

Journal for the History of Analytical Philosophy

Volume 8, Number 7

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ISSN: 2159-0303

jhaponline.org

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Sellars, Price, and the Myth of the Given

Michael R. Hicks

Wilfrid Sellars's "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (*EPM*) begins with an argument against sense-datum epistemology. There is some question about the validity of this attack, stemming in part from the assumption that Sellars is concerned with epistemic foundationalism. This paper recontextualizes Sellars's argument in two ways: by showing how the argument of *EPM* relates to Sellars's 1940s work, which does not concern foundationalism at all; and by considering the view of H. H. Price, Sellars's teacher at Oxford and the only classical sense-datum theorist to receive substantive comment in *EPM*. Timm Triplett has claimed that Sellars's discussion simply begs the question against Price, but this depends on the mistaken assumption that Sellars's concern is with foundationalism. On the contrary, Sellars's argument concerns the assumption that the innate capacity for sensory experience counts as "thinking in presence" in the way needed for empiricist accounts of content acquisition. Price's distinction between noticing universals and being aware of them encapsulates the tensions empiricists face here.

Sellars, Price, and the Myth of the Given

Michael R. Hicks

1. Introduction: the Myth of the Epistemic Given

In part I of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (*EPM*), Wilfrid Sellars writes that “the point of the epistemological category of the given is, presumably, to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a ‘foundation’ of non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact” (§3).¹ Timm Triplett and Willem deVries pick up on this claim in the introduction to their invaluable guide to *EPM* (deVries and Triplett 2000), and identify mythical givenness with epistemic foundationalism. While other scholars have urged that foundationalism does not *exhaust* the myth of the given,² there is general consensus that Sellars understands sense-data in particular as instances of the “epistemic given”, in virtue of their putative role as epistemic foundations. I shall argue that this is a mistake.

For one thing, by §3 Sellars has already distinguished those who would “analyze” sensing from those who would treat it as unanalyzable. The former, he says, tend to analyze sens-

¹Throughout I use the standard abbreviations for Sellars’s texts, identified in the reference section. *EPM* itself is numbered in two different ways: sixteen parts (given by Roman numerals) and sixty-three paragraphs. I will often make reference to the different parts, but will always give paragraph reference as well.

²To my knowledge, O’Shea (2007, 107) first used the phrase “epistemic given” to distinguish a putatively epistemological critique from a more general concern, which he identifies (cf. 115) with the “categorical given”. (He takes over Triplett and deVries’s analysis of the epistemic given; see O’Shea 2007, 208 n 3.) More recently, Sachs (2014, 29) argues that C. I. Lewis falls foul not of the epistemic but of the “semantic” given. See note 18 below. (Sachs (2014, 22), also endorses Triplett and deVries’s analysis of the epistemic given.)

ing in non-epistemic terms. An example might be Susan Stebbing (1932, 71): the “*givenness* [of sense-data] is not equivalent to *indubitableness* in the sense required to furnish ‘reasons’ for our beliefs concerning material things”. Presumably whatever provides epistemic foundations *does* furnish reasons. Thus, if Sellars’s complaint about sense-data is that they cannot serve as epistemic foundations, Stebbing can take this in stride. The same goes for other “analysts”, including (per Stebbing) G. E. Moore, the only classical sense-datum theorist mentioned by name in *EPM* I.

Even if we restrict Sellars’s argument to sense-datum theories that are plausibly interpreted as foundationalist,³ problems persist. He continues from the passage quoted above:

we may well experience a feeling of surprise on noting that according to sense-datum theorists, it is *particulars* that are sensed. For what is *known* even in non-inferential knowledge, is *facts* rather than particulars, items of the form *something’s being thus-and-so* or *something’s standing in a certain relation to something else*. (*EPM* §3)

Contrast this with H. H. Price’s distinction between apprehension “*that*” and apprehension “*of*”: only the latter, directed on particulars, deserves the Russellian label “acquaintance” (Price 1932, 5). Sellars’s claim that knowledge is concerned with facts not particulars automatically disqualifies Price’s apprehension of sense-data from status as knowledge, foundational or otherwise.

³I take no stand on the question, whether such interpretations are right. As just noted (note 2), Sachs (2014) disputes the traditional interpretation of Lewis as a foundationalist (though see Klemick (forthcoming) for a nuanced defense of the traditional view). Similar questions have been raised about Russell. H. H. Price is my primary concern, and while his doctrine of “perceptual assurance” is sometimes interpreted as resting on epistemic foundations deriving from sense-data, Price himself writes: “assurance as such, our consciousness of the reality of matter *in general*, cannot intelligibly be called either reasonable or unreasonable: it is that which *enables us to give* reasons of a particular kind” (Price 1932, 191).

Sellars does comment on this, offering the sense-datum theorist the following derivation: non-inferentially knowing that a sense content is red is sensing it “as being red”, which can in turn be characterized as “sensing it” (“full stop”), in which case the sense content can be said to be “known” (full stop) (*EPM* I, §4, 129). But this, he emphasizes, is knowing particulars in a derived sense. The fundamental concept of knowledge remains propositional. A bit later, Sellars develops for his opponents an “inconsistent triad”, the first proposition of which, thesis *A*, is:

A. *X* senses red sense content *s* entails *x* non-inferentially knows that *s* is red. (*EPM* §6)

If the sense-datum theorist abandons *A*, “the sensing of sense contents becomes a noncognitive fact”. And some years later, Sellars argues in *OPM* that Russell was committed to thesis *A*. Sellars sees no real possibility of (non-derivative) knowledge of particulars.

Nonetheless—and Sellars’s interpretation notwithstanding—Russell did: “Knowledge of things, when it is of the kind we call knowledge by *acquaintance*, is essentially simpler than any knowledge of truths, and logically independent of knowledge of truths” (Russell 1912, 31). Not only isn’t knowledge by acquaintance knowledge of truths, *pace* Sellars it is “logically independent” of it. Later we shall see that Price is not committed to thesis *A* either.⁴ Sense-datum epistemologists insist that not all knowledge is knowledge of facts. It is not without reason, then, that Triplett (2014) objects that Sellars has flatly begged the question.

