Sellars Contra Deleuze on Intuitive Knowledge

Matija Jelača
University of Pula

The spectre of intuitive knowledge has haunted philosophy since the beginning of philosophical time.1 It appeared under various guises, and took on many different names. But its essence remained the same: it was always supposed to be some kind of immediate knowledge defined explicitly in opposition and as an alternative to conceptual knowledge. Depending on the general framework in which it was invoked, it either proclaimed a higher form of knowledge capable of attaining the absolute (rationalism), or a more basic/fundamental kind of knowledge necessary to ground all knowledge claims (empiricism).

1 I am deeply indebted to Ray Brassier and Pete Wolfendale without whom most of this would not even have been intuited. Apart from their ideas, I am just as grateful for their continual support, encouragement, generosity and patience. I would also like to thank the organisers of the Aesthetics in the 21st Century conference for the opportunity to present my views in front of such an esteemed audience, and all the participants for making it such a memorable event. This version of the paper benefited immensely from the discussions that followed my talk, especially the ones I had with Steven Shaviro, Vijak Haddadi and Ridvan Askin. Finally, a special thanks is in order to Ridvan for being such an attentive reader and discerning interlocutor. The final version of this text is certainly much better for all his questions, interventions, and suggestions.
Kant was the first to denounce the spectral nature of intuitive knowledge. But although Kant’s critical injunction against its possibility, both in its rationalist (“thoughts without content are empty”) and empiricist (“intuitions without concepts are blind”) guises, certainly put the spectre on the defensive, it was by no means enough to vanquish it.\(^2\) Kant’s attack was followed by numerous others, but always with the exact same results: no sooner had one of its incarnations been laid to rest, the spectre would rise from the dead almost instantly, each time in a slightly different form. And to this very day, it continues to haunt us still.

Gilles Deleuze and Wilfrid Sellars, two major representatives of the continental and analytic philosophical traditions respectively, are the best testaments to the claim that the spectre of intuitive knowledge is pretty much alive and well on both sides of the philosophical divide. While the former developed his whole philosophical system around an incredibly rich and sophisticated (and all the more insidious for it!) account of intuitive knowledge, the latter devoted the greatest part of his philosophical adventure to sharpening the weapons necessary to haunt this spectre down and exorcise it in whichever form it takes. Confronting the two with regards to their opposing views on intuitive knowledge presents a perfect opportunity not just for testing their respective claims to knowledge, but also, and more importantly, for posing again the question of the nature and justification of knowledge, a question almost completely forgotten by recent trends in continental philosophy.

Ray Brassier, one of the very few contemporary continental philosophers unwilling to join in on this collective forgetting of the question of knowledge, expressed his perplexities about one particular variant of this trend:

\[\text{I am very wary of “aesthetics”: the term is contaminated by notions of “experience” that I find deeply problematic. I have no philosophy of}\]

art worth speaking of. This is not to dismiss art’s relevance for philosophy—far from it—but merely to express reservations about the kind of philosophical aestheticism which seems to want to hold up “aesthetic experience” as a new sort of cognitive paradigm wherein the Modern (post-Cartesian) “rift” between knowing and feeling would be overcome.³

Although it has recently been taken up again by certain factions of contemporary continental philosophy, the tendency that Brassier describes here is nothing new. In fact, it has a long and noble heritage dating back all the way to the early Romantics. Deleuze’s critique of discursive reason and his appeal to intuitive knowledge, on the one hand, coupled with the strong alliance he has forged with art and aesthetics, on the other, reveal him as a direct successor to the philosophical legacy of early Romanticism. What better way to challenge Deleuze’s Romantic attempt at overcoming the dualism of knowing and feeling than to contrast it with Sellars’s rationalist upholding of its necessity and irreducibility?

This essay is divided into three parts. The first part attempts to demonstrate that Deleuze was in fact a firm believer in the powers of intuitive knowledge. To this end, I will present Deleuze’s accounts of three important notions that appeared throughout his early work: the ideas of mathesis universalis, Bergsonian intuition as a method, and the transcendent exercise of the faculties. The second part of the essay is devoted to Sellars and attempts to show that his famous myth of the given is nothing else than intuitive knowledge itself. Three different accounts of this myth are presented, namely the ones found in “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,”⁴ “The Structure of Knowledge,”⁵ and “The Carus Lectures of

Wilfrid Sellars.” The third and final part concludes the essay by staging a confrontation between these two formidable opponents.

**Deleuze: *Mathesis Universalis, Intuition, Transcendental Empiricism***

For Deleuze, “the world of representation” is not a philosopher’s world. It might be a scientist’s world, it certainly is a technician’s, politician’s, journalist’s, and bureaucrat’s world, but the only engagement with it worthy of a philosopher’s time is learning how to escape it. The main reasons for Deleuze’s philosophical distrust in this world are neither new nor particularly original, and neither is his plan of escape. Possibly the clearest and most straightforward expression of Deleuze’s views on this account can be found in his first published text on Bergson:

One says that science gives us a knowledge of things, that it is therefore in a certain relation with them, and philosophy can renounce its rivalry with science, can leave things to science and present itself solely in a critical manner, as a reflection on this knowledge of things. On the contrary view, philosophy seeks to establish, or rather restore, another relationship to things, and therefore another knowledge, a knowledge and a relationship that precisely science hides from us, of which it deprives us, because it allows us only to conclude and to infer without ever presenting, giving to us the thing in itself.

To understand this passage fully, it is best to supplement it with:


Speculations V

with another quote from one of Deleuze's earliest published writings, “Mathesis, Science and Philosophy”:

Scientific method is explanation. To explain is to account for a thing through something other than itself ... At the other extreme, philosophical method is description in the widest sense of the word; it is that reflexive analysis whereby the sensible world is described as the representation of the cognizing subject—that is to say, here once again, it receives its status from something other than itself.⁹

Deleuze’s argument is seductively simple: science and philosophy (of representation) give us a knowledge of things only through something other than the thing itself. Therefore, they cannot give us the knowledge of the thing itself. An other kind of knowledge is necessary in order to get us at the thing itself. Other to representational or mediated knowledge is immediate knowledge. Therefore, only immediate knowledge can give us knowledge of the thing itself. This is the general structure of Deleuze’s argument against representational and in favour of intuitive knowledge. Depending on the context, the terms may vary, but its basic structure remains the same throughout Deleuze’s entire opus.

