PHÄNOMENOLOGISCHE FORSCHUNGEN 2025/2

Non- and Preconceptual Content in Experience

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Phänomenologische Forschungen

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Im Auftrag der
Deutschen Gesellschaft für phänomenologische Forschung
herausgegeben von

THIEMO BREYER, INGA RÖMER
UND MICHELA SUMMA

unter Mitwirkung von
LUKAS NEHLSEN

Jahrgang 2025
Heft 2

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FELIX MEINER VERLAG
HAMBURG

Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Daten sind im Internet über *portal.dnb.de* abrufbar.
ISBN 978-3-7873-5162-6

Kontaktadresse nach EU-Produktsicherheitsverordnung:
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Richardstraße 47, 22081 Hamburg
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Phänomenologische Forschungen · ISSN 0342-8117

INHALT

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Introduction

Nonconceptual Content or Two Forms of Conceptual Structure in Experience?

1. Intuition and Judgment

We often tacitly assume that, once we have language at our disposal, our human experience is structured and shaped by concepts. Such a presupposition can be observed in the fact that the experience of *something as something* is often conceptualized in philosophical discussion as if it immediately implied the possession of a corresponding conceptual or propositional content. The image of experience that emerges in this way is either that of sensory or intuitive data across the various sensory modalities, accompanied by a registering conceptual thought, or that of a primarily conceptual registration of facts, additionally accompanied by sensory impressions and intuitions. In the first picture, experience appears primarily as sensory intuition accompanied by conceptual subtitles; in the second, experience appears rather as a kind of ongoing novel, illustrated by intuition. While the first conception allows that the intuitively given contains more than is captured in the conceptual commentary, the second seems to imply that the intuitively given contains no additional information beyond the conceptual content. The idea shared by both views – that experience includes conceptual content – appears philosophically attractive in two respects. First, epistemologically: the idea of such content naturally suggests that experience could serve as an inferential foundation for justifying claims to empirical knowledge about the world. If we receive propositional contents in experience, we could make these the basis of our empirical knowledge claims. Second, and closely connected, the interface function of experience presupposed in such a picture seems to suggest that the conceptual structure of experiential content allows for conclusions about the ontological structure of the world. The correlationist idea that, via the conceptual-propositional structure of experience, there is a close connection between logic and ontology seems to suggest itself quite naturally here.

However, the claim that experience itself is fundamentally conceptually structured is not uncontroversial. Doubts arise already from the fact that our

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experience appears in many respects richer, more fluid, and more indeterminate than we could readily express conceptually. One of the essential challenges that art and poetry pose to conceptual thinking seems connected to the fact that not everything that can be articulated in experience can be clearly and directly expressed in language and communicated to others without difficulty. If our experience were structured conceptually from the outset, many of these difficulties would likely not exist in the way they actually do. A further objection is suggested by the way in which animals and children who do not yet possess language interact in complex ways within their respective environments. The entire complexity of animal behavior – how animals navigate their environments, align their behavior with social hierarchies, remember or communicate the locations of feeding sites – seems, *prima facie*, not reducible to simple stimulus-response schemes and suggests that the world must already present itself in a structured way in their experience. If one concedes this, one faces the alternative of either attributing conceptual abilities to them or ascribing to animals and young children non-linguistic capacities that share at least certain features with conceptual ones. Richard Rorty already pointed out that one should not imagine the transformation accompanying language acquisition as if a prior blindness or darkness of the mind were suddenly illuminated by conceptual thinking:

> The snare to avoid here is the notion that there is some inner illumination which takes place only when the child's mind is lighted up by language, concepts, descriptions, and propositions, and does not take place when the child inarticulately wails and writhes. The child *feels* the same thing, and it feels just the same to him before and after language-learning.[1]

According to Rorty, what is special about language is not that it "changes the quality of our experience" or that it "synthesizes a previously unconscious manifold"; what language learning changes is simply that it "lets us enter a community whose members exchange justifications of assertions, and other actions, with one another."[2]

The dimension of routine behavior and practical know-how appears similarly situated, as prominently described by Hubert Dreyfus from a phenomenological perspective as "skillful coping."[3] Many of our everyday actions, performed more or less unconsciously, appear complex in a way that suggests they are underpinned by at least functional equivalents of thought. In Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*, we find the corresponding thesis that even "dealing with equipment" is accompanied by a distinct mode of conscious seeing, which

[1] Richard Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature.* Princeton, NJ 1979, 184.
[2] Rorty: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 185.
[3] Hubert Lederer Dreyfus: *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action.* Edited by Mark A. Wrathall. Oxford 2014.

