

INTENTIONALITY AND THE MYTHS OF
THE GIVEN: BETWEEN PRAGMATISM AND
PHENOMENOLOGY

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction: Why a New Account of Intentionality?	1
1 Intentionality and the Problem of Transcendental Friction	7
2 The Epistemic Given and the Semantic Given in C. I. Lewis	21
3 Discursive Intentionality and ‘Nonconceptual Content’ in Sellars	43
4 The Retreat from Nonconceptualism: Discourse and Experience in Brandom and McDowell	71
5 Somatic Intentionality and Habitual Normativity in Merleau-Ponty’s Account of Lived Embodiment	101
6 The Possibilities and Problems of Bifurcated Intentionality	131
Conclusion	155
Appendix: Is Phenomenology Committed to the Myth of the Given?	157
Works Cited	169
Notes	177
Index	197

INTRODUCTION: WHY A NEW ACCOUNT OF INTENTIONALITY?

Looking back on what is now canonized as ‘twentieth-century philosophy’, it is tempting to think that ‘the problematic of intentionality’ is a persistent preoccupation, often implicit even where it is not made explicit. Many of the most prominent philosophers on both sides of the Atlantic devoted themselves to such questions as, what is the ‘aboutness’ of thought and perception? How can anything material or physical exhibit intentional states? Can intentional states be modeled or duplicated on a machine? What about animals and babies? The problem of intentionality made its appearance for the twentieth century with Franz Brentano, was refined and reformulated by major figures of both ‘analytic’ (Ryle, Chisholm, Sellars, Brandom, Dennett) and ‘Continental’ persuasions (Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty), and has continued today as a central focus of discussion about ‘naturalism’ and its limits. While a few prominent philosophers (such as Richard Rorty) have denied that intentionality marks out anything ontologically, epistemologically, or methodologically distinctive, it is fair to say that most philosophers have been unable to fully dispense with the suspicion, or ‘intuition’, that there has got to be *something* to the notion of intentionality.

While I share this intuition, I would not seek to ground any argument as to the limits of ‘naturalism’ in an account of intentionality; on the contrary, I have no reason to deny that ‘intentionality’ cannot be fully ‘naturalized’ – provided a satisfactory account of intentionality and of naturalism. But I submit that our grasp on the notions of ‘intentionality’ and ‘naturalism’ is not yet firm enough – at least, not if the firmness of our grasp of these notions is measured by the degree of consensus about what exactly it is that is contentious. In the following pages I attempt to explicate and defend a new account of intentionality that is, while not ‘naturalistic’ in a straightforward sense, at least fully naturalizable, in a sense to be carefully specified.

Methodological Preliminaries

The present work is indebted to Immanuel Kant on numerous fronts, and I would gladly label myself a ‘Kantian naturalist’ if the appellation did not immediately provoke the complaint that it is a *contradictio in adjecto*. Not only do I take for granted the plausibility of ‘the transcendental standpoint’ for philosophical reflection, but I also construe the transcendental task in terms of *cognitive semantics*.¹ Cognitive semantics, in the part that I am concerned with here, identifies the minimally necessary conditions that must be satisfied in order for an utterance (spoken or written) to count as an assertion, as expressing a thought or judgment, at all. Cognitive semantics is distinct from epistemology insofar as the latter is concerned with notions such as justification, warrant, evidence, goodness of reasoning, and so on. Compared with epistemology, cognitive semantics is ‘up-stream’: it is concerned with what must be the case for anything to even be the object of deployment of normative notions. In the Sellarsian idiom, now made popular by Robert Brandom and John McDowell, cognitive semantics inquires into the minimal conditions necessary for anything to count as a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons – including, importantly, the criteria for determining what can count as a player of that game. As a transcendental inquiry, cognitive semantics is an *a priori* inquiry into the most basic kinds of conceptual and perceptual capacities necessary for judgment, in that it is a kind of high-level functional analysis that can get off the ground from the armchair. (However, in the long run, cognitive semantics must be matched adequately with empirical facts in order to be validated fully). Cognitive semantics therefore occupies the intersection of epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. In what follows I shall construe the adequate account of intentionality in terms of what is required by cognitive semantics.

Specifically, the argument turns on what I call *bifurcated intentionality*: we need two different concepts of intentionality in order to have a fully adequate conception.² These two concepts are discursive intentionality, the capacity to engage in linguistic semantic contents within a shared linguistic community, and somatic intentionality, the capacity to engage with the ambient environment through a system of bodily relations. These two capacities are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for all reasoning with empirical content, and thus are essentially bound up with perception and action. (It is logically possible that a disembodied mind – one that had only discursive but not somatic intentionality – would be able to reason over purely formal domains. It could not have any substantive empirical content or any *a posteriori* knowledge).

Though the present work is heavily invested in the history of philosophy, it is not conceived, first and foremost, as a contribution to the history of philosophy. Let me be clear: I regard the history of philosophy as a valuable end in itself, and often the very project of philosophical reflection is carried out through

our attempts to clarify and understand what Plato, or Descartes, or Kant, really thought about any particular topic or interconnected set of topics. And I do aim at correctly understanding what C. I. Lewis, Wilfrid Sellars and Maurice Merleau-Ponty really thought about perception, intentionality, conceptuality, mindedness, experience, and action. Nevertheless, if at the end of the day scholars find fault with my interpretations, I hope that they would nevertheless appreciate the novelty of the distinctive theory of intentionality that emerges from those interpretations.