To confirm this claim and dispel the possible objection that the quotes above come from Deleuze’s early texts, which do not necessarily express his own views, it will suffice to take a closer look at one important and well known passage from *Difference and Repetition*, considered by many to be Deleuze’s single most important philosophical work, and also the first book in which Deleuze expressly speaks in his own name. By the end of chapter one, entitled “Difference in Itself,” Deleuze famously claims:

We have contrasted representation with a different kind of formation. The elementary concepts of representation are the categories defined

as the conditions of possible experience. These, however, are too general or too large for the real. The net is so loose that the largest fish pass through ... Everything changes once we determine the conditions of real experience, which are not larger than the conditioned and which differ in kind from the categories.¹⁰

It does not take much effort to notice the similarity with the previous argument: representation can give us knowledge of the real only through the categories. Categories are by definition general, while the real is singular. Therefore, representation cannot give us knowledge of the real. An other kind of knowledge is necessary. Other to general concepts are singular concepts, and only the latter can give us knowledge of the real.

Deleuze, then, has staged pretty much the same argument against representation that he has staged in favour of immediate knowledge from his earliest writings up to *Difference and Repetition*. Let us briefly analyse the structure of this argument. It consists of two parts: the first, critical part lays the basis for the second, constructive part. Although it might be interesting to question the critical part of the argument, it will be best to leave that aside for now and focus instead on its constructive part, which is much more important for my present purpose.

Deleuze’s conclusion of the critical part of the argument presents the first premise of the second, constructive part: in order to get at the knowledge of the thing itself/the real, an other kind of knowledge is necessary. This other knowledge is supposed to be immediate and to consist of the creation and application of some kind of singular concepts, concepts appropriate to the thing itself/the real. In order to learn more about this *other knowledge*, it is necessary to return to the texts mentioned above.

Although it was one of Deleuze’s earliest published writings, later explicitly disowned by him along everything else published before 1953, “Mathesis, Science and Philosophy” might very well be the most revealing text by Deleuze when

¹⁰ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 68.
Speculations V

it comes to the question of what this other knowledge is supposed to be. The short answer would be *mathesis universalis*. But then, what is *mathesis universalis*? According to Deleuze, the opposition of science and philosophy has opened up a fundamental dualism within knowledge, the Cartesian dualism between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*.\(^\text{11}\) *Mathesis universalis* (universal knowledge or universal science) names the desire to overcome this dualism and accomplish a “unity of knowledge.”\(^\text{12}\) This unity is “the unity of life itself”: “Life is the unity of the soul as the idea of the body and of the body as the extension of the soul.”\(^\text{13}\) Accordingly, “mathesis deploys itself at the level of life, of living man: *it is first and foremost a thinking of incarnation and of individuality.*”\(^\text{14}\)

But how does *mathesis* attain this knowledge of incarnation and individuality? As we have seen, both science and philosophy reduce the sensible object to an object of thought. In order to overcome this duality of the object of thought and the sensible object, the method of *mathesis* must reduce “this object of thought back to the sensible, quantity to quality.”\(^\text{15}\) It achieves this through the deployment of the *symbol*, which presents precisely “a sensible object as the incarnation of an object of thought,” this sensible object being “the very incarnation of knowledge.”\(^\text{16}\) And finally, “the symbol is the identity, the *encounter* of the sensible object and the object of thought. The sensible object is called symbol, and the object of thought, losing all scientific signification, is a hieroglyph or a cipher. In their identity, they form the concept.”\(^\text{17}\)

Without getting into all the details that a complete account of this text would require, this short and condensed exposition

\(\text{11}\) Deleuze, “Mathesis, Science and Philosophy,” 142.
\(\text{12}\) Ibid., 142.
\(\text{13}\) Ibid., 143.
\(\text{14}\) Ibid. my emphasis.
\(\text{15}\) Ibid., 150.
\(\text{16}\) Ibid.
\(\text{17}\) Ibid., 150–51.
of only a few of its aspects is more than enough to clearly show that *mathesis universalis* indeed is Deleuze’s *other knowledge*. Defined as a knowledge of incarnation and individuality, *mathesis universalis* responds perfectly to our earlier description of Deleuze’s *other knowledge* as an immediate knowledge of the thing itself. Furthermore, this text provides a clue as to how this singular knowledge might be possible: by way of concepts formed through the deployment of symbols.

In his various writings on Bergson, this *other knowledge* figures under the name of *intuition*. In “Bergson, 1859–1941,” Deleuze explicitly pits intuition against science: contrary to science, which “allows us only to conclude and to infer without ever presenting, giving to us the thing in itself,” it is “in and through intuition that something is presented, is given in person, instead of being inferred from something else and concluded.”

But, in Deleuze’s reading of Bergson, intuition is not to be understood in the ordinary sense of the word. That is, intuition is “neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method, one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy,” a method capable of establishing philosophy as an “absolutely ‘precise’ discipline, as precise in its field, as capable of being prolonged and transmitted as science itself is.”

A question immediately springs to mind, one that Deleuze certainly acknowledges: “How is intuition—which primarily denotes an immediate knowledge (*connaissance*)—capable of forming a method, once it is accepted that the method essentially involves one or several mediations?” As an answer to this question, Deleuze first states that although Bergson often does present intuition “as a simple act,” this simplicity “does not exclude a qualitative and virtual multiplicity,” following which he formulates “three different sorts of acts that determine the rules” of intuition as a method: “The first concerns the

---

20 Ibid., 13-14.
Speculations V

stating and creating of problems; the second, the discovery of genuine differences in kind; the third, the apprehension of real time.”\textsuperscript{21} The most interesting aspect is addressed in the second rule, which presents intuition as a method that “rediscover the true differences in kind or articulations of the real.”\textsuperscript{22} The most concise account of this crucial aspect of intuition as a method is to be found in Deleuze’s text “Bergson’s Conception of Difference”:

Intuition suggests itself as a method of difference or division: to divide whatever is composite into two tendencies. This method is something other than a spatial analysis, more than a description of experience, and less (so it seems) than a transcendental analysis. It reaches the conditions of the given, but these conditions are tendency-subjects, which are themselves given in a certain way: they are lived. What is more, they are at once the pure and the lived, the living and the lived, the absolute and the lived. What is essential here is that this ground is \textit{experienced}, and we know how much Bergson insisted on the empirical character of the \textit{élan vital}. Thus it is not the conditions of all possible experience that must be reached, but the conditions of real experience. Schelling had already proposed this aim and defined philosophy as a superior empiricism: this formulation also applies to Bergsonism. These conditions can and must be grasped in an intuition precisely because they are the conditions of real experience, because they are not broader than what is conditioned, because the concept they form is identical to its object ... Reason must reach all the way to the individual, the genuine concept all the way to the thing, and comprehension all the way to “this.”\textsuperscript{23}

The first thing to note with regard to this quote is that it unequivocally reveals that, despite being a method, and therefore involving various mediations, intuition still remains an es-

\textsuperscript{21} Deleuze, \textit{Bergsonism}, 13-14.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 21.

