

# Experience and the Space of Reasons: Rorty and McDowell on Kant and Wittgenstein

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## **Abstract**

John McDowell and Richard Rorty draw on Kant's influential account of experience. For Rorty, Kant is the antagonist who succumbs to foundationalism or what Sellars calls the Myth of the Given and Wittgenstein is the hero who helps in overcoming the siren call of the Myth. McDowell, however, is ambivalent toward Kant. With Sellars, he applauds Kant as the hero who helped us vanquish the Myth of the Given. But he argues that Kant failed to recognize the full strength of his account of experience and capitulated to a subjective idealism. Wittgenstein, for McDowell, is the hero who helps us achieve an account of experience that gets to the things themselves. I adjudicate the philosophical and the exegetical tensions between Rorty and McDowell and support the latter's approach to experience and to the reading of Kant and Wittgenstein.

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The aim of this essay is to explore Richard Rorty and John McDowell's respective discussions of the relation between Kant and Wittgenstein. I take Rorty's readings of both Kant and Wittgenstein to be helpfully illustrative of ways in which each of these philosophers have come to be read within contemporary analytic philosophy. I will oppose Rorty's readings of them (as well as the manner in which he seeks to align them) with the readings (and the resulting alignment) of Kant and Wittgenstein proposed by McDowell. It is the hope of this essay that the tension in Rorty and McDowell's readings of these two seminal figures will enable us to see in a new light a central problem they sought to unravel: the place of experience in relation to the conceptual space (i.e., the logical space of reasons).

1. It has been said that post-Kantian philosophers face two alternatives: they can either philosophize with Kant or against Kant. This proclamation suggests two different approaches to the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein, and, indeed, some commentators have wished to see Wittgenstein as following in Kant's footsteps,<sup>1</sup> while others have read him as an anti-Kantian.<sup>2</sup> This paper shares the conviction that it is profitable to understand Wittgenstein's aims in philosophy against the background of Kant's thought. On the part of many commentators, however, the presumption behind such an approach to Wittgenstein seems to be that it is clear what philosophizing with or against Kant means, the only remaining question being which side of this clearly defined divide Wittgenstein is on.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Rorty takes Wittgenstein as an opponent of Kant's philosophy, while John McDowell sees him as a champion of the critical enterprise inaugurated by Kant. Their mutual interest in proposing an alignment of Wittgenstein and Kant can invite the impression that McDowell takes Wittgenstein to straightforwardly champion that which Rorty takes him to oppose. But closer examination of their respective readings of Wittgenstein (and of their respective discussions of Wittgenstein's relation to Kant) reveals that their divergences turn, in part, on very different Kantian account of experience as involving the faculties of sensibility and understanding.

Rorty fastens on to the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon and interprets the Kantian manifold of intuition as the outcome of the impingement of noumenal reality on sensibility. The manifold of intuition is construed, by Rorty, as contributing immediately given bits of knowledge which provide the content of phenomenal experience. Rorty

applies Wilfrid Sellars's critique of modern empiricism to Kant's account of the relation of sensibility to understanding, claiming that it involves an illicit transition between (what Sellars calls) "the space of reasons" and "the space of causes." This opens Kant to the charge that his conception of experience (in its appeal to a purely passive faculty of sensibility) relies upon a version of (what Sellars dubbed) the Myth of the Given. Rorty takes the moral of the bankruptcy of any such account of experience – any account which relies upon an appeal to the Given – to be that the only metaphysically innocent relation between world and mind is causal. Rorty reads Wittgenstein as also drawing such a moral, and thus insisting upon a sharp separation between "the space of reasons" and "the space of causes."<sup>4</sup>

McDowell's relation to Rorty is complex. He shares Rorty's admiration for Sellars's critique of empiricism. McDowell's reading of Wittgenstein (as a critic of such accounts) thus shares much common ground with Rorty's. He differs with Rorty, however, in two critical respects: 1) on McDowell's reading of Kant, Sellars's attack on the Given can be seen as a reformulation of a Kantian point, and 2) McDowell reads both Kant and Wittgenstein as criticizing the moral Rorty draws from Sellars's work. In particular, McDowell criticizes Rorty for not allowing an external rational constraint on the mind. For McDowell, Kant's philosophy contains the resources for bridging the Rortian divide between causes and reasons. McDowell, therefore, takes a proper understanding of Kant's point – that experience is the product of the joint action of the faculties of sensibility and understanding<sup>5</sup> – to allow for a way of overcoming Rorty's dualism. On this view, intuitions are rescued from the status of mere Givens in that the faculty of sensibility is receptive (not to the causal impact of the noumenal world but) to the rational bearing of the empirical world. The conceptualizations of the faculty of understanding, on the other hand, figure in an account of how the world can be so.<sup>6</sup>

For McDowell, Wittgenstein follows in Kant's footsteps in that he also rejects the Given without succumbing to Rorty's dualism. Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument, according to McDowell, is an application of a general strategy for rejecting the Given. The sort of private ostensive definition presupposed by the possibility of a private language involves an implicit

endorsement of the Given: such private acts of ostension are, in effect, abstractions from a bare presence delivered by the private linguist's receptivity to his own inner life. McDowell reads Wittgenstein as a Kantian insofar as he takes Wittgenstein's rejection of the possibility of such acts of ostension to allow for the deliverances of sensibility to come as already conceptually structured. He, thus, takes Wittgenstein (*pace* Rorty) to be making a version of a Kantian point (concerning how sensibility and understanding are fused) – one which will look hopelessly metaphysical to Rorty – in his remark in *Philosophical Investigations* that thought does not “stop anywhere short of the fact” (1958, §95).

His admiration for Kant notwithstanding, McDowell suggests that Kant (despite the merits of his account of experience) recedes into a subjective idealism via his appeal to the supersensible affection of sensibility. For McDowell, Kant succumbs to a need to divorce the world of human experience from the world-in-itself. Wittgenstein, however, is concerned to elucidate the dependence of our concepts on our practical engagement with the world and thereby to exorcise the impulse to something like a Kantian invocation of the supersensible beyond our various applications of concepts.

2. Richard Rorty finds a philosophical account which relies on the Given problematic and much of his own work centers around a criticism of such an account. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty specifies the notion of the Given<sup>7</sup> (which he opposes) as “the notion that a quasi-mechanical account of the way in which our immaterial tablets are dented by the material world will help us know what we are entitled to believe” (1979, 143). In “The World Well Lost,” Rorty identifies Kant as a proponent of this view of the Given. Kant wishes to “split the organism up into a receptive wax tablet on the one hand and an ‘active’ interpreter of what nature has there imprinted on the other” (1982a, 4). Rorty's point is that it is philosophically suspect to endorse such a division of labor in the construction of experience – one according to which there is a passive sensory intake of content, on the one hand, and the understanding's active organization of that content, on the other. Much of the negative thrust of Rorty's philosophical work has to do with a rejection of this philosophically suspect position (often in the guise of an attack on Kant's account of experience). The positive account of

experience presupposed by Rorty's philosophy – one which is designed, above all, to save us from falling back into an illicit appeal to the Given – requires that a wedge be driven between the “space of reasons” and the “space of causes,” allowing only a causal link between them.

