Critiquing the Myth of the Given and the Rejection of Private Language - A Discussion Confined to the Theories of Sellars and Wittgenstein

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Abstract

Both Wittgenstein and Sellars oppose psychologism. In his argument against "private language", Wittgenstein dismantles the notion of an "inner, private something", while Sellars, in his critique of the "Myth of the Given", replaces immediate perceptual givenness with observation reports that are normatively structured and situated within the logical space of reasons. Although distinct in formulation, their theories exhibit significant conceptual affinities. This paper briefly outlines the core arguments of both thinkers and offers a critical commentary on their approaches.

Keywords

Private language, Psychologism, Grammatical propositions, Myth of the Given

Introduction

Three pivotal figures who steered early analytic philosophy toward its later developments are Sellars (critic of the "Myth of the Given"), Wittgenstein (of the later philosophy of language), and Quine (critic of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"). All three philosophers rejected the notion of purely a priori propositions. Instead, they emphasized that linguistic competence is acquired through social practice and that conceptual understanding is inherently embedded within a network of already mastered concepts, with no single concept being learned in isolation. Each philosopher launched a sustained critique of logical empiricism, particularly as exemplified by Bertrand Russell. At the heart of logical empiricism lies the notion of the "given", though it appears under different names across philosophical systems [1]. This paper focuses specifically on comparing and contrasting Sellars's rejection of the "Myth of the Given" with Wittgenstein's argument against "private language".

Core concepts definition

This paper focuses on four core concepts in the theories of Wittgenstein and Sellars, namely private language, grammatical propositions, the Myth of the Given, and the logical space of reasons. The connotation and extension of each concept are defined uniformly as follows, laying a conceptual foundation for the subsequent theoretical analysis and comparison.

(1) Private language

It is a language defined by Wittgenstein in §243 of *Philosophical Investigations*, which is used by an individual alone to record or express inner experiences such as personal feelings and moods. Its core feature is that the words of this language refer only to the speaker's private sensations that cannot be accessed by others, and thus it is impossible for others to understand and verify such a language.

(2) Grammatical propositions

A type of proposition proposed by Wittgenstein in his critique of private language, which is essentially different from empirical propositions. Grammatical propositions are not used to describe objective facts of the world and have no truth value or empirical meaning; they articulate the rules for the use of concepts and language in human life forms and language games, and their negation is logically nonsensical (e.g., "My image is private").

(3) The Myth of the Given

A core epistemological concept criticized by Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, which is the foundational premise of traditional empiricism (especially sense-datum theory). It holds that perceptual

experience can provide non-inferential, self-justifying immediate givenness (e.g., sense data), which serves as the unshakable bedrock of all empirical knowledge and does not rely on any conceptual or normative framework.

(4) The logical space of reasons

A key concept in Sellars' epistemology, which is opposed to the causal order of the natural world. It refers to a normative conceptual framework forged through human social practice, within which all knowledge claims must be situated. These claims can be justified, challenged, and defended via rational reasoning and intersubjective argumentation. Only the content framed in this space can be regarded as genuine epistemic knowledge.

Sections 243-315 of *Philosophical Investigations* critique "private language". In §243, Wittgenstein defines it as a language for a person to record or express inner experiences like feelings and moods for personal use. Its words refer to the speaker's private sensations, so no one else can understand it [2].

Against "private language"

Definition and core feature of private language

The central feature of private language is that its terms denote objects only accessible to the speaker. But Wittgenstein challenges its possibility not by direct refutation, but by asking probing questions to expose its conceptual incoherence.

Linguistic nature of sensation expressions: Taking "pain" as an example

In §244, he examines how words refer to sensations, using a child learning to say "I am in pain" as an example. Saying this doesn't describe pain expression but replaces it. He rejects the behaviorist view that pain is only observable behavior and inner experience is a fiction. It's not a behavior report but a linguistic substitute for the pre - linguistic cry, and language itself is a form of behavior.

In §245, he asks how language can be inserted between outer behavior and inner sensation. His answer confirms that expressions like "I am in pain" don't describe crying out but are a new, socially - embedded response mode. Language here is not a representational intermediary but an extension of expressive behavior.