Heidegger describes as "circumspection" ["*Umsicht*"]: "Dealings with equipment subordinate themselves to the manifold assignments of the 'in-order-to.' And the sight with which they thus accommodate themselves is circumspection."[4] Heidegger's point is that we should not imagine the skillful coping of experts as processes that proceed unconsciously and automatically. Rather, the practical actions of experts, like practical action in general, take place within a horizon of conscious alternatives, between which choices are sometimes made within the briefest of time frames. There thus seems to be a form of "thinking" here, even if one situated more in the realm of intuition itself than in that of conceptual-linguistic reflection. This suggests a conception that posits an independent, proto-conceptual articulation of intuitive experience, relatively independent of the capacity to form judgments – true or false – on the basis of linguistic concepts. What Heidegger calls circumspection denotes an intuitive understanding of the world that differs precisely from conceptual understanding and can, in this sense, be described as non-conceptual. As Heidegger claims in *Being and Time:*

> The primordial "as" of an interpretation (ἑρμηνεία) which understands circumspectively we call the "existential-hermeneutical 'as'" in distinction from the "apophantical 'as'" of the assertion.[5]

Alongside such phenomenologically inspired reflections, an intensive and at times difficult engagement with the question of non-conceptual contents in experience has developed in the primarily Anglophone debate, taking its departure from Wilfrid Sellars's influential critique of the "myth of the given." This debate constitutes one of the central points of reference for the texts gathered in this volume. It is, however, conducted essentially immanently and contains few to no references to the phenomenological tradition, whose insights are nevertheless of the highest relevance to the question of non-conceptual content. This volume accordingly sets itself the task of bringing the phenomenological and Anglophone discussions at least somewhat closer together. Before turning to an overview of the contributions, this introduction provides a systematic account of the central issues at stake. To this end, it is worth beginning with Immanuel Kant's concept of experience, which serves as both a latent and an explicit point of reference for the debate and helps keep the broader picture in view amid the finer details.

[4] Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time.* Translated from the German by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. London 1962, 98.

[5] Heidegger: *Being and Time*, 201.

2. Kant's Theory of Experience as a Systematic Bridge

The question of the relationship between experience and thought, intuition and concepts, represents one of the central focal points of theoretical philosophy. Kant's theory of experience is of particular interest in our context because it provides a systematic bridge between phenomenological and Anglophone discussions. It is succinctly expressed in the following much-quoted passage:

> Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind. It is thus just as necessary to make the mind's concepts sensible (i. e., to add an object to them in intuition) as it is to make its intuitions understandable (i. e., to bring them under concepts). These two faculties, or capacities, cannot exchange their functions. The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only through their unification can cognition arise.[6]

This brief passage functions as a systematic blueprint for the central positions within the debate on non-conceptual content. We encounter here Kant's well-known distinction between two dimensions of experience as the two sources of cognition: intuition, in which objects are given, and the understanding, through which objects are thought. Knowledge of objects can only come about, according to Kant, when an object is given intuitively and at the same time made intelligible through concepts of the understanding. This initially suggests a conceptualist reading,[7] since experience in the proper sense is defined here as intuition accompanied by thinking judgments. Experience would thus only arise if and insofar as it is conceptually formed – which constitutes the alleged blindness of intuition as such. Following such a definition, experience necessarily implies a thinking of what is experienced. Experience always appears as thought experience, while the intuitive dimension appears inferentially negligible, even though it is necessary to ensure that thoughts are not empty. For Kant, this follows from his definition of the understanding – which he takes to be constitutively involved in experience – as the faculty of judgment. Experience thus appears as a kind of continuous judging of facts in the world regarding objects given in intuition.