Rorty's polemic against Kant, in “The World Well Lost” and elsewhere, plays a central role in his critique of the traditional philosophical conception of “the world.” Rorty seeks to do away, once and for all, with the notion of a world to which experience is related only passively. The world which is well lost, according to Rorty, is one which leaves its imprint on the mind's passive faculty, which then in turn, in cooperation with an active faculty, produces “experience.” Rorty ascribes this conception of “the world” to Kant and proposes to undermine it by presenting a dilemma<sup>8</sup> whose conclusion “casts doubt on the notion of a faculty of receptivity” (4). Rorty argues that

- 1) If a Kantian intuition is effable, it is a perceptual judgment and not an intuition as such. However, a perceptual judgment is incapable of having an explanatory function (explaining how it is that experience is in touch with reality) since it is already transformed by the active faculty.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) If a Kantian intuition is ineffable, it is incapable of having an explanatory function.
- 3) Either the Kantian intuition is effable, or it is ineffable.
- 4) Therefore, the Kantian intuition is incapable of having an explanatory function.

The conclusion of this dilemma undermines (what Rorty takes to be) the contribution of the Kantian faculty of receptivity. If the contribution of the passive faculty cannot ever be specified, then any appeal to the impression of reality in the construction of “experience” is vacuous. Since “the world” plays no role in the construction of experience, Rorty concludes that this purportedly Kantian notion of the world “can no longer be given a sense” (4). It is a world well lost.

For Rorty, Kant's philosophy rests upon a problematic commitment – one which, he thinks,

recurs throughout the philosophical tradition – a commitment to a particular conception of experience (as comprised of given bits of knowledge obtained by the world’s impingement on a purely sensory faculty). Rorty has maintained some version of this reading of Kant throughout his career. In “Dewey’s Metaphysics,” for instance, Rorty criticizes Dewey for following in the misleading footsteps of Kant.<sup>10</sup> In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty supplies a brief intellectual history of post-Kantian philosophy based on his account of what is problematic in the position espoused by Kant. According to Rorty, the Kantian heritage splits into two schools, as it were. The first is “German idealism” culminating in the philosophy of Hegel. The second is “the ‘back to Kant’ movement of the 1860’s in Germany” (1979, 134). Although “German idealism” made some progress in overcoming the initial limitations imposed by its Kantian commitments, the “back to Kant” movement sacrificed what progress had been made and propagated the Kantian infection even further. What Rorty takes exception to in the philosophy of the “back to Kant” movement is their preoccupation with (what they called) *Erkenntnistheorie*, relying on the distinction introduced by Kant between knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) and science (*Wissenschaft*) (1929, A832=B860). Philosophy as *Erkenntnistheorie*, according to Rorty, aims to chart the mental and noumenal influences on the region of appearance in order to endow the claims to phenomenal knowledge with the certainty worthy of a science.<sup>11</sup> Due to the catastrophically far-reaching influence of Kant’s conception of experience, one of the most important tasks of twentieth-century philosophy, according to Rorty, has been the overcoming of Kant’s legacy. On Rorty’s telling of the story, as we shall see in a moment, Wittgenstein is one of the heroes who taught us how to live without Kantianism. Before we turn to Rorty’s portrait of the hero, however, we need to take a closer look at the work of a figure who (Rorty thinks) helped us to properly identify the villain.

3. Rorty’s main source for the attack on Kant’s commitment to the Given is Wilfrid Sellars’s seminal work, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. In this philosophically ground-breaking work, Sellars identifies “the point of the epistemological category of the given” to be the explication of “the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a ‘foundation’ of non-inferential knowledge of

matter of fact” (1997, 15). Sellars’s focus, in this article, is a specific version of the Given, embraced by modern forms of empiricism, according to which entitlement to a claim is supplied by a description of a causal process (involving the impact of external objects on the claimant’s sensory surfaces).<sup>12</sup> For Sellars, the causal impingement of real things on the mind’s sensibility cannot license an entitlement to a claim. Sellars points out that “in characterizing an episode or state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says” (16). Entitlement cannot come from outside of the “logical space of reasons,” via the causal impingement of an external reality on the senses, but must be supplied from within the space of reasons. In other words, the claimant is entitled to a claim only when she can justify the claim rationally (rather than by appeal to an external and merely causal determination).

Rorty argues that Kant falls prey to Sellars’s criticism of the Myth of the Given in that he

(Kant) seeks to ground the claims to knowledge by giving an account of the production of empirical (knowable) objects. In Rorty’s reading of Kant, intuitions provide the justification of knowledge claims by issuing from sensibility’s trafficking with the real (noumenal) world. However, if intuitions are somehow prior to any experience (outside the space of reasons) then they are not knowledge and cannot ground claims to knowledge. Intuitions cannot occupy a place within the space of reasons either, for then they would be perceptual judgments and would lose their privileged status of communicating the real. Hence one cannot employ them in justifying what one says. But if one cannot so employ them, then (Rorty concludes) the whole account of intuitions and organizing conceptual schemata must go by the board.

It is important to recognize that Rorty’s move – although prompted by Sellars’s attack on the Given – is not a mere extension of Sellars’s thought. For Sellars, in contrast to Rorty, there is an intimate relation between causes and reasons. Hence, the moral which Rorty draws from Sellars’s attack on the Given (and attributes to Wittgenstein) can be set out more clearly by developing Sellars’s conclusions and contrasting them with Rorty’s.

4. Sellars's rejection of the sensory Given involves, as we have seen, the repudiation of "the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a 'foundation' of noninferential knowledge of matter of fact" (15). Later, when developing a particular form of the Myth of the Given, Sellars clarifies what he means by "foundation". He refers to

a structure of particular matter of fact such that (a) each fact can not only be noninferentially known to be the case, but presupposes no other knowledge either of particular matter of fact, or of general truths; and (b) such that the noninferential knowledge of facts belonging to this structure constitutes the ultimate court of appeals for all factual claims – particular and general – about the world (68-9).

From this passage we can see that for Sellars, a non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact is a foundation if and only if (1) it is not justified by any other factual knowledge; and (2) it justifies all other factual knowledge about the world. To put it more precisely, the epistemological Given is the thesis that empirical knowledge is justified by non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact, which is not itself justified by other knowledge. As I show below, Sellars does not mean to deny that there is non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact, and that this knowledge justifies all other claims to factual knowledge. He accommodates these grounding features of the Given in his own position. He only denies (1), that is, the thesis that the non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact is itself unjustified by other knowledge [i.e., it is "self-authenticating" (73 & 77)]. He rejects this thesis because its endorsement would ground knowledge on something that has no rational credentials and enters our reasoning from the outside. Sellars, then, does not appeal to the affection of sensibility by an unknowable reality in order to ground our knowledge. Instead, he derives the rational authority of non-inferential factual knowledge from the application of concepts in sensory experience. These concepts are, in turn, available through our initiation into the public and linguistic space of reasons, enabling us to apply relevant concepts appropriately. For instance, Sellars holds that for endorsing the proposition "x, over there, is green"

[n]ot only must the conditions be of a sort that is appropriate for determining the color of an object by looking, the subject



must know that the conditions of this sort are appropriate. And while this does not imply that one must have concepts before one has them, it does imply that one can have the concept green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is only one element (44).

