

# Reading Kant with Sellars

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## Reconceiving Kantian Themes

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## Chapter 8

### Why Does Wilfrid Sellars Not Have a Transcendental Deduction?

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# 8 Why Does Wilfrid Sellars Not Have a Transcendental Deduction?

*Mahdi Ranaee*

## 8.1 Introduction

Wilfrid Sellars stands out among twentieth-century analytic philosophers for his direct engagement with the great philosophers past.<sup>1</sup> Of these figures, Immanuel Kant occupies a central place in his intellectual landscape. He famously expressed his ambition to lead analytic philosophy out of its Humean origins and into a more Kantian phase (Rorty 1997, 3). He underscores his philosophical continuity with Kant by titling his major work, *Science and Metaphysics* (SM), “Variations on Kantian Themes”, which shows Sellars’ perception of his philosophy as an extension of Kantian insights. However, Sellars’ engagement with Kant is not one of uncritical allegiance. He occasionally criticizes Kant for imprecision and lack of clarity (SM I, §5), sometimes suggests that Kant failed to articulate what he meant to say (e.g., in his discussion of Space and Time in SM), and sometimes even suggests adjustments to Kantian ideas to accommodate contemporary scientific advances. One such area, which he emphasizes in his “Autobiographical Reflections” (AR), is a great influence and, at the same time, a modification of Kant’s theory of concepts, especially what he calls “categorical concepts” (AR §18). This is one of the areas where Sellars thinks Kant’s ideas were on the right track. But since Kant, like any other human being, was necessarily bound by the time and place in which he wrote, Sellars thinks that he failed to see the correct theory of categories. For this reason, Sellars sets out to give an “adaptation” (PH §71) of Kant’s theory of categories, a version of what he calls the “empiricized Kant” (TTC §8).

What Sellars sees as Kant’s unavoidable disadvantage is that he is writing in the pre-Fregean and pre-Darwinian era. As an eighteenth-century philosopher, Kant was unaware of the logical revolutions and the linguistic turn brought about by the founding fathers of analytic philosophy—most importantly, for Sellars, Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap—and also of the enormous explanatory power that evolutionary theory offers

us. Aware of these two advantages enjoyed by a twentieth-century philosopher, Sellars offers his adaptation of Kant's categories by making two changes to them. First, whereas for Kant the categories are (pure) concepts that can be exemplified by objects, Sellars reads the categories metalinguistically. For him, in contrast to Kant, what the categories do is merely to regulate the terms of the object language, and as such they do not refer to any objects in the external world.<sup>2</sup> Second, and perhaps more importantly, he sees them as evolutionary results, thus rejecting what he sees as Kant's innatism regarding categories. In Sellars' reading of Kant, the German philosopher is faced with a dichotomy in which he thinks that categories can be either abstractions from experience or innate, and since he wants to reject the Lockean concept-empiricism, he endorses innatism (MP §60).

These two changes constitute two major differences with Kant's theory of categories. First, for Kant, categories are necessary in the sense that neither their number nor their meaning and/or function can be changed or could have been otherwise—these are *the* 12 categories. But Sellars not only adds new categories to the list and implies that it is possible to lose some in the course of evolution but also assumes that the categories can change; for example, he discusses that in the case of the category of causality.<sup>3</sup> This makes his categories *contingent* and not necessary, as it is for Kant. Second, the fact that the categories are not purely generated by the understanding but are a result of the evolutionary process makes them not purely formal and therefore *impure* in the Kantian sense of the term. For Kant, the categories are purely formal in the sense that they are generated *a priori* by the understanding, and since they are purely formal, the content of experience contributes absolutely nothing to their generation. But for Sellars, since the categories are evolutionarily acquired, they are not purely formal, and the content of experience—in the sense of the effects of the environment—contributes to their generation and thus renders them impure.

Sellars is well aware of the two changes he makes to Kant's theory of categories, and I show below that it is these changes that allow him to avoid the need for a transcendental deduction. However, I argue that he underestimates his divergence from Kant. These two changes, and hence the absence of a transcendental deduction, make his theory of categories rather un-Kantian. Drawing on Kant's own argument in §27 of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, I argue that Sellars' position is closer to the position that Kant there ascribes to the "skeptic", who is Hume, although, unlike Hume, it is not skeptical. By making categories contingent and impure, then, Sellars succeeds not in making analytic philosophy Kantian but in making Kantian categories rather Humean.

