Antidescriptivist Psychological Nominalism as Phenomenological Semantics

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Introduction

Husserl opens *Ideas* by stating straightaway that the knowledge of experience is non-conceptual:

> I am aware of a world, spread out in space endlessly, and in time becoming and become, without end. I am aware of it, that means, first of all, I discover it immediately, intuitively, I experience it (. . .) For me real objects are there, definite, more or less familiar, agreeing with what is actually perceived without being themselves perceived or even intuitively present. I can let my attention wander from the writing-table I have just seen and observed, through the unseen portions of the room behind my back to the verandah, into the garden, to the children in the summer-house, and so forth, to all the objects concerning which I precisely "know" that they are there and yonder in my immediate co-perceived surroundings—*a knowledge which has nothing of conceptual thinking in it*, and first changes into clear intuiting with the bestowing of attention, and even then only partially and for the most part very imperfectly (1913/2014 p. 48-50).

And proposes that the manner in which knowledge becomes conceptual is through arranging a descriptively intentional picture of nature as meaningful for thought:

> It is then to this world, *the world in which I find myself and which is also my world-about-me*, that the complex forms of my manifold and shifting spontaneities of consciousness stand related: observing in the interest of research the *bringing of meaning into conceptual form through description; comparing and distinguishing, collecting and counting, presupposing and inferring, the theorizing activity of consciousness, in short, in its different forms and stages.* (1913/2014, p. 50-51; first emphasis original; second emphasis added).

But it has been shown—by John McDowell and others—that an account of experience as non-conceptual commits the phenomenological project to a version

of the Myth of the Given, by treating experience as though it were intelligible outside of the logical space of reasons. Wilfrid Sellars (2003) states:

> The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says (EPM §36).

And I think that it should be clear that the kinds of episodes or states that Husserl reports—episodes or states central throughout the history of phenomenology—are a kind of *knowing*. For the contents of Husserl's experiences are only knowable (capable of being reported) insofar as he is exercising first-personal conceptual capacities in reflective awareness of the world. And if the knowledge of experience is non-conceptual, it is difficult to see how it could be that we can use experience for being able to justify what we say, even if all we are doing is making a report.

But I suggest that there is another dilemma that phenomenology faces on such an account, which comes from idea that "meaning is brought into conceptual form through description". In particular, I suggest that a commitment to this idea undermines the pragmatic, normative, and rule-governed nature of meaning. The result of the dilemma is that meaningful experience is conceived of as abstract activity performed by detached minds, as something separate from the world.

To avoid this dilemma, I will show that phenomenology should follow commit itself to a Janus-faced position of antidescriptivism and psychological nominalism. In order to do so, I will recount two relevant aspects Sellars' antidescriptivism and two relevant aspects of his psychological nominalism. The reason for this is to show that antidescriptivist psychological nominalism *as* phenomenological semantics ensures that experience stays in the world as playing an intersubjective justificatory role. In order to do so, it is necessary to understand experience as pervasively conceptual.

The result of the argument will be that phenomenology can work as a method for making explicit the logical space of reasons as it exists between persons. That is, antidescriptivist psychological nominalist phenomenological semantics provides us with a rigorous method for investigating normatively rule-governed commitments to perceptual experience.

The structure of my argument is as follows:

In (1) I will provide an overview of the argument that human reason and experience are pervasively permeated by a conceptual structure that enables experience to play a justificatory role in the space of reasons. The reason for this is to prevent phenomenology from advocating a position that keeps distance between minds and the world. As it is clear that phenomenology distinguishes itself as a tradition that unites experience as being in the world, I suggest that it must take the conceptual structure of experience seriously in order to do justice to that tradition. To do so, we cannot accept that meaning is something brought into conceptual form through description, but rather that experience structures

the conceptual form of meaning.

It is important to clarify that I follow McDowell's account of conceptual content as that which is capable of being used in reflective thought. McDowell (1994) states:

> The way I am exploiting the Kantian idea of spontaneity commits me to a demanding interpretation for words like 'concept' and 'conceptual'. It is essential to conceptual capacities, in the demanding sense, that they can be exploited in active thinking, thinking that is open to reflection about its own rational credentials. When I say the content of experience is conceptual, that is what I mean by 'conceptual' [...] According to the picture I have been recommending, the content of a perceptual experience is already conceptual (p. 47-48).

So, in saying that experience is conceptual, we are saying that in order to have knowledge about our perceptual episodes, we have to already be exercising conceptualization about those episodes in order for them to be recognizable to us. Put differently, I take McDowell's demanding interpretation of the word 'concept' as ensuring that experience is eligible for playing a role in what Robert Brandom refers to as the game of giving and asking for reasons.

Similarly, we need to make demanding use of 'experience'. I take it that the kinds of experience that are eligible for knowledge are experiences that one knows they are having. Johanna Seibt uses the term *full experience* for this, whereas bare attention to one's surroundings, something akin to what we share with non-rational animals, Seibt terms *rudimentary experience*. Seibt (1990) states:

> Full experience or experience in the proper sense can be ascribed only if the subject can be said to experience something as something (p. 122).