To put it more generally, for Sellars, the proper application of a concept in a non-inferential claim to perceptual knowledge presupposes the ability to apply a whole battery of other concepts – including the ones pertaining to other perceptible characteristics, more general (inclusive) concepts, and incompatible concepts. In other words, the truth of an observation report requires the claimant to be in the space of reasons. This requirement enables the sensory operation of concepts to which observation reports are accountable.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the claim that ‘this is green’ is “evoked or wrung from the perceiver by the object perceived” (40). Sellars writes,

[t]hus, when I say “X looks green to me now” I am *reporting* the fact that my experience is, so to speak, intrinsically, *as an experience*, indistinguishable from a veridical one of seeing that x is green. Included in the report is the ascription to my experience of the claim ‘x is green’; and the fact that I make this report rather than the simple report “X is green” indicates that certain considerations have operated to raise, so to speak in a higher court, the question ‘to endorse or not to endorse’ (41).

In other words, I see that X is green and when I have doubts (e.g., X is too far or a source of sensory illusion is present), I can adjust by saying “X looks green to me” or “it looks as though there is a green X over there.” This allows Sellars to ground perceptual judgments in the sensing of sense contents without invoking the inferentialist denial of concepts to the sensings.<sup>14</sup> Rorty, however, supports such a denial.

5. Rorty finds that Sellars, despite his spirited attack on the Given, remains committed to a form of representationalism according to which not singular sentences (observation reports) but entire conceptual schemes must correspond (refer) to reality. Hence, Rorty divides representationalism into two categories. The first is the view that singular sentences represent reality. Rorty and Sellars, both, attack this view as a form of the Myth of the Given. The second is Sellars’s own view according to which conceptual schemes, not the content determined by these concepts, represent reality, and

scientific investigations can reveal the causal mechanisms underpinning the representation of reality by conceptual schemes. Rorty reacts to Sellars's move by positing an impassable gulf between the space of reasons (i.e., the normative space of giving and asking for reasons) and the space of causal relations, in which sensory experience is included. He encourages non-normative investigations of reference (word-world relations) and sensory experience, while emphasizing the irrelevance of these investigations to the tasks of epistemology and the space of reasons. Therefore, Rorty struggles to dismiss both forms of representationalism, emphasizing that the divide between the space of reasons and the space of causes must remain.<sup>15</sup>

For Rorty, Wittgenstein is the hero who triumphs over the tradition (including Sellars) by positing the radical divide between the space of reasons and the space of causes. In "Wittgensteinian Philosophy and Empirical Psychology," Rorty applauds Wittgenstein's revolt against traditional philosophical notions and interprets this revolt as driving a deep wedge between empirical psychology as an investigation into the causal connection between the world and the mind, and philosophy as concerned with charting the space of reasons. Rorty concludes:

the notions of "philosophical problems raised by psychological discoveries" and of "philosophical criticism of psychologists' methods and doctrines" must stand or fall together. It would be well if they both fell (1977, 169).

Rorty rejects each of these notions – "philosophical problems raised by psychological discoveries" and "philosophical criticism of psychologists' methods and doctrines" – on the ground that each involves infringements on the divide between causes and reasons. In a later work, "Is Natural Science a Natural Kind?" Rorty reaffirms his commitment to the aforementioned reading of Wittgenstein, emphasizing that a causal account of the relation between the mind and the causal world is possible: "Wittgenstein's picture of the relation of language to the world is much the same as Davidson's. They both want us to see the relation as merely causal, rather than also as representational" (1991b, 60).<sup>16</sup> Sellars's exclusion from the list is due to the fact that he – unlike Wittgenstein and Davidson – is committed to a form of representationalism. Wittgenstein and Davidson allow for a scientific (causal) account of how the mind relates to the world,

but such an account has (*pace* Sellars) no representational role whatsoever. Thus, Wittgenstein and Davidson are the twin prophets of the dualism (between reasons and causes) which Rorty passionately endorses and which marks, in Rorty's view, the decisive break with the Kantian legacy.

6. McDowell is in agreement with Rorty's contention that the Given must be discarded. However, McDowell does not agree with Rorty's reading of Kant nor with the moral Rorty draws from the demise of the Given. For McDowell, Kant is not properly charged with a commitment to the Given, and, moreover, Kant's philosophy itself contains the resources for overcoming the divide between the space of reasons and the space of causes. McDowell supports his reading of Kant by drawing on a passage in the "Transcendental Doctrine of Elements" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant states that "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (1929, A51=B75). This passage, according to McDowell, supports the claim that the faculty of sensibility, supplying the manifold of intuition, and the faculty of understanding, supplying the concepts, do not operate independently of each other. Experience arise as the indissoluble product of the joint operation of the two faculties. Hence, McDowell concludes that the Kantian distinction between concepts and intuitions is properly understood as an abstraction from what, taken in itself, is a unitary process (1994, 9). Kant should not be read as advocating an analysis of knowledge as a two-stage, portmanteau, affair: sensibility does not produce the manifold of intuition in order for understanding to then come along and endow it with significance. This conclusion undermines Rorty's claim that Kant is committed to a version of the Myth of the Given. Such a claim would require Kant's commitment to a fundamental separation between concepts and intuitions. McDowell argues that this is a misunderstanding of Kant.

By emphasizing Kant's insistence on the equiprimordiality of intuitions and concepts, McDowell may appear to be suggesting that Kant is not Rorty's target but his ally. This is only partially true. McDowell would consider Kant as Rorty's ally only in the latter's attack on the Given. However, McDowell is careful to point out that, in rejecting the Given, Kant's view does not "threaten to disconnect thought from reality" (24). In other words, Kant does not recoil from the Given into a sort of Rortian coherentism which

denies any external rational constraint bearing on thought and judgment. Such coherentism, according to McDowell, abuses the good Kantian move that thoughts without intuitions are empty by crediting intuitions with only a causal bearing on thoughts. In other words, coherentism denounces the problematic representational effect of the Given on thoughts and replaces it with a causal bearing, which is considered to be an adequate constraint on thought and judgment. The question that plagues coherentism concerns the precise nature of this causal bearing on knowledge. The question is critical in that the causal bearing must abstain from assuming a representational role as in the Myth of the Given or in Sellars's scientism. However, if the commitment to the Given and scientism are resisted, it seems that the only alternative that remains is Rorty's chasm between causes and reasons.<sup>17</sup> Such a divide, according to McDowell, loses sight of Kant's insight regarding the rational bearing of the world on thought, brought about through the notion of the joint operation of understanding and sensibility.<sup>18</sup>

In order to capture Kant's insight which, according to McDowell, does not fall prey to the Given or to Rortian coherentism, it is important to examine the notion of an external rational constraint bearing on thought. The rational bearing of the world on thought is grounded in the notion of experience as involving concepts as well as intuitions.<sup>19</sup> The empirical intuitions are yielded by the receptivity of the mind to empirical particulars (1929, A20=B34). Concepts, on the other hand, are rules or standards (A106 & A126) which direct the activity of the mind in knowing the empirical particulars. That concepts help in knowing the particulars is grounded in the supposition that they condition experience as well. Therefore, the conceptual activity of understanding presupposes the conceptual organization of the empirical particulars. In other words, we can know our experiences because we are affected by empirical particulars as already conceptually determined. We know in that our faculty of understanding is able to produce judgments (involving the categorical synthesis of the representation of the particulars). These judgments become knowledge when they get experience right. Hence, McDowell's point about Kant: There is an external and empirical rational constraint on thought.<sup>20</sup>