For this reason, however, one may wonder why I bother to couch my account in the historical context used here. Why not simply present the positive account and leave the history to the historians? For one thing, I think that philosophy and the history of philosophy should be in better conversation than they are at present; for another, I think that we can better understand why we have the philosophical options that we have by reconstructing how the views were adopted and evaluated by those who held them. I take seriously Sellars's remark that 'The history of philosophy is the *lingua franca* which makes communication between philosophers, at least of different points of view, possible. Philosophy without the history of philosophy, if not empty or blind, is at least dumb'.³ We must do philosophy historically if we are to embody within our philosophical practice our understanding that none of the concepts with which we are concerned reside in some Platonic heaven. I would ask those interested in the positive theory of intentionality developed here to take seriously the role that historical interpretation plays in that development, and those interested in the interpretations of historical figures to take seriously how those interpretations can be used in promoting substantive philosophical views. For this reason the book is somewhat heavy on quotations, so that those who are not familiar with the relevant texts can see exactly why they are being invoked to the extent that they are, and that those who are familiar with the relevant texts can appreciate their richness from a somewhat different perspective. (Due to the specific philosophical views at issue here, I have elected not to broaden the historical focus to include Kant or Hegel; though some may feel that this restriction is unforgivable, I hope that this will not be the majority opinion).

A similar commentary is called for with regard to the societally-marked distinction between 'analytic philosophy' and 'Continental philosophy', and the terms 'pragmatism' and 'phenomenology' as used here. It is my fervent hope that we will see soon see treatments on *The Rise and Fall of the Analytic/Continental Distinction*; while I am not entirely sure that this distinction ought to be 'overcome', the very idea of there being such a distinction has done far more harm than good to professionalized philosophy. For one thing, I do not regard either 'analytic philosophy' or 'Continental philosophy' as a natural kind, in that I doubt that there are any substantive philosophical views found in one camp that are not

found in the other. This is not to say that there are no profound substantive differences between particular analytic and Continental philosophers. On the contrary, I shall argue that, on the construal of intentionality urged here, Lewis and Sellars share a serious blind-spot that is best revealed by the contrast with Merleau-Ponty. It is to say only that there are no substantive differences between all the philosophers classified as ‘analytic’, on the one hand, and all the philosophers classified as ‘Continental’, on the other. The differences, though not illusory, concern metaphilosophical views, rhetorical tropes, and the kind of training necessary to read the primary texts as a secondary language. At any rate, I am interested here with using specific philosophers associated with ‘analytic philosophy’ (Lewis, Sellars) and with ‘Continental philosophy’ (Merleau-Ponty) in order to say something new and interesting about an important philosophical problem.

In my view, similar considerations apply to the words ‘pragmatism’ and ‘phenomenology’, though I am more comfortable with these terms because are there are family resemblances. However, despite John Dewey’s formative impact on my thinking about the role of embodiment in experience, I shall have nothing to say here about the so-called ‘classical pragmatists’ (canonically, Peirce, James, and Dewey), although I have a great deal to say about the so-called ‘analytic pragmatists’ or ‘neo-pragmatists’ Lewis, Sellars, and Brandom. I think that more sustained attention to Lewis and Sellars will help show what is mistaken about the very idea of an ‘eclipse narrative’ (according to which pragmatism went into eclipse after Dewey’s death until it was revived in the 1980s by Rorty, Richard and Putnam).⁴ I focus on Lewis and Sellars here because of what they contribute to our thinking about the social nature of conceptuality, intentionality, and normativity. If one were to insist that this is not pragmatism, I would point to the numerous borrowings and convergences between them and ‘classical pragmatism’; if another were to agree with me but ask why I do not write about Peirce, James, and Dewey instead, I would say that there is much to be said for intellectual division of labor. Likewise, with respect to phenomenology, my chosen focus on Merleau-Ponty (with some attention to Dreyfus and Todes) should not be taken to mean that I neglect Husserl, Heidegger, or Sartre out of principle, misguided or otherwise.

The Plan of the Book

This book consists of six substantive chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 1 presents the need for a new conception of intentionality, based on John Haugeland’s taxonomy of the positions and on what I call ‘the demand for transcendental friction’. Chapter 2 shows how Lewis’s attempt to satisfy the demand led him to distinguish between epistemological and semantic issues. In making sense of Lewis here, I propose a new distinction between the Myth of the epistemic Given and the Myth of the semantic Given. In those terms, I argue that C. I. Lewis is explicit in rejecting

the former but that he implicitly accepts the latter. In presenting this claim I also argue that this was Lewis's consistent view in both *Mind and the World Order* and *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*, and that Lewis appeared to change his views because he was obliged to make the distinction between epistemology and semantics more explicit due to pressure from the logical empiricists with whom he was in conversation.

Chapter 3 examines Sellars's criticisms of Lewis, and shows that Sellars understood Lewis to be committing the semantic Myth, not the epistemic Myth. The stage is set by situating Sellars's criticisms of Lewis in terms of Sellars's attempt to reconcile Lewis's views with those of Sellars's father, Roy Wood Sellars. Accordingly I devote some time to the debate between Lewis and Sellars *per se* before turning to Sellars *filis*. In context, Sellars's account of conceptual content – even empirical conceptual content – as wholly constituted by its functional role in an inferential system is crucial to his cognitive semantical criticism of Lewis. Yet Sellars also noticed the need for a suitable reinterpretation of nonconceptual states of consciousness, though his view is not without substantial difficulties. On that basis I turn in Chapter 4 to explaining why Brandom and McDowell reject nonconceptual content and what they attempt to replace it with. Doing so shows that neither Brandom nor McDowell have a wholly satisfactory view of what constrains the application of conceptual content. Yet there is surely something right in the thought that 'the senses do not judge'. I argue that the acceptability of this commitment turns on whether 'judgment' is the only kind of intentional content.