That is, experience is always experience of something. I take *full experience* to also serve as the criterium of experience in phenomenology and will hereafter write the word *experience*.

In (2) I will provide an overview of antidescriptivist psychological nominalism (further: ADPN). I will argue that if phenomenology is the study of meaningful and intentional experience, then we should offer an account of meaning and intention—and ultimately mindedness—that is fully world-embedded. That is, if one's experience is to be construed as meaningful and intentional, then it follows that our picture of meaningful and intentional experience must reflect the world. On the side of meaning, this implies that one does not mentally grasp non-conceptual experience and supplies it with conceptual content; instead, one learns how to perform rule-governed linguistic episodes in particular contexts within a conceptually-structured world. On the side of intentionality, this implies that our thought—covert linguistic expression—is directed toward making explicit the intersubjective linguistic practices that allow us to make sense of our experiences in the space of reasons.

Last, in (3) I outline antidescriptivist psychological nominalism as phenomenological semantics. It may seem orthogonal to advocate an antidescriptivist psychological nominalism for phenomenology. However, my writing will close by demonstrating that the twofold solution of (a) conceiving of experience as conceptually structured and (b) advocating that an ADPN account of meaning is supportive to phenomenological philosophy. Phenomenological descriptive reports about experience will serve as a reflective machinery for linguistically explicating features of the phenomenal world (the world in the broad sense). The purpose of this turn will be to show that the overt linguistic episodes central to the phenomenological method (including bracketing) can serve scientific philosophy by demonstrating how distributive singular terms are predicated in everyday language. Phenomenological semantics will be framed as a practice for transposing subjective episodes of overt linguistic behavior into generalized categories of experience. Thus, I aim to show that phenomenological description can do more than mere reporting by showing that it gives us a picture of rule-governed linguistic activity. So, we can say that the purpose of this essay is to ensure that meaning remains in the world.

I. Keeping the Mind in the World: Pervasively Conceptual Experience

Suppose you were walking down a familiar street, a street that you did not need to actively consider directions, that you were accustomed to, where you as it were felt at home. Now, you realize that you've been thinking about other things: your social obligations later that evening, the weather, the chess move you made the day before, etc. Husserl says of such moments, moments of so-called wandering attention, that they have "nothing of conceptual thinking in them." Husserl, and those who fall in line with Husserlian phenomenology, would also say that your walk had nothing of conceptual thinking in it. You simply knew where you were going without needing to actively consider what was required for that knowledge.

But this is mistaken: without an account of immanent conceptual experience, it becomes difficult to see how it is possible that we could have conceptual experience at all. That is, on Husserl's picture, we need to have an account of epistemology that demonstrates just where the point of non-conceptual experience ends and conceptual experience begins. And it is difficult to see the shape of such an account without relying on the incoherent idea that rational animals are mysteriously able to apply concepts to a non-conceptual world; where would those concepts come from? So, the question which guides this section is whether or not perception is something distinct from conceptualization. And I would like to say that we should take the answer to be a resounding *No*.

The appearance of this mystery was made explicit by Sellars in EPM. It is the Myth of the Given: that when we do not see that experience must always be able to play a role in the space of reasons—our space of normative discourse where we are able to justify what we say—our knowledge becomes unintelligible.

All that is needed to avoid the Myth of the Given—the idea that our experiences are something distinct from our conceptual knowledge—is a commitment to recognizing that perceptual experiential knowledge is knowledge that comes from judgment and that judgment is immanently conceptually articulated. To judge *that-p* is nothing other than to see *p* as capable of playing a justificatory role in our language games. That is, having knowledge of a perceptual experience is nothing other than the first-personal awareness of judging *that-p*. Thus, I use the term *judgment* synonymously with *having knowledge of a perceptual experience*, say, walking down the street and thinking about chess. In fact, I take them to be equivalent terms.

I assert—following Sellars, McDowell, and others—that there are two primary problems with the phenomenological picture of non-conceptual knowledge. On the one hand, it is unclear how conceptual knowledge comes about. On the other hand, it is unclear how conceptual knowledge is differentiated from non-conceptual content.

Husserl's answer to the first problem is that the birth conceptual knowledge comes from the activity of intentional subjects who use the *transcendental reduction*, the so-called *epoché*, to make explicit features of perceptual experience that are otherwise taken for granted. Beyer (2020) states:

> All presuppositions or premises based on this realistic assumption are to be systematically bracketed in a 'phenomenological epoché', so that we have to start from a methodological solipsism (p. 68).

The epoché is central to phenomenology. It is the intentional act of suspending our everyday justificatory understanding in favor of a pre-predicative, pre-judgmental awareness of what are supposed to be the grounding qualities of perceptual knowledge in experience. It is from the position of the intersubjectively omniscient epistemic subject that conceptual knowledge takes shape through what the epoché reveals as foundational. Conceptualization, then, is the result of bringing meaning into form through description. That is, the epoché reveals the remainder that rational epistemic persons are capable of knowing about once their assuming natural conceptualizations of the world are temporarily suspended. At base, the activity of intentional subjects—on Husserl's picture—depends upon their use of the epoché to have any authentic philosophical knowledge at all. Conceptual knowledge, then, is provided by intentional subjects and applied to the world. The consequence of this account is that the experiential world—the world of judgment—is mind-dependent and internal to intentional subjects, despite Husserl's later attempts to insist a correlational view of knowledge while retaining the epoché of the dependency view (Beyer, 2020).