Before turning to substantiating these claims and showing how Sellars' theory of categories amounts to a regression to Hume, two important caveats must be made. First, I do not intend to argue for either of the two

positions under discussion. The aim of this chapter is modest—it aims only to illustrate the significant difference between Kant’s and Sellars’ theories of categories and to show that the affinities are really between Sellars and Hume rather than between Sellars and Kant. I do not wish to take a position on which theory should be adopted. Second, the focus of the analysis here is limited to Sellars’ theory of categories rather than his broader Kantian framework. An assessment of the fidelity of Sellars’ philosophy in general to Kant’s broader apparatus would require a more extensive investigation beyond the scope of this chapter. I will first (Section 8.2) give a summary of the Kantian and Sellarsian theories of categories and argue for the two main differences, showing that Kant’s categories are *necessary* and *pure*, whereas Sellars’ are *contingent* and *impure*. I will then (Section 8.3) rehearse why Kant needs and has a transcendental deduction and prepare the ground for seeing why Sellars does not need and nor have one.

## 8.2 Categories: Kantian and Sellarsian

Kant consistently emphasizes the duality and irreducibility (A51/B75) of the two cognitive faculties of “sensibility” and “understanding”.<sup>4</sup> The former is the receptive faculty that provides us with “intuitions” through which “an object is given to us”, while the latter is the spontaneous faculty through whose “concepts” the object given is thought (A50/B74; see also A15/B29; A19/B33; A51/B75). Both possess a pure part, i.e., a part “in which nothing is to be encountered that belongs to sensation” (A20/B34), which by definition precedes any experience and constitutes their form.<sup>5</sup> Space and time are the forms of sensibility, and the categories are those of understanding (A50-1/B74-5).<sup>6</sup> Kant is explicit that there can be no fewer and no more pure forms of sensibility (A41/B58), and the same holds for the categories, as “the understanding is completely exhausted and its capacity is totally measured by these functions” (A79/B105). The functions in question are “the unity of the action of ordering different representations under a common one” (A68/B93), and Kant gives 12 different such functions in the table of judgments (A70/B95ff). And then, in one of Sellars’ favorite passages,<sup>7</sup> he writes that:

The same function that gives unity to the different representations **in a judgment** also gives unity to the same synthesis of different representations **in an intuition**.

(A79/B104-105; original emphasis)

Since the table of the 12 forms of judgment has only 12 possible functions, and the same function also gives us unity in one intuition, we can also have the exact same number of categories, and therefore exactly 12 categories

(A80/B160). Kant takes logic to be on the secure path of science from its earliest days in Aristotle's hands (Bviii) and thus implies its immutability. He also takes pride in the fact that his theory of categories is based on a single principle and therefore systematic, unlike Aristotle's, which continued as he stumbled upon it (A81/B107). He therefore takes the categories to be complete, without the slightest possibility of change and improvement. Categories are therefore necessary in two senses: First, as the necessary condition of the possibility of experience, and second, as the opposite of contingent, i.e., in the sense of rejecting the possibility that they might have been otherwise—both in the sense of being open to revision and in the sense of the possibility of getting rid of them.<sup>8</sup> It is the latter sense of necessity that I am addressing here.

Sellars in his theory of categories partly follows Kant but also diverges from him in important respects. One important feature they share is that both the categories are “the most generic functional classifications of the elements of judgments” (TTC §23), which is a direct result of the same function passage we saw above.<sup>9</sup> But there are important differences between their theories of categories as well. These differences are not of course unknown to Sellars, but I show below that the radical nature of these differences has not been appreciated. A clear and early distinction between Sellars and Kant arises when Sellars introduces the distinction between “formal” and “material” categories and suggests adding some new *material* categories such as “event” and “action” to our list (TTC §§25-26). Sellars does not elaborate on what he means by this distinction, but since he calls the former “determinables” and the latter “determinates” (TTC §25), one can see that by a “formal” category he means what can be determined, as the most general kind of category—as “substance” and “quality” are in Kant's original table, and Sellars adds “state of affairs”—and by material he means a lower level of generality, namely, that which has been determined and is therefore “determinate”—his examples include “color”, “event”, and “action”. This shows a twofold divergence from Kant. First, as we have seen, Kant is adamant in believing that the table of categories cannot stand any sort of change, be it adding new categories or dropping some of the old ones. This difference is of course a methodological one, in which although Sellars accepts the same function passage and agrees that we can derive the categories from the forms of judgment, he rejects the Kantian adherence to the strictly speaking Aristotelian logic and goes further than him by adding some more categories. More importantly, he does not just add some new categories but also adds a new kind, namely “material” categories. Kant's theory of categories is just a formal theory, and the categories cannot be anything but formal, having to do only with what “determines” and not with what is “determined”. Sellars, on the other hand, by adding the “determinates” or the “material” categories diverges from Kant in an important and irreducible

respect. Put another way, Sellars' material categories would not belong to Kant's table of categories, as they are not pure and—being determinates—have some elements of sensation in them.<sup>10</sup>

