

Sellars and Knowing the Thing-In-Itself

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Abstract

DeVries' article "Sellars, Realism, and Kantian Thinking" misinterprets my argument that Sellars cannot show a sufficient degree of perceptual access for science to produce knowledge of "things-in-themselves" as involving a Cartesian characterization of Sellars. In correcting this misinterpretation (among many others), I will show that there are aspects of Sellars' views on sensory receptivity, analogies, and representation that are at odds with the epistemic claim Sellars makes in regard to knowing the thing-in-itself, which deVries fails to acknowledge. In highlighting the nature of these internal discrepancies, I argue that Sellars' and deVries' (reading of Sellars') account of science's ability to achieve metaphysical realism entails criteria for knowing the thing-in-itself that is normative and/or presumed rather than the product of scientific discovery. In short, this paper has two foci: first, to respond to deVries' misinterpretations of my account of Sellars, and second, to show that the traditional analytic commitment to metaphysical realism is central to Sellars, as well as to his readers, but cannot be sustained.

Section 1

In "Sellars on Perception, Science, and Realism: A Critical Response," I argued that Sellars cannot show a sufficient degree of perceptual access to permit his accounts of scientific concepts, theories, analogies, and models to count as knowledge of "things-in-themselves."¹ DeVries' response to this paper in "Sellars, Realism, and Kantian Thinking" misinterprets my critique as relying on a Cartesian form of the "new way of ideas" to characterize Sellars. In attempting to dissuade me from a view I do not hold, deVries offers several excellent accounts of Sellars' views on analogy and picturing. While correcting his mischaracterization of my view of Sellars, I will argue that neither Sellars' nor deVries' (reading of Sellars') account of science and picturing permits knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Additionally, I will argue that Sellars' and deVries account of the attainability of metaphysical realism via science entails criteria for knowing (what Sellars calls) the "thing-in-itself," which can only be normative and/or presumed rather than the product of scientific discovery.

¹ I will now refer to "Sellars on Perception, Science, and Realism: A Critical Response" as SPSR.

Section 2

I will begin by revisiting a key passage from *Science and Metaphysics*:²

Kant's account implies indeed that certain counterparts of our intuitive representation, namely God's intellectual intuition, are literally true; but these literal truths can only be indirectly and abstractly represented by finite minds, and there is an impassible gulf between our *Erkenntnisse* and Divine Truth. If, however as I shall propose [...] we replace the static concept of Divine Truth with a Peircean conception of truth as the 'ideal outcome of scientific inquiry', the gulf between appearances and things-in-themselves, though a genuine one, can in principle be bridged. (50)

Sellars believes that the historical development of science can "in principle" provide, in some undetermined future, knowledge of the thing-in-itself. Here the thing-in-itself refers to mind-independent existence free from the false or contingent ways the human mind perceives, thinks, and/or pictures it. Sellars emphasizes this aspect of his claim by associating "Divine Truth" with knowledge of the thing-in-itself. For instance, Christian theologians claim that God alone possesses perfect intellectual understanding of existence such that there is no difference between His knowing and existence.

Sellars suggests that science makes it possible to arrive at knowledge of things-in-themselves, which is not "merely indirectly and abstractly represented." This kind of knowledge seems to indicate something akin to the metaphysical exactness or perfection traditionally attributed to God alone. The quality, kind, and degree of representational similarity that Sellars believes science can garner of the thing-in-itself will remain a theme throughout this paper.

Kant believed that the human mind is completely responsible for the manner in which it synthesizes (i.e., unifies and arranges) sensory content and judges such content. As a result, he claims that one cannot know mind-independent reality. In other words, it is not possible for humans to know how entities exist independent of the manner in which they appear to the observing subject: "cognition reaches appearances only, leaving the thing in itself as something actual for itself but unrecognized by us" (Bxx).³ However, even though Kant claims we cannot know the thing-in-itself, it is natural for us to infer its existence: "For that which necessarily drives us to go beyond the boundaries of experience and all appearance is the unconditioned" (Bxx). By "unconditioned," Kant means that which endures in its naked existence unadulterated by the human mind's understanding and representation of it. This view supports the claim that the thing-in-itself cannot be known, for according to Kant, all experience requires the

² Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics*, Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 1992.

³ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

'conditioning' of mental processes. Thus, the thing-in-itself, by its very nature, is something necessarily unknowable to the human mind.