Chapter 5 turns to phenomenology and shows that Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of lived embodiment provides us with the theory of somatic intentionality necessary to complement the account of discursive intentionality drawn from Lewis, Sellars, and Brandom. The account of somatic intentionality yields a kind of 'givenness' that is not Mythic – a 'perceptuo-practical Given' – and that getting clear on this concept affects our conception of 'nonconceptual content'. (In the Appendix I argue that there is a phenomenological version of the Myth of the Given, but that Merleau-Ponty's own phenomenology does not commit itself to the Myth). Putting somatic intentionality together with discursive intentionality completes the account of bifurcated intentionality. Finally, in Chapter 6 I show how the account of intentionality resolves a key problem of cognitive semantics by specifying precisely how somatic intentionality constrains discursive intentionality. I also compare and contrast bifurcated intentionality with similar proposals made by recent philosophers. Chapter 6 ends by showing how bifurcated intentionality bears on eliminativism about original intentionality and on the prospects for 'naturalizing' intentionality generally. The Conclusion notes some implications for further research.

1 INTENTIONALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF TRANSCENDENTAL FRICTION

Original Intentionality and the Naturalist Challenge

In his insightful (and delightful) ‘The Intentionality All-Stars’, John Haugeland examines the problem of how there can be original intentionality within a naturalistic world-view. How, he asks, can any part of the natural world bear an intentional relation to any other part? ‘How can there be norms among the atoms in the void?’¹ I use ‘original intentionality’ here in Haugeland’s sense: ‘original’ contrasts with ‘derived’, with the kind of intentional, semantic content that sentences and signs have. Since not all semantic content can be derived, the argument goes, there must be original intentionality. Put otherwise, original intentionality does not mean a particular *kind* of intentionality but rather ground-level, ‘original’ *cases* of intentionality that need to be understood in order for other cases of intentional content to be understood.

This is not to say that any particular item has its own intrinsic semantic content independent of all other semantic contents – that, I will show below, is an episode of the Myth of the semantic Given. Rather, it is to say that the entire relational *system* of semantic contents does not have its content conferred upon it by something else; intentional content is a holistic property of the system, not of any specific part of the system. Nor does “original” here mean ineffable, private, inexplicable, or unexplained. Like Haugeland, I am interested in explaining the place of original intentionality within the broader framework of a naturalistic world-view (subject to caveats about ‘natural’). In that sense, what is original under one set of considerations (the order of understanding) can be a result or product when viewed naturalistically (the order of being). The question is, how to regard original intentionality as something other than a Lever of Archimedes, how to explicate what original intentionality is, and how to explain the place of original intentionality *in rerum natura*.

On Haugeland’s analysis, those who are interested in explaining original intentionality can be divided into three camps, which he calls neo-Cartesianism, neo-behaviourism, and neo-pragmatism. The neo-Cartesians (e.g., Jerry Fodor)

seek to explain intentionality in terms of the pattern of relations amongst internal mental states, whereas the neo-behaviourists and neo-pragmatists broaden the scope. The neo-behaviourists (e.g., Willard V. O. Quine, Daniel Dennett) focus on ascriptions of intentional contents by virtue of patterns of interactions between organisms and their environments, particularly in perception and action. By contrast, the neo-pragmatists (e.g., Wilfrid Sellars, Robert Brandom) explicate intentionality in terms of social norms. All three positions purport to account for original intentionality, and to that extent are rivals. But Haugeland allows a position between neo-behaviourism and neo-pragmatism, and more interestingly, for the possibility of being both a neo-behaviourist and a neo-pragmatist:

we might imagine a neo-behaviorist and a neo-pragmatist agreeing that animals and people share a certain primitive sort of intentionality (second-base position), and yet also that a qualitatively 'higher' intentionality is possible only for conformists with a culture and language (third-base position). Questions could be raised, of course, about what the two sorts of intentionality have to do with one another – why, in particular, both are sorts of *intentionality* – but perhaps there would be enough similarities to justify the common term.²

The position taken up here answers Haugeland's challenge by showing just how one can be both a neo-behaviourist and neo-pragmatist about original intentionality by distinguishing between the different *kinds* of intentionality. The key difference between Haugeland's suggestion and my developed view is that I draw extensively on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's first-person-standpoint descriptions of perception and action, rather than on the third-person-standpoint of the neo-behaviourists. The benefits of construing one kind of original intentionality as both non-social and non-linguistic will be made clear.

Hence, my approach is what I call *bifurcated intentionality*: that there are two basically different kinds of intentionality, both of which are 'original' in the relevant sense. The first is what I call *discursive* intentionality: the kind of intentionality that we use to characterize the 'aboutness' or 'of-ness' of thoughts, beliefs, desires, and more generally, anything with propositional content. The second is what I call *somatic* intentionality: the kind of intentionality that we use to characterize the lived bodily engagements with and comportments towards the world as enactively perceived and practically grasped. I aim to show that both discursive and somatic intentionality must be considered as *equally original* with regard to the philosophical work they are called upon to perform, because discursive intentionality (the intentionality of propositional discourse) and somatic intentionality (the intentionality of embodied perception) are *individually* necessary and *jointly* sufficient for judgements with empirical content: as empirical content or objective purport. To motivate this view, I shall show just

why it is that we need both discursive and somatic intentionality, how to remove the obstacles that have prevented us from accommodating both kinds, what further distinctions are needed in order to render the view intellectually satisfactory, and what further consequences this view has for philosophizing about mindedness and experience.