In §246, Wittgenstein says "Only I know" is false and meaningless. It's false as others often know I'm in pain

through my behavior, expressions, and context. It's meaningless as "I know I am in pain" has no practical function and just means "I am in pain". One can't meaningfully doubt being in pain, nor gain this knowledge through introspection or inference. So, "I know I am in pain" is nonsensical. Also, the idea that others infer my "inner sensations" from "outer behavior" presupposes private inner sensations, which Wittgenstein rejects.

In §247, he extends the reasoning: doubting having a certain intention is equally senseless, for intentions, like sensations, are not. Inner entities are subject to epistemic uncertainty. In §248, Wittgenstein uses the "solitaire game" analogy. He notes that a solo game must follow rules and allow public verification; otherwise, it's not a game. Treating inner sensations as private objects misinterprets their logical role, like having a rule-governed game with only one's fleeting impression for correctness.

Sections 249-250 expand on this. Feigned smiles and lies are learned in specific life forms and language games. A baby's smile isn't feigned, and a dog can't pretend pain or act insincerely as the concept of "sincerity" doesn't apply to it. Infants and dogs lack the necessary linguistic and social frameworks for pretense. Since language games and social contexts are human - specific, we can't apply human concepts like sincerity, deception, or pretense to non - human animals.

Grammatical propositions and Wittgenstein's grammatical investigation method

In §§251-252, Wittgenstein presents "grammatical propositions". Unlike empirical propositions, they can't be meaningfully negated as we can't imagine their opposites. Empirical propositions describe world facts and can be true or false; grammatical pro Positions concern the structure and use of language, being neither true nor false and having no empirical meaning. For example, "My image is private" seems empirical but is grammatical; its negation is nonsensical. The problem occurs when we mistake grammatical propositions for empirical ones, wrongly taking our inability to imagine the opposite as proof of indubitability. However, grammatical propositions articulate language - use rules, have no truth value, and make no factual claims.

Wittgenstein's philosophical method is "grammatical investigation," examining word grammar to solve

philosophical problems. Here, "grammar" broadly includes logical and normative structures governing concept use in life forms and language games [3].

In §253, Wittgenstein asks "how you know a pain is your own". This question presupposes a public identity criterion; there's no private standard or "privately following a rule". If we ask about the pain - identity criterion, the answer is - there is none. Treating pain as a "private, inner object" causes confusion. Asking if "my pain and his pain are the same" only makes sense in a public framework, not implying two individuals have identical "inner private objects". Without public criteria, talking of sameness here is meaningless [4].

In §§254-255, Wittgenstein says his philosophical method aims to address utterances of the "philosophically ill" who make metaphysical assertions. We're misled by surface grammar into formulating pseudo - problems, failing to understand deeper grammar. His solution is to stop using language outside the contexts where its expressions get meaning. Only by returning words to everyday use can we dissolve philosophical illusions.

The incoherence of private naming and definition: "S" and "E" diary examples

In §§257-258, Wittgenstein sharpens the "private language" idea to expose its incoherence. He imagines a child naming a sensation without outward behavior, like associating it with "S". But genuine naming requires an existing conceptual network or "what's prepared in language". Without a public framework, the act of naming lacks correctness criteria and is meaningless. Take "pain": It is a publicly intelligible term, and its grammar determines its use. We can use "pain" because we've mastered its place in a public meaning system, and others can understand us as it functions in this common space.

In §258, Wittgenstein extends the critique via the "E" diary entry example. Suppose I try to define "E" by inwardly pointing to a private sensation. The philosophically confused might claim I can give a private definition through inner ostension, but it's impossible as ostensive definition is public. Private sensations aren't publicly accessible, and there's no identity criterion to determine if the recalled sensation is the same as the one labeled "E". Without a public correctness standard, the idea of correctly remembering

the sensation collapses, leaving the private definition empty and unintelligible.

In §§259-264, Wittgenstein emphasizes that public criteria aren't based on private impressions, and the meaning of a word must be constituted by it. The sign "E" lacks a role in a language - game. Terms like "sensation", "have", and "something" are from public language with established grammar. When one tries to give a private definition through introspection, the resulting term has no function in language and no meaning. The "philosophically ill" wrongly think naming an inner sensation fixes its meaning, but meaning isn't just about reference.