With a perfected science, Sellars seems to think that our knowledge of things-in-themselves will indicate their 'unconditioned' existence, and that such knowledge will be free from the various ways one can incorrectly picture existence. If this is possible, such knowledge may be similar to God's knowledge. He thus appears to be taking the following stance: a perfected science may use a very human means to acquire knowledge, but the understanding it provides will transcend the contingent models in which it is obtained.

Section 3

Understanding Sellars' view concerning knowledge of the thing-in-itself requires an appreciation of Sellars' use of analogy.⁴ Unfortunately, DeVries misinterprets my views concerning Sellars and analogies.⁵ Rather than focusing on these misinterpretations, I will instead focus on the substantive differences between our views about Sellars and analogies. Perhaps the strongest point of disagreement concerns the extent to which Sellars can avoid the analogy of proportion in attempting to arrive at knowledge of the thing-in-itself.

DeVries' article begins with a concise rendition of relevant types of analogies that he believes escape the limitations associated with the analogy of proportion and which promote Sellars' view that knowledge of the thing-in-itself is attainable. He writes:

One is a matter of analogical relations between sets or family of concepts. Scientists use such analogies to generate new conceptual schemes that might

⁴ Sellars writes in *Science and Metaphysics*:

The thesis I wish to defend, but not ascribe to Kant, though it is very much a 'phenomenalism' in the Kantian (rather than Berkeleyian) sense, is that although the world we conceptually represent in experience exists, only in actual and obtainable representings of it, we can say, from a transcendental point of view, not only that existence-in-itself accounts for this obtainability by virtue of having a certain analogy with the world we represent but also that in principle *we*, rather than God alone, can provide the cash. For, as I see it, the use of analogy in theoretical science, unlike theology, generates new determinate concepts. It does not merely indirectly specify certain unknown attributes by an 'analogy of proportion'. One might put this by saying that the conceptual structures of theoretical science give us new ways of schematizing categories. (49)

⁵ DeVries misinterprets my view of Sellars' account of analogy by claiming that I attribute to Sellars only (or perhaps primarily) a Thomistic "analogy of proportion." I clearly indicate that Sellars believes analogies can help us "reshape and reorganize (i.e., schematize) the concepts we apply to phenomena" (SPSR 40). I also indicate that Sellars maintains science can provide us with new "schemas that are better suited (than our non-scientific schemas) to represent existence" (40). Additionally, he mistakenly suggests that one of my illustrations was intended as a comprehensive overview of Sellars' views on analogy (i.e., the fallacy of composition) — especially, since I note that Sellars "believes that science can exceed the achievement of 'analogy of proportion'" directly after this example (40).

prove explanatory useful and be subject to empirical tests. So, for instance [...] J.J. Thomson proposed the "plum pudding" model to explain the structure of the atom, which was fairly quickly replaced by the Rutherford "planetary" model [...]. This facilitated the development of new tests that drove the scientist to new models. Sellars has this kind of analogy in mind when he argues, as he did in so many places, that our mentalistic concepts are formed by means of such analogy, and in fact, by two different analogies. One likens our intentional states to episodes of 'inner speech', the other likens our sensory states to 'inner replicas.'
(58)

I am in full agreement that these types of analogy can count as knowledge and promote scientific discovery. I would also argue that Sellars is often underappreciated for providing deep insights into the manner in which this type of thinking plays a prominent role in knowledge and scientific advancement. However, it is unclear how the above noted analogies directly or indirectly contribute to knowledge that is *akin* to Divine Truth, that is truth claims about the so-called thing-in-itself. For instance, Sellars writes:

[A]lthough the world we conceptually represent in experience exists, only in actual and obtainable representings of it, we can say, from a transcendental point of view, not only that existence-in-itself accounts for this obtainability by virtue of having a certain analogy with the world we represent but also that in principle *we*, rather than God alone, can provide the cash (49).

Analogies by their very nature offer a tenuous mixture of similarity and difference, e.g., atoms are presumably like and unlike a solar system. In order to have knowledge of the thing-in-itself *qua* thing-in-itself, one must remove the differences until only what accurately depicts the thing-in-itself remains. New models replace old models precisely because they are deemed to offer fewer differences and more similarity than their predecessors. As a result, what drives most forms of justification for one type of analogy or model supplanting another is that it is deemed to be more similar to the entity (or event) it is intended to represent. Since one analogy is deemed to be more like the entity than another, there is a presumed progression of similitude. The acceptance of this progressive development functions as an analogy of proportion, i.e., some likeness found in models and analogies are proportionally closer (in similarity) to the entities (and events) they represent.

