

Relational and Non-relational Concepts of Intentionality: Sellars and Merleau-Ponty *contra*

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(Abstract for “Normativity of Meaning: Sellarsian Perspectives”)

A distinctive feature of the Sellarsian account of intentionality is “non-relational.” By this, he means that the meaning distinctive of linguistic utterances should not be understood as a world-word relation; the meaning of our utterances is not grounded any specific relation with causal transactions in the natural order. Rather, for any linguistic utterance (or inscription), meaning is grounded in the functional roles played by the terms contained in the utterance within the whole conceptual scheme. Thus linguistic meaning *as a whole* is not conferred by the relation between two super-objects, “language” and “world”. This thesis about the non-relational character of intentionality is crucial for understanding how Sellars aimed at reconciling the conceptual and causal orders – that is, for properly understanding the place of mind within the natural world.

How, then, are we to understand the relation between the conceptual and the causal orders? In a dark passage in *Science and Metaphysics* (1966), Sellars introduces the thought that the mind *is* indeed, somehow, “guided” by the natural world. Since, on his reading of Kantian intuitions, intuitions themselves do not play the requisite guidance, something else is required: what he calls “sheer receptivity.” How exactly “sheer receptivity” is to be understood, Sellars does not say; hence it not surprising that McDowell (1999) seizes the opportunity to construe this thought as a temptation to take “the sideways-on view” – a temptation that must be resisted. But the costs of resisting this temptation, in the way that McDowell does, is quite high.

I shall argue that we can obviate McDowell's critique of Sellars if we construe "sheer receptivity" in terms of our pre-discursive, embodied intentionality. Drawing on the phenomenology of perception developed by Merleau-Ponty, I shall argue that we need two different concepts of intentionality, discursive intentionality and corporeal intentionality. If the latter *is* relational *and* capable of "guiding" discursive intentionality, we can preserve the strengths of Sellars' account of the non-relational character of discursive intentionality.