Husserl's answer to the second problem is that immersive perceptual states—what Dreyfus and others have called absorbed coping— are non-conceptual, whereas the explication of those ground-level cognitive states is conceptual. The rationale for this is that immersive perceptual states are comprised of pre-judgmental non-conceptual habituated dispositions to act in particular ways (say, riding a

bicycle, walking down a familiar street, or, Dreyfus' choice, games of raid chess played by masters).

But these answers are insufficient: both remain committed to a version of Givenness and are inadequate for making clear how it is that our perceptual experiences—judgments—come to stand in justificatory relations in a shared space of reasons. Instead, we must remove the Husserlian distinction between judgment and conceptualization and follow Kant's insight that *thoughts without content are empty and intuitions without concepts are blind.* I should say, by way of a preface, that by already treating equivalent perceptual experiences and judgment do we get a sense of how to make sense of the unity of judgment and conceptualization.

Now, there is already extensive secondary research on conceptual and non-conceptual content. So, rather than attempt to offer a substantive account of the debate, the task of this section is to provide a summative picture of where I think we can and should land in light of this research. I will outline my reading of McDowell's treatment of non-conceptual content in *Mind and World* as well as his response to Dreyfus. I will conclude this section by suggesting that McDowell's account can be straightforwardly integrated with Brandom's explication of the Kant-Sellars thesis for ordinary empirical description (OED; elaborated below). Understanding our commonsense judgments by the lights of the Kant-Sellars thesis for OED will become important for the argument developed in (**II.**). So, despite taking a summative approach, I will offer a variation on McDowell's framework for understanding the necessarily conceptual structure of phenomenological knowledge.

We must understand just what kinds of experiences phenomenology tends to regard as non-conceptual. I take it that there are three paradigmatic types:

(a) the performance of well-trained embodied acts (e.g., riding a bicycle; playing rapid chess as a master)
(b) intersubjective and joint-attentional cognitive processes (e.g., recognizing someone familiar on the street)
(c) ground-level empirical perceivings (e.g., seeing a colored object; sensing pain)

The idea is that, in each of these cases, the application of a concept is not necessary in order to successfully have the experience (i.e., being aware of the fact that one is having an experience). In fact, Dreyfus argues that if one were to introduce concepts into such experiences, the experience would be interrupted and potentially become unsuccessful (i.e., not successfully carrying out an intention[1]). Dreyfus (2013) states:

> To be true to the phenomenon we should add that when we are ready to leave a familiar room we not only do not need to think that the door affords going out. We need not even respond to the door as affording going out. Indeed, we needn't apprehend the door at all. From the perspective of the skilled coper absorbed in the solicitation of a familiar affordance, the affording object, as Heidegger puts it,

> "withdraws." We need not even be aware of the solicitations to go out as solicitations. Thanks to our background familiarity, when it is appropriate to leave, we are simply drawn to go out. In general, the absorbed coper is directly drawn by each solicitation in an appropriate way: the chairs draw him to sit on them, the floorboards to walk on them, the walls may draw him to hang pictures on them, the windows to open them, and the door may draw him to go out (p. 18).

Leaving aside the strange idea of conversational furniture, the orthodox phenomenological picture of non-conceptual experience is that we simply know our way around the world and do not need to rely on the use of conceptualization to, say, sit down in a chair. But how is it that we come to do things like sit in chairs, ride bicycles, and play rapid chess without conceptualization? According to the next, apparently self-refuting, paragraph from Dreyfus, those experiences are always firstly conceptual:

> It might seem an argument for the pervasiveness of conceptuality that we often have to use concepts to find our way about in an unfamiliar situation. But, as in an unfamiliar city, we have to start to find our way by using concepts, but our situation gradually comes to make sense to us in a non-conceptual way as we learn our way around in it. Once our situation becomes familiar our skilled dispositions respond directly to the solicitations of the relevant affordances. Indeed, once a skill is acquired, concepts used in learning the skill need play no further role. It is not even necessary that to learn a practice one needs to have been aware of the relevant concepts. Our ability to act normally is usually picked up by imitating authorities without concepts playing any conscious role (p. 18).

There are at least two contradictions in this section. First, if our experience is supposed to be non-conceptual, then how are we supposed to start to find our way in an unfamiliar situation; where do the concepts come from? Second, if concepts are necessary for learning but stop playing a role in our competent activity, then how are we supposed to make sense of learning to act normally without conceptualization? I cannot see how a coherent account can follow and numerous others have pointed out that our competent activity (a masterful game of rapid chess) does relies on conceptualization, critical reflection, and judgment in order to be competent (McDowell, 2013).[2]

The main problem is that phenomenological accounts, *pace* Dreyfus via Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, fail to see that in order to be able to treat experiences as something that we are able to report, they must be conceptual.[3]

By contrast, McDowell (2013) states:

> I first made the claim of pervasiveness in its application to perceptual experience. I claimed that as enjoyed by rational animals, experience is an actualization of the conceptual capacities. [...] The episte-

> mological significance of the experience of rational subjects is that when our experiencing is perceiving, as it can be, features of the environment are perceptually present to us in a way that provides us with opportunities for knowledge, of a kind that is special to rational knowers: knowledge that is, to echo Wilfrid Sellars, a standing in the space of reasons (p. 41-42).