These two observations—not all sense-datum “epistemologists” figured sense-data as epistemic foundations, and those who did often saw them as providing non-propositional foundations—suggest that the target of *EPM* I needs to be reconsidered. Triplett maintains that ahistorical presumptions have

⁴O’Shea (2007, 112) concedes this, but argues plausibly that Sellars has “exposed a touchy nerve center” in Price’s thinking.

made it difficult to recognize what mid-century analytic philosophers were up to. He is especially concerned with Sellars’s treatment of Price, and I shall follow him in that.⁵ But the ahistorical fog he complains of implicates his own reading too. Sellars does not beg the question against foundationalists because he is not targeting epistemic foundationalism at all.

Consider the sense-datum analysts set aside above: their problem, Sellars maintains, is a version of the “naturalistic fallacy”. But his argument does not depend on this point. Instead, he detects a fundamental issue uniting “epistemic” and “nonepistemic” sense-datum theorists: “they have taken givenness to be a fact which presupposes no learning, no forming of associations, no setting up of stimulus-response connections” (*EPM* §6, 131). Developing this thought leads to the inconsistent triad, the two further theses of which are:

B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.

C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is φ* is acquired. (§6)

⁵Price taught Sellars at Oxford, and is referenced in *EPM*. Moreover, in his “Autobiographical Reflections” (*AR*) Sellars tells us that it was while reading Kant with Price that he “began to develop in embryo the interpretation which was to become the core of *Science and Metaphysics*”.

Peter Olen (2016, 95) has recently complained of a “romantic” or “idealist” tendency among Sellars scholars to efface discontinuities between his early work and his mature work. Below (esp. Section 3) I will be uncovering continuities Olen does not note, but I do not think this reflects the romantic impulse he complains of. Olen’s pathbreaking analysis centers around Sellars’s relationship to colleagues at Iowa. But the fact that Sellars’s “mature” research program began, in some sense, prior to that influence suggests a different interpretation of his evidence. Sellars was always concerned with how best to communicate his thoughts: perhaps the influence of Iowa was as much on the presentation of his ideas as on their substance. (Of course presentational changes can—and undoubtedly did—have substantial implications.) Anyway, while I cannot defend, or even articulate, a developmental story matching the detail of Olen’s, the real continuities I highlight should serve as a counterbalance to Olen’s emphasis on (equally real) discontinuities.

On my interpretation, thesis A is simply a stand-in for the idea that sense-datum theorists need something they agree is acquired to instead be innate.

Sellars's real target throughout *EPM* is not epistemology narrowly construed, i.e., the theory of epistemic justification, but—as its title announces—the philosophy of mind.⁶ To abandon thesis C, he says, “is to do violence to the predominantly nominalistic proclivities of the empiricist tradition” (132), evidenced for instance in Berkeley's rejection of abstract ideas. (He stresses this connection when introducing his own “psychological nominalism” in *EPM* VI: see Section 6 below.) According to Sellars, the myth of the given is a myth about content-acquisition, told by (“nominalistically”-minded) empiricists who *need* such a myth.⁷ In what follows I want to spell out his reasoning by considering the case of Price.

⁶Michael Williams (2009) makes this point about the title, but sees it as a part of Sellars's reconceptualizing of epistemology. For the idea that Sellars's concern is not “narrowly epistemological”, see McDowell (1998, 8).

⁷As Quill Kukla (2000, writing as Rebecca Kukla) points out, the problem is not *merely* that the given is a myth—Sellars himself uses a myth to kill a myth. The problem is that, *qua* myth it cannot do what it needs to do. As we shall see, Sellars's ultimate view is that the myth of the given is induced by a “static” picture of human rationality, which he rejects. From his “dynamic” perspective, access to content *as such* will seem far less pressing.

In response to a probing question from a reviewer, I should note that the myth of Jones “kills” the myth of the given, not by giving an alternative, competing explanation of access to content but by showing that, given access to content, we can make sense of *acquiring* “privileged” access to immediate experience. Thus, in repudiating the myth of the given we need not collapse into a behaviorism that denies the phenomenology of inner experience. (Focusing on the first “chapter” of the myth of Jones, I argue that Sellars fails to thread this needle (Hicks 2017). Ironically, it is precisely Sellars's nonchalance about equipping the Ryleans with access to content that causes his problems. When I wrote that paper, I had not yet fully worked out the interpretation that follows.)

2. Sellars on Price

Price is arguably the only classical sense-datum theorist to receive substantive discussion in *EPM*.⁸ Though the discussion I have in mind comes much later (*EPM* VII), careful consideration of it will make clear the relevance of Sellars's argument in *EPM* I to Price's view. Sellars's allusions in *EPM* are not to Price's better remembered *Perception* (1932), but to his later *Thinking and Experience* (1953), which deserves reconsideration anyway,⁹ and so I focus primarily on it.

This causes a complication: in the earlier book, Price is an unapologetic “givenist” (Triplett's word), resolutely committed to sense-datum theory. By contrast, in the later one he explicitly notes that his arguments do not *require* sense-data. The fundamental epistemic concept is not acquaintance but (“primary”) *recognition*.

At one point, however, Price ruefully comments that in “earlier days” the characteristics that are objects of primary recognition would have been said to have been “given” (47). Thus, like Triplett (2014, 95 n 12), I take this to be *primarily* a change in vocabulary, necessitated by another historical observation important to Triplett's discussion. By the 1950s, Sellars's audience would not have been sense-datum epistemologists. It is ahistorical, Triplett (2014, 80) insists, to conceive Sellars's argument as *convincing* sense-datum theorists to abandon their position. Triplett offers this in diagnostic spirit, to explain how Sellars could have gotten away with his purported “misconstrual”—

⁸Sellars mentions Moore, but only as a bookend for the “classical period” of sense-datum theorizing, which apparently began with Moore's “Refutation of Idealism”. In *EPM* II he sets off his discussion of Ayer as concerning a non-classical account, and in a footnote to *EPM* III, Sellars mentions Broad's explanatory conception of sense-data, but only to distinguish it from the theory of appearing.

⁹This is especially true in the context of Sellars studies. In personal communication Bill deVries tells me that in the late 1970s, Sellars encouraged him to read *Thinking and Experience*.

his audience wasn't sense-datum theorists, so they didn't object to his misconstrual. While the burden of my argument is that no such diagnosis is needed, the point about the audience is sound, and substantiated by evidence internal to *EPM*: "many who claim to attack the framework of givenness—and they are an increasing number—are really only attacking sense data" (§1). Sellars is self-consciously riding a sociological wave away from sense-datum theory, and his purpose is to make sure that the theory is rejected for the right reasons.¹⁰

Price is swimming against that wave. He is still a sense-datum epistemologist, if by now of an idiosyncratic sort, but he recognizes that for his arguments to find an audience, they must be divorced from what might look like an outmoded dogma.¹¹ This complicates the interpretation of the text, for Price does not spell out the relationship between his two sets of vocabulary. Triplett (2014, 95 n 14) plausibly supposes that recognition just is the replacement for acquaintance. I return to this question later: some problems with that identification will cut to the heart of the matter.

