SENSE DATA AND THE ROMANTIC MYTH OF THE GIVEN

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Historically, "data" has been understood as grounding reasoning by providing its raw content, while also enabling further conclusions by offering a basis of assumed fact. What is "given"—the word "data" derives from the past participle of Latin *dare*, to give—can be taken for granted. This foundationalist view holds that data provide both the *prima materia* for reasoning and the premises from which subsequent inferences might be drawn. But recent scholarship, like the essays collected in *"Raw Data" Is an Oxymoron*, argues that "data" is never simply given: data depend on frames of reference, preselected criteria, and choices made by researchers. Data are theory-laden before they provide a foundation for subsequent analysis, affirm or challenge our beliefs, and warrant inferences.

While contemporary scholarship has complicated our understanding of data and illuminated how "data are units or morsels of information that in aggregate form the bedrock of modern policy decisions," it has neglected the broader philosophical framework of givenness that sustains the view of data "before the fact" (Gitelman and Jackson 1–2). Moreover, recent contextualist accounts of the term "data" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries risk sidestepping difficult and enduring philosophical questions of how empirical knowledge is possible. For example, Daniel Rosenberg treats data and the recourse to neutral information to support knowledge claims as a rhetorical strategy for countering charges of subjectivism by grounding arguments in discrete, independent units marshaled within specific rhetorical contexts. Unlike its "sister terms," facts and evidence, "the

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semantic function of data" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "is *specifically* rhetorical" (18). But the fundamental problem of the role sense data play in perception is not merely rhetorical and bears on central questions of human cognition. What is at stake is nothing less than a naturalist account of the human mind—how the mind and meaning are produced by physical processes rather than existing independently from material interactions, though without being strictly reducible to neurophysiology—and the validity of conceptual knowledge in relation to the material world.[1]

The question data pose is how something non-epistemic and value neutral, like a single sense impression, can give rise to, restrain, or bolster normative judgment. "If properties are simples," or discrete units of neutral information, Hilary Putnam explains, "then it is unintelligible how one property can 'entail' another property" (*Renewing Philosophy* 139). Putnam here identifies a central feature of Hume's skepticism: Hume's account of the imagistic duplication of sense impressions by ideas cannot account for how something absent in the original can be present in its double. As a result, Willem DeVries and Timm Triplett explain, classical empiricists such as Hume "suppose[d] that impressions were like ideas in their capacity to represent," because "this would simplify the explanation of the relation between impressions and ideas, and at the same time would allow impressions to be cognitive, so that the problem of generating knowledge from noncognitive sources would not have to be posed" (56). Foundational data thus can be understood as posing the problem of how something can be known non-inferentially—that is, immediately, in and as itself—while simultaneously providing a basis for general claims that depend on previous experience, education, and conceptual understanding.

The mid-twentieth-century American philosopher Wilfrid Sellars called the pervasive notion that complex forms of human understanding can be analyzed into immediate, discrete units of information "the Myth of the Given." The framework of givenness that Sellars challenges goes beyond a critique of sense data empiricism to include any philosophical account of mind that rests on intuitively known or intrinsically meaningful experience to the neglect of acquired conceptual capacities.[2] In his dense and now classic essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," Sellars writes, "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* 76). The priority of the "logical space of reasons" over "empirical

description"—observation reports of perceptual states—suggests that data are always the product of conceptualization rather than its neutral contents, and therefore socially mediated and subject to normative assessment: of "justifying and being able to justify" one's judgments. Sellars's "logical space of reasons" has affinities with Aristotle's "second nature": a space of cultural and linguistic habits that through education and acculturation becomes equal to what is seen as original human nature (McDowell, *Mind and World* 84). According to Sellars, all empirical statements are subject to evaluation that carries the charge of "ought," and are therefore tacitly normative. In "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," he writes, "There is no thinking apart from common standards of correctness and relevance, which relate what *I do* think to what *anyone ought* to think" (16–17). Accordingly, normative standards of "correctness and relevance" are not additions to private, first-person experience, but represent the conditions for such conceptually rich experience in the first place.

But this view of data as normatively constructed encounters a problem. How are concepts and propositions answerable to objects and to independently existing empirical invariants if data are conceptual all the way down? Quill Kukla and Mark Lance explain that "the contents of experience must license inferences, rule out and justify various beliefs, rationalize actions and so forth. Otherwise the contents of receptivity will not rationally constrain actions or beliefs, but merely bully them through causal force, or leave them unconstrained and 'spinning in the void'" ("Intersubjectivity and Receptive Experience" 22–23). In other words, the philosophical problem of data is that of how epistemology, understood as "the enquiry into how we *know* what there is," can intersect with the ontological and metaphysical "investigation of *what* there is," and thus provide for how mind and world are joined together (Brassier, "Concepts and Objects" 47).

Romanticism is often construed as a repudiation of the mechanistic, sense-data account of experience. That is, romantic aesthetics and its closely linked philosophy of mind have frequently been understood as repudiating the myth of the given—the bottom-up account of cognition attributed to the Enlightenment and resurrected by the logical positivists—by prioritizing the mind's innate spontaneity and creativity over and against receptive constraint, education, and judgment.[3] Nevertheless, in this essay, I demonstrate that William Wordsworth's thought subscribes to the myth of the given. In particular, I draw on lively debates in contemporary philosophy of mind and revisit Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (1807) and other writings to suggest that

Wordsworth embraces a position contemporary philosophers might describe as "coherentist conceptualism." This position holds that "thought and the world must be understood together" (McDowell, *Having the World in View* 143). But it nevertheless perpetuates one version of the myth of the given by wishing for a world that is already conceptually and categorially fitted to the human mind. Wordsworth's reflections on the mind's dominance over what it perceives are in frequent tension with his affirmation of the autonomy of things.[4] The "Immortality Ode" represents Wordsworth's effort at finding a middle path, one that leads to the conclusion that for the philosophical mind the divisions between subject and object drop away when viewed through the principle of sufficient reason—the regulative belief that the physical world is intrinsically available to understanding and fitted to human understanding because both are suffused by the same intellectual substance.