The point McDowell makes is that in order for our perceptual knowledge to stand in the space of reasons, we must see that our perceptual experiences are capable of figuring into our discursive practices. Without pervasive conceptual activity (further: pervasiveness thesis), it is unclear how that knowledge comes to be known at all. He continues:

> We should not suppose conceptual capacities come into play, in connection with empirical knowledge, only downstream from experience—only when someone decides what to think on the basis of experience, with experience conceived as something she enjoys anyway, independently of any involvement of conceptual capacities (p. 42).

With regard to the paradigmatic examples of supposedly non-conceptual content, McDowell says that what happens in these moments, moments when there seem to be no conceptualization at play, is that it is the demonstration of cultivated rationality at work. People are able to know *what* they are doing as well as *why* they are doing it (and perhaps cannot know the former without first knowing the latter); and the knowledge of what and why is always joined up with knowing that it is *they* who are doing it, that an "I" is affixed to agential activity. We give expression to things that we already know (for example, knowing that this bicycle is able to be ridden; knowing that when I see someone familiar on the street, that I greet them[4]) (Sellars, 1954).

The crux of the pervasiveness thesis is that conceptualization requires the possibility of reflection on experience as a way into making sense of experiences rather than that conceptualization is always operative in perceptual states. Nonetheless, gaining masterful familiarity to our environment is a *Bildung*, a process of conceptualization from judgment (perceptual experience) that things are thus-and-so. I take McDowell to advocate a position wherein all experiences are eligible for being used in the space of reasons; and in order for that to be so, those experiences must be those we are directly aware of, of being thus-and-so. But this rests on the requirement that taking things to be a particular way requires our conceptual capacities to be pervasively present in perceptual experience, as a part of our nature as rational animals. That is, when we say that experience is pervaded by the conceptual, we are maintaining a modal view of conceptualization that is grounded in the possibility of playing a role in the space of reasons. McDowell (1994) says:

> Human beings are rational animals. What could be more natural than to hold that capacities that belong to what differentiates human beings from other animals, their rationality, are operative in activity

> that is essentially human, including activity at the ground-floor level (p. 54)?

And what makes human beings rational animals, animals whose experiences are pervasively conceptual, is that we acquire second nature. Briefly, our second nature (with regard to rationality, which McDowell non-exclusively[5] emphasizes) is our developed, learned ability to participate in a shared space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says. Second nature consists of "any responsive propensities that are not inborn or provided for by ordinary biological maturation but acquired through, for instance, training" (McDowell, 1994, p. 51). It is what comes from learning to follow a rule: knowing that, to use Wittgenstein's example, when asked to calculate *n+2*, that when we successfully reach 1000, we ought not to begin calculating 1004, 1008, 1016, etc., as it wouldn't fit the rule. It is part of our second nature to know that doing so would be calculating incorrectly according to second natural principles. And I would like to indicate—as a signpost for what comes below—that it is precisely because second nature is rule-governed and pattern-organized (something taught and learned in a socially distributed way) that demonstrates just how central it is to phenomenology to ensure that our experiences are seen as conceptually structured.

Now, I have shown elsewhere that there is evidence from the cognitive sciences that suggests that conceptualization is present even in explicitly pre-linguistic childhood and that the ground-level expressive communicative activity of young children can be seen to be, at the very least, symbolic if not fully conceptual (Porto, 2023). So rather than use an ontogenetic account of conceptualization, I would instead like to focus on Brandom's idea of modality in ordinary empirical discourse (OED)—the so-called Kant-Sellars thesis—as a way of demonstrating that experience is always pervaded by our conceptualization.[6] The need for introducing the Kant-Sellars Thesis will be made explicit in (**II.**).

The reason for this is to drive home the fact that, even if there were a coherent picture of non-conceptual experience, we would still be tasked with explaining how it could be possible for us to recognize that experiences are eligible for making descriptive reports. Without this, we would have no record of our experience and would be unable to see how our conceptualizations—which come later on the Husserlian picture—come into view. That is, even if one granted the idea of non-conceptual experience, then it would be still confusing to understand how it is that we can perform linguistic expression of those experiences. For, nobody would in good faith deny that linguistic expressions are conceptual through and through.

Brandom (2014) introduces the Kant-Sellars Thesis as follows: insofar as one is able to use ordinary empirical discourse to make reports about experiences, one is also equipped with everything they need to be able to say (and know) that things could be otherwise. Brandom says:

> The underlying pragmatic dependence is that an essential aspect of

> grasping, understanding, or mastering the use of OED vocabulary is grasping, understanding, or mastering subjunctive and counterfactual reasoning in which that vocabulary occurs. To know what cats or copper are requires knowing at least something about how they would behave under various circumstances: what follows from being a cat or made of copper, when that claim is conjoined with various auxiliary hypotheses, independently of whether one takes those auxiliary hypotheses to be true (p. 261).

