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The Seen and the Known

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Philosophy

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Philosophy

By:

Jeff Wasch

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Abstract

This project is a response to the question: what is the role of language in knowledge and experience? My answer is that knowledge must be *purely linguistic*, but experience has a non-linguistic level constructed by the senses. I suggest that a result of this is that there are two fundamentally different kinds of *content* which make up experience, the *phenomenological content* which is related to the senses, and the *semantic content* that is made up of language and constructs belief, justification, and knowledge. But then we have a question about how these two kinds of content interact? How is observational knowledge possible? To answer this question I turn to an under-explored technical term from Merleau-Ponty, *pregnancy*. *Pregnancy* is the idea that the phenomenological content of our experience is “pregnant” with its meaning. I argue that it follows from this that the phenomenological content of experience is pregnant with its corresponding semantic content allowing us to “see things as”. This framework, the *pregnancy framework*, is then applied to make claims within the fields of epistemology and philosophy of mind. First I make the claim that since experience is divided into two kinds of content, the phenomenological and the semantic, *we never really see what we know*. Second, the framework is stacked up against other contemporary explanations of perceptual epistemology, namely, Susanna Siegel’s notion of *epistemic charge*. It will be shown that Siegel’s picture over-intellectualizes the nature of perception, and therefore, the *pregnancy framework* is a more viable option than Siegel’s.

Keywords: Wilfrid Sellars, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Epistemology, Phenomenology Myth of the Given.

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Part I: Introduction

A) The Dreyfus-McDowell Debate: What is the Role of Language in Experience and Knowledge?

This project is a response to a nagging question which has bothered me for the past several years: what is the role of language in experience and knowledge? This question began to haunt me in the spring semester of 2018 when I took a philosophical topics class on phenomenology. I was tasked to read Robert Brandom's "What are the Categories in '*Being and Time*'" (1983). Brandom's argument in the piece is that the transcendence of an object which is *ready-at-hand* to *present-at-hand*¹ is the result of a "linguistic assertion". Without getting into the nitty-gritty of Heidegger and Brandom here, it seemed to follow from Brandom's claim about Heidegger's categories that *all knowledge was linguistic*. This *seemed* like a radical suggestion to me at the time and I set out to prove it was misleading.

It was then recommended by my instructor² that I read Brandom's paper "No Experience Necessary" (2004) to research for my final paper of the class; which, needless to say, I was doing on why Brandom's claim in "What are the Categories?" was wrong. I wrote the paper as an undergrad which admittedly pulled from too many different sources, said only a little about too much, and, in the end, made some seriously flawed assumptions. Nevertheless, Brandom's "No Experience Necessary" introduced me to "The Myth of the Given" and John McDowell. I became obsessed with the issue and became even more determined to show that their (the Pittsburgh Pragmatist's) approach to knowledge was wrong, and took sense experience for

¹ In *Being and Time* what is referred to as "ready-to-hand" is something we encounter in our *average everydayness* and typically take for granted. However, when something breaks and is no longer usable, it reveals its purpose to us and we understand it as "present-at-hand". So for example, we may walk into a room and use the door knob and take it for granted as a piece of "equipment", but if the doorknob does not work it reveals to us the doorknob's "present-at-hand" purpose to us. For Brandom, this is the result of a *linguistic assertion*. (Brandom, 1983).

² Dr. Patrick Denehy

granted. I then came across the Dreyfus-McDowell debate. On the one hand, McDowell spelled out a view which suggested that experience was conceptual from the top down (similar to Brandom's claim outlined above); while on the other hand, Dreyfus used phenomenologists like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to show that experience and knowledge were, at least in part, non-conceptual. This looked like a perfectly natural place to look, at the intersection of epistemology and phenomenology, in order to answer the question I became so interested in. What happened after digging into this was that I changed my mind, knowledge had to be purely linguistic; however, there remained a nonlinguistic level of experience (even in the views of Sellars and McDowell).

Now, let me explain why reading into the Dreyfus and McDowell debate forced me to change my views on the issue. Dreyfus argues in "The Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental" that McDowell's framework cannot account for "absorbed coping" or "flow states" (Dreyfus, 2013, 27-33). To illustrate this idea he asks us to think about a master chess player. In the heat of the game, Dreyfus purports that the chess master does not rely on their conceptual capacities, but they enter a "flow state" in which they respond to "the forces of the board" *without* deploying concepts. However, he admits that when responding to the board, the master player has reasons to make such-and-such a move. McDowell rebuts, the fact that there are "reasons" for the player to make such-and-such a move shows that our rational activities are actually at work in these flow states (McDowell, 2013, 43). I am sympathetic to McDowell here and am not so sure that Dreyfus's criticism is exactly fair for two reasons. The first is that I do not think that Dreyfus does proper interpretive justice to Merleau-Ponty in constructing his argument against McDowell. Dreyfus, I argue, fails to understand the importance of language and culture in

Merleau-Ponty's later thought. Second, he fails to interpret McDowell properly, or to recognize changes in McDowell's thought as the debate progressed.

Let me begin by discussing my disagreement with Dreyfus's use of Merleau-Ponty. Dreyfus picks up on Merleau-Ponty's criticism of "intellectualism" in the *Phenomenology of Perception*,³ and uses it to say that: "For McDowell, *mind* is everywhere the pure *given* is not, that is to say, "all the way out". Precisely because the myth of the pure Given is dead, we must understand our experience as conceptually permeated through and through" (Dreyfus, 2005, 52). Here, Dreyfus is arguing that for McDowell the mind is detached because the "mind is everywhere" because our conceptual capacities pervade into our perception. But I think if we look at Merleau-Ponty's later work, we will find something similar to what Dreyfus calls the "Myth of the Pervasiveness of the Mental". Merleau-Ponty writes that "matter is already "pregnant" with its form" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964*b*, 12). But what does it mean to say that something is "pregnant"? For this we have to turn to the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Merleau-Ponty writes that pregnancy is, "A question of that [logos] that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing, inasmuch as it varies around a certain type of message..." (Merleau-Ponty, 208, 1968). Thus, there is a type of rationality (logos) in perception for Merleau-Ponty.⁴ He says here that every sensible thing is accompanied by "logos", and pregnancy is the idea that our perceptual experience is also "pregnant" with its rational and/or conceptual content. Therefore, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty's thought should be thought of as similar to McDowell's in this way.

³ Merleau-Ponty's criticism of "intellectualism" is that "judgement is everywhere pure sensation is not, which is to say everywhere" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, quoted in Dreyfus, 2005, 52). What Merleau-Ponty means by this is that intellectualism takes sense experience for granted by claiming it is all a kind of judgement, claim, or belief.

⁴ For a further discussion of *pregnancy* see Part II Sec. A.

The second reason that Dreyfus's criticism of McDowell is unfair is because McDowell's position had changed since *Mind and World* and Dreyfus seems to pay this no mind.

Subsequently, this leads to a failed interpretation of McDowell. McDowell writes:

“Dreyfus here tries to provide evidence for attributing to me the idea that a subject of experience is always detached from the world, but the attempt misfires. His interpretation of me reflects his assuming that I accept the Myth of the Mind as Detached. But when I claim that mindedness is pervasive in our lives, it is part of my point that mindedness does not always involve detachment” (Ibid, 44-45).

In other words, McDowell's claim that concepts are pervasive in no way implies that the mind is in some way detached from the world, and when mindedness does involve detachment, it is an instance of imagining. So for example, I can imagine my friend Peter in Florida even when I am in Pennsylvania. This is the sort of detachment McDowell is speaking of.⁵

Now, Dreyfus's criticism relies on the claim that McDowell's theory cannot account for what he calls “flow”, and therefore McDowell's picture is “detached” from the world. Dreyfus articulates this criticism by example. For instance, consider a master chess player who is able to just respond to the situation on the board without explicitly thinking to themselves “move bishop”. The player is immersed in the “flow” of the game, if you will. This shows, according to Dreyfus, that our conceptual and/or rational capacities are not always at work, and because of this, McDowell's suggestion that our concepts operate “all the way out” is misleading. However, McDowell argues that the example shows *the opposite is true*, and that *the chess master's mastery shows their rational powers at work*. McDowell writes, “If he explains his move as a response to the forces on the board, as Dreyfus of course accepts that he can, he is giving a rational explanation of it” (Ibid, 47). In other words, the master has *reasons* for making the

⁵ See pg. 28-29.

moves he does, and therefore is making use of his rational and/or conceptual capacities. To cover his bases, McDowell suggests that we cannot ask the master to tell us their reasoning for the move in the moment, that would break the “flow” of the game, but if we asked the master after the game why they made such and such a move they would surely be able to offer us a reason.

This is related to McDowell’s “more relaxed” position, taken up since *Mind and World*. In “Avoiding the Myth of the Given” McDowell admits that he may have “over-intellectualized” experience in *Mind and World* by saying that experience is conceptual the “whole way down”. Furthermore, he admits that there is something “like a Given” in experience that is non-conceptual (McDowell, 2009, 272). He reintroduces the Myth of the Given as, “the idea that *sensibility by itself* could make things available for the sort of cognition that draws on the subject’s rational powers” (Ibid, 257).⁶ What is key here, for my purposes, is that he says “sensibility by itself”. This means that sensibility indeed makes up a level of experience which is non-conceptual. In other words, by saying “sensibility by itself” McDowell is implying that there is a kind of nonconceptual content in experience.

Nevertheless, what McDowell’s relaxed position implies according to Tim Crane, with whom I agree, is that “What it is for content to be conceptual, then, is not for it to be *conceptualized* -- in the sense that one has to actually be exercising a conceptual capacity when in a state with such a content -- but for it to be *conceptualizable*” (Crane, 2013, 231). Thus, not all of the content of our experience is conceptual, and what it means for content to be conceptual is that it is *conceptualizable*. But what does it mean for content to be conceptualizable? What I mean by this is that *it is able to be put into words*. So, from the example of the chess player, they may not make an explicit claim as to why they made such a move, but there was for the player a *reason* for making such a move at that moment. Since there was a reason for the move, and this

⁶ Emphasis my own.

reason can be articulated by deploying concepts, and the fact that content can be articulated *in words*, is what is meant by conceptualizable.⁷

This is McDowell's more relaxed position which leaves room for nonconceptual content since he makes a distinction between the content of intuition and the contents of judgements, or, as Crane writes, "McDowell no longer thinks what one can see is also what one can judge" (Ibid). This led me to an answer to the problem which started my investigation: what is the role of language in experience and knowledge? The answer is that *all knowledge must be linguistic*, and this aligns me with Sellars and McDowell because knowledge requires that "one be able to justify what one says" within the *space of reasons* (McDowell, 2009, 256). However, experience is tricky because there must be a level of experience that is *non-linguistic*, yet, we do not want to commit to a version of the Myth of the Given by saying that this level of experience grants us the capacity for knowledge or cognition on its own. This would be granting sensibility too much power.

Tim Crane makes a distinction between two kinds of content within our experience which I think is useful here. First there is the *phenomenological content*, which is "spatiotemporal, concrete, particular, and specific to the subject", and is the sort of content Given by the senses. Then there is the *semantic content*, which includes propositions and concepts in a linguistic form which are often *descriptions of the phenomenological content* (Crane, 2013, 245). Thus, the easy way to avoid this problem then is to say that Crane's *semantic* content is the part of experience which makes up knowledge and the space of reasons; while the *phenomenological* content of experience, *the Given*, makes up the nonconceptual level of our experience. As a result of this I will make a provocative claim, that *seeing is never believing*. In other words, since the kind of

⁷ For more on what it means for something to be "conceptualizable", see the discussion of "abstraction" on pg. 21-22 & 60.

content which we “see” is *fundamentally different* from the kind of content which affords us the capacity to have knowledge; it follows that *we never really see what we know*.

The idea that experience is made up of two different kinds of content, phenomenological and semantic, and the further implications of it are what I wish to clarify and advance throughout the remainder of this project. First, I will establish an epistemological framework by drawing on both Sellars and Merleau-Ponty and make similarities that I have found between the two clear since the two have more in common than what contemporary literature on the issue lets on. I will call this framework the *pregnancy framework* because it relies on an underexplored concept from Merleau-Ponty’s work “pregnancy” which I think is of significant epistemological importance. Next I will make the claim, following Merleau-Ponty, that there is a gap between what we “see” and what we “know” during experiences. Put differently, there is a gap between the kind of content which comes from sense experience (the *phenomenological content*), and the kind of content which constructs knowledge (the *semantic content*). Lastly I will stack this framework up against other contemporary explanations of perceptual epistemology, namely, Susanna Siegel’s notion of *epistemic charge*.

B) Some Definitions

In this section I will develop working definitions for the terms *concepts*, *norms*, and *content* in order to avoid potential verbal disputes. Concept, as I will be using the term, is described by Georges Rey as the “constituents of propositions” (Rey, 1996, 185). Concepts have been used to fill various roles in the acquisition of knowledge: representations, images, ‘prototypes’, etc., but I will be using them in the role of words (Ibid, 192). So, to use Rey’s example, let us take the proposition “capitalist exploit workers” (Ibid, 185). The concepts in the proposition are “capitalists”, “exploit”, “workers”, and they are connected via inference. Each concept has a correlating definition, made up of other concepts, which gives each word its meaning within the proposition.

Secondly, *norms* will be used as a system of rules which govern rationality (Guttenplan, 1996, 450-51). They are a system of conceptual rules which govern our capacities for knowledge. Let me continue with the example from above, in order to know what one means when one hears the proposition “capitalist exploit workers” the speaker and the person being spoken to must have shared (or similar) definitions of “capitalist”, “exploitation”, and “workers”. These shared definitions which allow subjects to communicate meaning are what I will refer to when I say norms. In other words, norms are conceptual (linguistic) rules which play a key role in adjudicating knowledge.

Lastly, I will define *content*. For the purposes of this project “content” will refer to mental states which we are aware of. This is anything which one can be aware of in experience, so, there can be a variety of different sorts of content. For example, there can be content related to the senses which we experience, and, at the same time, there can be content associated with thought which we do not experience in virtue of the senses. There are things beneath our

awareness in experience, but exploring this is out of the scope of the project. However, whatever it is in experience we are not aware of does not deserve to be called “content”; this is what makes it a mystery.⁸

⁸ For more on this see pg. 52-53.