The impossibility of private justification and private rule-following

In §§265-267, Wittgenstein claims subjective justification is impossible. "Guessing the time by looking at a watch" is like consulting an imaginary chart; without public criteria, such acts are empty.

In §268, he uses the image of the right hand giving money to the left hand to show that for a concept to have meaning, its use must have a recognizable effect in a shared practice. Ostensive definition via introspection is meaningless as it doesn't anchor the word in an intersubjective space.

Section 269 emphasizes that "subjective understanding" is not understanding at all. A private language is one others can't understand. But the speaker only thinks they understand it; in reality, they don't.

Finally, in §§270-271, Wittgenstein returns to the lack of a criterion of identity. Without public standards, there's no way to ensure "the same sensation" recurs. So, the speaker's memory of the term's referent has no justificatory role, exerts no constraint on usage, and contributes nothing to meaning.

Rejecting the reification of private experience and the essence of language meaning

In §§272-280, Wittgenstein examines the supposed essence of private experience, something only the subject can know and understand while being inaccessible to others. Each person has their own private "sample", a mental exemplar no one else can see. Thus, there's no basis for judging if two samples are the same or different. Wittgenstein differentiates between two notions of "red": the publicly - accessible one (the color of objects in our forms of life) and the private,

inner impression allegedly belonging only to the individual.

The act of "pointing" seems to imply a direct link between a word and a private color impression. However, in ordinary language use, we never use attention or inward ostension to refer to such impressions. A "color impression" is just the visual effect of an object's color on us, and in the "philosophically ill" discourse, it is reified as a private, inner entity. Wittgenstein also critiques expressions li "I know how green looks to me". Such statements seem meaningful but convey nothing as they have no established use and sense. Even if one draws a private - impression picture and shows it to others, it serves two functions: In daily life, it communicates something public; it may also represent the drawer's inner image. However, what a picture "reports" is public. There is no genuinely private report, just as there's no private rule - following.

Starting from §281, Wittgenstein aims to end our fascination with the "private". Language - games are learned gradually, and for words to have meaning, they need a broader communal and practical background. He uses the analogy of a real train (primary, public) and a toy train (derivative, secondary) to illustrate. Meaning comes from participating in shared life forms, not inner acts.

In §§282-288, Wittgenstein criticizes the Cartesian philosophy. He argues that "the body has a soul" is ambiguous. It's not the body alone or a body - mind composite that feels pain, but a person in a social and contextual life form. In ordinary life, Sympathizing with another presupposes we think the other is in pain. Doubting if one is in pain is meaningless; saying "I don't know if this is pain" shows lack of the pain concept.

In §§289-292, Wittgenstein notes that in actual language - games, "I am in pain" is like crying out, not identifying a recurring inner sensation. It's about using a shared expression for a linguistic practice. The "philosophically ill" wrongly think "pain" names a private inner object, but language doesn't work this way. Description gets meaning within a broader language - game in communal practices.

Section 293 presents the "beetle - in - a - box" experiment. The philosophically confused focus on a private inner "something", treating sensations as objects. However, in the language - game, "beetle" has a use independent of private referents. Even if boxes contain different things or nothing, "beetle" can function meaningfully if its role in the language - game is stable. If meaning were tied to a private object, the term would lose its value. All communicative function would lack a criterion for sameness or difference. The case of "pain" is similar: "Pain" is meaningful not as it labels a private sensation, but because it has a determinate role in our shared life forms. Wittgenstein aims to dispel the illusion that meaning comes from correspondence to inner, private sense - data.

Against the "Myth of the Given"

The core connotations of the Myth of the Given and sense-datum theory

Sellars's critique of the "Myth of the Given" is primarily articulated in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. The "Given" appears in various forms, one prominent version being the theory of sense data [5].