In *EPM* Sellars references Price twice on one page. First:

The real test of a theory of language lies not in its account of what has been called (by H. H. Price) "thinking in absence", but in its account of "thinking in presence"—that is to say, its account of those occasions on which the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact is exhibited. And many theories which look like psychological nominalism when one views their account of thinking in absence, turn out to be quite "Augustinian" when the scalpel is turned to their account of thinking in presence. (*EPM* §30)

¹⁰This fits well with Sellars's metaphilosophical commitments. In the opening of "Particulars" (*P*), and again in "Phenomenalism" (*PH*), he stresses the tendency to attack a symptom (e.g., sense-data) rather than the underlying disease.

¹¹In a reply to a reviewer (R. J. C. Burgener), Price emphasizes the tricky "climate of opinion" in which he was writing, namely an audience of admirers of the later Wittgenstein. He comments, "I am really just an old fashioned British empiricist" (Price 1959, 481).

For now we can let the reference to psychological nominalism slide (see Section 6 below). The important point is that considering the status of acquaintance in Price is "turning the scalpel" on Price's view; I will be arguing that Sellars intends us to do just that. Thus, this is not as positive a reference as it might seem.

A short while later, there is an unambiguously positive reference. Having moved (it seems) on to reflection on the possibility of a broadly behaviorist theory, Sellars comments:

there is a temptation to suppose that the word "red" means the quality *red* by virtue of these two facts: briefly, the fact that it has the *syntax* of a predicate, and the fact that it is a *response* (in certain circumstances) to red objects . . . [T]his account of the meaningfulness of "red" . . . Price has correctly stigmatized as the "thermometer view". (*EPM* §31)

Price introduces the thermometer view as a conception of human nature underwriting a "sign" theory of symbolization. Sign-based thinking is a very simplistic (genetically ancient) variety of thinking in absence. When I prepare for the coming storm, on seeing its sign in the darkening clouds, I am "thinking of" the storm, but only in absence. When we conceive of the animal deploying signs in this way, it underlines the idea that one can think "in absence" in *this* sense without the spontaneous capacity to, e.g., reflect on the nature of storms. Price invokes the then current psychological distinction between "tied" and "free" representation to locate the point: sign-based thinking is "tied".¹²

¹²Sellars employs this distinction too: "much of what (among philosophers) passes for tough-minded psychology is an over-simplified extension to the higher processes of the dog-fingersnap-sit-up-sugar schema of tied responses to environmental stimuli" (*LRB* 298). More explicitly, in the previously unpublished "Psychologism" manuscript included as an appendix to Olen (2016): "'Free' linguistic activity is not only *peculiar* to man, it is so characteristic of his behavior that it permeates even his 'tied' activities and gives them a nature and scope not to be encountered in the activities of animals lower in the evolutionary scale" (171). Olen stresses that Sellars's late 1940s shift towards

The crucial truth in the thermometer view, Price maintains, is the centrality of ostensive definition: “verbal thinking really would be impossible” without it (Price 1953, 221). This is echoed in Sellars’s comment about “those occasions on which the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact is exhibited”. Price and Sellars *agree* that such occasions are fundamental, *and* that it is easy to mischaracterize them in virtue of that fact. According to Price, the sign theory of symbolization misleadingly focuses on “ceremonious” ostensions like “this is a cat”. Ostensive definition typically occurs not ceremoniously but in occasions of “perceptual concern”, moments of perceptually mediated practical engagement with one’s environment (“good kitty!” or “the cat wants to be fed”). Without long experience with such implicit ostensions, one is in no position to understand a ceremonious ostension.

Most importantly, a picture that over-emphasizes the role of ostensive definition “can make no room for the distinction between tied thinking and free” (200). Picking up Sellars’s allusion from the first quotation above, we can say that Price is accusing the thermometer view of being “Augustinian” in its account of (free) thinking in absence. The fact that thinking in presence is definitively “tied” might have suggested that thinking in absence is the true test of a theory of language. That is to say, it might seem as if the accusation of being “Augustinian” only makes sense in the context of thinking in absence. Sellars’s argument, on the contrary, is that such objections can—and, in the case of Price, do—apply to accounts of thinking in presence as well.

behaviorism abandons the “formal” austerity of Sellars’s earliest work (see also Tripodi 2011). While undeniably true, if I am right it is not that revealing. As Sellars invokes behavioristic language, he also introduces a cautionary note: insofar as behaviorism makes our “tied” activities indistinguishable from those of animals “lower in the evolutionary scale”, it is not accounting for *thinking* in presence. This is independent of Tripodi’s and Olen’s shared observation that Sellars’s Skinnerian vocabulary quickly became out-of-date.

3. Sellars on Thinking in Presence

To contextualize the discussion of Price in *EPM*, it will help to briefly consider Sellars’s earlier work. The line of thought I am detecting here can be found in Sellars’s first publications, where it is not restricted to broadly externalist “thermometer model” semantic theories. It is Sellars’s basic concern about traditional empiricism.

Sellars’s first three publications (*PPE*, *ENWW*, *RNWW*) can usefully be grouped together as his “pure pragmatics” papers. All three were written around the same time, have some overlap between them, and are nearly impenetrable. Illuminating recent work by Peter Olen (2016) is changing that, but I do not pretend to offer a comprehensive account of pure pragmatics. Rather, I mean only to tease out a theme relevant to current concerns, the contrast between “verified” and “confirmed” sentences and predicates. Though this terminology suggests interest in pure epistemology, that is misleading: both are produced by an omniscient subject, and so express knowledge.¹³ The difference is not in epistemic status but their place in our cognitive economy.

Verified sentences, like Schlick’s *Konstatierungen*, co-occur with their “designata”; verified predicates occur in verified sentences.¹⁴ A merely confirmed sentence is not verifiable but is true as a matter of, roughly, material inference, what at this point he calls linguistic conformation laws within a “world-story”.¹⁵ A good example of an unverifiable sentence is a past-tense statement: it cannot co-occur with the fact in virtue of which it is true (as that fact is in the past). It can nevertheless express knowl-

¹³Sellars uses the device of the omniscient subject in both *ENWW* and *RNWW*. At *PPE* 191, he considers the complaint that in treating both the verified and the confirmed as (therefore) true he is collapsing an important distinction.