In “Avoiding the Myth of the Given,” McDowell refines his account of the empirical rational constraint by rejecting the *Mind and World* theses that experience has *propositional* content and that empirical content includes everything the subject can know non-inferentially (2009d, 258-59). In the revised position, McDowell distinguishes between intuitional experiential content and the discursive content of assertions and judgments. Discursive content is articulated (and propositional), and intuitional content is not (2009d, 262). Nevertheless, McDowell alleges that both are conceptual (262); so he preserves Sellars’s later distinction between sensory content and propositional content. From the publication of *Science and Metaphysics* onward, Sellars draws on Kant and interprets sensory content as a noun phrase, rather than construing it as a sentence as he did previously.<sup>21</sup> On the revised view, the extra-judgmental rational constraint on perceptual judgments is the conceptual *this-such* nexus. The sensory *this-such* provides this *external* rational constraint on perceptual judgments, since it is made up of conceptualizations that are non-propositional and external to the discursive activity of judging. Perceptual judgments are true (i.e., they are non-inferential grounds of empirical knowledge), if they accord with the relevant aspects of the *this-such* nexus. The use of “noun phrase” above does not mean “we are ready in advance with words for every aspect of the content of our experience, nor that we could equip ourselves with words for every aspect of the content of our experience” (McDowell, 2007, 348). Rather, the terminology suggests that “no aspect is unnameable” (348). Being initiated into a language equips us with the conceptual capacities that enable us have a conceptual experience, aspects of which we can articulate. To put it more precisely, in experience, the unity of our conceptual capacities is drawn into operation. This allows for an overall access to the world, an access the aspects of which can become more precise and better articulated through further discursive training and comprehension of the unity’s fine-grained conceptual structure.<sup>22</sup>

7. McDowell’s reading of Kant allows him to see Wittgenstein (*pace* Rorty) as a Kantian in three respects: 1) in his rejection of the Given, 2) in his insistence upon the rational bearing of the world on thought and judgment, and 3) in his rejection of any coherentist account of knowledge (which seeks

– through a misguided attempt to evade an appeal to the Given – to eliminate the rational bearing of the world on the knowing subject). In regard to the rejection of the Given, McDowell sets forth Wittgenstein’s Private Language Argument which “applies the general rejection of the Given” (1994, 18) to the notion of private ostensive definitions. In *Mind and World*, McDowell argues that private ostensive definitions are abstractions based on a Given presence.

[A]ny concept that was constituted by a justificatory relation to a bare presence would have to be a private concept. Making the abstraction that would be necessary to form such a concept would be giving oneself a private ostensive definition. In effect the idea that concepts can be formed by abstraction from the Given just is the idea of private ostensive definition (20).

As apparent from McDowell’s comment, private ostensive definitions involve, in effect, the formation of universals or concepts from particular objects which are given to a subject as bare presences (“as what sensations and so forth are,” [20]). In other words, the subject manufactures a private ostensive definition by associating the sign ‘S’ with a sensation. The question is whether this definition is legitimate, and the answer is a resounding No. The reason is simple: the private ostensive definition does not provide a rule for the use of the sign. In other words, further applications of the sign ‘S’ are neither sanctioned nor forbidden by the private ostensive definition. Once the naming is performed, the next move is left entirely open. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein has this problem in mind when he remarks that “naming is not by itself a move in the language-game – any more than putting a piece on the board is a move in chess” (1953, §49). Putting a piece on the chessboard is not a legitimate move in chess, since it does not constrain the further use of that piece. In the same way, naming by itself is not a move in the language game, because it leaves the future use of the sign undetermined.

It should be emphasized, in advance, that McDowell’s reading of Wittgenstein’s treatment of private ostensive definitions does not reflect the commonplace approach to this aspect of Wittgenstein’s thinking. Therefore, the exposition of McDowell’s account of the Private Language Argument would gain in lucidity when contrasted with Saul Kripke’s

influential take on Wittgenstein's overcoming the problem of private ostension. In addition, Kripke's approach will be seen to provide the details of what amounts to a coherentist reading of Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument (a reading which can be endorsed by Rorty among others).

Kripke, in *Wittgenstein On Rules and Private Language*, maintains that a central concern in the *Philosophical Investigations* is the articulation and the overcoming of the skeptical paradox. Wittgenstein articulates the skeptical paradox in the statement that "no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule" (1958, §201). Kripke reformulates the paradox in the claim that "there can be no fact as to what I mean by ... any ... word at any time" (1982, 21). The skeptical paradox has, as its corollary,<sup>23</sup> the problem of private ostension because once the private justificatory relation to a bare presence (as set forth in private ostensive definitions) is established, the next use of the sign is neither sanctioned nor forbidden. Kripke, to his credit, recognizes the force of the Wittgensteinian rejection of private ostensive definitions, as well as the paradox that emerges when one, in response to the rejection of the private ostensive definitions, tries to identify her sensations by criteria. The identification of sensations by criteria is paradoxical because it is reducible to the following absurdity: "if everything can be made out to accord with the rule, then it can also be made out to conflict with it" (1958, §201). In other words, the use of signs for Given particulars can be explained by some criteria, but the application of these criteria is not guaranteed, since the particulars, given independently of the criteria, can also be made to accord with some other set of criteria which conflict with the first ones.<sup>24</sup> This is a sort of skepticism since it casts doubt on one's ability to understand the meaning of the signs.

Kripke's Wittgenstein, to McDowell's disappointment, accepts the skeptical assumption (that meaning is determined by criteria for the use of signs) and supplies a skeptical solution, arguing that communal agreement on meanings can make the semantic skepticism introduced by Wittgenstein benign (1982, 79). Kripke's skeptical solution, in effect, implies a form of coherentism, akin to Rorty's, which rejects the bearing of objects on our thoughts about them. In Kripke's account, meanings are confined to the

intersubjective and normative space of reasons, and the domain of interaction between the subject and the object (as a bare presence) is innocuously independent of that space. Wittgenstein may be seen endorsing this interpretation: “[I]f we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of ‘object and designation’ the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant” (1953, §293). But this is not an endorsement; it is rather a reason for giving up the model that constrains us to consider the object as irrelevant. We only need to read to §304 where Wittgenstein has the following exchange with his interlocutor:

“And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a nothing.” – not at all. It is not a something, but not a nothing either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here.

As apparent here, Wittgenstein does not endorse the ‘object and designation’ model of the way we express our sensations, because the ineffable object fails to make any contribution to our discourse about sensations. But instead of looking for meaning in the normative coherence of our designations, Wittgenstein rejects the grammar of ‘object and designation’ as structuring our talk about sensations. In other words, Wittgenstein is rejecting the grammar that expresses our sensation as a Given “preconceptual this [bare presence] which is supposed to ground our conceptualizations (the items that we want to gesture at, when it is pointed out that ‘pain’ and ‘sensation’ are words of our common language, with an inarticulate noise: §261)” (McDowell 1989, 290).