sentially immediate faculty. Let us summarise: as a method of difference and division, that is, a method capable of dividing the composites into two tendencies, intuition is able to reach the conditions of the given or real experience. These conditions are variously named by Deleuze “tendency-subjects,” “pure,” “the living,” “the absolute” and “the ground.” Deleuze’s claim that these conditions “can and must be grasped in intuition” simply reiterates his previous claims that these conditions are “themselves given in a certain way,” “lived” and “experienced.” Therefore, proclaiming it to be a method in no way excludes the immediacy of intuition. As Deleuze puts it himself: “Intuition has become method, or rather method has been reconciled with the immediate.” 24 Secondly, this quote confirms once more that for Deleuze the aim of philosophy is the knowledge of the thing itself or the individual, and that this knowledge is attainable by constructing a singular or “unique” concept “identical to its object.” 25 Finally, the quote above reveals not only that Deleuze’s philosophical project as explicated in *Difference and Repetition* is best read as a continuation of Bergson’s own project, but also in which respects Deleuze departs from it. To demonstrate both these claims, it is necessary to turn our attention to *Difference and Repetition* itself.

With regard to the first claim, some of the most important passages in *Difference and Repetition* are stated in virtually the exact same terms as those found in the quote above. One well-known passage in particular stands out in this respect:

Empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible: difference, potential difference and difference in intensity as the reason behind qualitative diversity. It is in difference that movement is produced as an “effect,” that phenomena flash their meaning like signs. The intense world of differences, in which we find the reason behind qualities and the being of the sensible, is precisely the object of a superior empiricism. This

---


empiricism teaches us a strange “reason,” that of the multiple, chaos and difference (nomadic distributions, crowned anarchies).26

If we add to this quote the already cited claim from the ending of the first chapter of *Difference and Repetition* that philosophy should search for the conditions of real experience, and not merely possible experience, it becomes quite obvious that Deleuze makes in his own name virtually the very same claims as those he attributes to Bergson in the passage quoted above from “Bergson’s Conception of Difference.” What, then, does Deleuze retain from Bergson? First and foremost, Deleuze clearly has not relinquished Bergson’s belief in the power of intuition to immediately apprehend the conditions of real experience: “Empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed” (my emphasis). Likewise, Deleuze retains the idea that intuition is a method of difference, i.e., that which intuition directly apprehends is *difference*: “that which can only be sensed,” or “the very being of the sensible” is “difference, potential difference and difference in intensity,” or simply “the intense world of differences.” It is in this world of differences that

we must find the lived reality of a sub-representative domain. If it is true that representation has identity as its element and similarity as its unit of measure, then pure presence such as it appears in the simulacrum has the ‘disparate’ as its unit of measure—in other words, always a difference of difference as its immediate element.27

Add to this Deleuze’s earlier equation of “the immediate” with the “sub-representative”28 and there can be no more doubt: for Deleuze, “the intense world of differences” or “sub-representative domain” is “a pure presence,” “a lived reality,” or simply “the immediate.”

---

26 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 56-57.
27 Ibid., 69.
28 Ibid., 56.
Let us now address the second question: in which respect does Deleuze depart from Bergson? The passage from “Bergson’s Conception of Difference” quoted earlier is of great assistance here. In a seemingly offhand remark at the beginning of the passage, Deleuze makes the following claim: intuition as a method is “more than a description of experience, and less (so it seems) than a transcendental analysis” (my emphasis). It is my contention that Deleuze’s account of the transcendent or superior exercise of the faculties as presented in *Difference and Repetition*’s central chapter “The Image of Thought” is precisely the transcendental version of Bergson’s intuition as a method that Deleuze invokes in this quote. In order to confirm this claim, let me briefly outline the basic contours of Deleuze’s account of the transcendent exercise of the faculties.

Deleuze famously states, “Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter.”\(^{29}\) The first characteristic of the object of this encounter is “that it can only be sensed.”\(^{30}\) Following this, Deleuze variously refers to “that which can only be sensed” as “the sign,” “the being of the sensible,” “that by which the given is given” and the “sentiendum.”\(^{31}\) Furthermore, it is important to highlight that this object of the encounter is “imperceptible (insensible) from the point of view of an empirical exercise of the senses in which sensibility grasps only that which could also be grasped by other faculties, and is related within the context of a common sense to an object which also must be apprehended by other faculties.”\(^{32}\) Contrary to its empirical exercise thus defined, “sensibility, in the presence of that which can only be sensed (and is at the same time imperceptible) finds itself before its own limit, the sign, and raises itself to the level of a transcendent exercise:

\[^{29}\] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 139, original emphasis.
\[^{30}\] Ibid., 139.
\[^{31}\] Ibid., 139-40.
\[^{32}\] Ibid., 140.
Speculations V

to the ‘nth’ power.”\(^3\) Once sensibility has been raised to its transcendental exercise by its encounter with the sentiendum, it “forces memory to remember the memorandum, that which can only be recalled,”\(^3\) thereby raising memory to a transcendental exercise of its own. Finally, memory in its turn forces thought to grasp that which can only be thought, the cogitandum or noeteon, the Essence: not the intelligible, for this is still no more than the mode in which we think that which might be something other than thought, but the being of the intelligible as though this were both the final power of thought and the unthinkable.\(^3\)

According to Deleuze, what is revealed by this “transcendent, disjointed or superior exercise of the faculties” is precisely their “transcendental form.”\(^3\) For, in order to avoid tracing the transcendental form of the faculties from their empirical exercise, as Kant does, Deleuze claims that each faculty must be borne to the extreme point of its dissolution, at which it falls prey to triple violence: the violence of that which forces it to be exercised, of that which it is forced to grasp and which it alone is able to grasp, yet also that of the ungraspable (from the point of view of its empirical exercise).\(^3\)

It is at this point that each faculty “discovers its own unique passion,”\(^3\) or its transcendental form.

As I have emphasised, thought always begins with an encounter with the sentiendum. But what is this paradoxical element that can only be sensed yet is imperceptible at the same time? This element which forces sensibility to its transcendental exercise is

\(^3\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 140.
\(^3\) Ibid., 141.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid., 143.
\(^3\) Ibid.
\(^3\) Ibid.
intensity, understood as pure difference in itself, as that which is at once both imperceptible for empirical sensibility which grasps intensity only already covered or mediated by the quality to which it gives rise, and at the same time that which can be perceived only from the point of view of a transcendental sensibility which apprehends it immediately in the encounter. 39

Thus, for Deleuze, thought always begins with an immediate apprehension of difference in itself. Deleuze could hardly be any more explicit about his belief in the idea of intuitive knowledge. The notion of the transcendent exercise of the faculties represents nothing less than Deleuze’s attempt to give a properly transcendental account of this age-old philosophical ideal.