In this regard, when science is seen as a tool to get at the thing-in-itself, it necessarily sets up a dichotomy between insufficient analogies and models, which are replaced by ones that are seen as more accurately depicting some relevant feature of the thing-in-itself. Since the progression involves a chain of analogies that are deemed to be progressively more like the entity they represent, the analogies are in one important sense linked to views concerning degrees of

likeness. This in turn requires that one understand the differences or inadequacies of the previous models and some presumed feature of the entity or event that it fails to represent or even misrepresents.⁶ However, if analogies play a key role in Sellars' proposed means of gaining knowledge of the thing-in-itself, how will one know what the thing-in-itself is like in order to discern which analogies are more like it? This problem will be the theme of sections 4, 6, and 7.

Section 4

DeVries also believes that isomorphism supports Sellars' claim that the thing-in-itself can be known. He writes:

[I]somorphism between two domains of *objects* and their relations (as opposed to *concepts* and their relations). [...] [This occurs in at least two distinct ways for Sellars.] One is in the analysis of the sensory domain, where our sensory states exhibit counterpart properties to those exhibited by the manifest image sensory objects they are typically caused by, and arranged in a scheme that involves counterparts of spatial temporal relations (SM I §74). The other is in Sellars's difficult notion of picturing. Some tokens of a linguistic type (what Sellars calls a "natural linguistic object")⁷ *picture* some object in nature in virtue of participating in a complex system of such natural linguistic objects that, in virtue of unimaginable complex projection relation, is isomorphic (in certain respect) to worldly objects thus pictured. (58)

It is true that isomorphic relations between models, theories, concepts, and *the appearing world* constitute knowledge on account of the manner in which they can help us predict empirical

⁶ DeVries takes one of my examples of a stick figure representing a man as requiring an understanding of the proportional differences between the figure and an actual person, and falsely concludes that I believe all analogies are reducible to spatial imaginings. The point I made was that this type of analogy, like all analogies, requires an understanding of the possible or actual difference between the first entity of comparison to the second. This type of reasoning is a central part of "the type of thinking required of analogies" (SPSR 41). The fact that one of my examples requires spatial proportions is purely incidental, i.e., it is not indicative of all analogies.

⁷ Johanna Seibt writes:

"Natural-linguistic objects" are those natural items that can be said to picture. They are not necessarily the written or oral expression of a natural language: they may be hand movements of sign language, rhythmic patterns of an acoustic code, machine states of a Turing machine, or neurophysiological states. In fact, they include any collection of material items embodying a normative system as long as "there is a relevant degree of similarity" (Sellars "Mental Events" 36: 331; in *Philosophical Studies*: 288)."

The previous quote can be found in the following text: Johanna Seibt. "Function Between Reasons and Causes," in *Empiricism, Perceptual Knowledge, and Realism*, 247-282 ed. Willem A. DeVries (Oxford University Press, 2009), 253.

occurrences and successfully accomplish feats in the empirical world. Additionally, these relations can be deemed a type of knowledge insofar as they permit us to think about what is not evident in our everyday perceptual experiences. While the above is true, it is unclear how isomorphic relationships contribute to our knowledge of the mind-independent reality of the thing-in-itself.

For deVries and Sellars, the contributing role of such isomorphic relationships, as they concern knowledge of the thing-in-itself, is resolved by invoking a Peircean ideal of science. DeVries writes:

[D]irectly inferring how things in themselves are from any stage of our conceptualization of the world short of the Peircean ideal would be a mistake. For only in the Peircean ideal that such statement express, not merely 'best knowledge,' but *final* knowledge, knowledge that will never be ill-guided" (66).

DeVries additionally claims that "[t]he important point remains that we do not know things by first constructing a picture and then inferring from that how things are; rather, we know how things are (in part) by representing them in ways that conform to the requirements of picturing" in the sense that "pictures enable our engagement with the world around us" (66). What this apparently means is that, through our functional engagements in the world, we begin to "picture" in such a fashion that one "in part" gets epistemically closer to the thing-in-itself.