Put otherwise, by using OED at all, we are already engaged in the process of making material inferences—in fact, we cannot use OED without material inference, for we would be unable to infer under which circumstances our OED would be relevant. By making reports of experience (and by knowing that experiences can be used in reports at all), it is necessary that we would be able to make other kinds of reports of experience. So, we must have conceptualization active in experience in order to exercise the criteria for knowing which kinds of reports we ought to make. That is, experience and reports of experience are connected through the synthetic a priori. Seibt (1990) states:

> Not only is experience not the foundation of the formation of concepts; conversely experience presupposes concept formation. The language of observation, as part of the reticular functional system of concepts, is acquired all at once and only in connection with all other parts of that system. For example, mastering the use of color predicates means not only reacting under standard conditions with semantically correct language episodes; one must also be able to recognize when standard conditions obtain. Knowing that an object is not green if it is red under standard conditions, but that it can be green if it appears blue under non-standard conditions; that one can make a green object look blue; that a colored object is also extended: all this and more belongs to the meaning of color predicates (p. 122).

In other words, by learning that concepts A and B play the same functional role (say, *the author of the The Critique of Pure Reason* and *Immanuel Kant*), one has already implicitly mastered how to use (to make the inference of) the law of identity.

The minimal consequence of this is that, for one to be able to make an ordinary empirical description about an experience, they must: (1) have already rationally cultivated the linguistic dependencies to make the report (including in thought, which is nothing other than covert linguistic episodes[7]), and (2): have already rationally cultivated the capacity of subjunctive conditionality (that if things were otherwise, then we would be rather talking about horses and silver than cats and copper). For example, by having the experience of knowing:

> *That the children are playing in the garden while I am sitting at my writing table, despite the fact that I cannot see them.*

one must already be able to do quite a lot of conceptual work to be able to have

the experience at all (e.g., at the very least, the conceptualization that one is something other than other persons, say, the children). Rather than demonstrate this for the paradigmatic examples in phenomenology outlined above, it is sufficient to say that any experience that we *know* is always known *conceptually*. As Brandom shows, even when we do not take the auxiliary modal hypotheses to be true (e.g., that one was mistaken about the children playing in the garden), being able to make a report of such an experience in the first place requires that it be possible that the auxiliary *would be true in other circumstances*.

Indeed, I think that a phenomenologist would agree that the experience of being mistaken about a perceptual experience (e.g., falsely seeing that the ice cube is pink) is phenomenologically identical to—in the sense of being indistinguishable from—the experience of being correct about a perceptual experience (e.g., truly seeing that the ice cube is pink). Brandom's point about OED vocabulary is that, in order to know that one is having an experience, that experience must be immanently wrapped up in subjunctive and counterfactual counterparts (say, knowing what would be the case if the boiling point of water were different and being mistaken about perceivings of pink ice cubes).

The point to emphasize here is that, by combining Brandom's Kant-Sellars thesis will McDowell's pervasiveness thesis, we are in a position to recognize that the ground-level ability to distinguish between material particulars, of knowing that p and q imply different variables, rests foundationally on our rational conceptualization and the conceptual structure of experience. In the following section, I will show that it follows that we ought to follow Sellars' program of antidescriptivist psychological nominalism to make sense of phenomenological descriptions that can be authentically in the world.

II. Pervasively Conceptual Antidescriptivist Psychological Nominalism

I wrote in the introduction that there are two relevant and closely-related aspects of antidescriptivism and psychological nominalism for phenomenology. I also wrote that the aim of this section is to make sense of meaning in phenomenology in light of what was offered in (**I.**). In what follows, I will briefly outline *antidescriptivism* and *psychological nominalism* as philosophical approaches and indicate how each can benefit the phenomenological project. The result will be what I term *antidescriptive nominalist phenomenological semantics*.

There are relevant two aspects of antidescriptivism:

> AD1: We should be semantic externalists about the meaning of language and experience.
>
> AD2: We should account for the rule-governed structure of linguistic practices, especially for analyzing phenomenological description.

According to AD1, meaning is nothing other than the functional roles linguistic expressions play in linguistic practices. Sellars' case example is that of color terms. We are used to saying:

Rot (in German) means red (in English)

which suggests that there is something essential about the terms on either side of the meaning-relation, namely, picking out items that are essentially red. Over against this, Sellars shows us that we ought instead to reduce the *meaning* of the German expression *Rot* (or French expression *Rouge*, Portuguese expression *Vermelho*, etc.[8]) to the equivalent functional role the term plays in English, namely, *Red*, in order to have a correct picture of linguistic expressions.[9] The point is that there is nothing *extralinguistic* to the meaning of terms: meaning is only the expression of a role in a particular linguistic context. So rather than pick out items that *are red*, we nominally express of a particularly colored object that it is *red*. Put simply: there is neither an epistemological nor ontological foundation to meaning on such accounts.