¹⁴For the comparison to Schlick, see *PPE* 200 (also *EPM* VIII, esp. §§33–35; in §35, he calls back to Price’s critique of the thermometer model).

¹⁵Boris Brandhoff (2017) argues that these come to the same. Olen (2016, chap. 3.3) suggests some ways they might come apart.

edge; Sellars's thought is that confirmed sentences in general are like that.

The possibility he is keen to raise, and defends most explicitly in *RNWW*, is that some primitive *predicates* are merely confirmable, i.e., do not occur in verifiable sentences.¹⁶ The contrary position he associates with Russell's principle of acquaintance (*PPE* 193). Though he doesn't make much of it at this point, already in *RNWW* (448) Sellars connects this issue to the interpretation of scientific theories. This connection will loom large below (Section 7).

That any sentence system has a "verification base" is, Sellars says, a "theorem in pure pragmatics" (*PPE* 193) and a commitment of the minimal empiricism he himself endorses. Indeed, it is in virtue of verification that a world story counts as being about the world it takes place in. Thus, like I said, for Sellars thinking in presence is essential to our cognitive economy. But his central point is that verifications must "gear in" with conformation laws and, hence, merely confirmable predicates (if any there be). One of the threads woven into the complex tapestry of Sellars's short-lived program in pure pragmatics is the idea that sensual confrontation, though important, has been misinterpreted in the empiricist tradition that Sellars locates himself in.

This theme emerges somewhat more clearly in an intriguing 1949 essay called "Acquaintance and Description Again" (*AD*). The bulk of the short piece is a dialogue between, as Sellars puts it in his concluding remarks, "two of the many souls which vie in Lord Russell's breast" (*AD* 502): a logician named "Russell" and a sense-datum epistemologist named "Cantibrigian". It is relevant to my overarching aim to note that Cantibrigian the epistemologist mentions *knowledge* exactly once and in passing. "Epistemology" as Sellars understands it is a more expansive subfield than it is often conceived today.

¹⁶*RNWW* 447. The possibility of such predicates, he says, "is what distinguishes my position from positivism" (*ENWW* 656 n 20).

In his concluding remarks, Sellars asks how best to criticize Cantibrigian:

Is it enough to point out that the psychology of human cognition is most certainly not built on the concept of a meaning relation which holds between sign-events and other items, particulars or universals, in one field of acquaintance? No, for the mistake which Cantabrigan makes is a more basic one which could be allied with sound psychological doctrine. (*AD* 502)

The basic error made by the sense-datum theorist does not depend on what, a little while later, he calls "the pseudo-psychology of the 'given'". Notably, this characterization ("pseudo-psychology") comes without argument: even in 1949 Sellars did not think his audience would be shocked by off-hand repudiation of psychological givenness.

The sense-datum theorist and her more psychologically astute critic share a faulty theory of designation, as "a reconstruction of being present to an experience". For instance, Sellars applauds Cantibrigian's argument that Russell's theory of descriptions can (contra the Russell of the dialogue) explain how we can describe more than we can name. But Cantibrigian supposes this to show how we break out of "the semantic solipsism of the present moment" (*AD* 500)—in the absence of being able to describe further than we can name, Cantibrigian assumes, we would be stuck there. By contrast, on Sellars's view designation essentially concerns "the relation of sign habits to features of the environment in abstraction from particular acts of experiencing these features" (*AD* 503). *Names*, we could say, are essentially available for thinking in absence. "It is *demonstratives* and not *names* which are limited in their reference to items belonging to the same experiential situation in which they occur." Thus, the theory of descriptions cannot play its crucial "epistemological" role: taking us from thinking in presence to thinking in absence. Without names (deployable in absence) one has nothing to use a theory of descriptions on, and with names one is already able to

think in absence and so does not need the theory of descriptions (for *those* purposes).

Thus, at least in the late 1940s Sellars does not hang his critique of sense-data on their failure to serve as epistemic foundations. He is concerned with the relationship between thinking in absence and thinking in presence. If Sellars's position in *EPM* really is that sense-datum theorists are (one and all?) committed to thesis A of his inconsistent triad, he has *forgotten* what he clearly knew before, that there is a role for sense-data that does not depend on their justificatory relation to empirical knowledge.

Moreover, whereas none of his arguments in the 1940s invokes anything like thesis A, he does express a concern at least superficially like the one he discusses in *EPM* in connection with Price. It should come as little surprise if the formulations of *EPM* I are novel repackagings of his standing concerns. That is what we shall see.

4. Price on Recognition

Let's return, then, to Price. Price (1953) opens with a detailed analysis of the metaphysics of universals, the upshot of which is that the disagreement between an Aristotelean realism ("the philosophy of universals") and a more contemporary "resemblance" theory is almost entirely verbal. On either view, *recurrence* is essential to the possibility of intelligent activity. This leads him into what he calls "epistemology".

Price's reason for foregrounding recurrence is Rylean. Intelligence is exhibited first and foremost in behavior: "one may say if one pleases that the skilful or cunning performer is thinking after all. But then we must explain that he is thinking *in his actions*, and not in words or images; it is his hands or feet that he thinks with" (Price 1953, 34). According to Price, this would be impossible if the intelligent performer never recognized recurrence; and without recurrence, there would be nothing to recognize. Whatever differences there might be between the philosophy of

universals and the resemblance theory, they both have the same explanandum—intelligent behavior derived from recognition—and so cannot disagree on the fact of recurrence.

Recognition is the epistemic complement to recurrence: "In a world of incessant novelty, where there was no recurrence at all and no tedious repetitions, no concepts could ever be acquired . . . in such a world nothing would ever be recognizable" (8). (This "world of incessant novelty" plays an important role in the next section.) Given recurrence, recognition enables intelligence. If nothing were recognizable, recurrent, there would be no opportunities to develop intelligence, and if nothing were recognized there would be no opportunity to display it. But more importantly, recurrence takes on an epistemic significance in recognition by making conceptualization possible. "Before I can conceive the colour violet *in abstracto* . . . I must first learn to recognize instances of this colour when I see them. To think of it in absence, I must first learn to recognize it in presence" (35).

Recognition—what, when speaking with the philosophy of universals, Price calls the "awareness" of a universal—is supposed to constitute a cognitive stratum between free thinking in absence and mere "noticing", the conscious presence of some characteristic. Recognition results only in *tied* thinking in absence. Price registers helpful ambivalence when he notes that it is a matter for verbal decision whether sign-cognition of this sort deserves the label "thinking" (93–96).