In SPSR, I argued that practical engagements and predictions concerning the empirical world do not require metaphysical accuracy and, as such, are not proof or convincing support that successful models, theories, analogies, concepts, etc., indicate that *metaphysical truth* had been obtained or that one is closing in on such truths. Additionally, the claim that science can obtain "*final* knowledge" is dubious, because science is not equipped to demonstrate when it has reached a final stage. For example, I wrote:

Given the limitations of our access to existence (i.e., it is restricted to appearing phenomena) and social influences (as asserted by the normative functionalist) on scientific research, it is unlikely that we could recognize when we happen upon the best possible model/theory. Nor is it clear how the human intellect is capable of making such a distinction, because the success of a scientific model is limited to how well it solves a specific set of well-defined questions. The speculative claim that X is the *best possible* model is not demonstrable in science, because all that one can validate via science is that X is the best *available* (i.e., at a future date a better one may come along) model/theory for resolving a specific set of practical problems or predicting certain kinds of appearing phenomena. (50)

Even if science can achieve the Peircean ideal of final knowledge, it is unclear how an isomorphic structure of "unimaginable complex projection relation" or even simple ones disclose the thing-in-itself (58). Strictly speaking, such structures are not the thing-in-itself, but merely an intermediary mental structure or tool to "picture" mind-independent existence (58). But how will one know if one's picturing is correct? One cannot observe if it is; one can only infer it. For instance, a complex projection of relations that is believed to constitute an isomorphic relation to things-in-themselves is inferred from how well it can be confirmed in observation or practical engagements in the empirical world. Yet, as noted above, practical and predictive models do not require metaphysical accuracy. As such, their success is not an indicator of metaphysical truth. One must then have some other means to verify if "pictures" based on presumed isomorphic structures are metaphysically accurate, but the only means science (and Sellars) has for verification and justification is irreducibly one of observation. In other words, deVries' and Sellars' account of isomorphic structures are "presumed," in the sense that they are said to possess discernible relations to the thing-in-itself; yet, such relations, and the 'pictures' they provide, transcend what can be confirmed in observation.

When science is seen as verifying metaphysical truths (as opposed to empirical truths), it is relegated to circular thinking that does an injustice to this noble discipline. For instance, as noted above, one analogy is replaced by another because the first analogy is seen as less useful in comparison to the second. But the insufficiency or sufficiency of analogies, models, and concepts lies in observable outcomes. When one claims that observable outcomes match their analogies, it is often presumed that metaphysical truth has been obtained. But this cannot be shown. The only remaining avenue is merely to presume what the thing-in-itself is like and then to claim that one's model has matched it or accept some normative prescription (rather than the outcome of supposedly true scientific discovery).

The Peircean ideal, as conceived by deVries and Sellars, is short sighted. It not only assumes that practical engagements indicate metaphysical accuracies but also tends to overlook the fact that there are competing models that can achieve different or similar results. The assumption that science will necessarily come to a specific formulation of non-competing models is presumptive. Moreover, competing models can (at times) offer similar practical and observable results but nonetheless differ in the quality (i.e., in a Kantian sense of the term) and content they provide. When this occurs, it is often not possible to determine which model is better. For these reasons, I argued in my paper that scientific realists can only beg the question as to what the thing-in-itself is like and then presume their scientific reasoning captures it.

I have briefly made a case for the view that science does not disclose, uncover or discover metaphysical truths. Rather it is a process of the ongoing accumulation of empirical truths concerning what is observable, methods for predicting more nuanced observations and achieving practical results, which I regard as a modified version of Kant's "empirical realism." Scientific

realists, especially those like Sellars who overtly claim science can or at least in principle could obtain knowledge of the thing-in-itself, must be able to show how the latter description of science is wrong. This is a steep, if not insurmountable, task. It is in my view bewildering that many proponents of scientific realism regard the aforementioned view of science as unacceptable. I claim that the scientific realist has the burden of proof to show that science can produce metaphysical truth (and not those who doubt this extravagant knowledge claim). I believe Sellars thinks this as well, and for that reason, wrote *Science and Metaphysics* in an attempt to provide such proof. Though brilliant and often insightful, I argue that it goes astray by appealing to common themes found in Hume, Kant, Stace, and instrumentalism.⁸ In turn, these themes lead to the conclusion that knowledge of the thing-itself is either presupposed or a product of normative prescriptions that contingently assert epistemic standards and tolerances for acceptable degrees of similarity and dissimilarity.

Section 5

Now that I have addressed some global reasons why I believe Sellars' project fails, I would like to address some more specific problems. In so doing, I tackle additional misinterpretations of my view by deVries.