However, this is not the only possible reading of Kant. In the way Kant contrasts the intuition of objects with their thinking, one can also discern something like a conditional autonomy of the intuitive dimension, even if it is "blind" with

[6] Immanuel Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason.* Edited and translated from the German by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant. Cambridge 2009, 193 f. (KrV A50/B74–75).

[7] Anil Gomes: "Kant on Perception: Naïve Realism, Non-Conceptualism, and the B-Deduction." In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 64(254), 2014, 1–19, here: 2; John Henry McDowell: *Having the World in View: Essays on Kant, Hegel, and Sellars*, Cambridge, MA 2009.

regard to possible propositional knowledge. Robert Hanna and Lucy Allais, for example, argue that Kant's conception of intuition allows for empirical objects to be given to us even without any application of concepts.[8] On such a view, the thinking of intuitively given objects may optionally accompany their intuitive givenness, but is not itself a condition for experience. Intuition as such, without concepts, would already fall under the concept of experience – and we would have, in the merely intuitive givenness of individual objects, proto- or non-conceptual contents.

Kant's doctrine of the two essential dimensions of experience thus allows us to distinguish between two forms or conceptions of content in experience: objects as intuitively given and objects as conceptually conceived. At the same time, his thesis that intuitions without concepts are blind allows for a conceptualist interpretation of experience as prominently advocated by John McDowell.

3. Sellars's Critique of the Myth of the Given

The Anglophone debate regarding non-conceptual contents originates with Wilfrid Sellars's influential critique of the "myth of the given,"[9] as developed in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (EPM).[10] The myth of the given consists of two interconnected assumptions that, according to Sellars, cannot be consistently combined: on the one hand, the assumption that there is a form of direct awareness of entities capable of epistemically justifying knowledge – where knowledge is conceived as true propositional belief regarding empirical facts in the world; on the other, the assumption that this direct awareness is independent of the acquisition of linguistic concepts and the normative criteria for their appropriate use.[11] Proponents of the myth thus assume that there are experiential states which are passively received without the use of conceptual faculties and yet possess inferential power – which is why Sellars describes the myth of the given as "of a piece with the so-called 'naturalistic fallacy' in ethics,"[12] as an attempt to derive an *ought* from a *being.* The details of Sellars's argument against the myth need not detain us here, since they are not directly relevant to the ques-

[8] Lucy Allais: "Kant, Non-Conceptual Content and the Representation of Space." In: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47(3), 2009: 383–413; Robert Hanna: "Kant and Non-conceptual Content." In: *European Journal of Philosophy* 13(2), 2005, 247–90.

[9] For the broader context of this debate, see also: Daniele De Santis and Danilo Manca (Eds.): *The Given. Kantian, Neo-Kantian and Phenomenological Perspectives.* Phänomenologische Forschungen 2021–2.

[10] Wilfrid Sellars: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind.* Cambridge, MA 2003.

[11] Sellars: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 16.

[12] Sellars: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 19.

tion of non-conceptual content. What matters for our purposes is the account Sellars himself endorses as

> *psychological nominalism*, according to which all awareness of *sorts, resemblances, facts*, etc., in short, all awareness of abstract entities – indeed, all awareness even of particulars – is a linguistic affair.[13]

Along these lines, John McDowell has taken up Sellars's critique and drawn on it to motivate his own conceptualist conception of experience. McDowell emphasizes that Sellars has "put forward a conception of experience as 'so to speak, making' claims, or 'containing' them."[14] In fact, however, this is only the conceptualist half of Sellars's position. Already in EPM, Sellars emphasizes:

> It is clear that the experience of seeing that something is green is not *merely* the occurrence of the propositional claim "this is green" – not even if we add, as we must, that this claim is, so to speak, evoked or wrung from the perceiver by the object perceived. […] The something more is clearly what philosophers have in mind when they speak of "visual impressions" or "immediate visual experiences."[15]