C) A Synopsis of the Parts

Here, I will briefly outline the remainder of the project here. However, let me briefly discuss what I have done in this introductory part of the project. First, I introduced the question which inspired the project, “what is the role of language in experience and knowledge?”. I investigated this question within the context of the Dreyfus-McDowell debate. What I found was that McDowell and Merleau-Ponty had much more in common than Dreyfus had let on, and that ultimately, Dreyfus’s criticism of McDowell fell flat. It does not follow from the Sellarsian claim that knowledge is linguistic, that experience is entirely conceptual, *there is something like a Given for Sellars and McDowell*. This gave us an answer to our question, knowledge can be purely linguistic but there must be a nonlinguistic level to experience. I also developed working definitions for the terms *concepts*, *norms*, and *content* in order to avoid verbal disputes. Now, to outline the remainder of the project.

Part II of the project will historically situate the claims I want to make in Part III of the project by developing an epistemological framework to work from. First, *I will provide a phenomenological (specifically a Merleau-Pontean) approach to epistemology which avoids the Myth of the Given*. I do this by exploring an underexplored, but, in my opinion, epistemologically significant term in Merleau-Ponty’s later thought, *pregnancy*. This term suggests that sensible things are “pregnant” with their meaning, but, I will argue, that it also allows us to avoid the Myth. I will call this framework the *pregnancy framework of observational knowledge*. Next, I will establish *preconditions of experience and knowledge which are necessary conditions for us to have knowledge and experience in the first place*. I suggest that these preconditions make up what Husserl called the “always already there” that makes up the *lifeworld* (Husserl, 1970, 24, ft. 4). I will show that there are two basic preconditions. The first precondition is that, to use Merleau-Ponty’s words, *we are part of the*

flesh of the world. Flesh is what all spatio-temporal objects are made up of, putting us all in a sort of kinship which, as a result, allows for things to create meaning. Further, our flesh is what our body is made out of, and the body has an intrinsic organization which gives rise to a *perceptual field*. Thus, this first precondition is placing the body and the mind in the world together. The second precondition of experience and knowledge is that one is *acculturated into a linguistic community*. This sets up a system of norms that govern rationality. In short, one is able to *know* because one learns how to use a language which has been handed down by *tradition*.

Part III of the project applies the framework to make claims in the fields of epistemology and the philosophy of mind. First I will make the claim, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's distinction between *the visible and the invisible* and based on Crane's distinction between the phenomenological content and semantic contents of experience, that *we never see what we know, and that seeing is never believing*. Next, I will argue against claims made in Susanna Siegel's *The Rationality of Perception*. I will show that her notion of *epistemic charge*, and the *inferential modulation thesis* it rests on, over-intellectualize the nature of perception. Further, I will propose that *pregnancy* presents a viable alternative to *epistemic charge* since it does not over-intellectualize the picture and can still account for the influence of pre-existing psychological dispositions on our perceptual experiences.

Part II: Historically Situating the Argument

A) The Given is *Pregnant*: Merleau-Ponty and the Myth of the Given⁹

In this paper I will examine the epistemological significance of an underexplored technical term in Merleau-Ponty's later works, "pregnancy". I will suggest that *pregnancy* gives us a uniquely Merleau-Pontean answer to problems surrounding the notion of *Givness*. The upshot of this analysis will be that we have a phenomenological approach to epistemology which does not commit to a version of the Myth of the Given.¹⁰ First, I will outline the Myth. The Myth is described as thinking that sensibility *alone* can make things available for cognition and knowledge (McDowell, 2009, 257). Some may be worried that a phenomenological approach to epistemology which is critical of the Given takes sense experience for granted, but this is not so. Sellars writes in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* that if the term "Given" referred to just "observed data" and was not considered an item of knowledge *in itself*, the term would be *uncontroversial* (Sellars, 1997, 12). Thus, if we were to say that the Given was *merely* a kind of data we would *not* be committed to a version of the Myth. This interpretation of Sellars leaves room for *non-conceptual sense experience*, and I believe Merleau-Ponty has a framework which compliments this interpretation. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, he suggests that the perceptual field (the Given) presents structures *without a name* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 22). The perceptual field is what is "visible" or "sensible" for Merleau-Ponty, but what does it mean to say that it presents us structures without a name? I believe that what he is suggesting is that the sensible does *not* have a meaning in itself. *Rather, meaning is constructed for it by culture which, in turn, impregnates the sensible via the productive imagination.* Since the perceptual field has no

⁹ I would like to thank Phillip Berghofer, Walter Hopp, and the attendees of the *First Austrian Summer School in Phenomenology* for their comments on this section.

¹⁰ Not that there are not other approaches from the phenomenological perspective which are not committed to the Myth.

meaning for Merleau-Ponty, *I think it is fair to say he relegates the Given to only being a kind of data*. Ultimately, I believe this epistemological approach avoids the Myth because there is a distinction between two kinds of content which make up experience, one perceptual and another which supplies meaning. The distinction between these kinds of experiential content is made sense of by Merleau-Ponty's notion of the *chiasm* and *intertwining* between *sensible and the intelligible*. The intertwining of the sensible and the intelligible, I will show, is what Merleau-Ponty would call *pregnancy*, but there still exists a gap between them which is bridged in principle by "pregnancy" but is "never nullified" (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 124). I show that this is similar to the distinction between the *phenomenological* and *semantic* contents of experience made by Tim Crane (2013). Phenomenological content is what is Given, and semantic content is the type of content which supplies meaning. I will argue that the phenomenological content is pregnant with the semantic content of experience, and this allows us to avoid the Myth because phenomenological content is merely a kind of data which our semantic beliefs are about. In conclusion, a phenomenological approach to epistemology which avoids the Myth of the Given necessarily follows from the claim that *the Given is pregnant*.

1) The Given and Avoiding the Myth

First, I think it is important to discuss what "the Given" is. The Given, according to Willem deVries and Timm Triplet, arises out of a problem to connect "the knower to the known" (deVries, 2000, xvi). There are two fundamental features of the Given in the epistemological literature which give it its role. The first is that the Given is known *independent* of any other form of knowledge (Ibid, xx). But what does it mean to be known "independent of any other knowledge"? And further, what kind of knowledge can potentially be known independent of other kinds of knowledge? deVries and Triplet point out that the Given, in order to be known

independent of other kinds of knowledge, must be non-inferentially known (since inferences would be another kind of knowledge making it indirect) (Ibid, xx-xxi). The second feature of the Given which gives it its role is that it is *epistemologically efficacious*. What this means is that whatever is Given in experience must be able to ground all other empirical knowledge (Ibid, xxi). Meaning that the Given provides a *foundation and justification* for all other forms of knowledge.

This is the idea that Sellars wants to reject in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. In Sellars's words, he wants to reject the traditional empiricist presumption that observational knowledge "stands on its own feet" (Sellars, 1997, 75-76). This follows from his claim:

"In other words, for a *konstatierung* "This is green" to "express observational knowledge," not only must it be a *symptom* or *sign* of the presence of a green object in standard conditions, but the perceiver must know that tokens of "This is green" *are* symptoms of the presence of green objects in conditions which are standard for visual perception" (Ibid).

What Sellars is saying here is that not only must the perceiver be in "standard conditions"¹¹ and "see" the object to have knowledge that this particular object is green, but that they also must understand the token statement "this is green". This would mean that in order to have observational knowledge that "this is green", the perceiver must also have an understanding of the concepts at play in the proposition within a linguistic and normatively governed context. In other words, this implies that one must also know a cacophony of other facts (e.g. how to distinguish red from green) in order to know what "this is green" means. This suggests that one

¹¹ Standard conditions for Sellars are basically ideal conditions to have accurate perceptions. His example of a tie shop owner in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* illustrates this idea. John owns a tie shop but in the electrical lighting of the store blue ties look green, in order to accurately perceive the ties John has to take the ties outside and view them in "standard conditions" (Sellars, 1997, 37-38). It is also important to note that Merleau-Ponty has strikingly a similar example of a red dress looking brown in dim light (Romdenh-Romluc, 2007, 83). These ideal conditions for having accurate perceptions could be considered *accuracy conditions*.

must have a grip on how to use a language to have observational knowledge, and thus, it shows the traditional empiricist assumption that observational knowledge stands on its own two feet to be flawed because in order to have observational knowledge, one must also know a series of other facts. This effectively strips the given of its first feature, that it is known independent of any other form of knowledge, because to characterize something as being green requires that one knows a series of other facts. Therefore, it cannot be known independently in the way the Givenist supposes.

Now to reject the second feature of the Given, that it is epistemically efficacious we must see what remains of the Given after Sellars's criticism. Sellars writes that:

“if the term “given” referred merely to what is observed as being observed, or, perhaps, to a proper subset of the things we are said to determine by observation, the existence of “data” would be as non-controversial as the existence of philosophical perplexities” (Ibid, 13).

Thus, if one is to limit the Given to merely being a kind of data of what we are observing, then there is no problem in having a Given in one's framework since it does not have the two features which give it its role in traditional empiricist accounts of observational knowledge.

But what does it mean to say the Given is merely a kind of data? The goal for Sellars, I suggest, is to take any epistemological efficacy away from the Given, but we must answer the question if the Given has justificatory power? If it has justificatory power, then the Given is epistemically efficacious. Laurence Bonjour argues that the Given does have justificatory power and subsequently, that the Given is not a Myth in “The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism” (Bonjour, 2017, 134). Bonjour changes his notoriously coherentist position into a foundationalist picture. He writes that:

“if (i) an apperceptive belief that I entertain purports to describe or conceptually characterize that perceptual content, albeit no doubt incompletely, and if (ii) I understand the descriptive content of that belief, i.e., understand what an experience would have to be like in order to satisfy the conceptual description, then I seem to be in a good, indeed an ideal, position to judge whether the conceptual description is accurate as far as it goes; and if it appears to be accurate, to be justified on that basis in accepting the belief” (Ibid).

He goes on to say that here we have a “confrontation” between the conceptual belief and a “nonconceptual chunk of reality”. This confrontation, for Bonjour, means that the Given yields a kind of justificatory power, and he then declares that the Given is not a Myth.

However, I believe that there is an element of Sellars’s criticism of the Given which Bonjour overlooks. It should be noted that Sellars is not necessarily rejecting foundationalism. In fact, he even suggests that there are basic beliefs which arise as a result of our perceptual content, and he calls these “observation reports” (Sellars, 1997, 78). Nonetheless, these observation reports are conceptually formulated beliefs, and are therefore a part of a system of beliefs. Thus, these “observation reports” are not justified in virtue of their nonconceptual content alone, but also from being a belief within a system of beliefs. This is why Sellars suggests that the metaphor of the structure of justification being foundationalist is misleading because empirical inquiry is a “self-correcting enterprise” (Ibid, 79). Meaning that our system of beliefs as it relates to empirical inquiry is self-adjudicating. Or, as Sellars puts it in “Inference and Meaning”, “there is nothing to a conceptual apparatus that isn’t determined by its rules” (Sellars, 1953*b*, 337). This means that our conceptual beliefs are self-governing, and further, that the Given plays no epistemic role other than giving rise to observation reports which are then justified in virtue of their coherence within a system of beliefs. Thus, the Given is robbed of

epistemic efficacy since it *cannot* provide justification on its own. Rather, *justification is a linguistic affair*.¹²

However, Bonjour does provide us with a useful tool to avoid the Myth of the Given. In saying that we use concepts to make claims about “nonconceptual chunks of reality”, Bonjour implies that there are two kinds of content which make up our experience. One which is related to the senses, the Given, and another which structures knowledge. To put the point clearly, Sellars notes on the very first page of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* that no philosopher attacking the idea of Givenness would deny that there is a difference between *inferring* and *seeing* that something is the case (Sellars, 1997, 13). Therefore, to avoid the Myth of the Given is to accept that the kind of content which structures our knowledge is fundamentally different from the sort which is related to the *passivity of the senses*.

Tim Crane draws a useful distinction we could use here. Crane distinguishes between what he calls the *phenomenological* and *semantic contents* of experience in a defense of John McDowell. *Phenomenological content* is “spatiotemporal, concrete, particular, and specific to the subject” and this is the kind of content Given over by the senses. Then there is the *semantic content*, which includes propositions and concepts in a linguistic form which are often *descriptions of the phenomenological content* (Crane, 2013, 245). This implies that for McDowell and Sellars there still remains a nonconceptual element of experience; it is only knowledge that is purely linguistic. Rather, as Crane points out, what it is for something to be conceptual for McDowell was for it to be *conceptualizable*. What does it mean for something to be conceptualizable though? I suggest that what this means is for something to be *put into words*. Thus, when phenomenological contents are described by semantic contents the phenomenological contents are conceptualized in the sense that they are described using the

¹² For more on foundationalism and coherentism see Part III Sec. A Subsec. 2.

semantic content of our experience. This does not mean that the phenomenological content is conceptual; rather, *it is only described in conceptual terms*. An important thing to note here is that for Crane, the semantic content, that is, the conceptual content, is *abstracted* from the phenomenological. Thus, conceptualization, and putting into words, requires an abstraction from the actual perceptual content of that experience. Conceptualization and what it means for content to be conceptual then is for the content to be interpreted within the context of a socio-historical language. What follows from the discussion above is that the *phenomenological content* is a kind of data our propositions can be about; while the *semantic content* is conceptual, constructs the space of reasons, and is the kind of content which can provide justification for items of knowledge. I will take up this distinction moving forward.

The question now is whether or not there is a distinction like this in Merleau-Ponty's work? I argue that a similar distinction can be found in *The Visible and the Invisible*. First, we must understand Merleau-Ponty's notion of *chiasm*. The notion of *chiasm* for Merleau-Ponty is the idea that for every relation there is an opposite. For example, if one is holding something something is also being-held. Ted Toadvine calls it a "kinship between the sensing body and sensed things that makes their communication possible". Toadvine also points out that for Merleau-Ponty, there exists an "ultimate ontological *chiasm*" between the sensible and the intelligible (Toadvine, 2016, plato.stanford.edu). Now I suggest that this gap between the sensible and the intelligible, which is for Merleau-Ponty an ultimate ontological chiasm, is a similar distinction to the one made by Crane.

Now, what is similar to the phenomenological content and semantic content in Merleau-Ponty's work? One could interpret the *visible* as the phenomenological content described by Crane. Throughout *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty continually refers

to the visible as the “sensible”, and it is also made up of what he calls *the flesh of the world*. Essentially, *the flesh of the world* as Merleau-Ponty describes it is the idea that my body is a spatio-temporal object, and so is every other object. Being part of the *flesh of the world* allows me to have a kinship with all other spatio-temporal objects in the world. Now if the visible is the phenomenological content described above it fits several of the qualifications. First, if the visible is the sensible then it is related to the senses, and secondly, it fits the qualification of being spatio-temporal in the sense that it is part of the *flesh of the world*.