AD2 follows. If meaning is nothing other than functional linguistic roles, and if those roles must be intelligible to successfully express, say, particular information to others, then meaning must be conveyed according to a particular criteria which makes it successful (or not). And if there is nothing foundational—nothing extralinguistic—about meaning, then meaning is a result of the rule-governed structure of shared linguistic practices. That is, an antidescriptivist account of meaning is one that locates meaning as a part of a rule-governed system of linguistic behavior. Sellars (1949) states:

> To think of a system of qualities and relations is, I shall argue, to use symbols governed by a system of rules which, we might say, *implicitly define* these symbols by giving them a specific task to perform in the linguistic economy (p. 302).

Importantly, antidescriptivist accounts of meaning also range over linguistic practices that are historically treated in philosophy as distinct from terms like color-predicates. In particular, linguistic expressions that deal with concepts like *inner states*, *self-knowledge*, *morality*, *intentionality*, and even the concept of *I* are also to be understood in terms of functional roles (Brandom, 2014; Seibt, 1990). The consequence is that there is no foundational, essential, or otherwise a priori character of such terms, which implies that there is nothing extralinguistic in, for example, the concept *I* of the *I think*.... Recall Sellars' remark: "in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description [...] we are placing it in the logical space of reasons". So, when we use concepts about inner states, we are not describing something empirical or a priori; we are justifying or putting ourselves in a position to justify what role the concept plays in our linguistic community according to particular rules[10]. To see that this is so, we can continue to follow Wittgenstein in asking: *What if things were otherwise?*, where in this case the *things* are the functional roles that concepts about the self play in our language.[11] The importance of this for antidescriptive phenomenological semantics will be clear at the end of this essay.

And there are two relevant aspects of psychological nominalism:

> PN1: That there are no abstract entities and that thought and overt language are two sides of the same rule-governed behavior.
>
> PN2: That talk about experience is not talk about mental contents and does not express the contents of mental states.

PN1 adds an important element to our picture of antidescriptivism. It specifies that the only thing that distinguishes thought and language is the extent to which it is publicly available. That is, thought is to be understood as covert linguistic behavior (talking silently) and speech is to be understood as overt linguistic behavior (thinking-out-loud). Thought, being an abstract entity, cannot be seen as something distinct from language except through its mode of conveyance.

PN2 further specifies that mental states, as abstract entities, do not have contents. Instead, talk about experience falls under verbal behaviorism (which, of the Sellarsian variety, is methodological).[12] Scharp (2012) describes Sellars' psychological nominalism as a two-part rejection of traditional, realist approaches to talk about mental states:

> Sellars rejects the view that a linguistic expression has its semantic features by virtue of the fact that minds mentally grasp the right abstract entity and associate it with that expression, and he also rejects the view that to understand a linguistic expression is to associate the right mentally grasped abstract entity with it. Instead, a linguistic expression as its semantic features by virtue of the role it plays in a rule-governed system of expressions and the way it is used by members of a linguistic practice that display the right pattern-governed and rule-oberying behavior (. . .) to understand a linguistic expression is to know how to use it in such a practice" (p. 375-376).

The result of psychological nominalism is a denial that to perceive, to be aware of, or to experience something is the result of a mental grasping. It is important to note that when Scharp says *use*, we need to follow Sellars in understanding use in terms of functional role. The alternative picture is one where all experience is language-dependent and there are no extralinguistic qualities about facts, including those of what has traditionally been viewed as inner states or any other abstract concept that has historically thought to have been essential to thought, cognition, or the *I* of the *I think*.

Taken together, our picture of antidescriptivist psychological nominalism is a theory of knowledge that defines meaning of any type—from the meaning of color-predicates to the meaning of abstract entities like *property*, *quality*, *I*, *cognition*—in terms of linguistic practice. When one has *knowledge* in such an epistemology, they have knowledge of how to make material inferences based on the functional roles of singular terms. The prerequisite for knowledge, then, is that one has been so-conditioned to perform inferences based on an intersubjective,

rule-governed framework of those functional roles.[13]

Now, it should be clear that our account of pervasively conceptual experience outlined above rests upon our current picture of ADPN epistemology. If meaning is understood as the role a term plays within a linguistic economy, and if our capacity to use OED vocabulary implies that we would be able to make other kinds of reports of experience (i.e., to see that things are thus-and-so *and not otherwise*), then it necessary for any ground-level report (and awareness of the ground of our report) to rest on our capacity to conceptually articulate it within the linguistic economy to which we are members of.

III. Pervasively Conceptual Antidescriptivist Psychological Nominalism as Phenomenological Semantics

I have been tacitly suggesting that there is something that an antidescriptivist psychological nominalist epistemology can do for phenomenology. Made explicit, I argue that ADPN should be the epistemological basis for phenomenology. The reason for this is twofold: (1) There is already affinity between ADPN semantics and phenomenological judgment. (2) By relying on the non-conceptual experience of the epoché as the source of conceptual knowledge, phenomenology rests on weak epistemological grounds. Phenomenological philosophy needs to use ADPN epistemology in order to put forth a thoroughgoing account of intentional experience. The result will be to have built up phenomenological semantics on the basis of ADPN epistemology in order to provide a naturalistic means to making explicit the functional role of intentional and intersubjective—which should be read as inter-linguistic—patterns of rule-governed linguistic behavior in the world.