One last remark is in order. It might be objected that I am equivocating by eliding the distinction between thought and knowledge. As the objection might go, not only does Deleuze take over the Kantian distinction between thought and knowledge, but he is also expressly critical of the notion of “knowledge” throughout the book. This is, of course, true. But it is also quite obvious that “thought” in Difference and Repetition has almost the exact same function as “mathesis universalis” and “an other knowledge” have in his earlier texts. If the account given above of the transcendent exercise of the faculties were not enough by itself, this claim could be further reinforced by highlighting the fact that on various occasions throughout the book, Deleuze explicitly invokes both “an esoteric knowledge” 40 and “mathesis universalis” 41 itself. To establish even stronger ties between Deleuze’s earlier texts and Difference and Repetition in this regard let me quote from the preface of the book:

Empiricism is by no means a reaction against concepts, nor a simple appeal to lived experience. On the contrary, it undertakes the most

39 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 144.
40 Ibid., 15, 242.
41 Ibid., 181, 190, 199.
Speculations V

insane creation of concepts ever seen or heard. Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts, but precisely one which treats the concept as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an Erewhon from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed “heres” and “nows.”

Similar to his earlier work, Deleuze here explicitly invokes the creation of concepts identical to their objects as the goal of philosophy. Furthermore, his identification of empiricism with “a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts” further encourages the conclusion that “transcendental empiricism” itself is, for Deleuze, just another name for mathesis universalis or intuition as a method.

Sellars: The Myth of The Given

Around the same time as Gilles Deleuze was invoking the mythical powers of mathesis universalis, Bergsonian intuition, and transcendental empiricism, Wilfrid Sellars was waging his lifelong battle against “the myth of the given” on the other side of the Atlantic. By no means was Sellars the first, nor will he be the last philosopher to face this mythical creature in an open field of battle. But he may very well be its most tenacious opponent to date. What made Sellars’s attack on the myth of the given so powerful was his recognition of its highly protean nature. As he famously states at the very beginning of “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,”

Many things have been said to be “given”: sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself. And there is, indeed, a certain way of construing the situations which philosophers analyze in these terms which can be said to be the framework of givenness. This framework has been a common feature of most of the major systems of philosophy, including, to use a Kantian turn of phrase, both “dogmatic rationalism” and “skeptical empiricism.” It has, indeed, been so pervasive that few, if any,

42 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, xx.
philosophers have been altogether free of it; certainly not Kant, and, I would argue, not even Hegel, that great foe of “immediacy.” Often what is attacked under its name are only specific varieties of “given.” Intuited first principles and synthetic necessary connections were the first to come under attack. And many who today attack “the whole idea of givenness”—and they are an increasing number—are really only attacking sense data ... If, however, I begin my argument with an attack on sense-datum theories, it is only as a first step in a general critique of the entire framework of givenness.  

Sellars clearly realises that the various instances of the given are only different instantiations of the same general framework of givenness. He also realises that if we are to have any success in vanquishing this myth once and for all, it will be necessary to formulate a general critique of this entire framework of givenness. Unfortunately, due to the nature of Sellars’s philosophising, heavily oriented as it was towards specific debates with his contemporaries, Sellars himself never presented either a systematic account of the framework of givenness, or the announced general critique of it. What he did leave behind, though, was a whole host of specific attacks on various different varieties of the given. Although all of these various critiques of different forms of the given were presented by way of debates with his analytic peers, the passage quoted above clearly shows that Sellars’s intended target was much wider in scope. In light of this, our later attempt at a Sellarsian critique of the Deleuzian “given” should seem a little less unlikely than it probably appears at first glance. However, if we are to stage this confrontation, it will first be necessary to briefly outline Sellars’s account of the myth of the given and his main arguments for rejecting it. And it will be paramount to do so in terms general enough so that this confrontation does not turn into a missed encounter. Three texts will be of particular assistance to us with regard to this task: “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” “The Structure of Knowledge,” and “Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process: The Carus Lectures of Wilfrid Sellars.”

43 Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” 127.
Speculations V

Let us start with “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” (EPM). Of the various different formulations of the myth of the given, the one found in chapter eight, entitled “Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?,” in many ways the central chapter of the book, is definitely the most appropriate for our present purposes:

The idea that observation “strictly and properly so-called” is constituted by certain self-authenticating nonverbal episodes, the authority of which is transmitted to verbal and quasi-verbal performances when these performances are made “in conformity with the semantical rules of the language,” is, of course, the heart of the Myth of the Given. For the given, in epistemological tradition, is what is taken by these self-authenticating episodes. These “takings” are, so to speak, the unmoved movers of empirical knowledge, “knowings in presence” which are presupposed by all other knowledge, both the knowledge of general truths and the knowledge “in absence” of other particular matters of fact. Such is the framework in which traditional empiricism makes its characteristic claim that the perceptually given is the foundation of empirical knowledge. 44

First and foremost, this passage reveals which specific version of the given is under attack, not just in this chapter, but in the book as a whole: it is, of course, the given as conceived by traditional empiricism. Secondly, the passage possibly presents the most concise account provided by Sellars of the empiricist given. To summarise, the empiricist given consists in taking certain self-authenticating nonverbal episodes given in perception as the foundation of empirical knowledge, and by extension as presupposed by all knowledge. Clearly, the key term here is “self-authenticating nonverbal episodes.” What Sellars denies is neither that these “observings are inner episodes, nor that strictly speaking they are nonverbal episodes.” 45 Contrary to ill-informed popular belief, Sellars is not a reductionist, and especially not with regard to notions like “inner episodes,” “impressions,” or “immediate experi-

44 Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” 169-70.

45 Ibid., 170, original emphasis.
ence.” In fact, the later parts of EPM are explicitly devoted to devising an account of these very notions. What Sellars does deny, though, is the idea that these episodes are to be taken as self-authenticating, that is, that they have epistemic authority or the status of knowledge solely in virtue of their being perceptually given. This is the crucial point of Sellars’s critique of the given.

The main reasons for Sellars’s denial of the given thus construed is to be found in his famous definition of knowledge:

> The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a 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. ⁴⁶

Add to this Sellars’s earlier denial that there is “any awareness of logical space prior to, or independent of, the acquisition of a language,” ⁴⁷ and the main contours of his argument slowly begin to emerge. If awareness of the logical space of reasons is impossible without the acquisition of a language, and if to know something is to place it in the logical space of reasons, then it follows that only that which is linguistically structured can lay claim to the status of knowledge. ⁴⁸ Finally, insofar as what is perceptually given is not linguistically structured, it obviously cannot lay claim to the status of knowledge.