Now, what can we find which resembles the semantic content in Merleau-Ponty? Here I suggest that what he calls the *existentials of the visible* can be interpreted as the semantic content described by Crane. It is important to note here that the existentials of the visible are part of what make up the *invisible* for Merleau-Ponty. The invisible is made up of things which play a role in our experience which “literally cannot be seen” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 257), and is not limited to the existentials of the visible. The *invisible* all sorts of things which play a role in our experience that are *not logically connected*, yet all still unable to be sensed (Ibid).¹³ Nonetheless, the invisible element which serves our purposes in this paper are *the existentials of the visible*.

Merleau-Ponty writes:

“It is these existentials that make up the (substitutable) *meaning* of what we say and of what we understand. They are the armature of the “invisible world” which, with speech, begins to impregnate all the things we see” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 180).

¹³ Merleau-Ponty gives a list of what makes up the invisible in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*. Language would be what make up “the existentials of the visible” which cannot be seen as a thing (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 257). By “existentials”, Merleau-Ponty means the semantic content which allows us to understand the sensible content of experience. Another feature of the invisible which I argue could be considered semantic content are “the λέκτα of the cogito”, or “the lectures of the cogito”. Other things which make up the invisible are “things we cannot actually see but are nonetheless there” (e.g. the other side of the apple, when not teleperceiving), “what exists kinesthetically”, and “the visible of the other” (Ibid).

These existentials are what “impregnate” the visible, the sensible, and give it its meaning. The suggestion that these existentials “make up what we say and understand” and impregnate “all the things we see” using *speech*, I argue, implies that a cultural language impregnates the sensible with its meaning for us, allowing us to understand it. I suggest that these existentials are similar to the semantic contents of experience described above which are made up of concepts and construct the *space of reasons*. Thus, the existentials of the visible are the sort of content which structure knowledge.

But does Merleau-Ponty provide the means for avoiding the Myth the same way in which we have (that the kind of content which structures knowledge is different from the kind which is related to the senses)? I believe so; he writes:

“What is given, then, is not the naked thing, the past itself such as it was in its own time, but rather, the thing ready to be seen, pregnant -- in principle as well as in fact -- with all the visions one can have of it, the past such as it was one day *plus* an inexplicable alteration, a strange distance -- bound in principle as well as in fact to a recalling that spans that distance but does not nullify it” (Ibid, 124).

So if, as pointed out above, sensible things are “pregnant” with their meaning, we see things with their meaning for us. This, I argue, is what Merleau-Ponty means when he suggests that objects are pregnant with “all the possible visions” we can have of them, and, as I will suggest later, this resembles the Kantian notion of *schema*. However, as Merleau-Ponty points out here there still remains a “distance” between the sensible thing and its meaning. This distance, I argue, suggests that Merleau-Ponty’s notion of pregnancy provides us with a framework to approach epistemology from the phenomenological perspective which avoids the Myth of the Given in the

manner outlined above by taking up a distinction between *inferring that something is the case* and *seeing that something is the case*.

2) Pregnancy

Now, what does it mean to say that sensible things are pregnant with their meaning? Further, what is implied in saying that the gap between the sensible and the intelligible is bridged by the notion of pregnancy? What I will show now is that pregnancy provides us with a theory of how observational knowledge is possible from the phenomenological perspective which avoids the Myth in the way I have outlined above. My task then in this section is to now develop and defend this theory of observational knowledge.

Merleau-Ponty writes of pregnancy:

“It is a question of that [logos] that pronounces itself silently in each sensible thing, inasmuch as it varies around a certain type of message, which we can have an idea of only through our carnal participation in its sense, only by espousing by our body its matter of “signifying”, or of that [logos] uttered whose internal structure sublimates our carnal relation to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 208).

So, for Merleau-Ponty, the idea of pregnancy is the idea that rationality, a “logos”, “silently” announces itself in each sensible thing. But what does it mean to say that a logos “silently” announces itself? What I believe Merleau-Ponty means by this is that rationality is not “in” the sensible thing; this would be a version of the Myth of the Given. Rather, what Merleau-Ponty means by “silently announces” is that the sensible thing in itself is meaningless, but nonetheless, we have created meaning for it. So, when a sensible thing presents itself to us in perception we see it as having meaning for us not in virtue of the meaning being in the thing itself, but as a *cue*

for us. For example, when I see an apple, a culturally constructed meaning is cued up which allows me to understand the apple as something to eat.

But what explains this meaning? I suggest that culture is what provides this meaning. In *The Primacy of Perception* Merleau-Ponty offers a criticism of his opus, the *Phenomenology of Perception*, for not considering culture or history enough (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, 25). Rather, it aimed at understanding our relation to reality and others at the perceptual level of experience. He writes:

“We call this level of experience [the perceptual level of experience] “primordial” -- not to assert that everything else derives from it by transformation and evolution ... but rather that it reveals to us the permanent data of the problem which culture attempts to resolve” (Ibid).

What Merleau-Ponty is suggesting here then is that perceptual experience is not a kind of foundation, but rather that it *is a problematic data which culture attempts to resolve*.¹⁴ However, what do we mean by saying that this perceptual level of experience presents us with a permanent problem? Further, what does it mean to say that culture attempts to solve this problem, how does it go about this process?

Firstly, I suggest that perception presents us with a “permanent problem” for Merleau-Ponty because we are always engaged with the world through perception. It is our natural access into the world, and this is why perception is “primary” for Merleau-Ponty. He is truly seeking to understand our perceptual relation to the world because of this fact. Now, saying that culture attempts to solve this problem implies that through some means culture is somehow able to give meaning to the world which we have a primordial access to via perception. *I argue*

¹⁴ It is important to note that Merleau-Ponty, like Sellars, is maintaining that the perceptual level of experience only presents us with a kind of data.

that the means responsible is language. I say this based on his claim in an originally unpublished text where he writes that language allows us to “signify” the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 7).

Thus, culture uses language to imbue the perceptual level of experience with meaning, and in turn, “impregnate” it with that meaning. So, to the original question, what is meant in saying that pregnancy is a logos that “silently” announces itself in the sensible thing? By saying “silent” Merleau-Ponty means that the culturally constructed meaning which impregnates the sensible thing is not “in” the sensible thing itself. Rather, it is a cultural cue that arises in relation to an object encountered in perception (e.g. seeing an apple as something edible).

The question we have to answer now is how does the perceptual level of experience become pregnant with its cultural meaning? To answer this question I think it will be useful to understand how this takes place in Kantian terms. As I have explained in the section above,¹⁵ I have likened the visible to the phenomenological content of experience, and the existentials of the visible to the semantic content of experience described by Tim Crane. Here, I will liken these distinct features of our experience to the Kantian notions of the sensible and the understanding. I do not think that this is such a stretch, Merleau-Ponty refers to the visible as the sensible throughout *The Visible and the Invisible*, and a feature of the invisible, the existentials of the visible, are what make up the meaning which allows us to make sense of the sensible. Thus, I suggest that these existentials can be likened to the Kantian notion of the understanding. Not in the sense that they are some kind of “pure concept”, but that they are a feature of our experience distinct from the sensible which allow us to *make sense of the sensible*. Lastly, I think likening these ideas to the notions of sensibility and understanding helps us to better understand the “ultimate ontological chiasm” between the sensible and intelligible described by Toadvine, and to better understand the epistemic significance of pregnancy.

¹⁵ See Pg. 8-10.

Now the question we have to ask is how can these two extremes, the sensible and the understanding, interact? Samantha Matherne points out that for Kant the imagination plays this role (Matherne, 2016a, 57). The imagination is able to synthesize the intuitions given over to it by our sensible capacities and combine it with conceptual contents which afford us the capacity to *understand* that sensible content. But how does the imagination do this? In order to answer this I will turn to Sellars. He points out that for Kant, in the B deduction of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the imagination is described as “an act of the understanding on the sensible” (Sellars, 1978, 240). So, the question we must answer is what does one mean when they say that the imagination is an act of the understanding on the sensible? To answer this Sellars gives an example and asks how can we see an apple and know that it is red on the outside, but at the same time juicy, and has white flesh (Ibid, 234)? The answer given here is important for my purposes; he writes:

“We do not see of the apple its opposite side, or its inside, or its internal whiteness, or its coolness, or its juiciness. But while these features are not *seen*, they are not merely believed in. These features are present in the object of perception as actualities. They are present by virtue of being *imagined*” (Ibid, 235).

So, the answer to the question is that properties *which are not seen* are present in the experience because they can be “imagined”. The answer to our original question (how does the imagination mediate between the sensible and the understanding?) then comes down to a distinction between things which are “imaged” and “imagined” (Ibid, 236). What is “imaged” in a particular perception is the set of properties instantiated as phenomenological content in a particular experience; while on the other hand, what is “imagined” are the properties present in an object that are not being sensed during that experience. What this implies is that the imagination is “an

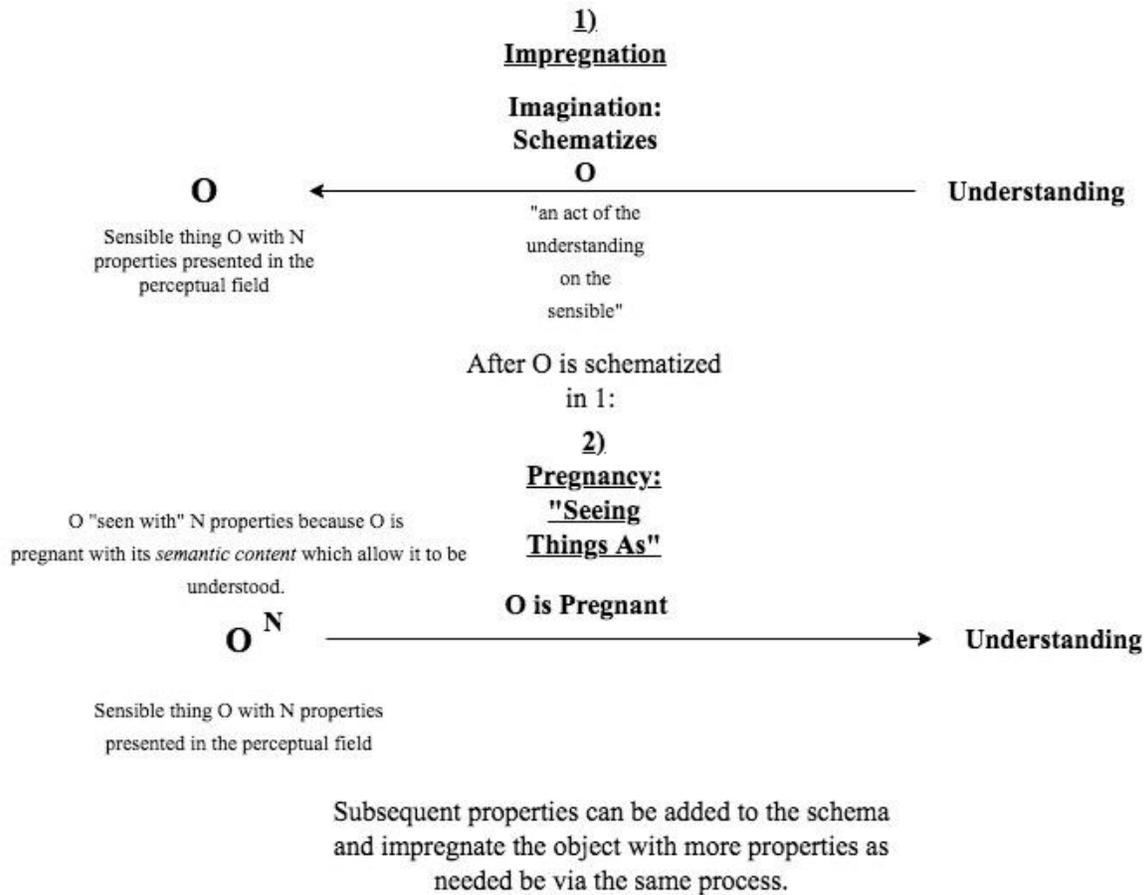
act of the understanding on the sensible” because when we perceive, according to Sellars, there is a blending of sensibility, imaging, and conceptualization. This allows us to see “all the visions” one can have of a particular object at once which, as pointed out earlier, Merleau-Ponty suggests pregnancy does.¹⁶

This conglomeration of properties is what is known as a *schema*. So, to keep with the apple example, when I see the apple’s outside, but can also imagine the apple’s white flesh, juiciness, and deliciousness *I am presented with an apple schema*. These schemas, according to Matherne, “bring all the relevant concepts and intuitions” of a particular object together (Matherne, 2016a, 60-61), and, as pointed out in the quote from Kant above, intuition is related to the faculty of sensibility. Thus, schemas formed by the imagination bring together the sensible elements of an object and its corresponding concepts. However, Matherne points out another feature of schemas, that they are “guided by our concepts” (Matherne, 2015, 207). This leads her to make the claim that Kant takes up a “moderate conceptualism”. Why this conceptualism remains moderate is because there is room left for a non-conceptual element of experience which is “independent of concept-guided imaginative synthesis” (Ibid, 773). Thus, for Kant, an element of intuition related to the faculty of sensibility is free from our concepts. However, this purely sensible element of experience must be schematized by the imagination (which is guided by our concepts). In short, schemas allow us to see things with all the properties they have, they afford us to “see things as”, either by being sensed directly, or imagined. What I want to suggest here then, is that the imagination, by being “an act of the understanding upon the sensible” is what

¹⁶ Accepting the idea that one can imagine more qualities than are present in an image would allow us to avoid what is known as the phenomenal bottleneck, which is the idea that phenomenal experience only presents us with, say, the front of a house rather than the whole thing. It is important to note here that Merleau-Ponty takes up something similar here in his critique of empiricism’s use of the “pure quale” as a type of sense experience in the *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, 60-61). Rather, Merleau-Ponty suggests that we are presented with an object with all of its qualities, not just the ones present in the image we have. In his words, we are *not* presented with dead qualities but active ones.

impregnates the sensible, the Given, with its meaning allowing us to understand it with the help of language. Thus, *for an object to be pregnant is for it to be schematized.*

In order to illustrate this idea I have constructed the following diagram:



As is shown in the diagram, stage one is the “impregnation” of the sensible. It involves the sensible thing being acted on by the understanding via the imagination. After which, we come to stage two. In stage two, O is seen with its properties and can be immediately understood because it is already schematized and is therefore “pregnant” with its semantic and/or conceptual content. Further properties can “impregnate” the object as needed via the same process. Let me illustrate this with a quick example. Say a child who knows what apples are, that they are red (in the case of apples which are red, e.g. red delicious), have white flesh, and are juicy has still *never come across a rotten apple*. So, the child sees an apple, which looks completely normal on the side

facing them, and reaches at it only to find that the apple is brown and squishy on the other side. The child asks their parents what it means for the apple to be this way, and they respond, “it is because the apple is rotten”. Now, when the child comes across apples they see apples with the possibility of being rotten and knows to inspect the entire apple before biting into them. So, the apple schema the child has, already pregnant with the properties of being red, juicy, and having white flesh, is now impregnated with the property of “possibly rotten”, adding to the schema.