In “Wittgenstein On Following a Rule,” McDowell supports the thesis that Wittgenstein rejects the grammar of ‘object and designation’ and the associated coherentist/skeptical solution to the paradox by pointing out that Wittgenstein dismisses the assumption that meaning is an interpretation thrown over a bare presence– as involving a “misunderstanding” (Wittgenstein, 1958, §201). The nature of the misunderstanding is brought to light when Wittgenstein (in the same fragment) maintains that “there is a way of grasping a rule which is not an



interpretation, but which is exhibited in what we call ‘obeying a rule’ and ‘going against it’ in actual cases” (§201). McDowell uses these passages to undermine Kripke’s account of Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning and offers a version of the straight solution to the skeptical paradox. McDowell’s straight solution rejects private ostensive definitions, the paradoxical version of the criterial account of meaning, as well as Kripke’s skeptical solution on the ground that they are in one way or another committed to the Myth (or, to use Wittgenstein’s word, the grammar) of the Given (1984, 331). For McDowell’s Wittgenstein, our language does not require super-rigid criteria for its use since our linguistic experiences take place in the context of customs and practices, and that experience is an adequate constraint on our judgments as to how a sign should be applied.<sup>25</sup>

For McDowell, Wittgenstein’s notion of a custom or a practice is related to Kant’s notion of experience in that they both account for the meaningful use of language through the rational bearing of things on thought. This can be elucidated further by showing that Wittgenstein’s notion of practice also involves something like the Kantian insistence that experience is the result of the joint operation of sensibility and understanding. In Wittgensteinian vocabulary, sensibility amounts to receptivity to an item in a practice and must involve, as with Kant, more than sensitivity to a brute presence (as in the private linguist’s sensation); the things with which we have our practical commerce are already signified by the norms and proprieties of the relevant practices. Linguistic norms or rules, as we will see in §9, are pragmatic versions of Kant’s concepts. They are similar in that they condition our language-involving thoughts about objects. For Wittgenstein, to think of an object, the subject responds to the object according to the rules and standards making up the normative pattern of the practice. It is the pragmatic peculiarity of Wittgenstein’s view, one that is not present in Kant, that such a response is brought about by adequate training in that practice. Hence, Wittgenstein is not paradoxical (despite his own confession) when he claims that “when we say, and mean, that such-and-such is the case, we – and our meaning – do not stop anywhere short of the fact; but we mean: this-is-so” (1953, §95). It is McDowell’s contention, in interpreting this passage and others of this sort, that there is no gulf between meanings

(space of reasons) and the real world, as suggested by Rorty's and Kripke's Wittgenstein. For McDowell's Wittgenstein, becoming a participant in a language game (resulting in the capacity to make claims that such-and-such is the case) gets to the things themselves (that this is so). This is because the concepts determining thoughts about objects in the world answer to the conceptualized practical context in which objects show themselves. Therefore, it seems that (McDowell's) Wittgenstein and Kant are in considerable agreement when they reject the Given in favor of an external rational constraint.<sup>26</sup>

Despite the affinity between Kant and Wittgenstein concerning the external rational constraints on thoughts, an important aspect of McDowell's approach to Wittgenstein is a developmental view of the subject which, according to McDowell, goes missing in Kant's account (1994, 111). For Wittgenstein, the subject begins as an apprentice to a practice, requiring instruction and supervision in order to act properly. The subject then proceeds to become competent, that is, she develops appropriate conceptual abilities and acquires independence in making the proper moves. This process of understanding culminates in the mastery of the practice allowing the subject not only the freedom to act in a certain manner but also the entitlement to approach the practice critically and creatively by holding the actual moves in the practice accountable to the salient normative constraints and revising where appropriate. However, McDowell argues that this aspect of the pragmatic approach to the subject is not available in Kant's account (111). The culprit is Kant's reliance on the supersensible.

8. The above criticism of Kant is expressed in a suggestive manner and requires a broader analysis of the Kantian texts to display its full force. This section attempts to expand McDowell's claim that "Kant cannot succeed in his admirable aim, to supersede traditional philosophy" (111), which I will assume to entail a commitment to the supersensible. The most conspicuous protrusion of the reliance on traditional philosophy occurs in Kant's account of the unity of the categories. The categorial unity, by itself, is not problematic. McDowell himself uses Kantian terminology to characterize the conceptuality of intuitional content as involving a "categorial unity" (2009d, 265)<sup>27</sup> – the same unity involved in judgments – with the exception

that intuitional (i.e., sensory) content is not propositional, as is the case in judgments (258 & 262-63). For Kant, categorial unity is the unity of the apperceptive *I*, that is, the unity of the “I think” that accompanies all my representations. Kant writes, “[t]he transcendental unity of apperception is that unity through which all the manifold given in an intuition is united in a concept of the object. It is therefore entitled objective” (1929, B139). McDowell interprets thus: “That intuitions are of objects ... is to be understood in terms of their possessing the kind of unity that results when, in judging, one brings cognitions to the unity of apperception” (2009b, 148). To put it more precisely, the thing that is red, the *this-red*, as perceived through the senses, is *of* an object, that is, it has intentionality, because it involves the unarticulated unity of categories in the “I think”. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant takes pride that his metaphysics resolves the ancient problem of the unity of categories, which is required for a scientific approach to the study of being (1929, B110-11). He then faults Aristotle for articulating this unity rhapsodically<sup>28</sup> by overlooking the importance of the faculty of judgment (i.e., the faculty of thought [A81-B106-07]) and the central role of the “I think” in affecting that unity (A106-10=B131-36). As McDowell puts it: “glimpses of objective reality ... [are] interdependent with the subject’s being able to ascribe experiences to herself; hence, with the subject’s being self-conscious” (1994, 99).

On McDowell’s view, however, Kant’s transformation of the Aristotelian account of the unity of conceptual space has at least two problematic features. First, Kant dissociates the “I think” from the empirical, substantial self. The apperceptive “I think” is the self that persists through time and “has nothing to do with the substantial identity of a subject who persists as a real presence in the world she perceives” (99). As a result, self-awareness is made into a formal, philosophical device and is deprived of its phenomenological qualities, which are relegated dismissively to the empirical ego. Second, Kant denies that our “knowledge” gets the *real* world right, and limits it to the apparent world (1929, Bxxiii-xxiv). In *Mind and World*, for example, McDowell argues that Kant spoils his meritorious account of experience by *framing* it in terms of mind’s receptivity to the radically mind-independent supersensible. McDowell writes: “if we take

Kant's conception of experience out of the frame he puts it in, a story about a transcendental affection of receptivity by a supersensible reality, it becomes just what we need... But the frame spoils the insight" (1994, 95-6). McDowell finds this frame problematic because "the radical mind-independence of the supersensible comes to seem exemplary of what any genuine mind-independence would be" (96). This exemplariness obscures mind's relation to the world in Kant's account of experience. In his more recent writings, McDowell has regretted saddling Kant with the transcendental framework discussed in *Mind and World* (2007, 77-8). McDowell, however, does insist that Kant's account of space and time, as "human" forms of sensibility, limits the scope of conceptualization and excludes a robust objectivity (82ff). Therefore, Kant, who had a glimpse into the interdependence of self-consciousness and the consciousness of objective reality, fails to sustain the glimpse and lapses into a subjective idealism. What McDowell calls a failure *inspires* Sellars to endorse a form of scientism by modifying the problematic Kantianism.