I. CLASSICAL EMPIRICISM AND RECEPTIVITY

"Data" is not a word used by the classical empiricists. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume talk about receptivity, passively received sense impressions, and various "takings-in" of what is "given" by sensibility for the higher operations of the mind.[5] But reading these empiricists in terms of sensory "data" came to be commonplace in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century interpretations of empiricism, which drove the development of logical positivism and its reinvigoration of empiricism after the "dogmatic slumbers" of nineteenth-century absolute idealism.[6] A. C. Fraser, for example, in his 1890 introduction to the philosophy of Locke, writes, "Locke thus reduces the entire certain knowledge of sensible things that man is capable of to one's present *data of sense*, and one's memory of *past data*" (Fraser 186; my emphasis).[7] The word "data" is Fraser's import into eighteenth-century texts. In English, "data" was used initially in mathematical and theological contexts, whereas its semantic equivalents "given" and "received" occur throughout empiricist psychology.[8] Subsequent translations and commentaries increasingly incorporated the language of "sense data" and "the data of experience" to describe the passively received, nonconceptual foundation of empirical knowledge posited by classical empiricists.

Later commentators such as Fraser resurrected empiricist foundationalism to ground complex forms of human understanding like natural science in simple, repeated observables, thus safeguarding the objectivity of concepts through their analyzability into discrete data points. Similarly,

early modern philosophy of mind asserted the continuity of the simple and complex, and developed a language for analyzing phenomena into their incontrovertible foundations from which everything in human mental life—concepts, morals, metaphysics—scales up. As Erasmus Darwin puts it, the question sense data pose is, "How loves, and tastes, and sympathies commence / From evanescent notices of sense? / How from the yielding touch and rolling eyes / The piles immense of human science rise?" (*The Temple of Nature* 3: 43–46).[9] Darwin finds precedent in Hobbes, who in the *Leviathan*'s brief opening section, "Of Sense," writes, "The cause of Sense, is the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper to each sense" (9). The sensorium receives what is given from the external world by corpuscular motion impacting upon it. But, as Hobbes is quick to point out, because "motion produceth nothing but motion," what we call "sense," or the qualitative experience of seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching is a function of "fancy" (10). What humans encounter in experience is not the chaotic impact of colorless, quality-free corpuscles—the "raw data" of experience—but intermediate "ideas" whose relationship to their material cause remains problematic. "Their appearance to us is fancy, the same waking, that dreaming. . . . For if those colors, and sounds, were in the bodies, or objects that cause them, they could not be severed from them, as by glasses, and in echoes by reflection, we see they are; where we know the thing we see, is in one place; the appearance, in another" (10). In the opening of *Leviathan*, as well as in his *Optics*, Hobbes theorizes what analytic philosophers call "qualia": the qualitative dimension of experience that is both radically privative, because sundered from its external cause, and subjective, because occurring prior to and ostensibly providing the foundation for conceptualization.[10] For Hobbes, human experience deals in ideal simulations fabricated by the fancy, whose relation to the external world is uncertain. These "appearance[s]" aggregate over time, providing the content for communicable—and objective, in the limited sense that they pertain to objects—ideas about things like color and texture.

For Hobbes, the fancy translates brute sense impressions into experience, substituting a conceptualized product for "what there is" through metaphors of duplication: echoing and mirroring. Similarly, in Locke's *Essay*, the mind passively takes in sensation and is "fitted to receive the impressions made on it," which provide "the groundwork whereon to build all those notions which ever he shall have naturally in this world." "In this part," Locke explains, "the *Understanding* is meerly [*sic*] *passive*" (118). The simple ideas generated from sense impressions mirror the outside world,

letting an image into the mind on the model of a *camera obscura*. Locke psychologizes the inductive ascent from particular impressions and simple ideas to complex phenomena, refashioning it "from a procedure for discovering the laws of nature" by deriving them from repeated instances, "into a way of explaining the structure of human thought and consciousness" (Porter 40).[11] As with Hobbes, there is a problem with origins in Locke's account of cognition.[12] The image let into the *camera obscura* presumably captures features of the external world, but by intervening between the subject and their direct contact with reality, Locke's imagistic "ideas" displace what he calls the "substratum, or support of those ideas" (Locke 95). By positing duplication of the external world in the form of internal representations, viewed by a homuncular subject of the mind, Locke shifts the focus of his epistemology away from the "substratum" of representations toward how humans come to synthesize them into general categories.