⁸ DeVries radically misrepresents my view on instrumentalism and appears to misunderstand some of its basic features. Instrumentalists disagree with scientific realists in that scientific realists argue theories describe reality:

A major controversy among philosophers of science is between instrumentalist and realist views of scientific theories (Leplin 1984; Psillos 1999; Niiniluoto 1999). The *instrumentalists* follow Duhem in thinking that theories are merely conceptual tools for classifying, systematizing and predicting observational statements, so that the genuine content of science is not to be found on the level of theories (Duhem 1954). *Scientific realists*, by contrast, regard theories as attempts to describe reality even beyond the realm of observable things and regularities, so that theories can be regarded as statements having a truth value. (Niiniluoto, Ilkka, "Scientific Progress", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2011/entries/scientific-progress/>>.)

DeVries misconstrues my view concerning the claim that general theories, which do not include particular entities or observable content, do not possess truth values for the instrumentalist. He believes that I assert instrumentalists claim one cannot make general observations concerning particular circumstances (or that my account has this unintended consequence). He, for instance, claims that, if my account were true, one could not note that "All the coins in my hand are pennies" as being either true or false. This is a gross misunderstanding of what I stated concerning the instrumentalist view. The context in which I was writing clearly refers to "observations concerning particular objects [...] can be reference, and hence, they are capable of being true or false" (59). My discussion concerns general theories, models, and concepts that are not applied to particular and observable existents, which the instrumentalists argue do not possess truth values like statements which reference observable entities. Similarly, I am confused by deVries claims that my statement "Sellars takes a quasi-instrumentalist stance" is wrong, because (in deVries own words) Sellars admits that "a correct account of matter-of-factual truth, even at the perceptual level, must contain 'instrumentalist' components" (60). My use of 'quasi' is meant to indicate that there are similarities without being the same view.

DeVries and I disagree in regard to Sellars' view of perception and how it hooks up with mind-independent time and space. I will simply start with Sellars' own words from *Science and Metaphysics*:

Kant's failure to distinguish clearly between the 'forms' of receptivity proper and the 'forms' of that which is represented by the intuitive conceptual representations which are 'guided' by receptivity — a distinction which is demanded both by the thrust of his argument, and by sound philosophy — had as its consequence that no sooner had he left the scene than these particular waters were muddied by Hegel and the Mills, and philosophy had to begin the slow climb 'back to Kant', which is still underway. (29)

Sellars believes that the distinction between the "'forms' of receptivity" and the "'forms" of "intuitive conceptual representations" permits him not only to answer an affirmative to the below questions but also to demonstrate the truth of these affirmative responses (in the form of illustrations i.e., drawings):⁹

But is it genuinely necessary to interpose non-conceptual representations *as states of consciousness* between the 'physical' impact of the sensory stimulus and the conceptual representations (guarded or daring) which find verbal expression, actually or potentially, in perceptual statements? Can we not interpret the receptivity involved in terms of 'purely physical' states and attribute to these the role of guiding conceptualizations? Why should we suppose that receptivity culminates in a state which is neither 'purely physical' *nor* conceptual? Yet to do just this is, I shall argue, of the greatest importance for the philosophy of mind and, in particular, for an understanding of how the framework of physical science is to be integrated with the framework of common sense (*Science and Metaphysics* 16-17).

The excerpts cited above frame a key component of Sellars' view on how "common sense," which stems from everyday perceptual experience, can be legitimately integrated into the framework of the physical sciences. In SPSR, I argued that this view forms the 'backbone' of Sellars' realism, because it shows that he thinks empirical observations are significantly connected to outer existence without appealing to the myth of the given or assuming perceptual states directly show the nature of the thing-in-itself.

⁹ A fuller account of Sellars' view of Kant and perception can be found in *Kant and Pre-Kantian Themes*. In it, he draws the following parallels between this work and *Science and Metaphysics*:

You will find the account of the τ -dimension in the appendix to *Science and Metaphysics* and you will find the account of space as a form of sense [...] I am giving you an exposition of these which I placed in a larger context in *Science and Metaphysics* (133).