Two features of Price's analysis are worth noting. First, recognition is basically indifferent as between "determinable" and "determinate" universals. He draws attention to our ability (and, he notes, the pheasant's as well) to recognize a blackberry bush by shape (54), though the determinate shape of a given blackberry bush is so complex as to be unrecognizable. What we recognize (in the "primary" sense) is often (merely) determinable.

Second, while he insists that recognition is a function of memory, Price denies that it is a function of *recollective* memory. Think of entering a familiar room and exclaiming that the furniture

has been changed (68). Such a feeling presupposes memory, in some sense, of how the furniture was, but you might well not be able to *recall* how the furniture was: you need only exercise recognitive memory. Recognizing something involves a feeling of (un)familiarity, but not necessarily the ability to recollect the incident in virtue of which one recognizes the situation. “No doubt, if the [recognized] characteristic feels familiar to us, we have as a matter of fact experienced at least one previous instance of it; but we need not recall when or how” (58). This will be a crucial point in my discussion below: as a matter of fact, the awareness (in Price’s technical sense) of a universal always presupposes a previous encounter.

At least at first, thinking in absence—as with the storm—presupposes previous thinking in presence. This goes also for what Price calls “secondary” recognition, like recognizing, on the basis of a “flappy” gestalt, that what is going overhead is a crow. In such an experience, one is not recognizing (in the primary sense for sure) other characteristic features of crows—sounds, close-up looks, etc. Nevertheless, Price is clear that (whether we “ought” to or not) we do not *infer* from primary objects of recognition (here, the flappy gestalt) to, e.g., crow-ness. A crucial feature that writes “signs” deep into our intellectual economy is the fact that inductive sign-based thinking informs perception, through secondary recognition.

With this contrast between primary and secondary recognition in place, one final essential point emerges: primary recognition always concerns characteristics, not individuals. The (secondary) recognition of the latter always “involves abstraction, the conceiving of characteristics in absence, as well as the recognition of them in presence” (39). For Price, the cognitive simplicity of a characteristic is essential to its availability for recognition.

By now we can see why Triplett suggests recognition is the stand-in for knowledge by acquaintance in *Thinking and Experience*. Price depicts recognition as the fundamental cognitive activity, underlying the capacity for thinking quite generally.

His is a subtle account, clearly designed to avoid a number of familiar objections to sense-datum epistemology, and indeed Price stresses that his story does not depend on (though it is friendly to) sense-datum theorizing. Most importantly, no propositional knowledge is on the scene until free conceptualized thinking is available. There is, thus, no reason to attribute thesis A to Price.

5. The Structure of Repeatability

I quoted Price as saying that “as a matter of fact” recognition presupposes previous experience of a characteristic. He dedicates a whole chapter to the possibility of what he calls “errors of recognition”. Most of his discussion concerns ways in which what looks like error is not really error of primary recognition. The exception is Russell’s thought experiment of the world having been created one second ago, with all our memories intact. Here, recognition would proceed without the previous experience of a characteristic. Price takes it, though, that what this shows is really only that recognition is not an infallible guide to the past. I’ll return to this shortly.

Already this suggests a difficulty for identifying recognition and acquaintance. Recognition is a *complex* cognitive act, involving both a memorial component and “noticing”—“a cognitive function which is too elementary to be erroneous” (Price 1953, 85). In its simplicity and immunity to error, it is tempting to compare noticing to acquaintance. Colloquially, at least, to *recognize* someone we must already have some acquaintance with them. I said that recognition presupposes a previous experience. Shouldn’t that previous experience have been the initial acquaintance, in virtue of which recognition can occur?

Only someone who *is* acquainted with something is a candidate for *recognizing* them. My suggestion, then, is that noticing is *becoming* acquainted. Perhaps Price’s equation is between being able to recognize and *being*—not *becoming*—acquainted. While plausible, this leaves the difficulty that recognition is oc-

current, where being acquainted (being able to recognize) is dispositional.

Be that as it may, Price at least once says that he has called primary recognition “noticing” (45). But officially the view is more careful: “awareness of a universal . . . is not merely the noticing of something now present; it is also a function of memory. A universal . . . is a *recurrent* feature of the world. And in being aware of it I am aware of it *as recurrent*” (61). Awareness, unlike noticing, is awareness of a characteristic *as recurrent*.

This is from the perspective of the philosophy of universals; in the resemblance theory recurrence is not *identity*, and so the point is a little more complex. Crucial to the resemblance theorist’s analysis of recognition is a “totalistic memory” of a set of exemplar objects, “alike in the midst of unlikeness”, i.e., closely resembling one another in only one of the many ways they could resemble objects (thus, a group of red objects unlike in shape and size). Recognition, then, is “the *way* we (actively) remember an exemplar group when we perceive a new object which resembles that group as a whole” (72)—we perceive the object, he says, “in the light of” the exemplar group; and indeed, we remember the exemplar group “in the light of” the perceived object. Again, this is not *recollective* but merely cognitive memory. The putative upshot is a new appreciation for the significance of memory to conceptual life: “in the totalistic memory of a set of exemplar-objects as a whole, we have the first faint beginnings of an abstract idea” (73).¹⁷

As this detailed analysis of memory suggests, Price’s account of recognition is sophisticated. Though sometimes it seems otherwise, the official view is not that there is a brute and unanalyzable feeling of familiarity, which accompanies some acts of noticing. Recognition is a (complex) whole, not a mere combination of noticing plus feeling: as I said, it is awareness “as recurrent”.

¹⁷Price’s relation to Berkeleyan abstraction looms large below. But an abstract idea would be available in absence, and the totalistic memory is only drawn on in recognition—i.e., “in presence”.

There are two thoughts embedded in this claim, worth teasing apart.

Recall that primary recognition is of characteristics, not continuant particulars. Reidentifying a particular, Price claims, imposes a cognitive load that goes beyond merely recognizing a further instance of a repeatable. Individuals are not repeatable, and this is why they cannot be recognized in the primary sense; what is recognized in the primary sense is repeatable. By the same token what we notice are repeatables too.

