allow a theory of conceptual meaning for non-predicate terms, such a theory goes to the heart of his semantics. For Sellars does wish to explain all intentionality, and not just the strictly cognitive subset.[[43]](#footnote-43) While Sellars’ critical task in *EPM* allows that he take the significance of the standard function-argument analysis of propositions for granted, his own positive semantic project does not do so (cf. 1968, § 3.16). Quite to the contrary, Sellars wanted to show that the predicative aspect of meaning could be eliminated altogether.[[44]](#footnote-44) Thus, if there is a Sellarsian basis for conceptualism, it will not depend on assuming that concepts correspond to predicate terms at all.

In a series of challenging works following *EPM*, Sellars attempts to show how the primary function of language can be modeled without predicates.[[45]](#footnote-45) The result is his quasi-Tractarian notion of language as “picturing” the world.[[46]](#footnote-46) It is picturing which answers for the more complete demand of explaining the intentionality of all “linguistic episodes,” even those of non-propositional shape. Unlike the early Wittgenstein, who understood picturing to obtain between sentences and *facts*, Sellarsian picturing is what obtains between linguistic tokens (considered as natural objects themselves) and pointillistic *objects* (cf. 1979, § 5.84). Though picturing is a relation of words to objects, it does not occur atomistically, as if there were a natural resemblance of an individual word’s “sign design” to some particular object. Instead, much like an individual symbol on a map can be coordinated with an object in the world only through the symbol’s position on the whole of the map,[[47]](#footnote-47) so a word pictures an object only in the context of a large swath of language that Sellars calls a “world story.” Finally, since picturing is to *explain* the intentionality of language, it is not itself a *semantic* relation, but a *natural* one of object (as a token in a world story) to object (in the world). It is the causal efficacy of picturing, for Sellars, that explains why our words have purchase in our dealings with the world.

Though picturing is supposed to occur between, e.g., English sentences and the world as well, Sellars develops a trial language called “Jumblese” to illustrate the nature of picturing. Jumblese contains no predicates, but only (in its written form) stylized individual sign designs which are “concatenated” in such a way that shows or “projects” the objects they represent (Sellars 1979, 54ff., 117). Thus, an extremely elementary Jumblese sentence could be written “a b” and translated into English as “a is to the left of b” (assuming the presence of the *objects a* and *b*, whatever they are). Unlike English, however, which represents this thought through the relation “to the left of,” the Jumblese sentence only *shows* the objects involved, without a problematic relational universal. The “meaning” of the sentence is what the sign designs (causally) *do* in relation to the objects with which they are concatenated*.* Only thus does the sentence ‘represent’.Of course, Jumblese, or a similar nominalistic language, cannot picture on the strength of a single sentence, but only within a world story functioning systematically as a map (108). Individual sentences picture reality by the way they relate linguistic objectswithin the world story.

Tendentious as it may be as a candidate for an actual language, Sellars thinks Jumblese illustrates the starting point for explaining the meaningfulness of natural languages themselves, and it does so without using predicative structure. This means that the apparent function of predicates in natural languages should be seen as parasitic on picturing *à la* Jumblese. As he writes in *Naturalism and Ontology*, where these views are worked out most systematically, “[T]he strategy of treating predicative expressions as auxiliary expressions should be applied at the level of empirical subject predicate statements, rather than merely at the level of exemplification statements” (1979, 90). And again, “the connection of a statement with extra-linguistic reality does not directly involve a connection between a predicate and extra-linguistic reality. *But the names could have had a distinctive character of equal effectiveness though the statement contained no predicate*” (56; emphasis added). Sellars seems to be suggesting that, despite the pragmatic role of predicates in natural language as it stands,[[48]](#footnote-48) that role depends ultimately and more narrowly on a function much more like that of *names* to objects: “the natural-linguistic objects which…constitute a picture…are the linguistic counterparts of nonlinguistic *objects* (*not* facts), and it is not too misleading to speak of them as ‘names’” (117).[[49]](#footnote-49) This is because it is the *demonstrative* and *referential* function of linguistic tokens that makes them meaningful in a language. Predicative structure is mere scaffolding; for “saying” can be explained in terms of “naming,” taken in a broad sense.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Sellars’ theory of picturing gives a new sense to his celebrated theory of concepts as involving the “mastery of the use of a word,” for it shows how such an account covers *all* language, not just those concepts with an “inferential role” in a more colloquial sense. The irreducible form of a “use of a word” is reveled to be a referential or demonstrative use within the context of a world story. Most simply, this involves using *naming* as the ultimate *explanans* for *saying*. We can now see how such a view makes conceptualism possible. If we assume (as many claim Hegel argues; see section 1 above) that experience is thoroughly *linguistically* structured, then it won’t matter for conceptualism if any predicative or propositional content is attributed to an experience; for as long as the content of the experience has some indexical or demonstrative linguistic content, then it will already count as conceptual. However, this happens only because the sufficient conditions for a concept have been expanded to the point that the distinction between concepts and names evaporates. That is, picturing requires that *all* linguistic tokens function like context-dependent proper names, and these are what serve as concepts rather than predicates. On Sellars view, not only could (properly concatenated) proper names function as concepts, but even indexical expressions (such as those involved in “Sense-Certainty”: “this,” “here,” “now”) turn out to be conceptual in a primary way, since they are needed to map names onto objects in the first place.[[51]](#footnote-51) In the broader Sellarsian picture, words have content to the degree they function as demonstratives, and this seems to imply that names and indexicals[[52]](#footnote-52) have a *more* respectable conceptual status than predicates, which were traditionally seen to be the bearers of descriptive content.

