

Wilfrid Sellars's Disambiguation of Kant's "Intuition" and its Relevance for the Analysis of Perceptual Content

ABSTRACT

Wilfrid Sellars claimed Kantian intuitions to be ambiguous: an intuition, on one reading, is an Aristotelian "this-such". I suggest that this understanding of Kant offers a way around familiar problems faced by John McDowell's otherwise Sellarsian (and Kantian) account of perceptual content.

McDowell considers but rejects Sellars's suggestion: perceptual content, in order to be able to justify perceptual judgment, needs to be *fully propositional*, and a "this-such" is only *part* of a proposition. But the idea of the propositionality of perceptual content has led to claims that McDowell thinks of perception in counter-intuitive ways—in particular, as "quasi-linguistic".

I extend Sellars's suggestion of the Aristotelian-shaped content of perception from that of a "this-such" to something that *is* "propositional", but in the Aristotelian sense of "*prótesis*" and not the modern, Fregean, sense accepted by McDowell. Thus, rather than treat perceptual content on the model of a "this-such" (as in "this-man"), I suggest we treat it as a "this-such ϕ -ing" (as in "this-man sitting", with a noun-gerund structure translating Aristotle's noun-infinitive verb structure). This seems to afford a solution to the quasi-linguistic objection to McDowell's account (*this-man sitting* is a "thing", a "*pragma*"), as well as a more natural account of perceptual contents because it is *present-tensed*. But this interpretation *also* shows why Kant needed another "face" to the notion of intuition—one that links into the more modern, *non-tensed*, understanding of a proposition that is needed for thinking of judgments as linked in the transcendental unity of apperception. Sellars's reading of Kant's ambiguity here, which fits with his distinction between the "manifest" and "scientific" images of "man in the world", shows parallels with that of Hegel, who similarly distinguished the conceptual structures of "perception" and "the understanding".