It is natural for a scientific realist to take the above stance for the following reasons: if science can achieve the Truth, 1) empirical observation must be significantly connected and responsive to space-time (e.g., it would be curious to hear a scientist claim that observational science leads to the Truth, but empirical experience bears no significant or privileged relation to existence), while at the same time, 2) perceptions (in themselves) cannot accurately represent existence, because if they did, the findings of science would be manifestly false (e.g., the sun would not be over a million times the volume of the earth or nearly 93 million miles away from it, light would not be the product of wavelengths of energy, etc.).¹⁰

Perhaps the best place to see Sellars' explanation of the above stance can be found in sections 11 to 15 in his appendix "Inner Sense" from *Science and Metaphysics*. These sections are riddled with diagrams, so I will provide a shortened account of these passages. In these sections, he attempts to illustrate (metaphorically and literally) how the temporal and spatial characteristics of perceptual experience are informed by non-conceptual sensory content, which 'guides' the understanding. He claims that our spatial and temporal experiences share characteristics (or structural similarities), which are analogous to actual time and space. Lastly, he argues that Kant wrongly assumes our understanding must be restricted to the 'forms' of space and time (which concern only the possible arrangement of empirical content), and as such, fails to notice how non-conceptual sensory content does inform our perceptual understanding *a posteriori*.¹¹

Sellars correctly shows the manner in which Kant wrongly argues that our awareness of time and space *must* be ideal. However, Sellars is wrong to believe he has shown that our empirical experience delineates representings, which in turn possess characteristics such as " τ -characteristics" (temporal characteristics) and " σ -characteristics" (spatial characteristics) that bear important similarities to mind-independent space and time (without themselves being spatial or identical to mind-independent time). Here, my claim is not that this view is or must be false, but rather that Sellars cannot demonstrate it.

¹⁰ In this regard, I disagree with deVries, in that there is a sense in which Sellars believes in the "inalienable prerogative of the perceptual level." However, this is the case only when one *avoids* couching the perceptual level in the current conceptual order, i.e., a non-final science of the Peircean order. According to Sellars, to do otherwise would be to make the same mistake as the instrumentalists.

¹¹ Sellars write the following in *Science and Metaphysics*:

If Kant had clearly drawn the relevant distinctions, the way would have been open for him to argue that the fact that τ -characteristics are characteristic of presentings doesn't require that the intuitive representing which are synthesized by the understanding in response to them be representings of representings. For in the case of Space, in spite of the fact that the σ -characteristics (we may call them), which are the counterpart of spatial characteristics, are also characteristics of representings, the corresponding intuitive representings are representings of *non-representings*, i.e., spatial structures. Thus, that a form of sense is a form of (unrepresented) representings does not require that corresponding form of intuition be a form of (represented) representings. (235)

DeVries seems to believe that the Sellarsian view (or at least my account of it) requires something akin to the Cartesian foundationalist view, in which one is intimately and immediately aware of one's own mental states, e.g., "the Cartesian foundationalist thinks that what we know directly and primarily are certain sensory states of ourselves" (*Kant and Pre-Kantian Themes* 125).¹² However in SPSR, I made it clear that Sellars' account of sensory receptivity is Kantian in the sense that it is something for which we are not directly aware. Taking this into account, I argued that the arrangement of sensory content and its guiding role is a preconscious event similar to Kant's account of 'association': the "subjective and empirical ground of reproduction in accordance with rules is called the association of representations" (A 121).¹³

DeVries is correct to argue that, according to Sellars, physicists are "free to develop a theory of space-time that is in principle quite independent of the peculiarity of the constitution of human sensibility," but he is wrong to argue that it is a misreading of Sellars to claim that he deems perception to be significantly connected, responsive, and analogous to mind-independent space-time (7).¹⁴

Section 6

DeVries is also critical of my claim that "when we 'picture' what something is like, we *can* use relevant sensory content and apply such content in a manner that is compatible with scientific theories. If this is the case, then 'picturing' stems neither from sensory nor conceptual content alone, but some fusion of both." (SPSR 42). This view is evident in the following context: 1) Sellars believes that empirical experience is significantly tied to mind-independent existence, 2) as a result, "the framework of physical science" can be legitimately "integrated with the framework of common sense [which is a derivative of empirical experience]," and 3) consequently, theoretical science, insofar as it is based on empirical observation, is on a solid footing (*Science and Metaphysic* 16-17).