Sellars is disappointed when Kant does not posit sense impressions resulting from sheer receptivity as elements in a more full-blooded explanation of non-inferential claims in the space of reasons (1968, 9). He complains that Kant did not distinguish clearly between 'forms' of non-conceptual sense impressions and those of conceptual representations since "forms of sensibility proper become, as the argument of the *Critique* proceeds, forms of conceptual representations" (30). Therefore, despite his admirable rejection of the empiricist Given and his moves to explain minimal conceptual representation, Sellars's Kant does not go far enough and reduces "the concepts of receptivity and sensibility to empty abstractions" (30). According to Sellars, we must await the end of scientific inquiry for our cognitive states to be in proper causal relation to the world.<sup>29</sup> In "Representation, Social Practise and Truth," Rorty defines scientism as "the assumption that every time science lurches forward philosophy must redescribe the face of the whole universe. Scientists think that every discovery of micro-structure casts doubt on the 'reality' of the manifest macro-structure and the intervening middle structures" (1991c, p 160). Meanwhile, all we have are inadequate conceptual schemes that fail to

picture reality adequately. McDowell, in tandem with Rorty, rejects this problematic scheme-content dualism, and he enlists Wittgenstein in this.

9. Wittgenstein, true to the “spirit” of Kant’s philosophy, continues the critical enterprise by adjusting a major problem in the Kantian “letter” which concerns Kant’s appeal to a supersensible reality. In §217 of the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein’s interlocutor asks a potentially Kantian question: “How am I able to obey a rule?” Wittgenstein offers two interpretations of this question, “If this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do” (1958, §217). The interlocutor’s question is a Kantian question only according to the interpretation in the consequent of Wittgenstein’s conditional. Kant’s appeal to the supersensible is meant to subvert the justification from experience. Wittgenstein’s response to the Kantian aspect of the interlocutor’s question is “if I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: ‘This is simply what I do’” (§217). Wittgenstein can be interpreted as suggesting that the appeal to the noumenal realm as the sub-bedrock assurance in regard to whether I get the world right is redundant.

For Kant, the need for the appeal to the supersensible reality arose from his anxiety concerning understanding. Having inherited the tradition’s irreverence for experience, Kant worried about empirical judgments licensed by the actualization of mere empirical concepts in experience. Therefore, he sought more assurances and claimed to have found them in the deep recesses of the subject.

Wittgenstein, however, wants to dispel the Kantian worries. For Wittgenstein, the rational bearing of objects on thought is sufficient for one’s understanding of experience. In response to the Kantian anxiety about the authority of the empirical representations, Wittgenstein would say briefly, “this is simply what I do” (§217). Having been trained in the salient practices or institutions supplies the adequate independent rational justification.<sup>30</sup> In other words, justifications are available in the practices, not external to them.

One could, however, ask for a causal account of how one obeys a rule and engages in a practice. Wittgenstein, anticipating this worry, responds: “I

have been trained to react to this sign (the expression of a rule) in a particular way, and now I do so react to it" (§198). In other words, to the question concerning the causes of obeying a rule, Wittgenstein offers the story about apprenticeship and learning the techniques of a practice. Hence, Wittgenstein embraces a developmental view of the subject of experience not present in Kant. According to this view, the subject is always already in a community of practices.<sup>31</sup> As the subject develops, she begins to understand the language of her community. "To understand a language means to be a master of a technique" (§199), and to master a technique is to achieve higher levels of competence in a practice – to have acquired the proprieties of a practice in such a way that one performs the practice spontaneously as if it were second nature. One who thus understands a language is capable of employing it in such a way that her descriptions, for instance, are accurate; they depict the way things show themselves by drawing on one's conceptual abilities. "[I]f a person has not yet got the concepts, I shall teach him to use the words by means of examples and by practice. –And when I do this I do not communicate less to him than I know myself" (§208). For Wittgenstein, one's mastery of a technique seems to license her to teach that technique, but teaching does not necessarily involve direct communication of the techniques. The master practitioner can teach by examples, performances, and active supervision (this list is by no means exhaustive). The aim is to enable the initiate to carve out the concepts as they are actualized in her experience. Wittgenstein's view of understanding as mastery of techniques involves a major departure from Kant's views on "understanding" and "reason," which involve trafficking with the supersensible. Wittgensteinian "understanding" is only limited by the training in the practices and institutions amidst which the subject finds herself.

10. This essay has sought to show that the Kantian critical enterprise is not a victim (*pace* Rorty) but a hero of the battle against the Given. Once this status of critical philosophy is brought to light, a deep and powerful relationship between Kant and the later Wittgenstein is unraveled. This essay has developed this relationship through McDowell's reading of the bond between Kant's concept of experience and Wittgenstein's notion of

practice. Kantian “experience” and Wittgenstein’s “practice” have been shown to abrogate the empiricist Given by invoking an external *rational* bearing on thoughts.

It has also been shown that, despite his valuable concept of experience, Kant’s appeals to the noumenal realm unnecessarily shrink the scope of the space of reasons. Wittgenstein, according to the final argument of this essay, exorcises the appeal to the Kantian noumena through his modification of Kant’s notion of understanding. Wittgenstein defined understanding as the mastery of the techniques or the practices that make up the cultural-linguistic tradition in which the subject finds herself. With this move, Wittgenstein showed that the understanding’s grasp of experience is not achieved through Kant’s noumenal, sub-bedrock assurances; we get things right through answerability to experience’s rich conceptual grain.

## Endnote

1. Hilary Putnam and Stanley Cavell are examples of philosophers who claim that Wittgenstein’s thought is best understood when viewed against the background of Kant. In “Was Wittgenstein a Pragmatist?”, Putnam offers an extended discussion of the relation between Wittgenstein’s philosophy and that of Kant. He concludes:

There were some genuine insights in Kant, insights which were hard won, and by which Wittgenstein was educated. Wittgenstein could not have seen so far if he had not stood on the shoulders of that giant (1994a, 41).

See also Putnam’s claim, in “Rethinking Mathematical Necessity,” that Wittgenstein belongs to a Kantian tradition of thought about logical necessity (1994b, 246-8).

A continuing interest in the relation between Kant and Wittgenstein can also be traced in Cavell’s writings. In “The Availability of Wittgenstein’s Later Philosophy,” Cavell writes:

The problems of philosophy are not solved by “hunting out new facts;” ... What do such answers look like? ... [W]e could say that what such answers are meant to provide us with is not more knowledge of matters of fact, but the knowledge of what would count as various “matters of fact.” ... It is a knowledge of what Wittgenstein means by grammar – the knowledge Kant calls “transcendental.” ... And where Kant speaks of “transcendental illusion” – the illusion that we know

what transcends the conditions of possible knowledge – Wittgenstein speaks of the illusions produced by our employing words in the absence of the (any) language game which provides their comprehensible employment. ... If his similarity to Kant is seen, the differences [between Kant and Wittgenstein] light up the nature of the problems Wittgenstein sets himself. For Wittgenstein it would be an illusion not only that we do know things-in-themselves but equally an illusion that we do not (1962, 85-86).