However, Merleau-Ponty does suggest that pregnancy is not merely “the recognition of a concept”, but is a kind of *transcendence* (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 209). But what is meant by transcendence here? Transcendence means a lot of different things for a lot of different philosophers. On the one hand, pregnancy is a kind of transcendence for Merleau-Ponty because it shows how “flesh responds to flesh” (Ibid, 209). In saying “flesh responding to flesh” Merleau-Ponty is saying that when we experience something as pregnant, since *we are embodied subjects which are part of the flesh of the world*, we are literally flesh responding to flesh. In other words, we are part of the world which is aware of and responsive to itself, others, and the world around us. Let me illustrate this with a simple example: Say there is a chair in the middle of the room which I have to walk around in order to get to the television. I see the chair as something to walk around, and in this instance I am “flesh responding to flesh”. This is a kind of transcendence because my body is part of the same flesh as the chair (or any other object for that matter), and I respond to it. When something is pregnant and has meaning for us it sometimes warrants a response. This motivation which flesh provides to other flesh represents a kind of transcendence for Merleau-Ponty.

On the other hand, pregnancy is also a kind of transcendence because it is how the *form* interacts with the *thing in itself* (Ibid, 208),¹⁷ and *I believe that this kind of transcendence involves conceptual deployment*. I do not think Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that pregnancy is more than the recognition of a concept necessarily precludes us from saying that pregnancy *also includes the recognition of concepts*. The point here is that pregnancy is *also* the recognition of concepts in things themselves, and this is a kind of transcendence. In short, for our epistemological purposes, I argue that objects are pregnant, in part, with their corresponding concepts, and, in turn, we can say that *the given is pregnant*.

Now that I have shown that the idea of pregnancy also includes the recognition of concepts. Pregnancy, as I am thinking of it, can be likened to Sellars's "conceptual cues" from *Science and Metaphysics*. He writes, "the ability to teach a child the color-shape language game seems to imply the *existence of cues* which systematically correspond... to the color shape attribute families" (Sellars, 1992, 23).¹⁸ These cues represent a propensity for us to, for example, respond to red items with the term "red". Thus, *pregnancy* is the cue we get from the Given which brings forth the epistemological significance (in the form of *semantic contents*) of what is handed over by the sensible. In other words, *the Given is pregnant with its corresponding linguistic significations*.

3) Conclusion

What I have done in this section is first, I argued that one way to avoid the Myth of the Given is to take up a distinction between the kind of experiential content related to the Given, the phenomenological content, and the kind of content which structures knowledge, the semantic

¹⁷ At times Merleau-Ponty uses Platonic terms to describe pregnancy. In *The Primacy of Perception* he writes that "matter is pregnant with its form" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b, 12). In saying this, I argue that what he means is that the sensible thing in itself is "pregnant" with the idea of it. Meaning the thing in itself is pregnant with its epistemological significance.

¹⁸ Emphasis my own.

content. I then showed that Merleau-Ponty takes up a similar distinction in *The Visible and the Invisible* between *the visible* and its *corresponding existentials*. Next, I explained the concept of pregnancy and its epistemological significance using Kantian terminology. I argued that to say the Given is pregnant is to say that it has been *schematized*. Thus, the concept of pregnancy provides us phenomenologists with an approach to epistemology which does not commit to a version of the Myth of the Given. Moving forward, I will refer to the framework established here as the *pregnancy framework*.

B) Lifeworld: Preconditions of Experience and Knowledge

In this section my goal will be to establish *preconditions for experience and knowledge*. These preconditions are *not* meant to be something like Kant's notion of the a priori. Rather, it takes up Merleau-Ponty's *redefined* notion of the a priori "as the "formal expression of a fundamental contingency: the fact that we are in the world"" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, quoted in Matherne, 2016b, 217). So, as opposed to thinking of an a priori in terms of "pure concepts" or judgements, we are going to search for features of our existence which are *necessary* conditions to have experience and knowledge in the first place. Now, rather than use the Kantian language of the a priori which would lead to confusion and perhaps commit me to some things I may not be committed to, I will just call these *preconditions of experience and knowledge*. These preconditions are the "always already there" which make up the *lifeworld* described by Husserl in his later work especially *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserl, 1970, 24, ft. 4).

Nonetheless, I suggest that there are two basic preconditions we can pull from the lifeworld. First, that *the body is part of the lifeworld*. I advance this claim by furthering Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that *the body is part of the flesh of the world* (Liginis in Merleau-Ponty, 1968, liv-lv). Toadvine writes that for Merleau Ponty, "Flesh in this sense is a "general thing" between the individual and the idea that does not correspond to any traditional philosophical concept, but is closest to the notion of an "element" in the classical sense" (Toadvine, 2016, plato.stanford.edu). Flesh encompasses all spatio-temporal objects within the universe for Merleau-Ponty, being made up of it is a kinship shared by things in the world simply in virtue of being-here. The question arises then, how do we, as embodied subjects, interact with the flesh of the world? For Merleau-Ponty, the body accesses the world through perception. This perceptual contact with the world has an intrinsic *organization* which gives rise to a perceptual

field. The perceptual field is a culmination of the body's sensory capacities presented to the subject which allows them to navigate the world. This *first precondition effectively places the body in the lifeworld*. The second precondition is that we are *acculturated into a linguistic community*. This allows us to imbue things we come across in perception with meaning through the process of impregnation discussed in the section above. This second precondition gives us the capacity to *interpret and understand the lifeworld*.

1) Flesh, Bodily *Organization* and the Perceptual Field

In the chapter entitled “The Intertwining -- The Chiasm” of *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty outlines what is called his “ontology of *flesh*” (Toadvine, 2016, plato.stanford.edu). As mentioned above, flesh is something like an *element* in the classical sense for Merleau-Ponty. Naturally, the question we have to answer here is what does it mean to say “element in the classical sense”? To the Ancient Greek Philosophers an element was something which made up the world; they did not mean elements in the sense that we mean in modern chemistry. The classical four are earth, air, fire, and water. The Ancients set off in search of a singular *arche* out of which all of the world was made up of arguing in favor of whichever one they had decided. Nevertheless, what does Toadvine mean in suggesting that Merleau-Ponty's concept of *flesh* is relatable to the classical notion of “element”? I believe that what Toadvine means by this is simply that for Merleau-Ponty *flesh* is what the world is made out of. However, flesh is not something divided up any further, it is something which all things are made up out of. Merleau-Ponty writes, “*Flesh of the world*, described (apropos of time, space, movement) as segregation, dimensionality and encroachment” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 248). So *flesh* is the basic idea that all spatio-temporal objects are in the same world, and made up of the same fabric. The fact that we can interact with the world, and that it can have a meaning for us proves this for

Merleau-Ponty. It is a kinship shared by *all spatio-temporal objects*. In short, the entirety of the universe is made up of a singular fabric which ties it all together. This fabric is what Merleau-Ponty means by *flesh*. This, perhaps, makes Merleau-Ponty into a kind of a *monist*, but it is a monism which I am sympathetic toward and I think makes sense because *how could we look at the stars if we did not share something with them?* This is the problem Merleau-Ponty's concept of *flesh* is meant to solve.

Now what does it mean to say that the body is part of this flesh? Merleau-Ponty writes in the working notes of *The Visible and the Invisible*:

“That means that my body is made up of the same flesh as the world (it is as perceived), and moreover that this flesh of my body is shared by the world, the world *reflects* it, encroaches upon it and it encroaches on the world...” (Ibid).

What this means for Merleau-Ponty is that because we are embodied, we are *part of Being*. He writes in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that “the body is our anchorage in a world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, 167). So, I suggest that what it means to say that the body is part of the flesh of the world is to say that the body is a spatio-temporal point in the world from which we have experience. But what does Merleau-Ponty mean by saying that our bodies encroach on the world as the world encroaches on the body? What is meant by this is that because we are embodied subjects and part of the *flesh of the world* we have a relation with the world where we both perceive it (the world encroaching on us through perception) and are perceived (the fact that we are visible to others and part of the world, shows that we encroach on it). In other words, the relation between us and the world is the relation between the perceiver and the perceived. When I perceive something, I am simultaneously also perceived. In short then, to say that the body is part of the *flesh of the world* is to say firstly, that the body is made up of the same fabric which

the rest of the world is made up of, and secondly, that we exist in a constant relation with the world of perceiving it while simultaneously being perceived.

However, it is important to note that perception of the world is still mediated through the body for Merleau-Ponty. To understand this we have to look to the concept of *perceptual faith*.

Toadvine writes that *perceptual faith* is:

“our shared pre-reflective conviction that perception presents us with the world as it actually is, even though this perception is mediated, for each of us, by our bodily senses. This apparent paradox creates no difficulties in our everyday lives, but it becomes incomprehensible when thematized by reflection” (Toadvine, 2016, plato.stanford.edu).

The point here is that we usually just assume that our perceptions just provide us access to the world as it is, despite its being mediated through the body. However, this does not create a problem for us in our everyday experience, and this certitude of the world, that our perceptions present us with the world essentially as it is, is Merleau-Ponty’s “starting point for developing an alternative account of perception” (Ibid). According to Toadvine, *perceptual faith* leads Merleau-Ponty to criticize natural science and psychology on the one hand, for relying on *perceptual faith* without recognizing it, and on the other hand, philosophers of reflection like Kant and Descartes for “reducing the perceived world to an idea” (Ibid). Thus, I argue that Merleau-Ponty is essentially carving out a middle position between empiricism and rationalism for himself. The empiricist error is that they rely on perceptual faith without recognizing that our access to the world by perception is mediated through the body, but the rationalists *over-intellectualize* and reduce our perceptual experience to ideas.

Merleau-Ponty's alternative account of perception is that the body is a sensible mass (it is capable of sensing things but also capable of being sensed) which has an intrinsic organization of its own. What is meant by this is that the body's sensory capacities are organized by the body itself, or, simply, that the body's sensory capacities are contingent in that it is simply by chance that we perceive the world in the way we do. What I mean by this is that, for instance, when I see the color red, there may not be red actually present in the external world. In other words, our manner of seeing red is merely the way in which our optic nerves process light coming into the eye, and there is no way of escaping this *perspective*. However, this does not mean that the body is merely a conglomeration of organs for the subject because, as pointed out above, *the body is our anchorage into the world because it is also part of the world in virtue of its being part of the flesh* (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, 112-13). Nonetheless, the body has a contingent way of perceiving the world, for example, Merleau-Ponty points out that my body's organization is different from someone who is experiencing "phantom limb" simply because they are missing a limb and I am not (Ibid, 115). Or, for instance, the way in which a sighted person and a blind person perceive the world is different in virtue of our having different *bodily organizations*.¹⁹ To use Merleau-Ponty's words, our body's organization is its mode of being-in-the-world. So, presumably, the blind person and sighted person have different modes of being-in-the-world.

This bodily organization is similar to the role that Sellars gives to the Given in "Inference and Meaning". He writes that "The role of the Given is rather to be compared to the role of the environment in the evolution of species" (Sellars, 1953*b*, 337). Thus, the body which allows us to access the world via perception, has an intrinsic organization owed to evolution. For example, we see the way we do because the human eye has developed in a particular way. This is what is

¹⁹ I use the term "bodily organization" here rather than the term used throughout the literature "body schema" in order to avoid this concept being confused with the Kantian notion of schema discussed above (see pg. 28).

Given over to the subject and what allows subjects to navigate the world. In short, *the body's organization, while not providing knowledge in itself, is a necessary condition to have experience and knowledge in the first place.*

But what does this organization provide the subject with? I argue that what the body's organization provides us with is a *perceptual field* which is a culmination of our body's sensory capabilities. Merleau-Ponty writes of the perceptual field:

“a total determination of the concrete perceptual field of a given living individual at a given moment appears not provisionally unattainable but definitely meaningless, *because it presents structures that do not even have a name in the objective universe of separated and separable “conditions”*” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 21).

What is apparent here is that the “concrete perceptual field” is meaningless in the sense that it does “not even have a name”, but what is interesting about this is that the perceptual field, while entirely passive, still “presents structures”. Therefore, I argue that the perceptual field, while meaningless because it lacks our conceptual capacities in itself, presents us with an organized “representation” of the external world for the organism to navigate and interact with and conceptualize. This perceptual field described by Merleau-Ponty represents a culmination of passivity absent its conceptualization because these structures remain *nameless*. This means that the perceptual field, the Given, remains without concepts, and therefore, it remains without epistemological significance with the exception of being able to be the subject of a conceptual claim. Thus, I suggest that this *perceptual field* is the “culmination of receptivity” which Sellars suggests explaining is one of the “greatest tasks of the philosophy of mind” in *Science and Metaphysics* (Sellars, 1992, 22).

Now, we must answer the question of what is in the perceptual field itself? There are many different routes we can take here. I can distinguish between sets of properties and say that one set is in the field and the other is not, but I am inclined to take a more radical path forward. What I am going to suggest is that the perceptual field is a culmination of the body's sensory capabilities which gives the organism a sensory grasp on its environment, and has a natural structure on its own. *This is to say that the imagination does not structure the visual content of our experience; rather, the eyes process light in such a way which passively gives us a representation of the external world in the brain.* Nevertheless, since the things in the field “do not even have a name” I am suggesting that the field does not contain concepts. Thus, I claim that the perceptual field contains everything except for the semantic contents of experience; it is the “phenomenological content” of experience which is Given. This Given, I argued, has a structure of its own, but nonetheless, this structure cannot be understood without the conceptual apparatus which affords us the capacity to form belief and have knowledge.²⁰

Now a question we should ask of the perceptual field is does it have “accuracy conditions”? However, we must first ask what are “accuracy conditions”? Accuracy conditions are the means we have for measuring the accuracy or inaccuracy of our perceptual experiences. Siegel writes:

“Once one recognizes the datum that one can be misled by one's senses, it is a further claim that experiences themselves can be assessed for accuracy... Given an experience—either one we actually have, or a hypothetical one—we at least sometimes have intuitions about whether the experience is accurate (“veridical”) or inaccurate (“falsidical”). To this extent, we seem to be able to assess experiences for accuracy” (Siegel, 2016, plato.stanford.edu).

²⁰ For more on this claim see Part III Sec. A Subsec. 1.