In order to present Sellars’s argument in its entirety, though, it will be necessary to return once more to his formulation of the myth of the given. Let us recall: the claim made by traditional empiricism was not only that what is perceptually given is self-authenticating, but also, and just as importantly, that it can serve as a foundation of empirical knowledge,

---

⁴⁶ Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” 169.
⁴⁷ Ibid., 162.
⁴⁸ Or as Robert Brandom famously put it: “only what is propositionally contentful and conceptually articulated can serve as (and stand in need) of justification, and so ground or constitute knowledge.” Robert Brandom, “Study Guide” in Wilfrid Sellars, Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 122.
and by extension all knowledge. The first thing to note with regard to this claim, and as Sellars emphasises himself, is that by rejecting it, Sellars does not imply “that empirical knowledge has no foundation.”49 On the contrary: “There is clearly some point to the picture of human knowledge as resting on a level of propositions—observation reports—which do not rest on other propositions in the same way as other propositions rest on them.”50 In other words, by rejecting the myth of the given, Sellars does not reject the idea that inferential judgments are grounded in some way on non-inferential judgments. His notion of “observation report” is precisely this kind of non-inferential judgment. But, on the other hand, Sellars does insist “that the metaphor of ‘foundation’ is misleading in that it keeps us from seeing that if there is a logical dimension in which other empirical propositions rest on observation reports, there is another logical dimension in which the latter rest on the former.”51 Without giving a complete account of Sellars’s term “observation reports,” the following will have to suffice for our present purposes: according to Sellars, even the simplest observation report like “this is green” implies “that one can have the concept of green only by having a whole battery of concepts of which it is one element.”52 Moreover, “there is an important sense in which one has no concept pertaining to the observable properties of physical objects in Space and Time unless one has them all—and, indeed ... a great deal more besides.”53

Returning to Sellars’s suspicion of the metaphor of “foundation,” his beautifully written concluding remarks on this topic will also be the best possible way to conclude this short presentation of his views on the myth of the given as presented in EPM:

49 Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” 170.
50 Ibid., original emphasis.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 148
53 Ibid.
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 a 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. \(^{54}\)

If making a knowledge claim consists of placing it in the logical space of reasons, then any and every such claim can never be safe from challenge, and therefore cannot serve as the firm ground of knowledge as a whole. But by the same token, if this is the only kind of knowledge available to us—by refuting the myth of the given, Sellars believes he has sufficiently demonstrated this—then there is no way to challenge this framework as a whole. The only thing there is is a slow, arduous, hazardous, and never-ending process of testing each and every claim put forth. This is the inglorious venture of rational knowledge.

Let us now move on to Sellars’s second text under consideration here, “The Structure of Knowledge.” \(^{55}\)Interestingly enough, neither the notion of “the given,” nor that of “the myth of the given” are to be found in these lectures; at least not explicitly. But it is precisely because of this terminological peculiarity that this text is of particular interest. For while Sellars may not invoke the given explicitly, it is quite obvious that what he is in fact discussing is precisely another version of the myth of the given. And what makes this particular account of the myth especially interesting for our present purposes is the fact that Sellars here explicitly invokes “intuitive knowledge,” thereby unequivocally confirming that the myth of the given indeed refers to this age-old notion.

The third and final lecture of the series, entitled “Epistemic Principles,” is crucial in this regard. After briefly conveying

\(^{54}\) Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” 170, original emphasis.

\(^{55}\) Sellars, “The Structure of Knowledge.”
the traditional arguments for the necessity of non-inferential judgments, Sellars goes on to state,

We are clearly in the neighbourhood of what has been called the “self-evident,” the “self-certifying,” in short, of “intuitive knowledge.” It is in this neighbourhood that we find what has come to be called the foundational picture of human knowledge. According to this picture, beliefs which have inferential reasonableness ultimately rely for their authority on a stratum of beliefs which are, in some sense, self-certifying.  

By using here almost the exact same terms to refer to intuitive knowledge (“self-evident” and “self-certifying”), as when referring to the given in EPM (“self-authenticating”), this passage clearly demonstrates that “the myth of the given” and “intuitive knowledge” are virtually synonymous for Sellars. Likewise, by being almost identical to the discussions of the myth of the given in EPM, it surely dispels any possible doubts left. But only a few paragraphs later, an even more interesting passage appears:

Now many philosophers who have endorsed a concept of intuitive knowledge are clearly committed to the position that there is a level of cognition more basic than believing. This more basic level would consist of a sub-conceptual—where “sub-conceptual” is far from being used as a pejorative term—awareness of certain facts. In terms of the framework sketched in the preceding two lectures, there would be a level of cognition more basic than thinkings or tokenings of sentences in Mentalese—more basic, in fact, than symbolic activity, literal or analogical. It would be a level of cognition unmediated by concepts; indeed it would be the very source of concepts in some such way as described by traditional theories of abstraction. It would be “direct apprehension” of facts; their “direct presence” to the mind.  

Sellars here clearly presents a somewhat different version of the myth of the given to the one provided in EPM. But

57 Ibid., lecture 3, section 5, paragraph 21, original emphases.
there is little doubt that it still is the same mythical creature we have learned to recognise so very well. Here again the claim is that there is some kind of non-conceptual and non-inferential knowledge that has the status of knowledge simply by virtue of being directly present, apprehended, or given to the mind. Given that this kind of knowledge essentially depends on the idea of “direct apprehension,” Sellars asks, how is this notion to be understood? To begin to answer this question, Sellars notes that “‘apprehend’, like ‘see’ is, in its ordinary sense, an achievement word.” 58 This clearly implies that the act of apprehending might not be successful, that is, that it might occur without anything being apprehended. The consequences of this seemingly simple observation are spelled out in the next paragraph:

Many who use the metaphor “to see” in intellectual contexts overlook the fact that in its literal sense “seeing” is a term for a successful conceptual activity which contrasts with “seeming to see.” No piling on of additional metaphors (e.g., “grasping,” which implies an object grasped) can blunt this fact. Now the distinction between seeing and merely seeming to see implies a criterion. To rely on the metaphors of “apprehending” or “presence of the object” is to obscure the need of criteria for distinguishing between “knowing” and “seeming to know,” which ultimately define what it means to speak of knowledge as a correct or well-founded thinking that something is the case. 59

To put it in the simplest possible terms, knowledge necessarily implies some criteria by which it is to be distinguished from ostensible knowledge. Therefore, invocations of direct apprehension, which obviate this simple fact, cannot lay claim to the status of knowledge. Finally, Sellars concludes:

In short, I suspect that the notion of a non-conceptual “direct apprehension” of a “fact” provides a merely verbal solution to our problem. The regress is stopped by an ad hoc regress-stopper. Indeed, the very

58 Sellars, “The Structure of Knowledge,” lecture 3, section 5, paragraph 23, original emphasis.
59 Ibid., lecture 3, section 5, paragraph 24, original emphases.
metaphors which promised the sought-for foundation contain within themselves a dialectical moment which takes us beyond them.\textsuperscript{60}

The last sentence is worth highlighting. Instead of providing a non-conceptual foundation for conceptual knowledge, as they are supposed to do, metaphors of direct apprehending, grasping, seeing and the like, allow us to arrive at the exact opposite conclusion: if something is to lay claim to the status of knowledge, there has to be an explicit (or implicit) criterion by which this claim is to be adjudicated.