There is affinity between ADPN semantics and the Husserl of *Experience & Judgment*. Staiti (2018) states:

> Husserl shows that the origin of concepts as ideal objects involved in universal judgments ("Cats are mammals") is to be found in the constitution of empirical types, that is, low-level, malleable bundles of expectations based on foregoing experience of various types of objects. Types guide our encounters with new objects and govern our attempts to make sense of what we do not know on the basis of analogy with what we already know. Unlike concepts, types do not have a definite intension and an indefinitely large extension. A subject's type "cat" is based on the finite number of cats she has actually experienced, and it projects onto the world a set of expectations about what can legitimately count as a cat. It is only by a shift of focus from actual instances of the type to the ideal "something" that recurs as identical in all instances that we first form concepts as new kinds of entities that, unlike types, allow us to judge in the mode of "in general." (p. 196).

However, I have been trying to show that Husserl's distinction between that which

is conceptual and non-conceptual (in this case, types and concepts) is mistaken. We can see that Husserlian types are at the very least adjacent to Sellarsian distributive singular terms. The error of Husserl's formulation is in the priority given to the experiencing subject, who is supposed to pick out material particulars in a pre-predicative, non-conceptual way. That is, "what can legitimately count as a cat" is only knowable to a person through linguistic practices, which rest on conceptualization in experience. In this case, the conceptualization is of recognition of familiarity and generalization across individual members of what a singular term ranges over. There is nowhere inscribed that either concepts or conceptualization have definite intension and indefinitely large extension, so it is unclear why Staiti relies on this for explicating Husserl's account of type-judgment. By doing so, Staiti's explication of Husserlian phenomenology buys into the Myth of the Given by attempting to give an account of ground-level empirical perception without explaining how it is that we come to inferentially transpose material particulars into universals.

Husserl's epistemology hinges on the transcendental reduction: robust philosophical knowledge is reached through investigating first-personal experiences in order to reveal what is essential to experience itself. Generally, phenomenology rests on a definitional framework that aims to leverage the faculties of intuition to describe the nature of consciousness and conscious experience.[14] So, on the phenomenological picture, what we know about consciousness comes from directly experiencing it and making explicit that experience in descriptive reports. In order to have a conscious experience, that experience is intentional (i.e., about something, the object of the phenomenological analysis). However, phenomenological knowledge is only possible insofar as rational cognitive agents engaged in the transcendental reduction are already making use of justifications that rest on inexplicit epistemological assumptions (Pietersma, 2000). I suggest that those inexplicit assumptions ought to be made explicit in terms of ADPN epistemology.

Building up phenomenological semantics on an ADPN epistemology requires that perceptual experience, the kind of experience that persons can make phenomenological descriptions of, is pervasively conceptual. To reiterate, for experience play a role in knowledge implies that we must be capable of recognizing its justificatory role in our thought. The recognition of an experience is at the same time the recognition that our experiences entitle us to a position in the space of reasons. As I argued above, without this dual recognition, it is unclear just how it is that experience is something that persons are capable of making reports about. Reports of experience rest on the ability to make counterfactual and subjunctive conditional alternative reports of the same experience. In order to make the inference that one is seeing a red cube, conceptual distinctions must already have been drawn over against other items, say blue circles and green diamonds. Acknowledging the foregoing as a requirement for experience puts phenomenology on firm epistemological grounds.

So, if having an intentional experience rests on being able to have alternative

intentional experiences (and knowing that this is so), then knowledge gained through the epoché is knowledge of the role that the object intended to plays in thought. Pietersma (2000), in explicating Husserlian epistemology, states:

> [W]e notice how an act in which one actually perceives an object is essentially accompanied by capacities for further perceptions. A perceiver ascribes to herself capacities, which give her a sense of environment and context. She knows that she can do things other than what she is doing at the moment, which gives her a sense of her powers of inquiry. She is therefore convinced that her actual awareness of an object at a given time takes place in a context of other ways of being aware of it, namely, those in which the same object would be apprehended under a different description or from a different perspective (Pietersma, 2000 p. 39).

And later:

> What seeing an F means depends on the concept of being an F. "Seeing" is used by Husserl to mark a contrast with various ways of not seeing F [...] It is a *functional* relation [...] The frequently used phrases "seeing the object that was meant" or "seeing the object itself" do not describe any particular kind of act, *but rather a role which, given a specific context, an act plays for an act of mere belief*, namely, the role of giving it fullness or fulfilment, thereby putting a knower in a cognitively better position with respect to whatever object that person desires to know [...] the cognitive subject implied by Husserl's stated account of knowledge is a subject whose beliefs form a network and whose intentional references implicitly locate their objects in the context circumscribed by those beliefs (p. 45-46, second emphasis added).

which fits squarely within ADPN semantics. We must, however, recognize that the ground-level "cognitive subject" of Husserlian phenomenology is also an abstract entity (according to PN2 above). That is, our phenomenological descriptions must be seen as meta-inferential reports that elaborate the functional role of perception in a particular context (say, a given language game), rather than first-personal empirical descriptions. For, on strictly ADPN terms, to talk about the experience of, e.g., a cognitive subject, is not talk about the inner episodes of that subject as they mentally apply conceptuality to an otherwise non-conceptual experience. Instead, it is to put oneself in a shared space of reasons according to a rule-governed semantic system.