Hobbes and Locke understand the mind in terms of internal representations of an outside world. For them, and the empiricists who followed, experience is something that happens inside the mind and deals with mental representations. This mimetic or "mirror" theory of experience provided one half of the organizing image of M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Abrams's literary and intellectual history tells how a view of the mind as reproducing images of the outside world, in analogy with a mirror, was displaced by an expressivistic one, intimations of which can already be seen in Hobbes's claim that qualitative experience is a product of fancy. Abrams's classic account identifies a shift in poetry and aesthetics from descriptive naturalism toward "Genius": those qualities of creativity, spontaneity, and imagination that gradually displaced "the opposing attributes of judgment, learning, and artful restraints" in aesthetic theory (Abrams 21). The expressivist theory supporting the Romantic account of creativity privileged mind over receptivity. In Coleridge's summation, "The pith of my system is to make the senses out of the mind—not the mind out of the senses, as Locke did" (179).[13]

The expressivist theory of art develops key conclusions of classical empiricism, as Abrams's exhaustive examples often show, and elaborates latent premises within empiricist accounts of mind and perception. If the world cannot be known immediately because the medium of knowing is already conceptual—or ideas, in Locke's terms—then it follows that the focus of philosophical activity should be on those ideas rather than on the world as given in sensibility that they supersede. The substitution of ideas for external objects in classical empiricism thus paves the way for

versions of absolute idealism—the notion that reality consists entirely of concepts. The shift from a metaphor of mirroring to one of illuminating tracks changes "in the concept of the role played by the mind in perception" such that "the conditions of the given world" cease to matter to an account of art (Abrams 57, 48). Yet where Abrams sees revolution between the Romantics and their Enlightenment forebears, there is more ubiquitous continuity.[14] Rather than reversing eighteenth-century accounts of the mind in perception, Romantic critics pursued the consequences of the dissociation of human experience from the shared empirical world that Thomas Reid called the "Way of Ideas"—the pervasive notion that experience involves mental representations rather than the world itself.[15] An extended effort to think through the "entire framework of givenness" (Sellars, *EPM* 14) unites Romantic and Enlightenment views of experience around explaining how thought and world intersect. At stake in the myth of the given is not just sense-data theories of experience but the notion of a propositionless stratum in human perception presupposed by skeptical empiricists and dogmatic rationalists alike.[16] Uniting both is the fundamental question how receptive sensibility (or sense data, which passively register neutral information about the external world) combines with the spontaneity of understanding (or concepts, in Kantian terms), hinging on whether sense data provide the raw materials for human cognition and whether such data play a meaningful role in recognizably human experience.

The uncertain relation of conceptual contents to the outside world in classical empiricism motivated early forms of conceptualism such as Bishop Berkeley's. In an argument that has become known in analytic circles as the "gem," Berkeley equates being with perception. As Ray Brassier summarizes the central argument of *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley's first proposition consists of a tautology—"You cannot conceive of a mind-independent reality without conceiving of it"—from which Berkeley derives a nontautological consequence: "Therefore, you cannot conceive of a mind-independent reality" (Brassier, "Concepts and Objects" 58). "From the indubitable premise that 'One cannot think or perceive something without thinking or perceiving it,' Berkeley goes on to draw the dubious conclusion that 'Things cannot exist without being thought or perceived.'"[17] The resulting position dissolves "things as conceived" and "things *simpliciter* (i.e., physical objects)" by replacing mind/world dualism with conceptual monism—the idea that the material world is uniformly constituted by a single, indivisible intelligent substance intrinsically knowable by rational agents (Brassier 57).[18] Berkeley dissolves the

tension in Hobbes and Locke between mere receptivity (sense impressions) and imagistic "ideas" derived from them, but at the cost of the world existing independently of anyone's thinking it. Berkeley solves a central dilemma in empiricist epistemology by eliminating the role that Locke ascribes to sense data of standing in representational relation to noncognitive particulars. For Berkeley, then, the mind becomes the primary source of order because its own conceptual products are the only thing intuitively knowable.

II. WORDSWORTH'S COHERENTISM

Overcoming the dichotomies of mind and world, and the related antinomies of understanding/sensibility, spontaneity/receptivity, and activity/passivity was a central goal of Romantic criticism, whether via the esemplastic imagination's fusion of subject and object or in Wordsworth's marriage of "the discerning intellect . . . to this goodly universe" ("Preface" to *The Excursion* 52–53).[19] Similarly, resolving mind/world dualism remains a perennial concern in philosophy of mind, connecting contemporary accounts of cognition to central questions of Romanticism: is the mind active, or passive in experience? How are thoughts related to empirical reality? Do value and meaning (or what philosophers call "intentionality") exist independently of human minds, or are they projections onto an otherwise meaningless material world?

Wordsworth resisted fully arrogating the receptive capacities of human mind to reason. For the most part, he avoids the Berkeleyan "abyss of idealism" that in his youth threatened to dissolve the empirical world into concepts.[20] For example, Wordsworth writes, "our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings" ("Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* 79), suggesting that "feeling" comes first and provides the basis for thought and subsequent modification and direction by thought. Similarly, as his hierarchy of "the powers requisite for the production of poetry" in the 1815 preface shows, first and foundationally comes "the ability to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer" (*Prose* 3: 26). By defending receptive experience, Wordsworth resists absolute idealism.

But sensory reception is regulated by "the higher qualities of the mind" that recast receptive experience "as reacted upon by [the poet's] own mind" (3: 26), turning what was initially construed as a cause of mental activity

into its effect by investing the given of sensibility with normative significance. "The appropriate business of poetry," he writes, "her appropriate employment, her privilege and her *duty*, is to treat things not as they *are*, but as they *appear*; not as they exist in themselves, but as they *seem* to exist to the *senses* and to the *passions*" (*Prose* 3: 63). The hierarchy, from brute sense impression up to reason's constitutive power, partly derives from David Hartley's materialistic account of sensation and mental activity, but Wordsworth places greater emphasis on reason's top-down control over sensation—how things "*seem* . . . to the *senses* and to the *passions*"—than Hartley's mechanistic account allows.[21] Construing the outside world as flowing from the subject (rather than imprinting itself upon the subject, as in the classic version of the myth of the given) apotheosizes the rational mind by making it the shining source of light and order in the universe: as in Wordsworth's "auxiliar light" that "came from my mind, which on the setting sun / Bestowed new splendor" (*Prelude* 1805: 2.387–89). The subject posited in both classical empiricist and Romantic idealist accounts peers not directly into the world but through a veil of ideas and discovers itself refracted through the data of sense impression.