Sellars thus asserts the existence of intuitive, non-propositional contents in experience – impressions – which possess no inferential power of their own. These contents must, from a theoretical perspective, appear as theoretical postulates in order to avoid the myth of the given, which would consist in claiming that the subject can be aware of the categorical similarity of these impressions without presupposing concepts. It is these postulated sensations or impressions that McDowell, as a disjunctivist, criticizes as "idle wheels" as they bear no inferential power on their own.[16] In fact, Sellars develops, in engagement with Kantian and phenomenological considerations, a rather intricate theory of the relationship between sensory intuition and conceptual judgment, including an elaborate conception of non-conceptual experience. In "Some Reflections on Phenomenal Consciousness," in explicit engagement with the idea of phenomenological reduction, Sellars develops the thesis that intuitive representings – for example, "*something, somehow* a cube of pink in physical space is present in the perception other than as merely *believed in*"[17] – constitute a distinct level of experiential givenness. In this context, he refers to such forms of intuitive givens not as "impressions" but as "sensings." Like impressions, sensings are not to be

[13] Sellars: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 63.
[14] McDowell: *Having the World in View*, 93.
[15] Sellars: *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 40.
[16] McDowell: *Having the World in View*, 16; Corijn Mattheus Arie van Mazijk: *Perception and Reality in Kant, Husserl, and McDowell.* London 2020, 29.
[17] Wilfrid Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics: Sellars's Cassirer Lectures Notes and Other Essays.* Edited by Jeffrey F. Sicha. Atascadero 2000, 437.

understood as "sensing *as*,"[18] since this would imply conceptual categorization and thus a variant of the myth of the given. At the same time, Sellars defines sensings as "analogous to the common and proper sensibles."[19] Sensings are thus each of a certain sort – such as a cube of pink ice – but do not imply a conceptual "as" or any awareness on the part of the subject that they belong *to a certain sort.* They are "non-conceptual representings,"[20] givens of sorts, but in an intuitive rather than linguistic manner. As such, they cannot serve as inferential grounds for perceptual judgments, but can, in Sellars's view, "guide" them.[21] More specifically, regarding "intuitive representation" he asserts:

> If it is, as I take it to be, non-conceptual, it can only guide 'from without' the unique conceptual activity which is representing of *this-suches* as subjects of perceptual judgement.[22]

It is at this point that McDowell criticizes Sellars for risking a relapse into the myth of the given,[23] since the supposed guidance almost sounds as if intuition were itself providing reasons. Sellars's point, however, seems to be that intuition, as intuition, possesses no inferential power, and yet exhibits a proto-conceptual structuredness that can assume a guiding function for a subject possessing conceptual faculties. The most elaborated conception of such non-conceptual representation at the level of intuition is developed by Sellars under the term "image-models," prominently in "The Role of Imagination in Kant's Theory of Experience." These "image-models" go beyond the momentary representation of impressions or sensings: through the productive imagination – which Sellars describes as "a unique blend of a capacity to form images in accordance with a recipe, and a capacity to conceive of objects in a way which supplies the relevant recipes"[24] – they are perspectival images of objects. The recipe thereby describes the intuitive rules according to which the various perspectives of an object merge into one another.[25] In phenomenological terminology, they can be understood as temporal and spatial horizonal appresentations of the respective sensory given along possible lines of accordance ("*Einstimmigkeit*") – an aspect we will return to when discussing Husserl's con-

[18] Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, 438.
[19] Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, 438.
[20] Wilfrid Sellars: *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes.* London 1982, 233.
[21] Sellars: *Science and Metaphysics*, 16.
[22] Sellars: *Science and Metaphysics*, 16.
[23] McDowell: *Having the World in View*, 40.
[24] Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, 424.
[25] For a rather conceptualist interpretation of Sellars in the context of phenomenology, see Michela Summa: "Is Imagination a 'Necessary Ingredient of Perception'? Sellars' and Husserl's Variations on a Kantian Theme." In: Daniele De Santis, Danilo Manca (eds.), *Wilfrid Sellars and Phenomenology. Intersections, Encounters, Oppositions.* Athens, OH 2023.