But this leads to a more important difference. We have seen that for Kant categories are necessary in two different senses, one in the sense of being the necessary conditions of our experience and one in the sense of being unchangeable. The mere addition of categories, as Sellars does, shows that he goes further than Kant in rejecting the necessity of categories in the second sense of the term. Up until now, however, Sellars is totally on board that his theory of categories is not exactly Kant's, as he himself calls his theory an "adaptation" (PH §71) rather than an exegetical, faithful reading, and he himself later distinguishes between "empiricized Kant and historical Kant" (TTC §8). He evidently opts for the former. But the difference, *pace* Sellars, turns out to be more serious than a mere adaptation, as Sellars sees the categories not as pure in the Kantian sense but as a result of the evolutionary process—although he of course uses the term "pure" on many occasions, but arguably in a different sense than Kant. For Kant, the categories are the pure concepts "that the understanding contains (*enthält*) *a priori*", and are "systematically generated (*erzeugt*) from a common principle, namely the faculty of judging" (A80-1/B106). Therefore, according to Kant, the faculty of judging generates these concepts in a pure and *a priori* way, i.e., in a way which is absolutely independent and prior to any experience and any contribution from sensation, which is exactly Kant's definition of something being pure (A20/B34). Put differently, it is our faculty of judgment, which according to Kant is the understanding itself (A69/B94), which generates these concepts, and therefore they do not depend one bit on sensation. Sellars believes that

Kant's account of the conceptual structures involved in experience can be *given a linguistic turn* and purged of the commitment to innateness to which, given his historical setting, he was inevitably led.<sup>11</sup>

(OAPK §31, emphasis added)

Sellars wants to preserve the core truth, namely the feature that we saw above, i.e., that categories are functional classifications, by getting rid of the innateness or Platonism. He sees Kant's innateness as a result of his historical setting. The historical setting in question is obvious from the term "linguistic turn" in the passage, i.e., that Kant was writing before all the logical and linguistic revolutions at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>12</sup> For Kant, as we have seen, Aristotelian logic was already final and in no need of change. But Sellars was writing after the inauguration of analytic philosophy, and most importantly for him, all the conceptual machinery we find in Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and Carnap. Therefore, we need to see the

categories not as conceptual, as Kant did, but as metalinguistic, functional classifications. This, however, does not still suffice to reject the innateness Sellars sees in Kant. Another aspect which is at play here, and is no less important for Sellars, is that Kant was writing in the pre-Darwin era. He therefore did not have the evolutionary theory at his disposal to explain our having the categories. We have seen that Kant argues that the understanding contains (*enthält*) the categories *a priori* in itself. Sellars reads this as an innatism, but an unavoidable one, since Kant was writing before the theory of evolution and could not see that there was a third option between the Cartesian innatism and the concept-empiricism defended by Locke, among others. He writes, for example, that

Kant's fundamental error was to construe the phenomenal world in Cartesian terms. [...] But, as I see it, this (unavoidable) error was but one more symptom of his pre-evolutionary commitments. Correctly rejecting standard empiricism, he was forced into the platonic alternative of innate ideas. This led him to tie together in one bundle the diversity of concepts in terms of which we explain the course of nature.

(MP §60)

Kant is right to reject the Scylla of sheer empiricism defended by Locke and, in a different, more sophisticated sense, by Hume, and therefore to assume that categories are more than mere contiguities or generalizations that we make on the basis of our perceptions, but, innocently unaware of the evolutionary option, he fled to the Charybdis of the Platonic theory of the innateness of these categories. But we can, *Sellars' Meinung nach*, retain the core Kantian idea of categories as *summa genera* and reject the concept-empiricism, but also reject the idea of innateness:

The idea that this logical space [i.e., logical space of the concept] is an evolutionary development, culturally inherited, is an adaptation rather than a rejection of Kant's contention that the forms of experience are *a priori* and innate.

(PH §71)

He sees his own theory of the categories, which is both post evolutionary-theory and post linguistic-turn, as an adaptation and therefore not a rejection of Kant. He does not naively treat his own theory of the categories as if it were identical to Kant's, but as a twentieth-century update. But I think the difference is much deeper than he seems to realize, and that his theory of categories is in principle inconsistent with Kant's theory.