In dominant empiricist accounts, sense data—what Hume calls impressions—play the dual role of both "cognitive representations" of particular things in the world and thus a product of conceptualization, and "those (noncognitive) items themselves," effectively "fitting" mind and world together (DeVries and Triplett 57). In these accounts, sense data provide the vanishing point at which mind and world merge. But the imagined reconciliation of noncognitive things and cognitively rich representations disguises their incommensurability. Wordsworth's acuity lies in his recognition that sensory representations cannot be both neutral and conceptually laden at the same time; thus he places emphasis on how what is given in sense already exhibits proto-conceptual characteristics.

For Wordsworth, the coalescence of subject and object, and the access of the poetic mind to "the life of things" derives from their shared rational structure. The "motion and . . . spirit, that impels / All thinking things, all objects of all thought, / And rolls through all things" integrates agent and object and dissolves the mind/world dichotomy with the solvent of a rational universe ("Tintern Abbey" 101–03). Shortly after writing these lines, Wordsworth wrote, "All beings have their properties which spread, / Beyond themselves, a power by which they make / Some other being conscious of their life" ("There Is an Active Principle" 6–7). The "active principle" theorized here, like the "motion and spirit" of "Tintern," transcends

the mind/world binary because it suffuses all creation with intentionality—the quality of value, aboutness, and meaning often used to distinguish sentient from nonsentient processes.[22] The poet, Wordsworth says, is "a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe" ("Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* 85). The premise that "similar volitions and passions" as are found in the poet also animate the physical universe depends on a version of the principle of sufficient reason that imputes a rational, intrinsically knowable structure to being.[23] Some transcendent "Intelligence which governs all" ("Preface" to *The Excursion* 22) secures the fitness of the mind and the world, such that Wordsworth can fend off the abyss of idealism while at the same time countering the mind's "subjugation" (Fenwick note to the "Intimations" ode, *Poetical Works* 4: 463) by externalities: "Feeling has to him imparted strength, / And—powerful in all sentiments of grief, / Of exultation, fear and joy—his mind, / Even as an agent of the one great mind / Creates, creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance with the works / Which it beholds" (*Prelude* 1805: 2.269–75). Because the individual mind issues from "the one great mind," as do all things, they share an intelligible structure so that the mind is both "creator and receiver both, / Working but in alliance" with the external world. Wordsworth places faith in the principle of sufficient reason to guarantee the compatibility of mind and world, finding both suffused by "the spirit of life" that ensures their consilience.[24]

But this fitness remains a matter of faith: as the "Immortality Ode" makes clear, Wordsworth's mind / world coherentism navigates precariously between the Scylla of sensuous determinism and the Charybdis of absolute idealism. As Noel Jackson has observed, Wordsworth's epistemology is "suspended between a monist or even materialist understanding of the mind as dependent upon external impressions and an idealist conception of the mind as capable of creating the objects that it perceives" (33). The dialectically structured ode construes poetic maturity as balancing an acquiescence to worldliness with an enduring dedication to visionary experience originating in "immaterial nature" (*Poetical Works* 4: 463). From the perspective of maturity, Wordsworth no longer fears the "abyss of idealism" but instead a "subjugation of an opposite character": the heteronomous determination of mind by material influence (4: 463).

To reconcile the duality of extrinsic determination and absolute idealism, Wordsworth develops what Sellars calls an "adverbial" account of

sense experience. Typical accounts of perception depend on an "act / object" dichotomy. For instance, the observation "A sensation of red" posits an act of mind ("sensation") that has an external attribute in the perceptual field ("red") for its intentional object. There is an assumption of directedness: the intentional object is the quality red, but "red" is already a concept depending on acquired conceptual capacities such that it is unclear how the mere sensation could entail the concept. In contrast, whereas "of" is commonly used in these cases to convey intentional contents, the "of" in the example, "a sensation of pain" does not posit a "sensory-cognitive continuum" (O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars* 69) because the intentional object ("pain") belongs to the subject in a manner analogous to the example "the thoughts of a man." Such a shift in the role of the word "of" changes the act / object dichotomy, such that the sensation belongs to and is already structured by the conceptual category that previously was treated as external object. This "adverbial" view of sensation—for example, "sensing redly"—integrates mind and world.

An adverbial account of sense experience aligns with Wordsworth's view of "man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting qualities of nature" (Wordsworth, "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* 87–88). In the first, idealizing stanza of the "Immortality Ode," Wordsworth describes "The earth, and every common sight, . . . Apparell'd in celestial light, / The glory and the freshness of a dream" (2–5). The dreamlike "glory and freshness" modify "celestial light," and as Lionel Trilling observed, the echo of "glory" in the later lines "there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth" (18) identifies "celestial light" with the mind of the poet illuminating "meadow, grove, and stream" (1).[25] The youth experiences the world's appearance dreamily, in a distinctive, adverbial form of seeming that Wordsworth elsewhere calls "the first / Poetic spirit of our human life" (*Prelude* 1805: 2.275–76). By hinting at the superficiality of this coalescence, the verbs "seem" and "apparell'd" foreshadow the disenchantment that comes later. But for now the dreamlike quality of the experience is not an external object: the youth encounters the world as already part of himself, already conceptualized in accordance with his receptive capacities. The dreamily appearing objects of "every common sight," where the act / object distinction falls away, is ephemeral—"It is not now as it has been of yore" (6)—and the opening stanza introduces the poem's nostalgia for a feeling of the mind seamlessly encountering itself in and through a world made for it, already "apparell'd" for the poet's apperception. But the

"visionary gleam" (56) which the poem goes on to mourn is not irrecoverable. Instead, the movement of the poem from youth to maturity tracks how the determinations of sense and habit are reconciled to the "visionary gleam" of poetic inspiration in the "primal sympathy" (184) of the "philosophic mind" (189).