The first point to draw out from Price’s analysis of awareness is that it is awareness of a universal *as repeatable*, multiply instantiable. This involves sensitivity to what I’ll call the structure of repeatability. This phenomenological claim is distinct from the second point: the genetic claim that in order to be aware of a universal as possessing the structure of repeatability, one must have encountered it *at least twice* (at least once prior to this). Price’s characterization of our awareness of universals “as recurrent” runs these together. If, instead, we talk of awareness of a universal as *repeatable*, we have terminological leverage to ask, as Price cannot quite: does such awareness really *require* recurrence? Noticing is of repeatables, but not “as recurrent”. Does that mean it is not of them “as repeatable”? Does mere noticing involve sensitivity to the structure of repeatability?

Powerful arguments can be made on either side. Recall Russell’s thought-experiment: if the world was created one second ago with all my “memories” intact, I would be aware of universals. On Price’s view I would be (erroneously) aware of them “as recurrent”, and our terminology helps make this a little less paradoxical: I am aware of them as repeatable, and take them to be recurrent. The evidence of my experience as to the past is misleading. As I said, it is merely as a *matter of fact* that awareness presupposes recurrence; awareness is, first and foremost, awareness of the repeatable.

On this line of thought, Price should deny that *noticing* involves sensitivity to the structure of repeatability, and this is

in keeping with his opening discussion of the world of incessant novelty. There, presumably, there *is* noticing. But if there is sensitivity to the structure of repeatability, then there could be erroneous “recognitive” experiences. It is not just the capacity to think about certain repeatables—violet, say—that is acquired, but sensitivity to the structure of repeatability itself.

Price cannot simply endorse this line of thought, though, for if it is correct, it is hard to see how *re*-cognition works. Price’s two analyses of recognition appeal to earlier cognitions, earlier episodes that are qualitatively identical, or at least similar. But this implies that those earlier episodes *did* involve sensitivity to the structure of repeatability. They, so to speak, looked forward to the possibility of being recognized later. Of course, insofar as it was the first encounter, they did not have a characteristic feeling of familiarity; but if they were to be recognized later, the experience of them must have been sensitive to their repeatability.

So Price faces a dilemma: noticing must both be and not be a sensitivity to the structure of repeatability. This problem emerges from attending, as Triplett advised, to the details of Price’s view. But I have massaged it into a form in which it makes direct contact with an argument from *EPM*.¹⁸ The argu-

¹⁸Compare Carl Sachs’s enlightening argument that C. I. Lewis falls foul of the myth of the Given when he insists that the given is qualitative and so repeatable (Sachs 2014, chap. 2). Sachs takes repeatability to be a problem because it is conceptual, and so cannot supply “transcendental friction”. My diagnosis is different: whereas the capacity for awareness of the Given is supposed to be innate, sensitivity to repeatability is—perhaps because conceptual—acquired. I worry that on Sachs’s view, it is a condition on “transcendental friction” that what provides it be innate, in which case it is inevitably “Given” in Sellars’s pejorative sense. (The issue is most clear in Sachs’s treatment of John McDowell: McDowell (1994) thinks that by construing passivity as drawing on conceptual capacities we can see it as, in a sense, providing transcendental friction. But for Sachs that is a non-starter, because it construes passivity as drawing on conceptual capacities. Perhaps McDowell’s account doesn’t work, but so far as I can tell Sachs’s argument simply fails to engage with how “transcendental friction” would figure in McDowell’s thought. Thanks to Griffin Klemick for

ment occurs immediately before Sellars references Price, in an extended discussion of the classical empiricist tradition in *EPM* VI, when Sellars introduces his psychological nominalism. I turn to that now.

6. Psychological Nominalism and Sense-data

In *EPM* VI Sellars criticizes Hume and Berkeley for inattention to the relation between repeatability and determinability: Hume’s Berkeleyan attack on abstract ideas targets *determinable* ideas, while taking for granted *repeatable determinate* ideas. Though Sellars does not mention Price here, the Berkeleyan line is contrary to Price’s observation that our cognitive economy shows no special preference for determinate as opposed to (merely) determinable recognition.¹⁹ One way of reacting to Price’s observation would be to reinstate abstract—determinable—ideas: after all, we can recognize determinable repeatables just as well as their determinate counterparts. But Sellars insists that this is not the only reaction available, nor the one most in the spirit of classical empiricism.

Sellars introduces psychological nominalism as a more thoroughgoing Berkeleyan nominalism.²⁰ Hume would have hit upon it, Sellars says, had he characterized initial elements of ex-

helpful conversation on this point.)

¹⁹Price (1940) complains repeatedly that Hume minimizes the complexity of repetition: 33–34, 45–48, 60.

²⁰A few critics have noted the importance of this move. Paul Snowdon (2009, 111) sees Sellars’s observation that Hume and Berkeley did not endorse psychological nominalism as registering an undefeated way out for the sense-datum epistemologist. And David Chalmers (2003, 263 n 21) recognizes Sellars’s discussion as contrary to his own (non-propositional) foundationalism. Chalmers is unmoved because he sees no problem with innate access to determinate repeatables. For present purposes, we need only note that Price’s attitude—denying that determinacy confers special status—faces the would-be empiricist with a dilemma: either the innate access in question is to repeatables in general, or there is no such innate access. The first horn abandons what Sellars calls the “nominalistic proclivities” of the empiricist tradition.

perience as “*red particulars*” not “*impressions of red*” (*EPM* §29, 160), for the latter characterization, unlike the former, gives the impression of repeatability. It ought not to be assumed that the initial elements of experience are cognized as repeatable.

Had Hume made this observation, his view would have been that “all consciousness of sorts or repeatables rests on an association of *words* (e.g., ‘red’) with classes of resembling particulars”. This is Sellars’s initial introduction of psychological nominalism, which he immediately observes is “hopelessly crude”.²¹ A proper understanding of Sellars’s own positive view would require careful attention to this point: he takes it to clear the way “to recognizing that basic word-world associations hold, for example, between “red” and red physical objects” (contrast Price’s discussion of recognizing particulars). For present purposes, however, we just need to relate it to Price.