ception of *typified pre-predicative experience.* It is important to keep in mind that these image-models, despite their complex temporal and spatial structure, possess no conceptual or propositional content and cannot therefore be used for the inferential justification of beliefs. Sellars illustrates this using the example of children who, without linguistic concepts, are already capable of forming image-models:

> The best way to illustrate this is by a very simple example, for our perceptual experience does not begin with the perception of dogs and houses. The child does not yet have the resources for such experience. But though the child does not yet have the conceptual framework of dogs, houses, books, etc., he does, according to Kant, have an innate conceptual framework – a proto-theory, so to speak – of spatio-temporal physical objects capable of interacting with each other, objects – and this is the crux of the matter – which are capable of generating visual inputs that vary in systematic ways with their relation to the body of a perceiver.[26]

Although image-models exhibit a complex structure that guides and orients intuitive experience, this structure itself is not to be conceived as conceptual in the sense of a propositional awareness of facts. In his introduction to Sellars's *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, Jeffrey Sicha accordingly explains that "image-models are blind" and,[27] insofar as they are blind, "ontologically impotent."[28] We thus arrive at a kind of two-stream theory of experience, in which one stream is intuitive but ontologically impotent, while the other is conceptual-propositional, ontologically potent, and epistemologically susceptible to error.

Against such a two-stream theory of experience, McDowell objects that Sellars's model imposes two parallel tasks on the imagination and proposes instead that

> there is only one task for the productive imagination where Sellars's reading has two. […] What the productive imagination generates is a unity involving both sensibility and understanding – not an amalgam.[29]

Accordingly, McDowell argues for a homogeneous model of the co-constitution of world and experience, in which even the intuitively given is already conceptually formed and, in the case of veridical perception, brings us into direct contact with worldly facts. However, such a critique can also be inverted: Sellars's two-stream theory attempts to account for the apparent hiatus between the world as it manifests itself in ordinary experience – the manifest image – and the world as postulated from a scientific perspective – the scientific image – a hiatus that has its historical correlate in the progressive refinement of the scien-

[26] Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, 424.
[27] Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, 161.
[28] Sellars: *Kant's Transcendental Metaphysics*, 168.
[29] McDowell: *Having the World in View*, 124.

tific image of the world. Sellars's two-stream model preserves room for the gradual refinement and critical correction of conceptual frameworks of the world – a possibility that McDowell's account forecloses, since his homogeneous model removes the friction that stems precisely from the non- or proto-conceptual character of the intuitive dimension and the necessity for its conceptual interpretation within the space of reasons.

Further, in McDowell's view, as Corin van Mazijk argues, the intuitive dimension loses all independent significance, and he thereby obscures the motivational connections of intuition itself, "that have a distinct kind of epistemic efficacy."[30] McDowell is thus unable to explain how conceptual capacities "form a unity with the passive life of which they are part."[31]

4. Conceptions of Non-Conceptual Content in the Analytic Debate

An important modern reference point for the Anglophone debate on non-conceptual content in experience is provided by Gareth Evans's distinction between the "informational system" and a subject's faculty of "judgment," whereby the former "constitutes the substratum of our cognitive lives,"[32] the stratum on which our cognitive lives are grounded. Evans here takes up the Kantian distinction between two levels of experience, whereby what he calls the informational system is "more primitive" than the "cognitive state" he describes as "judgment."[33] The fact that the informational system is more primitive than judgment already follows, he argues, from the fact that animals too possess an informational system that informs them about states in the world and guides their behavior. According to Evans, informational states are "*non-conceptual*, or *non-conceptualized*,"[34] since their content is not individuated by the concepts available to a subject. They serve to directly induce behavioral dispositions, but can also function as inputs for thinking about the world.[35] In this context, it is crucial that judgments "are *based upon*," but "not *about* the informational state."[36] Evans therefore conceptualizes judgments as transitions from a non-conceptual informational state to another kind of "cognitive state (with a con-