¹² DeVries writes the following with my paper SPSR in mind: "Sellars must not be shoved into a Procrustean bed structured by the old "new way of ideas" that claimed we know mental occurrence first and best and must infer from that knowledge to any knowledge we might be able to gain about external reality or thing in themselves" (66). *I have not attributed* "the old 'new way of ideas'" to Sellars. In this regard, DeVries provides a straw man characterization of my arguments. For those interested, in "Normative Functionalism and the Pittsburgh School", I show that Sellars considered the above view of the "new way of ideas" as one form of the myth of the given, which Sellars rejects.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹⁴ One can find many passages throughout Sellars' career where he takes this view. For instance, in *Kant and Pre-Kantian Themes*, he cannot help but provide the following stance even though the framework the context under which the expert is written is Kant's view of time and space:

In other words, this sort of relationship between material things in space and time and the empirical self is the way in which, to my mind with its faculties, this kind of action, the action of the in itself on my faculty of sensibility, appears.

So, as I would like to put it, the *empirical* action of material things, on our body and our mind, is the appearance of a real in itself relationship of impingement by the in itself on my faculty of sensibility. (178)

Furthermore, carefully note Sellars' following claim:

I mean by 'picture' literally picture because as Wittgenstein correctly emphasizes philosophers of different persuasions are hypnotized by different pictures: literally picture, little diagrams they draw on the margin of their pages even if they don't get into the heart of the text. But you can read a philosopher's work and pretty soon you can illustrate it. I've always been very candid. You can illustrate what I say because I provide the illustrations. (5)¹⁵

One cannot 'picture' or illustrate in the above sense without appealing to one's empirical experiences (though one of course is not unilaterally restricted to them) as they are perceived to occur in space and time.

This latter point brings me to a further criticism of deVries. He claims that I think knowledge of the thing-in-itself requires an "exact replica" or again that I am arguing that Sellars espouses a form of Cartesian representationalism. I adopt neither of these views, but it is worth mentioning, since it brings to light an issue often found in Sellars' work and scientific realism as a whole: 1) what *degree* of similarity (or dissimilarity) is permissible for legitimate knowledge of the thing-in-itself, and 2) what degree of qualitative difference can there be between our representations and the actual existence of the thing-in-itself? For example, different kinds of practical engagement and experimentation result in different types of 'pictures.' These pictures can be the product of radically different kinds of analogous relations to observable phenomenon. Is each of these different types of 'pictures' just as true or accurate as the next? These questions beckon the reader to question what it means to know the thing-in-itself and what degree and type of similarity finite minds can produce in regard to scientific accounts of things-in-themselves.

The above questions are not something science can directly answer. Thus, enters the philosopher. Yet, can any degree of difference found tolerable by the philosopher (and still count it as knowledge of the thing-in-itself) be anything more than a presumed, contingent, and/or normative view of what is deemed to be true? In the same way, any accepted normative range of similitude or dissimilarity cannot be confirmed by science, for as I have argued, science is based on observations, and one cannot observe whether theories concerning the unobservable thing-in-itself are similar or dissimilar to it. Finally, though a scientific realist might claim science can achieve the latter, I argued in SPSR that he/she can only do so by begging the question as to what

¹⁵ Wilfrid Sellars, *Kant and Pre-Kantian Themes: Lectures by Wilfrid Sellars*, Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company, 2002. I would like to thank Aaron Schiller Vice President of the WSS (i.e., Wilfrid Sellars Society) who sent the above "favorite quote" to all WSS members.

the thing-in-itself is truly like. When this occurs, the flood gates open for unproven similarities in analogies being upheld as the gold standard of "how things really are."¹⁶

Section 7

Kant's Copernican revolution makes a case for the claim that knowledge is limited to empirical objects (as empirical objects), minds, as well as their mental contents and processes. This claim is easily misunderstood. It does not deny the occurrence of mind-independent existence, but rather only that we cannot have knowledge of it. Nor does it claim that knowledge cannot exist. Similarly, it does not transform empirical experience into a subjective fantasy, which devolves into global skepticism or solipsism.¹⁷

While Hegel finds Kant's dualism of the thing-in-itself problematic, he makes his own contribution to the Copernican revolution by emphasizing that in fact all experience, including empirical experience, is an expression of the observing subject's consciousness.¹⁸ For Hegel, at least in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the height of knowledge (and the only type worthy of being considered 'science') *begins* when human consciousness recognizes itself in the act of experience. When this is achieved, consciousness will no longer consider the lived world of empirical entities and events as something foreign to or other than itself.¹⁹ In short, Hegel believes that all *experience* is necessarily a form of consciousness, even when it appears in the guise of empirical certainty (i.e., "sense-certainty") or an intentional attitude one holds towards the empirical world.

¹⁶ Hence Loki, the trickster god, cursed man to be the measure of all things, but compelled his eyes to look forever outward so he may never know the truth of himself.