Empiricism holds that perceptual experience ultimately provides the foundation of knowledge, with sense data serving as the bedrock upon which the edifice of knowledge is built. The notion of the "Given" was introduced to avoid circularity: It purports to offer a kind of non-inferential, self-justifying awareness - propositions that require no further justification from other beliefs, functioning as an "unmoved mover" precisely in epistemology. For example, when you see a bunch of green grapes on a plate, you may doubt whether the grapes are truly green or even real, but you cannot doubt that you are presented with something objectively green and round. Such immediate sensory presentations are called "sense data", and their mode of givenness is what empiricists label the "Given". This foundational epistemic layer is supposed to constitute non-inferential knowledge of facts, capable of justifying other, subsequent higher-order beliefs.

The inherent dilemmas and theoretical contradictions of sense-datum theory

Proponents of sense-data theory maintain that what we directly perceive are particulars (i.e., individual sensory items). Yet this leads to a dilemma: in the inferential sense, knowledge of particulars is epistemically inert - it cannot support reasoning; while in the non-inferential sense, what we know are facts, not bare particulars.

Consequently, our perceptual content seems incapable of grounding either inferential or non-inferential knowledge. Thus, the sense-datum theorist faces a fundamental impasse [6].

(1) What is sensed is a particular. Sensing is not a form of knowing; the existence of sense data does not logically entail the existence of knowledge.

(2) Sensing is a form of knowing; what is sensed is not a particular but a fact.

Empiricist philosophers attempt to combine both views. On the first view, sensing sense data does not logically entail non-inferential knowledge. On the second view, sensing sense data is itself a form of knowing and thus logically entails non-inferential knowledge. By conflating these two, they claim that sensing sense data constitutes a kind of awareness in which what is given is either a fact or a particular. This conflation carries a double meaning: First, we perceive a fact - e.g., "It is snowing outside"; second, this perception involves using a proper name to refer to a particular - e.g., "Do you know Nanjing?" - which is non-propositional in character.

Sellars rejects this hybrid account. He argues that the second type of "knowledge of particulars" - such as acquaintance with an object via a proper name - cannot serve as a justificatory basis for empirical knowledge. Genuine knowledge of the external world, he insists, must be propositional. Non-conceptual awareness, no matter how immediate or vivid, cannot provide epistemic warrant for conceptual, propositionally structured knowledge.

Sellars argues that sense-datum theorists face a trilemma:

(1) If x senses a red sense content s, this entails that x non-inferentially knows that s is red.

(2) The capacity to sense contents is unlearned (i.e., innate or pre-conceptual).

(3) The capacity to know, in the form "X knows that X is φ", is also unlearned.

If A and B hold, then C cannot; if B and C hold, then A cannot; and if A and C hold, then B cannot. Sense-datum theorists maintain that the capacity to perceive sense data is innate - that is, one need not possess any conceptual abilities prior to perception. Yet they also claim that, in order to know that an object is green, one must first learn to classify certain objects as "green", abstracting the concept of greenness from sensory experience and subsequently applying this concept to particular instances. This generates contradiction: On the latter view, conceptual capacities must already be in place before perceptual awareness can yield knowledge.

Sellars argues that this tension arises because sense-datum theory conflates two distinct ideas:

(1) The idea that there are certain inner episodes - such as sensations of red or of the musical note C# - which can occur in human beings (and even in non-human animals) without any prior learning or conceptual formation; and that, in some sense, without such episodes it would be impossible to see, for example, the facing surface of a physical object as red and triangular, or to hear a physical sound as C#.

(2) The idea that there are certain inner episodes which constitute non-inferential knowledge that certain items are (e.g.) red or C#; these episodes serve as the evidential foundation for all other empirical propositions and are thus necessary conditions for empirical knowledge.

According to the first conception, such inner episodes cannot serve as justifications for knowledge; they are merely causal preconditions for our engagement with the world - not reasons in any epistemic sense. The second conception, by contrast, treats these episodes as providing non-inferential justification, grounding empirical knowledge through rational warrant rather than mere causation. Sellars argues that it is untenable to suppose that one and the same kind of inner episode could simultaneously play both roles - that is, function as both a causal antecedent and a justificatory reason.