The Naturalistic Challenge to Intentionality

This work is animated by a commitment to what I call transcendental naturalism: the view that transcendentally-specified roles must have empirically-specifiable role-players.³ I aim to use ‘transcendental’ in a minimal sense, avoiding transcendental arguments or substantive metaphysical doctrines with ‘transcendental’ in the name. By ‘transcendental’, I mean the activity of identifying those items in a basic inventory of our cognitive capacities: what conceptual and perceptual roles must be filled in order for a cognitive system to count as having a mind similar to the kinds of minds that we have, and thereby to have the kinds of experiences that we have (however loosely and contextually characterized is the ‘we’ in this usage). Within this loose construal, philosophical methods as different as Lewis’s ‘reflective analysis’, Sellars’s comparison of the manifest and scientific images, and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological descriptions of embodied perception will all count as different implementations of transcendental philosophy.

But transcendental philosophy is not, I think, sufficient: we can, on the other hand, interpret the insights and discoveries of the natural (and social) sciences as providing specifications of the role-players for various transcendentally-specified roles. So I take ‘intentionality’ to be a transcendental notion, rather than a straightforwardly empirical one – but with the caveat that the theory of intentionality that we arrive at should be, at the end of the day, at the very least fully consistent with the natural sciences– it should not commit us to positing the existence of any entities that are not required for any other explanatory purposes. Rather than hastily attempt to ‘naturalize intentionality’, I want to inquire more carefully into what sort of thing intentionality is, such that it could be naturalized (or perhaps not). To see the value of doing so, consider the following line of thought:

- (1) The concept of original intentionality requires that the basic units of thought are sentence- and term-shaped representations;
- (2) If original intentionality is real, then it must be empirically identifiable;
- (3) Hence the most plausible candidate for being the bearer of original intentionality is the primate (perhaps even human) brain;
- (4) But cognitive neuroscience shows that brains do not represent their environments in sentence-shaped representations – there are no propositions in the prefrontal cortex;
- (5) So, there is no such thing as original intentionality.

As Alex Rosenberg confidently summarizes this view:

The illusion of original intentionality has its origin in the fact that while the brain stores information in nonpropositional data structures of some kind, it extracts and deploys the information in temporally extended processes, such as noises and marks – eventually speech and writing – and it is these together with the conscious states that they result in that generate the illusion of propositional content.⁴

I am uncertain what to say about (5) save that I find this conclusion so ‘counter-intuitive’ that I would be hard-pressed to locate a common ground with those who think that (5) is correct. Yet I find no problem with either (2) or (4); the problem lies entirely with (1) and (3). Against (1), I urge a distinction between two different kinds of intentionality, discursive and somatic, so that the identification of intentional content with propositional content does not go unquestioned. Against (2), the two basic kinds of original intentionality are ‘at home’ in *linguistic communities* and in *embodied animals*, respectively. This allows that intentionality may be ‘naturalized’, with the crucial proviso that we do not have at present a sufficiently fine-grained comprehension of the intricate causal interplay between brains, bodies, and environments that would be needed to fully specify how discursive and somatic intentionality are causally instantiated. (Whether it is possible or probable that we may eventually have such a comprehension is beyond the scope of the present investigation). In other words, Rosenberg-style eliminativism about intentionality does not follow from neuroscience alone; it follows from neuroscience conjoined with a specific picture of what intentionality must be like. It is that picture which I aim to dislodge by offering a series of minor corrections to those who have preceded me in this enterprise.

One constraint on the account of intentionality to be developed here is that it must avoid what is called, following Sellars, ‘The Myth of the Given’. Yet here at once a whole net of problems arise as to what is supposedly Given, just why the Given is supposedly a Myth, how the Myth of the Given should be avoided, and whether our commitment to avoiding the Myth entails that we ought eschew ‘nonconceptual content’. The interpretation of the Myth of the Given is compounded by according undue emphasis to Sellars’s ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’, at the expense of the comprehensiveness of Sellars’ philosophy as a whole, even though Sellars himself insists at the outset:

This framework [the Given] has been a common feature of most of the major systems of philosophy, including, to use a Kantian turn of phrase, both ‘dogmatic rationalism’ and ‘skeptical empiricism’. It has, indeed, been so pervasive that few, if any, philosophers have been altogether free of it; certainly not Kant, and, I would argue, not even Hegel, that great foe of ‘immediacy’. Often what is attacked under its name are only specific varieties of ‘given’. Intuited first principles and synthetic necessary connections were the first to come under attack. And many who today attack ‘the whole idea of givenness’ – and they are an increasing number – are really only attacking sense data. For they transfer to other items, say physical objects or relations of appearing,

the characteristic features of the 'given.' If, however, I begin my argument with an attack on sense-datum theories, it is only as a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness.⁵

Accordingly, I want to be bear in mind 'a general critique of the entire framework of givenness' through the current project. Our understanding of the Myth has been hampered in two different ways. Firstly, critics of the Myth (and even a few defenders) have emphasized the empiricist version of the Myth at the expense of rationalistic, Kantian, and even Hegelian versions.⁶ These versions of the Myth differ according to what is said to be given: sense-data, universals, real connections, the typology and structure of mental representations, and so on. That is, the Myth has a much wider *scope* than usually understood. Secondly, the Myth has been construed as merely an epistemological thesis rather than, as I argue here, also a cognitive-semantic thesis. While this is understandable, it matters because Lewis (as I shall argue in Chapter 2) does *not* commit the Myth *if* the Myth is just an epistemological mistake – nor, importantly, does Sellars himself think that Lewis' error was an epistemological one. Rather, I will argue, Sellars' criticisms of Lewis' notion of 'the given' is not epistemological, but *cognitive-semantic* – a kind of reflective inquiry closely related to what Hegel called 'logic' and to what Wittgenstein called 'grammar'.