¹⁷ Sellars commendably avoids these shortcomings.

¹⁸ Hegel writes:

Thus what seems to happen outside of it [i.e., the conscious self], to be an activity directed against it, is really its own doing, and Substance shows itself to be essentially Subject. When it has shown this completely, Spirit has made its existence identical with its essence; it has itself for its object just as it is, and the abstract element of immediacy, and of the separation of knowing and truth, is overcome. (21; 37)

See the following text: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, USA: Oxford University Press, 1977.

¹⁹ Hegel writes:

In pressing forward to its true existence consciousness will arrive at a point which it gets rid of its semblance of being burdened with something alien, with what is only for it, and some sort of 'other', at a point where appearance becomes identical with essences, so that its exposition will coincide at just this point with the authentic Science of Spirit. (56-7; 89)

Arguing for the truth of a specific reading of Hegel is a bit like attempting to change another person's political affiliation. I will therefore not make such an attempt here, as it requires extensive commentary. Those familiar with the history of Hegelian scholarship will not find any reading of Hegel surprising (e.g., he has been read as being everything from a more extravagant version of Berkeley to a metaphysical realist). I of course believe there is much textual support for this account of Hegel.

A strong case can be made that knowledge of mind-independent content is not possible and all knowledge is irreducibly mind-dependent. There are of course many superficial ways to respond to this type of claim. Yet I believe that careful consideration will show that it is a matter of epistemic limits and that the qualitative status of knowledge (at an ontological level) is at stake. These issues are clearly some of the most important, deep, and enduring concerns a philosopher can address. Because scientific realism is in vogue, I am concerned that such perennial philosophical issues of philosophy, issues which deepen and renew the philosophical discipline, are routinely ignored.

Sellars should be celebrated as one of the first analytic philosophers to truly appreciate and respect the problems presented by German idealism. It is unfortunate that his work is often seen as supporting the view that one can circumvent these problems by merely appealing to science.

Section 8

The analytic tradition epitomizes a dangerous trend, starting with its progenitor G.E. Moore. He argues that all forms of idealism and all challenges to metaphysical realism are absurd and unworthy of serious philosophical reflection. The analytical tradition seems habitually to misrepresent German idealism as a form of global skepticism, the bad idealism of the British variety, or as a type of pseudo realism, which only needs to be gently nudged to ripen into full blown metaphysical realism.

Perhaps the analytic tradition is in the process of returning to German idealism, as Sellars believes (and via the Pittsburgh School and its proponents in general). This primarily occurs as the various forms of analytic realism increasingly accept German idealism's account of the subject. Yet the analytic tradition cannot, despite its claims to the contrary, demonstrate how knowledge of mind-independent content (e.g., such as the thing-in-itself) is possible. In this regard, there is a tension between its sympathies with the German idealist's account of the subject (which supports the claim that mind-independent content is unknowable) and its insistence that knowledge must, and can, encompass mind-independent content. Hence, it is doomed to be at odds with itself on important epistemic and metaphysical issues. If, however, it accepts that it cannot demonstrate such knowledge, then all of its considerable methodological strengths and enormous intellectual resources can be unleashed on more productive pursuits that avoid extravagant faith in metaphysical realism. It can perhaps, at last, let go not only of the myth of the given but also the myth of metaphysical realism, where knowledge of mind-independent entities are presumed to be perfected and demonstrable.

I will close by reminding the reader that in the Western philosophical tradition, the winning epistemic stance is not the one that appeals to one's wishes to know but fails to be validated. It is not the one that proves to be the most practical. Nor is it the one that appears to be most likely.

The victor is always the one who can *demonstrate* his position. It may in fact be the case that German idealism holds significant epistemic advantages over the metaphysical realism of the analytic tradition, in that German idealism can demonstrate their objects of knowledge in ways metaphysical realists cannot.²⁰ For all the above reasons, it is important to challenge the analytic tradition about its numerous expressions of metaphysical realism and force it to reevaluate the viability of such views. In doing so, metaphysical realists (and perhaps the analytic tradition as a whole) will become more sophisticated either by rethinking what it means to know the "in-itself" (rather than considering this and similar themes to be unimportant) or by returning to the bosom of philosophy in making the human intellect its object of knowledge.

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²⁰ Since this a major theme of my book manuscript "The Analytic Tradition and German Idealism: A Case for Epistemic Idealism," I will refrain from further comment.