Sellars provides a relatively detailed account of the metalinguistic reading of the categories in a number of places, most relevantly in TTC, which

is based on his functional role semantics and the dot-quotation machinery he developed elsewhere (e.g., AE).<sup>13</sup> His evolutionary take on the categories, however, does not go further than some scattered pointers, and he does not develop it in any detail beyond the cited passages (see also MGEC §180). Although the devil is always in the details, it is not difficult to see Sellars' core idea, and this core idea is already enough to have the essential difference. The core idea, however we work out the details is that our categories are developed in the process of evolution. This can be true both when we see the categories as concepts and when we see them metalinguistically—both are the result of an evolutionary process. Since Sellars' idea aligns with the latter, however, I do not touch the former. This means that through our navigation in the environment, we developed our categories metalinguistically that regulate our use of the object language terms. In this process, like any other evolutionary process, the categories that are helpful remain and those less helpful are lost. However we fill in the details of the oversimplified picture I have presented here, we see that Sellars' two divergences from Kant remain intact. First, his categories can and do change (SM V, §42) depending on the environment: In this picture, as Sellars suggests, we should not only add new categories such as “state of affairs” and “action”, but might in the future even need new ones and lose some others—even those most essential to the Kantian framework, such as substance and causality.<sup>14</sup> Second, the necessity of the categories is rejected, as there is no unique set of categories which is necessary for our cognition, but it's a changing set of categories, and no single category can be necessary for the sense it had for Kant.<sup>15</sup>

This leads, however, to an essential difference with Kant that Sellars never explicitly admits, i.e., that his categories are not pure in the Kantian sense of the term. We have seen above that Kant takes the categories to be contained (*enthält*) in the understanding *a priori*, which systematically generates (*erzeugt*) them from a common principle (A80-1/B106). This means that although they may be generated at the time of the application of the understanding to sensibility, they are the result of the *spontaneous* activity of understanding, and therefore they would not change in the course of our navigation of our environment.<sup>16</sup> This is the direct result of Kant's treatment of the categories as purely formal, independent of any content, and as one of the determining factors of that content—the other being space and time as the pure forms of sensibility—and Sellars' going further than this and adding some elements of the content, or as he calls it, the “matter” of experience. In this sense, as the categories are determined in our navigating the environment (which can be physical, cultural, linguistic, etc.), they are not purely formal, but have some elements of sensation in them, and hence are impure in the Kantian sense.<sup>17</sup> Hence their essential difference with Kantian categories.

### 8.3 Kant, Sellars, and Transcendental Deductions

Kant introduces sensibility and understanding as distinct and irreducible cognitive faculties immutable to changing their roles. Despite this sharp distinction, however, he stresses repeatedly that we cannot have cognition (*Erkenntnis*), at least “cognition in the proper sense” (A78/B103; see also A51/B75-6; B149), except with the joint activity of these two faculties (A50/B74). This means that concepts must have a legitimate use in the case of physical objects, otherwise there would be no cognition of those objects. This is the *quid juris* question that Kant discusses as the target of his “transcendental deduction” (A84/B116). In its most general form, it is a question about our right or entitlement to use different kinds of concepts. In some cases, Kant believes, it is relatively easy to answer this question. What he calls “usurped concepts”, such as “fate” and “fortune”, for example, have no deduction because they lack any kind of justified use. In the case of empirical concepts as well, our entitlement to applying them is easily established via experience (A84-5/B116-7). But pure concepts pose an unprecedented problem: How is it possible for pure concepts, which are by definition free of any contribution from sensibility, to be justifiably applied to physical objects? Being pure, they do not have their sources in experience and are therefore generated completely independently of any contribution from any kind of experience. But then, if we are to have cognition, these pure concepts must have a justified use in the case of physical objects. Kant then faces the problem of how to prove this justified use independently of any appeal to experience, so as not to beg the question against the skeptic. This is a problem for Kant both in the case of the pure concepts of space and time as forms of sensibility and the categories as the forms of understanding (A85/B118). In both cases, what we need is a “transcendental deduction”, which is “the explanation of the way in which concepts can relate to objects *a priori*” (A85/B117). The transcendental deduction of space and time is provided in the “Transcendental Aesthetic” and that of the categories in the “Transcendental Deduction of the Categories”.<sup>18</sup>

But this is a problem that Sellars does not face. If my argument in the previous section is on the right track, then his categories are not pure in the Kantian sense of the term, i.e., they are not spontaneously generated by the understanding but are the result of an evolutionary process in the navigation of our environment. In this sense, although he does not need to deny that the categories are (partly) the result of the activity of the understanding, he needs to deny and does deny, that they are purely formal in the Kantian sense. This means that, although for Kant, the categories are independent of any content from the outside world in the form they take—although they might be, as originally acquired, dependent on that for their activation—for Sellars, they are so dependent not only for their activation

but for the form they take as well. It is the environment that shapes our categories, and if we had a different environment, we would have ended up with a different set of categories.<sup>19</sup> But this partial dependence, by rendering the categories impure, also renders any kind of transcendental deduction superfluous to them. Kant needs a transcendental deduction because his categories are pure and as such need an explanation for their justified application to objects, but since for Sellars categories are impure in the Kantian sense and are developed in response to physical objects—in addition to the cultural and linguistic environment—they derive their justification from this evolutionary process and thus do not need any kind of transcendental deduction. Kant needs a transcendental deduction to prove our justification for using categories; Sellars already has an evolutionary explanation to accomplish this goal.