In its most general form, the Myth of the Given is the idea that a fully adequate cognitive semantics can identify cognitive-semantic contents simply as such, independent of the role(s) that they play in perception, thought, and action. Thus construed, the Myth of the Given constrains any account we can construct of what is necessary for any being to count as sapient (to be able to play the game of giving and asking for reasons) as well as sapient-and-sentient (to be able to play the game of giving and asking for reasons with regard to perception and action). The *traditional* defender of the Given holds that the Given is not a Myth by arguing that there are contents of cognitive experience that do not require awareness of any other cognitive-semantic contents in order to be known as those contents. Those who hold that the Given is a Myth argue that all cognitive access to cognitive-semantic contents is itself mediated by their role in perception, thought, and action; consequently, identification of anything as Given either covertly depends on our ability to deploy cognitive-semantic contents generally, or that the purported contents do not actually play any cognitive-semantic role. One central problem, for those who think that the Given is a Myth after all, is whether avoiding the Myth requires adjuring from any commitment to 'nonconceptual content', much-vexed notion as that is. If so, we shall need to know under what specifications nonconceptual content would be consistent with that criticism, and under what specifications the commitment to nonconceptual content would be an instance of the Myth.

The challenge thereby posed is this: how can one accept nonconceptual content without committing the Myth? Is it coherent that nonconceptual content could be a kind of intentional content, or must all intentional content be conceptually structured? The concept of nonconceptual content in recent analytic philosophy of perception has a complicated history.⁷ Consequently, several scholars have urged that the very debate between conceptualism and nonconceptualism rests on undiagnosed equivocations. Though I agree with that line of thought, I am unsure that the present diagnoses of those equivocations have gotten it entirely right. To see why, consider the following supremely condensed summary of the debate based on recent contributions by Richard Heck, Jeff Speaks, T. M. Crowther, and Josefa Toribio.⁸

Heck argues that the key idea behind ‘nonconceptual content’ is that there is a kind of mental content that is *representational* but nonconceptual by virtue of failing to satisfy Gareth Evans’s Generality Constraint: that a subject cannot conceive of *a is F* if she cannot also entertain the thought that *a is G* and that *b is F*. However, Speaks and Crowther both argue that this is an insufficient characterization of nonconceptual content based on the arguments brought forth by both nonconceptualists (Peacocke, Evans, Heck, Kelly) and conceptualists (McDowell). Based on both Speaks and Crowther, Toribio puts the contrast between ‘content nonconceptualism’ and ‘state nonconceptualism’ – capturing both Speaks’s distinction between ‘absolute nonconceptual content’ and ‘relative nonconceptual content’ and also Crowther’s distinction between ‘compositional content’ and ‘possessional content’. According to Toribio, content nonconceptualism holds that ‘for any perceptual experience E with content C, C is nonconceptual_c if C is essentially different in kind to the content of belief?’⁹ whereas state nonconceptualism holds that ‘for any perceptual experience E with content C, any subject S and any time *t*, E is nonconceptual_s if it is not the case that in order for S to undergo E, S must possess at *t* the concepts that a correct characterization of C would involve.’¹⁰ One note of caution: since Crowther distinguishes between compositional and possessional conceptualism *and* conceptualism, one could hold both compositional nonconceptualism and possessional conceptualism or both compositional conceptualism and possessional nonconceptualism.

In these terms, I take ‘nonconceptual content’ to be personal-level representational cognitive-semantic content that does not conform to the Generality Constraint. Each of these points deserves separate elucidation: NCC is personal-level, not a feature of subpersonal neurocomputational processing; it is representational, not a mere sensory quale; it is cognitive-semantic, and not ‘mental’ in the sense of a psychological state. The last point becomes particularly important because I will treat normative inferential semantics, as developed by Lewis, Sellars, and Brandom, as a way of specifying why the Generality Con-

straint holds of conceptual content. In addition to what kind of concept of NCC is, we also need to know how we have any cognitive grip on this concept. In the dominant literature, NCC is posited (or denied) in order to explain the psychology of perception; it is a psychological, hence empirical, concept. However, I am interested here in the role of NCC as a transcendental concept – as what must be at work in any adequate explication of the cognitive machinery of any being with a finite mind like ours. The key differences to be explored in what follows turn on what is necessary to account for our grasp of NCC as a transcendental concept: whereas for Lewis transcendental argument grounded in the explication of cognitive experience is both necessary and sufficient, Sellars holds that the transcendental status of the concept of NCC must be supplemented with a *genealogy* of the origins of the concept (hence his well-known ‘Myth of Jones’) that accounts for ‘sheer receptivity’ in terms of causal explanation of perceptual episodes. By contrast, Merleau-Ponty holds that the transcendental status of the concept of NCC must be underpinned by *phenomenological description* of motor intentionality in embodied perception, both normal and pathological. The importance of transcendental content nonconceptualism will become especially clear in Chapter 5, where I contrast my views with those of Robert Hanna and Jay Rosenberg. As I will show there, everything turns on whether we are willing to accept Merleau-Ponty’s conception of *non-apperceptive* or *pre-subjective* consciousness as having its own kind of *intentional* content.