The second stanza begins with a series of deliberately simplistic, primarily visual observation reports that invest the setting with anthropomorphic qualities, like the moon looking with delight "round her when the heavens are bare" (13). The repeated structure of subject, helping verb, and attribute creates simple visual descriptions, the pattern of which is broken by the "Now" (19) of the third stanza where the priority of vision is ceded to sound. The "thought of grief" (22) that disrupts the youth's encounter with the normatively charged external world intimates mortality, calling the poet back from idealistic indulgence and creating tension with the intuitions of beauty and spiritual order the first two stanzas detail. Following on the adverbial fusion of mind and world, the third stanza continues the confusion of outside and inside. The origin of the "timely utterance" (23) that relieves the "thought of grief" visited upon the poet is obscure: is it the poet's incipient voice emerging, or is the "timely utterance" external, like the trumpeting cataracts "from the steep" (25) and the "Echoes through the mountains" (27) with which it is apposed? Here the outside world both echoes the poet's emotional state, but also counters it, offering resistance to the "grief of mine" that does "the season wrong" (26). The noisy cataracts merge seamlessly into the "call" (36) of the creatures communing with one another heard intelligibly by the poet. As the fourth stanza unfolds, the sounds of nature are merged with those of children pulling flowers and the babe in "his mother's arm," all within "a single Field" that traverses human and nonhuman realms: "Both of them speak of something that is gone: / The Pansy at my feet / Doth the same tale repeat: / Whither is fled the visionary gleam?" (49–56). The progress from unintelligible noise to meaningful sound tracks the emergence of language, but the structure of the poem suggests that the natural sounds were themselves already meaningful to the philosophic mind even if their import was missed by the immature poet. The synthesis that emerges gradually through the poem's third and fourth stanzas calls the poet back from the overt idealism embraced in the first two stanzas, such that the world comes to provide not merely a receptive surface for his projections, but a participant in, and even correction to, his mental state.

Mortality, as the emblem of material constraint, repeatedly breaks in upon the poem's autoerotic idealism. Both Trilling and Helen Vendler view the interruptions of death in terms of a loss that it is the purpose of the poem to remediate. As Trilling paraphrases, alluding to "Elegiac Stanzas," "The loss: 'A power is gone which nothing can restore.' The gain: 'A deep distress hath humanized my soul" (137).[26] The reality of human finitude forecloses the "visionary gleam," while at the same time providing for its recovery. The structure here is dialectical, such that the loss of idealism is converted into the coherence of mind and world as the poet comes to realize that both are encompassed within a comprehensive, preexisting harmony. While the "abyss of idealism" fades, the world itself becomes visible as a participant in the poet's mental activity. The "shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing boy" (67–68), but his task as a mature poet is to balance the inevitable inheritance of a world of cultural encrustations and extrinsic determinations with his own original creative capacity. While through young adulthood the sensuous pleasures of the material world—that "subjugation of an opposite character"—dominate, the project of the poem is not to recover youthful idealism so much as to wed receptivity and spontaneity. Rather than a return to the "simple creed / Of childhood," he raises his song "of thanks and praise" to "those obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things, / Fallings from us, vanishings; / Blank misgivings of a Creature / Moving about in worlds not realiz'd" (139–48). He repudiates the "benediction" (137) earlier poured on the idealism of youth and raises instead a song of praise for dynamic synthesis.

The "obstinate questionings" are "of sense and outward things," in a more ambiguous mode than the earlier adverbial *ofs* that describe the poet's youthful perception. Whereas in the earlier instance, the *ofs* suggested the unity of mind and world, here they raise the prospect of a transcendent, spectatorial subject skeptically scrutinizing the given "of sense and outward things." It is less clear here if it is an assimilative "of" such that "sense and outward things" are the intentional object of the questions. The ambiguity is central to determining whether the poem is ultimately elegiac in its account of how loss is converted to gain, as Vendler contends, or whether it moves ineluctably from irrecoverable, youthful idealism toward naturalistic disenchantment. If the lost idealism the poem posits cannot be recovered by locating ideas in the world itself, the "of" in "obstinate questionings / Of sense and outward things," is assimilative and posits an independently acting mind, the intentional objects of which remain

in a remote external world, under constant suspicion and doubt—a conclusion that leads both to solipsism and to the triumph of those sublime "High instincts, before which our mortal Nature / Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised" (149–50). But this conclusion is unsettled by the subsequent assertion that doubting "of sense and outward things, . . . Are yet the fountain light of all our day, / Are, yet a master light of all our seeing," connecting doubt to the celestial light of the first stanza as its essential condition—a "seeing doubtfully" (154–55). The subversion of the outside world becomes the ground for its return, and the idealism "of that immortal sea / Which brought us hither" (166–67) prepares for the renewal of song and "the tabor's sound" (173) as the poem moves toward its conclusion. There is a residue of loss and a potentially stoic "strength in what remains behind / In the primal sympathy" (183–84) but the poem ends with the triumph neither of the absolute subject—those "high instincts"—nor with that subject's heteronomous determination by the external world. Instead, "primal sympathy" suggests neither the self nor the world provides the foundation for experience, but rather an endless succession of metaphorical substitutions and beliefs that justify further beliefs all partaking of the same "filial bond / Of Nature that connect[s] him with the world" (Prelude 1805: 2.263–64).