This claim, however, is disputed. Johannes Haag, for example, in his contribution to this volume, maintains that the “essence of Sellars’ take on the ‘Transcendental Deduction’ ... can be found in the very last section of ‘Kant’s Transcendental Idealism’” (Haag, this volume 167), which reads as follows (where Sellarsian “perceptual takings” are roughly Kantian “intuitions”):

Kant saw that the concept of an *object* of perception contains a reference to the perceptual takings, which are the criteria for its actuality. He *also* saw that the concept of a perceptual taking, as the taking of an *object*, contains a reference to material things and events which, if actual, would imply its own actuality. The actuality of perceptual takings and the actuality of material things and processes are not logically independent. And since, for Kant, the concept of matter-of-factual truth concerns the agreement of what we represent with what is, *in the critical sense*, actual, rather than as traditionally with what exists *per se*, he can pay his respects to what he calls “the nominal definition of truth” while giving it a radically new interpretation.

(KTI §53)

What Haag cites as Sellars’ transcendental deduction is the third sentence, i.e., the one in which Sellars ascribes to Kant the idea that “the actuality of perceptual takings” and “the actuality of material things and processes” are logically interdependent. That is, for Kant, our perceptual takings cannot be actual if the material things and processes are not actual. This is precisely the point of the previous sentence in the passage; that the very concept of perceptual taking refers to material things. But in what sense would this then be a transcendental deduction? Haag takes the essence of a transcendental deduction to be the following question: “How can objective reference of the categories be guaranteed?” The question is, in other

words, how can the categories have a guaranteed objective reference to actual objects, and the answer, according to Haag, is this:

We need to conceive of sensible appearances (actuality of perceptual takings) as representations of actually existing objects of experience (actuality of material things), since we cannot have actual perceptual takings without at least in the ordinary case being able to refer them to objects of experience they are takings of.

(Haag, this volume 167)

This shows that Haag sees the essence of the problem Kant addresses in the “Deduction”, at least in the second half (Haag, this volume 168), as concerned with the actuality of objects to which our perceptual takings refer. Kant, of course, on some occasions, associates transcendental deductions with relation to an object (A85/B117; see also Axvi, A109, A197/B242), and it might seem that what is meant by such a relation is just such an actuality of the object. But the expression “relation to an object” can have two different meanings, one being the *quid juris* question or the question of right discussed above and one being the question of actuality. In the former case, the expression simply means that the concept in question can in principle be justifiably applied to objects of experience without at the same time being a commitment to their actuality, and in the latter case it is such a commitment to their actuality. This is the difference, I suggest, between the claim to prove the objective validity (*objektive Gültigkeit*) of the concept—which would be to prove the former—and their objective reality (*objektive Realität*)—which would be the latter.<sup>20</sup> But the meaning of the “relation to an object” Kant has in mind in his definition of transcendental deduction in A85/B117 is the former—after all, he there talks about “relation to an object *a priori*,” and except in the case of mathematical objects, which are the objects of pure intuition and hence cannot even exist or be actual (MAN 4: 467n), no object can be given to us purely *a priori*, and hence the relation to objects in this expression cannot mean their actuality. The point of the last paragraph of KTI, however, is related to the second meaning of “relation to an object”, i.e., their being given to us *in* an empirical intuition, which is not the point of the “Deduction”, but of the “Refutation of Idealism”, and in fact it is the “Refutation” which is the main object of discussion in KTI, not the “Transcendental Deduction”. It is therefore a difference in reading of the target of a transcendental deduction that makes the difference between my reading and Haag’s in debating whether Sellars has a transcendental deduction. I reject him having any kind of transcendental deduction because I see the only target of any transcendental deduction to be proving a concept’s objective validity, which is

the first meaning of the expression “relation to an object”. But Haag takes Sellars to give a transcendental deduction because, in his reading, the aim of a transcendental deduction is to prove their objective reality, i.e., the second meaning of the expression “relation to an object”, as I suggest.<sup>21</sup>

Sellars, therefore, need not and nor have a transcendental deduction. But this does not mean that he does not have a *quid juris* question. We have seen that Kant sees the *quid juris* question as the question regarding our right or entitlement in using any sort of concepts, and it is no less a question regarding empirical concepts, i.e., how we are justified in using them, than it is one about pure concepts. Kant seems to be quite happy to answer the question regarding empirical concepts quickly by acknowledging experience as a means of providing their objective reality (A84/B116). Sellars, however, seems to take it as a puzzling fact, in need of explanation, that we can respond by the concepts “red” and “rectangular” in the presence of a red and rectangular object. His question is, therefore, how to explain “the occurrence of certain conceptual representations in perceptual activity” (SM I, §42). That is, we need

to explain the correlation of the conceptual representations in question with those features of the objects of perception which, on occasion, both make them true and are responsible for bringing them about.