2. J. Alberto Coffa, in *The Semantic Tradition From Kant to Carnap*, argues that Kant is the father of the semantic tradition [the tradition of seeking “a conception of the a priori in which pure intuition played no role” (1991, 22)] in philosophy (7), and that Wittgenstein’s purposes were fundamentally opposed to that tradition: “their philosophical hopes seemed to be Wittgenstein’s fears; their projects, Wittgenstein’s targets; their enemies, Wittgenstein’s friends” (141). Coffa further argues that “even Kant was too much of a rationalist for Wittgenstein’s taste, since ... Kant remained enthusiastic about science and rationality in general” and that “if Wittgenstein was a fifth column among semanticists, it is because from the very beginning his heart was with one of the most romantic, unrational versions of idealism. If it ever looked otherwise, it is in part because he joined the enemy camp in order to display its failure from within” (141-2). Rudolf Haller, in *Questions on Wittgenstein*, in a similar vein, explicitly takes issue with Cavell’s alignment of Kant and Wittgenstein. He goes on to deny the parallel between Kant and Wittgenstein even more vehemently than Coffa, stating that “Wittgenstein seemed to follow Mauthner, who replied to the neo-Kantian motto ‘back to Kant’ with his own: ‘back to Hume’ “ (1988, 53); Haller concludes: “the critique of language is not the critique of reason” (1988, 52-3).

3. The problematic character of this presumption can be illustrated by comparing Eric Stenius’s claim that “Wittgenstein was in essential respects a Kantian philosopher” (1960, 214), and James Conant’s apparently parallel claim that certain basic ideas of Wittgenstein have their source in Kant (1991, 115). The “presumption” would lead one to suppose that Stenius and Conant are allies when, in fact, the philosophical positions which Conant attributes to Kant and Wittgenstein are in clear opposition to the ones which Stenius attributes to them. Stenius insists that “what Kant’s transcendental deductions are intended to perform ... is performed by (Wittgenstein’s) logical analysis of language” (1960, 218). Thus, Stenius concludes:

Wittgenstein moves the limits of theoretical reason to the limits of language. Whereas Kant thought “possible to theoretical reason” to be a more narrow concept than “logically possible,” these two concepts are identical according to Wittgenstein (219).

Conant, however, distinguishes two notions of limit: 1) limit as imposed by the laws of logic and 2) limit as the boundary of theoretical discourse. Conant does not see the *Tractatus* (as Stenius does) as identifying these two notions of a limit, but rather as seeking to follow Kant in arguing that the former notion of a limit rests upon a



confused conception of logical necessity. Conant reads the transcendental deduction as supplying the limiting concepts for significant thought in theoretical discourse – as marking the limit not of thought *per se*, but of thought about objects. This limit, according to Conant, is transgressed “in philosophical speculation” (1991, 171), while the laws of logic cannot be transgressed and “should not be represented as imposing a limit on thought” (171). Conant finds Wittgenstein to be a Kantian insofar as he is sensitive to the two notions of limit and has corresponding notions in his own philosophy. Stenius, from the standpoint of Conant’s reading, misunderstands Kant and therefore Wittgenstein’s Kantianism.

4. I develop the Sellarsian attack on the Myth of the Given in Chapter 1 of my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna: Knowing the Unknown* (2020, 9-22).

5. In *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 16-19), I make the case for this reading, drawing on A78=B103 among other passages in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

6. Refer to Chapter 3 of my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* for a more detailed treatment of McDowell’s criticisms of Rorty (2020, 36-51).

7. Sellars, in *Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind*, maintains that “many things have been said to be ‘given’: sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself” (1956, 253). Sellars, in his article, subsequently narrows his concern to the role played by the Given in sense-datum theories. This is precisely the version of the Given to which Rorty pays the most attention. Nevertheless, there is ample reason to think that Rorty (like Sellars) means to be opposing any form of appeal to the Given.

8. Rorty summarizes the dilemma as follows: “insofar as a Kantian intuition is effable, it is just a perceptual judgment, and thus not merely ‘intuitive.’ Insofar as it is ineffable, it is incapable of having an explanatory function” (1982a, 4).

9. McDowell’s criticism of Rorty’s reading of Kant implies a rejection of the second premise. McDowell reads Kant as arguing that experience results from the cooperation of concepts and intuitions. Intuitions, as such, are the products of the Kantian analysis of experience and concern the reference to particulars in judgments of experience. This view undermines Rorty’s interpretation which relies on an account of intuitions as pre-conceptual Givens. See §6 for a more detailed treatment of the contrast between Rorty’s reading of Kant and that McDowell.

10. Rorty writes: “what Kant had called ‘the constitution of the empirical world by synthesis of intuitions under concepts,’ Dewey wanted to call ‘interactions in which both extra-organic things partake.’ ... [T]he level of generality to which Dewey ascends is the same level at which Kant worked, and the model of knowledge is the same – the constitution of the knowable by the cooperation of two unknowables. Sounding like Kant is a fate that will overtake any systematic account of human knowledge which purports to supplant both physiological Lockean accounts and sociological Hegelian accounts by something still more generic. The ‘ontology of the sensible manifold’ is the common destiny of all philosophers who try for an account of subject-and-object, mind-and-body, which has this generic quality” (1982b, 84-5).

11. The proponents of *Erkenntnistheorie* declared their task to be, as Rorty puts it, “the patient labor of sorting out the ‘given’ from the ‘subjective additions’ made by the mind” (1979, 133-34).

12. It may be objected that this reading of Sellars conflates internalist foundationalism (the proper target of Sellars’s attack) and some version of externalism. The proper target of Sellars’s attack is the Myth of the Given as found in some forms of empiricism, and the Given does not simply imply an assumed foundation for justification. It also entails that such a foundation be “knowledge of matter of fact,” that is, it should depict how things really are. This latter implication is brought out by the causal account of the impact real things on sensibility.

13. In “Why Is Sellars’s Essay Called ‘*Empiricism* and the Philosophy of Mind?’” (2009c), John McDowell reads Sellars in this way. I also support this reading in my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 14-16).

14. In his work, Robert Brandom accounts for the representational dimension of observation reports through the interplay between the reporter and an interlocutor. Brandom accounts for getting things right in our non-inferential perceptual judgments by invoking the endorsement of the interlocutor/scorekeeper and her undertaking of the commitment ascribed to the reporter. See, for example, his discussion in “Knowledge and the Social Articulation of the Space of Reasons,” (1995, 903). Brandom’s *social* practice view, however, overlooks a sensible way of explicating non-inferential perceptual judgments as justified by the *experience* of the world. I develop my criticism of Brandom’s reading of Sellars in my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 14-16).

15. In “Representation, Social Practice and Truth,” Rorty argues that Davidson’s work on the role of the disquotational theory of truth in a viable theory of meaning eliminated the last trace of representationalism by showing that the proper context for a theory of truth is semantics, not epistemology. “So the thing to do is to marry truth and meaning, and conversely. But that theory will be of no use to a representationalist epistemology, nor to any other sort of epistemology. It will be an explanation of what people do, rather than of a non-causal, representing relation in which they stand to non-human entities” (1991c, 154). I critique Rorty’s dualism in Chapter 3 of my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 36-51).