A critique of the linguistic reconstruction of sense-datum theory

It is precisely because of this difficulty that philosophers like A. J. Ayer proposed treating sense-datum discourse as a distinct linguistic framework. Ayer developed a "code" theory: Statements of the form "X looks H to S" are to be rephrased as "X presents S with a sense datum H" (i.e., rendered in "sense-datum language"). Sellars rejects this maneuver, arguing that even if such a translation is formally carried out, it fails to clarify - or even articulate - the logical relationship between "X looks H to S" and "X is H". Consequently, this reconstrual does not resolve the

epistemological problem but merely masks it; as such, it is philosophically empty [7].

A critique of "looks"-language and representationalism with logical clarification

Sellars argues that theories of representation - particularly those couched in "looks"-language (e.g., "This apple looks red to someone") - are in fact manifestations of the Myth of the Given. Many philosophers treat such statements as minimal, non-inferential bedrock facts, and empiricism often takes the way things appear as the foundational layer upon which knowledge is built. Sellars firmly rejects this view. He insists that "X looks red to S" does not entail - and cannot justify - "X is red". To illustrate this, he introduces the story of John: when John says, "This tie is blue", he is expressing a judgment grounded in inference and conceptual competence. The claim "The tie is blue" cannot be justified by "The tie looks green" - not only because the appearances may be misleading, but more fundamentally because perceptual reports do not, by themselves, provide epistemic warrant.

Moreover, statements of the form "X is φ" are not merely descriptive; they are cognitive achievements that embed the speaker within a normative space of reasons. Crucially, the logic of "is" precedes the logic of "looks": One must already master color concepts like "blue" and "green" before one can meaningfully say that something "looks blue" or "looks green". The very capacity to use "looks"-locutions presupposes prior command of the corresponding categorical concepts. Thus, the perceiving subject is not a passive recipient of given data but an active participant in a conceptual framework.

Sellars further links "looks" with "seeing". The statement "X looks red to S" can also be understood as follows:

(1) S sees that x over there is red.

(2) x over there looks red to S.

(3) It looks to S as if there is a red object over there.

The first proposition expresses full endorsement; the second, only partial endorsement; and the third merely acknowledges the abstract "existence" of something. Sellars refers to what is not endorsed in the second and third propositions - their unasserted descriptive content - as "descriptive content". Such sensory episodes, precisely because they lack assertoric force and conceptual structure, cannot serve as justifications for knowledge.

Sellars' epistemological reconstruction: The logical space of reasons and observation reports

Sellars maintains that perception belongs to the causal order, not the epistemic order - though it is indeed a causal trigger for knowledge. To transform perceptual episodes into genuine items of knowledge, they must be situated within the logical space of reasons. He explicitly rejects the idea that raw experiential reports constitute knowledge. Only the normative description of these inner episodes - framed in conceptual, propositional terms - can enter the domain of epistemology. It is this normatively articulated content, embedded in the space of reasons, that can be justified, challenged, and defended as knowledge [8].

Sellars argues that sensation already implicates conceptual and cognitive elements. Even in the most basic perceptual acts of a cognizing subject, classificatory concepts - and indeed the entire conceptual framework - are at work. In the case of John, "knowing what it is for something to be blue" logically precedes "its looking blue". To make a perceptual judgment at all, one must already command the relevant concept - understanding its rules of application (i.e., when it is appropriate to use it) - a competence acquired through participation in shared practices.

For Sellars, possessing any single concept requires possession of the whole conceptual scheme. While critiquing the Myth of the Given, he nonetheless grants perception of a foundational role - but only in a methodological, not epistemological or ontological, sense. His positive view is that the traditional empiricist "foundation" of knowledge can be replaced by a network of observation reports. These reports, formulated as normative descriptions of perceptual episodes and situated within the logical space of reasons, can serve as non-inferentially justified starting points for empirical knowledge - not because they are "given", but because they function as reliable, socially calibrated moves in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

This practice of seeking and offering reasons presupposes a holistic conceptual framework. Theoretical entities, in this view, are methodological posits rather than ontological primitives. As science progresses, we may come ever closer to understanding

the ultimate constituents of reality - but our knowledge remains inherently fallible, subject to continuous correction and inquiry [9].