To conclude this second part of my essay, let me briefly address one last account of the myth of the given, the one presented by Sellars in his Carus Lectures.\textsuperscript{61} In the first lecture of the series, given under the title “The Lever of Archimedes,” Sellars states this:

\begin{quote}
If a person is directly aware of an item which has categorial status C, then the person is aware of it \textit{as} having categorial status C.
\end{quote}

This principle is, perhaps, the most basic form of what I have castigated as “The Myth of the Given” ... \textit{To reject the Myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorial structure of the world—if it has a categorial structure—imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax.}\textsuperscript{62}

Thus, “the most basic form” of the myth of the given consists in the idea that the “\textit{categorial structure of the world}” is in some way directly available or given to the mind. To understand why this might be problematic for Sellars, we have to take a look at his conception of the categories. In Sellars’s functionalist-nominalist Kantian interpretation, categories are defined as “the most generic functional classifications of the elements

\textsuperscript{60} Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” lecture 3, section 5, paragraph 25.
\textsuperscript{61} Sellars, “Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process.”
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 11-12, original emphasis.
of judgments.” 63 This definition of the categories makes it obvious that, for Sellars, the categorial structure of the world is not something that can be simply read off of the world. On the contrary, we can arrive at the categorial structure of the world only as a result of that long, slow, and arduous self-correcting rational enterprise described earlier. This might in fact be one of the most important lessons to be learned from Sellars: knowledge of the world is indeed possible; but it will most certainly not come by some miraculous insight. Hard work is still our best bet.

Sellars Contra Deleuze: Normativity versus Creativity

Now that we have assembled all their weapons, let us follow these two formidable opponents onto the field of battle. The stakes of this confrontation are high indeed! Nothing less than their respective claims to knowledge are on the line, possibly even the nature of knowledge itself. But before we let them engage each other in battle, one last effort is in order. If we are to confront these two great philosophers in their guises of major representatives of two opposing philosophical camps, some common ground has to be found upon which this confrontation is to be staged. The problem of universals might very well be just what we are looking for. For it could be argued that both Sellars and Deleuze fashioned their respective philosophies in general, and accounts of knowledge in particular, precisely in response to this ancient and well-travelled philosophical problem.

Traditionally, three types of answers were given to the question of the existence of universals. Platonic realism affirmed it, nominalism denied it, and conceptualism (or idealism) acknowledged the existence of universals but merely as concepts or ideas in the mind. While Deleuze could arguably be classified in the first, realist camp, Sellars is to be situated

Speculations V

firmly in the second, nominalist one.\textsuperscript{64} Let us start once more with Deleuze.

As Deleuze, following Nietzsche, famously stated, the overturning (or reversal) of Platonism is the principal task of modern philosophy.\textsuperscript{65} Deleuze’s solution to the problem of universals, and possibly even his philosophy as a whole, is best read in light of this often repeated pronouncement of his. The first thing to note in this regard is that this operation of overturning is not to be confused with a simple denial of Platonism. Quite the contrary, “that this overturning should conserve many Platonic characteristics is not only inevitable but desirable.”\textsuperscript{66} Therefore, in order to understand Deleuze’s stated ambition to overturn Platonism it is necessary to determine which aspects of Plato’s system Deleuze retains, and in what form, and which ones he discards.

It could be argued that Plato’s whole philosophical enterprise is a response to the problem of universals. And his solution is very well known. To put it in the simplest possible terms, in order to account for the existence of universals, Plato found it necessary to postulate an Other world: beyond the sensible world of appearances (individuals, becoming, images, copies, simulacra, differences) existing in time, there is an intelligible world of essences (Universals, Being, Forms, Ideas, the One) outside of time. The task of philosophy, then, is to think this Other world. In order to accomplish this, Plato also had to postulate an Other kind of knowledge: beyond the discursive intellect capable of providing knowledge of the sensible world, there is an intuitive intellect capable of immediately apprehending the intelligible world.

Interestingly enough, Deleuze’s overturning of Platonism retains virtually all of Plato’s dualisms listed above. But it does

\textsuperscript{64} With regard to Deleuze’s solution to the problem of universals, I am following Pete Wolfendale’s account provided in his paper “Ariadne’s Thread: Temporality, Modality, and Individuation in Deleuze’s Metaphysics,” http://deontologistics.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/deleuze-mmu.pdf, (accessed July 15, 2013).

\textsuperscript{65} Deleuze, \textit{Difference and Repetition}, 58.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
so with the intent to abolish the fundamental Platonic dualism of the sensible world of appearances and the intelligible world of essences. For Deleuze, there simply is no Other world: the world we live in is the only world there is. And, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, “it may be that believing in this world, in this life, becomes our most difficult task today.”\(^{67}\) In order to accomplish this difficult task, Deleuze recruits the help of a whole host of figures from the entire history of philosophy. Arguably, Immanuel Kant is the most important of these. For as the one who discovered “the prodigious domain of the transcendental,” Kant is hailed by Deleuze as the “analogue of a great explorer—not of another world, but of the upper and lower reaches of this one.”\(^{68}\) It is Kant’s discovery of the transcendental that allows Deleuze to solve the problem of universals. Ideas (or universals) do exist, but not as eternal essences in an Other world; rather, they are to be conceived of as the conditions of experience to be found in the lower reaches of this world. But contrary to Kant, who conceived of the transcendental in epistemological terms, that is, as conditions of possible experience, Deleuze famously reconceives the transcendental in ontological terms, that is, as conditions of real experience.

Deleuze’s world therefore truly is a reversed version of Plato’s dualist universe. While Deleuze retains Plato’s dualism of the intelligible and the sensible he, instead of opposing them as two distinct worlds, conceives of them as two complementary aspects of this world. The intelligible domain of Ideas is to be conceived as the condition of the sensible domain of real experience. In a similar inversion and contrary to Plato, for whom the intelligible world is to be thought in terms of the One and the Same, and the sensible world in terms of the multiple and the different, the intelligible realm of Deleuze’s world is populated by Ideas defined as differential multiplicities, which are then to be actualised in the sen-

---


\(^{68}\) Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 135.
Speculations V

sible realm as self-identical individuals. Furthermore and again contra Plato, for whom only the intelligible world of essences is real, Deleuze draws on Duns Scotus’s doctrine of the univocity of being in order to affirm the reality of both the intelligible and the sensible domains. “Being is said in a single and same sense of everything of which it is said, but that of which it is said differs: it is said of difference itself.”69

Finally, if the overturning of Platonism is to be complete, Deleuze has to find a principle of immanence which will allow him to demonstrate that the intelligible and the sensible indeed are to be conceived as two domains of the same world. Contrary to Plato’s relegation of time to the sensible world of appearances, and the upholding of the eternal nature of the intelligible world of essences, Deleuze affirms precisely time as the unifying principle. These are the basic contours of Deleuze’s ontology.