The Demand for Transcendental Friction

Thus far I have only raised the possibility of bifurcated intentionality and some of the problems that must be faced in order to make the view acceptable. What I have not done, however, is suggest any reasons why one would want to adopt such a view. Though there are perhaps several distinct reasons, the most salient in my view is that it satisfies what I call *the demand for transcendental friction*: that it must be possible, by reflecting on our most basic conceptual and perceptual capacities and incapacities, to guarantee that we are in cognitive contact with a world we discover and do not create. Here I will first briefly sketch how I understand C. I. Lewis and Sellars as trying to satisfy the demand for transcendental friction. I will then turn to John McDowell’s account of experience and argue that his distinction between discursive and intuitional conceptual content cannot satisfy the demand. (Importantly, McDowell rejects the Lewis-Sellars thesis that the demand could not be satisfied if all content were conceptual; his entire project is an attempt to satisfy the demand through conceptualism.)

Generally speaking, we can understand Lewis’s project, at least with regard to *Mind and the World Order* (hereafter *MWO*) as a reflective analysis of cognitive experience.¹¹ By ‘a reflective analysis of cognitive experience,’ I mean that Lewis makes explicit, for the purposes of clarification and improvement, the implicit fea-

tures of our own practices of classification and predication concerning the objects, properties, and relations that we experience. Central to this inquiry is the nature of *objective purport*: how is it that our experiences can so much as seem to be a taking in of things being thus and so. To clarify the structure of objective purport, Lewis distinguishes between the two necessary conditions of objective purport: that there must be *conceptual interpretation* and there must be *the given*.¹² Conceptual interpretation and the given are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for objective purport, or to use a coextensive term, empirical content.

In order to understand the exact role of the given for Lewis' project, consider his transcendental arguments for the individual necessity of both the given and concepts. On the one hand, a being that had nothing given to it would have nothing for its judgements to be about; they would lack all content, in the sense that while the judgements could very well form an internally consistent, norm-governed inferential nexus, there would be no possibility of *applying* this conceptual framework, and so no way of *using* it. Such a being could not have the kind of cognitive experience that we manifestly have. On the other hand, a being that only had a pure given in experience, and lacked concepts, could only experience an undifferentiated flux. Indeed, on Lewis's pragmatist conception of concepts as essentially connected with action, a being entirely bereft of concepts would be an entirely *passive* being, unable to even distinguish between past and future, self and world. This kind of being, too, could not possibly have the kind of cognitive experience that we manifestly have. On the basis of these arguments, Lewis concludes that any analysis of our cognitive experience must account both for the basic structure of our implicit-yet-explicable, fallible-but-correctable categories at work in our practical dealings with things, and for the application of these categories to a reality that is not itself merely constituted by those categories. This is why concepts and the given are individually necessary and jointly sufficient to characterize the kind of cognitive experience that we are able to recognize as having objective purport for beings like us.

To distinguish between the achievement of objective purport and its conditions, Lewis draws a distinction between 'thick experience of the world of things' and 'thin experience of immediacy'.¹³ Whereas 'thick experience' is of a world of objects and their properties and relations, persisting through space and time, 'thin experience' is the minimal sensory apprehensions to which concepts are applied in order to yield objective purport. In (roughly) Kantian terms, thick experience is the experience resulting from the synthesis of the sensibility (the given) and the understanding (concepts), whereas thin experience is sensibility considered independent of the understanding. The need for sensibility to function as a constraint on conceptual application is made clear by Lewis's definition of the given as that element *in* experience which is unalterable by thought. It guarantees that there is transcendental friction: that our concepts are con-

strained by something external to and independent of them. In other words, the given functions as a ‘tribunal of experience.’¹⁴ The problem, of course, is how to understand this. If we understand experience in the thick sense, where conceptual interpretations are already fully engaged, then the concepts are not being constrained by something external to them. Yet if we understand experience in the thin sense, which threatens to recede into the specious present, then it seems mysterious as to how the given can have enough determinacy to it for it to function as a tribunal for our conceptual interpretations of it at all. Lewis’s contrast here shows us the Demand can be satisfied only if some experienceable content is both sufficiently distinct from concepts to serve as a constraint, and not just more of the same, and yet sufficiently proto- or quasi-normative in basic structure to *be* a constraint.

The tensions in Lewis’s conception of the given are only heightened as Lewis tries to specify more precisely what he means by it. For example, Lewis proposes two different characterizations of the given: (a) that it has a specific feeling-quality; (b) that it is inalterable by thought.¹⁵ By ‘inalterable by thought’, Lewis means that the given is constant under imaginative variation – I can alter, in my imagination, my judgement that I am looking at a coffee-mug as I write (is it a coffee-cup façade? a hologram? a hallucination?) – but what I cannot alter by any such variations is the sheer awareness of *something* to which those categories *apply*. (That we cannot say exactly *what* the given is – that it is, in other words, ineffable – is a point that Lewis not only concedes but emphasizes, at least in MWO). This awareness is not even that of an *object*, since objects per se are only brought into the purview of conscious experience insofar as the given is conceptually interpreted.