Commentary

Wittgenstein's core argument against private language and the elimination of psychologism

Take "pain" as an example. For Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as a private "pain". The meaning of the word "pain" is already fixed by its grammar - a grammar that is itself shaped by language-games and the broader social context in which they are embedded. We do not use "pain" to refer to or describe an inner, private object. Consequently, the idea that others cannot understand my pain because they cannot access my private realm is a philosophical illusion. To say "I am in pain" is not to report on an inner entity but to perform a linguistic act - one that replaces natural expressions like crying out. Because others can correctly use the word "pain" within shared practices, they can understand what it means to be in pain.

The statement "My image is private" is not an empirical claim but a grammatical proposition - one that says nothing about the world and has no factual content. The "philosophically ill" are fixated on the idea of a private "something". They insist, for instance, that they can clearly distinguish each occurrence of a sensation as being the same private feeling. Yet this is incoherent: There are no private criteria of identity, and there is no such thing as "obeying a rule privately". All standards and all rules are inherently public. Without public criteria, the very notion of sameness, correctness, or understanding collapses.

Wittgenstein rejects the view that the meaning of a word consists in its reference to an actual object. Such a referential theory of meaning readily leads into psychologism, tempting us to posit an "inner something" - a mental entity or private object - as the bearer of meaning. But, Wittgenstein insists, no such inner entity exists. Meaning is not grounded in reference but in use: to understand a word is to master its role within a language-game, and how a word is used is determined by the language-game itself and the broader social context in which it is embedded. In this way, Wittgenstein effectively eliminates the notion of an "inner something" (i.e., a mental or private entity) altogether.

The core consensus of anti-psychologism between Wittgenstein and Sellars

Wittgenstein's rejection of words referring to "inner, private objects" directly targets what Sellars calls the "Given". For Sellars, the "Given" - whether conceived as sense data, private impressions, or immediate perceptual contents - may serve as a causal trigger for knowledge, but it cannot function as a justificatory foundation. Both philosophers thus converge in their opposition to psychologism.

Moreover, Wittgenstein and Sellars agree fundamentally on the impossibility of private rule-following: there are no private rules, and all standards are public. For Sellars, one cannot possess a single concept in isolation; conceptual competence requires mastery of an entire conceptual network, including knowledge of the conditions under which the application of a concept counts as correct - that is, in accordance with shared norms. Wittgenstein holds a parallel view: In the case of "pain", for example, one can use the concept only because one has already been initiated into the public language-game surrounding pain. Both philosophers emphasize that linguistic understanding is rooted in communal practices - concepts and their uses are learned holistically through participation in shared forms of life [10].

Although Wittgenstein and Sellars both take anti-psychologism as their core theoretical orientation and reach consistent conclusions on the publicity of rules, the conceptual holism of knowledge, and the priority of "is" over "looks", their argumentation paths of anti-psychologism are essentially different in terms of theoretical starting point, analytical method and ultimate theoretical goal. The core differences between Wittgenstein's therapeutic linguistic argument based on "grammatical investigation" and Sellars's epistemological critical argument based on "trilemma" are as follows:

(1) Theoretical starting point: dissolving philosophical illusions vs. reconstructing empirical epistemology

Wittgenstein's argument against private language starts from the misunderstanding of language use by traditional philosophers (the "philosophically ill"). He believes that the illusion of "private language" and "inner private objects" arises from the misuse of language outside the context of daily life and language

games - philosophers mistake grammatical propositions for empirical propositions and reify inner sensations as independent objects. His theoretical starting point is to diagnose and dissolve such philosophical pseudo-problems caused by language misunderstanding. Sellars's critique of the Myth of the Given starts from the theoretical dilemma of traditional empiricism (especially sense-datum theory). He points out that the empiricist attempt to take non-conceptual immediate givenness as the foundation of knowledge falls into a fundamental logical contradiction, which makes the entire empirical epistemology lose its reliable justificatory basis. His theoretical starting point is to reveal this epistemological dilemma and reconstruct a normative empirical knowledge theory that conforms to the logical nature of human cognition.