[30] Mazijk: *Perception and Reality in Kant, Husserl, and McDowell*, 158.
[31] Mazijk: *Perception and Reality in Kant, Husserl, and McDowell*, 158.
[32] Gareth Evans: *The Varieties of Reference.* Edited by John Henry McDowell. Oxford 1982, 122.
[33] Evans: *The Varieties of Reference*, 124.
[34] Evans: *The Varieties of Reference*, 227.
[35] Evans: *The Varieties of Reference*, 158.
[36] Evans: *The Varieties of Reference*, 227.

tent of a different kind, namely, conceptual content)."[37] Conceptual content is thus not *inferred* from nonconceptual content, conceptualization is rather a form of transformation of an informational state that necessarily involves a loss of information,[38] as informational states are finer-grained than their conceptualizations. What Evans does not provide, however, is a detailed account of the independent form of articulation of informational states themselves.

Such an account is attempted by Christopher Peacocke's concept of "scenario content." Peacocke defines a basic form of scenario content as "individuated by specifying which ways of filling out the space around the perceiver are consistent with the representational content's being correct"[39] – a vivid, "nonconceptual" representation of the environment anchored perspectivally by the subject's body.[40] In Peacocke's account, scenario contents serve to epistemically ground perceptual judgments as well as to "explain the possession conditions of some very basic concepts."[41] José Luis Bermúdez builds on Peacocke's conception of scenario content, but criticizes his earlier view that the possession of scenario content itself depends on a "rudimentary conception of the objective world."[42] Bermúdez's starting point is the observation that the behavioral complexity of animals and prelinguistic children – their ability to reidentify objects, navigate social hierarchies, represent spatial environments – cannot be reduced to simple stimulus-response patterns and seems to imply a form of proto-conceptual thought situated below the threshold of linguistic, propositional beliefs. A content is non-conceptual, according to Bermúdez, if it "can be attributed to a subject without ipso facto attributing to that subject mastery of the concepts required to specify it."[43] Bermúdez aims to show that while the non-conceptual dimension of experience is independent of conceptual faculties, even "non-linguistic creatures" engage in "thinking without words," "with many of the characteristic features of language-based thoughts:"[44]

> These thoughts reflect the creature's ontological perspective on the world – the way in which it carves up the environment into bounded individuals and the object-properties to

[37] Evans: *The Varieties of Reference*, 227.
[38] Evans: *The Varieties of Reference*, 125.
[39] Christopher Peacocke: *A Study of Concepts.* Cambridge, MA 1999, 61.
[40] Peacocke: *A Study of Concepts*, 63.
[41] Josefa Toribio: "Nonconceptual Content." In: *Philosophy Compass* 2(3), 2007, 445–460, here: 447.
[42] José Luis Bermúdez: "Nonconceptual Content: From Perceptual Experience to Subpersonal Computational States." In: *Mind & Language* 10(4), 1995, 333–369, here: 338.
[43] José Luis Bermúdez: "What Is at Stake in the Debate on Nonconceptual Content?" In: *Philosophical Perspectives* 21(1), 2007, 55–72, here: 55 f.
[44] José Luis Bermúdez: *Thinking Without Words.* Oxford 2003, vii.

> which it is sensitive. […] And they reflect the aspectuality and intensionality of the modes of presentation under which objects and properties are thought about.[45]

Even non-linguistic subjects are thus given their world in a pre-conceptually, categorically articulated form, insofar as they are "sensitive" in their experience to higher-order physical regularities of the common behaviors of material things, which may also be given to them in various "modes of presentation."[46] These modes of presentation are closely related to what is typically expected of an object – whether it could be grasped or serve as a partner for cooperation – and correlate with "higher-level similarities of the sort that might best be captured through the concepts of instrumental properties and affordances."[47] On this level of proto-conceptual thought, which "tracks relationships, which can be either deterministic or probabilistic,"[48] nonlinguistic creatures are also capable of what Bermúdez describes as the formation of protoinferences.[49]