Lewis himself stresses, rightly, that the constancy-under-imaginative variation conception of the given is of far greater philosophical importance than Lewis’s identification of the given with ‘qualia’, because constancy-under-variation shows that the given is sufficiently *independent* from the categories to be *external* to them, in the way necessary to satisfy the Demand. Indeed, to identify the given with qualia – as Lewis eventually did – spoils the entire attempt to vindicate transcendental friction. With this move, the given is identified only by virtue of its phenomenal properties – a move that Lewis makes because he is unable to disentangle conceptuality from intentionality, and so the nonconceptual becomes the non-intentional and *a fortiori* non-representational. But then it becomes mysterious as to how anything merely phenomenalistic, as qualia evidently are, could generate any real friction on our cognitive activities. In general terms, this problem then exercised all those who came after Lewis – Goodman, White, Quine, Firth – and especially Sellars, who was not fully engaged in these debates as they unfolded but who has much to contribute to what we should learn from those debates.

Much like Lewis, Sellars is both rarely far from Kant and rarely uncritical. In his *Science and Metaphysics* (hereafter *S&M*), subtitled “Variations on Kantian

Themes”, Sellars, Wilfrid departs from Kant in many crucial respects – leaving many to wonder ever since how the appearance of Kant in Sellars’s text could ever be confused with Kant -in-himself.¹⁶ One of the most substantive and far-reaching of these departures is Sellars’s revision of the Kantian concept/intuition distinction, which Sellars argues rests on an ambiguity that Kant simply conceals by conflating it with the general/particular distinction. For it is just not the case that all and only conceptual representations are generals; there are conceptual representations of particulars as well. And once we take full cognizance of this (rather obvious) fact, we will see, Sellars argues, that ‘intuition’, in the Kantian sense, is ambiguous between ‘representation of particulars’ to which we are (ostensibly) ‘immediately’ related – e.g. ‘*this* cup here now’- and sense-impressions proper.

Given Sellars’s conception of intentional content as entirely constituted by functional role in an inferential system, intentional content is not *directly* related to the world, although the entry and exit transitions are caused by the impingements of worldly objects on our cognitive systems. And yet there must be a point of ‘contact’ or ‘friction’ between us and the world – in other words, there must be ‘sheer receptivity’, or a kind of mental state that is not intermingled with the ‘spontaneity’ of discursive intentionality. This is required in part by the Demand itself, and in part by a satisfactory interpretation of what Kant was aiming at, insofar as meeting the Demand is something with which Kant was concerned. In Sellars’s terms, we can satisfy the Demand only by distinguishing the sheer receptivity of sense from the guidedness of intuitions. The latter, as this-such complexes, are already displays of the productive imagination; they lack the independence from conceptual capacities generally which would be needed for genuine friction. This is why we need the sheer receptivity of sense, which is ‘sheer’ in that nothing of spontaneity – understanding, conceptuality, apperception, rationality – has yet entered onto the scene. We need sheer receptivity, with no spontaneity as yet combined with it, in order to guarantee the right sort of external constraint that, in turn will terminate the dialectic that leads from Hegel’s insights to Bradley, Blanshard, Bosquinet, or for that matter, Lewis’s philosophical mentor, Josiah Royce.

As Sellars is not exceedingly clear as to how sensations perform their ‘guiding’ role, the following tentative remarks on the role of sensations in Sellars’s epistemology will have to suffice. Sellars requires that we think that “having a sensation of a red triangle is a fact *sui generis*, neither epistemic nor physical, having its own logical grammar.”¹⁷ That is, sensations must be *non-physical causes*. They must be causes because they have no *epistemic* or *rational* character: the mere having of a sensation is not itself within the space of reasons, and they are necessary but insufficient for language-entry transitions (perceptual reports). Indeed, to treat the mere having of a sensation as itself playing any epistemic or semantic role is simply the empiricist version of the Myth of the Given. But

though sensations are merely causal, they cannot be physical – they are *states of consciousness*, conceptually distinct from the triggering of external neuroreceptors. This is why Sellars was eventually led, in the Carus Lectures, to insist that the absence of ‘sensa’ from the scientific image was a serious oversight.¹⁸ Only if sensa are both non-epistemic but only causal, and yet non-physical but only states of *consciousness*, can we adequately explain the difference between perception and judgement, which is needed to satisfy the Demand – precisely what was lost in the dialectic that led to nineteenth-century idealism. The crucial difference between Lewis’s qualia and Sellars’s sensa is that sensa play only a causal-functional role and have no semantic content, since semantic content is explained entirely in normative-functional terms. By contrast, as I will show in Chapter 2, Lewis’s qualia are not causal antecedents of empirical content, but partially constitutive of empirical semantic content.

To summarize a complicated line of thought from *Science and Metaphysics*, then: Sellars’s thought is that we can satisfy the Demand by recognizing that the noumenal world, the things in themselves, gets a vote in what we say about it by causing sensations – the moment of sheer receptivity – which are then taken up in judgements about the world, the semantic content of which is, of course, dependent on the rest of the conceptual framework, and the phenomenal objects are what are referred to from ‘within’ that conceptual framework. The question is, how is this gap from causes to reasons bridged? Suppose we think of a process with three arrows:¹⁹

Physical objects → sensings of sense contents → noninferential beliefs → inferential belief

It seems obvious that the first arrow is a merely causal arrow. Physical objects cause our sensations by virtue of how photons and molecules affect the neuroreceptors in our retinas, cochlea and epithelial surfaces. And it seems obvious that the third arrow is a rational arrow — noninferential beliefs serves as reasons or justifications for inferential beliefs (“I see that the streets are wet, so I have good reason to believe that it was probably raining earlier”). But what is the second arrow? Is it causal? Rational? (Both? Neither?) Sellars’s metaphor of “guidance,” borrowed from Wittgenstein, is both insightful and unhelpful; it tells us where to look for transcendental friction but not what it actually is. Hence it should come as no surprise that post-Sellarsian philosophers such as Rorty, Brandom, and McDowell find the notion of sheer receptivity to be utterly unworkable. But if the given is a myth, and sheer receptivity is unworkable, then we might worry that the Demand cannot be satisfied.