If the immediate experience Sellars is offering Hume corresponds to Price’s noticing, then Sellars’s argument is that noticing cannot, in the first instance, be of repeatables (“as repeatable”). As we saw, this seems to be Price’s view as well. While Sellars does not mention Price in *EPM* VI, he spells out the connection close to explicitly. His (nominalistic) Humean subject associates words with classes of resembling particulars, but does not presuppose “awareness *that they are resembling particulars*” much less “awareness *that they are red*”. Where these would require sensitivity to the structure of repeatability, Sellars’s Humean subject is not aware of it as possessing a repeatable character, being red. The two kinds of awareness Sellars distances himself from here correspond to the two analyses of recognition Price gives, for resemblance theory and the philosophy of uni-

²¹Much has been made of Sellars’s invocation of language here (“all awareness... is a linguistic affair”, *EPM* §29). But it is less often noted that the “crude” reference to language derives from Hume. What really matters is that capacities for recognition are acquired. A stress on words does helpfully bring into focus the *social* dimension of this process of acquisition. But the connection to language as such can be overstated—including sometimes by Sellars himself.

versals. Price’s invocation of recognition presupposes that one can notice something as possessing a repeatable character; but on Price’s own accounting this is an acquired characteristic.

Triplett (2014, 85) stresses that recognition is supposed to be available to animals and pre-linguistic humans. This does not change the basic point. For one thing, Price attributes to animals a kind of inductive learning (cf. Price 1953, 42), and Sellars’s argument depends solely on the contrast between what is acquired and what is innate. Perhaps non-human animals acquire sensitivity to the structure of repeatability too.

More importantly, the plausibility of this thought depends on just what that sensitivity is. All can agree that if recognition is just “noticing” plus a feeling of familiarity, i.e., an ability to let the past guide future action, it is widespread in the animal kingdom. Price quotes C. J. Holloway as saying that an intelligent being “does not waste his past” (1953, 59), and adds that even “the humblest slug (unless it is a mere automaton)” clears this bar. But on Price’s official view, sensitivity to the structure of repeatability ought to be more sophisticated than simply allowing the past to condition one’s responses (“feeling of familiarity” or not). Conflating this distinction makes it seem possible to isolate recognition as a discrete stage in conceptual development. But Sellars’s view all along has been that sensitivity to the structure of repeatability requires the capacity for thinking in absence. It is his inattention to this point that makes Price’s account of thinking in presence “Augustinian”.

7. Revisiting the Inconsistent Triad

Sellars argues that traditional empiricism ties the acquisition of content too intimately to thinking in presence, as if such thinking is a self-standing phenomenon. Thinking in presence only counts as such in virtue of its relationship to conceptual abilities that are not, as he put it in the pure pragmatics papers, “verifiable”. More generally, thinking in presence gears in with a

proper account of thinking in absence. Nothing in any of this depends on epistemic foundations.

This is the theme of *EPM* VI and VII. But Triplett's concern was *EPM* I: the "inconsistent triad" in particular insinuates the centrality of thesis *A* to sense-datum epistemology. If the later arguments are more studied than the initial presentation, still—Triplett might complain—the damage is done.

From the vantage we have achieved now, however, it is relatively easy to reconstruct the core argument of *EPM* I without centering foundationalism. In *EPM* VI, when Sellars discusses the awareness of repeatables he glosses it as the awareness "that they are red". But nothing turns on this propositional phrasing: he could just as well have characterized it as awareness of them "as red". Recall the entailments Sellars used to explain away knowledge of particulars in *EPM* I: non-inferential knowledge of a sense content that it is red is the sensing of it as red, in which case we can say it is sensed "full stop", in which case we can say it is known "full stop", i.e., that we are acquainted with it. The question is whether the very first step is essential: must sensing "as" presuppose propositional knowledge?

If Sellars's primary target is narrowly epistemological, and only propositional knowledge can play the epistemological role he has in mind, the argument would be unintelligible without that presupposition. But considerations like the ones Sellars uses here were active earlier in his career without this narrowly epistemological gloss. I suggest, therefore, that these propositional terms are an optional means—deriving from the foundationalist concerns that givenists did at least sometimes have—of stressing that the object of an experience possesses the structure of repeatability. Sellars wants most to insist that to have an experience as of a repeatable is connected with the ability to think in absence, in such a way that it is necessarily acquired. He could have started with the sensing of the particular "as" red.

Thus, we can restate the inconsistent triad without reference to knowledge:

- A'. *X* senses red sense content *s* entails *X* experiences *s* as (repeatably) red.
- B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
- C'. Sensitivity to the structure of repeatability—the ability to enjoy experiences of *s* as φ —is acquired.

I have put the argument in the terminology of the theory of universals, which as Price notes is in some ways less cumbersome. But with a little preparation, it gives way to resemblance theory just as well. In this case, the structure of repeatability needs to be cashed out in terms of resemblance. To cut a corner I shall introduce what I'll call a "candidate ressembler": to say that some particular is a candidate ressembler is to say it is the sort of thing about which "have I seen something like this before?" ("does this remind me of anything?") makes sense. Then the argument can be stated like this:

- A". *X* senses red sense content *s* entails *X* experiences *s* as a candidate ressembler.
- B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
- C". The ability to experience objects as candidate ressemblers is acquired.

Of course this is not yet to say why Sellars did not put it this way—I discuss this below. But I offer these rewritten versions of the argument to secure a preliminary point. A line of thought that would count against Price is only a slight variation on the inconsistent triad Sellars in fact offered the sense-datum epistemologist. Thus, Triplett notwithstanding, Sellars's discussion is not irrelevant to Price's view. I have not *defended* Sellars's objection, of course. To evaluate this dispute requires careful consideration of C' and C". But Sellars does argue for those claims in part VI, on what I have maintained (Section 5 above) are terms internal to Price's position. Moreover, at least put as bluntly as I have, they carry the air of plausibility. So I leave the point there for now.

8. Foundationalism and the Myth of the Given

The final question, then, is why Sellars put this point in narrowly epistemological terms. What relationship *did* Sellars see between epistemic foundationalism and the myth of the given?

I began from Sellars's characterization of the point of the given as ("presumably") "to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a 'foundation' of non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact" (*EPM* §3, 128). This is one claim that funds the assumption that foundational structure just *is* the target of his argument. It is at least curious, then, that in *EPM* VIII ("Does Empirical Knowledge Rest on a Foundation?") Sellars characterizes a generalized epistemic foundationalism as "[o]ne of the forms taken by the Myth of the Given" (§32).