So, accuracy conditions are the intuitions about whether or not a particular experience is accurate or inaccurate. Siegel gives a few examples:

“Suppose you see a fish while unwittingly looking in a mirror. It may look as if there is a red fish in front of you, when in fact the red fish you see is behind you and there is no fish at all in front of you. Similarly, in auditory or olfactory hallucinations, one may seem to hear voices when in fact no one is speaking, or to smell an odor when in fact nothing is emitting that smell. In phantom limb pain, one feels pain as located where one’s limb used to be but is no longer. These are cases of being misled by one’s senses, and it is natural to say that in these cases things are not as they appear to be” (Ibid).

Thus, the question of accuracy conditions arises out of the fact that we can be misled by our senses, and accuracy conditions are essentially measures of whether or not things actually are as they are presented to us in the *perceptual field*. Considering this definition, *I think it would be a mistake to say that the perceptual field does not have accuracy conditions.*

I think that we can find another example of the role which accuracy conditions play by looking at EPM. In EPM Sellars gives the example of a tie shop owner. The tie shop has new electric lighting, which John, the tie shop owner, has never used before to look at the color of his ties. In this lighting blue ties look green, but John does not know this yet. To compensate, presumably after ties being returned for being blue and not green, John learns to say that the ties “look green”, but wants to take it outside to see if the tie *is* green or if it *is actually* blue (Sellars, 1997, 37-38). The conditions for viewing ties outside are what Sellars calls “standard conditions” vs. the conditions for viewing ties in the store which manipulate their color. These “standard conditions” are essentially ideal conditions for having accurate perceptions, and I believe they

resemble what contemporary literature would call “accuracy conditions”. The question then is does Merleau-Ponty have something like accuracy conditions in his philosophy? I believe that he does. Romdenh-Romluc points out that in the *Phenomenology of Perception* Merleau-Ponty has an example of a red corduroy dress which looks brown in dim light, and when we come to find that the dress is actually red we come to a better understanding and gain a “maximal grip” on the dress (Romdenh-Romluc, 2007, 84). Thus, in Merleau-Ponty as well as in Sellars we can see that there are indeed ideal conditions to have accurate perceptions. So, it makes sense to say that the perceptual field does in fact have accuracy conditions. Therefore, one can, for instance, intuit that they may not be seeing the correct color of a dress because of inadequate lighting, and in this way one can determine if environmental conditions are ideal for having accurate perceptions or not.

Furthermore, I suggest accuracy conditions are what make up the phenomenological content that construct the perceptual field. Siegel writes:

“One influential version of the idea that the contents of perception are analogous to the contents of a newspaper story holds that the contents of an experience are given by the conditions under which it is accurate. What an experience conveys to the subject, according to this conception, is that those conditions are satisfied” (Siegel, 2016, plato.stanford.edu).

So, from Sellars’s example of John and the tie shop, when John sees a *green* tie in odd lighting of the store which is *actually blue*, the conditions make experiences accurate or inaccurate determine what is presented to the subject in the form of phenomenological content. In other words, the lighting conditions which have altered the appearance of the tie determine what sort

of phenomenological content one is presented with. Thus, phenomenological content is determined by accuracy conditions.

In sum, what I have argued in this subsection is that, first, the body is integrated into the world as a spatio-temporal object itself that is capable of being perceived effectively placing the body in the lifeworld. Further, that the body has an intrinsic organization that gives rise to a *perceptual field* which is *passively constructed by the body, not by the imagination or conceptual deployment*. It was then determined that the perceptual field is made up of the phenomenological content of experience which is determined by its accuracy conditions.²¹

2) *Historically Effected Consciousness* & Observational Knowledge

What I want to do now is to outline the second precondition of experience and knowledge. This second precondition is that we are *acculturated into a linguistic community*, and this acculturation allows us to imbue our world with meaning. I argue that this role is a necessary condition for us to have observational knowledge. In order to understand this role, I turn to Gadamer's notion of *historically effected consciousness*. This concept, I believe, clearly articulates the role which culture, tradition, and, ultimately, language play in experience and observational knowledge. One may worry that this concept comes along with certain hermeneutical commitments which Merleau-Ponty and Sellars (the cornerstones of the *pregnancy framework*) may not necessarily be committed to, or, vice versa, that Gadamer's *historically effected consciousness* can be compatible with Merleau-Ponty or Sellars, but I will show otherwise. In order to outline this second precondition of experience and knowledge, I will first show the influence that Gadamer had on John McDowell. Next, I will explain the philosophical history of the idea (it is important to understand its reliance on Husserl's *lifeworld*)

²¹ See pg. 21-22.

and the notion of *historically effected consciousness* itself. I will then show that there is a similar idea in both Sellars and Merleau-Ponty's work. Lastly, and, most importantly, I will show that the *pregnancy framework* depends on linguistic interpretation handed down by tradition. Thus, linking the framework and the notion of *historically effected consciousness*.

First, I will briefly discuss McDowell's interpretation of Gadamer in order to understand why I think the concept of *historically effected consciousness* is of importance to this project.

McDowell writes:

“Languages are among what Gadamer calls “the suprasubjective powers that dominate history”.²² They give a normative shape to our lifeworld, in a way that is not to be reduced to the activities of subjects, but saying that is not crediting personal performances to super-persons” (McDowell, 2002, 190).

Let me explain the context of this quote in order to tease out the significance of what McDowell and Gadamer are saying about language here. McDowell is defending the *I-We* structure of language and normativity, which he equates to Gadamer's notion of language's *I-Thou* structure, against a criticism launched against it by Brandom. Brandom's criticism of *I-We/Thou* structures is that when “the community” takes on this burden of setting norms for a particular culture it (the community) acts as a “superlative individual” (Ibid, 189). McDowell writes this problem off as “baseless”. So when McDowell says that languages “give a normative shape to our lifeworld, in a way that is not reduced to the activities of subjects”, he is suggesting that the *Thou* gives a normative shape to our lifeworld through language, but this does not mean that the community is some “super-person” as Brandom claims in his nonsensical criticism of the *I-We/Thou* structure of language. However, what is important for our purposes is first, McDowell's claim that for Gadamer, language gives a “normative shape to our lifeworld”. So, since norms have been

²² McDowell quoting Gadamer's *Truth and Method*.

defined above²³ as a system of rules which govern rationality and knowledge, the significance of McDowell's claim is that *norms are constructed by language*. In short, rationality and knowledge are governed by language.

Now, in order to understand *historically effected consciousness* I think it is necessary to first discuss Gadamer's interpretation, appropriation, criticism, and development of Husserl's concept of the lifeworld. Gadamer writes, "the lifeworld means something else, namely the whole in which we live as historical creatures... It is clear that the lifeworld is always at the same time a communal world that involves being with other people as well" (Gadamer, 2019, 248). So, Gadamer takes up two key points from Husserl, that the lifeworld is both *historical* and *intersubjective*. Let's discuss the first feature. The importance of looking at the lifeworld as historical is that consciousness is embedded in a historical context, but this historical context is a constantly shifting and unfolding *horizon*. Horizon, for Gadamer, is defined as a "range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of opening up new horizons, and so forth" (Gadamer, 2019, 313). Thus, what is meant by horizon when it is applied to the "thinking mind" is everything that can be *understood* from one's perspective. So part of what Gadamer is taking up from Husserl is that consciousness, in virtue of being embedded in history, is immersed in an ever-changing historical horizon. That is, what can be understood is constantly changing with history; our view of the world takes a *historical perspective*. For example, before Copernicus made the claim that the Earth was not the center of the universe, it was understood that the Earth was the center of the universe. What this shows is that as history unfolds, more and more can be understood, the horizon is constantly expanding. This process of the shifting of the historical horizon is described as a constant *fusion of horizons*.

²³ See pg. 11.

What this means is that the horizon of the past has fused to the horizon of the present, and eventually the future. The second feature which Gadamer takes up from Husserl's lifeworld is that our existence is *intersubjective* (i.e. the fact that we live amongst other people). The significance of this is that others construct a culture which is passed down by tradition and along with this tradition comes a language, and language which, for Gadamer, allows us to *understand* (Ibid, 407). In other words, language is necessary for understanding (Ibid, 402-03).

There are several important points to consider about Gadamer's taking up of Husserl's conception of the lifeworld. First, there is the fact that consciousness is embedded in a *historical horizon* that is in constant flux, that is, a constant fusing of horizons. Second, there is the *intersubjective* nature of our existence. This provides us, ultimately, with a language which affords us the capacity to understand, and by default, have observational knowledge of the sort discussed in the previous section.

Now that we have explained what Gadamer has taken up from Husserl's concept of the lifeworld, that experience and knowledge are *historical* and *intersubjective*; we can effectively explain Gadamer's concept of *historically effected consciousness*. Gadamer writes:

“The linguisticity of the understanding is *the concretion of historically effected consciousness*... The essential relation between language and understanding is seen primarily in the fact that the essence of tradition is to exist in the medium of language, so that the preferred object of interpretation is a verbal one” (Ibid, 407).

It is important to note that for Gadamer, understanding always involves application, and what he means by application is an interpretive act within the medium of language (Ibid, 403-07). Thus, understanding, and by consequence observational knowledge, is always a linguistic interpretation. This relation, between language and understanding, is handed down then by

tradition, from generation to generation. So, consciousness is “historically effected” for Gadamer because we inherit a linguistic tradition created by a “Thou” which determines the norms that construct the rules of the understanding. Further, because of the horizontal structure of history, which Gadamer takes up from Husserl, these norms are in constant flux. In short, to say that consciousness is “historically effected”, and to take up the concept of *historically effected consciousness* as I am hoping to do, is to accept that consciousness is embedded in a constantly shifting historical horizon. Furthermore, to take this up is to accept that understanding and knowledge consist of interpretive acts within the medium of a language that are passed down via tradition.

What I want to do now is show that Merleau-Ponty takes up a similar position as Gadamer. However, since they are up to much different things; their respective projects look different. Nonetheless, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty’s concept of pregnancy, and by default the *pregnancy framework*, shows that he places a similar significance on language to Gadamer. He writes in *The Primacy of Perception*:

“We call this level of experience “primordial” -- not to assert that everything else derives from it by transformations and evolution... but rather that it reveals to us the permanent data of the problem which culture attempts to resolve” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964*b*, 25).

First, we have to answer the question, what is the “primordial” level of experience that Merleau-Ponty is talking about? What Merleau-Ponty is doing here is offering a criticism of his *Phenomenology of Perception* for not considering the role that culture, and as a result, language play in perception. So, by saying “primordial”, he is saying that the perceptual level of experience is our primitive access to the world, and this has to do with our body organization which has been discussed above.²⁴ Now what does it mean to say that “not everything else

²⁴ See pg. 38-39.

derives from it”? When he says that this level of experience is “primordial” is not to say that “everything else derives from it” he is saying that not everything derives from our perceptual level of experience. Rather, he suggests that this level of experience provides us with a “data” that culture tries to solve. To say that the perceptual level of experience only provides us with a kind of data is clearly similar to Sellars’s suggestion that the Given would be non-controversial if it was considered to be only a kind of data, and therefore, I believe that this could be taken in an anti-foundationalist way. This is because to say that things do not “derive” from this data, is to say that there is something else which Merleau-Ponty suggests is related to culture and language.

Now, what does it mean for this level of experience to present us with a “permanent problem”? To say that our perceptual level of experience presents us with a permanent problem is to say that we are always engaged with the world through perception. In other words, we access the world through a perception and this is a permanent fact of our existence. This presents us with a problem because this level of experience is *merely a form of data*. Knowledge of it is impossible without something else. Now, this leads us to another question, what does it mean to say that culture attempts to solve this problem? I suggest that what Merleau-Ponty means by saying that culture attempts to solve the problem is that culture imbues our perceptions with a meaning, but by what means does culture do this? Language, which as suggested above, constructs the understanding and is inherited from the “Thou”, is what solves this problem. In other words, I argue that the problem of perception is solved, for Merleau-Ponty, by a system of cultural norms in linguistic form that are passed down by a tradition, and this is how *historically effected consciousness* plays a role in observational knowledge.

Some may question whether or not Gadamer would sympathize with this point, or whether or not Gadamer agrees that there is a nonlinguistic level of perception. I argue that both

of these statements are true of Gadamer. In order to see this we have to look at his response to Habermas in *Truth and Method*. Habermas questions if Gadamer had taken for granted the nonlinguistic, perceptual, level of our experience in saying that it is through language that we come to understand the world (Gadamer, 2019, 572). Gadamer's response is that, yes there is a nonlinguistic level to our experience and something that goes beyond language in gestures, facial expressions, etc., but ultimately, these nonlinguistic forms of communication always require a "translation" into thought. This translation requires an interpretive act within the medium of language; he writes, "The translation process fundamentally contains the whole secret of how human beings come to an understanding of the world and communicate with one another" (Ibid, 574). Thus, even if one communicates nonlinguistically through a gesture, and even if the two interlocutors do not even speak the same language, understanding what one is saying requires a linguistic interpretation of the gesture (i.e. translating the gesture into something linguistic which can be understood). What is important to take from this point then is that Gadamer is *not* rejecting that there is a nonlinguistic level of experience; rather, he is saying that this level of experience must be translated into a linguistic form in order to be understood. The perceptual level of experience then, for Gadamer, would be rendered merely to a kind of data which we "translate" into something understandable within the medium of language. This, I argue, aligns him with Sellars and Merleau-Ponty.

The point I wish to make here is that Merleau-Ponty's notion of pregnancy is compatible with Gadamer's theory of language and *historically effected consciousness*. Pregnancy shows the role which language, and therefore *historical consciousness*, plays in observational knowledge and perception. It shows how the perceptual level of our experience is "translated" into something we can understand. For the Given to be pregnant, is for the Given to be interpreted

within the medium of a language, and this gives us the capacity to understand the nonlinguistic, or perceptual, level of experience. Thus pregnancy, the fact that our perceptual level of experience is imbued with meaning since it is interpreted within a medium of language by a culture which is then handed down via tradition, shows that both Gadamer and Merleau-Ponty's respective ideas are compatible. Further, as was shown above,²⁵ Sellars's perceptual epistemology also relies on there being language handed down by tradition which constructs a system of "conceptual cues" which imbue our perceptual level of experience with meaning, and, as a consequence, their epistemological significance.