(SM I, §43)

Sellars, like Kant, takes it for granted that we have experience and that our concepts are in principle capable of relating to objects, and, to put it in a more Sellarsian way, we are in principle capable of successfully conceptualizing the world. But he finds it puzzling that we can conceptualize physical properties like red and triangular both in the successful case of doing so in the presence of a red and triangular object and in the unsuccessful case of doing so in the presence of, say, a blue and rectangular object (SM I, §44). The problem is how it is possible that we can have conceptualizations that can *in principle* be successful. But whereas Kant spends no time addressing this “empirical deduction”, which he takes the “famous Locke” to be doing and calls it a “physiology of human understanding” (Axi), Sellars spends much time, throughout his career, addressing this, although not in the exact same way Locke has done. Unlike Locke, Sellars offers a unified theory for all conceptualizations and, to this end, introduces his “sense impressions”. As non-conceptual states of consciousness (SM I, §41), sense impressions—or “entities, *sensa*, raw feels or qualia” (deVries 2005, 235)—have “characteristics which, without being colours, are sufficiently analogous to colours to enable these states to play these guiding roles” (SM I, §45). That is, we are able to conceptualize a red triangular shape in the presence of a red triangle because we have sense impressions

which, without being red or triangular, have properties analogous to the properties of red and triangular. It is these analogous properties that allow us to conceptualize in this way. Sellars' discussion of sense impressions is a contentious matter (see Corti, Haag, and Horstmann in this volume), and it arguably even changes in his own writings from the myth of the genius Jones in EPM and PSIM to SM, and the introduction of process ontology in FMPP, and I do not wish to enter into that debate here.<sup>22</sup> My aim here is to see how his position differs from Kant's, and for that purpose, I limit my discussion to his treatment of the matter in SM as it is the most relevant in the context of comparing Sellars and Kant. In particular, I'm interested in why Kant does not see the need to introduce an intermediate entity between the categories and the physical states that are the effect of the physical stimuli, whereas Sellars sees the need to "interpose" (SM I, §41) such a state between them.<sup>23</sup>

The reason, once again, is that for Kant the categories are pure, and it is in fact these categories that make the experience possible, whereas for Sellars the categories are (partly) generated in response to our environment, and hence it is lived and, as such, adaptive experience which makes them possible. In §27 of the first *Critique*, in which Kant gives a summary of his argument in the "B-Deduction", he writes that

[T]here are only two ways in which a **necessary** agreement of experience with the concepts of its objects can be thought: either the experience makes these concepts possible or these concepts make experience possible.

(B166-7)

Kant takes the former to be impossible in the case of the categories, as they are pure and their agreement with objects and their concepts should be necessary.<sup>24</sup> But we have seen that Sellars rejects both these claims, and his categories are both impure and contingent in the Kantian sense of the term. Therefore, this is a confirmation of my previous claim that he cannot, but also need not, have a transcendental deduction. But this does not mean that he is committed to the latter option, i.e., that it is experience which makes these concepts possible. This is because we should take it seriously that for Sellars experience is partly responsible for making the categories possible, but it is also the understanding which is partly responsible for making the Sellarsian categories possible. His theory of the categories is not, therefore, the concept-abstractionism of Locke (as he repeatedly makes clear throughout his work), but it is closer to what Kant deems the "skeptic to wish most", i.e., "that I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected" (B168). The skeptic at issue here is Hume, and the position is that it is not the pure and