This conception makes it *possible* to interpret all empirical intentionality (assuming its linguistic involvement) as conceptual, and thus to treat the case of “Sense-Certainty” as an argument for conceptualism. For on this conception, it is virtually trivial that there is no non-conceptual given hiding under a “this” or some such expression. For the “this” functions conceptually because it is involved in picturing, even if it only “describes” due to its involvement in the context of a larger world story. Sellars’ view implies that the subject of “Sense-Certainty” wouldn’t have to go all the way to propositional form or even *universals* to run into concepts, so long as her concatenation of ⋅this⋅es, ⋅now⋅s, and ⋅here⋅s were suitably structured. She could do so even without describing in any standard sense. This conceptualism would be more thoroughgoing than one that only strains to accommodate non-predicate expressions, since even where intentionality is not structured propositionally, it is plausibly treated as indexical (as Hegel himself would grant).

The sacrifice involved with this move is a dialectical one. The problem with this Sellarsian view as a basis for conceptualism is not that it lowers the bar for conceptuality, which might simply beg the question in favor of Hegel, but that it involves a *reversal* of the traditional asymmetry between concepts and proper names, an asymmetry defended in different ways by Plato, Frege, Kripke, and Kaplan, among many others. This asymmetry says that terms that can serve as predicates express meaning in a different way than mere names. At minimum, the predicate term can express descriptive content even where a name or demonstrative subject does not. Hegel is especially insistent on this asymmetry:

The subject [of a judgment] only has its explicit determinacy and content in the predicate; and hence, taken on its own, it is a mere representation or an empty name. (*EL* 320/247, § 169R)

[W]hereas the predicate expresses the *universal*, the essence or the concept, the subject [of a judgment] as such is at first only a kind of *name*; *what it is*, is first enunciated only by the predicate which contains *being* in the sense of the concept. (*WL* II: 303/551)[[53]](#footnote-53)

Though Hegel demands more from concepts than many others, his insistence here only affirms largely common ground: names do not “say” without the addition of a predicate. Indexicals like “this,” “here,” and “now” are not names, to be sure, but according to the same asymmetry they fail to be conceptual *a fortiori*. For even less than names do they express a constant content that makes concepts capable of description in changing contexts.[[54]](#footnote-54)

We can make Sellars’ view adequate for conceptualism only if we deny this asymmetry of concepts and names as irreducible, and then collapse meaning on the side of names and demonstratives. We make room for the conceptual content of names and indexicals only by making all conceptual content nominalistic. Thus even McDowell (who typically sides with Frege over Sellars in semantics) seems to equate names with concepts to make his conceptualism work. In his debate with Hubert Dreyfus, he suggests that *nameability* of experience is enough to make it count conceptually.[[55]](#footnote-55) But naming something is not describing it; nor is mere indexing or demonstration.[[56]](#footnote-56) If concepts have even something to do with description, we cannot accept a view that requires that conceptual content be explained by naming. Moreover, in terms of Hegel’s putative conceptualism, whatever he is affirming in “Sense-Certainty,” he clearly regards indexical expressions as descriptively weak, if not vacuous. Sellars has us saying almost the opposite.