Indeed, he makes it sound as if he is introducing foundationalism for the first time, and only now arguing that it too falls foul of the myth of the given. And what he says is equivocal: there *is* point to the metaphor of foundations. The problem is not the claim, properly understood, that observations play a foundational role in epistemology. Rather, taking this unproblematic claim too seriously distorts our understanding of human cognition:

Above all, the picture is misleading because of its static character. One seems forced to choose between the picture of an elephant which rests on a tortoise (What supports the tortoise?) and the picture of the great Hegelian serpent of knowledge with its tail in its mouth (Where does it begin?). Neither will do. For empirical knowledge, like its sophisticated extension, science, is rational, not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put *any* claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once. (*EPM* §38)

That Sellars offers an alternative to foundationalism and coherence is an interpretive commonplace.²² But the issue here isn't re-

²²Michael Williams (2009, §8, 180–82) even connects this point to scientific realism, as I do below. But in characterizing Sellars as a "radical fallibilist"

ally correct epistemology: as Danielle Macbeth (2018, 139) notes, the last sentence concerns what makes science (and "empirical knowledge" in general) *rational*. For all Sellars says, empirical knowledge could *have* foundations. What he denies is that such foundations make "knowledge" *rational*.

Empirical cognition is rational because it is *dynamic* (not "static"). Recall the upshot of *AD* (Section 3 above): a Russellian "epistemology" could account for the fact that a subject can describe further than she can name, but it is useless to address the solipsism of the present moment. More generally, while Russell's theory of descriptions can account for a subject's capacity to "refer to" items with which she lacks acquaintance (in the colloquial sense), it can only do so *given* that the subject is in a position to use *names* for items of that sort, whether in virtue of (colloquial) acquaintance or not. This is the point Sellars stresses in *EPM* VII, when he discusses thinking in presence. And it is a crucial feature of Sellars's epistemology of science: scientific theories generate new content, of a sort that cannot be explained by appeal to such analytical devices as Russell's theory of descriptions.²³

The epistemology of science is the topic of *EPM* IX. Here, the dynamic character of rationality is reflected in its denial of absolute "authenticity" to any category of object:

There is a widespread impression that reflection on how we learn the language in which, in everyday life, we describe the world leads

Williams highlights that beliefs about ordinary objects *could be false*. If I am right, this epistemic fallibility is merely a symptom of the crucial point: that our ordinary conceptual frame will have to go. Sellars thinks *any* privileging of the conceptual framework of "the manifest image" is incompatible with an anti-instrumentalist epistemology of science, and so falls foul of the myth of the given. Elsewhere (Hicks forthcoming), I argue that this is the thesis of *PSIM*.

²³If the sense of a theory were exhausted by a definite description, "the theory would be no theory at all, but at most the claim that a theory can be found" (*PH* 92). As I mentioned above, Sellars first connected his critique of Russell to the epistemology of science in the pure pragmatics papers (*RNWW* 448).

to the conclusion that the categories of the common sense picture of the world have, so to speak, an unchallengeable authenticity . . . The philosophers I have in mind are united in the conviction that what is called the “ostensive tie” between our fundamental descriptive vocabulary and the world rules out of court as utterly absurd any notion that there are no such things as this framework talks about.
(*EPM* §43, 173)

Among the philosophers implicated by this remark is G. E. Moore, though here not for his commitment to sense-data but for his commitment to common sense. Sellars invokes Moore in this connection in *PSIM*, at a place where, as O’Shea (2007, 194 n6) helpfully reminds us, we can construe Sellars as in dialogue with Stebbing. Moore and Stebbing, of course, were the sense-datum *analysts* who made a brief appearance at the outset of my paper. From the perspective I am outlining, this no longer looks like a coincidence. Whereas a more foundationally-minded sense-datum theorist might see the framework of ordinary objects as in principle revisable (by, say, correctly composing the sense data), Moore and Stebbing think the only way we can understand sense-data is by analyzing the unchallengeably authentic framework of ordinary objects. In each case, sense-data are figuring as a sort of home base for content. But even if one were to *give up* the analytical project and so repudiate sense-data—falling back perhaps on ordinary language as the home base—one would not escape the basic framework of Sellars’s problem.

The extension of Sellars’s attack on the myth of the given to a kind of naive common sense realism is most explicit in *PH*, where he treats naive realism as the most plausible species of phenomenalism. There he says that if the normative fine structure of common sense is adequate as it stands, we would be obliged to adopt an instrumentalist epistemology of science (see esp. *PH* 96). He sends us to *EPM* for refutation of this obligation.

Thus, the target of *EPM* is the assumption that some category of thought-objects—whether sense-data or middle-sized dry goods—has an absolute authenticity, such that the philoso-

pher need only pay respect to it and cannot expect empirical developments to overthrow it. In highlighting the way Sellars’s scientific realism echoes *AD*, I am arguing that his rejection of a “home base” for content is the basic point underlying the attack on the myth of the given.²⁴

This makes intelligible the epistemological language of *EPM* I. If acquaintance provides unrevisably authentic presence to mind, it might be a plausible ground for certainties—at least once subjects acquire the capacity to identify them. But it is not the connection to certainty itself that causes sense-datum epistemology to be locked into the framework of givenness. Thus, one could jettison the project of epistemic foundations and still fall foul of the myth. For the problem is the assumption of unrevisably authentic presence to mind, not the connection of the latter to empirical knowledge.

I began with Triplett’s observation that an ahistorical conception of mid-century analytic philosophy distorts our appreciation of Sellars’s argument in *EPM*. I have argued that this is more true than Triplett himself recognizes. For in contextualizing Sellars’s objection to his sense-datum opponents—most notably Price—we have seen that Sellars’s abiding concern is not with foundationalist epistemology *as such*, but with the static understanding of a conceptual repertoire that it tends to embed. Traditional empiricists rightly emphasize the centrality of thinking in presence to our cognitive economy. They imagine, though, that to register this fact they have to construe thinking in presence as an unchallengeable source of content, reflecting our innately given sentience. The connection between this and talk of foundations, while optional, is obvious. But if I am right more contemporary interest in foundationalist epistemology distracts

²⁴Compare Macbeth’s intriguing discussion of the “myth of the taken” (Macbeth 2017, 178)—content we have somehow “taken” but cannot now revise. Because she takes for granted an epistemological reading of the myth of the given, she makes it seem as if this is only *related* to Sellars’s concern. If I am right, it is the key.

us from Sellars's fundamental concern: the presumption that we must locate an innate openness to something that can count as content. This is the myth of the given.

Acknowledgements

I presented an ancestor of this paper at SSHAP 2019 in Boston, and again at the 2019 NEH Summer Seminar, "Philosophical Responses to Empiricism in Kant, Hegel, and Sellars". I am grateful to both audiences for substantive and constructive feedback that improved the paper immensely. Thanks especially to Griffin Klemick, who was in both audiences; and to Bill deVries and Jim O'Shea for, among many other things, organizing the NEH Seminar.

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