

Bergson, Lived Experience, and the Myth of the Given

1. The existence of which we are most assured and which we know best is unquestionably our own, for of every other object we have notions which may be considered external and superficial, whereas, of ourselves, our perception is internal and profound.
(Creative Evolution)

2. Either you keep to what consciousness presents to you or you have recourse to a conventional mode of representation. In the first case you will find a difference between S and S' like that between the shades of the rainbow, and not at all an interval of magnitude. In the second case you may introduce the symbol DS if you like, but it is only in a conventional sense that you will speak here of an arithmetical difference, and in a conventional sense, also, that you will assimilate a sensation to a sum.

[...]The mistake which Fechner made, as we have just seen, was that he believed in an interval between two successive sensations S and S', when there is simply a passing from one to the other and not a difference in the arithmetical sense of the word. But if the two terms between which the passing takes place could be given simultaneously, there would then be a contrast besides the transition; and although the contrast is not yet an arithmetical difference, it resembles it in a certain respect ; for the two terms which are compared stand here side by side as in a case of subtraction of two numbers.
(Time and Free Will)

3. But a true empiricism is the one which purposes to keep as close to the original itself as possible, to probe more deeply into its life, and by a kind of spiritual auscultation, to feel its soul palpitate; and this true empiricism is the real metaphysics. The work is one of extreme difficulty, because not one of the ready-made conceptions that thought uses for its daily operations can be of any use here (...) But an empiricism worthy of the name, an empiricism which works only according to measure, sees itself obliged to make an absolutely new effort for each new object it studies. It cuts for the object a concept appropriate to the object alone, a concept one can barely say is still a concept, since it applies only to that one thing.

(Introduction to Metaphysics)

4. The Inconsistent Triad

- A. x senses red sense content s entails x non-inferentially knows that s is red.
- B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.
- C. The ability to know facts of the form x is \emptyset is acquired.

A and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B.

Sellars will accept A and C but reject B.

5. Experiences

What is common to:

- a. Seeing that x, over there, is red [qualitative]
- b. Its looking to one that x over there is red [qualitative]
- c. Its looking to one that there is a red object over there [existential]?

Common conceptual content: *that x over there is red*

Common experiential content: *seeing that x over there is red*

What is the intrinsic character of the common experiential content given that

- in b) the object need not be red
- in c) there may be no object at all
- “red” is not a determinate particular but a generic determinable attributed to physical objects?

6. The 'ultimate homogeneity' of perceptible qualities, which, among other things, prevented identifying the perceptible qualities of physical objects with complex properties of systems of physical particles, stands equally in the way of identifying, rather than correlating, conscious sensations with the complex neural processes with which they are obviously connected.

We are confronted, therefore, by an antinomy, either, (a) the neurophysiological image is incomplete, i.e. and must be supplemented by new objects ('sense fields') which do have ultimate homogeneity and which somehow make their presence felt in the activity of the visual cortex as a system of physical particles; or, (b) the neurophysiological image is complete and the ultimate homogeneity of the sense qualities (and, hence, the sense qualities, themselves) is mere appearance in the very radical sense of not existing in the spatiotemporal world at all.

As long as the ultimate constituents of the scientific image are particles forming ever more complex systems of particles, we are inevitably confronted by the above choice. But the scientific image is not yet complete; we have not yet penetrated all the secrets of nature. And if it should turn out that particles instead of being the primitive entities of the scientific image could be treated as singularities in a space-time continuum which could be conceptually 'cut up' without significant loss -- in inorganic contexts, at least -- into interacting particles, then we would not be confronted at the level of neurophysiology with the problem of understanding the relation of sensory consciousness (with its ultimate homogeneity) to systems of particles. Rather, we would have the alternative of saying that although for many purposes the central nervous system can be construed without loss as a complex system of physical particles, when it comes to an adequate understanding of the relation of sensory consciousness to neurophysiological process, **we must penetrate to the non-particulate foundation of the particulate image, and recognize that in this non-particulate image the qualities of sense are a dimension of natural process which occurs only in connection with those complex physical processes which, when 'cut-up' into particles in terms of those features which are the least common denominators of physical process -- present in inorganic as well as organic processes alike -- become the complex system of particles which, in the current scientific image, is the central nervous system.**
(Sellars, Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man)