3) Conclusion

What we have done in this section is establish preconditions for both experience and knowledge. These preconditions are things which make up the lifeworld, or the "always already there", as described by Husserl. The first precondition is that we are embodied subjects which access the world through perception. Our body's organization provides us with natural access to the world which we are also a part of. The organization of one's body determines one's capacities for perception which culminates into a perceptual field. This perceptual field is a passive and perceptual grip that one has on the environment, but it only remains a kind of data, which, in Merleau-Ponty's words, presents us with a problem which culture attempts to solve. This leads us to the second precondition. The fact that we live in an intersubjective and historical world is consecrated by the fact that our understanding of the world is inescapably linguistic. Language and its norms are handed down by tradition, but they are also constant flux within a historical horizon. In sum, the first precondition places a subject in the world and provides them access to the world via perception, and the second precondition imbues the primordial level of experience

²⁵ See pg. 32.

with meaning, and in turn, its epistemic significance in virtue of its being interpreted within the medium of language, these interpretations construct cultural norms which are then passed down via tradition.

Part III: Applications

A) The Seen and the Known

In this section, I will make the claim that *we never really see what we know and that seeing is never believing*. This is because the semantic content of experience, the sort which structures knowledge and justification, is *abstracted* from the phenomenological content of our experience. What I mean by this is that one's beliefs, in their linguistic form, are distinct from the phenomenological content which is presented to us by the senses. I will do this by first asking the question, what does it mean for the Given (i.e. the phenomenological content of experience) to merely be a kind of data? I will argue that the phenomenological content of experience is a mental state which we are aware of that is related to the senses. In other words, the phenomenological content makes up the passive sensory bit of experience which we are aware of. However, this is not constructed by the imagination as neo-Kantians like Sellars claim; rather it has an intrinsic organization, but it is still not the type of content which is capable of providing justification for belief simply because it is *not linguistic*. So, the next thing I have to do is discuss the structure of justification. I have stated before that the conceptual apparatus is self-adjudging when it comes to justification, and one may think that this commits me to a sort of *coherentism*. Sure, coherence is certainly necessary for justification, but I will argue that *the dialectic of foundationalism and coherentism is misleading*. I will follow deVries interpretation of Sellars here, and show that there is a tenable position which avoids the dialectic altogether. Lastly, I will make the claim that *we never really see what we know and seeing is never believing*. This is because belief, justification, and, ultimately, knowledge are a *purely* linguistic affair. Furthermore, despite being the subject of beliefs, the phenomenological content of experience is still only a form of data which our beliefs can be about. Thus, *the kind of content*

which we see is distinct from the kind which structures what we know. This claim is inspired by Merleau-Ponty's path to avoiding the Myth of the Given, and his claim that there is an ontological chiasm between the sensible and the intelligible.²⁶

1) Phenomenological Content: Data and Interpretation

To understand what it means to say that the phenomenological content only provides us with data which our beliefs can be about I must first explain, in more detail, what exactly the phenomenological content of experience is. As pointed out in the introduction,²⁷ for something to be "content" it must be an element of experience which we are aware of. But what does it mean to be "aware"? I think a good way to answer this question is to turn to David Armstrong's famous example which we will call the "distracted driver scenario". He writes:

"After driving for long periods of time, particularly at night, it is possible to "come to" and realize that for some time past one has been driving without being aware of what one has been doing. The coming-to is an alarming experience. It is natural to describe what went on before one came to by saying that during that time one lacked consciousness. Yet it seems clear that, in the two senses of the word that we have so far isolated, consciousness was present. There was mental activity, and as part of that mental activity, there was perception. That is to say, there was minimal consciousness and perceptual consciousness. If there is an inclination to doubt this, then consider the extraordinary sophistication of the activities successfully undertaken during the period of "unconsciousness"." (Armstrong, 1980, 59).

Armstrong is arguing that when one is driving and is unaware of it that they are still conscious because how could they drive if they were not? I am arguing, by saying content is something

²⁶ Both of these points were discussed above. See Part II Sec A SubSec. 1.

²⁷ See Part I Sec B.

which we are aware of, that the perceptual experiences that the driver has in their unaware driving state are *not* deserving of being called content. This is what makes this scenario so interesting because the driver does not have any *contentful* recollection of their driving along the road. The driver merely appears at the location where they “snap out of it”, if you will, after a duration of time. Clearly attending to, and having contentful experiences of something else other than driving. In short, what it is for something to be a piece of content is for us to be *aware* of it. The phenomenological content of experience then, is that which we are aware of in virtue of the senses.

Now, there is the question of what gives rise to the phenomenological content? Kant and neo-Kantians like Sellars suggest that the “images” of our experience, which would be the phenomenological content, are constructed by the imagination. Matherne writes that for Kant, the images we actually see in perception are formed by the imagination (Matherne, 2015, 773).²⁸ In other words, the imagination structures sensible data into an image via our conceptual capacities. But since I have defined concepts as words, how could words possibly give rise to a perceptual field? This puts me at odds with Sellars but I argue that for Merleau-Ponty the sensible has a structure of its own, and I think this is a tenable position. The *perceptual field*, Merleau-Ponty suggests, “presents us with structures” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 21), but what do we mean when we say structures? He goes on to write that the perceived world is “a field of laws and intrinsic organization” and that “a perceived world would not appear to a man if these conditions were not given in his body; but it is not that they *explain* that world” (Ibid, 22). What this means is that the way we see things, or the images that we see in perception which for Kant and Sellars are produced by the imagination, are instead formed because of the *body's*

²⁸ Sellars makes this same claim (Sellars, 1978, 236-37).

organization discussed above.²⁹ Therefore, since we have access to the perceived world because of our body, and the subject's faculty of sensibility relies on the structure of their own body and its sensory capabilities; *it must be admitted that there is a structure to the sensible.*

This means that the phenomenological content of experience is structured in virtue of an individual's bodily organization as opposed to the Kantian suggestion that this kind of content is structured by concepts. I believe that this makes sense on a practical level as well. Think about it, people do not have much control over the way they perceive the world, our perceptual field is constructed *passively*. Therefore, I argue that it makes more sense to say that the body is responsible for the construction of the perceptual field. Sure, there is brain and neural activity that give rise to it, but the subject is in no way, shape, or form in control of this. Furthermore, is the brain not also part of the body? If we cannot control the perceptual field that our body presents us with, then clearly, the field is *passively presented*. Further, even if there is neural activity responsible for giving rise to the perceptual field, this does not mean that our concepts, as I have defined them, are responsible. Thus, the perceptual field and its content are constructed by the *body's organization*.

Now, what I have shown in this section thus far is that the phenomenological content of experience is a conscious mental state which is related to the senses, and further, that this sensible content is constructed not by concepts, as Kant and Sellars would claim, but by the body's organization itself. This would mean that the phenomenological content of experience is what we "see", but this is not a capacity capable of providing knowledge on its own. To commit to this would be to commit to a version of the Myth of the Given because we would be accepting that something passive and sensible could be an item of knowledge without conceptual deployment. I suggest here that the key to making this claim is asking what it means when

²⁹ See Part II Sec B SubSec. 1.

Sellars says that to call the Given “merely a form of data” would be uncontroversial (Sellars, 1997, 13)? This is the form of the Given which Sellars takes up; the Given is merely a kind of data which our claims can be about.

I think that this point could be articulated well through an analogy. Think about a sociologist who is doing a survey study. There is hard data presented which they collected in the field, interpretations of that data which the sociologist presents, and maybe argues certain conclusions about the data. Imagine if one was only presented with a table full of data with no hypothesis, no explanation, and no interpretation. The reader would probably be pretty confused. I argue that this is what it means to say that the Given only presents us with a kind of data. On the one hand, it is useless without its interpretation, but on the other hand, the interpretation could not be done without the data. If we take Kant seriously when he says “To neither of these powers [sensibility or understanding] may a preference be given over the other. Without sensibility no object would be given to us, without understanding no object would be thought. *Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind*” (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, quoted in McDowell, 1994, 4-5 ft. 3), we should accept that we cannot have it full stop one way or the other. Phenomenological content, the Given, is *necessary* for observational knowledge, but it cannot provide it on its own. Likewise, the semantic content which structures belief, justification, and knowledge can form a belief, but what is there to form a belief about if there is no phenomenological content? Thus, *the two faculties necessitate one another*.

2) Foundation or Coherence?

This brings me to the next point in making the claim that *we never see what we know and seeing is never believing*. If we are to make this claim, we should probably say something about the structure of justification. This is because, in order to avoid the Myth of the Given, I must

deny the Given any justificatory power, but I must also allow sense experience to keep its integrity. In order to do that I will continue with the analogy from above. Sure the sociologist, when making their point, can look at the data, but the data is useless without making a claim. The validity of the sociologist's claim depends on whether or not a valid rebuttal can be formulated by either cross-examining the data or by doing a new study. Both the claim and the rebuttal are obviously linguistically formulated. Therefore, I argue that since justification and knowledge are linguistic the structure of justification depends upon the *coherence* of a belief in a myriad of other beliefs. Nonetheless, if we are to take Kant seriously in the quote above we cannot give preference to coherence over the passive sensibility which gives rise to a perceptual field that a foundationalist would argue is the foundation of knowledge.

However, if the perceptual field is a contingent part of our experience; that is, it happens simply in virtue of our being-here and in these particular human bodies, and justification and knowledge are spontaneous cognitive achievements that are linguistic in nature, we must say that coherence within a system of beliefs is necessary for justification. What would we be holding beliefs about in instances of observational knowledge if we did not have phenomenological content? Because of this dilemma, I argue that the dialectic of foundationalism and coherentism is misleading since either *route* gives preference to one faculty over the other is problematic. Some may call this a “foundherentist” account,³⁰ but I think it is better to just reject the dialectic if one sees the merits and pitfalls on both sides.

Here, I will show that Sellars provides a way out of this dialectic. Willem deVries points out that foundationalism has developed since EPM (deVries, 2000, xxxiii), and this is the type of foundationalism that Bonjour was proposing in “The Dialectic of Foundationalism and

³⁰ A middle position between foundationalism and coherentism developed by Susaan Haack (Haack, 1993)

Coherentism”.³¹ However, I do not think that this type of foundationalism takes seriously enough Sellars’s criticism of the Given. The key is that there is a difference between *inferring* and *seeing* that something is the case (Sellars, 1997, 13), and in conjunction with his claim from “Inference and Meaning”, that there is nothing to a conceptual apparatus that is not determined by its own rules, Sellars effectively closes the conceptual, and I argue the inferential, in on itself. In other words, there is a distinction between *seeing* that something is the case and *inferring* that it is the case, and if there is nothing to the conceptual that is not determined by its own rules, (if one accepts that inferences are conceptual) then inferences can only be corrected by other inferences. So even if, as Bonjour claims, one is in a good position to understand the phenomenological content of a particular experience (i.e. they are in “standard conditions”) the belief one has is conceptual, and can therefore only be justified by competing against other beliefs in the “marketplace of experience” (Sellars, 1953*a*, 138). Furthermore, does being in a good position to understand the phenomenological content of one’s experience not also require being able to form a belief in the first place? As pointed out earlier,³² this also requires knowing a series of other facts. So, in order to understand that one is having a green experience one must also know what colors are and must also be able to distinguish between colors. Thus, in order to be in a good position to make a claim as Bonjour suggests involves having a grip on how to use concepts. Therefore, I argue that Bonjour’s foundationalism does *not* show that “the Given is not a Myth”; rather, it commits to a version of the Myth because it does not take seriously the self-adjudicating nature of the conceptual in Sellars, nor does it take seriously the difference between *inferring* and *seeing*.

³¹ For a discussion of this piece see pg. 19-20.

³² See pg. 17-19.

The lynchpin to my claim is what Sellars says at the end of chapter eight of EPM, “Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”. He writes:

“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” (Sellars, 1997, 79).

What he is saying here is that, sure maybe there is a “foundation” to empirical knowledge, he is not rejecting that there is, but to say that all knowledge rests on a foundation is *misleading*. This is because if there is a foundation of “basic beliefs” which empirical knowledge is based on, these beliefs must then compete against other beliefs to be justified in the “marketplace of experience”. Further, for Sellars, the notion of basic beliefs laying a foundation is problematic because these beliefs remain static. Therefore, what he is saying is that beliefs, even empirical beliefs, are constantly in competition with each other for adoption in a space of justification. These beliefs form a system and the most coherent belief is adopted as an item of knowledge. However, if this belief is proven to be wrong then another belief will replace it, and this is what Sellars means when he says that empirical knowledge is a “self-correcting enterprise”. A system of beliefs which are conceptually formulated correct themselves. In other words, the Given has no role in the correction process, instead, beliefs compete against one another for adoption as items of knowledge.

Nevertheless, as suggested earlier, this position is not strictly anti-foundationalist; it just rejects the dialectic entirely. Sellars points out that “there is clearly *some* point to the picture of human knowledge 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” (Ibid, 78). What he is suggesting here is that sure, the Given can provide us with a level of propositions which are like

basic beliefs, he calls these “observation reports”. These are like the conceptual cues discussed earlier which explain the *pregnancy of the Given*.³³ However, these basic beliefs must then compete against other beliefs, and this is ultimately what yields their justification. Therefore, coherence is necessary for justification, but we should not reject the idea of a foundation since it provides us with basic beliefs. In short, if we cannot reject either a foundationalist or coherentist theory of knowledge, and we find that one is actually necessary for the other, we should just reject the dialectic as a *false dilemma*.

3) Seeing is *Never* Believing

What I have done thus far in this section is first show what it means for the phenomenological content of experience to be merely a form of data. Next, I argued that we should reject the dialectic of foundationalism and coherentism in order to show that the phenomenological content plays no justificatory role beyond providing cues which are connected to conceptually formulated beliefs. Now, I will argue that *if* what we know are concepts within the space of reasons *then we never really see what we know*, and that this is a result of an “abstraction” of the *semantic content* from the *phenomenological content* of experience (Crane, 2013, 238-39). I will claim that the semantic content is what is *known* while phenomenological content is what is *seen*. I will liken this distinction between *the seen and the known* to what Ted Toadvine called the “ultimate ontological chiasm” which, for Merleau-Ponty exists, between the “sensible and the intelligible”. What I will show is that the sensible being the *visible* is what we see, while what we know, the intelligible, is a part of the invisible, and, as a result, there exists an ontological gap between these two elements of experience (Toadvine, 2016, plato.stanford.edu).

³³ See pg. 32.

Let me begin by looking at Tim Crane's "The Given" to outline the notion of "abstraction". Crane writes:

"When I judge because of what I can see, that the pig is under the oak, this is something which, in a certain way, *abstracts* from the *real* presence of the pig there. The content of the judgement can outlive the experience, it can be the content of others' judgements, things can follow from it (for example, that something is underneath the oak)" (Crane, 2013, 238-39).³⁴

So, for Crane, when one makes a perceptual judgement, one is abstracting from the "real" presence of something actually being there in front of them. Thus, when I judge that the wall is in fact blue, the judgement that the wall is blue is abstracted from the actual "seeing" of the blue wall.