necessary categories that make my experience possible and hence explain their agreement, but that I just happened to be so constituted to be like this, which my categories, say the category of causality, agree with.<sup>25</sup> Hume famously argues that, for example, a causal relation is just the “contiguity” of what I call cause and what I call effect.<sup>26</sup> For this alone is what makes me believe in the concept of causality, and it is neither pure nor a necessary category of my understanding. Hume, of course, like Kant, writes before the development of evolutionary theory and hence does not have this option for explaining our categories in his arsenal, and hence he takes refuge, at least in Kant’s reading, in skepticism. But Sellars has the option of appealing to evolutionary explanations and can argue that the reason we are just so constituted is that we have these categories: It is that we happen to presently find ourselves at this particular stage of the evolutionary process. But not being a skeptic in the Humean sense does not mean that he is not in the Humean camp. He would in fact admit that “I am so constituted that I cannot think of this representation otherwise than as so connected”, which is what Hume wishes most, but he can have this without being a skeptic regarding the concept of causality, or any other category, for that matter. This, therefore, is Sellars’ regression to Humeanism, despite what Rorty quotes him saying, that he wants to usher analytic philosophy from its Humean to its Kantian phase. He managed to remain a Humean analytic philosopher, although he definitely managed to distance himself from the simple-minded concept empiricism of his analytic predecessors.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Other noteworthy examples are Peter Strawson (Strawson 1966), John Rawls (Rawls 2000, 2008), and Gilbert Ryle (Ryle 2009).
- 2 Note that for Kant as well the categories do the regulating job, since they are, as concepts, “rules” for the understanding to make it possible to synthesize the manifold of a given intuition into a cognition (B145; see also A126-7).
- 3 It is not always clear whether Sellars is defending the claim that the category of causality is revisable, or the stronger claim that we can get rid of it altogether. Both, however, would amount to a rejection of the Kantian necessity of categories. Thanks to Bill deVries for pressing me on this point.
- 4 I refer to Kant in the standard way of using A/B page numbers to refer to the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the volume and page number of the *Akademie Ausgabe* (Kant 1900) to refer to his other works. All translations are from the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Kant 1992).
- 5 A word about sensation is in order here. There are two broad camps of readings of Kantian sensation, one in which sensation is nothing more than the effect of stimuli, and the other that gives them a representational power (Jankowiak 2014, 495ff). I do not have the space to substantiate my reading here, but for the purposes of this paper, I will assume a reading of “sensations” that belongs to the former camp. In this reading, then, something is not pure if the effect of stimuli plays a constitutive role in its generation.

- 6 This “form” is to be contrasted with the “matter” of appearance, i.e., that “which corresponds to sensation” (Jankowiak 2014).
- 7 See for example (KTI §10; KPT §173). For a discussion, see Johannes Haag (this volume).
- 8 Whether they are necessary in the sense of being necessary not just for humans but for every discursive understanding is another question. For a discussion see (Gomes, Moore, and Stephenson 2022).
- 9 Sellars seems to associate another feature with this one, i.e., that he rejects the idea that the categories are “*summa genera* of entities which are ‘objects in the world’” (TTC §24). If what he means by this is that the categories cannot be exemplified by external objects, Kant would not accept this. Although Kant would stress that the categories are functional classifications, he does not reject their being *summa genera* of entities. I would not follow this line of difference in this chapter.
- 10 It is noteworthy that for Kant, the “formal” nature of the categories is even more general, since for him their being formal means not that they’re “determined”, but that they are “determiners”. Therefore, whereas for Kant the categories are only “determiners”, for Sellars they are either “determinates” or “determinables”. Even Sellars’ “formal” categories are not formal in the Kantian sense of the term.
- 11 There is a tension in Sellars’ reconstruction. In some of his earlier exegetical works, Kant is an “innatist” and hence belongs to the Platonic tradition (OAPK §1, §31; KTE §36; MP §60; IKTE §32). Now Kant vehemently rejected innateness:

The *Critique* admits absolutely no implanted (*anerschaffene*) or innate (*angeborene*) representations. One and all, whether they belong to intuition or to concepts of the understanding, it considers them as acquired. But there is also an original acquisition (*ursprüngliche Erwerbung*) (as the teachers of natural right call it), and thus of that which previously did not yet exist at all, and so did not belong to anything prior to this act.

(ÜE 8:221)

Interestingly enough, Sellars in later writings such as “... This I or He or It (the Thing) Which Thinks...” corrects his earlier interpretation:

Kant’s revolutionary move was to see the categories as concepts of functional roles in mental activity. Categorical concepts are not, indeed, innate. They *are* formed by abstraction, *not*, however, by reflecting on the self as object, but by reflecting on its conceptual activities. The ability to engage in these activities is, indeed, for Kant, innate; but this does not require that concepts of these activities be innate.