## 4. Conclusion

Independently of Hegel’s high-standard for conceptuality, a conceptualism of Sellarsian inspiration involves a dialectical reversal of concept and name that would be unwelcome to many. *Contra* Sellarsians, if the presence of indexicals is our only evidence of the linguistic involvement with an experience, we have no reason to credit that experience as a conceptual one. It seems to be common ground that conceptual meaning has an independent descriptive aspect which names and indexicals do not have. To assimilate concepts to demonstratives is to lose this distinctive contribution, most characteristic of predicates; yet this is what is required to accept an occasion of putative “sense-certainty” as thoroughly conceptual just in virtue of its linguistic expression. Thus, unless we are prepared to understand concepts apart from their connection to descriptive content, it is inappropriate to ascribe to Hegel a *de re* acceptance of conceptualism. For even apart from his own way of using “concept,” his very complaint about sense-certainty is that it seems to *say* nothing. The involvement of the barest words does not enable sensibility to speak: nothing given, nothing taken. Hence, a positive conceptualism cannot be merely the remainder of a critique of the Myth of the Given.[[57]](#footnote-57)

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1. This description matches quite well the view McDowell attributes to Sellars: “[E]xperiences are actualizations of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness” (2003, 77). Here, conceptual capacities figure in a *real definition* of experience. Note that Sellars discusses the older (and largely unrelated) sense of “conceptualism” at *EPM* § 25. See also Hanna (2013, 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ironically, though Sellars’ influence is responsible for inspiring contemporary conceptualism, especially McDowell’s, it is sometimes unclear in what sense his own views should be thus characterized. For in his major work after *EPM*, *Science and Metaphysics* (1968), Sellars spoke of conceptuality being “guided” by pure receptivity of a non-conceptual variety. McDowell criticizes Sellars on this point in his Woodbridge Lectures (reprinted in McDowell 2009a). However, Levine (2016) argues that the Sellarsian non-conceptual content is not intentional in a way that threatens his conceptualism. Though I will speaking of conceptualism in a fairly general way in the early portions of this paper, I will consider what a thorough Sellarsian conceptualism *would* look like in section 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This is how I would characterize Robert Pippin’s claim here: “This [sc. Hegel’s position] can fairly be called an idealism since it seems to make the possibility of experience, experiential knowledge, and explanatory success dependent on conceptual rules that are not themselves empirically derived, given that the possibility of empirical experience already depends on such discriminating capacities” (2005, 383). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “For it is with the denial that a firm distinction can ever be usefully drawn between intuitional and conceptual elements in knowledge that distinctly Hegelian idealism begins, and Hegel begins to take his peculiar flight, with language about the complete autonomy, even freedom of ‘thoughts’ self-determination’ and ‘self-actualization’” (Pippin 1989, 9). Sellars anticipated, but tried to avoid, a similar path: “Indeed, it is only if Kant distinguishes the radically nonconceptual character of sense from the conceptual character of the synthesis of apprehension in intuition [which is, of course, to be distinguished from the conceptual synthesis of recognition in a concept, in which the concept occupies a predicative position] and, accordingly, the *receptivity* of sense from the *guidedness* of intuition that he can avoid the dialectic which leads from Hegel's *Phenomenology* to nineteenth-century idealism” (1968, § 1.40). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Cf. Sellars (1968, § 1.17). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hegel’s works cited in text will reference the *Werke* German edition, an English translation (when available), then a paragraph number for the *Encyclopedia* or for Terry Pinkard’s translation of the *PhG*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. From the other side: “It is clear that though he does not appeal to specific texts, Sellars takes his campaign against the Myth of the Given to be Hegelian in spirit” (McDowell 2003, 76). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Other references include Pippin 1997, 10-11; Westphal 2000, 175; Rorty 2003, 42; Stekeler-Weithofer 2005, 239; Rockmore 2005, 62; de Vries 2008, 65 *et passim*; Maher 2012, 124, n. 21; Hanna 2013, 3. Selivanov (2012) offers one of the more thorough comparisons. Bowman (2012, 105 n. 58; 106) sounds a note of caution at the connection. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See also Brinkmann (2011, 108-117). Brinkmann’s reading exemplifies a problem we will return to later on, namely the identification of deictic (or indexical) expressions with concepts (even predicates), though Brinkman acknowledges that “the conceptual information contained in the concept of This (or of Here, or Now) is close to zero” (109). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. *EG* § 467, addition. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. As far as I can tell, the only uses of “concept” in “Sense-Certainty” are references to the meta-conception *of* sense-certainty, i.e., its notion of what its knowledge and putative object are: “That is, [the object in sense-certainty] is to be considered as to whether this, its concept, which is to be the essence, corresponds to the way it is present within that certainty” (*PG* 84/61, § 94). A similar reference is found in “Perception”: “According to its simple concept, this experience can be briefly looked at in this way” (103/76, § 126). This is a concept *of* not *in* perception. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hegel says consciousness is implicitly conceptual when “the unconditioned universal” is on the scene, during the later stages of “Perception” (107/79, § 132), which becomes thematic in “Force and Understanding.” This suggests that consciousness is not yet implicitly conceptual in “Sense-Certainty.” [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I put it this way here (following Westphal (2000)) to recall that the allusion to *Begreifen* Hegel makes was to an attempt at avoiding conceptualizing, not doing its opposite. It is true that a negation of a genuine opposite would entail its contrary affirmation. Nothing like that relationship between conceptual and non-conceptual is explicit in the text, however; nor would it be proposed, I expect, by conceptualists. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. His sole mention of “intuiting” in the passage (“I am pure intuiting,” 88/64, § 104), moreover, is quite removed from the typical Kantian sense, though he is capable of using the term in roughly Kant’s way (cf. 54/74, § 80). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Perhaps Klaus Brinkmann (2011, 102) speaks for many commentators when he assumes that the “Notion/Concept” is “tacitly presupposed” in the discussion of sense-certainty. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. According to Dina Emundts, “Most interpreters of *Sense Certainty* immediately identify the universal that is introduced in this chapter with concepts” (2012, 179). However, if we follow her reading, this identification is premature: “First of all, in my view, the assumption that Hegel argues that *any* reference to something in the world is conceptual is not appropriate. Hegel does not want to deny to consciousness the ability to form opinions [*Meinungen*] about some instant sensuous presence. Only it cannot defend these opinions as true” (2012, 180). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Emundts (2012, 180f.), for the view that Hegel affirms space and time as universals here, much like Kant himself. “Quantitative and qualitative determinations are the universal but not yet something conceptual in the sense of something law-like [*Gesetzmäßigem*] (which the determines the relationship of objects among themselves). And it is also not something conceptual in the sense of a predicate-concept” (ibid., 181). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Michael Forster takes it as a significant assumption on Hegel’s part (argued elsewhere, he claims) that “meaning and thought require linguistic expressibility (including pointing as a form of language)…” (1998, 205ff.). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Cf. Sellars (1974, 1991 essays 10 and 11). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. “In experience one takes in, for instance sees, *that things are thus and so*. That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance, judge” (McDowell 1994, 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This does not mean that Sellars equated concepts and words, which he denied (cf. *EPM* § 31). They must be caught up in some rule-governed or inferential pattern. See section 3 for a further discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Conceptualist readings such as those of McDowell and Pippin tend to assume that there is a specific problem about the way sensory knowledge is approached in “Sense-Certainty” which would be avoided if the proper role of concepts were acknowledged. In my view, Hegel’s argument hangs on features of the representation of immediate spatial-temporal content that would be shared regardless of the acknowledgement of conceptuality. Bowman (2012) seems to arrive at a similar view, though from his view of Hegel’s metaphysics. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This is the view put forward by Charles Travis (2004), with McDowell’s conceptualism specifically in view. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I offer support of these views especially in Wolf (2018). I also provide developmental, historical reasons to think that Hegel uses “concept” in ways coordinate with its typical philosophical meaning in Wolf (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. E.g., Bowman (2013) and Taylor (1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. As Pippin (2015) also attempts (however unsuccessfully, in my view). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. E.g., “But *a* concept is also, first of all, *the* concept, and this concept is only one concept, the substantial foundation…” (*WL* I: 29-30/19). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For further references, see, e.g., *WL* II: 290/541-42; 321-22/564; 260/519. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. One should note, however, that he also makes remarks of contrary nature: “[T]he concept as deduced here should in principle be recognized in whatever else is adduced as such a concept” (*WL* II: 252/514). And: “[T]he deeper significance of the concept is in no way so alien to general linguistic usage as it might seem to be at first sight” (*EL* 308/237, § 160Z). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cf. Bowman (2013, 32); Horstmann (2017, 133-34). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Though I am simplifying Kant’s views here, one might think I am leaving out the crucial claim that concepts are *rules*, which many Sellarsians find attractive. However, in the primary context Kant discusses such rules, they are hardly rules of inference, but rather “schematic” rules that order representations *on the basis of their spatial and temporal properties* (A 138ff./B 177ff.)*.* For example, the “rule” for a concept of a plate involves its circular geometrical shape (A 137/B 176). I find this far from an inferential rule that would give a logical shape to a concept. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See, e.g., *WL* II: 282/536, 525/717;W 7: 123; W 9: 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Cf. *WL* I: 48/32. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. See Kant’s *Jäsche Logik*, § 1 (1992, 589; Ak. 9: 91). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cf. Hegel (1991 [= *EL*], xlvii). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. That is how Hegel completes the sentence just quoted: “to recognize the concept in what is otherwise mere representation is philosophy itself” (*WL* II: 406/628). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Cf. *EL* 24/11 (1827 Preface): “…so, too, there are two tongues [*Sprachen*] for that import: the tongue of feeling, of representation, and of the thinking that nests in the finite categories and one-sided abstractions of understanding, and the tongue of the concrete Concept.” [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The concept need not be an *adequate* or *true* understanding: the latter would fall under the category of “idea” (*Idee*) for Hegel. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Thus, I am not accusing conceptualists of “intellectualism” (*à la* Hubert Dreyfus). My own view of Hegelian concepts *would* lead to intellectualism if I suggested they were as involved in experience as McDowell and others suggest. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Brandom’s notion of *de re* in contrast to *de dicto* belief-ascription (where the latter is closer to “intellectual biography”) (2002, 99-107). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Recall the controversy mentioned in note 2 above regarding whether such a view is Sellars’ own. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Sellars does briefly consider the way empiricists also attempt to credit acquaintance with sense-data considered as *particulars*, rather than predicative facts. However, he charges this attempt with confusion if meant to explain the way such particulars form the basis of *knowledg*e (taken as propositional). Cf. *EPM* §§ 3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cf. Sellars 1979, 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. For present purposes, it is not necessary to detail Sellars’ motivation for this position. Most basically, he sees this semantics as required for his ontological nominalism. Apart from his own scientific leanings toward nominalism, he saw the realism of contemporaries like Gustav Bergmann as fraught with paradox. See “Naming and Saying” in his 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The account here derives especially from Sellars 1979, Ch. 5. See also essays 2, 6, and 7 in Sellars 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See deVries (2005, 81-89) and Rosenberg (2007, Ch. 5) for sympathetic accounts of picturing. Levine (2007) offers a helpful critical evaluation within Sellars’ attempt to conjoin the two “images.” [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Sellars himself (1979, §§ 5.42ff.) develops the map analogy. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Note Sellars attitude toward the structure of ordinary language: “ordinary grammar is the paper money of wise men but the gold of fools” (1991, 208). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Cf. also: “A map is no list of names, though in a sense it consists in names” (1979, 112). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. It would be wrong to say that Sellars *reduces* saying to naming, since he is concerned to keep the distinction relevant. However, the predicative structure of saying is not to be accepted as explanatory in its own right. Brandom expresses skepticism (rightly, in my view) that Sellars has the resources to make “saying” intelligible: “I don’t see that we have the makings of a story [in Sellars] on the ontological side or on the semantic side of what corresponds on the pragmatic side to *saying* (claiming, believing) something” (2015, 270). Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See his (1968, § 3.32) where Sellars says explicitly that such expressions are necessary for the “language entry rules” which give language meaning. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Names and indexicals are closely related for Sellars. More specifically, indexicals function as cataphoric (or anaphoric) place-holders for names. In Rosenberg’s reconstruction of Sellars’ view, “Roughly, ⋅this⋅ is a *temporary* proper name” (2007 [orig. 1978], 149). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See also *PhG* 62/41, § 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. As David Kaplan writes, “But in any case, the descriptive meaning of a directly referential term [sc. such as a proper name or an indexical] is no part of the propositional content” (1989, 497). Kaplan’s point is ably illustrated by Hegel’s own claim that the demonstrative “now” cannot refer to the same thing if repeated later on. To retain the same propositional content, one would have to replace it with “then.” [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. “All that would be needed for a bit of [experience] to come to constitute the content of a conceptual capacity, if it is not already the content of a conceptual capacity, is for it to be focused on and made to be the meaning of a linguistic expression. … No aspect [of experience] is unnameable, but that does not require us to pretend to make sense of an ideal position in which we have a name for every aspect, let alone to be in such a position” (McDowell 2009b, 319-20). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. It is true that Sellars wants us to think that “naming” and other demonstrative pragmatics will function *like* describing in a holistic “world story,” but this appears to be conjectural, especially given the weakness of the example of Jumblese for modeling natural languages. Sellars is aware of this general problem (cf. his remark on describing vs. labelling in 1957, 306), but his reliance on the holism of world stories to solve it seems to be a mere promissory note. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for requesting further clarification here.) [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. The research for this project was generously supported by a Rev. John P. Raynor, S.J., Fellowship at Marquette University. Many thanks also to Jorge Montiel and Phil Mack for helpful discussion on an earlier draft of the paper, as well as to an anonymous reviewer for valuable feedback. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)