Wordsworth places faith in the principle of sufficient reason to guarantee the compatibility of mind and world. But the "Ode" is fundamentally speculative: Wordsworth presents its vision as a hope to counter both the disenchantment of the natural world by scientific advance, and the severance of experience from shared reality. For Wordsworth—as for subsequent philosophers equally invested in reconciling naturalism and normativity—coherentism presents the tentative promise of a middle path between skeptical empiricism and dogmatic rationalism. At the end of the "Immortality Ode," thought and world must be taken together: "The Clouds that gather round the setting sun / Do take a sober coloring from an eye / That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality" (199–201). The meditative placidity of Wordsworth's poetry speaks to his faith that the world is made for human understanding because both partake of the same "primal," preexisting rational structure.[27] But there is no guarantee that things-in-themselves are available to thought.

III. THE MYTH OF THE CATEGORIAL GIVEN

For Wordsworth, the rational structure of the universe supports the conviction that objects in the world exhibit conceptual characteristics *a priori*, as

though made for human understanding: "The external world is fitted to the Mind" ("Preface" to *The Excursion*, 68). This approach to experience avoids one canonical form of the myth of the given by rejecting the notion of neutral data as epistemically effective, as generating cognitive states from noncognitive ones. But the way Wordsworth imagines the world fitted to the poetic mind and the conviction this fitting inspires—that the world and the poet are suffused by the same form-giving, spiritual force—incline him to minimize the friction generated in the encounter of mind and world. The resulting loss of contact between human concepts and nonhuman reality yields what O'Shea calls the myth of the "Categorial Given"—a more insidious version of the myth closely connected with Romantic and post-Kantian philosophy.[28] As Sellars points out, any account of mind that assumes this "fitting and fitted"—in Blake's mocking paraphrase of Wordsworth's philosophy (Blake 667)—by annexing a propositionless stratum of experience to a normative one remains under the sway of the myth of the given. "To reject the Myth of the Given," Sellars contends, "is to reject the idea that the categorial structure of the world—if it has a categorial structure—imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax" (Sellars, "Foundations for a Metaphysics of Pure Process" 12). Wordsworth's view resembles contemporary accounts of the co-constitution of thought and receptive sensibility that place faith in the world's categorial structure.[29] His mature theory anticipates contemporary conceptualists such as John McDowell and Robert Brandom by denying a role in perception to what these philosophers call "nonconceptual content" and avoiding what Wordsworth would call the mind's "subjugation" to noncognitive things.

But nonconceptual content can forestall a too-aggressive constructionism—the view that all human knowledge is mediated by historically contingent conceptual arrays whose truth content is defined by internal relations rather than relations to the world, a prevalent view that renders matters of fact relative, and thus treats scientific knowledge as just another framework.[30] It is possible to acknowledge the historical character of human knowledge while also preserving the causally effective, constraining role in empirical knowledge for nonconceptual information from the outside world (rather than epistemically rich sense data). As Danielle Macbeth explains, "If all we are answerable to is the tribunal of experiences," meaning the historically and normatively constructed space of reasons and judgment, "if we are not answerable to things as they *are*, however we experience them to be, then we are not answerable in any

way that counts as rational" (178). It is the task of conceptual frameworks, foremost among them the "self-correcting enterprise" of empirical science, to enhance and refine the capacity for primitive mapping that humans share with nonhuman animals (*EPM* 170).[31] Sense experience, Macbeth explains, "is our first sensory mode of cognitive access to reality, one that can be supplemented, though never supplanted, by the subsequent, non-sensory, purely rational mode of cognitive access we achieve in the sciences" (178). One consequence of construing all understanding as socially mediated, normative, and detached from the governance of empirical objects is that no framework has privilege or priority. Various forms of antiscience, relativism, and denialism result from severing human conceptual systems from the causally effective, mind-independent world because if the world itself is displaced by concepts of it, the priority of science as the "sophisticated extension" of "empirical knowledge" is sacrificed to the dominance of historically contingent conceptual arrays (*EPM* 170).

Whether there is a role for nonconceptual content, or that which is simply, causally "given" in human encounters with the world remains as controversial for contemporary philosophy of mind as it was for empiricist and Romantic philosophy. The epistemological focus of post-Enlightenment philosophy has repeatedly struggled to account for how human conceptual schemas might intersect with reality without recourse to some version of data foundationalism. The resulting silence around the nonconceptual sources of empirical knowledge of a world not of human making has resulted in the wholesale reduction of sense experience to normative and ideological determination.