(I §20; see also I §19; CLN A31ff)

- Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to do justice to this change in Sellars’ view and to see what brought this change about. For discussion about Kant’s own view regarding innateness and original acquisition, see Møller (2020, chap. 3). Cf. Vanzo (2018).
- 12 This seems to be a common worry among the great analytic philosophers of the second half of the previous century which found Kant’s adherence to Aristotelian logic unacceptable. Peter Strawson, for example, questions Kant’s fervent adherence to the “finality of Euclidean geometry, Newtonian physics, and

- Aristotelian logic” (Strawson 1966, 23). Sellars adds to this: Kant’s ignorance of evolutionary theory. Interestingly, Strawson does not even mention Darwin or evolutionary theory in the *Bounds of Sense*.
- 13 Unfortunately, I do not have the space to discuss this here, but it does not directly affect my argument. For discussions, see deVries (2005, chap. 3) and Seiberth (2022, chap. 2).
  - 14 One can’t help but think that Sellars sides with Quine, who thinks that even the most essential parts of logic can change.
  - 15 Sellars might, and I think does, still maintain that having a set of categories is necessary for cognition, but the specific categories within that set might change. In other words, he might argue that having categories in general is a necessary condition for cognition, while no particular category is necessary in the way that Kant believed.
  - 16 The qualification that follows “although” is necessary to accommodate Kant’s rejection of innatism and affirmation of original acquisition (ÜE 8:221). If we take this picture seriously, the categories are not innate in the sense that they are fully developed before their application to sensibility, but they are not so fully developed by original acquisition, but they are fully activated by that application. But even in this case they are, as purely formal conditions, independent of the content of the experience, and so would not change according to the content received. But if we ignore this complication and accept the Sellarsian reading of innateness, the difference between Sellarsian and Kantian categories is even greater.
  - 17 This is not to deny that Sellars does use the term “pure” in his theory of categories—see KPT §161ff. But his notion of “pure” is different from Kant’s.
  - 18 The “Transcendental Deduction” is a notoriously difficult text, and there is no agreement on either the problem it seeks to address nor the way in which it addresses it. I have developed my reading of the text in (Ranae 2022), but I hope that the formulation of the problem of the “Deduction” is not too controversial. In particular, I take for granted here Ameriks’ “regressive” reading of the “Deduction”, in which there is no doubt that our categories do indeed refer to physical objects (Ameriks 1987) and hence diverge from those readings which take it to be a response to what they call “skepticism”, e.g., Strawson (1966) and Stroud (2017).
  - 19 Recall that sensations are the effects of stimuli (Note 5), and on this reading, evolutionarily inherited language depends on sensation in two ways. First, every human being needs the effect of stimuli to learn a language and thus acquire metalinguistic categories. Second, in the course of history, it was the effect of stimuli that caused some categories to catch on and others to lose currency as useless. The effect of stimuli thus plays a *constitutive* role. But in the case of Kantian categories, even if we consider the picture Kant paints as “original acquisition”, sensation and even sensibility and its form do not play a constitutive role in the generation and formation of categories.
  - 20 I defend the distinction and the duality of the meaning of the expression “relation to an object” in Ranae (forthcoming). For further discussion, see Wagner (1967), Meerbote (1972), Zöller (1983), Allison (1983), Bunch (2010), and Ranae (2022). Haag’s reading seems to me to be closer to Aaron Bunch’s.
  - 21 There are two more problems with this reading, which I cannot pursue here. First, this reading of the “Deduction” which equates it with the “Refutation” does not do justice to the legal meaning of the term “deduction” Kant has in mind, as in legal deductions as well there is no doubt about the actuality of the

- object under discussion, but the discussion is about the right or entitlement in using it—see Walker (1977) and Henrich (1989). Second, as we have seen above, Sellars denies that categories are “*summa genera* of entities which are ‘objects in the world’” (TTC §24). If true, this means that categories cannot refer to any entity in the world, and hence it would not be appropriate to ask about their actuality.
- 22 For introductions to the matter, see deVries (2005, chap. 8) and J. R. O’Shea (2007, chaps 4–5).
  - 23 Note that sense impressions are not intuitions proper, since intuitions proper are, for Sellars, partly conceptual in the sense of being this-suches (SM I, §11ff), but sense impressions, though states of consciousness, are not conceptual (SM I, §41).
  - 24 In the quoted passage, of course, Kant writes “experience”, but he has told us earlier that the “conditions of the **possibility of experience** in general are at the same time conditions of the **possibility of the objects of experience**” (A158/B197), and hence one can replace here “experience” with “objects of experience”. See also (Bxvii).
  - 25 This is of course a disputed matter and not everybody agrees that the skeptic in question is Hume. I defend my reading in Ranaee (2022). Cf. Engstrom (1994).
  - 26 See Hume’s own account of his skeptical concern in Hume (1975a, 86–94; 1975b, 25–39).
  - 27 I would like to thank Luca Corti, Bill deVries, Cord Friebe, and Luz Christopher Seiberth for commenting on earlier drafts of this chapter.

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