Crane goes on to then make the distinction between the two kinds of content in experience which he calls "phenomenological content" and "semantic content". The "phenomenological content", as we have discussed, represents the Given, and this is the content which is "conveyed to the subject" (Ibid, 45). The phenomenological content of experience is, I have argued, the kind of content within the "perceptual field". But what about the "semantic content" of experience? Crane writes:

"The propositional content of a perceptual experience is also something that deserves the name "content". But it must be distinguished from content in the phenomenological sense. The content in the phenomenological sense is something spatiotemporal, concrete and specific to the subject. The content in the propositional sense is not... Semantic contents can only be descriptions of this [phenomenological] content" (Ibid, 245).

³⁴ Emphasis my own

What Crane is arguing is that there is a distinction between the content that is conveyed to the subject and the kind of content which we use to make judgements. Then, Crane suggests that when we make a judgement about something we “abstract from the “real” content” (Ibid). But what is interesting here is that Crane makes the point that the phenomenological content of experience is “spatio temporal” and “concrete” while the semantic content of experience is not. What does it mean if the semantic content is something that is not spatiotemporal, but rather, is abstracted from the phenomenological content of our experience? I argue it follows from this that *we never really see what we know since what we know is abstracted from what we see.*

But this claim would require that what we know is limited to the semantic content of our experience, and that is exactly the point I am trying to make here. As a result, I am taking up the Sellarsian definition of knowledge as outlined by McDowell: “Sellars says attributions of knowledge place episodes or states “in the logical space of reasons”. He identifies the logical space of reasons as the space “of justifying and being able to justify what one says”” (McDowell, 2009, 256). I am going to argue here that the “semantic content” makes up the logical space of reasons, and therefore, is exclusively the kind of content which can supply knowledge. However, there seems to be an odd consequence to this claim because McDowell writes that sensible episodes (Crane’s phenomenological content) themselves are placed within the space of reasons. One could ask though, if the semantic content is an abstraction from the phenomenological content, and the semantic content is what is in the space of reasons, how is it that the phenomenological content can be “placed” within the space of reasons? The answer is that McDowell is literally not “placing” the phenomenological content in the space of reasons per se, because, as he suggests, “sensibility does not belong to reason” (Ibid, 257). Thus, according to McDowell, our sensible episodes are not part of our capacity to reason and make claims about

things. Because of this I suggest that our capacity to reason is *not* active in our sensible episodes themselves for McDowell.³⁵

Nevertheless, while neither content is actually “in” one another, Crane points out that for McDowell “What it is for content to be conceptual, then, is not for it to be *conceptualized* -- in the sense that one has to be actually exercising a conceptual capacity when in a state with such a content -- but for it to be *conceptualizable*” (Crane, 2013, 231). I take it here that what it is for things to be conceptualizable is that everything that is sensible has the *potential* to be conceptualized, and by this I mean put into words. That is, everything that is sensed has the possibility to become schematized and thereby *pregnant* with a culturally constructed meaning. This, I argue, is the abstraction that Crane was discussing. The sensible becoming pregnant with its corresponding semantic content, giving it its meaning, and, subsequently, its epistemological significance within a linguistic community. The meaning, while corresponding to sensible content, is nonetheless abstracted from its corresponding sensible content since it is an act of the imagination abstracting from the sensible.

But how do we explain this abstraction? Or put differently how do we justify the claim that semantic content is abstracted from the phenomenological content? The answer, I argue, revolves around how McDowell appropriates the Kantian notion of the understanding as “spontaneous”. He writes, “Kant makes his remark about intuitions and concepts in the course of representing empirical knowledge as the result of a co-operation between receptivity and spontaneity, between sensibility and understanding” (McDowell, 1994, 4). I argue, the result of making the claim that the understanding is spontaneous is that it is a *unique achievement of the human mind*. The sensible, while we should be careful to not over-intellectualize the picture, is

³⁵ It is important to note here that experience has both semantic and phenomenological content, and that the two kinds of content happen at the same time, but are never active within one another.

merely a passive faculty which we must draw on our conceptual capacities to “make sense of”. This follows from the claim that the imagination is an “act of the understanding upon the sensible”.³⁶ So, to answer the question, if we accept the claim that the understanding is spontaneous and a result of the imagination, one can see how the semantic content of experience is abstracted from the *receptive* phenomenological content of experience. Therefore, I argue that *since* the semantic content of experience (which gives us the capacity for knowledge) is abstracted from the phenomenological content (which is related to sensibility) *we never really see what we know, and seeing is never believing.*

Now what I want to show is that for Merleau-Ponty this same problem presents us with the “ultimate ontological chiasm” between the sensible and the intelligible. However, before I show that the *chiasm* between sensibility and intelligibility comes with the result that we never really see what we know; I feel I must first show that Merleau-Ponty has a similar qualification for knowledge to Sellars and McDowell. Merleau-Ponty suggests in the *Phenomenology of Perception* that the synthesis of our senses is *not* the “work of the epistemological subject” (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, 270). From this one can see that the culmination of our senses which results in the perceptual field³⁷ is not something which could alone be an item of knowledge for Merleau-Ponty. Rather, the perceptual field remains “private” to the subject.³⁸ Now, I wish to suggest that it follows from this that Merleau-Ponty would not consider things private to the subject as items of knowledge, and thus, the perceptual field is not an item of knowledge in itself. He writes in an originally unpublished paper, “It seems to me that *knowledge and the communication with others which it presupposes* not only are original formations with respect to

³⁶ See Part II Sec. A Subsec. 2.

³⁷ Discussed in Part II Sec. B Subsec. 1.

³⁸ One should note here that this is also how Crane describes the phenomenological content of experience, “The content in the phenomenological sense is something ... specific to the subject” (Crane, 2013, 245).

perceptual life but also preserve and continue our perceptual life even while transforming it” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a, 7).³⁹ The important bit here is that for Merleau-Ponty, knowledge is “presupposed” by an ability to communicate with others. I argue that this implies that Merleau-Ponty places a requirement on the knower that their beliefs be in a conceptual or linguistic form, since we communicate with others through the medium of language. Therefore, I suggest that Merleau-Ponty’s qualifications on knowledge are similar to those of Sellars and McDowell, because being able to justify what one says also implies an ability to communicate with others, which for Merleau-Ponty presupposes knowledge.

Now, the claim that I am making, *that we never really see what we know, and seeing is never believing*, is related to the notion of *chiasm* in *The Visible and the Invisible*. Chiasm is described by Merleau-Ponty as:

“relation[s] with being is simultaneously a taking and a being held, the hold is held, it is inscribed and inscribed in the same being that it takes hold of. Starting from there, elaborate an idea of philosophy... . It is the simultaneous experience of the holding and the held in all orders.” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 266).⁴⁰

So, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of chiasm is essentially that for every relation, there is an opposite that exists within it. The example here is that *when one touches there is also one who is touched*. However, Toadvine points out that for Merleau-Ponty “the ultimate ontological chiasm, [is] that between the sensible and the intelligible” (Toadvine, 2016, plato.stanford.edu).⁴¹ The ontological gap that exists between the sensible and the intelligible shows that there is an *abstraction* away

³⁹ Emphasis my own.

⁴⁰ This is also quoted in Toadvine (2016).

⁴¹ What Merleau-Ponty goes on to say that philosophy presents us with an epistemological chiasm in the sense that there is no *pure philosophy*. So, what does Merleau-Ponty mean by “pure philosophy”? He goes on to describe a series of opposites, transcendental and empirical, ontic and ontological. I think his most clear example is his political example, communism vs. fascism. What he means by this is simply that for every philosophical idea, an opposite appears. For example, idealism and materialism, or dualism vs. physicalism.

from our sense capabilities by our capacities to understand; *the understanding abstracts from the sensible*. In other words, the *chasm* between the sensible and the intelligible shows that for Merleau-Ponty there is a gap between what we *see* and what we *know*.

Now, does this result in the claim “*if what we know are concepts, then we never really see what we know*”? As pointed out above, the space of reasons is constructed of deployed semantic content, and at the same time if the semantic contents are abstracted from the phenomenological contents; *it follows that what we know is abstracted from what we see*. This result is clear when Merleau-Ponty writes that, “a total determination of the concrete perceptual field of a given living individual at a given moment appears not provisionally unattainable but definitively meaningless, *because it presents structures that do not even have a name in the objective universe of separated and separable “conditions”*” (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, 21). The point here, I believe, is that the structures presented to us by the perceptual field do not have an objective meaning in themselves. But what gives the perceptual field its meaning? And further, how does this meaning remain abstracted from the field? He goes on to write:

“The “other [people]”, a social and historical constellation, can intervene as stimuli only if we recognize the efficacy of ensembles that have *no physical existence and that operate on man not according to their immediately sensible properties but by reason of their social configuration, within a social space and time, according to a social code, and finally as symbols rather than causes*” (Ibid, 23-24).⁴²

What Merleau-Ponty is claiming here is that the socially shared language, which by our analysis, constructs the space of reasons, can “intervene as stimuli” only if we accept that something without a spatio temporal existence acts on us not because of its sensory properties, but because it is a “socially configured” system of symbols. Thus, what gives the perceptual field meaning

⁴² Emphasis my own.

for Merleau-Ponty is our socially configured language. From here, I argue that in the same way that Crane argues the semantic content of our experience is abstracted from the phenomenological content, *for Merleau-Ponty, our socially configured language is not spatiotemporal and is “abstracted” from our perceptual field.*

Lastly, I argued above that the realm of the *visible* is what Crane would call the phenomenological content of experience, which is “spatiotemporal, concrete, and specific to the subject”; while what is *invisible* is partially made up of semantic contents which I have claimed make up the space of reasons.⁴³ The result of this would be that what we see, what is *visible*, is *not* what is *known* because what we *know* is made up of *invisible* semantic contents. In other words, since what we know are propositions in the space of reasons, then we never really see what we know because the semantic contents of experience are “invisible”. But we are left with a paradoxical consequence. While we do not “see what we know” because what we know are the semantic contents of our experience, we know things about what we see, and the things we see are, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, “pregnant” with their “invisible” content. Meaning that the invisible is, in a certain sense, bound up in the visible. However, in spite of being able to bridge this gap through the notion of pregnancy, *the gap between the seen and the known is never nullified.*

So what I have argued is that the claim *we never really see what we know and that seeing is never believing* follows from Tim Crane’s suggestion that the semantic contents are abstracted from the phenomenological contents of experience. The semantic contents have an exclusive hold on knowledge while the phenomenological contents are made up of sense experience. This, I have suggested, requires me to take up the Sellarsian definition of knowledge, that one places a belief in the space of reasons and justify what one says. The result of this is that the semantic

⁴³ For further discussion of this see pg. 22-24.

contents of experience make up the space of reasons, while phenomenological contents construct the sensible. In order to make my point I turned to the *chiasm* between the sensible and the intelligible outlined by Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and the Invisible*. This idea suggests that there is simultaneously a relationship between the sensible and the intelligible, and a gap between them. It follows from this, I have argued, that while the sensible is “pregnant” with the intelligible they are constructed out of two fundamentally different kinds of content. Therefore, a gap remains between them, allowing us to maintain that we never really see what we know.

4) Conclusion

In conclusion, what I have shown in this section is that *we never really see what we know and that seeing is never really believing*. In other words, *there is a distinction between what we see in experience and what we know about it*. In order to make this claim I first outlined what it meant for the Given, the phenomenological content of experience, to be merely a form of data. I drew this point out by analogy, the Given is like the data presented by a sociologist in a study -- *necessary*, but also meaningless without an explanation and interpretation. Secondly, if I was to make this claim, I felt it was necessary to address the structure of justification because if I am to reject that seeing can be a type of knowledge, I must also reject that sensation could provide justificatory power. Therefore, I had to show that coherence within a system of beliefs was necessary for justification. However, this is not strictly anti-foundationalist. Phenomenological content clearly provides us with basic beliefs because it is conceptually cued, or pregnant with “observation reports”. Now if both foundations and coherence necessitate one another for observational, or empirical, knowledge, I argued that it was just better to reject the dialectic of foundationalism and coherentism entirely. This led me to make the claim that *what we see is distinct from what we know*. This claim is inspired by what Merleau-Ponty and Toadvine call an

“ontological gap” between the sensible and the intelligible. That is, what is sensed is distinct from what we know since the semantic content of experience is distinct from the phenomenological content. As a result, despite the colloquial phrase that “seeing is believing”, *seeing is never believing since belief is linguistically structured and abstracted from its phenomenological content.*

B) *Mutilating From Above*

Sellars's critique of the Given in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* is a double-edged sword. He goes after those who claim that there is something "epistemically Given" but he also argues that some of those who attack the Given are merely attacking *sense data* (Sellars, 1997, 14). To critique sense data itself is to *over-intellectualize* the nature of perception. Or, as Merleau-Ponty suggests in his critique of "intellectualism" that it *mutilates perception from above* (Merleau-Ponty, 2013, 62). What I will do in this section is argue against Susanna Siegel's claim that she has "expanded the house of reason" because in the process of doing so she "mutilates" perception from above.⁴⁴ The first step she takes in doing this is choosing to flip the route of traditional perceptual epistemology, from perception to psychological states. Instead, Siegel's route goes *from psychological states to perception* (Siegel, 2017, 19). Understanding the route from psychological states to perception is certainly important, but I think *there is another route which goes from our bodily perception to our psychological states which Siegel seems to take for granted*. As a result of taking up this route Siegel takes up what she calls the "inferential modulation thesis", which suggests that perceptual experiences are the conclusions of inferences, and this modulates the epistemic character of the experience (ibid, 21). To illustrate this she outlines what she calls *hijacked experience*, which shows that pre-existing psychological dispositions can "inferentially modulate" our perceptual experiences. I take up a middle position here. Sure, pre-existing psychological states can have an influence in our *interpretation* of perceptual experiences, but there is a level of receptivity that is Given by the senses. Thus, it is all well and good to claim that psychological inferences play a role in the understanding of our perceptual experiences, but the route is really a two-way street.

⁴⁴ Errol Lord (2020) makes a similar claim, that Siegel's "inferential thesis" over-intellectualize the nature of perception. However, Lord and I have differing reasons for making this claim. Nonetheless, Lord's claim has inspired my own criticism of Siegel as over-intellectualizing the nature of perception.

In other words, sometimes inferences are a result of perceptual experiences. Lastly, since Siegel over-intellectualizes the picture, I propose that the *pregnancy framework* is a better way to understand the epistemic nature of perception as opposed to what Siegel calls *epistemic charge*. This is because, as I will show, the *pregnancy framework* can account for Siegel's route as well as the traditional route of doing perceptual epistemology.