16. Rorty (1991a, 3) supports his reading of Wittgenstein as an anti-representationalist by invoking Michael Dummett’s essay, “Can Analytic Philosophy Be Systematic, and Ought it to Be” where Dummett claims to set forth a central idea of Wittgenstein “about which it would be universally agreed that any attempt to construct a theory of meaning must come to terms with [it]” (1978, 452). This idea involves “the rejection of the conception, advanced by Frege and by Wittgenstein himself in the *Tractatus*, that the meanings of our sentences are given by conditions that render them determinately true or false, in favor of one according to which meaning is to be explained in terms of what is taken as justifying an utterance” (452). Rorty fastens unto the idea presented here and claims that Wittgenstein

rejects representationalism. I will offer my critique of this reading of Wittgenstein in §7.

17. Although McDowell's primary target, in his critique of coherentism, is Donald Davidson, he finds Rorty applauding and exaggerating "the aspects of Davidson's thinking" that he has "objected to" (1994, 146).

18. I develop this reading of Kant in *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 16-19).

19. Kant expresses his view of experience, in a historical manner, as involving a course in between Leibniz and Locke. "Leibniz intellectualized appearances, just as Locke ... sensualized all concepts of the understanding, i.e., interpreted them as nothing more than empirical or abstracted concepts of reflection. Instead of seeking in understanding and sensibility two sources of representations which ... can supply objectively valid judgments of things only in conjunction with each other, each of these great men holds to one only of the two, viewing it as an immediate relation to things in themselves. The other faculty is then regarded as serving only to confuse or to order the representations which this selected faculty yields" (1929, A271=B327).

20. Although McDowell argues that Kant and Wittgenstein share the thesis that there is an external rational constraint on thought, he (McDowell) is careful to note that their accounts of how it is that there is such an external rational constraint differ. I will develop this difference in §§8-9.

21. McDowell acknowledges this in "A Sellarsian Blind Spot," (2016, 101). Along with *Science and Metaphysics*, see also Sellars's "Some Remarks on Perceptual Consciousness."

22. For a more detailed discussion of McDowell's later view, see my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 31-32, 68, 86).

23. Kripke states that "the impossibility of private language emerges as a corollary of his [Wittgenstein's] skeptical solution of his own paradox" (1982, 68).

24. Kripke illustrates the skeptical paradox thus: "Now suppose I encounter a bizarre sceptic ... he suggests, as I used the term 'plus' in the past, the answer I intended for '68 + 57' should have been '5'! Of course the sceptic's suggestion is obviously insane ... After all, he says, if I am now so confident that, as I used the symbol '+', my intention was that '68 + 57' should turn out to denote 125, this cannot be because I explicitly gave myself instructions that 125 is the result performing the addition in this particular instance. By hypothesis, I did no such thing. But of course the idea is that, in this new instance, I should apply the very same function or rule that I applied so many times in the past. But who is to say what function this was? ... So, perhaps in the past I used

'plus' and '+' to denote a function which I will call 'quus' and symbolize by '⊕'. It is defined by

$$x \oplus y = x + y, \text{ if } x, y < 57 \\ = 5 \text{ otherwise}$$

who is to say that this is not the function I previously meant by '+' (1982, 8-9)?

25. McDowell writes: “The upshot is that if something enters into being a participant in the relevant customs, it enters equally into being capable of making any judgments at all. We have to give up that picture of genuine truth, in which the maker of a true judgment can shrink to a point of pure thought, abstracted from anything that might make him distinctively and recognizably one of us” (1984, 352).

26. There is a temptation, if one is not sufficiently alive to the snares of idealism, to infer from the above account that the existence of all objects is dependent on human practices or experience. This conclusion and the thesis that supported it are then reduced to absurdity by pointing out that dinosaurs, for instance, went extinct well before the advent of any of the human practices and institutions; yet we seem to have a deluge of evidence that they existed. Such arguments can be refuted by rejecting their assumption that the existence of all objects is dependent on human practices. Although it is true that many types of objects, i.e., chess pieces, flags, money, etc., depend for their existence on human practices, there are a host of other objects whose existence lacks this sort of dependence. This does not imply a contradiction in McDowell’s account of Wittgenstein’s position but a peculiarity in some of our practices in which objects do not depend on the practices for their existence but are, nevertheless, understood according to the grammar supplied by those practices. This is not ad hoc; scientific activities, for instance, involve sophisticated practical constraints, but this does not mean that atoms or molecules came into being as soon as the appropriate disciplines were developed. Scientific practices supply us with the concepts to think objects like atoms or dinosaurs (or to be able to discourse about them), but these concepts do not determine their objects in the same way as the rules of chess determine chess pieces. Hence, in some of our practices, including the scientific ones, the concepts underdetermine objects, and that should be enough to evade the idealist challenge.

This point is put in an interesting manner by Elizabeth Anscombe. In “The Question of Linguistic Idealism,” she introduces Hume’s observation regarding the natural unintelligibility of promises and extends the notion to rules. To be “naturally unintelligible” is to not be an expression of “perception or experience” which she means in the sense of Humean sense impression. Naturally unintelligible things, according to Anscombe, “are understood by those of normal intelligence as they are trained in the [appropriate] practice” (1976, 121). In other words, naturally intelligible notions – such as the existence of dinosaurs, horses, giraffes, colors, and shape –

– are not the products of human linguistic practices. But “if there is such a thing as idealism about rules and about the necessity of doing *this* if you are in conformity with *this* rule, then here Wittgenstein was a linguistic idealist. He insists that these are the creation of human linguistic practices” (122).

27. See also “Conceptual Capacities in Perception,” (2009a, 127) and “Apperceptive I and the Empirical Self” (2009b, 148-49).

28. For an account of Aristotle’s so-called rhapsodic account of the unity of categories, see my *Analytic Philosophy and Avicenna* (2020, 88-90).

29. Sellars's scientism is characterized by slogans like "science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not" (Sellars, 1997, 83).

30. McDowell amplifies this Wittgensteinian response to Kant in this way: "Kant wants subjects of experience and intentional action to be already, just as such, in possession of objective reality. He wants exercises of conceptual powers to be intelligible only as undertaken by subjects who do not need philosophy to regain the world for them. But since he lacks a pregnant notion of second nature, and has no inclination to naturalize spontaneity within the realm of law, the best he can provide in the way of an experiencing and intending subject is the merely formal reference he allows to 'I', in the 'I think' that must be able to 'accompany all my representations'" (1994, 111).

31. In *The Bounds of Sense*, F. Strawson, to whom McDowell expresses great indebtedness, affirms the viability of this approach to Kant and Wittgenstein thus: "We should remember that all [of] Kant's treatment of objectivity is managed under a considerable limitation, almost, it might be said, a handicap. He nowhere depends upon, or even refers to, the factor on which Wittgenstein, for example, insists so strongly: the social character of our concepts, the links between thought and speech, speech and communication, communication and social communities ... [A]n other name for the *objective* is the *public*" (1966, 151).

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