The problem of transcendental friction has also been central to McDowell’s attempt to dislodge us from the oscillation between the Myth of the Given and coherentism as ‘frictionless spinning in a void.’²⁰ Since publishing *Mind and World*, McDowell has made increasingly explicit that he shares Sellars’s con-

viction that Kant's concept of 'intuition' needs rehabilitation and clarification. Unlike Sellars, however, he sees no need for 'sheer receptivity with regard to transcendental philosophy – a point that proved central to McDowell's criticism of Sellars in the 1998 Woodbridge Lectures.²¹ Insofar as sheer receptivity is *posited*, McDowell argues, it belongs with other causal posits in the realm of law, not in the explication of the standpoint of experience in which we do transcendental philosophy. In the terms deployed in those lectures, sensations are 'below the line' that separates characterizations that belong to the space of reasons from characterizations that belong to the realm of law. Instead, McDowell thinks that is necessary and sufficient to distinguish between perceptual experience as the passive actualization of conceptual capacities in sensory consciousness and judgement as the free exercise of those very same capacities.²²

So experience can constrain judgement because experience already involves conceptual content, though since it is passively actualized rather than freely exercised, it is not under the control of the subject. In this way the subject can be reassured that what she experiences is sufficiently independent from what she judges that her judgements are constrained, and indeed, *normatively* constrained – experience can be a genuine tribunal because concepts are already at work within it.

McDowell's 'Avoiding the Myth of the Given' recasts this account in terms of the distinction between 'discursive conceptual content' and 'intuitional conceptual content', and that making this distinction will satisfy our Demand.²³ As I will show in detail in Chapter 4, McDowell now regards intuitional content as actually conceptual because it is potentially propositional. Though this modification makes clear that experience does not itself have *propositional* form, even this modified version of McDowell's view does not, contrary to his intention, satisfy the Demand. If intuitional conceptual contents are stipulated to have the right sort of form to be suitable for discursive articulation, though they are not discursively articulated, then we have satisfied one aspect of the Demand at the expense of the other.

Recall that the Demand requires that some experienceable content have *both* the requisite quasi- or proto-normative structure to constrain the application of conceptual contents *and* that it be sufficiently distinct from conceptual contents to be a genuinely *external* constraint, and not just 'more of the same' (as arguably was the problem with nineteenth-century idealism). McDowell's attempt to dislodge the oscillation between the Myth of the Given and coherentism is his version of the need to satisfy both constraints at once. But it is not clear that he can do so in a satisfactory way, because intuitional conceptual contents have the structure that they have – the structure that is supposed to constrain application of discursive conceptual contents – because they have, in fact, the exact same structure, the structure of conceptual content – that differs only by virtue of the *mode* in which that content is present (as discursively articulated or as intui-

tionally articulable).²⁴ But since experience and judgement have the exact same content, and differ only in mode, McDowell cannot satisfy the Demand, because the Demand requires that conceptual content itself be constrained by something external to it.

The preceding compressed sketch, to be expanded upon significantly in Chapters 2–4, shows that the demand for transcendental friction is a central, animating concern of Lewis, Sellars, and McDowell, but that none of them can satisfy it. Should we then conclude that the Demand itself is fundamentally misconceived? That conclusion would be, I suggest, premature. Before dismissing the Demand altogether, we should reconsider the terms in which the Demand is conceived, and perhaps in the process discover why those terms prevented it from being satisfied. I thereby suggest that the very heart of the entire problem is *not* the Demand itself, but rather in the next move: in the assumption that rational conceptuality is the paradigm of intentional activity – consider how this might have come about through the history of reception of Kant’s notion of ‘spontaneity’ – and then it will seem that only that which is passive can provide friction. But passivity cannot provide friction, since sheer passivity lacks the requisite structure to offer the constraint that friction requires. What we ought to learn from the history of Lewis’s, Sellars’s, and McDowell’s instructive failures to meet the demand for transcendental friction is this: if nothing passive (transcendentally considered) can give us the friction we need, we should re-think that assumption that only the conceptual is intentional. What we ought to, instead, is find a way to accept that there is a kind of proto- or quasi-normativity, a kind of nonconceptual (at least non-discursive) intentionality, that can indeed satisfy the demand for transcendental friction. It is only the assumption that the conceptual is the intentional – an assumption shared by Lewis, Sellars, and McDowell – which has prevented us from noticing that we needed to find it. Put otherwise, if we can see our way clear to accepting the bifurcated account of intentionality – that there is both discursive intentionality and somatic intentionality – we will indeed be able to satisfy the Demand. Putting this audacious claim on the gold standard of textual and conceptual analysis is the goal of Chapter 5 and 6, and of the book as a whole. With the new conception of intentionality defended here, we will have the right sort of ‘hybrid position’ that Haugeland suggested but did not explore, and that in turn will shed new light on whether Rosenberg’s eliminativist challenge to intentionality can be refuted.