Poetry is always returning us to the world of experience, and experience has a historical character.[32] However, to presume that experience only has a historical character exhausted by contingent conceptual systems is to miss one of the most important things that literature does. By asking readers to set aside commitments and historical determinations, poetry draws attention to and challenges the historical construction of experience, intervening in the logical space of reasons to demand the answerability of claims made therein to the recalcitrant, nonconceptual world. Experience is not reducible to normative conceptual systems, just as those conceptual systems themselves cannot be analyzed into epistemically rich but preconceptual data. Experience is historical—and thus conceptual and epistemological—but to claim that it is theory-laden all the way down is to embrace the kind of conceptualism that contemporary philosophers of mind might join Wordsworth in conjuring to account for the mind/world relation. For

Wordsworth, the integrity of mind and world afforded artistic resources to counter the pervasive disenchantment he saw as a primary symptom of modernity and the advance of the sciences. He was not an absolute idealist, and human responsibility to a world not of human making remained central to his view of experience. But one consequence of some versions of philosophical conceptualism, as Sellars's own shifting association with that school of thought indicates, is the decoupling of the arena of normative and conceptually structured experience from the way things are independently of anyone's thinking them. At stake, ultimately, is the very possibility of criticism and the human capacity to assess whether what we say is true and correct ourselves when our judgment errs.

NOTES

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1. For a useful discussion of philosophical naturalism, see De Caro and Macarthur. By engaging these questions surrounding data from the perspective of philosophy of mind rather than social science, this article builds on developments in cognitive literary studies, including the work of Kramnick and Savarese.

2. Sellars's account of the myth of the given, canonically described in "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind" (1956) and variously reformulated throughout his career, has profoundly influenced modern philosophy of mind, generating many different interpretations, roughly divisible between so-called right-wing and left-wing Sellarsians. They agree that the myth should be avoided but differ on what exactly it entails and how one can defend empirical knowledge without falling victim to givenness. See Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, hereafter cited as *EPM*. Some left-wing Sellarsians (like John McDowell) have claimed that by defending the notion of "nonconceptual content," Sellars smuggles the given into his account of mind and perception, and they reject as positivist scientism his naturalist claim that mental states must be substantiated in neurophysiology. For a broad overview of Sellars's philosophy and its reception, see James O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars*, and for a detailed analysis of the various forms the myth of the given takes in Sellars's philosophy, see O'Shea's "What *Is* the Myth of the Given." For examples of left-wing Sellarsian philosophy, which emphasizes the constitutive role of the "logical space of reasons" in perception, see Rorty; McDowell, *Mind and World*; and Brandom, *Making It Explicit*. For an example of the scientifically realist, right-wing version of Sellars, see J. Rosenberg and Rottschaeffer.

3. For a critique of Romantic notions of genius and its figuring of both art and cognition in internalist terms, see Staten. For a critique of Staten's account of Romanticism and argument for the enduring importance of judgment and practice to Romantic critical theory, see Brown's response to *Techne Theory*, "The Myth of the Romantic Myth and the Place of

Poiesis." For a broader philosophical challenge to the idealized version of "mechanical causality" in terms of an efficient, push-pull mechanism, see the essays collected in Groff and Greco, particularly Mumford, and Cartwright and Pemberton.

4. On Wordsworth's affirmation of the autonomy of things, see Potkay. Potkay refutes the "Romantic trope of mind's sovereignty over the empirical world" (396), but does so on the basis of a Spinozistic "leveling of human and nonhuman" according to which all "things"—his keyword in the essay—are already normatively charged. In "Tintern Abbey," he argues, "we are distinguished as or among 'thinking things,' and yet both ourselves and the objects we make through thinking are joined in the anteriority and comprehensiveness of 'all things'" (399). By investing the nonconceptual world with thought and intention, Potkay's ethics of things is fundamentally vitalist. For a critical response to the political valence of recent "vitalist" criticism, see Taylor.

5. In the *Treatise on Human Understanding*, Hume writes, "All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call impressions and idea. The difference between these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations . . . this priority of the impressions is an equal proof that our impressions are the causes of our ideas, not our ideas of our impressions" (49–53). By emphasizing "force" and the mechanical impact "upon the mind," Hume is elaborating on Locke's assertion that "since there appear not to be any *Ideas* in the Mind, before the Senses have conveyed any in, I conceive that *Ideas* in the Understanding, are coeval with *Sensation*; which is such an Impression or Motion, made in some part of the Body, as produces some Perception in the Understanding" (117).

6. Bertrand Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World*, expanding on his discussion of sense data in *Problems of Philosophy*, attempted to reestablish empiricism on the foundation of modern physics. See Russell, *Knowledge* 72, 110.

7. Fraser's 1894 edition of Locke's *Essay* repeatedly glosses Locke's discussion of the "substratum" of qualitative experience (*Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 108) and of material substance with the phrase "data of sense," (436) "the data of external and internal sense" (lxv), and "data of experience." D. Rosenberg points out that the word is increasingly interpolated into texts of classical empiricism, from Bacon's *New Organon* to Newton's *Principia* starting in the 1730s.

8. See D. Rosenberg 16.

9. For an analysis of Erasmus Darwin and Enlightenment sciences of sensation, see Jackson 35.

10. For a discussion of "qualia" and the problems it poses for a theory of normative conceptualization, see Dennett.

11. See also Abrams 159.

12. How material, external causes can give rise to mental events that do not share their material substratum remains a stubborn problem for philosophy of mind. This question is a subset of questions pertaining to what David Chalmers termed "the Hard Problem of Consciousness." How neurophysiology gives rise to qualitative experience has been the subject of extensive debate given influential shape by Thomas Nagel. See Chalmers and Nagel.

13. Kant makes a similar claim about how Locke "sensitivized the concepts of understanding," or oversensualized the mind, while Leibniz "intellectualized the appearances" in *Critique of Pure Reason* (372).

14. As Perry points out, much of the enduring strength of Abrams's encyclopedic book is his fidelity to his examples, which often point toward greater continuity across Enlightenment and Romantic accounts of experience than his schematic opposition would suppose.