In order to think this world, Deleuze will, once again, follow in Plato’s footsteps. If we are to think the immediate unity of the intelligible and sensible, discursive reason with all its mediations simply will not do. What is needed is an other knowledge capable of going beyond the sensible. But this time, contrary to Plato, this beyond is not situated up and above this world, but down and below in its lower reaches. Thought is to apprehend directly the intelligible, the being of the sensible or the conditions of real experience. As we have seen in the first part of this essay, thought begins with an encounter with the sentiendum (the being of the sensible, or that which can only be sensed), and proceeds to think the cogitandum (the being of the intelligible, or that which can only be thought). Interestingly enough, in his quest for this other knowledge, Deleuze will once again find an unlikely ally in Kant. For it is precisely Kant’s account of the sublime that Deleuze takes as a model for his account of the transcendent exercise of the faculties.

The consequences of Deleuze’s overturning of Platonism for philosophy were revolutionary indeed. Ever since Plato

69 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 36.
and up until Kant’s Copernican or epistemological turn, metaphysics was proverbially considered to be the queen of all sciences. After almost two centuries of various attempts in the wake of Kant to disprove its possibility, Deleuze was one of the first contemporary philosophers to give back to metaphysics the pride of place it deserves. But in Deleuze’s world of overturned Platonism, metaphysics will find itself allied with the most unlikely of allies. In contrast to both Plato’s denial of the reality of the sensible realm, on the one hand, and Kant’s denial of the reality of the intelligible realm, on the other, Deleuze’s affirmation of the univocity of being, affirming as it does the reality of both the sensible and the intelligible domains, breeds a new philosophical alliance between metaphysics and aesthetics. In this regard, Deleuze’s famous pronouncement on aesthetics, castigating Kant and his transcendental conditions of possibility for introducing the familiar schism between the two senses of the term, is of a particular significance:

No wonder, then, that aesthetics should be divided into two irreducible domains: that of the theory of the sensible which captures only the real’s conformity with possible experience; and that of the theory of the beautiful, which deals with the reality of the real in so far as it is reflected. Everything changes once we determine the conditions of real experience, which are not larger than the conditioned and which differ in kind from the categories: the two senses of the aesthetic become one, to the point where the being of the sensible reveals itself in the work of art, while at the same time the work of art appears as experimentation. 70

This quote expands on the already cited claim made by Deleuze: “Empiricism truly becomes transcendental, and aesthetics an apodictic discipline, only when we apprehend directly in the sensible that which can only be sensed, the very being of the sensible.”71 Whether we want to call Deleuze’s philosophy an aesthetical metaphysics or a metaphysical aesthetics, it

70 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 68.
71 Ibid., 56-57, original emphasis.
is quite obvious that for Deleuze aesthetics and metaphysics are virtually interchangeable terms. But what the first quote also reveals is the importance that Deleuze attributes to art. Add to this Deleuze’s earlier equation of the work of art with transcendental empiricism or the science of the sensible,\(^\text{72}\) and it becomes clear that Deleuze has forged an equally strong bond between art and philosophy itself. Never since the early Romantics has there been such a grand alliance of aesthetics and metaphysics on the one hand, and art and philosophy on the other.

Let us now turn to Sellars. There is little doubt that Sellars was a scientific realist. As he famously put it in EPM, “in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.”\(^\text{73}\) But Sellars’s commitment to scientific realism is to be interpreted in terms of his deeper commitment to naturalism. To be is to exist in nature, nature being understood here as the spatiotemporal causal domain. Science is the measure of all things simply because it has proven itself time and again as the best and most reliable way for exploring this spatiotemporal causal realm. Sellars’s nominalism, in turn, follows from his naturalism. Being causally impotent, universals or abstract entities cannot be said to exist in any meaningful way. Individuals are all there is.\(^\text{74}\)

It might seem tempting to read Sellars as a reductive or even, as some have done, an eliminative materialist. But nothing could be further from the truth. If there is one thing Sellars was always unequivocal about, it is his insistence that the greatest challenge facing modern philosophy today is how “to take both man and science seriously.”\(^\text{75}\) The clash of the scientific and manifest images of man in the world is to be

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 56.

\(^{73}\) Sellars, “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind,” 173.

\(^{74}\) I am here following Willem A. deVries’ characterisation of Sellars as presented in his study Wilfrid Sellars (Chesham: Acumen, 2005).

resolved not by reducing one to the other, or by eliminating one altogether, but by fusing these two images into one stereoscopic vision.\textsuperscript{76} If philosophy is to meet this challenge, it is imperative to acknowledge both the authority of the scientific image over the \textit{natural space of causes} (the order of being, or the real order), as well as the authority of the manifest image over the \textit{normative space of reasons} (the order of knowing, or the conceptual order). Defining the nature of the complicated relationship between the \textit{natural} and the \textit{normative} has been the central problem of Sellars’s entire philosophical enterprise.

Sellars’s response to this predicament is ingenious to say the least. The normative space of reasons is to be understood as \textit{causally reducible}, but \textit{logically (conceptually) irreducible} to the natural space of causes.\textsuperscript{77} Insofar as conceptual thought or the logical space of reasons has a material substrate from which it arises, there is nothing, in principle, preventing the natural sciences from exploring it. This is why, for Sellars, the normative is \textit{causally} reducible to the natural. On the other hand, insofar as the space of reasons is essentially \textit{normative} in character there is nothing, in principle, that the natural sciences can teach us about it. Given that they are empirical, descriptive and concerned with what \textit{is} the case, natural sciences cannot by definition provide an account of the transcendental, the prescriptive and what \textit{ought to be} the case. This is why, for Sellars, the normative is \textit{logically (conceptually) irreducible} to the natural.