(2) Analytical method: grammatical investigation vs. trilemma reasoning

Wittgenstein adopts the method of grammatical investigation in his argument. He abandons the traditional metaphysical argumentation mode of "proof and refutation", and instead examines the actual use rules of concepts such as "pain", "sensation" and "private" in human life forms and language games. By clarifying the grammatical status of these concepts (e.g., "I am in pain" is a linguistic act of expressing feelings rather than a report of inner objects), he exposes the conceptual incoherence of private language and makes the philosophical illusion of "inner private something" self-defeating. This method is a kind of "philosophical therapy" that focuses on language practice and context.

Sellars adopts the method of trilemma reasoning and conceptual analysis in his critique. He constructs a strict logical trilemma for the sense-datum theorists who hold the Myth of the Given, pointing out that the three core claims of the theory (sensing sense contents entails non-inferential knowledge, the capacity to sense is unlearned, the capacity to know is unlearned) cannot be true at the same time. He also distinguishes two confused conceptions of "inner episodes" in traditional empiricism (causal preconditions vs. justificatory reasons), and through rigorous epistemological analysis, he reveals that non-conceptual givenness can never provide epistemic warrant for propositional knowledge. This method is a kind of systematic epistemological criticism that focuses on logical reasoning and conceptual clarification.

(3) Ultimate theoretical goal: returning language to ordinary use vs. establishing a normative epistemological framework

Wittgenstein's ultimate goal of rejecting private language is philosophical therapy: By dissolving the illusion of private language and the reification of inner sensations, he guides philosophers to abandon the metaphysical pursuit of "private inner essence" and return words to their ordinary use in daily life and language games. He does not aim to construct a new philosophical system, but only to eliminate the pseudo-problems caused by language misunderstanding, so that philosophy can "return to the rough ground of daily life".

Sellars's ultimate goal of critiquing the Myth of the Given is epistemological reconstruction: By rejecting the non-conceptual Given, he establishes the "logical space of reasons" as the core of epistemic normativity, and replaces the traditional empiricist "given foundation" with normatively structured observation reports. He aims to construct a holistic, fallibilist empirical epistemology that unifies the causal order of perception and the normative order of knowledge, and provides a reliable theoretical basis for the rationality of empirical knowledge and the progress of scientific inquiry.

Finally, both reject the equation of "looks" with "is". They concur that the logic of "is" precedes that of "looks": one must already command categorical concepts like "red" or "blue" before one can meaningfully say that something "looks red" or "looks blue". Thus, appearance-statements presuppose, rather than ground, our capacity for objective judgment.

Unlike Wittgenstein, Sellars situates the normative description of perception within what he calls "the logical space of reasons". Methodologically, he allows for the postulation of theoretical entities - though strictly as heuristic devices, not as ontological commitments. Wittgenstein, by contrast, would reject even the methodological invocation of such entities if they imply the existence of inner, private objects or hidden referents. For him, talk of "theoretical entities" that purport to name private mental items only perpetuates grammatical illusions.

Conclusion

Sellars embraces fallibilism: Knowledge is not static but

subject to continual revision and refinement - a process he metaphorically describes as the ongoing "repair" of our conceptual edifice. Wittgenstein, in contrast, may be characterized as a thoroughgoing nominalist. Nominalism, in this context, holds that universals are not independently existing realities but are either linguistic signs, conceptual constructs, or general definitions derived from particular instances. The "philosophically ill" - those who insist on the reality of a "private, inner something" - adopt a realist stance rooted in a Platonic metaphor: They yearn for a mysterious realm of pure ideas or private essences. Wittgenstein resolutely opposes this metaphysical impulse, arguing that it stems from a misunderstanding of language and generates pseudo-problems devoid of sense.

Sellars, while equally critical of the Myth of the Given, exhibits greater methodological tolerance. He permits the provisional assumption of theoretical entities - not as features of ultimate reality, but as tools within an evolving scientific practice. Such assumptions serve a regulative function, guiding inquiry toward an ideal of coherence and empirical adequacy, even if that ideal is never fully attained. In this way, Sellars preserves a forward-looking, progressive conception of knowledge, whereas Wittgenstein seeks not progress but therapy - dissolving illusions by returning words to their ordinary use.

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