Against such attempts to explicate the proto-conceptual structure of intuitive experience, conceptualist approaches insist on the fundamentally conceptual nature of experience in general. According to McDowell, the thesis of the conceptual nature of experience follows as a necessary consequence of the assumption that the "deliverances of sensibility can stand in grounding relations to […] judgements and beliefs."[50] McDowell thereby presents conceptualism as a way out of a dilemma: on one side stands the myth of the given, in which we would be purely passive recipients of perceptual beliefs without responsibility for their justification; on the other, a mere coherentism that, according to him, would have no genuine empirical friction with the world. But this position comes at a cost. McDowell draws a sharp line between what counts as the personal level of experience – where epistemic standing is at stake – and what he consigns to mere causal mechanism: the "sub-personal machinery that enables us to have such standings."[51] As Bermúdez pointedly observes,

> it is ironic that philosophers most resolutely opposed to the very idea of nonconceptual content are often the keenest to stress the differences between what goes on at the personal level and what goes on at the subpersonal level.[52]

[45] Bermúdez: *Thinking Without Words*, 192.
[46] Bermúdez: *Thinking Without Words*, 75.
[47] Bermúdez: *Thinking Without Words*, 95.
[48] Bermúdez: *Thinking Without Words*, 147.
[49] Bermúdez: *Thinking Without Words*, 140 ff.
[50] John Henry McDowell: *Mind and World: With a New Introduction.* Cambridge, MA, 1996, 46.
[51] McDowell: *Having the World in View*, 272.
[52] Bermúdez: "What Is at Stake in the Debate on Nonconceptual Content?," 57.

Any notion of an intuitive domain that belongs to experience yet is not conceptual-propositional in nature is thus banished to the sphere of unconscious natural processes. It is precisely from this vantage point that the phenomenological tradition comes into sharper focus as an independent engagement with the question of non-conceptual contents in experience.

5. Non-Conceptual Content in Phenomenology

The analytic debate, shaped by Sellars's critique of the myth of the given, is primarily oriented toward one specific epistemological question: whether, and by what means, experience can serve as a foundation for empirical knowledge – for justified, true belief about an empirical and independently existing world. The question of the content and specific articulation of the intuitive, possibly non-conceptual dimension of experience is accordingly framed throughout by the problem of whether and to what extent it can play this justificatory role. Phenomenology, by contrast, focuses from the outset on an explication of experience from the perspective of experience itself. How experience constitutes its objects – not how it justifies empirical knowledge claims – is the primary question.

That said, phenomenology as developed by Husserl initially focused primarily on forms of conscious experience accompanied by a conceptual awareness of what the respective experience is about – forms of intentional experience in which intentional givenness and perceptual judgment go hand in hand. In Husserl's work, non-conceptual experience in the eminent sense first appears prominently in *Experience and Judgment* and in the *Analyses of Passive Synthesis.*[53] The question Husserl explores in *Experience and Judgment* only superficially resembles the question of how empirical propositional knowledge can be grounded in experience. His more fundamental concern is *genetic:* how predicative judgments can epistemologically be traced back to what he calls "pre-predicative experience."[54] His phenomenological analysis reveals a level of experience whose structuredness is, on the one hand, not mediated by general concepts, yet is also not a mere chaos of hyletic qualities. Even in pre-predicative experience, through what Husserl describes as "passive synthesis,"[55] objects are

[53] Edmund Husserl: *Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik.* Edited by Ludwig Landgrebe. Hamburg 1999; Edmund Husserl: *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis: Aus Vorlesungs- und Forschungsmanuskripten 1918–1926.* Husserliana XI, edited by Margot Fleischer. The Hague 1966.

[54] Husserl: *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 21, our translation.

[55] Husserl: *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 327, our translation.

given not merely as isolated instances but retentionally and protentionally as units of possible continuation within experience itself, situated within specific horizons of anticipation that may be fulfilled or disappointed in the course of further experience. According to Husserl, it is not general concepts but "types" – understood as proto-conceptual capacities – that underlie such forms of passive synthesis in pre-predicative experience and provide the horizons of anticipation that constitute it.[56] The key difference is that *typifying apperception*, unlike *apperception through general concepts*, does not imply the subject's awareness of the proto-conceptual generality constitutive of pre-predicative experience itself.[57]

According to Husserl, there thus exists an *implicit "as" of experience* that need not be thematically present to the experiencing subject, since it manifests itself simply in concrete horizons of anticipations. This corresponds to what Heidegger describes as the hermeneutical – in contrast to the apophantical – "as" of experience. The content of such experience is categorized, while its categorization need not be explicitly thematic for the experiencing subject. Thus, pre-predicative experience appears structured by types, while the experiencing subject need not be aware of them. We are dealing here with a conception of the proto-conceptual structure of the intuitively given that eludes the myth of the given: it implies the experiential givenness of categorials, yet without any awareness of their categoriality.