There is another sense in which the normative can be said to be ineliminable. Following Kant, Sellars defines thought as essentially conceptual, that is, as a rule-governed activity. The rules governing thought, as Pete Wolfendale puts it, are to be conceived as “the fundamental norms of rationality—those norms by which we are bound simply in virtue of making claims at all, or those norms that provide the conditions of


the possibility of rationality itself.”78 Insofar as the natural sciences are essentially rational, they are bound by these same fundamental norms of rationality. This is why, for Sellars, the normative is to be construed not only as irreducible to, but as constitutive of the transcendental conditions of empirical knowledge that the sciences provide of the natural domain. In claiming that the norms of reasoning are to be construed as the transcendental conditions of knowledge of the natural world, Sellars clearly sides with Kant. But on the other hand, in upholding that the knowledge which the natural sciences attain is a knowledge not of appearances, but of the real order or the in-itself, Sellars obviously rejects Kant’s injunction against the possibility of such a knowledge. By the same token, Sellars certainly does not shy away from affirming the possibility of metaphysics. Yet, once again siding with Kant, Sellars clearly believed that if metaphysics is to be anything more than a flight of fancy, it needs to be coupled with epistemology. Or as Ray Brassier puts it: “just as epistemology without metaphysics is empty, metaphysics without epistemology is blind.”79

The time for confrontation has finally come. Let us start it by foregrounding the single most important conviction that Deleuze and Sellars both share: they both firmly believe not just in the possibility, but the necessity of metaphysics—if philosophy is to be anything at all, it has to be a metaphysics. To describe and explain the fundamental structure of the world has always been and always will be the ultimate goal of philosophical thinking. But with regards to answering the question of how philosophy is to achieve this formidable goal, Deleuze and Sellars could not be further apart from one another.

---

Deleuze’s epistemology, insofar as he can be said to have one, follows from his ontology. In his attempt to overturn Platonism, Deleuze affirms a one world ontology. This world is the only world there is. Yet Deleuze retains Plato’s distinction of the sensible and the intelligible. Only this time, these distinct realms are to be conceived as two aspects of this world: the intelligible, universal, virtual, transcendental Ideas constituting its lower reaches, and the sensible, singular, actual, and empirical individuals the upper ones. If we are to know this world, Deleuze insists, conceptual, representational knowledge will not do. An other knowledge is necessary, a knowledge supposedly capable of apprehending directly the intelligible Ideas, but also of creating the concepts identical to the sensible individuals. These two dimensions of knowledge, the intuitive and the creative, are not to be conceived as distinct, but as two sides of the same coin, or two aspects of a single principle governing thought. Once again, Deleuze’s account of thought follows from his account of being. In line with his affirmation of the univocity of being, Deleuze believes that if we are to affirm the being of thought, being has to be said of thought in the same sense in which it is said of everything else. And, as is well known, the sense of being, for Deleuze, is productive or creative difference. This is why Deleuze affirms that “to think is to create.”

Finally, following the early Romantics, Deleuze finds the model for this other knowledge in aesthetic experience (for its intuitive aspect) on the one hand, and artistic practice (for its creative aspect) on the other. By the same token, Deleuze will proclaim aesthetics to be the greatest ally of metaphysics, and art that of philosophy.

Sellars, on the other hand, unequivocally upholds the distinction between epistemology and ontology. But this distinction itself is to be conceived in epistemological, and not ontological terms. By construing thought as a rule-governed,
Speculations V

normative activity, Sellars is able to affirm both the epistemological difference and ontological indifference of thought from being. Insofar as it is an activity, that is, something that we do and not something that is, thought, strictly speaking, has no being. But by the same token, precisely because it is an activity, it is not to be conceived as something otherworldly or supernatural, but as firmly rooted in this world and in the order of natural causality. Therefore, and in contrast to Deleuze's program, Sellars clearly shows that upholding the distinction between being and thought need not imply a commitment to an ontological dualism of some sort. That is, the difference between thought and being is not an ontological but an epistemological difference. Sellars's ontological commitment to naturalism and scientific realism follows from his epistemological commitment to the distinction between being construed as the natural space of causes, and thought construed as the normative space of reasons. To be, for Sellars, is to be causally efficacious, and thus only a naturalism willing to take seriously the advances of the natural sciences can explore the natural space of causes. Yet, if this naturalism is to provide a complete account of this world, it has to acknowledge its normative dimension, that is, the specificity of the normative space of reasons. Sellars's philosophy indeed is a “naturalism with a normative turn.”

Deleuze and Sellars both affirm the univocity of being. And they both attempt to devise an account of thought that would not go against this basic ontological principle. For Deleuze, this means that if the distinction between being and thought is not to be construed as an ontological dualism, thought is to be said in the same sense as that in which being is said, that is, as creative difference. But by construing thought purely in ontological terms, Deleuze collapses the very distinction he is trying to explain, making it thereby unintelligible. By the same token, Deleuze's failure to acknowledge the specificity of thought in its difference from being leaves him without a proper epistemology, making it thereby impossible for him to

82 O'Shea, Wilfrid Sellars, 3.
justify his ontology. Finally, by erasing the difference between being and thought, Deleuze might have escaped the need to construe thought as an ontologically distinct domain, but he has accomplished this at a steep price indeed, the price being nothing less than idealism. Ironically enough, Deleuze's attempt to overturn Platonism ends up affirming Plato's worst idealist excesses.

In order to provide an account of thought that does not violate the principle of the univocity of being, Sellars takes the exact opposite route to the one travelled by Deleuze. For Sellars, thought is expressly not to be construed in ontological terms. If we are to avoid the dangers of collapsing the distinction between being and thought on the one hand, and of turning it into an ontological dualism on the other, it is imperative to conceive thought both in its difference from but also in its relation to being. As we have seen, Sellars achieves this by conceiving thought in normative terms, as a rule-governed activity. Thought is at the same time different from (logically irreducible to) and in relation to (causally reducible to) being. By securing the rights of thought in its distinction from being, Sellars simultaneously secures the rights of being from the idealist incursions of thought. This way, Sellars is able to uphold a decidedly realist ontology. Finally, insofar as the normative space of reasons can be construed in transcendental terms, as consisting of the very conditions of the possibility of rationality, Sellars's ontology can be said to be a properly transcendental realism.

Let us conclude. Ultimately, the confrontation between Deleuze and Sellars revolves around their contrasting views on normativity. While Sellars's entire philosophical edifice is built upon his normative conception of thought and knowledge, Deleuze's philosophical adventure is best described as an attempt to escape the norm-bound world of judgment and representation. In fact, Deleuze's quest for an other knowledge is nothing but such an attempt. But what Deleuze fails to realise, and what Sellars makes so perfectly clear, is that the choice to leave the normative space of reasons is not ours to make in the first place. To reiterate once again
Speculations V

Wolfendale’s pronouncement: insofar as we make any claims at all, we are bound by the fundamental norms of rationality, the very norms that provide the conditions of the possibility of rationality itself. Unless one is willing to leave behind the claim to rationality itself, there simply is no way out of the normative space of reasons.