For example, in the phenomenological descriptive report:

> I know that *seeing that-p before me now* implies *not seeing that-p before me now in a variety of other ways*

we are not reporting on the judgment of a particular person. Instead, we are making certain inference tickets explicit: that seeing *that-p* requires that we

see it against an already conceptual horizon of counterfactual or subjective conditional possibility. By foregoing the appearance that the report describes a mental grasping in favor of PN2, we gain further inferential capacity to reason about the judgment itself. Put differently, by recognizing that the *I know* of the report likewise plays nothing other than a linguistic role, we position ourselves to analyze the role it plays in a rule-governed system of linguistic expressions and the extent to which first-personal judgments display an intersubjectively pattern-governed, rule-obeying behavior.

So, rather than reflecting an account of first-personal meaning, I argue that the phenomenological reduction should be used a reflective machinery for linguistically explicating features of the experiential world in order to examine the rule-governed structure of experience. Doing so will transpose knowledge derived from descriptive reports into overt linguistic accounts of judgment. When synthesized with additional linguistic accounts of judgments, particular intersubjective aspects of verbal behavior will become eligible for further philosophical analysis in order to generatively identify intersubjective categories of experience, grounded in the world.

So, insofar as meaning is the result of functional roles played by terms in a linguistic community; and insofar as being a member of a linguistic community presupposes that one is in a position to make (and think) subjunctively robust reports of ordinary empirical experiences; and, finally, insofar as our explication of such experience logically rests on a linguistically articulated conceptual understanding, then it follows that what the project of phenomenological philosophy provides is nothing other than a robust method for analyzing variations of experience according to ADPN semantics.

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Notes

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1. It is important to cursorily note here that ground-level empirical experiences and intentional acts are conflated on this kind of phenomenological position. My purpose is not to repeat well-argued territory but instead to summarize how phenomenological accounts of experience posit non-conceptual content.
2. I would like to point out that Dreyfus obviously has a weak knowledge of the rigorous analysis necessary for masterful chess. He states: "To sum up: In all domains, masters learn primarily not from analyzing their successes and failures but from the results of hundreds of thousands of actions. And what they learn are not critically justifiable concepts but sensitivity to subtler and subtler similarities and differences of perceptual patterns. Thus, learning changes, not the master's mind, but his world. If he could say anything at all about his reason for making a particular move, the master could only respond to the demand for a reason by saying 'I made the move because I was drawn to make it'." (p. 35) Every titled chess player that I have interacted with can, and often do, recount blunders and successes from tournaments that occurred years ago with detailed rationale.
3. Staiti has suggested that the idea of pre-predicative, non-conceptuality in Husserl is due to Landgrebe's misrepresentation of Husserl's ideas. Staiti says: "Understandably, this [distinction between conceptualization and pre-predicative experience]has lead some commentators to attribute to Husserl a kind of 'epistemological Rousseaunism' (Fellman 1983: 118), the dream of a primeval state of dwelling in the world prior to all language, culture, and science." However, it is clear throughout the *Crisis* as well as in *Ideas I* that Husserl is either insistent upon non-conceptual experience or is using the concept unintelligibly.
4. I point the reader here to Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Grammar* on expectation.

5. In his response to Dreyfus, McDowell points out that being disposed to stand at a particular distance to other members of a cultural community, one has acquired an embodied second nature.
6. Obviously it is beyond the scope of this writing to offer a full account of OED. See: Brandom, 2014.
7. This idea is explicated below.
8. Note that in linguistic systems that have different kinds of color-terms (e.g., value-based color systems like Mandarin), those terms simply play different functional roles than English color-terms. They demand a different role-semantic analysis.
9. This is done through Sellars' dot-quote notation. For a full, accessible account of Sellarsian role semantics, see Seibt, 1990.
10. Analogously, consider Footnote 7: the point is that color-terms play a different role in different language-games. They express *something different*.
11. Moreover, there is ample anthropological, philosophical, and psychological literature that demonstrates that our self-concept is liable to be different when we are conditioned with different linguistic practices. See Keller, 2018; Lindemann, 2016.
12. See Seibt (2000) for a discussion of how Sellars' methodological behaviorism differs from logical or psychological behaviorism.
13. But not in a truth-functional sense; rather, correct in terms of role. For example, we can follow Wittgenstein in saying that aesthetic terms (*beauty*, *skill*, *sensibility*) express something as being *correct* or not, depending on the linguistic practice the expression is uttered in.
14. I will not differentiate between the epistemologies of different phenomenological philosophers. This is because Pietersma has shown that later phenomenologists (Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) employ Husserlian phenomenology.