1) Siegel's Route

The first point I want to make here is that Siegel's route of perceptual epistemology, from psychological states to perception, is a first step in over-intellectualizing the nature of perception. Siegel writes:

“Most discussions of perceptual epistemology focus on the route *from* perceptual experience to belief. The Rationality of Perception focuses on the route *to* perceptual experience from other psychological states of the perceiver. It extends the domain of rationality to transitions and states that were previously assumed to be entirely a-rational. It expands the house of reason” (Siegel, 2017, 19).

Siegel challenges Donald Davison's notion of the “house of reason”. She claims to be showing that perceptual states typically thought of as a-rational can have a rational standing on their own. The question is has she given perception itself a rational standing, or, to keep with the house metaphor, *has she only built an extension from the house of reason onto the natural grounds of perception?* In other words, has she proven that perception itself is rational, or has she thrust rational capacities onto something a-rational and passively received. I argue that her route, and what follows from it commit her to the latter.

In so doing I suggest that Siegel commits to an “intellectualist” error outlined by Merleau-Ponty.⁴⁵ The intellectualist error is to say that judgement is everywhere, even in passive sense experience. Siegel writes that her route is “at odds with a sharp division in the mind between perception and reasoning, and with the idea that the route to perception is “passive” as compared with the mental activity found in reasoning” (Ibid). It seems here that Siegel is either rejecting the idea that perception has a passive characteristic, or is at least rejecting the traditional route of explaining perceptual epistemology as going from “passive” perception to rational mental states. However, both of these explanations are mistakes. On the one hand, if Siegel is rejecting that perception has a passive character she is simply denying that the body produces a perceptual field which is *passively received* sense data. Yet, as I have argued in a previous section,⁴⁶ the body is organized in a particular way which gives rise to the perceptual field, and this is passively acquired. *The perceptual field is constructed by one’s passive bodily sense capabilities.* Rather, what is rational in these scenarios are the linguistic interpretations of this passively acquired data. Now, on the other hand, if Siegel is attacking the “traditional route of perceptual epistemology” and replacing it with a route which goes from psychological states to perception then she is committing an error in Kantian terms for giving preference to the understanding over the sensible. Ultimately either direction one takes this it places judgement within the realm of sensation, and thereby, commits to the intellectualist error, *mutilating perception from above.*

Siegel also seems to be suggesting that her proposed route of doing perceptual epistemology collapses the gap between passive perception and rational activity. What this suggests is that for Siegel perception is an entirely rational activity. However, I wish to maintain

⁴⁵ See pg. 6, ft. 3.

⁴⁶ See pgs. 53-54.

that there is a passive element to our perception; it involves both passive and active faculties.

Perception involves receptive sensibility and spontaneous conceptualization working in tandem.

Thus, perceptual epistemology should involve a route which goes from passive sensation to psychological states, and, at the same time, Siegel's proposed route, from psychological states to perception. To take Siegel's route exclusively is to over-intellectualize perception, but to take the other route exclusively is to commit to a foundationalist picture. *Thus, neither of these routes alone will do.*

2) Epistemic Charge vs. Pregnancy: Problems with the "Inferential Modulation Thesis"

Siegel introduces the notion of *epistemic charge* to explain how perceptual experiences get their rational character. However, this concept rests on what she calls the *inferential modulation thesis*. The inferential modulation thesis is why Siegel's picture is over-intellectualized, but what exactly is the inferential modulation thesis? Siegel states that the inferential modulation thesis is the idea that "experiences can be formed by inferences that can modulate their epistemic charge" (Siegel, 2017, 21). Key to this claim is Siegel's suggestion that:

"If a perceptual experience could be the conclusion of an inference, the inference would modulate its epistemic status -- just as an inference modulates the epistemic status of a belief that is a conclusion of the inference" (Ibid).

So for Siegel, perceptual experiences do not arise from bodily passivity. Rather, they are a conclusion of an inference, and this inference modulates the epistemic status of the experience. The epistemic status given to this perceptual experience in virtue of its being inferentially modulated gives the experience its *epistemic charge*. In other words, perceptual experiences

yield an epistemic status because they are inferential conclusions, and in turn, are *epistemically charged*.

The question I have though is can a perceptual experience be the conclusion of an inference? I think to make this claim is to over-intellectualize the nature of perception and to expand the house of reason onto the natural grounds of perception,⁴⁷ or, to use Merleau-Ponty's words, *mutilate perception from above*. However, to answer the question we have to ask a key question, what exactly is meant by *inference*? Inferences are conclusions based on evidence (data) and reasoning. If inferences are conclusions based on a mix of reason and data, then the observation reports discussed by Sellars in EPM⁴⁸ would surely be inferential. These observation reports are conceptually guided schemas which are constructed by the imagination, but ultimately these reports depend upon cues we get from the phenomenological content which is Given. In these cases, would an inference not be the result of a world cue in the perceptual field? This shows that we can also understand perceptual epistemology as going from perception to psychological inferences. Thus, if inferences can be the result of a passively received perceptual data in combination with imaginative conceptualization, we could say that the perceptual field and its accuracy conditions modulate inferences.⁴⁹ Thus, it must also be recognized that we must also understand perceptual epistemology as going from perception to psychological states.

However, I do not wish to reject Siegel's route entirely. What I am rejecting is the idea that inference *always* modulates experience and *epistemically charges* our perceptions. Rather, the exchange between passive perception and spontaneous conceptualization should be seen as

⁴⁷ What I mean by this is that there is something natural going on in perception related to the "evolution of the species" (Sellars 1953*b*, 337) that is not necessarily a type of reasoning. Therefore, it is a-rational, and what Siegel is doing with the inferential modulation thesis is taking our natural engagement with the world for granted.

⁴⁸ See Part III Sec. A Subsec. 2 for a discussion of this.

⁴⁹ This is not to take up a foundationalist picture. These observation reports are only rational and justified if they are coherent within a system of beliefs. Or in Sellars's words, observation reports are rational because they are within a system of beliefs which is a "self-correcting enterprise".

bi-directional. This is to say that perceptual epistemology should be understood as having the route I have just defended as well as Siegel's proposed route. In other words, I am not rejecting Siegel's route, or her example of it, *hijacked experience*. Hijacked experience, as described by Siegel, is:

“When perceptual judgements or perceptual experiences arise from processes that give prior outlooks too much weight and fail to give proper weight to perceptual inputs (if there are any such inputs), we can say that the outlook *hijacks* the perceptual state”
(Siegel, 2017, 5).

What Siegel is suggesting here is that pre-existing outlooks can “hijack” a perception, making it irrational. So, for example, let's say that one night driving home along a rural road you hit a deer. This was a terrible experience and you are anxious about it happening again. Later, you are driving along the rural road on your way home and your headlights illuminate a branch on the side of the road. At a quick glance, you believe that the branch is a deer's antlers because you have been primed by your prior outlook. That is, the outlook that when driving along this road you may hit a deer. What happens in this case is that the outlook influences the observation reports we get from the perceptual field. Thus we can understand perceptual epistemology as going from psychological states to perception as well. *It is possible for experience to be hijacked by pre-existing psychological states.*

It is important to note that when Merleau-Ponty discusses hallucination in the *Phenomenology of Perception* he proposes a very similar account to Siegel. Romdenh-Romluc points out that for Merleau-Ponty, hallucinations are a result of the “power of summoning is exercised in the absence of the appropriate world cues” (Romdenh-Romluc, 2007, 81). The question here is what is the “power of summoning”? Romdenh-Romluc suggests that the power

of summoning is the idea that things in the world summon us to do certain things; for example, one sees a pile of dirty dishes as needing to be washed (Ibid, 78-81).⁵⁰ What happens in cases of hallucination though is that we “summon” an action dependent on a world cue despite its not actually being there. So, to the deer example, in this instance we “summon” the reaction to a deer running across the road despite its not being there because of our anxiety about hitting a deer while driving along this particular road at night. Thus, an action is summoned despite there not being an appropriate world cues in the experience. In this way pre-existing psychological states can lead us to act irrationally, if you will, and this shows that pregnancy can account for hijacked experience.

The question is can we explain the phenomena of hijacked experience using the concept of pregnancy instead of epistemic charge? I suggest that we can. Recall the process of how the perceptual field becomes pregnant,⁵¹ the imagination forms object schemas with the use of concepts. Let me illustrate this point by using the deer example. When you hit the deer and it destroyed the front end of your car making you become anxious about driving along that road at night, the experience of you driving along that road at night was impregnated with the property that deer are living along that road and one may run out in front of you. In this case you are primed, because of your pre-existing psychological outlook towards driving along that road at night, to anticipate deer running out in front of your car. *This priming is a case of the subject’s experience of driving along that road being “pregnant” with the possibility of hitting a deer just as the child’s experience of seeing an apple, after experiencing a rotten one, is pregnant with the possibility of the apple to be rotten.*⁵²

⁵⁰ The power of summoning is similar to the concept of affordances outlined by J.J. Gibson in psychological literature (1979).

⁵¹ See pg. 30-31.

⁵² See pg. 31.

Now, what I want to explain here is why the concept of pregnancy is a better explanation of the epistemic role of perception than Siegel's notion of epistemic charge. The problem with the concept of epistemic charge is that it relies on the inferential modulation thesis which claims that perceptual experiences are the conclusions of inferences. If this is the case then perceptual experiences would be conclusions of observation reports and this seems to over-intellectualize the nature of perception. There is data that is Given in the form of a perceptual field; in certain (most) instances, inferences (observation reports) are cued up by objects in the perceptual field. In these cases, perceptual experience is not the conclusion of an inference, but an inference is the result of a perceptual phenomena. Pregnancy accounts for this traditional route of perceptual epistemology which explains how perception can result in an inference, but as just outlined above, pregnancy can also account for times when perceptual experiences are hijacked by pre-existing psychological states (e.g. when one is anxious about hitting a deer while driving). Thus, pregnancy can be used to explain both routes of doing perceptual epistemology. On the one hand, it can explain the traditional route, how perceptions can lead to psychological states and inferences. While, on the other hand, it explains how pre-existing psychological states influence our perceptions and sometimes have an adverse effect on us. However, epistemic charge, since it relies on the inferential modulation thesis, can only account for the route proposed by Siegel. Therefore, epistemic charge threatens to over-intellectualize the nature of perception. While pregnancy recognizes that perceptual experiences rely on an exchange between passivity and rationality. *In short, Siegel's concept takes perceptual epistemology as a one-way street, but in reality perceptual epistemology is bi-directional, and pregnancy can account for this.*

3) Conclusion

What I have done in this section is argue against several of Susanna Siegel's claims in *The Rationality of Perception*. First, I disputed Siegel's route of doing perceptual epistemology. This was not to reject the route, but rather to suggest that perceptual epistemology should be understood as going both from psychological states to perceptual experience (Siegel's route) and as going the other direction, from perception to psychological states. These routes are *not* mutually exclusive, they can co-exist. Nonetheless, Siegel's only focusing on the one side of perceptual epistemology leads to the "inferential modulation thesis" which leads me to my second point. The inferential modulation thesis, and its result, *epistemic charge*, by only focusing on Siegel's route, ultimately over-intellectualizes the nature of perception. I then proposed that the *pregnancy framework* is a better explanation of the epistemic role of perception since it can be explained bi-directionally. This is to say that pregnancy can explain the epistemic role of perception both as going from perception to inference, and from pre-existing psychological states to perceptual experience.

Conclusion

What I want to do here is conclude the project by summarizing what I believe are its two upshots. The first upshot is the *pregnancy framework* I have developed derived from the works of Merleau-Ponty, Sellars, and, indirectly, Kant. The notion of pregnancy explains how things passively received within the perceptual field can give rise to observation reports. These reports are cued up to respond to phenomena in the perceptual field, so, for instance, when one is presented with a red square, and one is in ideal conditions to accurately perceive a red square, the observation report is that “there is a red square”. However, since one has been acculturated into a language which uses these categorizations one must also know a series of other facts in order to make this claim (e.g. how to distinguish red from green and squares from circles). Therefore, if one is to form this belief it is justified in virtue of its not being able to be defeated by another belief. So, to say that the Given is *pregnant*, is to say that the Given is a kind of datum which gives rise to observation reports. An object, when pregnant, is schematized, that is, linked to the properties that describe it. Thus, when one sees an apple one sees it as juicy, having white flesh, possibly rotten, etc., the apple is “pregnant” with its properties for the subject. These properties are “cued” up and correspond to concepts which take part in a knowledge-language game that is self-correcting.

I stacked up this notion against contemporary explanations of how perception and rationality interact. Namely, Susanna Siegel’s notion of *epistemic charge*. I made the claim that Siegel over-intellectualizes the picture because epistemic charge rests on the “inferential modulation thesis”. The inferential modulation thesis suggests that inference modulates the epistemic character of perceptual experiences, and this is all well and good. However, in the process Siegel rejects the traditional route of perceptual epistemology and flips it on its head.

The traditional route goes from perception to psychological states, but Siegel's route goes from psychological states to perceptual experience. I argued that *observation reports* show how perceptual experience can sometimes lead to an inference. Therefore, the traditional route remains intact. However, I did not necessarily reject Siegel's route; what I disagree with is that she does not seem to accept the traditional route in addition to her own. Thus, I suggested that pregnancy can account for both routes, and is therefore a more viable explanation of the rational character of perception.

The second upshot to the project was making the claim that *we never really see what we know, and seeing is never believing*. To understand this claim we have to understand how the *pregnancy framework* avoids the Myth of the Given. I showed that Merleau-Ponty's notion of pregnancy avoids the Myth by taking up a hard-lined distinction between what Tim Crane would call the *phenomenological* and *semantic contents of experience*. The phenomenological content is that which is passively received by the senses; while, the semantic content is linguistic in nature, and the sort which structures belief, justification, and knowledge. Merleau-Ponty's notion of *flesh as the visible and sensible*, as well as his suggestion that *the body's intrinsic organization gives rise to a perceptual field*, I claimed gave rise to the phenomenological content of experience. While the *existentials of the visible*, which impregnate the visible with its meaning, were likened to the semantic content of experience. These existentials are part of what make up the "invisible" for Merleau-Ponty, that is, things which are not able to be sensed. Thus, the visible flesh would be what makes up the perceptual field (i.e. the Given); while an element of the invisible would structure belief, justification, and knowledge. *Therefore, since what we see is visible but what we know is invisible in a literal sense for Merleau-Ponty, I argue that we never really see what we know, and seeing is never believing.*

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