15. A central feature of Abrams's argument is that mimetic and expressivist accounts of experience (loosely mapped onto empiricist and rationalist theories of mind) are irreconcilable. Even critics of Abrams like John Hayden preserve this deeply ingrained assumption; see Hayden, "Wordsworth and Coleridge" 78. Sellars's critique of "the entire framework of givenness" challenges the conventional opposition of empiricism and rationalism, mirror and lamp. Catherine Legg examines the connections between Reid's direct realism and Sellars's "critical-direct realism," mediated by the nineteenth-century American pragmatist C. S. Peirce; see Legg. Reid first advanced his critique of the "way of ideas" in *Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* and followed up with *Essays on the Active Powers of Man*. Ryan Nichols examines the connections between Reid's direct reason and contemporary philosophy of perception in *Thomas Reid's Theory of Perception*.

16. Sellars appropriates the phrases "skeptical empiricism" and "dogmatic rationalism" from Kant, who has Locke, Berkeley, and Hume in mind on the empiricist side, and Leibniz and Christian Wolff on the rationalist. On Kant's gradual turn from Wolffian rationalism—less punctuated than his reported sudden awakening from his "dogmatic slumbers," see Kuehn.

17. The philosopher David Stove coined the phrase "the gem," and summarizes the argument as follows: "1 We can immediately perceive the sensible qualities of physical objects. 2 We can immediately perceive nothing but our own ideas. So, 3 The sensible qualities of physical objects are nothing but ideas. 4 Ideas can exist only in a mind. So, 5 The sensible qualities of physical objects can exist only in a mind. 6 A physical object is nothing but its qualities. So, 7 Physical objects can exist only in a mind" (Stove 144).

18. Brassier explains that "conceptual idealism," like Berkeley's, but also that of contemporary conceptualists McDowell and Brandom, "emphasizes the normative valence of knowing at the cost of eliding the metaphysical autonomy of the in-itself" ("Concepts and Objects" 49). Brassier, along with O'Shea (2007; 2010; 2021) and Sachs (2014; 2018), see the priority placed on the normative by "left-wing Sellarsians" as incapable of providing an account of the answerability of concepts to reality and thus unable to defend scientific realism or account for the corrigibility of scientific concepts.

19. Savarese argues that Romantic critical theory is itself a folk cognitive science because of its investment in enduring questions of the role of the mind in perception, in the relationship of mind to matter, and its early formulations of such problems as qualia and other minds. See Savarese 17–40.

20. Wordsworth attributed his feeling "of the indomitableness of the spirit within me," and his inability "to think of external things as having external existence" to seeing the sensible world "as something not apart from but inherent in my own immaterial nature" (*Poetical Works* 4: 463).

21. See Hayden, "Wordsworth, Hartley, and the Revisionists."

22. On the widely dispersed, nonhuman capacity for sentience as directed "awareness *of*" and "awareness *that*" (in contrast to the recursive recognitions of human *sapience*), see Brandom, *Articulating Reasons* 157–84.

23. On the "Principle of Sufficient Reason" in Hegelian-inflected conceptualism, see Sachs (2018).

24. In contrast, "transcendental friction" denotes the constraining role played by the in-itself on human understanding. The "demand for transcendental friction," as Sachs explains, expresses "that it must be possible, by reflecting on our most basic conceptual and perceptual capacities and incapacities, to guarantee that we are in cognitive contact with a world we discover and do not create" (*Intentionality and the Myths of the Given* 13).

25. See Trilling 129–59.

26. In *The Liberal Imagination*, Trilling famously describes the poem in terms of naturalism and disenchantment, narrating the poet's gradual coming to terms with maturity and constraint. Helen Vendler counters that the "Ode" should be read as an elegy whose conclusion celebrates "the acquisition of metaphor" following the loss of youthful naivete (Vendler).

27. On the consequences for ethics of Wordsworth's "ecological" belief in the unity of mind and world "sustained by a rational power or spirit" (395), see Potkay.

28. Sellars does not use the phrase "categorial given," but O'Shea has recently suggested that Sellars intended his critique of the given to apply also to Hegelian and post-Hegelian conceptualism, as the passage quoted above rejecting the "categorial structure of the world" suggests. While the critique in *EPM* is aimed most squarely at the sense-data empiricism of the logical positivists, Sellars emphasized that theirs was only one, and arguably the less insidious version of the myth of the given. Similar critiques of the categorial given can be found in Sachs (2014), in which he describes it as the "Myth of the Semantic Given," and in Brassier (2014).

29. Contemporary philosophers rely on Wordsworthian themes in an effort to overcome the mind/world dualism that has challenged accounts of cognition since Descartes. Brandom, for example, draws on Abrams's mirror/lamp binary to set up the traditional dichotomy against which his own pragmatist definition of reason as a "flywheel governor that is the flexible instrument of control for the engines of the Industrial Revolution" in *Articulating Reasons* (8) and "Some Strands of Wittgenstein's Normative Pragmatism, and Some Strains of his Semantic Nihilism" (4).

30. See Brassier (2011) and Sachs (2014) for an account of the constraining role played in human experience by nonconceptual content.

31. Capacities for sentient mapping keep emergent, sophisticated systems like modern science answerable to the physical world. "Empirical knowledge," Sellars argues, "like its sophisticated extension science, is rational not because it has a *foundation* but because it is a self-correcting enterprise which can put any claim in jeopardy, though not *all* at once" (*EPM* 170). The exact nature of Sellars's "synoptic" view of the scientific and manifest images of the world is hotly contested in Sellars criticism. For an overview of Sellars's efforts, and those of his followers, to reconcile scientific naturalism with normativity, see Levine.

32. See Elder 26.

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