Such a conception of experience not mediated by explicit concepts is systematically elaborated in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception.* According to Merleau-Ponty, too, experience rests on a synthesis that has already taken place, which underlies it as an enabling foundation and which does not imply a consciousness that thinks what is experienced while experiencing:

> My act of perception, in its unsophisticated form, does not itself bring about this synthesis; it takes advantage of work already done, of a general synthesis constituted once and for all, and this is what I mean when I say that I perceive with my body or my senses, since my body and my senses are precisely that familiarity with the world born of habit, that implicit or sedimentary body of knowledge.[58]

Such perception "with my body or my senses" guides action by pre-figuring behavioral impulses and horizons of anticipation, enabling the realization of complex structures in and through action, of which the acting subject need not have complete awareness at any moment. Indeed, it is entirely sufficient if expe-

[56] Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, 143, our translation.

[57] Cf. Dieter Lohmar: *Erfahrung und kategoriales Denken: Hume, Kant und Husserl über vorprädikative Erfahrung und prädikative Erkenntnis.* Dordrecht 1998, 236.

[58] Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *Phenomenology of Perception.* Translated from the French by Colin Smith. London 2006, 277.

rience itself outlines the correct expectations and impulses to act at each moment. We thus arrive at a phenomenological conception of non-conceptual contents in experience that can, functionally, correspond to behavior that would be guided by explicit concepts – while many of the outcomes realizable in this way could not be achieved with the same fluency through conscious means. Dreyfus deserves credit for making these considerations productive for the analytic debate through his notion of "skillful coping."[59]

This phenomenological conception of pre-predicative experience – structured not by concepts but by proto-conceptual types, and manifesting itself in horizons of anticipation rather than in acts of predication – opens onto an unexpected systematic convergence with the work of Ruth Millikan. Despite its explicitly naturalistic framing, Millikan's account of "substance concepts," developed in *On Clear and Confused Ideas* and expanded under the term "unicepts" in *Beyond Concepts,* proves remarkably continuous with this phenomenological line of thought.[60] Millikan does not regard herself as a phenomenologist; on the contrary, she explicitly grounds her reflections in a naturalistic view of the world. A closer examination of her approach, however, reveals that what she describes as the function of substance concepts and unicepts systematically converges with what Husserl attributes to typifying apperception and what Merleau-Ponty describes as the bodily synthesis upon which experience rests. According to Millikan, substance concepts essentially fulfill two functions constitutive of experience:

> The conception one has of a substance is not merely the ways one knows to identify it, but also the dispositions one has to project certain kinds of invariances rather than others from one's experiences with it. One pole of a substance concept consists of more or less reliable means by which to recognize the substance, the other pole is a rough grasp of an applicable substance template or templates.[61]

Just as types structure pre-predicative experience, substance concepts provide a proto-conceptual articulation of experience that manifests itself in action tendencies and horizons of anticipation, constituting modes of givenness that do not imply a conceptual awareness of its implicit categorization. In this context, Millikan uses the term "identification" explicitly in a technical sense and distinguishes it from perceptual "classification," which implies a conceptual awareness of predication:

[59] Dreyfus: *Skillful Coping.*

[60] Ruth Garrett Millikan: *On Clear and Confused Ideas: An Essay about Substance Concepts.* Cambridge 2006; Ruth Garrett Millikan: *Beyond Concepts: Unicepts, Language, and Natural Information.* Oxford 2017.

[61] Millikan: *On Clear and Confused Ideas*, 73.